CHAPTER 4

Providence and Cosmology in Philo of Alexandria

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1 Introduction

Philo's conception of providence has two main implications, one cosmological, the other ethical.[1] The first implication concerns the action of God in creating and governing the world, whereas the second deals primarily with human responsibility. Whereas the ethical implications are discussed by Roberto Radice in the next chapter of this volume, I will here focus on the cosmological ramifications of providence, which in Philo are related to the coming-into-being and the corruption of the world.[2]

The cosmological relevance of providence is attested especially in the works written by Philo after his participation in the delegation to the Emperor Gaius Caligula in 38 CE. In Rome, he actively sought more protection for the Alexandrian Jewish community, which, under the prefect Flaccus, had been suffering unsustainable forms of abuse.[3] Recently, Maren Niehoff suggested that the period spent in Rome would also have influenced him from a cultural and philosophical point of view.[4] In the works which Philo wrote during and after his stay, he paid more attention to issues such as that of providence which were widely discussed in Rome. Even though providence is a topic that can be found in all of Philo's works, in the works which are considered to have been written after the Roman embassy, it resurfaces as "freed" from the dense allegorical accounts in the *Allegorical Commentary* and in the *Questions and Answers*, where the philosophical issues are more difficult to extract.[5] After

1 For providence in Philo of Alexandria and its consequences on ethics and theodicy, see Frick 1999, 139–175. The standard edition of Philo's works is Cohn-Wendland 1896–1930.

2 Frick 1999, 89–118. For providence in Philo, see also Dragona-Monachou 1994, 4456–4461.

3 Schwartz 2009, 14–31.

4 See Niehoff 2018, 1–22.

5 According to Niehoff 2018, 245–246, Philo was born ca. 20 BCE in Alexandria, where he wrote the *Allegorical Commentary* and the *Questions* between ca. 10–35 CE. After the pogrom in the autumn of 38 CE, he travelled to Rome as the head of the Jewish embassy to Gaius (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.259). Between 38–41 CE Philo was active in Rome as ambassador and author and, according to Niehoff, even probably led the negotiations with Claudius after Gaius' assassination in 41 CE. Between 40–49 CE, Philo started to write a new series of works, addressing a wider Graeco-Roman audience, which include his historical

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the embassy, Philo – like Seneca a few years later – would devote a whole treatise to providence, dealing with the connection between *pronoia* and theodicy in a more substantial manner.[6] Also in *On the Creation of the World* (part of the *Exposition of the Law*) he assigned to providence a fundamental role within his cosmology.[7]

The Roman embassy also affected Philo's approach to cosmology, in which providence allows for a specific form of communication between God and the cosmos which He created. In Philo's conception of *pronoia* the Jewish tradition, Platonism and Stoicism converge.[8] Philo's providence is a "synthetic" concept, in the sense that it not only refers to the divine "premeditation" that precedes the creative act, but also to God's "care" towards the world. Philo develops from a Jewish perspective doctrines that can already be found in the *Timaeus* and in the Stoic readings of this dialogue. Philo's conception of *pronoia* shows a remarkable continuity with the conception that permeates the Jewish-Hellenistic literature of his time. Although Philo's cosmology is functional to his ethics, in the works which he wrote after the embassy, providence is no longer considered solely in relation to man's responsibility, as it had been in the *Allegorical Commentary*. *Pronoia* starts to assume the role of "guarantor" of a cosmology aimed at reconciling Judaism, Platonism and Stoicism. Philo's providence is a philosophical answer to questions regarding the perpetual existence of the cosmos.[9]

2 Providence in *On the Creation of the World*

Already at the beginning of *On the Creation of the World* Philo explicitly refers to *pronoia*. At 9, he attacks those who – like Aristotle and Epicurus – had

and philosophical writings and the *Exposition of the Law*. According to Niehoff, Philo died in ca. 49 CE.

6 *On Providence* 1.77–88 Aucher. Cf. Niehoff 2018, 76–77. See Kaiser 2007, 134–146, where, in the light of the Stoic tradition, the Wisdom of Ben Sirach is compared with Seneca's *On Providence*, Philo's *Every Good Man is Free* and Cicero's *On the Paradoxes of the Stoics*, with a focus on analogies/divergences between human action and divine providence. For Philo and Seneca see also Radice 1989, 281–319 and Scarpat 1977, 64–65. For Philo's *On Providence* see Runia 2017, 159–178 and Radice in this volume.

7 Niehoff 2018, 74–77, cf. Runia 2017, 177. Frick 1999, 185–189; 194 underlines how in *On the Embassy to Gaius* and *Flaccus* Philo identifies providence with justice and with the divine protection which the Alexandrian Jewish community was seeking more urgently than in previous years. In these two works Philo appears to have elaborated a notion of providence aimed at encouraging and instilling hope in the Jewish people.

8 Runia 1986, 241–242. Cf. Frick 1999, 92–94.

9 Frick 1999, 102–108, Runia 1986, 494. Cf. Sterling 1992, 15–41.

believed that the cosmos was ungenerated. Philo has no doubts in considering providence as indispensable for an explanation of the origin of the world:

> But the passive object, which of itself was without soul and unmoved, when set in motion and shaped and ensouled by the intellect, changed into the most perfect piece of work, this cosmos. Those who declare that it is ungenerated are unaware that they are eliminating the most useful and indispensable of the contributions to piety, the (doctrine of) providence (πρόνοιαν).[10]

In his commentary on the passage Runia states: "The doctrine of providence has to be seen as the obverse of the doctrine of creation."[11] The existence of *pronoia*, in fact, guarantees the whole creative process which involves both macrocosm (world) and microcosm (man).[12] Although from several passages of *On the Creation of the World* it is clear that providence must be taken for granted, Philo refers again to it only at the end of his work. Nevertheless, Philo, following Genesis and *Timaeus*, highlights that God is like a father who takes care of the sons which He has generated.[13] According to Philo, the world is not left to chance but is subject to a divine will, which, in line with the Stoic tradition, corresponds to the law of God and the law of nature.[14] God, like a king and a commander, rules over the cosmos by making sure that everything follows His providential plan which aims at avoiding a "power-vacuum" (ἀναρχία)

10 Cf. *On Providence* 1.6–8. All translations of *On the Creation of the World* in this chapter are taken from Runia 2001. Runia offers the parallels of Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 1.18–20, where the Epicurean Velleius attacks *Pronoia* presented as "the old woman predicting future of the Stoics" (*anus fatidica Stoicorum*), and of Atticus, fr. 4 Des Places (= Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 15.6.1–17), where the existence of providence in the universe is safeguarded in an anti-Aristotelian key (Runia 2001, 117–118). For a discussion of *On the Creation of the World* 9, see also Radice 1987, 234–236; cf. Trabattoni 2009, 113–122.

11 Runia 2001, 117–118.

12 See also Radice 1987, 235.

13 For God as father see *On the Creation of the World* 46, 74–75, 84, 89, 145, 171.

14 In *On the Creation of the World*, at 143, Philo states: "But since every well-governed city has a constitution, it was the case that the citizen of the world necessarily made use of the constitution which belonged to the entire cosmos. This is the right reason of nature, which is named with a more appropriate title "ordinance" (θεσμός), a divine law, according to which obligations and rights have been distributed to each creature." Radice underlines that, despite Stoic influence, Philo's thoughts here are original. Even if Philo is using a Stoic lexicon, the law of nature corresponds to the Torah (cf. Radice 1987, 302). For the law in Philo and some possible connections with Platonic-Stoic authors (such as Antiochus of Ascalon), see Koester 1970, 521–541 and Horsley 1978, 35–59.

in this world.[15] On a metaphorical level, the divine plan corresponds to a blueprint which an architect would draw up in order to build the "great city" of the cosmos (μεγαλόπολις).[16] From a cosmological point of view, therefore, providence does not consist only in divine thoughtfulness and care for the perpetual existence of the cosmos, it also expresses the foresight of God: everything happens as has already been inscribed in the Architect's project. The corruption of the cosmos, however, does not form a part of this divine blueprint. Runia has made clear that the connection between providence and the indestructibility of the world in Philo is to be understood against the background of Plato's *Timaeus*, at 41a6–b6, where Plato writes that the things which the demiurge has assembled are not dissolvable unless he wants.[17] Following Plato, in *On the Eternity of the World* Philo argues against the theory of *ekpyrosis*, which he attributes to the Stoics Boethus of Sidon and Panaetius of Rhodes.[18] More specifically, in *On the Eternity of the World* 25–26 Philo defends the indestructibility of the cosmos by referring this time to *Timaeus* 32c5–33b1, where the universe is described as "ageless and without sickness" (ἀγήρως καὶ ἄνοσος).

15 In *On the Creation of the World*, at 11, Philo states: "It is a worthless and unhelpful doctrine, bringing about a power-vacuum (ἀναρχία) in this cosmos, just like (what happens) in a city, because it does not then have a ruler or magistrate or judge, by whom everything is lawfully administered and regulated." In his commentary Runia 2001, 139 explains his preference for translating *power-vacuum* rather than *anarchy* "because this would obscure the meaning of a lack of legitimate authority. But of course when this is missing, anarchy in the modern sense ensues. As a Jewish inhabitant of Alexandria, Philo knew at first hand what civil anarchy could mean. Witness the dreadful pogrom of 38 CE. Implicit here is the apologetic theme of the monarchic rule of the God of Israel."

16 In *On the Creation of the World* 17–20 Philo compares the paradigm, in which the ideas are contained, to a νοητὴ πόλις and this cosmos to a μεγαλόπολις. For Philo's simile of God as an architect, see Runia 2003, 89–106 (cf. his 1990, 398–412, 2000, 361–379 and Decharneux 2017, 11–26). My forthcoming monograph *Il Dio architetto di Filone di Alessandria* (Opif. *17–20*) is dedicated to an analysis of *On the Creation of the World* 17–20.

17 Runia 1986, 494 stresses that Philo is best brought in connection with the Middle Platonists. A common aspect is that God is not considered as responsible for the evil in the cosmos (see Emmanuele Vimercati's contribution to this volume). According to Runia, the Stoic tradition seems to be dominant in comparison to the Platonic tradition. See e.g. *On Providence*, where Plato's thought plays a secondary role in comparison with Stoicism. In *On the Heavens* 1.279b4–282b7 Aristotle, referring to the *Timaeus* and its interpreters, had already criticized those who believed in a generated and indestructible cosmos. Cf. Frick 2001, 102–108.

18 *On the Eternity of the World* 76–78. Von Arnim inserts this passage into *SVF* as Boethus, fr. 7. In the collections on Panaetius, scholars usually only regard section 76 as Panaetian: see fr. 65 Van Straaten, fr. 131 Alesse, fr. A59 Vimercati (who takes 76–84 on board as uncertain: fr. C1). It should be remembered that Philo's authorship of *On the Eternity of the World* has been doubted: see further Runia 1981, 105–151. For Philo as a "doxographer", see Runia 2008 (for *On the Eternity of the World* especially 34–39).

In Frick's words, "the doctrine of providence functions as an essential pillar within the structure of Philonic thought as a whole",[19] or put differently: *pronoia* holds everything together. On the one hand, *pronoia* is the "divine forethought" in which the creation – and, more generally, everything will happen – is planned. On the other hand, *pronoia* is the law which governs the world as a city. Due to providence the world can persist even after the sixth day when God stopped creating and embellishing it. At the end of the *On the Creation of the World*, at 170–171, Philo illustrates the key-points of his cosmology:

> By means of the creation account which we have discussed he [Moses] teaches us among many other things five lessons that are the most beautiful and excellent of all.
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> The first of these is that the divinity is and exists, on account of the godless, some of whom are in doubt and incline in two directions concerning his existence, while others are more reckless and brazenly assert that he does not exist at all, but is only said to exist by people who overshadow the truth with mythical fictions.
>
> The second lesson is that God is one, on account of those who introduce the polytheistic opinion, feeling no shame when they transfer the worst of political systems, rule by the mob, from earth to heaven.
>
> The third lesson is, as has already been said, that the cosmos has come into existence, on account of those who think it is ungenerated and eternal, attributing no superiority to God.
>
> The fourth lesson is that the cosmos too is one, since the creator is one as well and he has made his product similar to himself in respect of its unicity, expending all the available material for the genesis of the whole. After all, it would not have been a complete whole if it had not been put together and constituted of parts that were themselves whole. There are those who suppose there to be multiple cosmoi, and there are others who think their number is boundless, whereas they themselves are the ones who are really boundlessly ignorant of what it is fine to know.
>
> The fifth lesson is that God also takes thought (προνοεῖ) for the cosmos, for that the maker always takes care of what has come into existence is a necessity by the laws and ordinance of nature, in accordance with which parents too take care of their children.

At 172, Philo summarizes the five lessons by stating:

19 Frick 2001, 1.

> He, then, who first has learnt these things not so much with his hearing as with his understanding, and has imprinted their marvelous and priceless forms on his own soul, namely that God is and exists, and that he who truly exists is one, and that he made the cosmos and made it unique, making it, as was said, similar to himself in respect of its being one, and that he always takes thought (προνοεῖ) for what has come into being, this person will lead a blessed life of well-being, marked as he is by the doctrines of piety and holiness.[20]

From these five lessons or "doctrines" (δόγματα) it can be inferred that providence occupies an intermediate position, between the existence of God and that of the cosmos. Providence, in fact, originates in God but represents a sort of "bridge" between the Creator and mankind. In addition to guaranteeing the existence of the cosmos, providence includes the care of the Father for what has been created.

The doctrines have been understood as decrees of faith. According to Goodenough, these five doctrines corresponded to "the first creed in history".[21] Against Goodenough, Runia argued that this summary of the Mosaic/Philonic doctrine – which might have didactic goals – cannot consist in "a creed or articles of faith in which one must believe before one can belong to Judaism."[22] Rather, they are "the fundamental or preliminary doctrines (δόγματα) of which one must be intellectually convinced in order to embark on an understanding of the scriptures that embrace both the Mosaic legislation and the wider Jewish tradition."[23] Runia suggested that these doctrines could have a pre-Philonic origin, even if "the strong philosophical emphasis makes it likely that Philo decisively contributed to their formulation."[24]

These doctrines, in fact, should be contextualized not only within Hellenistic Judaism, but also within the contemporary debate among philosophers, because they contain answers to the "standard philosophical questions of Philo's time."[25] Excluding God's uniqueness, Aëtius testifies to divine existence

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20 Frick 1999, 2 translates: "(1) God is and is from eternity, and (2) that He who really is is One, and (3) that He has made the world and (4) has made it one world, unique as Himself is unique, and (5) that He ever exercises providence for his creation."

21 Runia 2001, 392 against Goodenough 1962, 37.

22 Runia 2001, 394.

23 Runia 2001, 394. Cf. Radice 1987, 312, for a comparison between *On the Creation of the World* 172, *On the Special Laws* 3.189, *On Rewards and Punishments* 42 and *Questions and Answers* 2.34.

24 Runia 2001, 394.

25 Runia 2001, 392–393.

(*Placita* 1.7 Diels), to the corruptibility/incorruptibility of the cosmos (*Placita* 2.4), to its uniqueness (*Placita* 1.5 and 2.1), and, finally, to the presence of providence in the world (*Placita* 2.3).[26] Aëtius reports that, according to all philosophers – with the exception of the Atomists, Epicurus, Ecphantus and Aristotle –, it is providence which animates and administers the world.[27] Philo, as we will see, stresses the emblematic role of *pronoia* within the five doctrines as being in harmony with the Platonic and Stoic traditions, implicitly brought up by Aëtius, and coherent with the Stoic reading of the *Timaeus*.[28]

3 *Pronoia* in Hellenistic Judaism: from Royal Care to Divine Providence

Like other concepts in the *corpus Philonicum*, providence has a double meaning, which is theological and philosophical at the same time. According to Philo, no conflict is to be assumed between Judaism and Hellenistic philosophy: he even introduces Moses as the first philosopher.[29] Philo's concept of providence, elaborated from a cosmological perspective, is part of a general need to reformulate philosophical topics in a Judaic key.[30] This need has its roots in Judaic-Hellenistic thought. As soon as Jewish thinkers starts to write in Greek, they also adopt philosophical issues discussed in this language. As is well known, Philo, who most probably did not know Hebrew, used the *Septuagint*, the Greek translation of the Scriptures. The "seventy translators" thus already imported typically Greek notions in their translations.

In general, the seventy translators rarely used the term *pronoia* in the sense of "divine providence". Only in the books of the *Septuagint* which were composed directly in Greek and where the influence of Stoicism is more manifest does this word start to mean "providence". In the second book of Maccabees

26 Runia 2001, 392–393. Cf. Runia 2009, 341–373. See Mansfeld and Runia 1997–2018, vol. 1, 321–323, who suggest that the *Placita* could have been writing during the first century CE.

27 Mansfeld and Runia 1997–2018, vol. 1, 337–346.

28 See Reydams-Schils 1999 for the readings of *Timaeus* from the ancient Stoics to Calcidius. See also Reydams-Schils 2013, 29–58 and Alesse 2018, 46–57 (for the *Timaeus* especially 49–50).

29 *On the Creation of the World* 8: "Moses, however, had not only reached the very summit of philosophy, but had also been instructed in the many and most essential doctrines of nature by means of oracles." Cf. *On the Creation of the World* 131, where Philo compares Moses with the "other philosophers" (ἄλλοι φιλόσοφοι).

30 For the notion of "Judaic-Hellenistic thought", see Calabi 2010, 5–14. See also Wendland 1912, 192–211 and Momigliano 1975, 74–96.

an embryonic sense of providence can be found, not yet related to the celestial government of the cosmos, but to the terrestrial authority of kings.[31] Two examples should suffice here: at 2 Maccabees 4.6 the "regal decision" (βασιλικὴ προνοία) of king Seleucus IV Philopator re-establishes peace, and at 2 Maccabees 14.9 his son Demetrius, once having become king, is asked "to take care" (προνοεῖν) of his people and, in particular, of the Jews. According to Arnaldo Momigliano, the *Letter to Aristeas*, where the origin of the *Septuagint* is celebrated in a solemn manner, would have been written around the same time as the second book of *Maccabees*. Both of them are to be connected to the same cultural ambience.[32] Also in the *Letter of Aristeas*, in fact, *pronoia* is a typical characteristic of kings.[33] In particular at 30.5 mention is made of "royal care" (βασιλικὴ προνοία) that warranted the translation of the Torah.[34] Two further examples can be found at 80.3 and 190.3. At 80.3 *pronoia* is king Ptolemy's "forethought" towards the temple furnishings, which he has donated to the High priest Eleazar. At 190.3, the hope is expressed that every king will exercise "great care" (πολλὴ πρόνοια) towards the people which they govern.[35]

However, in the *Letter*, at 201.2, *pronoia* is used in the sense of divine providence. This use is attributed to Socratic Menedemus of Eretria (4th–3rd century BCE), apparently also present at the celebration of the translation of the *Septuagint* in the presence of the king, who in his answer pronounces these words:

> Indeed, O King. For since all things are governed by providence (προνοίᾳ), and assuming this correctly, that human beings are created by God, it follows that all sovereignty and beautiful speech have a starting point in God.[36] (Tr. Wright.)

Unlike the earlier occurrences of *pronoia* in the *Letter*, here it no longer characterizes the actions of kings, but refers to the divine government of the cosmos.

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31 According to Momigliano 1987, 41–51, the second book of *Maccabees* should be dated around 124 BCE. Cf. Sacchi 2012–2019, 1434 n. 9. For the use of the verb προνοέω and of the substantive πρόνοια in the *Septuagint*, see Moulton-Milligan 1930, 543.

32 Sacchi 2012–2019, 1434.

33 Philo frequently describes God as king (e.g. *On the Creation of the World* 71 and 88). He seems to invert the process of the divinization of the sovereigns, typical of the Hellenistic age, with Alexander the Great as the standard example: Wendland 1912, 123–127.

34 Wright 2015, 154. Cf. Calabi 2011, 60–61 n. 28.

35 Wright 2015, 342–343.

36 Diogenes Laertius 2.140. Wright 2015, 351–352 remarks that the Menedemus quotation could be due not only to his reputation as philosopher but also as a host of symposia, where he was often one of the last to leave. Cf. Gruen 2013, 2711–2768, especially 2749.

A similar meaning can also be found in the *Septuagint*, in relation to the heavenly sovereign. In 3 Maccabees 4.21 and 5.30, God helps and protects the Jewish people, using invincible, divine providence.[37] Also, in 4 Maccabees *pronoia* is an exclusive characteristic of God and represents the silent "director", who guides all the events narrated in the book.[38] In 4 Maccabees 17.22 only providence could save Israel from oppression and could protect the Jewish people from the misfortunes which fall upon them.

In the Book of Wisdom a similar notion of providence as "divine protection" can be found. According to Scarpat, this book would have been composed within the Alexandrian Jewish community by an author who was well-skilled in Platonic and Stoic traditions.[39] At 6.7, with reference to the severe judgment which awaits powerful men, it is said that not only does God create everything, whether big or small, He also "provides" (προνοεῖ) equally to everything.[40] At 14.3, in the metaphor of a ship at the mercy of stormy waves, it is said that only the providence of the Father guides everything: "but your foresight, oh Father, pilots it" (ἡ δὲ σή, πάτερ, διακυβερνᾷ πρόνοια).[41]

According to Otto Kaiser, providence is also implicit in the Wisdom of Sirach – a Greek translation of a text originally written in Hebrew, probably in Jerusalem at the beginning of 2nd century BCE. There it is connected to the creation of the world.[42] At 39.12–35 – so Kaiser – Ben Sirach is concerned with ensuring the responsibility of man and there are no doubts about the finalistic character of the divine action.[43] The God of Ben Sirach predicts how human beings will behave, by making sure that they will have the means at their disposal to do well, such that He can do good to right people and the evil to the bad one (Wisdom of Sirach 39.16–21). In the Wisdom of Sirach, providence serves divine justice, which finds expression in God's punishment or reward. As Kaiser notes, despite his debt to Stoicism throughout the work, Ben Sirach's conception of providence lacks the aspect of "necessity" (ἀνάγκη), which

37 Sacchi 2012–2019, vol. 2.2, 1537–1538.

38 See e.g. 4 Maccabees 9.24 and 4 Maccabees 13.19.

39 Scarpat 1989, vol. 1, 18. Cf. Winston 1979, 25–59; Sacchi 2012–2019, vol. 3, 864.

40 Sacchi 2012–2019, vol. 3, 893 n. 83, where, in the context of Stoicism the connections between the use of the verb προνοεῖν and the verb ποιεῖν are discussed.

41 In Wisdom of Sirach 17.2 αἰώνια προνοία concerns all people, except blasphemous men who are excluded from perpetual providence and who are prisoners of darkness. In the *Septuagint pronoia* is also mentioned in the Greek version of the book of Daniel, at 6.19, where it is said that God, in "taking care of him" (πρόνοιαν ποιούμενος αὐτοῦ), closes the lion's jaws in order that they do not disturb Daniel ever again.

42 Kaiser 2007, 96–112. For Wisdom of Sirach see Sacchi 2012–2019, vol. 3, 955–960.

43 Kaiser 2007, 96.

according to the Stoics determines the fate of man.[44] God gives human beings what they deserve: He is benevolent towards good people and punitive to the bad.[45] Therefore, the Creator does not determine the course of things in the world in their entirety, but from the beginning He provides men with the means they will need to do good. For this reason, according to Kaiser, the hymn at 39.12–35 can be understood as a sort of celebration of God, who created the world and the human beings in it, and who governs over them.[46]

Philo developed his conception of providence against this Judaic-Hellenistic background, where Platonic and Stoic traditions had already merged with Judaism. On the basis of the *Timaeus*, however, Philo emphasized the cosmological role of *pronoia*, which becomes part of the five doctrines expressed in his "Mosaic philosophy."[47] Aristoboulus (2nd century BCE) was a Peripatetic of Jewish descent, who, like Philo, lived in Alexandria and used Greek philosophy in order to interpret the Scripture. Unfortunately, only a very limited part of his work survives. For this reason, it is difficult to ascertain the role of providence in Aristoboulus' thought and to know, in particular, if he held that providence guaranteed the creation of the world as did Philo. Although in these fragments Plato is quoted by name, it is not possible to establish with certainty whether the *Timaeus* may have represented a stable point of reference for his works.[48] Runia, in particular, sees some traces of divine providence in fr. 4 Radice (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 13.12.4) and in fr. 5 (Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 13.12.12), where God preserves what He has produced according to His original arranging.[49] Even if it is not possible

44 Kaiser 2007, 107.

45 Kaiser 2007, 107.

46 Kaiser 2007, 109–110.

47 For "the essence of Mosaic philosophy", see Radice 1987, cxxxviii–cxxxix.

48 For Aristoboulus and the *Timaeus*, see Reydams-Schils 1999, 137–139. Also Niehoff 2013, 90–91 (cf. her 2011, 58–74) highlights a possible role of the *Timaeus* in Aristobulus' thought. According to Radice 1995, 97–119, 181–182, however, Aristoboulus does not refer at all to the *Timaeus*. The imprint of this Platonic dialogue would have emerged from the few and short, but – Radice underlines – not insignificant, fragments. Radice also notes that in Aristoboulus, furthermore, there are no echoes of the Platonic doctrine of ideas, which will later be fundamental in Philo. See also Runia 1986, 410.

49 Runia 2001, 118. The presence of the divine providence in Aristoboulus would be evidenced by the verb συνέχειν. In fr. 4 Radice (~~Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 13.12.4~~), Aristoboulus embraces the idea, which he attributes also to Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, of the possibility of listening to the "voice of god." According to Aristoboulus, the three philosophers described nature as a divine creature "held together" (συνεχομένη) by the Creator. In fr. 5 Radice (~~Eusebius of Caesarea, *Preparation for the Gospel* 13.12.12~~), Aristoboulus underlines that, when God gives an order (τάξις), He also "maintains" (συνέχει) and "remodels" (μεταποιεῖ) it. Cf. Radice 1995, 200–201; 214–215.

to exactly establish the role of providence according to Aristoboulus, Philo seems to be aware of being part of the hybrid process which had been established between Judaism and Graeco-Roman philosophy. This process started in Alexandria: there *pronoia* came to mean not only royal care but also the divine design in which everything has its place. God is not responsible for evil actions but He can reward those who act rightly in conformity with the divine law. In this way human actions are in accordance with God's plan, in which everything – including the creation of the cosmos – is inscribed.

4 The *Timaeus* and Stoicism: the Philosophical Sources of Philo

The role of *pronoia* in *On the Creation of the World* must also be discussed in relation to the *Timaeus*. As the studies by Radice and Runia have shown, Philo's work on the creation of the cosmos seems to be nothing more than an attempt to give a double "exegesis" of both book of Genesis and the *Timaeus*.[50] Philo offers a Stoic interpretation of the *Timaeus* with continuous reference to the creation in Genesis. As I already noted in the Introduction, with regard to the *Timaeus* Philo would most likely have been influenced by a Stoic reading of this Platonic dialogue.[51] Gretchen Reydams-Schils has underlined how in the development of different interpretations of the *Timaeus* (she speaks of a "hermeneutic circle") the Stoics played a central role.[52] Despite their overall hostile attitude towards this Platonic dialogue, the Stoics assimilated some of its doctrines.[53] Philo, as well as other authors before him (such as Posidonius and Antiochus of Ascalon, as they are known to us via Cicero's writings), could

50 Radice 1989, 125–186, 373–378. Runia 1987, 384–388, 399–411, 426–433, 461–467, 535–546. See Niehoff 2007, 161–191, where she suggests that Philo could have played a decisive role within the "textual community" which was born around the *Timaeus*. Philo attributes a certain "sacredness" to Plato and attributes to his works an authority similar to that of the Torah. For Philo's explicit and implicit quotations of Plato, see Koskenniemi 2019, 102–106.

51 The Stoics themselves could have accessed it through collections of *vetusta placita* or through transmitted memorizations: cf. Reydams-Schils 1999, 16, 35–36, 41–83; 2008, 169–195; 2013, 29–58. Cf. Mansfeld 1990, 3167–3177; Mansfeld and Runia 1997–2018, vol. 2.1, 27–41.

52 Reydams-Schils 1999, 16. For a summary of the reception of *Timaeus* until Philo, see Runia 1987, 38–57. For the general reception of *Timaeus* see Reydams-Schils 2003, Sheppard and Sharples 2003, Steel and Leinkauf 2005, Napolitano 2007, Celia and Ulacco 2015.

53 See Alesse 2018, 46–57. Cf. Sedley 2007, 225–230 for the dependence of the Stoics on the *Timaeus*. For their use of *Timaeus* 30b1–c1 Sedley 2007, 229–233 points to Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 9.104 and Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 2.21 (both in *SVF* 1.111).

have formulated his conception of *pronoia* on the basis of this kind of readings of the *Timaeus*.[54] In Philo's "Stoic reading of *Timaeus*" the Judaic-Hellenistic tradition remains, however, crucial.

In the *Timaeus*, at 30b8–c1, Timaeus, recognizing the demiurge's benevolence as the starting point for the creation of the world, states that the universe, which is like a living being endowed with soul and thought, had been generated "thanks to divine providence" (διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν). A similar notion of providence can also be found in book 10 of Plato's *Laws*,[55] in particular at 901d–902c, where the idea that the gods do not care about human affairs is rejected, since the gods understand, see and listen to everything that happens.[56] The *Timaeus*, however, goes one step further than the *Laws*: *pronoia* not only preserves and takes care of human beings but also has a generative character. When Philo considers *pronoia* in relation to the demiurge, who in *On the Creation of the World* becomes one of ways by which Philo refers to God, his point of reference is obviously the *Timaeus*.[57] In the Philonic image of God as an architect, this world is perfect, because it was built by the Creator according to the blueprint which He had previously designed. The generative character of *pronoia* in the *Timaeus* can be found also in Stoics like Chrysippus who also conferred to it the capacity of shaping matter.[58] In Stoicism, *pronoia* is identified with the nature of the whole. According to Diogenes Laertius 7.138 (*SVF* 2.634), Chrysippus and Posidonius stated that providence coincides with *nous*, which permeates the cosmos as a "force of cohesion".[59] Philo takes up this aspect of Stoic *pronoia*, in order to reconcile the transcendent and the immanent roles of the Creator. He lives in the world which He has built, ruling it not only "from above" but also "from within". Different from the Stoics' conception, Philo's *pronoia* has no value in itself and can exist only if God "activates"

54 Reydams-Schils 1999, 117–133 (cf. her 2013, 25–43). According to Radice 1989, 267–275, however, neither in Antiochus nor in Posidonius traces of Philo's theory of ideas as thoughts of God can be found. Ideas as thoughts God is thus to be attributed to Philo. Cf. Runia 1987, 46–49.

55 In the *Laws*, however, Plato does not use a specific lexicon focused on *pronoia* which is possible to find only through adverbial connotations or in connection with human forethought. For instance, see *Laws* 4.721c7, 8.838e7, 9.871a2, 873a6.

56 Cf. *Phaedrus* 254e7 where *pronoia* is the foresight of the charioteer. For *pronoia* in Plato, see Dragona-Monachou 1994, 4419–4422. Cf. Ferrari 2010, 177–192.

57 E.g. *On the Creation of the World* 36, 68, 138–139, 146, 171. Cf. Powers 2013, 713–722.

58 Cicero, *On the Nature of the Gods* 3.92 (= *SVF* 2.1107). For *pronoia* in Stoicism, see Dragona-Monachou, 1976, 1994, 4424–4452 and Brouwer and Salles in this volume.

59 Plutarch, *On the Contradictions of the Stoics* 34.1049F (*SVF* 2.937) also reports that, according to Chrysippus, both universal nature and universal reason are to be identified with providence and Zeus.

it. For this reason, *pronoia* becomes part of the five Philonic doctrines, occupying an intermediate position between God and the cosmos: providence both originates in God and acts on the world.

5 Conclusions

Philo's debt towards Stoicism concerns the role which divine immanence plays in his theology, where it is harmonized with God's transcendence.[60] As Maren Niehoff has pointed out, both the politics of the Empire and Stoicism represent the context for the emergence of a "monotheistic creation theology", which can be found not only in Philo but also in later Jewish authors such as Flavius Josephus.[61] Therefore the cosmological meaning of *pronoia*, which emerges in *On the Creation of the World* must be understood in relation to these political and philosophical influences which Judaism encountered at the dawn of the new era. Philo's interpretation of the *Timaeus* in a Stoic-Jewish key is emblematic of the new air which Philo inhaled in Rome. In *On the Creation of the World* providence becomes a symbol of the encounter between Judaism and Greco-Roman Hellenistic philosophy and Philo elaborates this concept in order to prove that the cosmos will be governed in the best possible way.

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60 Niehoff 2018, 99–100: "Following his immersion in Stoic philosophy, Philo interprets Plato's *Timaeus* with emphasis on divine immanence. [. . .] Plato's god remains separate from the world, enjoying a perfection that is impossible in the material realm. Philo's creator God, by contrast, has become astonishingly close to humans and the world, sharing his very essence in the creation."

61 Niehoff 2013, 85–106 (I owe the reference to this article to Prof. Runia). Cf. Radice 2008, 124–145.

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