



Kamesar, Adam, ed.

The Cambridge Companion to Philo

Cambridge Companions to Philosophy

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Another issue of the multivolume series Cambridge Companions has now been published, this time as *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*. It is written by nine well-established Philo scholars and edited by Adam Kamesar, Professor of Judeo-Hellenistic Literature at Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, U.S.A.

The present volume consists of three main parts, each divided into three subchapters. In part 1, “Philo’s Life and Writings,” Daniel R. Schwartz deals with “Philo, His Family, and His Times” (9–31) and provides both a well-informed and balanced account of the few facts we have about Philo’s life, then a sketch of some main aspects of Jewish life in the Diaspora at his times. James R. Royse then presents “The Works of Philo” (32–64). After first giving the generally accepted classification of Philo’s works, he presents these as the *Questiones*, the allegorical commentary, “The Exposition of the Law,” Apologetic and historical works, and the philosophical works. Then he has some reflections on additional lost work and fragments, on spurious works, and, finally, on the chronology and transmission of Philo’s works. The last chapter in this part is by Adam Kamesar, who provides an overview of central issues concerning “Biblical Interpretation in Philo” (65–91), focusing on his notions of text and canon and some fundamental principles of his biblical exegesis, especially in his allegorical interpretations.

Part 2 focuses on “Philo’s Thought.” First Christina Termini deals with “Philo’s Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism” (95–123), appropriately subdivided into “Theology,” “Theory of Man,” “The Law,” and “Israel.” This chapter functions as a broad survey of Philo’s biblical faith as understood in the setting of Second Temple or Middle Judaism. Her main thesis is that “Philo probably does not represent the typical Jew of the Diaspora. Rather he seems to express the viewpoint of a cultured elite, and his writings may also reflect the acme of Jewish Hellenistic tradition, in which exegesis and philosophy were deeply influenced both in form and in content by Greek models” (96). The next chapter, written by Roberto Radice, narrows its focus to “Philo’s Theology and Theory of Creation” (124–45). Hence both this and the following (on “Philo’s Ethics,” by Carlos Levy, 146–71) are more in-depth treatments of some aspects of Philo’s thought as seen in light of perspectives inherent in Greek philosophy.

The last and third part deals with Philo’s “Influence and Significance.” Here Folker Siegert first writes about “Philo and the New Testament” (175–209). The New Testament writings here investigated are the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Pauline corpus, 1 Corinthians, Luke, the Pauline school, and the Gospel according to John. Each of these groups again is then studied in light of fourteen different topics taken from the works of Philo. To some extent this procedure works well, but I am not sure if all aspects of how Philo are used in New Testament studies are caught up by this method.

In the next chapter David T. Runia deals with “Philo and the Early Christian Fathers” (210–30). He aims to describe and analyze the role that Philo played in the Christian tradition from the second to the fifth centuries, narrowed down to two specific questions: How did Philo come to be accepted in the Christian tradition? Why did this unexpected adoption take place? The first question is answered by describing how Philo was used by several of the church fathers; the second receives a threefold answer: Philo was adopted because of (1) the role he played as a historian and as an apologist for the Jewish tradition; (2) Philo’s value as an exegete and interpreter of Scripture; and, finally, (3) Philo’s role as theologian and philosopher.

In the ninth and final chapter, David Winston deals with “Philo and Rabbinic Literature” (231–53). His point of departure is the fact that in the rabbinic works there is virtually no real response to Philo’s meditations on Scripture (232). The response of Winston to this is that it is most probably due to the fact that Philo was writing in Greek, his reliance on the Septuagint, and his lack of recourse to the Hebrew original. In spite of this fact that Philo is never mentioned by name in the rabbinic literature, there are some echoes of his thought discernable in rabbinic works. Winston then comments on Philo and rabbinic midrash, then on similarities and contrasts between Philo and the rabbis. In this section he deals with issues such as God’s transcendent immanence, two types of Mosaic

prophecy, the natural law, Philonic halakah, and repentance. Finally, if asking if Philo was a Philo Judaeus or Philo *philosophica-mysticus*, Philo would probably have been quite content to be described as both a Philo Judaeus *et philosophica-mysticus*. How the rabbis would have considered him is, however, at least to me not quite clear from such a description.

The book has no concluding chapter, but it has a classified bibliography (255–65), an index of sources, and a general index.

As with all of the other volumes in The Cambridge Companion Series, its authors are taken from the best within the field, representing a good balance of viewpoints, and being very well informed and informative. I do think we here have a good introduction to Philo. For new readers of Philo, however, it might possibly be better if they started out with one or more of the introductory volumes by E. R. Goodenough, Samuel Sandmel, and Ken Schenk,¹ then proceeded to this new and more advanced introduction as a companion to their studies

This companion volume also demonstrates that it is difficult to write an introductory or companion volume like this on Philo; there are so many fields of related issues, opinions, and groups of writings that have to be considered and compared. In this volume I found F. Siegert's essay on Philo and the New Testament somewhat too selective. This may be due to the fact that I know the New Testament better than the rabbinic works, but also to the selective approach that he uses. Furthermore, when looking for parallels or influences from or on Philo, it becomes even more clear to me that one has to distinguish carefully between echoes of thought and similarity of traditions. An author may not as much provide echoes of Philo's thought as both he and Philo might draw upon similar or comparable traditions.

Second, Philo's works are important as evidence of how it was to live in the social world of Alexandria. I would have liked if the present volume had focused more on this aspect. The first chapter deals with "Philo, His Family and His Times," but for the rest the emphases are mostly on Philo's ideas, thought, theology, and theory. Even in the otherwise informative subchapter on "Philo and the New Testament," there is little to be found on how Philo can inform us about social issues of his days, issues relevant for the study of both Philo and the New Testament.

1. E. R. Goodenough, *Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (repr., Rowman & Littlefield, 1986); Samuel Sandmel, *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 1979); Ken Schenk, *A Brief Guide to Philo* (Westminster John Knox, 2005). A review of the latter can be read at http://bookreviews.org/pdf/4699_4818.pdf.

Nevertheless, in spite of these few comments, the volume is to be very welcomed, and I think particularly those intending to be initiated into the world and thought of Philo will find it very helpful. Hence Adam Kamesar is to be congratulated for this volume.