

## Theological Suicide: Evil and the Imperception of God

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### Introduction

Written in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem, the apocalypse of *4 Ezra* expresses deep dissatisfaction with the Deuteronomic logic of divine justice as *quid pro quo*.<sup>1</sup> In response, Ezra's Angelic dialogue partner appeals to the inscrutability of the "way of the Most High" (*4 Ezra* 4:1–4, 13–18, 20–21).<sup>2</sup> Ezra remains unconvinced and presses, "It would be better for us not to be here than to come here and live in ungodliness, and to suffer and not understand why" (*4 Ezra* 4:13).<sup>3</sup> Ezra's exasperation is profoundly intellectual, even lamenting human rationality (7:62–68). In the end, it appears that the author of *4 Ezra* ultimately comes around to the Deuteronomic scheme after fierce

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<sup>1</sup> On this theme in Second Temple Literature see George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Torah and the Deuteronomic Scheme in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: Variations on a Theme and Some Noteworthy Examples of its Absence," in *Das Gesetz im frühen Judentum und im Neuen Testament: Festschrift für Christoph Burchard zum 75. Geburtstag*, eds. Dieter Sänger and Matthias Konrad, NTOA 57 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 222–235. On the problem of evil in *4 Ezra* see Wolfgang Harnisch, *Verhängnis und Verheissung der Geschichte. Untersuchungen zum Zeit- und Geschichtsverständnis im 4. Buch Esra und in der syr. Baruchapokalypse*, FRLANT 97 (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1969), esp. 19–67; Alden Lloyd Thompson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra: A Study Illustrating the Significance of Form and Structure for the Meaning of the Book*, SBLDS 29 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977); Egon Brandenburger, *Die Verborgenheit Gottes im Weltgeschehen: as literarische und theologische Problem des 4. Esrabuches*, ATANT 68 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1981), esp. 12–21; Tom W. Willett, *Eschatology in the Theodicies of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra*, JSPSupp 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), esp. 65–72; Miryam T. Brand, *Evil Within and Without: The Source of Sin and its Nature as portrayed in Second Temple Literature*, JAJSupp 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 128–134, 137–43; Robbie Griggs, "Apocalyptic Experience in the Theodicy of *4 Ezra*," in *Evil and Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. Chris Keith and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, WUNT 2.417 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 282–98.

<sup>2</sup> See Michael E Stone, "The Way of the Most High and the Injustice of God in *4 Ezra*," in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. R. van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld, EPRO 112 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 132–42. This strategy has precedent in Job (37:14–39:30)

<sup>3</sup> As Stone argues, Ezra is not pressing for heavenly secrets but the meaning of God's action in history (*4 Ezra* 4:22). As Ezra sees it, humans are worse off than irrational animals because of their awareness of sin and judgment (7:63–69).

interrogation.<sup>4</sup> Yet the text of *4 Ezra* provides no rational response to the prophet's lament. Whence evil?<sup>5</sup> If a rational response to Ezra was available in Second Temple Judaism, we might expect to find it in Philo of Alexandria. Although he presumably did not live to see the destruction of the Temple, Philo was deeply engaged in philosophical discourse, concerned for the welfare of his people, and eager to defend God's justice.<sup>6</sup> What would Philo say to the author of *4 Ezra*?

Perhaps he would commiserate. In examining Philo's views on evil, justice, and providence, Alan Mendelson finds a notable difference between the Deuteronomic scheme found in the Exposition of the Law and the more philosophical reflections in the Allegorical Commentary.<sup>7</sup> Mendelson sees a "dialectical movement" in Philo: "a shift from Deuteronomy to philosophy. . . "from Moses to Plato, or from revelation to reason."<sup>8</sup> Despite this dialectical movement, Mendelson does not portray Philo forsaking Deuteronomy but rather holding it in tension with his philosophical concerns. In a striking

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<sup>4</sup> Uriel, Ezra's Angelic interlocutor, appeals to Deut 30:19 to affirm the Deuteronomic perspective (*4 Ezra* 7:129; cf. *2 Bar* 19:1). Near the end of the apocalypse, Ezra publicly affirms Uriel's view (14:28–34, esp. 34).

<sup>5</sup> I use the term "evil" in an admittedly broad, descriptive sense, referring to physical suffering and moral evil or sin. I do not intend to argue for "evil" as a metaphysical reality. On the fluidity of the term "evil" see, for example, the essays in David Parkin (ed.), *The Anthropology of Evil* (New York: Blackwell, 1985) and the anthology by Chris Keith and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (eds.), *Evil in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity*. Philo does not see evil as a metaphysical reality in *Sacr.* 32 and *Leg.* 3.105; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 3.2.5.25.

<sup>6</sup> This is evident in many ways in the historical works *Legatio ad Gaium* and *In Flaccum* as well as the rare autobiographical introduction in *Spec.* 3.1–6. Peter Frick argues that Philo's doctrine of "providence [*πρόνοια*]" is crucial to the structure of Philo's thought and provides a brief analysis of how Philo sees providence at work in history (*Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria*, TSAJ 77 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], chpt. 6).

<sup>7</sup> Philo's view of evil is not often discussed and typically only while addressing another issue. See: Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "The Problem of Evil in Philo of Alexandria, with Special Reference to the *De Providentia* [in Greek]," *Philosophia* 5-6 (1975–76): 306–52; Fritz-Peter Hager, *Gott und das Böse im antiken Platonismus*, (Elementa 43 Würzburg: Rodopi, 1987), 112–115; Gérard-Henry Baudry, "La théorie du 'penchant mauvis' et la doctrine du 'péché originel,'" *BLE* 95, no. 4 (1994): 271–301; Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria*, chpt 5; David T. Runia, "Theodicy in Philo of Alexandria," in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, eds. Antti Laato and Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 576–604; Archie T. Wright, "Some Observations of Philo's *De Gigantibus* and Evil Spirits in Second Temple Judaism," *JSJ* 36 (2005): 471–88; Brand, *Evil Within and Without*, 119–126; Michael Francis, "Borderline Bad: Philo of Alexandria on the Distinction between Voluntary and Involuntary Sin" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> Alan Mendelson, "Philo's Dialectic of Reward and Punishment," *SPhiloA* 9 (1997): 104–125, here 124.

parallel, then, both Philo and the author of *4 Ezra* appear to articulate criticisms of the Deuteronomic view of divine justice using human reason without abandoning Deuteronomy. This parallel may suggest that human reason and the dominant Mosaic perspective on justice were found to be odds in some circles of Second Temple Judaism. For a disciple of Moses like Philo, this raises the question of how evil factors in theological epistemology.<sup>9</sup>

Analyzing the figure of Cain in Philo's corpus provides an avenue for exploring how evil functions in relation to theological epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Abel's death and Cain's continued existence prompt questions about divine justice that appear to undermine Deuteronomic logic. Additionally, some of Philo's most explicit descriptions of how humans can properly perceive God appear in his allegorical exegesis of Genesis 4 (esp. *Det.* 86–90; *Post.* 13–20, 158–69). These positive accounts, affirming the possibility of human perception of God through divine aid, are set in a negative frame, Cain's slaughter of Abel and departure from God. This essay explores the negative frame. What might Cain teach about Philo's criteria for the impossibility of perceiving God?

In order to clarify the role of evil in Philo's theological epistemology this essay focuses on Philo's allegorical interpretation of the figure of Cain. I argue that Philo portrays Cain as the quintessential evil man, unable to perceive God because of self-inflicted disorder. Two passages in particular are notable examples of Philo interpreting Cain as a type for the person unable to perceive God.<sup>11</sup> First, in *Det.* 75–78 Philo argues that by

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<sup>9</sup> The role of evil in Philo's theological epistemology is not, to my knowledge, often addressed. See the recent history of scholarship on knowledge of God in Philo found in Jang Ryu, *Knowledge of God in Philo of Alexandria*, WUNT 2.405 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 7–18. The role of free-will and evil is addressed by H. A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2 Vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962) 1.432–55.

<sup>10</sup> In addition to identifying a shift from Deuteronomy to philosophy, Mendelson finds the question of divine justice cropping up most frequently in the "Cain Trilogy" of the Allegorical Commentary. He refers to *De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*, *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat*, *De Posteritate Caini* as the "Cain Trilogy" in "Philo's Dialectic of Reward and Punishment," 105.

<sup>11</sup> Cain as a type has already been well-described by Hindy Najman, "Cain and Abel as Character Traits: A Study of the Allegorical Typology of Philo of Alexandria," in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and*

slaughtering his brother, Cain has destroyed himself. Philo portrays Cain's suicide as akin to the deceptive epistemology of Protagoras in Plato's *Theaetetus*. Second, in *Post.* 8–11 Philo interprets Cain's departure from God's presence as a voluntarily blinding to the *visio Dei*. Cain's departure is a self-mutilation that further solidifies Cain's ontological status as sub-human, lacking a theological imagination. Analyzing Philo's portrait of Cain in *Det.* 75–78 and *Post.* 8–11 reveals the self-imposed conditions under which the Alexandrian considers it impossible for humans to develop a proper conception of God, namely voluntary ignorance of the ideal world. After analyzing these passages, it is worthwhile to take note of how Cain factors in the Exposition. Although the references to Cain are few, they are strikingly similar to the Allegorical Commentary.

### Destroying the Imprint (*Det.* 75–78)

The primary biblical lemma throughout second treatise in the Cain Trilogy, *The Worse Attacks the Better*, is Genesis 4:8–15. As usual in the Allegorical Commentary, Philo comments on each verse sequentially, occasionally incorporating secondary and tertiary passages to interpret the primary text.<sup>12</sup> Philo also employs ideas, images, and metaphors from non-biblical, especially Platonic, sources that not only illustrate but also influence his exegesis.<sup>13</sup> Jaap Mansfeld has insightfully characterized the interdependence of scripture and philosophy as an “interpretive circle.”<sup>14</sup> Exegesis of particular sections of the Allegorical Commentary requires appreciating both resources and their interconnection for Philo.

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*Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, TBN 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 107–18.

<sup>12</sup> David T. Runia, “The Structure of Philo’s Allegorical Treatises: A Review of Two Recent Studies and some Additional Comments,” *VC* 38 (1984): 209–256; idem. “Further Observations on the Structure of Philo’s Allegorical Treatises,” *VC* 41 (1987): 105–138. The exegesis of Gen 4:8–15 as the Primary Biblical Lemma breaks down as follows: 4:8 (§§ 1–56), 9 (§§ 57–68), 10 (§§ 69–95), 11 (§§ 96–103), 12 (§§ 104–140), 13 (§§ 141–149), 14 (§§ 150–166), 15 (§§ 167–178).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas H. Billings, *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus*, AP 3 (New York: Garland, 1979); David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, PA 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1986); Michael Cover, “The Sun and the Chariot: The *Republic* and the *Phaedrus* as Sources for Rival Platonic Paradigms of the Psychic Vision in Philo’s Biblical Commentaries,” *SPhiloA* 26 (2014): 151–167.

<sup>14</sup> Jaap Mansfeld, “Philosophy in the service of Scripture: Philo’s Exegetical Strategies,” in *The Question of “Eclecticism”: Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, eds. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley, CA: University of

Philo resolves the injustice of Cain’s slaughter of his righteous brother, Abel, by carefully examining the “surface appearance [τὴν πρόχειρον φαντασίαν]” of Gen 4:8 (*Det.* 47; cf. *Det.* 155; *Post.* 1; *Ebr.* 65). Adding a single vowel, Philo offers a more amenable allegorical reading, Cain has killed himself.<sup>15</sup> The self-slaughter interpretation re-appears in the treatise, forming an inclusio around Philo’s interpretation of Gen 4:10 (*Det.* 69–70, 78), where he elaborates on Cain’s fate as “soul death” (*Det.* 70, 74).<sup>16</sup> It is Philo’s interpretation of Gen 4:10 and his expansion on Cain’s fratricide-as-suicide interpretation that connects the Cain’s actions with theological epistemology.

Philo has already established that God does not ask anything out of ignorance (*Det.* 57–59), so it is no surprise when he interprets the enquiry of Gen 4:10 as a rhetorical question. It is this divine question, “What have you done [τί ἐποίησας]?” (Gen 4:10a) that functions as the primary lemma of *Det.* 69–78.<sup>17</sup> The question expresses divine “indignation [ἀγανάκτησις]” over Cain’s “intention [γνώμη]” in killing Abel, namely, “to destroy the good [τὸ καλὸν ἀνελεῖν]” (69).<sup>18</sup> Key to Philo’s interpretation is his view that Cain’s intention was thwarted. Abel “the one seeming dead” lives and Cain “the one who seems to survive has died the death of the soul” (*Det.* 70). As David Runia has pointed out, Philo’s contrast of

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California Press, 1988), 70–102, here 75. See also Gregory E. Sterling, “Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism,” *SPhiloA* 5 (1993): 96–111.

<sup>15</sup> The textual correction is fascinating. Instead of the reading that Cain “killed him [ἀπέκτειεν αὐτόν i.e. Abel]”, Philo prefers that Cain “killed himself [ἀπέκτειεν ἑαυτόν]” (*Det.* 47–8). Although lacking the textual emendation, the same interpretation appears in Wisdom of Solomon (10:3). See Karina Martin Hogan, “The Exegetical Background of the ‘Ambiguity of Death’ in the Wisdom of Solomon,” *JSJ* 30 (1999): 1–24, esp. 21–22

<sup>16</sup> The focus on Cain’s action as suicide is particularly noticeable in Philo’s only use of the term ἀυθέντης in *Det.* 78. This is a play on the word which can mean “suicide” (Antiphon, 3.3.4; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* 37.13) or “murder” by family member (Aeschylus, *Eum.* 212; *Ag.* 1572).

<sup>17</sup> Philo’s exegesis of Gen 4:10 is mostly limited to *Det.* (48, 49, 69, 70, 74, 78, 79, 91x2), appearing only once in *QG* (1.70) and twice in the Exposition (*Virt.* 199; *Praem.* 69).

<sup>18</sup> “Indignation” is typically an attribute of humans (Plato, *Phaedr.* 251C; Philo, *Mos.* 1.234; *Spec.* 3.42; 2 Cor 7:11), but Philo twice predicates it of God, here and in his exegesis of Gen 6:7 (*Deus* 68). Philo’s exegesis of Gen 6:7 is, in part, driven by his goal to refute anonymous interpreters who attributed wrath and anger to τὸ ὄν based on this text (*Deus* 52)

appearance and reality bears a notable similarity to Plato.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Jaap Mansfeld has shown that Philo's description of Cain's suicide and soul-death integrates/participates in a common Middle-Platonic cento.<sup>20</sup> Philo is weaving a Middle-Platonic trope that goes back to Heraclitus into his exegesis of Gen 4:10.<sup>21</sup> Philo's view of evil and its relationship to epistemology is deeply indebted to Plato.

It cannot be denied that Philo's view of evil was profoundly influenced by Plato. First, it is a Platonic axiom that God, by definition, cannot be the cause of evil.<sup>22</sup> This is articulated quite clearly in the cosmology of the *Timaeus* and the epistemology of the *Theaetetus*, both important dialogues for Philo.<sup>23</sup> In the creation myth of the *Timaeus*, Plato describes how the Demiurge, after creating the rational soul (41CD) and demonstrating the "nature of the Universe [τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν]" (41E), entrusted the final creation of humanity to the young gods (*Tim.* 42D). This passage from the *Timaeus* strongly influenced Philo's view of evil. Most famously, it informs the Alexandrian's interpretation of Gen 1:26 in *Opif.* 72–75 (cf. *Abr.* 143).<sup>24</sup> Unfortunately, Gen 1:26 is never a primary biblical

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<sup>19</sup> Runia, "Theodicy in Philo," 598 identifies "the distinction between appearance and reality" as especially Platonic. On the reception of Stoic and Platonic theodicy in Philo see Frick, *Providence in Philo*. The Stoic arguments are particularly evident in *Prov* 2.82, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Jaap Mansfeld, "Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria," *VC* 39 (1985): 131–156.

<sup>21</sup> John T. Conroy, "'The Wages of Sin Is Death': The Death of the Soul in Greek, Second Temple Jewish, and Early Christian Authors," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008), 73–77.

<sup>22</sup> On evil in Plato generally see esp. Harold Cherniss, "The Sources of Evil According to Plato," *PAPS* 98 (1954): 23–30. Cherniss identifies two sources of evil in Plato that cohere with his cosmology. First, there is the evil that results from the imperfect way the phenomenal world mirrors the ideal (24–25). Philo appears to view erratic matter as a source of evil as well (*Spec.* 1.27; 3.178; *Det.* 148; *Post.* 23, 29; *Deus* 4, 119; *Fug.* 160; *Mut.* 156; *Cher.* 19; *Congr.* 107; *Abr.* 84; *Somn.* 2.253, 258). Second, there is the evil originating in erratic motion, ultimately caused by souls ignorant of the ideas (26–28). It is this latter source of evil that is most relevant to Philo's allegorical exegesis of Cain. Cf. William Chase Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good, and Evil, in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1944), 277–316; Billings, *Platonism of Philo*, 23–24, 70–71.

<sup>23</sup> *Tim.* 29E–30C; *Theaet.* 176C; *Phaedr.* 242E; *Rep.* 617E; *Laws* 907B. This assumption is also part of Plato's argument against the Poets who, he opines, falsely claim the gods dispense good and evil (*Rep.* 379C–380D [citing Homer, *Il.* 24.527–528, 530, 532]).

<sup>24</sup> See the commentary by David T. Runia, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, PACS 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 236–238; idem. *Philo and the Timaeus*, 242–249.

lemma in the Allegorical Commentary, but Philo offers the same interpretation of the passage as a secondary lemma elsewhere in the Allegory (*Conf.* 168–183; *Fug.* 68–72; *Mut.* 30–31; cf. *QG* 1.54). In these instances, the primary function of Philo’s interpretation is to argue that God cannot be the source of evil.<sup>25</sup> In the *Timaeus*, then, Philo finds a helpful resource for distancing God from evil, a resource that informs both the Exposition and the Allegorical Commentary.

While the *Timaeus* shapes Philo’s theodicy elsewhere, the *Theaetetus* exercises a profound influence in Philo’s allegorical interpretation of Cain.<sup>26</sup> It is worthwhile to summarize the portion of the dialogue that is pertinent to Philo. As the first plausible answer to the question “what is knowledge?” Plato articulates a version of Protagorean Relativism.<sup>27</sup> He portrays Socrates investigating Theaetetus’s claim that knowledge [ἐπιστήμη] is sense perception [αἴσθησις] (*Theaet.* 151D–186E) and identifies this view as Protagoras’s doctrine that “Man is the measure of all things” (152A; cf. 160C–E, 166D).<sup>28</sup> In the middle of his critique of Protagoras, the dialogue digresses into a comparison of

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<sup>25</sup> Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 247 points out that while according to Plato the Demiurge employs the young gods because otherwise there would be no mortal creation (*Tim.* 41B–C), Philo extrapolates from the myth to focus on theodicy.

<sup>26</sup> Ryu, *Knowledge of God in Philo*, 164–67 rightly identifies the connection Philo makes between Cain and Protagoras but does not explore the influence of *Theaetetus* on Philo’s view of Cain. This is not to suggest that the *Timaeus* is absent from Philo’s Cain Trilogy, see *Sacr.* 82 [*Tim.* 30A], *Det.* 84–85 [*Tim.* 90A, D, 91E], 160 [*Tim.* 69D], *Post.* 5 [*Tim.* 42E]. In none of these instances, however, does the theodicy reading of the *Timaeus* occur. These references are drawn from David Lincicum, “A Preliminary Index to Philo’s Non-Biblical Citations and Allusions,” *SPhiloA* 25 (2013): 139–167. Although not treated here, Philo cites the *Theaet.* in the context of theodicy in *Fug.* 62–64; cf. *Phaedr.* 247A and *Leg.* 2.249; *Prob.* 13).

<sup>27</sup> On Plato’s presentation of Protagoras see Mi-Kyoung Lee, *Epistemology after Protagoras: Response to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 78–117. On the various ways to read the *Theaetetus* see D. J. Chappell, *Reading Plato’s Theaetetus* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2005), esp. 15–24. On the difficulty of ascribing “relativism” to Plato’s presentation of Protagoras’ position in light of Heraclitus see Gail Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 132–159.

<sup>28</sup> As noted by Ryu, *Knowledge of God in Philo*, 162 fn. 45 Protagoras’s measure doctrine is cited elsewhere in Plato (*Euthyd.* 283E–287A; *Crat.* 385B–386E; *Protag.* 316B–327B, 334A–C, 356C–E), Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1005b35–1011b22; 1021a29–b2; 1047a4–7; 1051b6–9; 1053a31–b3; 1057a7–12; 1062b12; 998a2–4), and Diogenes Laertius (*Vit.* 9.51). cf. Plutarch *Adv. Col.* 1009A.

Sophists and Philosophers (172B–177C).<sup>29</sup> Philosophers, who have the leisure to discourse about “being” (i.e. the ideal world), appear ridiculous (172C, 173C–175B).<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Sophists damage their souls in pursuit of rhetorical victories (172E–173B). When it comes to investigating essential questions, however, the Sophists are shown to be ridiculous (175C–E). Theodorus responds to Socrates’ assessment with approval, “If, Socrates, you could persuade all men of the truth of what you say as you do me, there would be more peace and fewer evils among mankind” (176A). The response from Socrates stands behind much of Philo’s view of evil in the Cain Trilogy.

Replying to Theodorus and effectively ending the digression contrasting Philosophers and Sophists, Socrates argues:

It is impossible that evils should be done away with [οὐτ’ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν], [. . .] for there must always be something opposed to the good; and they cannot have their place among the gods, but must inevitably hover about mortal nature and this earth [τὴν δὲ θνητὴν φύσιν καὶ τόνδε τὸν τόπον περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης]. Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God [φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῶ], so far as this is possible; and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise. But, [. . .] it is not at all easy to persuade people that the reason generally advanced for the pursuit of virtue and the avoidance of vice—namely, in order that man may not seem bad and may seem good [ἵνα μὴ κακὸς καὶ ἵνα ἀγαθὸς δοκῆ εἶναι]—is not the reason why one should be practiced and the other not. [. . .] Let us give the true reason. God is in no wise and in no manner unrighteous, but utterly and perfectly righteous, and there is nothing so like him as that one of us who in turn becomes most nearly perfect in righteousness. (*Theaet.* 176A–C)

Plato condemns the sophistic notion that virtue is about appearances and instead invests it with theological significance. Knowledge of this truth is “true wisdom or true virtue” while

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<sup>29</sup> Plato does not actually use the word “Sophist,” but the contrast with Philosophers makes the identification clear. Moreover, Plato explicitly identifies Protagoras with this kind of Sophist elsewhere in the dialogues (*Protag.* 313A–314B; *Soph.* 232D–E; Cf. *Soph.*, 231D–E; 233B–C).

<sup>30</sup> Socrates illustrates the apparent foolishness of Philosophers with the example of Thales falling into a pit while studying the stars only to be mocked by a servant girl (*Theaet.* 174A–B).



ignorance is “folly or manifest wickedness” (176C). Socrates wants this truth to be known to the Sophist who faces a punishment far worse than scourging and death. When Theodorus asks about this terrible punishment, Socrates responds:

Two patterns are set up in the world [παραδειγμάτων ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐστώτων], [. . .] the divine which is most blessed, and the godless, which is most wretched. [. . .] They therefore pay the penalty for this by living a life that conforms to the pattern they resemble [οὗ δὴ τίνουσι δίκην ζῶντες τὸν εἰκότα βίον ᾧ ὁμοιοῦνται]. (*Theaet.* 176E–177A)

The penalty for the ignorance of the Sophist is twofold: a life of wickedness and the inability to be free of evil. The philosopher focuses on what truly matters while the Sophist is adept in evil.<sup>31</sup> There is, then, a notable correspondence between cosmology, epistemology, and ethics. Because of the nature of the cosmos as both ideal and perceptible, true knowledge cannot be limited to the sense perceptible. Therefore, any attempt to limit knowledge to the sense perceptible world is unethical deception, a kind of sophistry. The two patterns that Socrates describes, coordinating cosmology, epistemology, and ethics, influences the portrait of Cain and Abel in Philo’s Cain Trilogy.

Philo’s interpretation of Cain’s evil deed reflects the critique of sense perception and the digression on Sophists and Philosophers in the *Theaetetus* in at least three ways. First, Cain and Abel are allegorically interpreted as conflicting doctrines akin to the paradigms described in *Theaet.* 176E.<sup>32</sup> At the beginning of *Worse Attacks the Better*, interpreting Gen 4:8, Philo allegorizes the “plain” where Abel goes to meet Cain as a battlefield of contrary doctrines (*Det.* 1–32). The contrary doctrines are “God-love [φιλόθεος]” and “self-love [φιλαυτος]”:

Abel, referring all things to God, is a God-loving creed [φιλόθεον δόγμα]; but Cain, referring all things to himself [. . .] is a self-loving creed [φιλαυτον] (*Det.* 32).

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<sup>31</sup> Cornford, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge*, 82–83 points out that Plato’s portrait of the Sophist here is reminiscent of Thrasymachus’s position that “justice is the advantage of the strong” (*Rep.* 338C) and likely goes beyond Protagoras’s actual position.

<sup>32</sup> Philo’s interpretation of Jacob and Esau is similar (*Sacr.* 4) and Isaac and Ishmael (*Fug.* 209–211). Interestingly, Philo develops Isaac as the righteous one more than Ishmael as the Sophist.

These contrary doctrines are paradigms that have already appeared in Philo's reading of Gen 4:1–2. His identifies the “the implied philosophy [τὴν ἐμφανομένην φιλοσοφίαν]” of the text as follows:

It is a fact that there are two opposite and contending views of life [δύο τοίνυν δόξας εἶναι συμβέβηκεν ἐναντίας καὶ μαχομένας ἀλλήλαις], one which ascribes all things to the mind as our master, whether we are using our reason or our senses, in motion or at rest, the other which follows God, whose handiwork it believes itself to be. The first of these views is figured [ἐκτύπωσίς] by Cain who is called Possession, because he thinks he possess all things. (*Sacr.* 2)

This typological reading of Cain and Abel is explicitly connected with an epistemology that privileges the human mind over God and is most accurately described as “self-love.” Both Plato and Philo describe “self-love” as the “greatest of evils [μέγιστον κακῶν].”<sup>33</sup> Consistent with Plato's description of two paradigms, Philo declares that “every lover of self” is called “Cain” (*Det.* 78). Like Plato's description of two conflicting paradigms, Philo typologizes Cain as the godless paradigm of self-love, falsely measuring knowledge by human reason alone.

Second, Philo portrays Cain as a Sophist in the likeness of Protagoras. Philo's portrait of Cain as a wicked Sophist runs throughout the Cain Trilogy and is especially pertinent to his suicide interpretation.<sup>34</sup> The Alexandrian points out that the perceived fratricide is in reality a suicide (*Det.* 70, 78; cf. 49). God's question “What have you done [τί ἐποίησας]” is equivalent to the declaration, “You have done nothing [οὐδὲν ἐποίησας]!” (*Det.* 70) and is the very question that should be put to all Sophists (*Det.* 74).<sup>35</sup> Like the Sophist

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<sup>33</sup> The only occurrence of φίλαντρος in Plato occurs in *Laws* 731D–E, which alludes to a line from Euripides (Frag. 460; cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1371b19; *Pol.* 1263b2). This was likely a well-known passage among Middle Platonists since Plutarch begins his treatise, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* by referencing it (*Adul. amic.* 48F, cf. 66E; *Mor.* 90A, 92E, 1000A). Φίλαντρος is often a title for Cain in Philo (*Sacr.* 52; *Det.* 68, 79; *Post.* 21) and φίλαντρία is similarly described as the “greatest of evil [κακὸν μέγιστον]” (*Congr.* 130).

<sup>34</sup> Bruce W. Winter has rightly noted that Philo's critique of the Sophists is significantly dependent on Plato, particularly in regard to their shared view of Sophists as deceptive (*Philo and Paul among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 80, 88–91, 94). Even Philo's connection of the Egyptian Magicians and Sophists has similarity to Plato (*Meno* 80B; *Symp.* 215C; *Rep.* 358D).

<sup>35</sup> Here Philo does not dwell on Cain's inability to harm righteous Abel, although see *Det.* 91–95 in comparison with Plato, *Apol.* 33C–D.

of the *Theaetetus*, Cain appears successful but in reality his actions destroy his own soul (*Det.* 74–75).<sup>36</sup> Philo compares Cain to “the sophist Balaam, who is an empty conglomeration of incompatible and discordant notions” (*Det.* 71).<sup>37</sup> In the course of Philo’s exegesis, Cain is described as using “sophistries” (*Det.* 1; cf. *Post.* 52) and compared to the Sophist Egyptian Magicians of Exod 4:10 (*Det.* 38–44; cf. *Migr.* 74–75; *Mos.* 1.92). The only reference to Protagoras in the Philonic corpus identifies him as both a Sophist and a son of Cain:

Of what sort is the impious man’s opinion? That the human mind is the measure of all things, an opinion held they tell us by an ancient sophist named Protagoras, an offspring of Cain’s madness. (*Post.* 35)<sup>38</sup>

God’s question/rebuke of Cain is directed at all Sophists who appear to prosper but actually destroy their souls. The deception of the Cain, the Sophist in the likeness of Protagoras, is to use the human mind as the measure of truth.

Third, Cain’s slaughter of Abel, like Protagoras’ measure doctrine, is interpreted as an attempt to privilege the sense-perceptible world above the ideal world. This similarity between Philo’s interpretation of Cain and Plato’s *Theaetetus* gets at the heart of epistemological problem the Sophist Protagoras represents for the Alexandrian. Philo uses a fascinating illustration to describe the futility of Cain/the Sophist:

When a musician or a scholar has died, the music or scholarship, that has its abode in individual masters, has indeed perished with him, but the original patterns of these remain [αἱ δὲ τούτων ἰδέαι μένουσι], and may be said to live as

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<sup>36</sup> Philo writes of Cain/the Sophist: “The good in your souls has died while evils blaze [ἐν ταῖς ὑμετέραις ψυχαῖς τέθνηκε τὰ καλὰ, ζῶπυρηθέντων κακῶν]” (*Det.* 75).

<sup>37</sup> The name “Balaam” occurs eight times in Philo’s corpus, always in the Allegorical Commentary (*Cher.* 32, 33; *Det.* 71; *Deus* 181; *Conf.* 159; *Migr.* 113, 115; *Mut.* 202). Often Balaam is used as an example of a faulty epistemology (*Det.* 71; *Deus* 181; *Conf.* 159; *Mut.* 202–3). *Det.* 71 is the only text where Balaam is explicitly labelled a “sophist,” but based on the LXX rendering of Num 22:4–5, the description of Amorites as Sophists is almost certainly based on Balaam (*Leg.* 3.232; *Her.* 300–305). This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Philo can refer to Balaam without using his name, most notably in *Mos.* 1.263–299 where Philo gives considerably more attention to the Balaam narrative than the biblical text itself. See Louis H. Feldman, *Philo’s Portrait of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism*, *CJAS* 15 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 188–96.

<sup>38</sup> Philo cites the Protagorean measure doctrine elsewhere in the Allegorical Commentary (*Her.* 246; *Somm.* 2.193).

long as the world lasts; and by conforming to these the men of this generation, and those of all future generations in perpetual succession, will attain to being musician or scholars. In exactly the same way, if what is sensible or modest or brave or just, or, to say it in one word, wise, be destroyed, none the less does there stand, inscribed on the undying tablets of the universe [σύμπασα ἄφθαρτος ἐστηλίτευται], good sense with a life that dies not, and all virtue exempt from decay; and it is by having part in this excellence that men are truly wise to-day, and will be so in days to come. [. . .] A single seal has often left its impress on innumerable substances [μία σφραγίς πολλάκις μυρίας ὄσας ἀπείρους οὐσίας τυπώσασα], and it has sometimes happened that all the impressions have vanished with the very substances on which they were made, while the seal has in its own nature taken no hurt but remains just as it was to begin with. (*Det.* 75–76)<sup>39</sup>

Philo correlates this illustration to Cain and Abel interpreting slaughtered Abel as “the form, the part, the stamped impression [τὸ εἶδος, τὸ μέρος, τὸν ἀπεικονισθέντα τύπον] not the archetype, not the genus, not the idea [οὐ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον, οὐ τὸ γένος, οὐ τὴν ἰδέαν]” (*Det.* 78). This harkens back to the beginning of the Allegorical commentary where Philo describes the creation of the ideal mind and ideal sense-perception (*Leg.* 1.1, 21–22) as well as the combination of the embodied human mind [νοῦς] and sense perception [αἴσθησις] to operate on the perceptibles [τὸ αἰσθητόν] for human cognition (*Leg.* 1.28–30).<sup>40</sup> Philo recognizes, along with Protagoras (*Theaet.* 152E), that sense perception provides access to the material world that is in flux (Plato, *Tim.* 27A–28A). However, because the corporeal world is modelled on the archetypes of the ideal world, the philosopher theologian can work back from the corporeal to the ideal cause.<sup>41</sup> To deny this possibility is the way of the Sophist Protagoras and the “lover of self,” Cain (*Det.* 78; *Somn.* 2.219).

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<sup>39</sup> The same metaphorical use of the grammar and seal language appears in *Mut.* 80, 145–50; cf. Plato, *Phaed.* 85E–86D.

<sup>40</sup> The Stoic overtones here are notable as in *Deus* 43. See Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 7.45. Scott Mackie, “The Passion of Eve and the Ecstasy of Hannah: Sense Perception, Passion, Mysticism and Misogyny in Philo of Alexandria, *De ebrietate* 143–52,” *JBL* (2014): 141–163, esp. 143–44 explores Philo’s allegory of mind and sense perception as it relates to Adam and Eve.

<sup>41</sup> *Post.* 36–39; cf. *Her.* 181, 246–248, 293–299. See Ilaria Ramelli. “Philo’s Doctrine of APOKATASTASIS: Philosophical Sources, Exegetical Strategies, and Patristic Aftermath,” *SPhiloA* 26 (2014): 29–55. esp. 40.

The Protagorean Sophist of the *Theaetetus* refuses the wisdom of the Philosopher and destroys his soul. Likewise, Cain thinks that by destroying the embodiment of virtue in Abel he has rid himself of it altogether. This is based on his faulty epistemology that there is nothing beyond the sense perceptible. Since, according to Philo, Abel is merely the sense perceptible impression of the archetype, Cain's actions do not do the work he intends. There is a paradox here. Cain does successfully rid himself of Abel, but the cost of doing so is the death of his soul, a zombie life. Thus, Philo paints a portrait of Cain in the likeness of the Protagoras from Plato's *Theaetetus*. Plato's coordination of cosmology, epistemology, and ethics has illuminated Philo's interpretation of Cain and Abel.

### Blinding the Soul's Eye (*Post.* 8–11)

The primary biblical lemma throughout the third treatise in the Cain Trilogy, *On the Posterity of Cain*, is Genesis 4:16–22, 25.<sup>42</sup> Philo begins his exegesis of Gen 4:16 with a lengthy argument for the necessity of interpreting “figuratively [τροπικώτερον]” (*Post.* 1) and using “the way of allegory [τὴν δι' ἀλληγορίας ὁδὸν]” (*Post.* 7). Allegory is required because the surface appearance [προχείρου φαντασίας] of Gen 4:16 is incompatible with the truths that God neither has a face nor a location.<sup>43</sup> How, then, does Philo interpret Cain's departure from the face of God?

Like his interpretation of Cain's fratricide as theological suicide, Philo interprets Cain's departure as a fundamental rejection of theological epistemology. He portrays Cain voluntarily blinding himself to the vision of God. Thankfully, contemporary readers of Philo are not lacking in resources analyzing the important concept of the “Vision of God” in

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<sup>42</sup> The exegesis of Gen 4:16–22, 25 as the primary biblical lemma breaks down as follows: 4:16 (§§ 1–32), 17 (§§ 33–65), 18 (§§ 66–74), 19 (§§ 75–97), 20 (§§ 98–99), 21 (§§ 100–113), 22 (§§ 114–123), 25 (§§ 124–85)

<sup>43</sup> *Post.* 1–7 is the lengthiest argument against anthropomorphism up to this point in the Allegorical Commentary. Previous denouncements of anthropomorphism have occurred (*Leg.* 1.36; *Sacr.* 91–96), and the lengthiest is yet to come (*Deus* 51–68) with more brief denials to follow (*Plant.* 35; *Conf.* 134–136; *Congr.* 115; *Mut.* 54). In *Post.* 2–7 there are two primary arguments: 1) God does not have a face (*Post.* 2–4) and 2) Cain cannot actually depart from God who transcends location (*Post.* 5–7; cf. *Opif.* 4, 17; *Conf.* 95; *Somn.* 1.64–67)

Philo's thought and its relationship to Middle-Platonic philosophy.<sup>44</sup> In particular, there have been numerous studies exploring Philo's apparent inconsistencies regarding object of the vision, the measure of knowledge attained, and the means by which it occurs.<sup>45</sup> Various attempts have been made to explain these inconsistencies. Ellen Birnbaum contributed significantly by noting the different functions of Philo's commentaries, suggesting that this might help explain why the Alexandrian appears to take conflicting positions.<sup>46</sup> Fredrick Brenk is content to let the inconsistencies stand as a common feature of Middle Platonism in general.<sup>47</sup> Scott Mackie has argued that despite the inconsistencies, there is a general coherence to Philo's view that the Vision is the goal of human existence (esp. *Abr.* 58; *Legat.* 4; *Spec.* 3.1–6; *Migr.* 34–35; *QE* 2.51).<sup>48</sup> Michael Cover has further nuanced our

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<sup>44</sup> On theological epistemology in the Middle-Platonic tradition as *via negativa* see Ilaria Ramelli, "The Divine as Inaccessible Object of Knowledge in Ancient Platonism: A Common Philosophical Pattern across Religious Traditions," *JHI* 75 (2014): 167–88; Others have emphasized the presence of both *via negativa* and *via eminentiae* in the Middle-Platonism of Plutarch and Alcinous: Jaap Mansfeld, "Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception," *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, eds. R. van den Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld, EPRO 112 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 92–117; Fredrick E. Brenk, "Darkly Beyond the Glass: Middle Platonism and the Vision of the Soul," in *Platonism in Late Antiquity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 39–60, esp. 51–56 on Plutarch.

<sup>45</sup> The object of the vision as τὸ ὄν (*Ebr.* 152[?]; *Mut.* 81–82; *Mos.* 1.158; *Opif.* 69–71; *Abr.* 79–80, 107, 119–132; *Spec.* 1.41–50 [?]), the Logos (*Conf.* 95–97; *Somm.* 1.64–67), the powers (*Mut.* 15–24; *QG* 4.2, 4–5, 8; *Spec.* 1.41–50 [?]; *Abr.* 107, 119–132). On the means of the vision as entirely divine initiative see John M. G. Barclay, "'By the Grace of God I am what I am': Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment*, eds. John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole, LNTS 335 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 140–157. The key Philonic texts to support this position are (*Ebr.* 145–146, 152; *Migr.* 34–35; 169–171; *Abr.* 80; *Praem.* 45–46). For the contrary position, that Philo advocates a synergism of divine and human agency, see Scott Mackie, "Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism," *JSJ* 43 [2012]: 147–179. His key Philonic texts are *Post.* 13; *Mut.* 81–88; *Spec.* 3.1–6; *Abr.* 107, 119–132; *Praem.* 36–40; *QG* 4.2, 4–5, 8; *QE* 2.51).

<sup>46</sup> Ellen Birnbaum, "What does Philo mean by 'Seeing God'? Some Methodological Considerations," in *SBL Seminar Papers* 34 (1995): 535–52.

<sup>47</sup> Brenk, "Darkly Beyond the Glass," 51 "a part of Philo remains intractable, sharing the ambiguity of his fellow Middle Platonists."

<sup>48</sup> Scott D. Mackie, "Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: The Logos, the Powers, or the Existent One?" *SPhilo* 21 (2009): 25–47. Mackie accepts the inconsistencies and suggests four possible reasons (45–47). First, along with Birnbaum, he recognizes the different functions of the commentaries. Second, along with Gregory Sterling, Mackie recognizes Philo's debt to existing exegetical traditions. Third, Philo's position may have developed over time. Fourth, Philo may have been conflicted about how to articulate the mystical experience. In a follow-up article, Mackie further clarifies his views on the role of human agency and mysticism in the *visio Dei* texts ("Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism," *JSJ* 43 [2012]: 147–179).

understanding by pointing out that some of Philo's ambiguity can be linked to conflicting views within the Platonic dialogues themselves.<sup>49</sup> Depending on Philo's Platonic intertext, then, the Alexandrian may offer different accounts of the vision. As far as I know, however, there has been no attempt to incorporate the allegorical exegesis of Cain's departure from God into Philo's understanding of the Vision of God.

Philo focuses on two aspects of Cain's "departure" before turning to a lengthy exhortation for the "pupils of Moses" to pursue knowledge of God (*Post.* 12–21). First, Cain's departure is interpreted as a loss of sight that effectively dehumanizes the Son of Adam (8). Second, Philo dwells on Cain's departure as most evil because it is "voluntary" (9). Cain's departure is then contrasted with Adam's involuntary departure from Eden and the "fall" of Seth's soul (*Post.* 10–11). This portrait of Cain, then, fills out the picture of Philo's theological epistemology as it relates to his anthropology, specifically the human condition and evil.

Philo begins his interpretation of Cain's departure as a form of blindness by comparing it to departing from a mortal monarch (*Post.* 8). Again, since God is not subject to location, it is much more difficult to "depart" (*Post.* 2, 7, 8; *Det.* 163). Elsewhere in the Allegorical Commentary, Philo uses the same word for "departure [*μετανίστημι*]" to describe how people who "have become apt pupils of God receive the free unlaboured knowledge and are *translated* into the genus of the imperishable and fully perfect" (*Sacr.* 7; also *Sacr.* 8). Moreover, Philo will use the same language later in the *Posterity* treatise to describe Abel's departure from the mortal "to the better nature [*πρὸς τὴν ἀμείνω φύσιν*]" (*Post.* 173). This corresponds well with Philo's view of Cain's departure as downward mobility on the ontological scale.<sup>50</sup> He is not leaving a location, but rather departing from his humanity by rejecting the possibility of a theological epistemology.

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<sup>49</sup> Cover, "The Sun and the Chariot," 151–167.

<sup>50</sup> John T. Conroy Jr. argues that "soul-death" describes for Philo an ontological transformation of humans into beasts ("Philo's 'Death of the Soul,'" 34–40). All of the clearest examples of humans becoming beasts cited by Conroy occur outside the Allegorical Commentary: *Abr.* 8, 32–33; *Mos.* 1.43; *Decal.* 109–110; *Spec.* 3.99; *Virt.* 86–87; *Flacc.* 66.

This departure is conceived by Philo using one of his common Platonic metaphors for theological epistemology, the “eye of the soul.” As Philo puts it, “to become incapable of receiving a mental picture of [God] through having lost the sight of the soul's eye [τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἀφάνταστον αὐτοῦ γενέσθαι τὸ ψυχῆς ὄμμα πηρωθέντα] (*Post.* 8).<sup>51</sup> The link between loss of vision and epistemology is paralleled in Plato. In the *Sophist*, the Athenian Stranger contrasts the Sophist who “runs away in the darkness of not being [ὁ ἀποδιδράσκων εἰς τὴν τοῦ μὴ ὄντος σκοτεινότητα]” with the philosopher who is “always devoting himself through reason to the idea of being [τῆ τοῦ ὄντος ἀεὶ διὰ λογισμῶν προσκείμενος ἰδέα]” (*Soph.* 254A).<sup>52</sup> Again, the contrast concerns different epistemologies, with only the philosopher having an epistemology that accurately reflects cosmology. Unlike the Philosopher who seeks illumination beyond sense perception, the Sophist plunges into the darkness. Like the Sophist chasing darkness, Cain blinds himself.

Philo's word for “loss of sight” is *πηρώω*, not *τυφλώω*. Admittedly, the words can be synonymous (e.g. *Leg.* 3.231; *Spec.* 1.341), but *πηρώω* is more general, referring to an incapacitation or “maiming” not limited to the eyes (*Cher.* 116; *Spec.* 1.117).<sup>53</sup> Interpreting Gen 3:14, for example, Philo describes the effect of pleasure as seeming to have “maimed” the senses (*Leg.* 3.112; cf. *Cher.* 58; cf. *Post.* 112).<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere Philo refers to “maiming” the eye of the soul as an inability to properly read scripture (*Det.* 22; *Spec.* 3.6), the worship of idols (*Decal.* 67–68), Pharaoh's inability to look beyond the corporeal world (*Sacr.* 69; cf.

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<sup>51</sup> The “eye of the soul” in Plato (*Phaed.* 83A, 99E; *Soph.* 254A; *Phaedr.* 253E, 255C; *Rep.* 508D, 518C, 533D)

<sup>52</sup> Despite their differences, the Athenian stranger points out that both the Sophist and the Philosopher are difficult to recognize, but for different reasons. The Sophist is challenging to identify shrouded in darkness while the philosopher “is also very difficult to see on account of the brilliant light of the place; for the eyes of the soul of the multitude are not strong enough to endure the sight of the divine.” Philo's interpretation of Gen 15:5 in *Her.* 76–78 is notably similar. Cf. the contrast between the deception of the eyes, ears, and senses with the apprehension of the mind in the soul as well as Plato's warning against the soul's enslavement to the body through pleasure or pain (*Phaed.* 82D–83E).

<sup>53</sup> Philo used the same verb in his suicide interpretation of Gen 4:8: “The one *maiming* and killing himself, is *maimed* and killed [ὁ πηρῶν ἢ κτείνων ἑαυτὸν πηροῦται καὶ κτείνεται]” (*Det.* 49)

<sup>54</sup> Notably similar to Socrates' fear of blinding his soul by using only his senses (*Phaed.* 99E; cf. Philo, *Deus* 93)



*Fug.* 124–125), those who neither seek nor find God (*Fug.* 121–125), and the Egyptians (*Somn.* 1.117; cf. *Post.* 2–3).<sup>55</sup> The fullest expression of this vision-maiming appears in Philo’s exegesis of Cain’s departure.

The result of Cain’s “maiming” is that he has become “without imagination [ἀφάνταστος]” (*Post.* 8), which is the epistemological capacity of sub-human creation. When Philo explains the ontological divisions in creation, he classifies plants and animals as “without reason [ἄλογα]” because “they do not possess soul [ἄψυχά] and are regulated by a nature without imagination [ἀφαντάστω], the latter because they have been excluded from intellect and reason [νοῦν καὶ λόγον].” (*Opif.* 73).<sup>56</sup> Although this division is expressed in the Exposition, it is assumed in the Allegorical Commentary as well (*Deus* 41; *Plant.* 13; *Her.* 137; *Somn.* 1.136).<sup>57</sup> After a lengthy discourse on the possibility of knowing God in a synergistic view of divine and human agency (*Post.* 12–20), Philo again describes Cain’s sorry state:

The self-loving Cain [. . .], who has forsaken his own soul as without imagination of the Existent One [ὃς ἀφάνταστον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν τοῦ ὄντος καταλέλοιπεν], after having voluntarily maimed the thing by which alone he was able to see [τὸ ὧ μόνῳ βλέπειν ἠδύνατο ἐκουσίως πηρώσας] (*Post.* 21).<sup>58</sup>

Already Philo has established that by killing Abel, Cain has actually killed his own soul. In his departure from God, however, it has gone a step even further. Cain has not only killed his own soul, but in departing from God he has lost his imagination. Watson has argued that in Imperial period the Platonic concept of φαντασία underwent a Stoicizing modification.<sup>59</sup> As a result the imagination [φαντασία] could be used to extrapolate from the

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<sup>55</sup> One of the more fascinating accounts of the “maimed” eye is Philo’s description of voluntary ignorance in *Ebr.* 165–170; cf. 223. This text deserves more attention than it can be given here.

<sup>56</sup> This translation is from Runia, *On the Creation of the Cosmos*, 65. Runia, 240 maps out the division which is common to ancient philosophy (*Agr.* 134–142; cf. Aristotle, *Metaph.* 981a27–b27)

<sup>57</sup> See also *Deus* 45–47 on the relationship between human rationality and the voluntary faculty.

<sup>58</sup> My own translation.

<sup>59</sup> G. Watson, “Discovering the Imagination: Platonists and Stoics on *phantasia*,” in *The Question of “Eclecticism”: Studies in Later Greek Philosophy*, eds. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 208–233. For Plato, φαντασία is formed by the “mixture of sense perception and opinion [σύμμικτος αἰσθησεως καὶ δόξης]” (*Soph.* 264A; cf. 260C, E; *Theaet.* 152C, 161E).

world of flux, always becoming (*Tim.* 27A–28A), to the world of ideas (*Tim.* 52B). Cain’s disabled imagination, like his slaughter of Abel, is a rejection of an epistemology beyond the sense perceptible world. In Philo’s view, this makes Cain less than human.

Philo dwells at length on Cain’s departure as voluntary, which makes it particularly despicable. Cain’s “voluntary intention [ἐκουσίω γνώμη]” to depart from τὸ ὄν is described as “surpassing even the pinnacle of evil itself [ὑπερβάλλοντες καὶ τὸν αὐτῆς ὄρον κακίας]” (*Post.* 9). Cain stands in contrast to Adam in this regard. Even though Adam was driven out from God’s presence and subject to the death of the soul, the Protoplast’s departure was not voluntary (*Post.* 10–11).<sup>60</sup> Michael Francis has shown the concept of voluntary and involuntary sin in Philo reveals that “humankind stands in a liminal position” between good and evil.<sup>61</sup> Further, that this “life on the border” is a result of the combination of the rational soul with the non-rational, a state endemic to embodied existence. However, Cain’s voluntary intention to destroy his theological imagination has crossed the border. It has plunged him ever deeper into the corporeal world, ruining the possibility of perceiving the ideal. This, I think, is why Philo contrasts Seth with Cain. Seth’s soul has “fallen” into a body, but not by his own doing (*Post.* 10; cf. *Det.* 96–99; *Gig.* 12–15).<sup>62</sup> Cain has forsaken the ideal world in favor the corporeal. His soul is dead and his theological imagination has been irreparably maimed.

### Cain in the Exposition

In an important essay on how to read Philo, Ellen Birnbaum argued that a careful reading requires, among other nuances, that the interpreter “be aware of the possibility that [Philo] may be adapting his presentation to suit a particular audience or literary genre.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Philo is explicit about the death of Adam’s soul both in the Allegorical Commentary (*Leg.* 1.105–108; 3.52) and *Quaestiones* (*QG* 1.51).

<sup>61</sup> Michael Francis, “Voluntary and Involuntary Sin and the Allegory of the Soul in Philo,” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, GA, 22 November 2015), 1–29, here 6.

<sup>62</sup> The brief reference to Seth’s “fall [τρέπω]” recalls Philo’s exegesis of Gen 2:21 describing the combination of mind and sense perception in *Leg.* 2.19–34, esp. the repetition of τρέπω in *Leg.* 2.31–34.

<sup>63</sup> Ellen Birnbaum, “What does Philo mean by ‘Seeing God’? Some Methodological Considerations,” in *SBL Seminar Papers* 34 (1995): 535–52, here 538. This insight has been particularly influential in the work of

This insight has been important for thinking about how the intended function of each commentary series informs its interpretation.<sup>64</sup> Following Birnbaum and somewhat like Mendelson, Jang Ryu claims that there are two different theological epistemologies respective to the Allegorical Commentary and the Exposition.<sup>65</sup> According to Ryu the Allegorical Commentary is animated by three convictions that provoke contrasting roles for human reason in the process of knowing God.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes human reason must be “enhanced” while on other occasions it must be “evacuated.”<sup>67</sup> The Exposition, in contrast, is animated by the tripartite structure that illuminates “the idea that the written laws of Moses collectively represent the perfect counterpart to the unwritten law of nature.”<sup>68</sup> Birnbaum’s insight, especially as applied by Ryu, invites us to reflect on how Cain functions in the Exposition in comparison with the Allegorical Commentary.

The figure of Cain is particularly important in Philo’s allegorical exegesis but largely absent in the Exposition. The name “Cain” appears eighty-two times in Philo’s corpus.<sup>69</sup> Not surprisingly, the bulk of references occur in the “Cain trilogy.” However, outside of the Allegorical Commentary, Cain’s name appears only in the *Quaestiones*. Additionally, Philo

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Sarah Pearce, *The Land of the Body: Studies in Philo’s Representation of Egypt*, WUNT 208 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), esp. 23–25.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, Gregory E. Sterling, “‘The School of Sacred Laws’: The Social Setting of Philo’s Treatises,” *VC* 53 (1999): 148–164, esp. 158–160 and Maren Niehoff, “Philo’s *Exposition* in a Roman Context,” *SPhiloA* 23 (2011): 1–21. Both Sterling and Niehoff mention the contribution of Birnbaum in this regard, citing her monograph: *The Place of Judaism in Philo’s Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*, SPhiloM 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

<sup>65</sup> Ryu, *Knowledge of God in Philo*, 6, 215–224.

<sup>66</sup> The three convictions are: (1) the sovereignty of God, (2) creaturely contingency of the human mind, and (3) the mind’s inescapable limitations.

<sup>67</sup> Ryu, *Knowledge of God*, 217. On enhancement see pp. 34–55 and evacuation pp. 55–62.

<sup>68</sup> Ryu, *Knowledge of God*, 218. The tripartite structure (Creation, Patriarchs, Moses) is drawn from *Praem.* 1–3

<sup>69</sup> This is according to Peder Borgen, Kåre Fuglseth and Roald Skarsten, *The Philo Index: A Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). *Cher* 12, 40, 52[x2], 53, 54, 55, 65, 124; *Sacr.* 1, 2, 3, 5, 11[x2], 14, 51, 52, 72, 88; *Det.* 1[x3], 32[x2], 47[x3, 50, 61, 68, 74, 78, 96, 103, 119, 140, 141, 163, 165, 166, 167, 168, 177, 178; *Post.* 1, 10[x2], 12, 21, 33[x2], 34, 36, 38, 40[x2], 42, 45, 48, 51, 65, 124, 170, 172[x2]; *Agr.* 21, 127; *Sobr.* 50; *Conf.* 122[x2]; *Migr.* 74; *Congr.* 171; *Fug.* 60[x2], 64; *QG* 1.60[x2], 62, 74, 76b, 77

limits his exegesis of Genesis 4 almost exclusively to the Allegorical Commentary and the *Quaestiones*. The only clear references to Cain or Genesis 4 in the Exposition occur in the two treatises *On Rewards and Punishments* (68–73) and *On Virtues* (199–200). It would appear, then, that the Pentateuchal character is particularly important in Philo’s Allegorical Commentary but not in the Exposition.

How does Cain factor in his rare cameos in the Exposition? In *On Virtues* Philo describes the virtue of “nobility” (*Virt.* 187–227). In order to make the point that nobility is measured by the acquisition of virtue and not merely by having excellent parents, Philo cites the example of Cain (*Virt.* 198–200; cf. *Spec.* 4.206).<sup>70</sup> Although born from the best parents, the fratricide’s noble birth was no benefit to him because of “ignobility in the soul [τὴν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ δυσγένειαν]” (200).<sup>71</sup> Philo also briefly describes Cain’s penalty: “suspended over him a multitude of deaths—deaths which made themselves felt in a constant succession of griefs and fears” (*Virt.* 200). This sketch of Cain is brief and lacks any reference to theological epistemology. However, in the larger context of Philo’s argument, theological epistemology is the crucial measure of nobility.

After describing other ignoble souls who spurned their heritage, “evil born from good [ἐξ ἀγαθῶν πονηροὺς γενομένους]” (*Virt.* 211), Philo turns to the opposite example, Abraham.<sup>72</sup> Unlike Cain’s noble birth, Abraham was born to Chaldean astrologer ignorant of “the one, the Primal, the Uncreated and Maker of all” (*Virt.* 213). Receiving a conception of God and divine inspiration, Abraham departed from his native country:

Knowing that if he stayed the delusions of the polytheistic creed [αἱ τῆς πολυθεοῦ δόξης] would stay with him and render it impossible for him to

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<sup>70</sup> It is worth pointing out Philo does not use Cain’s name in *Virt.* 199–200 but he is identified by his terrible crime of “fratricide [ἀδελφοκτόνος].” In the Allegorical Commentary, fratricide it is typically associated with Cain (*Det.* 96; *Post.* 49; *Agr.* 21; *Cher.* 52; *Fug.* 60), the sole exception being *Ebr.* 66. The noun or adjectival form occurs in both of the rare “Cain” passages in the Exposition (*Virt.* 199; *Praem.* 68, 72, 74). Fratricide vocabulary also appears without reference to Cain (*Ios.* 13; *Spec.* 3.16, 18; *Legat.* 234).

<sup>71</sup> Ignobility is characteristic of “the wicked man [ὁ φαῦλος]” (*Virt.* 190), the Chaldeans from whom Abraham departed (*Virt.* 213, 219; cf. *Praem.* 152), Amalek (*Congr.* 54), as well as Ham and his son Canaan (*QG* 2.65).

<sup>72</sup> The other ignoble characters described by Philo before this transition include: Ham and Canaan (*Virt.* 201–202; cf. *QG* 2.65), Adam (203–205), Abraham’s illegitimate children (206–207), and Esau (208–210).

discover the One, who alone is eternal and the Father of all things, conceptual and sensible, whereas if he removed, the delusion would also remove from his mind and its false creed replaced by the truth. At the same time, also the fire of yearning, which possessed him *to know the Existent* [γινῶναι τὸν ὄν], was fanned by the divine warnings vouchsafed to him. With these to guide his steps, he went forth never faltering in his ardour to seek for the One, nor did he pause until he received clearer visions [τρανότεραι λαβεῖν φαντασίαι], not of His essence, for that is impossible, but of His existence and providence (*Virt.* 214–15)

Philo goes on to describe Abraham as the first believer precisely because he recognizes the “One Cause above all [ἐν αἴτιον τὸ ἀνωτάτω]” and divine providence (*Virt.* 216). Abraham has an increasingly clear imagination that allows him to work from the sense perceptible to the cause of the ideal world, τὸ ὄν. Cain’s ignobility, evident in his evil action, is contrasted with Abraham’s nobility evident in his epistemology. In both instances human agency is a crucial factor in the ability of humans to perceive God.

In the concluding treatise to the Exposition (*Praem.* 1–3), Philo transitions from the rewards of obedience to the punishments of disobedience with the example of Cain (*Praem.* 67–73).<sup>73</sup> Philo’s goal is to highlight Cain’s punishment, which unexpectedly was not death (*Praem.* 69). Cain’s “new deed [καὶνὸν τὸ ἔργον]” required a “new punishment [τιμωρίαν καὶνὴν]”:

A life always dying [ζῆν ἀποθνήσκοντα ἀεὶ] . . . a death to remain deathless and interminable [θάνατον ἀθάνατον ὑπομένειν καὶ ἀτελεύτητον]. For there are two kinds of death, the one to have died [τὸ τεθνάναι], which is good or indifferent, the other to die continuously [τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν] and that is entirely bad [κακὸν πάντως], increasingly worse as it is continues (*Praem.* 70).<sup>74</sup>

Philo’s description of Cain’s enduring death contrasted with normal death bears striking similarity to the “death of the soul” doctrine found almost exclusively in the Allegorical

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<sup>73</sup> It is worth noting that Philo’s choice to begin with Cain as the first and perhaps paradigmatic example of disobedience (*Praem.* 67–68) is not without parallel in Jewish literature. In Wisdom of Solomon Cain is the first person in history to reject Lady Wisdom and blamed for the flood (Wis 10:3–4). His rejection of Wisdom is contrasted with Adam’s salvation (Wis 10:1–2).

<sup>74</sup> My translation attempts to capture the difference in aspect between the perfect (τεθνάναι) and the present (ἀποθνήσκειν) infinitive verbs.

Commentary and the *Quaestiones*.<sup>75</sup> Since this doctrine rarely appears in the Exposition, and never with descriptive detail, we are left to wonder if Philo intends to describe the death of Cain's soul at this pivotal transition in the concluding treatise of commentary series?

Without explicitly mentioning soul death, it seems likely that Philo is describing precisely the death of Cain's soul. The lengthiest description of the soul death doctrine occurs in Philo's allegorical exegesis of Gen 2:17 (*Leg.* 1.105–108).<sup>76</sup> As Dieter Zeller has pointed out, the distinguishing features of “soul death” for the Alexandrian are a loss of virtue (*Leg.* 1.105; *Det.* 48; *Her.* 292), withdrawal of the Logos (*Det.* 141; *Fug.* 106–118), and ruin by overwhelming vice and passions (*Leg.* 1.107; 2.77–78; 3.69–72; *Post.* 73).<sup>77</sup> Here in the Exposition Philo elaborates on Cain's perpetual death:

There are four passions in the soul, two concerned with the good [περὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν], either at the time or in the future, that is pleasure and desire [ἡδονῆς καὶ ἐπιθυμίας], and two concerned with evil [περὶ τὸ κακόν], present or expected, that is grief and fear [λύπης καὶ φόβου]. The pair on the good side God tore out of him by the roots so that never by any chance he should have any pleasant sensations or desire anything pleasant, and engrafted in him only the pair on the bad side, producing grief unmixed with cheerfulness and fear unrelieved. [. . .] And he set a sign upon him that no man should slay him so that he should not die once but continue perpetually dying [ἵνα μὴ ἀπαξ ἀποθάνῃ, διαωνίζῃ δέ], as I have said, dying with anguish and distress and sufferings unceasing, and

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<sup>75</sup> Philo mentions the “death of the soul” only in passing in *Spec.* 1.345 and the near death of the soul in *Praem.* 159.

<sup>76</sup> Philo interprets Gen 2:17 elsewhere (*Plant.* 45; *Somn.* 2.70; *Virt.* 205; *QG* 1.16, 51), but *Leg.* 1.105–108 is the most complete account. On the concept of the “death of the soul” elsewhere in Philo see also *Fug.* 53–64; *Det.* 47–51, 70, 74; *Her.* 292; *Congr.* 54–57; *Somn.* 2.235; *QG* 1.51; *QE* 2.38 and the secondary literature: D. Zeller, “The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria: The Use and Origin of a Metaphor,” *SPhiloA* 7 (1995): 19–55; Emma Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology*, WUNT 2.256 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 60–76; Conroy, “The Wages of Sin Is Death,” 104–130; idem. “Philo's ‘Death of the Soul,’” 23–40; Jason M. Zurawski, “Hell on Earth: Corporeal Existence as the Ultimate Punishment of the Wicked in Philo of Alexandria and the Wisdom of Solomon,” in *Heaven, Hell, and the Afterlife: Eternity in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. J. Harold Ellens, 2 Vols. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 1.193–226.

<sup>77</sup> Zeller, “Life and Death of the Soul,” 21–23. Zeller also points to the “endangering influence of the senses” citing *Fug.* 115; *Deus* 89; *Agr.* 175; cf. *Leg.* 2.31–34. These passages, however, seem to be of a different order in being involuntary and less permanent than soul-death elsewhere. On voluntary sin see Michael Francis, “Voluntary and Involuntary Sin and the Allegory of the Soul in Philo,” (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Atlanta, GA, 22 November 2015), 1–29, esp. 9–14 on reason and human responsibility for sin.

most grievous of all should be sensible of his own evil plight, feeling the weight of the present ills and foreseeing the onrush of those yet to come against which he could not guard. (*Praem.* 71–72)

This description bears remarkable similarity to Philo's exegesis of Genesis 4:15 in *QG* 1.76, which also describes Cain's sensible faculty overwhelming by the specific passion fear (cf. *Det.* 140). Furthermore, in *QG* 1.76 Cain's perpetual death is illustrated using Homer's description of Scylla, "not a mortal but an immortal evil" (*Od.* 12.118). Philo uses the same verse from the *Odyssey* to label Cain in the Allegorical Commentary (*Det.* 178; *Fug.* 61). In both the Allegorical Commentary and the *Quaestiones*, the death of the soul doctrine is explicitly connected to Cain's slaughter of Abel (*Det.* 47–49, 70, 74; *QG* 1.70). Despite the rarity of the "soul death" doctrine in the Exposition, Philo's description of Cain's undying death, or zombie life as we might call it, not only matches the soul death doctrine articulated in the Allegorical Commentary and *Quaestiones*, but perhaps provides the clearest description of soul death in the Exposition. Even though Philo does not employ the language for "soul death" found in the Allegorical Commentary, his description of Cain's punishment matches the doctrine.

The rare Cain vignettes in the Exposition portray a particularly wicked villain. First, he is the example of the "ignoble soul" spurning his magnanimous parents (*Virt.* 199–200). Cain's ignobility is contrasted with Abraham's nobility, evident in the Patriarch's pursuit of the *visio Dei*. Second, after committing the terrible crime of fratricide he is punished with the death of the soul (*Praem.* 68–73), a fate worse than death. The nefarious portrait of Cain in the Exposition, although brief, fits with Philo's allegorical exegesis quite well. The most striking difference is that in the Exposition Cain's fratricide is not interpreted primarily terms of epistemological consequences. Instead he is faced with an overwhelming flood of fear.

## Conclusion

This essay has focused on Philo's allegorical exegesis of Gen 4:10 and 4:16 as a means of exploring the relationship between evil and epistemology in Philo's thought. A brief glance at the Exposition shows that Cain is the quintessential evil man for Philo.

However, in the Allegorical Commentary there is a much more pronounced focus on Cain's fratricide having epistemological consequences. In the Allegorical Commentary Cain is unable to perceive God because of a self-inflicted disorder.

It has been argued that a Platonic correspondence between cosmology, epistemology, and ethics profoundly shapes Philo's interpretation of Genesis. Specifically, in *Det.* 75–78 Philo's interpretation of Gen 4:10 utilizes the Platonic attack on Protagorean epistemology found in the *Theaetetus* to characterize the consequences of Cain's fratricide. Ignorant of the consequences of his actions, he has killed his soul. Without the embodied example of virtue in Abel, Cain has no way to move beyond sense perception. Philo's reading of Gen 4:16 reiterates Cain's ruined theological epistemology. Cain's departure from God's presence signifies a voluntarily blinding to the *visio Dei*. This solidifies Cain's ontological status as sub-human, lacking a theological imagination.

What, then, would Philo say to the author of *4 Ezra*? Please indulge a brief and probing answer that does not adequately recognize the complexity of *4 Ezra* or Philo. First, Philo would have a cosmological account of evil. Since evil cannot come from God it must be a result of intermediaries. To put it even more basically, can we assume that if Ezra asked about the origin of Adam's "evil heart," Philo would have answered, "Angels"?

Second, Philo would offer an epistemological account of evil. Evil is the result of ignorant souls moving themselves without knowledge of the good. This is a profoundly Platonic answer, but Philo links it to his reading of the story of Cain and Abel. If Ezra asked about the meaning of history, would it be fair to say Philo's answer is that Ezra has put too much emphasis on history? Would Philo, like Uriel say that Ezra needs a perspective that accounts for the immortality of righteous souls?

Third, Philo would offer an ethical account of evil. Evil is a result of human action, both voluntary and involuntary. The involuntary evil action would be a result of cosmological necessity or human ignorance, but voluntary evil is the most pernicious sort. It is a fundamental denial of what it means to a human being and not an animal. Ezra's lament of human rationality, then, would appear to Philo misguided. Just as Uriel and ultimately Ezra agree, God's judgment is just.