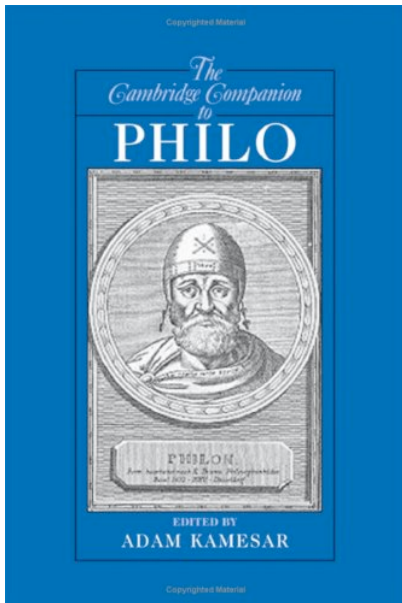


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Kamesar, Adam, ed.

The Cambridge Companion to Philo

Cambridge Companions to Philosophy

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The Cambridge Companion series provides a valuable service to students and scholars alike who need sophisticated introductions to significant authors. Adam Kamesar has done just that in this orientation to Philo. The Jewish commentator is a significant writer, even if he was not a philosopher in the grand manner that Harry Austryn Wolfson imagined him to be. He is, nonetheless, an important figure for at least three groups or movements: for Judaism, as a leading member of the Alexandrian Jewish community as well as a witness to Judaism in the Diaspora; for Hellenistic philosophy, as a major witness to the traditions that he used, especially Platonism and Stoicism; and to early Christians, as a thinker who bequeathed to the Alexandrian Christian tradition—in particular—the skill of interpreting the biblical text through the lens of philosophy via allegorical interpretation.

Kamesar organizes his companion in three major parts with three essays in each part. Part 1 explores Philo's life and writings (7–91). Danny Schwartz opens the volume with a careful and thoughtful essay setting out what is known about Philo's life, his family (we know more about his brother and nephew than we do about Philo), and the larger Jewish community in Alexandria, especially the events surrounding the pogrom and the embassies in 38–41 (9–31). Schwartz makes the astute observation that Philo offered a

modus vivendi for living in a world dominated by Rome by interiorizing Judaism: Judaism within the heart permitted Jews to accept the restrictions imposed by the superpower in the West. Jim Royse follows with a careful survey of the extant works of Philo (32–64). The strength of Royse’s contribution lies in his mastery of the textual evidence and in his summaries of the extant treatises. Some experts will differ in their assessments of a few specific of his reconstruction of Philo’s oeuvre. For example, Royse classifies the *Life of Moses* among the apologetic and historical works (50–51). I consider it to be an introduction to the Exposition of the Law. There are a series of intertextual references in the Exposition of the Law, including several references back to the *Life of Moses* (*Virt.* 52 and *Praem.* 53) and a summary of the Exposition of the Law as a whole within the *Life of Moses* (2.45–47). Since intertextual references in the Exposition of the Law are typically to other works in the Exposition, I think that *The Life of Moses* must be part of the Exposition. The best explanation is that it has a role analogous to Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus* that introduces the *Enneads*; the *Life of Moses* introduced the Exposition of the Law. Adam Kamesar contributes the third essay in part 1, in which he unpacks Philo’s allegorical exegesis through ancient literary theory (65–91). He suggests that Philo had two bases for his allegorical interpretations: the *defectus litterae* of the biblical text and his conviction that even when the text was not defective it offered instruction at an allegorical level through what Kamesar calls Philo’s “pan-Scriptural didacticism.” Kamesar’s approach to Philo’s allegory has the merit of being squarely anchored in ancient literary theory.

Part 2 explores Philo’s thought (93–171). Christina Termini explores Philo’s thought within the context of “Middle Judaism” (95–123). She works through Philo’s understanding of God, humanity, the law, and Israel. The strength of her essay lies in the summaries that she provides of different Jewish works as she sketches Philo’s thought. The weakness of her essay is that she does not give due weight to the importance of Hellenistic philosophy, especially Platonism, for Philo’s thought. For example, she says that “Philo’s theology cannot be understood by reference to a scheme whereby transcendence requires the presence of lower intermediaries to bridge the growing distance that separates God from the world” (101). This is, in my judgment, the role of the Logos in Philo as well as other intermediaries. Whether we argue that Philo followed the lead of Middle Platonists and attempted to account for the entities that Plato had introduced by bringing them into an unified understanding of being or that he felt compelled to create more of a buffer between the transcendent and unknowable God and the created cosmos by positing intermediaries, the result is largely the same: they serve as intermediaries that span an otherwise unbridgeable gap. So, Philo explained the plural in Gen 1:26–27 as God’s use of the powers to create the potential for evil in humans (*Opif.* 72–76, esp. 75; *Conf.* 168–183; *Fug.* 68–72). There is a correction within the volume in the

next essay by Roberto Radice (124–45; see esp. 129 and 137 n. 20 for the opposite conclusion of Termini). In an impressive summary of Philo’s understanding of God, creation, and the intermediaries, Radice provides a most helpful overview of some of the central ideas in Philo. Again, not every specialist will agree with every position, but they are all views held by a significant number of experts. The most intriguing interpretation that he offers the specialist is his view of *creatio ex nihilo* for the world of ideas and demiurgic creation for the sense-perceptible cosmos (144–45). The final essay, on Philo’s ethics, takes the same basic point of orientation as the preceding essay (146–71). Carlos Lévy argues, quite correctly, that Philo’s philosophical base was not the Stoic principle of *oikeiosis* but the Middle Platonic principle of *homoiosis*, or likeness to God (Plato, *Theat.* 176a–b cited by Philo, *Fug.* 63). He works through Philo’s presentation of the virtues, the passions, progress, and politics. He demonstrates Philo’s indebtedness to the philosophical tradition in each case and shows how Philo often modifies the tradition because of other philosophical allegiances or his commitment to Judaism.

Part 3 sets out Philo’s influence and significance (173–253). Folker Siegert catalogues the relevance of Philo’s exegetical positions for authors of the New Testament (175–209). He denies any direct literary dependence but points out the importance of the analogies and the possibility that some of the exegetical traditions embedded in Philo’s commentaries may also appear in the New Testament. The strength of this essay is the expansive collection of the parallels; the weakness is that it is so dense that it almost becomes an index rather than an exposition—only those who know both the Philonic and the New Testament texts will fully appreciate the parallels. David Runia offers a condensed and updated version of his magisterial book on the reception of Philo in early Christian writers in the next essay (210–30). He works through twelve significant Christian authors or texts to analyze the extent of Philo’s influence. He suggests that early Christians found Philo attractive as a result of his work as a historian and apologist, as an exegete and interpreter, and as a theologian and philosopher. In the final essay, David Winston tackles the difficult question of Philo’s reception or lack of reception in rabbinic texts (231–53). Winston suggests that the rabbis ignored Philo because he depended on the LXX and wrote in Greek. There are, however, some overlaps, for example, rabbinic midrash and early halakot.

There have been a number of introductions to the works of Philo since E. R. Goodenough published his introduction in 1940. Some have been essays in larger works, and some have been short books. This is easily the best available today. While there is some unevenness in the quality of the contributions, they are uniformly good, and some are excellent. The contributors represent the state of Philonic studies across the globe. The scope of topics is excellent. While there are areas that might have been treated and were not, this could always be said. The issue is whether an intelligent reader could work

through this volume and then read Philo with appreciation and understanding. I think that she or he could. This companion should help a reader to understand that Philo “is not too hard” and is “not far away”; rather, he is “near” and hopefully on the “lips” and in the “heart” of attentive readers (Deut 30:11, 14).