# Philo of Alexandria on divine forgiveness
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# 2

# Philo's doctrine of God

## 2.1    Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, divine pardon in Philo's thought is a fascinating topic. With it, Philo introduced a notion into his reflections that is well at home in everyday religion, but not so much in intellectual discourse. In everyday religion, seeking divine pardon is something related to action and experience rather than to intellectual reflection. People who have done something wrong may experience the relief of divine forgiveness after performing certain ritual acts, through which they hope to have appeased God or the gods and turned divine anger into mercy. However, the presentation of God or the gods involved in divine forgiveness posed several serious challenges to intellectuals reflecting on the nature of the divine. These difficulties were identified in the conclusion to Chapter 1.[167] Given that the reflection on who God is stands at the core of Philo's (as any other ancient intellectual's) contemplations, it is therefore most appropriate to begin our investigation of divine pardon in Philo's thought with the two difficulties that it raises in light of his doctrine of God.[168]

The first difficulty is that forgiveness implies a relationship between the forgiven and the forgiver. This raises the following question: did Philo consider interaction between a transcendent God and creation possible and, if so, how was this connection and interaction established?[169]

The second difficulty is that if God is said to forgive, this statement implies ascribing human traits to God – that is, different emotional states (such as anger or mercy) and changing one's mind (replacing punishment with forgiveness). Such an anthropomorphic presentation of God does not appear to cohere with Philo's presentation of the divine. Therefore, the second matter of enquiry will be: how did Philo reflect on the emotional presentation of God, including the suggestion that God changes?

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[167] See pp. 43–46.

[168] As Peter Frick notes: 'Philo's thought is theocentric to the extent that every other facet of his thought must be correlated with the concept of God' (Frick, *Providence*, p. 4). Goodenough provided a schematic overview of Philo's doctrine of God in Goodenough, *Light*, p. 29. Other useful summaries include: Morris, 'Philo', pp. 880–889, and Calabi, *God's Acting*, p. 16. Runia lists the following as antecedents for Philo's doctrine of God: 1) from the Stoa: the idea that God contains everything, although Philo rejected Stoic pantheism; 2) from Aristotle: a) God as the first cause; b) God as the unmoved mover; c) God as fully active; 3) from Plato: a) God as creator; b) God as τὸ ὄντως ὄν; 4) from the Old Academy and Neopythagorism: identification of God with the monad (see Runia, *Timaeus*, pp. 434–436). Further overviews of Philo's doctrine of God can be found in every introduction on Philo. For a discussion of how for ancient authors like Philo, theology and philosophy were always intertwined, see note 39.

[169] Zeller explores how Philo adopted Platonic and Stoic concepts to address the tension between transcendent and immanent conceptions of God, see Zeller, *Studien*, pp. 22–25; see also Bréhier, *Les idées*, pp. 79–80.

The first part of this chapter will be dedicated to finding an answer to the first question. The approach will be to establish Philo's position in the philosophical debate of his time regarding the possibility of a relationship between the divine and the world. An important element of this debate was the matter of divine providence. Philosophers discussed whether it was appropriate to maintain that the gods involved themselves with events in the world. The various solutions to this question as they existed in Philo's intellectual context can be presented as a spectrum with two extremes. At one end of the spectrum, the divine and the world were regarded to be separate entities, not at all involved with each other.[170] At the other end of the spectrum, the divine and the world were regarded to be connected so much to each other that they were perceived as one entity.[171]

The analysis of a section from the treatise *De Opificio Mundi*, in which Philo describes the creation of the world, is expected to shed light on his view regarding the relationship between the divine and the world. The analysis will be focused on the reasons why Philo on the one hand saw God and creation as two fundamentally different natures and on the other hand maintained that God takes providential care of creation. The analysis of a second section from *De Opificio Mundi* will be focused on the details of how Philo held that the providential connection between God and creation is established. The analysis will lead to the conclusion that Philo can be seen to present God's providential care, a notion that brings to mind emotional and affectionate overtones, in such a way that it appears as an impersonal and emotionless process.

This conclusion paves the way for the second question of this chapter: how did Philo interpret the attribution of human characteristics to God, especially emotional traits that belong to the sphere of forgiveness, such as hurt, anger and mercy? This question will be the topic of the second part of this chapter. An analysis of a section from *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* will bring the answer into view. First, however, I will consider Philo's view on the relationship between God and creation.

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[170] Epicurus is an example of this view. According to him, the blissful existence the gods enjoyed meant that they were not involved with taking care of the world (see Nilsson, *Geschichte vol. 2*, p. 239 and Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 42, see also notes 184 and 185).

[171] Zeno is an example of this view. He held that the gods were an integral part of the world (see Nilsson, *Geschichte vol. 2*, p. 247). The modern term for such a view is 'pantheism'; Stoicism in general is described as 'pantheistic' (ibid., p. 246, see also note 192). Caveats regarding the attribution of such a modern label to ancient philosophical traditions as well as a critical philosophical examination of the term 'pantheism' can be found in Mander, 'Pantheism'.

## 2.2 *Philo's view on how the transcendent God can relate to and interact with creation*

### 2.2.1 *The relevance of* De Opificio Mundi *to this topic*

The first main question of this chapter is: what was Philo's view on how the transcendent God can relate to and interact with creation? Philo engaged this topic in *De Opificio Mundi*, a treatise dedicated to his interpretation of the biblical creation account. A structural analysis of the treatise will help identify the relevant sections to be investigated.

### 2.2.2 **De Opificio Mundi:** *Structure of argumentation*

The treatise *De Opificio Mundi* is the first in a larger body of treatises, commonly known as the Exposition of the Laws.[172] In *De Opificio Mundi*, Philo presents an interpretation of elements of Gn. 1:1–3:19, the biblical account of the creation of the world, the lives of the first human beings and their succumbing to vice. Philo's main aim in this treatise is to show that Moses' laws and the laws of nature are interconnected.[173] As Philo saw it, God did not only provide a law for the behaviour of people. Philo believed that God is the source of order and structure in the whole of creation. He also held that to perceive God as the source of order in creation is essential for living a life of virtue. Philo's argumentation in *De Opificio Mundi* is structured as follows.

**Introduction: Moses provided the best account of the world's creation. 1–12:** Philo introduces the topic of the treatise, the creation of the world as described by Moses in Genesis, with two preliminary considerations. The first is a remark that he will only present the highlights of Moses' all-embracing

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[172] The Exposition of the Laws includes (from the extant works of Philo) *De Opificio Mundi*, *De Abrahamo*, *De Josepho*, *De Vita Mosis* books I and II, *De Decalogo*, *De Specialibus Legibus* books I, II, III and IV, *De Virtutibus*, and *De Praemiis et Poenis*. There is some debate amongst Philonic scholars concerning whether *De Opificio Mundi* and/or *De Vita Mosis* should be counted as part of the Exposition of the Laws. In *Praem.* 1–3 Philo provides a summary of 'the oracles delivered through the prophet Moses' (as F.H. Colson translates), which agrees with the inclusion of both *Opif.* and *Mos.* I and II (see also Colson, *Philo vol. 6*, pp. ix–xviii and Rogers, 'Universalization', p. 86). Runia provides strong arguments (internal evidence, manuscript evidence and evidence of the indirect tradition) for the inclusion of *Opif.* in the Exposition of the Laws in Runia, *Creation*, pp. 2–4.

[173] Philo begins *Opif.* with the claim that 'Moses ... has made a most beautiful and most impressive beginning of the laws. ... The beginning – like I have said – is most amazing, since it consists of the creation of the world, because the world is in agreement with the law, and the law with the world' (*Opif.* 2–3). Before proceeding to the actual laws, Philo first retells the lives of various patriarchs, because according to him, Moses 'wants to show, that the recorded commands are in harmony with nature' (*Abr.* 5). In *Mos.* I, 36 and 44, Philo expresses the belief that 'the whole human race will profit, when they apply wise and most beautiful commands for the betterment of life,' and that each nation should abandon its own peculiar ways and start honouring Moses' laws. Having presented the patriarchs of the Jewish people and Moses himself as sages who lived according to the unwritten laws within them and he then moves to the written laws, beginning with the Ten Commandments (see *Dec.* 1) (see also Rogers, 'Universalization', pp. 85–86).

account of creation. The second is an argumentation to convince his readers that the world is indeed created. His central argument is that to suppose the world was uncreated would exclude divine providence, which would imply that the world was without order.

**Day one: Creation of the intelligible world, the fundamental order of the world.**
**13–36a:** Philo wants to involve his reader in the beautiful order of creation. He uses the numbers appearing in Genesis to expound on that order. He explains that the fundament of everything that exists is created on day one, because the number 'one' or 'the monad' (μονάς) is the basis of all other numbers. This fundament of creation is the intelligible world – that is, the world of ideas (also called powers) that exists in divine reason.

**Days two to six: The creation of the material world.**
**36b–68:** Philo describes what was created on the subsequent days of creation. The dimension of space comes into being with the creation of the material heaven on day two. Then the earth is organised on day three, complete with fruit-bearing trees, to prepare for the creation of living creatures. On day four, heavenly bodies are created and heaven is arranged further. On days five and six, living creatures, including humans, are added.

**The reason why humans are created last.**
**69–88:** Humans are created last and surpass all other living creatures, because they are created after the image of God. With the creation of humans, the world is complete. Their creation closes the circle, because through their minds, humans are connected to the intelligible world created on day one.

**Day seven: The special qualities of the number 'seven'.**
**89–133:** Day seven of creation prompts Philo to discuss several of the many special qualities of the number 'seven'.[174] He provides examples in both the intellectual and material realm. Philo then makes a few summarising statements, before he discusses detailed aspects of the first earthly man.

**The qualities of the first earthly human.**
**134–170a:** Philo discusses the creation of the first earthly human, who lived in a borderland between mortal and immortal existence, because his body is mortal and his mind is immortal. He was perfect both in body and soul and his descendants retain only faint elements of the original perfection. The first human, because his reason was still pure, could perceive the true nature

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[174] A modern reader can easily be deterred by the many numerological aspects that Philo elaborates on in these sections. They were very important to Philo, however, as discussed in note 236.

of everything that exists. This brought him ultimate happiness. The senses, however, distracted the first earthly man and caused him to be disobedient, resulting in a life full of toil.

**Conclusions in five important lessons.**
**170b–172:** Philo concludes the treatise with five lessons: namely that God exists; that he is one; that he has created the world; that the world is also one; and that God cares for the world through his providence. Learning these lessons will lead to a virtuous life.

Through analysing sections from *De Opificio Mundi* I intend to find an answer to the question: what was Philo's view on how the transcendent God can relate to and interact with creation? In the introduction to the treatise (*Opif.* 1–12), Philo's central argument for the createdness of the world is in fact that God and creation must be connected to each other, because God cares for the world like a father for his offspring. He presents this particular argument in *Opif.* 6b–12, therefore I will analyse this passage first. As the analysis of these sections will show, Philo adhered to two seemingly incompatible ideas regarding God and creation. He emphasised that God and the physical world are fundamentally different in nature. At the same time, Philo wanted to maintain that God takes providential care of that world. Why were these two ideas essential for Philo? Furthermore, how did Philo combine these seemingly contradictory ideas? My analysis of Philo's description of the intelligible world in *Opif.* 13–36a will present the specifics of Philo's solution to this problem.

My exploration of these matters will further result in an in-depth understanding of Philo's view on the nature of God, the nature of creation and how the two are related to each other.

### 2.2.3    Opif. *6b–12: God is the creator and upholder of the world*

#### 2.2.3.1 *Paraphrase*

*Opif.* 6b–12 is part of Philo's introduction to the treatise. In the preceding sections (*Opif.* 1–6a) he draws attention to the fact that Moses began his exposition of laws with an account of the creation of the world. Moses did so, as Philo explains, to emphasise that the laws he was about to give were in complete accordance with the governing order of everything that exists. As this governing order embraces everything in existence, Philo understandably emphasises that he can only present a few highlights of the creation of this all-embracing order. He does so from *Opif.* 13 onwards. First, however, he needs to address an important issue (as he states in *Opif.* 6b).

This issue is some people's opinion that the world is without beginning or end and instead is everlasting and not created (*Opif.* 7a). If the world were indeed uncreated, Moses' creation story would be rather pointless. Thus, this fundamental issue needs to be addressed first. Philo's central argument (brought forward in *Opif.* 10–11) against the claim that the world is uncreated illustrates why he sees this as a fundamental issue. Philo argues that if such a view were true, there could be no governing order in creation. The world would be a chaotic place, ruled by anarchy. As Philo sees it, only God can maintain the order of the world and he can only do so if he is the father and maker of the world, caring for what he has made. The world therefore has to be created.

Philo surrounds his central argument with two supporting arguments why the world must be created. His first argument (*Opif.* 7b–9) is that everything that exists, can only exist because of the impact of an active cause on a passive object. Philo argues that the world needs a creator as its active cause in order to come into existence. Philo's second argument (*Opif.* 12) is that the world can be seen to be constantly changing; it is in a constant process of becoming. He then argues that this process of becoming must have a starting-point, an origin. This is why it is appropriate that Moses described the origin of the world.

### 2.2.3.2 *Analysis part 1: Why God takes providential care of his creation*

In the following pages I will present an analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12, focused on discovering Philo's view on the relationship between God and creation, because divine forgiveness implies interaction between God and creation. The analysis is divided into three parts. The first is dedicated to Philo's main concern regarding the opinion that the world was not created. He maintained that such a view implies that God does not care for the world.[175] Philo structured *Opif.* 6b–12 in such a way that his strong support for God's providential care is placed at the centre of his argument, in *Opif.* 10–11. Therefore, this central argument will be analysed first. In the second and third parts of the analysis, Philo's two arguments in support of the created nature of the material world will be explored. What will become apparent is that for Philo it was essential to maintain that even though God and creation are of completely different natures, God still cares for his creation.

Why was it so important for Philo to maintain that God takes care of his creation? Several observations come to the fore. Philo saw God's providential care as a law of nature connected to God's goodness, he argued that God created the world out of goodness and goodness automatically leads to care.[176] Some

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[175] The world under discussion in *Opif.* 6b–12 is the world experienced through the senses – the material world – as becomes clear in *Opif.* 12.

[176] In *Opif.* 10, Philo writes that it is reasonable and logical that the father and maker of the material world also takes care of this world. In *Praem.* 42, he calls care for one's creation a natural law.

scholars maintain that Philo did so because he found these ideas in the Bible.[177] In the Bible, however, God's reasons for creating the world are not explored, nor is his providential care considered a law of nature. Philosophical arguments, particularly those of Plato, provide a better background for a notion that Philo apparently took for granted. A paraphrase of Plato's deliberations will shed light on what Philo believed was at stake when the created nature of the world and God's providential care for that world were denied.

In *Laws,* X 893B–903D, Plato carefully deliberates on whether there is a spirit that guides the created world and whether it is good or evil. Here, Plato contemplates whether there is proof for the belief that the gods exist and that they are good. He observes that the movement of the stars and other heavenly objects is orderly and harmonic. He deduces from this harmony that the souls steering them, commonly called the gods, must be rational and good.[178] Plato further reasons that if the gods were not to care for the world, they would be either unknowing or cruel. Given that he shows that the gods are rational and good, it follows that they take providential care of the world.[179] According to Plato, the care of the gods does not simply stop at a general level of providing order for the created world, but extends even to the minute details of human affairs as well. Plato compares the divine providential care for the world to the care of a good physician. The latter does not stop at curing the most visible symptoms of a disease either; rather, he carefully considers all the details, knowing that to miss one single detail could leave a patient ill.[180]

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In *Opif.* 21, Philo presents goodness as God's motive for creating the world.

[177] Bréhier identified Deutero-Isaiah as Philo's source for the view that God, because of his goodness, takes providential care of the world (BRÉHIER, *Les idées*, pp. 76–77) (cf. above note 46). Runia presents a similar view when he maintains that Philo combines in his theological views Plato's understanding of goodness as a metaphysic category of 'excellence of being' with a biblical understanding of goodness as a more relational category of compassion and care. Runia further maintains that in Philo's concept of God as Father, a Greek philosophical notion of God as the creative cause of creation and a biblical notion of God as a loving, caring father are combined (RUNIA, *Timaeus*, p. 442) (compare also FRICK, *Providence*, p. 63). Williamson quotes multiple passages from Philo stating that goodness was God's motive for creating the world (WILLIAMSON, *Philo*, p. 35), without mentioning a specific source for this thought. In the Bible, however, no motive for God creating the world is articulated, whereas Plato explicitly described goodness as the motive for God to create and care for the world (*Tim.* 29E). Therefore, it seems more plausible that philosophy rather than the Bible was a source for this thought.

[178] The first element in Plato's evidence is his observation that there is movement. Plato distinguishes ten types of movement, of which he finds the self-moving motion (that which moves itself and sets other things in motion) to be the first and the best. Plato identifies the self-moving motion with the soul, which leads him to conclude that everything that moves, is moved by a soul. According to Plato, the stars and the universe itself must be moved by a soul as well.

[179] As Plato reasons in *Tim.* 29E, the goodness of the creator is the reason why there was creation to begin with, an argumentation that Philo adopted (see, for example, *Opif.* 21 and *LA* III, 73; see also note 177).

[180] Wolfson states that 'there is no individual providence in the philosophy of Plato' (WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 1*,

**To sum up.** For Philo the goodness of the Creator and his care for creation were undisputed facts, a law of nature. I considered Plato's rationale for something Philo saw as necessarily logical to reveal what was at stake for Philo if the created nature of the world were to be denied, namely the harmonious order of creation. Philo argued that without a creator, there can be no providence, and without providence there can be no order in creation. In line with Plato, Philo held that God's providential care enveloped the good and harmonious order governing the whole of creation from the vast scale of the planetary movements to the minute scale of human affairs. Without it, as Philo saw it, there could only be chaos and anarchy, and human affairs would be left without a judge or arbitrator, ultimately leading to an evil world. That the elimination of divine providence was his main concern is affirmed in the analysis of the two arguments he presented in support of the created nature of the world.

### 2.2.3.3 *Analysis part 2: God is not completely detached from creation*

We saw in the previous section that Philo's main problem with the people who held the material world to be uncreated was that they eliminated God's providence. To understand Philo's arguments in support of the createdness of the world, we need to know the following: who were the people of whom Philo thought? Several scholars have proposed that Philo refuted the Aristotelian position in *Opif.* 6b–12.[181] Others have come to the conclusion that Philo had the Stoics in mind.[182] However, Philo appears to address two kinds of opponents instead of just one, for he offers two clues regarding the people he wants to counter. The first clue is that they allegedly underestimate God, presenting him as inactive; the second is that they overestimate the world, assigning to it more splendour than it deserves.[183]

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p. 434) and according to him, both Plato and the Stoics held that God's freedom is limited because he is bound to the laws of nature, which excludes individual providence (ibid., *vol. 2*, p. 283). However, as the paraphrase of sections from the *Laws* shows, Plato intended to prove that the gods are good and held care on both a general and an individual level to be an essential element of that goodness.

[181] Ibid., *vol. 1*, p. 295; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, p. 157; Runia, *Timaeus*, p. 100. A consequence is then that Philo's statements in *De Opificio Mundi* appear to contradict those in *De Aeternitate Mundi*, in which Philo writes that Aristotle's claim that the world is ἀγένητον καὶ ἄφθαρτον is a testament of his piety (*Aet.* 10). The relation between *De Opificio Mundi* and *De Aeternitate Mundi* will be discussed in note 218.

[182] Abraham P. Bos suggests that Philo does not refute the Aristotelian position in *Opif.* 6b–12, but 'the pure immanentist philosophy of the Chaldeans' (see Bos, 'Philo', p. 70). Runia has adopted Bos' conclusion, with several critical remarks (see Runia, *Creation*, pp. 121–122). Robert W. Sharples discusses the various arguments that Philo brings forward in *De Aeternitate Mundi* and their possible backgrounds in Sharples, 'Peripatetics'.

[183] Cf. *Opif.* 7. See also Frick, *Providence*, pp. 98, 126, where he identifies the two claims (a world governed by unreasoning automatic processes on the one hand, and God and the world being one on the other hand) that Philo resists. Somewhat similar positions appear in *LA* III, 7. Here, Philo presents 'the leper' as someone who identifies God with creation. 'The gonorrhoeic' he interprets as a symbol for someone who claims that the material world is not created by God, but consists of an

Philo seems to warn against two undesirable extremes regarding the relationship between God and the material world. One extreme is to overrate the created world. This extreme leads us to think of the Stoics, who identified the world and the divine as one. The other extreme is to present God as inactive. I propose that Philo's second opponents were atomists who held the gods to be inactive and not at all involved with the world. Philo's objection against them will be explored first.

For atomists, the inactivity of the gods cohered with how they viewed the gods and the nature of the world. Epicurus, for instance, held that if the gods live in bliss, they must be in complete rest, and that the gods can only rest if they are completely detached from the world and not occupied with managing it. The gods were also deemed to be inactive in the creation of the world. The world was seen as self-generated, its existence was the result of a randomly coming together and falling apart of atoms.[184] The world therefore had no end either, as atoms cannot be destroyed. Epicurus held that there is no other reality than the world experienced through the senses. There is only the material world consisting of bodies moving around in a void.[185] This material world is not ruled by any god, but by chance alone.[186]

According to Philo, however, forces without reason and random chance cannot explain the order and harmony he observed in the material world.[187] With this opinion, Philo joined a long-standing tradition of opposition against the

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endless loop of coming together and breaking apart. Philo further writes that such persons associate themselves with Heraclitus. Diogenes Laertius (DL *IX*, 7) summarised the view of Heraclitus as follows: everything is generated by fire and returns to fire and is controlled by fate. Anthony A. Long describes the close relation between the Stoics and Heraclitus in Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, pp. 145–147.

[184] Cicero summarises the Epicurean position regarding the divine as follows: 'He does nothing, is not involved in any activity, nor does he undertake any work' (*Nihil enim agit, nullis occupationibus est implicatus, nulla opera molitur*, Cicero, *ND* I.19.51). According to Cicero, the Epicureans furthermore held that nature is not created, but creates itself; that the gods have a human form; that their substance is not that of material objects; rather, they are images that arise out of the stream of the atoms (Cicero, *ND* I.18.46–20.54).

[185] Epicurus, *On Nature I, Letter to Herodotus*, 39 (=DL *X*, 39).

[186] An illustrative example of how Philo summarised these views is *Som.* II, 283: 'they say that this [world] we see and experience is the only one in existence, it was not created at a certain point in time nor will it ever perish, neither generated nor perishable (ἀγένητον δὲ καὶ ἄφθαρτον), completely without government, helmsman, or caretaker.' See also *Ebr.* 199; *Spec.* III, 189; *Praem.* 42. In almost all of these passages, Philo contrasts this opinion with his view that the world is created and cared for by God (see further *Plant.* 50; *Spec.* I, 35).

[187] For background and a more elaborate discussion of the Epicurean defence against this accusation, see Long, 'Chance'. Christopher C. W. Taylor points out that it may be a misunderstanding of the atomist position to claim that they attributed everything to chance. Indeed, their position may have been much more deterministic: everything is ruled by necessity, but because humans cannot know the causes of everything that happens, they attribute it to chance (see Taylor, *Pleasure*, p. 188).

atomistic view of reality. Already Plato and Aristotle refuted the mechanistic philosophies for their seeming incompatibility of the arbitrariness of the atomic swerve on the one side with the stability of the laws of nature and the regularity of the movements of the stars and planets on the other. Philo similarly argued that without God providing order and stability to the material world, there can only be disorder and chaos.[188]

**To sum up.** The presentation of God as completely detached from the material world is the first extreme position regarding the relationship between God and creation that Philo rejected. Philo argued that without God's involvement with the material world, it would be in chaos, without order, stability or goodness. The opposite position, whereby God and the material world were seen as one, is the second extreme that Philo rejected. As will be shown, he did so for the same reason. To Philo, such a view also implied that there can be no reliable order in the world.

### 2.2.3.4 *Analysis part 3: God and creation are not one*

According to Philo, atomist philosophy failed to provide an explanation for the order visible in the material world. But Philo was also aware of philosophers who did provide an explanation for the order visible in the material world, but at the same time, in his opinion, assigned too much splendour to it. Philo used the name 'Chaldeans' to identify these philosophers. According to Philo, they claimed the heavenly bodies, the sun, the moon and the stars to be the ultimate powers which provide order and control events in the material world.[189] As Philo saw it, these philosophers presented the world itself as divine instead of distinguishing between creation and God.[190]

The identification of God with the world itself resembles a form of materialism present in Stoic philosophy.[191] In general, the Stoics held that the material world was one whole and that nothing existed outside it. They held that God must be part of the material world as well.[192] Philo opposed this view of reality, although

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[188] See also RUNIA, *Creation*, pp. 117–118, where he additionally presents the example of Atticus (2nd century CE), who brought forward an argument in favour of divine providence similar to that of Philo.

[189] *Migr.* 179, 192–194; *Her.* 99, 301; *Mut.* 16; *Spec.* I, 13–14; *Virt.* 212. Philo almost always combines his description of what he calls the 'Chaldean creed' with an exhortation to leave their opinion behind.

[190] As Philo put it with a Greek wordplay in *Congr.* 49: μᾶλλον δὲ τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν θεὸν αὐτοκράτορα νομίζων, οὐκ αὐτοκράτορος ἔργον θεοῦ.

[191] Niehoff describes the similarities between what Philo presents as the 'Chaldean creed' and Stoic materialism in NIEHOFF, *Biography*, pp. 226–228.

[192] Cicero, *ND* I.15.37; *SVF* II, 532, 774. Stoic philosophy in general is described as pantheistic (see note 171 and also, for instance, LONG, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 152 and HORNBLOWER/SPAWFORTH, *Classical Dictionary*, p. 1446). In the latter (p. 195) it is additionally claimed that Stoic philosophers, especially Posidonius, legitimised astrology, which is contested by Long in LONG, *Epicurus to*

we should note that he describes this view as 'Chaldean' and not Stoic.[193] In *Opif.* 6b–12, Philo offers two arguments for why he maintains that God transcends his creation. These arguments bring two aspects to light of how Philo considered God and creation to be fundamentally different from each other.

Philo's first argument is that regarding everything in existence, one must distinguish between the active cause and its passive object.[194] The active cause forms the passive object into separate, distinct objects, thereby bringing the material world into existence. According to Philo, the active cause that brought the material world into existence cannot be part of that world itself. He identifies the active cause with 'the mind of the universe' (*Opif.* 8). Moreover, to avoid seeing that mind as in anyway a part of that universe, Philo adds that it transcends even immaterial concepts, such as virtue and beauty.[195]

Why did Philo believe that the ultimate active cause could not be part of the material universe? He did not explain his view in *De Opificio Mundi*, but in other places Philo elaborated on what he saw as the fallacy of the Chaldeans. According to Philo, the Chaldeans, the astrologers, thought that instead of a transcendent God, the stars controlled the events in the world. Philo countered

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*Epictetus*, p. 133. The doctrines of Antiochus of Ascalon (approximately 130–68 BCE), as described by Dillon, provide an example of the kind of doctrines that Philo refuted. Antiochus often took his starting point from the writings of Plato and in his philosophy merged Platonic, Aristotelean and Stoic ideas. Enlightening for our discussion is Antiochus' agreement with Zeno that there is nothing that is 'immaterial, transcendent or external to the material universe.' In addition, Antiochus merged Plato's Demiurge and World Soul into 'one positive force immanent in the world, the Logos' (DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 83–84).

[193] For this reason, Bos avoids identifying the Chaldeans with the Stoics and only uses the label 'Chaldean' in his article discussing Philo's argument in *Opif.* 6b–12, see BOS, 'Philo'.

[194] As Philo writes in *Opif.* 8: 'Moses … realised that it is completely inevitable that in everything that exists there is an active cause and a passive part' (Μωυςῆς δέ … ἔγνω δὴ ὅτι ἀναγκαιότατόν ἐστιν ἐν τοῖς οὖσι τὸ μὲν εἶναι δραστήριον αἴτιον, τὸ δὲ παθητόν). In Diogenes Laertius' summary of the Stoic view on the relation between God and the material world, a distinction is made between the active cause and the passive object similar to Philo (as Bos explains before the Stoics, Aristotle already distinguished between the active and the passive, see ibid., p. 71). In contrast to Philo, however, Zeno identified the substance of God with the whole of the world and heaven (see DL *VII*, 134 and 148). Sterling presents an overview of various aspects of the philosophical debate in antiquity over 'cause' in STERLING, 'Day One', pp. 126–129.

[195] Philo continues in *Opif.* 8 that the active cause is 'the most pure and fully unmixed mind of the universe … greater than virtue, and greater than knowledge, greater than the good itself and the beautiful itself.' Bos suggests that Philo was inspired by Aristotelian arguments in this section. Aristotle argued that the active and the passive principle are both immaterial (cf. *An.* I, 407b 17–18). He further claimed in *Met.* XII, 1075b 34–37 that Plato did not clearly identify the cause of everything that exists (although Plato did connect νοῦς and αἴτιος in *Phil.* 30A–E, as Dillon points out in DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, p. 157). Bos argues that Aristotle's solution to Plato's perceived omission was to identify that cause as the intellect and the prime mover. According to Aristotle, God is the intellect transcending virtue in the sense of human practice (*Eth. Nic.* X, 1177b 25–30) (see BOS, 'Philo', pp. 71–73).

that if the heavenly bodies of the material world were the ultimate cause for everything in existence, then they would need to be constantly active and never be passive or at rest. This is not so, according to Philo. The sun, the moon and the stars can be seen to change their course with the seasons. Change implies being acted upon, 'suffering' in a sense.[196] Thus, if the heavenly bodies are acted upon, they are also passive in some way and cannot be the ultimate cause for creation. According to Philo, only a transcendent God can be said to be active only and never be acted upon.[197]

As Philo saw it, to believe that the cause for the material world lies inside that world itself is a grave mistake. Its consequence is that one honours creation over its creator.[198] According to Philo, there can be no greater impiety than to ascribe attributes of the truly active to what is essentially passive.[199] Philo reasoned that 'Chaldeans' believed something created (i.e., the stars) was greater than their creator (God). Philo held that the order is exactly the other way around, namely that the creator is always superior to that which he has created.[200]

Philo maintained that the ultimate cause for creation must exist apart from the material world, because everything existing in the material world, including the

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[196] *Cher.* 88.

[197] *Det.* 161: 'the truly existent must be active (δραστήριον), not passive (πάσχον)'; and *Mut.* 22: 'no one who has come into being (γενητὸς) can truly be lord (κύριος) ... only the unoriginated (ὁ ἀγένητος) can be a true ruler (ἀψευδῶς ἡγεμών).'

[198] A statement that we find in *Opif.* 7 and also in *Som.* II, 70; *Dec.* 60–64; *Spec.* I, 180; *Virt.* 180. Philo connects his arguments in *Opif.* 7 and 12. Through this connection he emphasises the contrast between the correct insights of Moses and the wrong opinions of others. Philo writes in *Opif.* 7 that those who assume the material world to be uncreated ascribe too much majesty to that material world, whereas as Philo makes clear in *Opif.* 12, Moses correctly ascribed majesty to God by honouring him as the creator of the world.

[199] In *Spec.* III, 180 Philo writes: 'For there is no greater impiety (ἀσέβημα) than to ascribe the power of the active to the passive.' Moreover, Philo writes in *Deus* 22: 'Could there be a greater impiety than to suppose that the Immutable changes?' In *Legat.* 118 Philo writes that to presume a man to be a god, is to mistake the becoming and destructible nature of humans for being not-becoming and indestructible; moreover, to do so is the most evil of impieties. Apparently, the greatest impiety for Philo is to interchange the categories of being and becoming, to mistake the one for the other, most of all to take God to be a part of the material world, the world of becoming. In Philo's works, impiety often appears as rejection of misconceptions regarding God: for example, in *Aet.* 85 to believe that the world will be destroyed and that God rejoices in disorder is called an impiety, or in *LA* III, 29–31 to suppose that anything in creation moves by itself is seen as an abandonment of God. Impiety also appears regularly within the context of some religious law being broken: it is an impiety to mistreat guests and suppliants, to curse God or to use his name in vain, to work on the Sabbath, to commit murder or to expose children (*Mos.* I, 33, II, 200–204, 217, *Spec.* II, 251–254, III, 84 and 110). The two aspects of impiety (adhering to misconceptions about God and breaking religious laws) are combined in *Mos.* II, 294, where Philo writes that it is the greatest impiety to put one's own deliberations before the oracles from God.

[200] *Migr.* 192–194.

heavenly bodies, is always acted upon in some way. He held that the ultimate cause cannot be but active. Therefore, Philo concluded that it must exist separate from the material world. Philo identified God as the ultimate cause.[201] According to Philo, the material world and God are fundamentally different, even incompatible (ἀντιπάλοι) natures.[202]

Philo's first argument why God and the material world are fundamentally different from each other is that in his view, only God can be said to be truly active and never acted upon. For Philo, God simply *is*. He saw God as pure existence – neither becoming nor changing – because he must be the best possible being and change could only turn him into something worse.[203] Philo's second argument why he considered God and the material world to be fundamentally different from each other, is also related to the theme of change, as will become apparent by zooming in on Philo's concluding statement in *Opif.* 12.

He writes:

> The great Moses, on the contrary, held that which is unoriginated (τὸ ἀγένητον) to be of a completely different order from that which is visible; for everything that is perceived through the senses is always becoming and changing (ἐν γενέσει καὶ μεταβολαῖς), never being the same (οὐδέποτε κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν). So, he assigned to that which is invisible and perceived by the mind "everlastingness" (ἀιδιότητα) as most closely related to it, and he gave to that which is perceived through the senses "becoming" (γένεσιν) as its appropriate name. Well, since this world is both visible and perceived through the senses, it must also have come into being (ἀναγκαίως ἂν εἴη καὶ γενητός); which is why he set down the coming into being of the world not without reason, for in doing so he spoke of God in the most respectful way.

Philo's argument in *Opif.* 12 is quite condensed. Something of a wordplay appears in *Opif.* 12 on two derivatives of γίγνομαι: γένεσις and γενητός. These words need to be translated differently in English, as 'becoming' and 'having

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[201] See *Ebr.* 73; *Conf.* 98; *Mut.* 15.

[202] *LA* III, 7. See also *Som.* II, 28 where Philo tells us that God is completely separated from creation.

[203] For God as unchangeable in contrast to the constant change and movement of the material world see also *Cher.* 19; *Som.* I, 249; II, 290. Plato provides two pieces of evidence to support his view that God cannot change, in *Rep.* II, 380D–381E. First, change is forced upon something by a stronger external force. Given that there can be nothing greater or stronger than God, God cannot suffer from some external force and change. Second, change always makes something better or worse. Given that God is the best possible being, change can only make him worse and therefore God cannot change. Plato's arguments in support of the immutability of God can also be found in Philo's works: in *Sacr.* 9 (nothing can be added or removed from God) and *Cher.* 90 (God does not suffer or can be worn down into changing) (see also EDWARDS, 'Pagan Dogma').

come into being.' This fact somewhat obscures Philo's argument, namely the contrast he wished to emphasise between γενητός ('that which has become') and ἀγένητος ('that which has *not* become'). Expanding on Philo's argument in *Opif.* 12 will bring two important aspects of this contrast into view.

One aspect is similar to what we encountered above. For Philo, 'becoming' implied a cause. Philo does not mention the necessity of a cause in *Opif.* 12.[204] However, Philo does establish this link elsewhere in his works.[205] That he must have had this link in mind in *Opif.* 12 is also likely because of the close resemblance between Philo's formulation and that of a section of Plato's *Timaeus* (*Tim.* 28A). In this section, Plato discusses the contrast between 'being/ not-becoming' and 'becoming/not-being.' He explains that things perceived by the mind truly exist, whereas things perceived by the senses never truly exist, because they are always becoming.[206] Plato then adds that what becomes must necessarily have a cause.[207]

The necessity of a cause is one important aspect of 'becoming.' Another important aspect of 'becoming' has to do with its relation to sense-perception. Philo discusses this relation quite elaborately in *De Ebrietate*.[208] In *Ebr.* 162–192, he argues against the opinion that the human mind is able to decide by itself what is true or false.[209] On its own, the human mind can only form judgements using impressions generated in it by objects in the world by means of the senses. These impressions vary among persons and over time even within the same person.[210]

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[204] He mentions the active cause in *Opif.* 8, but he does not explicitly link cause and becoming to each other.

[205] In *Cher.* 125–127 Philo explicitly states the connection between becoming and cause.

[206] Philo uses a phrasing similar to Plato. In *Tim.* 28A Plato writes that what is grasped with the mind through reason is ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν, whereas that which leads to opinions is formed through αἴσθησις ἄλογος ... ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν. Philo in a sense combines these two and describes that which is perceived through the senses as οὐδέποτε κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν. As Runia notes, 'Philo gives a compact paraphrase of *Tim.* 27d6–28a4' (Runia, *Creation*, p. 120, cf. also Sterling, 'Day One', p. 131).

[207] In *Tim.* 28A Plato states that 'everything coming into being necessarily does so through some cause (ὑπ' αἰτίου τινὸς).'

[208] Cf. *Cher.* 19, 170; *Spec.* III, 178–179; *Som.* I, 249; *Som.* II, 290.

[209] See especially *Ebr.* 166.

[210] In *Ebr.* 171–192 Philo lists all the various differences and changes in the things that appear in the realm of the material world, such as differences between the forms and appearances of living animals, the dependency of impressions on the state of mind of the beholder, optical illusions and more. In *Tim.* 28A Plato also presents the information from the senses as leading to opinions, not rational knowledge (see note 206). Furthermore, Philo's list is reminiscent of sceptical arguments. Francis H. Colson calls Philo's list his 'version of the "tropes of Aenesidemus"' which are found in the works of the Sceptics Sextus Empiricus (see, for example, *Pyrrh. Hyp.* I, 36–37) and Diogenes Laertius (see DL IX, 79–88 and see also notes in Colson, *Philo vol. 3*, pp. 318–319 and 505–506).

This leads Philo to conclude that judgements based on these impressions can never result in certainty.[211] The second important aspect of 'becoming' is that it necessarily results in uncertainty and instability. The observation of 'what becomes' can never lead to stable, trustworthy information. Such observations only lead to opinions and not to true knowledge.

With these two aspects of 'becoming' in view, we can fully appreciate Philo's argument in *Opif.* 12. The material world is a world perceived through the senses. Given that it is perceived through the senses, it is necessarily always in a state of becoming. This state has two implications. One is that the material world must have a beginning, a cause that started its process of becoming. The other is that the material world, because it is in a state of constant change, is inherently unstable. It can never be a source of trustworthy knowledge.

The aspect of instability and unreliability brings the second argument into view of why, according to Philo, God cannot be identified with the material world. In the opinion of Philo, if God and the material world were one, the consequence would be that God must also be in a constant state of change and therefore unreliable. This was a blasphemous thought for Philo, which he strongly rejected.[212] Philo's second argument against the identification of God with the material world is that the latter belongs to 'becoming', implying change and unreliability, whereas God belongs to the completely opposite nature of 'not-becoming', never changing and therefore completely trustworthy.[213]

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[211] Philo presents this conclusion in *Ebr.* 170: 'However, since we find that they affect us ambiguously, we can say nothing with certainty about anything, because what appears is not stable, but always suffers from changes in many ways and forms.'

[212] Two aspects of the nature of that which becomes can be found in *Opif.* 6b–12: what becomes changes and what becomes has an origin. Another aspect of becoming we can find elsewhere in Philo's works is that becoming implies the dimension of time, which in turn implies the possibility of destruction. Becoming implies destruction, because becoming implies a time when something was not as well as a time when it will no longer be. Philo reasons that to identify God with the material world is to imply that God also becomes and that there was a time when God was not, or will no longer be. To say something like that about God is for Philo a profanity (see note 199).

[213] Philo does not state this explicitly in *Opif.* 6b–12, but the claim that God belongs to the category of not-becoming can be found in *Sacr.* 101, where Philo speaks of θεὸς ὁ ἀγένητος. A positive formulation of the same thought is where Philo identifies God with true being (see, for example, *Det.* 160; *Mut.* 11–13; *Som.* I ,231–234). The distinction between 'becoming' and the 'not-becoming' is at the root of many more characteristics for God: because God belongs to the category of 'that which has not become' he is immortal, imperishable, at peace, free from illusion, enjoys freedom, unchangeable, holy and solely blessed. By contrast, 'that which has become' is mortal, perishable, at constant war, subject to fatality, mutable and profane. These differences between γενητός and ἀγένητος can be found in *Mut.* 181; *Som.* II, 253; *Sacr.* 101. In *Som.* I, 249–250 Philo claims that creation is ever in movement, whereas the not-becoming (with God as the prime example) stands still and does not change. Similar statements can be found in *Post.* 23, 29–30; *Som.* II, 221–222. In *Som.* II, 290 Philo writes that creation is in a constant state of change and decay. In *Spec.* II, 166 Philo further associates creation with destruction, and God with eternity. A similar link between becoming and destruction can be found in *Dec.* 58. In *LA* III,

**To sum up.** Seeing God and the material world as one is the second extreme position regarding the relationship between God and creation that Philo rejected. Philo presented two arguments against those who identify God with the material world. He considered God and the material world to be of completely different natures in two fundamental ways. The first is the difference between God as truly active and the material world as passive. The second way is the contrast between becoming and being. The material world is in a continuous process of becoming and changing. Philo reasoned that if God were a part of the material world and the material world were the only existing thing, nothing could truly exist; everything would always be becoming and changing, without order and stability. Without order and stability, for Philo, there ultimately would be no beauty, truth or goodness in creation.

### 2.2.3.5   *Results from the analysis of* Opif. *6b–12*

My analysis of *Opif*. 6b–12 has shown what was at stake for Philo in the debate regarding the relationship between God and the world. His main concern was whether there can be order, stability and goodness in creation. Philo battled on two fronts, namely first against those who present God or the gods as completely detached from the world, and second against those who identify God and the world as one entity. According to Philo, both these views undermine God's providential care for the world, without which the world would be a place of chaos.

Against those who claimed that God does not concern himself with matters in the material world, Philo maintained that a world ruled by chance cannot explain the order and beautiful harmony distinguishable in creation. As Philo saw it, only God can provide and sustain that order, so the material world and God must be in some way connected. At the same time, Philo considered it blasphemous to identify God with the material world itself. Philo deemed everything that appears in the material world as subjected to change, becoming and destruction. To identify God with the material world is incompatible with Philo's view that God is the only truly existent. According to Philo, the nature of what truly exists is completely opposite to that of the material world. True being is the best form of being and therefore implies not changing, not appearing or disappearing.

Philo considered God and the material world as opposing natures. This view reminds us of one problematic aspect of divine forgiveness: forgiveness implies a relationship, yet how can two opposing natures be connected? At the same time, we have seen that Philo emphasised the necessity of a connection between

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101 Philo writes that God cannot be identified with anything in the created world, because what is created disappears, whereas the uncreated is eternal.

God and the world. There could be no stable order in the material world, if God were not involved with that world, or if that world were the only thing in existence. To remain harmonious, the material world is dependent on the immutable God. Without such order, creation would be without beauty and goodness.

The following question then presents itself: if Philo held on the one hand that the material world and God are of completely different natures, and on the other hand claimed that the material world is dependent upon God for its continuing existence, how could he reconcile these two seemingly incompatible tenets? Philo's solution to this problem will come into view when he describes the creation of the intelligible world in *Opif.* 13–36a. I will now analyse this passage.

### 2.2.4   Opif. 13–36a: God's providence operates through the intelligible world

#### 2.2.4.1  *Paraphrase*

In *Opif*. 13–36a, having established in the preceding sections (*Opif.* 6b–12) that the world must have been created, Philo can now begin his exposition of the creation story. Before discussing the details of the creation of the material world on days two to six (in *Opif.* 36b–68), Philo dedicates *Opif.* 13–36a to the first day of creation which in his opinion was reserved to bringing the intelligible world into being.

Philo first explains (in *Opif.* 13–14) why six is the most appropriate number for creation, using arithmological arguments. He further argues that of the six creation-days, day one was set apart by Moses. Philo attaches special significance to the fact that in Gn. 1:5 this day is designated 'one' (μία) and not 'first' (πρώτη) (*Opif.* 15; the argument is repeated in *Opif.* 35). The choice of avoiding the ordinal number 'first' is made to separate day one from the sequence of the other creation days. Being 'one' shows the special relationship between what is created on day one and the monad (ἡ μονάς), the fundament of everything that exists.

On day one, God created the intelligible world (*Opif.* 16). Philo compares the way the intelligible world is conceived to the way a human architect wanting to build a city first creates a design for it in his mind. The architect then uses this mental model to create the city in material form (*Opif.* 17–18a).[214] Similarly, God first created the intelligible world in his divine reason (*Opif.* 18b–20). This is because, being good, he wanted to bring order, quality and life to that which lacked all those things (*Opif.* 21–23). He did this by forming the material world, using the intelligible world – existing in his divine reason – as a model

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[214] This element of *Opif.* 13–36a will be analysed in Chapter 3, see pp. 100–105.

(*Opif.* 24–25).

The intelligible world was created first. Not first in time, for, as Philo argues, time comes into being only with the creation of the material world. It was created first in order, as it is the most excellent of everything God created (*Opif.* 26–28). According to Philo, Moses wanted his readers to note especially the concepts of life-breath and light. Life-breath deserves special attention, as it emphasises that God is the source of all life (*Opif.* 29). Light also deserves special attention, as it refers to intellectual light. This is the light of reason that brings understanding. Such intellectual light is far greater than the visible light of the sun, the moon and the stars, for all objects of the material world have a certain dimness when compared to the objects of the intelligible world (*Opif.* 30–34).

The last two things created on day one were the concepts of dawn and evening. They function as the boundaries between light and darkness, defining day and night and thereby the boundaries of time (*Opif.* 35). By setting these boundaries the intelligible world is now complete, and the creation of the material world can begin (*Opif.* 36a).

### 2.2.4.2 *Analysis part 1:* Ἀγένητος *implies existence outside the dimension of time*

Philo's concept of 'the intelligible world' (κόσμος νοητός) has been greatly debated in Philonic scholarship.[215] I wish to add my own observations to the discussion, because in Philo's concept of the intelligible world lies an important key towards understanding how he held that God and the material world can interact with each other, while claiming that they are of completely different nature. This exploration is therefore relevant to Philo's view on divine pardon, a specific form of interaction between the immutable God and the ever-changing material world, as it will show how Philo believed the gap between two such contrasting natures might be bridged.

In the first two parts of the analysis, I will explore the contrast between God and the intelligible world on the one hand and the material world on the other. The first part of the analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a will be dedicated to the apparent contradiction between Philo's statement that the intelligible world is created and at the same time is qualified by him as ἀγένητος. Exploring this paradox will enable a better understanding of how Philo used γενητός and ἀγένητος to amplify the contrast between God and the material world. Understanding Philo's use of γενητός and ἀγένητος prepares the way for the second part of the analysis, where his view on the relationship between God and the intelligible world will be explored. The intelligible world will be seen to be intimately

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[215] See for instance DANIÉLOU, *Philon*, pp. 168–172, DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, pp. 158–166 and WILLIAMSON, *Philo*, pp. 103–143, see also literature in note 217.

connected to God, resulting in a gap between God and the intelligible world on the one hand and the material world on the other. The final step of the analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a, however, will show how precisely the deep chasm between God and the material world is bridged through the intelligible world.

I will begin the analysis of Philo's description of the intelligible world's creation with what appear as contradictory statements regarding that world. In *Opif.* 13–36a, Philo presents the intelligible world as part of creation.[216] Nevertheless, Philo also used the word ἀγένητος as a qualification for the concepts (which he also calls 'ideas' or 'powers') that are part of the intelligible world.[217] Two ideas, first that the intelligible world is created by God and second that the contents of this intelligible world are ἀγένητος, seem to contradict each other – that is, if we understand ἀγένητος to mean 'uncreated.' I will explore this apparent contradiction by focusing on the concept of 'time', because Philo also described 'time' as both created and as ἀγένητος.

As Philo explains in *Opif.* 26, time came into being (γέγονεν) either together with or after the material world, because it is connected to movement through space. The same definition of time appears in *Aet.* 52.[218]

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[216] In several other places Philo also states that God is the creator of both the conceptual and the material world, see, for example, *LA* I, 21 and *Virt.* 213.

[217] See *Cher.* 86 (here Philo uses ἀρχέτυπος) and *Deus* 78 (where Philo writes that the powers are ἀγένητος). There are countless concepts contained within the intelligible world, which explains Philo's statement in *Opif.* 15 that it would be impossible to recount every individual concept that was created on day one (see also *Conf.* 171, where Philo writes that the powers are numberless). The most eminent concept is the intelligible world as a whole, which contains all other concepts. In *Opif.* 13–36a Philo uses various words to designate the contents of the intelligible world. In *Opif.* 17 he uses ἰδέαι, and in *Opif.* 20 δυνάμεις. In *Opif.* 21, Philo names goodness as one of these powers. For Philo, these powers represent concepts (such as goodness), just like the ideas, which explains how he can use the two terms interchangeably. Goodness (ἀγαθότης) and authority (ἐξουσία) can often be found in Philo's works as the two chief powers from which all others derive. See, for example, *Cher.* 27–28 for a description of the hierarchy that Philo has in mind: goodness and authority are the two chief powers; they again come together in reason. A similar description can be found in *Sacr.* 59; *Plant.* 90–92; *Fug.* 95; *Som.* I, 162–163; *Abr.* 121; *Mos.* II, 98–100; *Spec.* I, 307; *QG* IV, 2, 8; *QE* II, 68. For a more elaborate discussion of the relation between divine reason, the (chief) powers and the ideas see also BRÉHIER, *Les idées*, pp. 107–117 and 155–157, WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 1*, pp. 210–331 and RUNIA, *Timaeus*, pp. 447–449. Both Bréhier and Wolfson identify the powers with the ideas.

[218] The arguments that Philo presents in *De Aeternitate Mundi* seem to contradict those of *De Opificio Mundi*. Some scholars interpret the larger part of *De Aeternitate Mundi* as a presentation of Aristotelian arguments, supposedly refuted by Philo in the second, lost part of the treatise (see DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, p. 133 and COLSON, *Philo vol. 9*, p. 174). The central question of this treatise, however, is whether the *order* of the material world can be undone (see *Aet.* 6). When the arguments presented in *De Aeternitate Mundi* are read with the contrast between 'being' and 'becoming' in mind – and in particular with a translation of 'not-having-become' for ἀγένητος – they appear less contradictory to those in *De Opificio Mundi*. Philo agrees in *Aet.* 10 with Aristotle that the *order* of the material world (that is, the intelligible world) is not subject to becoming, change or destruction, for it is ἀγένητος and ἄφθαρτος.

Philo, however, begins that section with the claim that time is ἀγένητος. Did Philo contradict himself, by describing time both as ἀγένητος and as having come into being with the material world? The key to understand what Philo meant with his statement that time is ἀγένητος can be found in *Aet.* 53. Here, he reasons that time must be without a beginning or end *in time*, because to say that there was a time 'when time was not' is nonsense. Philo therefore reasons that time must be ἀγένητος, meaning that time 'did not become' at a certain point of time, rather than meaning that time is 'uncreated.'[219]

Qualifying something as ἀγένητος meant for Philo that it has no beginning or end in time; it exists outside the dimension of time.[220] This is precisely how he described the nature of the intelligible world: it was made, but it was not made in time.[221] He further explains that when a 'beginning' is ascribed to the creation of the intelligible world, this should not be understood as a beginning in time.[222] Philo interprets it to mean 'first' in a hierarchical sense: the intelligible world takes first place in the hierarchy of all the things God made. Implicated in this hierarchy is dependence. In hierarchy God is the very first. He is pure existence, the source for everything else – including the intelligible world – to exist. According to Philo, the intelligible world was created, meaning it has a beginning in the sense that it is dependent upon God for its existence; and it is also ἀγένητος, not meaning 'uncreated' but rather that it exists outside the dimension of time.[223]

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[219] The only dimension available for time to have been made in is eternity. In *Her.* 165 Philo writes that time is 'the copy of eternity' (τό μίμημα αἰῶνος) (similarly in *Deus* 32 and *Mut.* 267). Colson refers to a similar thought of Plato in *Tim.* 37D–E (see Colson, *Philo vol. 3*, p. 484 and Colson, *Philo vol. 4*, p. 365, note c). In *De Opificio Mundi* Philo mentions more than once that the whole of creation came into being simultaneously (see for instance *Opif.* 27 and 67). Dillon explains that within Platonism the question of whether the world was created at a certain point in time was greatly debated. According to Dillon, both Eudorus and Philo agree with Xenocrates that the world was not created at a point in time. As Dillon notes: 'The world must be taken to have been created extra-temporally, in the sense that it is dependent upon an external cause, to wit, God' (Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, p. 132).

[220] For the interpretation of eternal as meaning supra-temporal instead of everlasting, see Bos' analysis of Aristotelian metaphysics, in Bos, *Soul*, p. 219.

[221] See *Opif.* 26 and also *LA* I, 20; *Sacr.* 65, 76.

[222] See *Opif.* 27.

[223] As Philo writes in *Mut.* 267: 'Eternity defines the lifespan of the intelligible world, as time defines that of the visible world.'

When Philo qualified the intelligible world as ἀγένητος and placed it outside the dimension of time, he also qualified it as *not* 'becoming' – meaning that the intelligible world neither has a beginning in time, nor changes over time, nor will cease to exist at a certain point in time.[224] True existence and not-becoming is a form of existence completely opposite to that of the material world. Things in the material world necessarily come into being at a certain point in time, they change or grow as time goes by, and then disappear again.[225] With ἀγένητος Philo qualified the nature of the intelligible world as opposite to that of the material world. With this qualification he placed the intelligible world in the same category of 'being' as God.[226]

**To sum up.** Philo used the qualification ἀγένητος for the intelligible world to express that it belongs to a form of existence completely different from what can be qualified as γενητός.[227] The contrast is not between uncreated or created. Rather, Philo used ἀγένητος to qualify something as belonging to the category of God, of true being and not-becoming, unchanging and imperishable; and γενητός to qualify something as belonging to the category of the material world, the world of becoming, of the flow of time, of birth, change and decay. When Philo described the intelligible world as created by God, he expressed a form of hierarchy and dependence regarding the intelligible world and God. Philo saw God as true being in the first place, and the intelligible world as dependent upon God for its existence, for its share in true being. The relationship between God and the intelligible world will be further explored in the next section.

### 2.2.4.3 *Analysis part 2: God and the intelligible world are intertwined*

In the previous section, I explored Philo's qualification of the intelligible world as ἀγένητος and we saw how this qualification meant for Philo that God and the intelligible world are closely related to each other. They both belong to the category of true being, opposite to the material world of becoming. The current section describes how Philo regarded God and the intelligible world as so closely related to each other that neither can easily be distinguished from the other. We will see how the distinction between God and the intelligible world

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[224] The timelessness of the intelligible world also explains the close relation that Philo expresses in *Opif.* 12 between the conceptual, the invisible, the not-becoming and everlastingness.

[225] See pp. 61–67.

[226] Philo qualified both God and the intelligible world as ἀγένητος. Philo uses ἀγένητος for God in *Migr.* 91; *Mut.* 22; *Som.* I, 77; *Dec.* 60; *Virt.* 213. Philo expresses the thought that time does not apply to God in *Deus* 32 (see further note 230). The doctrine that the ideas are that which truly exist is formulated as a Platonic tenet by Seneca in *Ep.* 58 (see DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, p. 136). Wolfson claimed that Philo qualifies the ideas as ἀγένητος to indicate that they were not created out of matter (WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 1*, p. 222).

[227] This idea is comparable to Dillon's explanation that Philo used the term ἀσώματος to express that something has qualities opposite to those of σῶμα (especially decay and change) (see DILLON, 'Angels', p. 203).

becomes vague when we explore the following question: where did Philo believe the intelligible world exists?

In *Opif.* 16–25, Philo explains that if in any sense the intelligible world can be said to exist in a place, this place must be divine reason: God's mind.[228] Philo problematises this statement in *Opif.* 17. Here, he writes that it is not appropriate to say that the intelligible world exists in a place, because a 'place' is something belonging to the material world. In *Opif.* 24, Philo bypasses this terminological problem by identifying the intelligible world with divine reason itself, instead of saying that it exists within it. He writes: 'one would say the intelligible world to be nothing else than the reason of God already creating the world.'[229]

In this sentence, 'already' is used as translation of ἤδη, but we should bear in mind that this 'already' cannot imply a temporal sense for Philo. The dimension of time does not apply to God, and therefore does not apply to his act of creation.[230] As Philo saw it, it is nonsensical to suggest that there was a time when God was not engaged in the act of creation. Given that the dimension of time does not apply, God can be seen as always being in the act of creation. Therefore, the intelligible world can be identified with divine reason, because time is not a relevant category whenever God's act of creating the world is concerned.[231]

The identity between divine reason and the intelligible world can be taken a step further. Not only could Philo identify divine reason and the intelligible world with each other, he could also identify the intelligible world and God with each other. He designated both God and the intelligible world as 'the monad' (ἡ μονάς) or 'the one' (τό ἕν). In *De Opificio Mundi* he identified the intelligible world with the monad.[232] Elsewhere he identified God the Creator with the monad or the one.[233] Both 'the monad' and 'the one' were used in ancient philosophy to identify the source of everything that exists. The origin of this

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[228] According to Dillon, the doctrine that the ideas exist in the mind of God was an established doctrine of Middle-Platonism, and probably originated with Xenocrates (396–314 BCE) (see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, p. 29). Runia presents an overview of the background of this doctrine in Runia, *Creation*, pp. 151–152.

[229] Οὐδὲν ἂν ἕτερον εἴποι τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη κοσμοποιοῦντος.

[230] An explicit denial by Philo of God creating in time can be found in *LA* I, 20 and *Sacr.* 65. In *Sacr.* 76 and *Dec.* 58 Philo writes that to God the dimension of time does not apply.

[231] Wolfson also identified the intelligible world with divine reason itself. He referred to Aristotelian philosophy as a source for the notion that the mind and what the mind thinks can be identified with each other (Wolfson, *Philo vol. 1*, p. 246). The identity between the mind and what it thinks will be further explored in Chapter 3 (see pp. 124–137).

[232] Both in his introduction to the passage in which he describes the creation of the intelligible world in *Opif.* 15 and in his summary in *Opif.* 35.

[233] See *Som.* II, 70; *Spec.* II, 176; *Virt.* 213.

concept was ascribed to the Pythagoreans, who argued that numbers represent the fundamental order of the world and that everything in existence begins with the monad, because all other numbers are derived from it.[234] Plato accepted this idea and expanded on it by associating the elements with various mathematical figures.[235] The idea that the order in the world is associated with numbers, and that 'the monad' is fundamental for everything in existence became part of Philo's thinking as well.[236]

Philo was able to identify different things (God, his mind, the intelligible world) with the same labels, precisely because he considered them to be one. According to Philo, 'the monad' is essentially indivisible and therefore everything associated with it is essentially one and the same. The essential oneness of what to us appear as different things can be further illustrated: given that Philo saw 'the monad' as the beginning of everything else, he identified it with 'the first cause'.[237] He also used 'first cause' for the mind of God.[238] Since he saw 'the monad' as source of everything else to exist, he also identified it as the truly existent (τὸ ὄντως ὄν).[239] He identified God as the truly existent as well. Philo identifying different things with the same labels does not mean that he was a confused or inconsistent thinker. He was able to use the same labels

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[234] See Kahn, *Pythagoreans* pp. 23–38; amongst others, Aristotle ascribes this notion to the Pythagoreans in *Met*. I, 986a15–21; X, 1056b21 and discusses it somewhat critically in XIV, 1089b35.

[235] For example, in *Phd*. 101C Plato identifies one with unity and in *Soph*. 245A–B he identifies one with being and wholeness. As Plato writes in *Tim*. 53B, everything exists because of 'shapes and numbers' (εἴδεσι τε καὶ ἀριθμοῖς); moreover, in *Tim*. 53C–56C he describes how the elements fire, earth, water and air correspond to various numbers and mathematical figures.

[236] James W. Thompson discusses Philo's identification of God with 'the one' in Thompson, 'The One', pp. 572–576; see also Noack, *Gottesbewußtsein*, pp. 131–141 (cf. Rabens, '*Pneuma*', p. 302, note 30), who points out that for Philo God also transcends the title of 'the one', as will be further discussed in the analysis of *Deus* 51–85 (see p. 87). Possibly, Philo suggests in *Opif*. 15 that he wrote a treatise – now lost to us – about the special properties of numbers and/or 'the one', although instead of referring to a separate treatise, he could simply refer to his discussion of 'day one' in *De Opificio Mundi* itself (see Runia, *Creation*, pp. 136–137). His interest in numerology is apparent in *De Opificio Mundi*; for example, he dedicates *Opif*. 47–52 to describing the special properties of the number four and 89–127 to the number seven (shorter and somewhat different in *LA* I, 8–15). Symbolical meanings for numbers appear more often in his works; in *Spec*. I, 187, for example, he associates one with beginning and seven with completion. A more elaborate discussion of Philo's use of numerology as an exegetical tool (including an overview of Philo's possible precursors) can be found in Moehring, 'Arithmology'; Horst R. Moehring concludes that Philo uses numerology 'to demonstrate that God's creation is orderly and in harmony with certain numbers and numerical relations,' (ibid., pp. 143–144) and that 'the cosmic and human order described by Moses is of universal validity' (ibid., p. 176). A comparison between Philo's discussion of the number seven in *Opif*. 89–127 and *LA* I, 8–15 is presented by Robert A. Kraft, in Kraft, *Jewish Texts*, pp. 217–236 (see also Runia, *Creation*, pp. 274–275).

[237] *Spec*. III, 180.

[238] *Opif*. 8, see also the analysis of *Opif*. 6b–12, especially pp. 61–67.

[239] *Deus* 11. Similarly, in *Her*. 216 Philo identifies 'the one' as καὶ μόνον καὶ καθαρὸν ὄντως.

for God, his mind or reason and the intelligible world, because he saw them as essentially one and as indivisible.

The indivisible nature associated with God and the intelligible world again deepens the contrast between them and the material world. As Philo identified God and the intelligible world with 'the monad', he identified the material world with the number two. The number two represents that which has come into being, the world of 'becoming' as well as the matter (ὕλη) from which that world is formed, because Philo associated it with division and multiplicity.[240] Philo esteemed indivisibility over divisibility.[241]

**To sum up.** Philo presented God and the intelligible world as closely intertwined, so much so that he considered the intelligible world and God as essentially one with each other. The consequence of this unity between God and the intelligible world is that Philo presented both as completely different from the material world. I began the analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a with the following question: how did Philo believe that God and the material world can interact with each other when he also held them to be of completely different natures? The first two parts of my analysis of Philo's presentation of the intelligible world in *Opif.* 13–36a appear to have only deepened the problem. However, as we will see in the next section, it is precisely because the intelligible world and God are so closely intertwined that the former can function as a bridge between two completely different forms of existence, namely God and the material world.

### 2.2.4.4 *Analysis part 3: The intelligible world gives existence to the material world*
The previous part of the analysis showed how Philo held that the intelligible world always exists in God as divine reason engaged in the act of creating the material world. This final part of the analysis will show how Philo maintained that the intelligible world exists in the material world as well. We will see that the intelligible world forms a bridge between God and the material world, connecting the world of 'becoming' to that of 'being'. In this way, it is the medium for God to express his benevolence towards creation and his care for it.

In *Opif.* 16, Philo describes how the intelligible world exists in the material world. Here, he claims that the material world was created after the pattern of the intelligible world.[242] Philo writes that each material object that can be experienced through the senses has a corresponding immaterial object existing as part of the intelligible world.

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[240] See *LA* I, 3; *Som.* II, 70; *Spec.* III, 180; *QG* I, 15; II, 12.

[241] *Spec.* I, 180.

[242] Similarly, in *Opif.* 36, 130; *Ebr.* 133; *Her.* 280; *Mos.* I, 158; *Spec.* I, 302, 327; III, 191; *Aet.* 75.

In *Opif.* 21–22, Philo explains why material objects need corresponding immaterial objects to guarantee their continued existence: without a concept (ἰδέα), an individual object appearing in the material world would be without order and quality.[243] As Philo saw it, without the concepts through which material objects are catalogued, qualified and identified they would remain an unidentifiable chaos. Such unidentifiable chaos has the potential of *becoming* anything, but only immaterial concepts can bring material objects into actual *being*.

Did Philo believe that there is something like pre-existent matter? This is not the case. Instead, he maintained that unformed matter is something to which the term 'existence' does not quite apply; it exists only as potential, in and of itself it *is* nothing yet. It comes into being – it *becomes* something – through the imprint of the concepts from the intelligible world.[244] Through that imprint, individual objects with qualities that identify them as belonging to a certain class or category can come into being.

Through the intelligible world God grants 'being' to not-yet-existent matter, which explains why Philo saw the intelligible world as an expression of God's benevolence. In *Opif.* 21, Philo writes that because of his goodness, the creator wished to grant existence to something other than himself, for it is inherent to goodness to share and not jealously keep to oneself.[245] Philo saw the intelligible world as the medium through which God gives the material world a share in

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[243] Compare *Mut.* 135; *Som.* II, 45; *Cont.* 4. Plato describes in *Tim.* 29E–30A how through the process of creation God bestows order on that which of itself is without order.

[244] The question whether Philo believed that matter is pre-existent, is greatly debated in Philonic scholarship. Some scholars hold that Philo preferred the notion that God brought order to that which was without order (Bréhier, *Les idées*, p. 82; Runia, *Timaeus*, pp. 425–426, 451, 454). Both Runia and Dillon maintain that Philo remained ambivalent about whether matter was created by God or not (ibid., p. 289; Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, p. 158). According to Wolfson, Philo believed that God created everything, including the elements out of which the material world was made (Wolfson, *Philo vol. 1*, p. 308). However, *Opif.* 22 (similar in *Her.* 160) seems to express that Philo regarded matter as something pre-existent, on which God imprints the patterns of creation. Then again, in *Som.* I, 76 Philo clearly states that nothing existed before and separately from God and that God brought everything into being 'not only a as crafter (δημιουργός), but also as its founder (κτίστης)' (see also *LA* II, 2; *Mos.* II, 100; *Prov.* frag. I, 1). The solution lies in the way Philo saw potential as not yet existing, as he reasons in *Opif.* 21, where he writes that something that can *potentially* be everything does not exist in the proper sense until it becomes something *definite*. According to Philo, this potential only becomes something definite, something that actually exists, through the creative action of God (see also Frick, *Providence*, p. 42; Winston, 'Eternal Creation', p. 120 and the summary of the debate on Philo's stance towards *creatio ex nihilo* in Runia, *Creation*, pp. 152–153). On the subtleties of the debate concerning the nature of matter in Platonism in late antiquity (80 BCE to 250 CE), see Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy*, pp. 103–107.

[245] Philo's argument in *Opif.* 21 closely resembles the arguments Plato presents in *Tim.* 29E. Similarly in *Migr.* 182–183.

'being' and thereby a share in beauty and goodness.[246] This happens as follows: the concepts truly exist, they are unchangeable. They retain their form and quality for eternity, whereas the individual objects of the material world *become* – that is, they appear, grow, change shape, deteriorate, and disappear again. The class and the category of the individual object, however, do not disappear.[247] Not in the slightest way: it is precisely because of that eternal concept that it is possible that individual objects appear, disappear and reappear again and again with consistent forms and qualities. The coherence of material objects is safeguarded by the eternal existence of the unchanging concepts. Conversely, Philo held that without the intelligible world, there can be no order, no quality, no objective guarantee that something that appears in the material world would do so consistently.[248]

As much as it is an expression of God's benevolence, the intelligible world is also an expression of God's care for the material world.[249] According to Philo, the intelligible world guarantees continued existence, beautiful harmony and good order of the objects that appear in the material world.[250] He viewed the intelligible world as the medium through which God's providential care for the material world works and operates.[251] It is through the intelligible world that the gap between God's existence and the becoming and constantly changing material world is bridged.[252] Philo reasoned that God's providence means that through the intelligible world, he guarantees the eternal existence of the material world. Without it, the material world would disintegrate. This can be illustrated with a quotation from *Dec.* 58 where Philo writes about the created world: 'For it has come into being and its becoming is the start of its destruction, were it not for the creator's providence making it immortal.'[253]

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[246] A thought Philo also expressed through speaking of the eternal existence of nature (see *Opif.* 44; *Sacr.* 98; *Her.* 114) (see also Chapter 3, pp. 118–121).

[247] *Cher.* 51; *Fug.* 11–13. Plato argues for the immortal existence of the soul based on the assumption of the indestructible existence of the qualities in *Phd.* 105E–106B.

[248] In *Spec.* I, 327–329, Philo argues against those who claim that the ideas do not truly exist. According to Philo, the implication of this line of thinking is that quality and form are said to be non-existent, which again means that what is left is 'formless matter' (ἄμορφος ὕλη). Philo adds that 'the opinion which eliminates the ideas destroys everything and brings it back to the pre-elemental state of being, the state without form or quality.' He then adds that by use of the truly existing ideas God has brought everything else into being (see also Philo's objections to the atomists as discussed on pp. 59–61).

[249] In *Mut.* 45–46, Philo describes God's care for the world as an expression of God being good and generous (ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόδωρος).

[250] See also WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 1*, p. 286; RUNIA, *Timaeus*, p. 444.

[251] Philo expresses this thought explicitly in *Migr.* 6.

[252] Philo expresses this thought explicitly in *Post.* 14, 20; see also *Spec.* I, 239 (paraphrased in note 248).

[253] Dillon suggests that Philo tended towards a belief that the material world is ruled by an entity almost separate from God (DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, p. 170). I disagree with this view. I maintain that Philo held that God through his providential care is closely involved with the material world, even

For Philo, the intelligible world is a channel connecting God to the material world. God, because he is good and cares for the world, uses this channel to let the material world share in the category of 'being' and thereby in beauty and goodness. This channel is a two-way connection. The concepts also form a channel through which humans can perceive the truly existing intelligible world and can recognise God's goodness and care. Philo held that the material world perceived by the senses, can lead the mind to perceive the concepts of the intelligible world.[254] How does this work? The senses experience and identify material objects through the forms and qualities of those objects.[255] These forms and qualities are concepts, which are grasped by the mind. The mind discerns the patterns of the intelligible world when the eye looks at the visible objects which appear in the material world.[256]

**To sum up.** Philo maintained that God's providential care for creation operates through the intelligible world. The concepts give the objects of the material world meaning and coherence. The concepts connect the material world of becoming to the divine world of true being, beauty and goodness. The concepts are also a means for the human mind to come into contact with the world

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though at the same time Philo more than once emphasised that God should not be identified with the material world. Wolfson, Runia, Frick and Francesca Calabi also identify providence with divine reason (WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 1*, pp. 331–332; *vol. 2*, p. 190; RUNIA, *Timaeus*, p. 441; FRICK, *Providence*, pp. 52, 117; CALABI, *God's Acting*, p. 100). Wolfson did not believe that Philo had a problem with transcendence, for according to Wolfson, Philo believed that God could be in direct contact with the material world and does not need intermediaries; God chooses to employ intermediaries (WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 1*, pp. 282, 289, 376; see also FRICK, *Providence*, p. 59). Runia states that Philo did not provide a solution for the problem of God's transcendence (RUNIA, *Timaeus*, p. 443). However, Runia largely holds the view that divine reason is the instrument for God to be immanent in the material world, while at the same time maintaining God's transcendence (ibid., p. 450). According to Daniélou, Philo solved the problem of God's transcendence by suggesting that God gives συγγένεια between the creator and creation, although how this 'relation' operates does not become clear (DANIÉLOU, *Philon*, p. 176). Bos suggests that Philo was inspired by the Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo* for the concept that the gap between God and the material world is bridged through God's powers (BOS, 'Philo', p. 69). Runia maintains that Philo must have found the solution of *De Mundo* 'unsatisfactory, because God's providence is not exercised directly' (RUNIA, *Creation*, p. 123).

[254] Even though he regarded the human senses as untrustworthy, as discussed on pp. 61–67.

[255] *Opif*. 62–63, 134.

[256] The world of the senses is in this way a gateway to the world of the mind, a statement Philo makes in *Som*. I, 188. He continues in the same section and writes about a time when the intelligible world shall change its title and its walls and gates shall be removed. This has been interpreted as either a Christian interpolation, or an expression of Philo having apocalyptic notions. Philo's statement, however, can be interpreted in the light of a comparable statement by Plato in *Phd*. 109B–111C. In this passage, Socrates compares life in the material world to living on the bottom of the sea. Should people raise their head out above the water (which to those living at the bottom of the sea is mistakenly held to be the heaven), they would see a completely different and new world. Just so, when human souls travel to the real heaven and see the real world, they will learn that before they mistook something completely different to be the heaven, but now know the true heaven.

of being. Order and qualities reveal themselves in the material world, when the mind begins to discern the patterns, the concepts that lie behind the bewildering diversity of the material world.

My analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a began with the question how Philo thought God could interact with the material world. It was demonstrated that Philo maintained that only the intelligible world is able to establish the connection through which God interacts with creation. At the same time, this connection between God and the material world functions as the medium through which humans are able to come into contact with the divine. The interaction between God and human beings will be further explored in Chapter 3.

### 2.2.4.5 *Results from the analysis of* Opif. *13–36a*

My analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a provided the answer to the question of *how* God's providential care for the material world can work, even though Philo, as we saw in the analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12, maintained that God and the material world are two contrasting natures. According to Philo, God's providential care operates by means of the intelligible world. Philo saw the intelligible world as the collection of all the concepts forming and ordering everything that appears in the material world, allowing it to exists in a harmonious and beautiful way. These concepts exist as part of God, as the contents of divine reason. They also exist as part of the material world, as concepts which through their imprint upon matter create individual material objects. By means of the concepts, discernible for the human intellect, God benevolently grants 'being', beauty and goodness to the material world.

The notion of providential care brings to mind images of parents caring for their offspring, an image evoking personal and emotional associations. It has become clear, however, that providential care appears in Philo's thought as a more detached process. As Philo presented it, the intelligible world does exactly the same as providence, namely safeguarding the order and the stability of the material world, but without personal or emotional overtones.

The first main question of this chapter was: what was Philo's view on the possible connection and interaction between God and creation? My analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12 brought into view *why* Philo wanted to maintain that God and creation are connected, even though he considers them to be contrasting natures. Now the analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a has shown *how* Philo thought these two contrasting natures can interact with each other. What do these findings mean for Philo's view on divine pardon? I will answer this question in the next section.

### 2.2.5  *Conclusions: God's relationship to creation and divine forgiveness*

I have examined two passages from *De Opificio Mundi* to explore Philo's view on the relationship between God and creation. Through the analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12, several aspects have become apparent regarding Philo's view on the relationship between God and the world. Philo strongly emphasised that God and creation are connected. It was essential for Philo to see God as the father and maker of the material world who takes constant providential care of it. Otherwise, as Philo suggested, it would be impossible for stability and order to exist in the material world. The material world would then be a place of anarchy and chaos.

Nevertheless, the analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12 has also shown that Philo wanted to emphasise that the material world and God are of two completely different natures. One main difference between the two is that only God can be said to truly exist and be fully active. The nature of the material world is to be passive, to be acted upon. The material world can only come into existence through the action of an active cause. The other main difference between the material world and God is that the material world – i.e., the world experienced through the senses – is constantly changing and becoming. The only truly existing entity is God. God does not change or become. Rather, God *is*.

The analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a has shown how Philo believed a connection between the material world and God is possible. He transformed a personal and emotional concept – providential care – into a more detached process. He presented the intelligible world as a bridge through which God benignly grants the material world which he defined by 'becoming' a share in the divine category of 'being', thereby also giving it a share in beauty and goodness. According to Philo, God's providential care for the world meant that God in his divine reason thinks the concepts that bring material objects into existence and that guarantee their continued existence, while individual objects appear and disappear in the material world.

Through analysing these sections from *De Opificio Mundi*, I wanted to ascertain Philo's view on the possible connection and interaction between God and creation, because forgiveness presupposes a relationship between the forgiver and the forgiven. We have seen that for Philo connection and interaction between God and the world are not only possible, but are essential for creation to subsist. Moreover, he considered a connection and interaction between God and creation as a crucial expression of God's goodness, granting true being, beauty and goodness to creation.

The possibility of a connection between God and creation is also a necessary requirement for God to be able to interact with human beings at all. For if God is to pardon human errors, God and humans need to be connected in some way as well. In my analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a it became apparent that Philo saw

the intelligible world not only as a bridge between God and the material world, but also as a medium through which the human mind can enter into contact with and perceive that which truly exists. It appears that, according to Philo, the intelligible world functions as a channel to connect humans to the divine realm and possibly even to God as well.

Before addressing the topic of interaction between God and humans in Chapter 3, another implication of divine pardon must be considered in light of Philo's doctrine of God. Philo's transformation of the personal concept of God's providential care into a more impersonal process, leads us to the second question of the current chapter: how did Philo interpret biblical passages in which God is presented with human characteristics? A forgiving God implies that God is described as showing human emotions: turning from angry to merciful; or, also like humans, as changing his mind, substituting punishment with amnesty. However, as we have seen, Philo identified God with true being without change. The attribution of human traits involving change to an unchanging God would seem to be problematic for Philo. How did Philo handle this difficulty?

## 2.3 *Philo's view on anthropomorphic presentations of God*

### 2.3.1 *The relevance of* **Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis** *to this topic*

Having examined Philo's view on the relationship between God and creation, I will now move on to the second difficulty regarding divine forgiveness in light of Philo's doctrine of God: what did Philo think about the relational and emotional presentation of God? Forgiveness implies that someone is hurt and possibly angered by someone else's offence. The perpetrator's remorse may subsequently soften the victim's anger and, if compensation is offered for the damage, the victim may decide to grant the perpetrator amnesty instead of inflicting punishment. This change in attitude involves a change of mind. When ascribed to humans, such behaviour is not problematic for Philo. Humans can be expected to be subjected to constantly changing emotions; humans as imperfect beings can also be expected to frequently change their minds.[257] However, given that Philo saw God as immutable and perfect, the attribution of human emotions or the suggestion that God changes his mind proves problematic.

### 2.3.2 **Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis:** *Structure of argumentation*

Philo engaged the matter of why in the Bible human characteristics are ascribed to God in the treatise *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis*. This treatise is part of a large body of treatises, usually named the *Allegorical Commentary*, in which Philo

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[257] Philo's anthropological outlooks will be more elaborately discussed in Chapter 3.

discusses aspects of Gn. 2–41.[258] In the treatise *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* Philo presents an interpretation of Gn. 6:4–12, verses presenting God's motive for the Flood. Part of Philo's interpretation is a discussion of why in these verses God is presented as having changed his mind. This presentation of God leads Philo to bring forward arguments for God's immutability. Philo's consideration of the immutability of God, however, is not the main issue of the treatise; rather, it is a subsidiary argument to the treatise's central message.[259] The central message of *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* is that humans can only become virtuous when divine reason is present in their soul and when they have chosen to follow its guidance. Such souls follow the way of wisdom: they are oriented towards God and heaven and therefore towards truly existent and stable things. The treatise is structured as follows.

**Introduction of the theme of this treatise, connecting it to the previous one (Gn. 6:4).**
**1–19:** The words 'after that' (in Gn. 6:4) connect *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* to the previous treatise, *De Gigantibus*, and lead Philo to introduce the main theme of the current treatise: the differences between souls close to God and those far removed from him. In souls close to God, the divine spirit is present and such souls are characterised by stability and unity, leading to virtue. The divine spirit, however, is absent from souls far removed from God.[260] Such souls are characterised by instability and multiplicity, producing a myriad of evils.

**God is completely stable and does not change his mind (Gn. 6:5–7).**
**20–32:** Having put forward the main theme of the treatise, Philo wants to explain various anthropomorphic aspects ascribed to God in Gn. 6:5–7. The first pertains to whether God changes his mind (ἐνεθυμήθη and διενοήθη in Gn. 6:6). Philo first explains that this aspect of Gn. 6:6 does *not* mean that God changes and presents two arguments in support of God's immutability. The first and most important argument is that if wisdom brings stability to the human soul, the source of wisdom, i.e., God, must be completely stable. The second argument is that God is not as fickle as humans are, because he has no emotions and is all-knowing. He therefore never changes his mind.

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[258] This series probably consisted of thirty-one treatises, nineteen of which have been preserved in Greek: *Legum Allegoriae* I–III, *De Cherubim, De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini, Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat, De Posteritate Caini, De Gigantibus, Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis, De Agricultura, De Plantatione, De Ebrietate, De Sobrietate, De Confusione Linguarum, De Migratione Abrahami, Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit, De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia, De Fuga et Inventione, De Mutatione Nominum, De Somniis* I–II. For a brief overview of general characteristics of this body of treatises, see Sterling/Niehoff/van den Hoek, 'Philo', pp. 263–267 and Niehoff, *Biography*, pp. 173–185.

[259] The title of the treatise therefore seems to be a little off the mark, as Colson remarks in his introduction to the treatise, Colson, *Philo vol. 3*, p. 3.

[260] As Philo discusses in *De Gigantibus*, it is difficult for the divine spirit to remain in the soul, when a soul becomes attached to a body (see *Gig.* 19, 28, 53; see also note 427).

**God contemplates the nature of everything in creation (Gn. 6:5–7, continued).**

**33–50:** Having explained that God does not change his mind, Philo next explains what ἐνεθυμήθη and διενοήθη used in Gn. 6:6 *do* mean. He proposes that God considered the defining properties of everything in creation and specifically whether something adheres to the order in creation or attempts to rebel against it. Philo concludes that the defining property of humans is that only they among created beings are free to choose whether they will comply with the order in creation, choosing to do good, or go against it, choosing to do evil. With this freedom of choice comes the duty to choose good over evil.[261]

**Embodied souls need anthropomorphic presentations of God (Gn. 6:5–7, continued).**

**51–85:** Philo focuses on another anthropomorphic aspect in Gn. 6:5–7, namely that God became angry (ἐθυμώθην in Gn. 6:7). His approach is again to explain first what this does not mean, namely that in truth, God is not like humans; and then to explain what this does mean, namely the reason why God is presented like humans in the Bible. Moses did so to accommodate those not gifted enough to see God as he truly is. Philo explains that there is a difference in perspective. God, as he is to himself, is one, unmixed and undivided; he only appears as mixed or divided in how humans perceive him. In particular, humans perceive God as being merciful, tempering his judgement through mercy and allowing the human race to subsist.

**Acknowledging God as the source of creation leads to virtue (Gn. 6:8–9).**
**86–121:** Philo discusses various aspects of the statement that Noah found grace with God (Gn. 6:8–9). According to him, this statement means that Noah realised the highest truth, namely that all things in creation are God's gracious gift. Philo contrasts realising this truth with instead becoming captivated by the input from the senses, which is the cause of a myriad of evils. Philo warns: do not become captivated by the sensations, for that will lead to vice; rather, seek to perceive God which will lead to virtue.

**God brings the corruption of the earth to light (Gn. 6:11).**[262]
**122–139:** Philo discusses the statement in Gn. 6:11 that seems to imply that God corrupted the earth. However, this statement does not mean to Philo that God indeed did harm the earth; rather, it means that he brought the corruption of the earth to light.

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[261] These sections and in particular the link with the divine spirit will be discussed in Chapter 3 (see pp. 112–139).

[262] Gn. 6:10 is not discussed by Philo.

In particular, it means that divine reason in the form of conscience brings someone's sins to light.

**Earthly temptations lead away from God; God therefore battles against them (Gn. 6:12).**
**140–183:** Philo summarises the previous topic: God corrupting the earth means that God, through Noah's virtuousness, brought the sins of humankind to light. He then focuses on a particular grammatical detail of Gn. 6:12 which leads him to elaborate on how earthly things and the flesh attempt to destroy wisdom, the way leading to God.[263] Conversely, divine reason attempts to block the road of these earthly temptations. Philo then warns that those who ignore divine reason, which manifests itself as conscience showing the way of wisdom, are eventually destroyed.

Philo discusses in this treatise, amongst other topics, why in the Bible human characteristics such as regret, changing the mind or becoming angry, are ascribed to God. These human characteristics are implied in the dynamics of divine forgiveness as well. Philo presents what he believes are the reasons for such anthropomorphic descriptions of God to appear in the Bible in *Deus* 51–85. My analysis will therefore focus on this passage.

### 2.3.3 Deus 51–85: The reason for anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible

#### 2.3.3.1 Paraphrase
Philo has explained in the preceding passage, *Deus* 33–50, that 'bethinking' (ἐνεθυμήθη and διενοήθη used in Gn. 6:6) does not mean that God changed his mind, but that God always contemplates the nature of all things he created and specifically whether they follow the order he has intended for creation or not. Philo has concluded that only humans are free to choose whether they will do so or not and that therefore only humans can obey or disobey God, and only they can be commended when they obey or punished if they do not. Before discussing (in *Deus* 86–121) whether Noah should be considered as praiseworthy, because he is said to have found grace, Philo first explains in *Deus* 51–85 the meaning of the statement that God became angry (in Gn. 6:7) and why anthropomorphic descriptions of God are used in the Bible in general.

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[263] This grammatical detail is that Gn. 6:12 states that 'all flesh destroyed his way (τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ) throughout the earth.' As Philo explains in *Deus* 141–142 'flesh' (σάρξ) in Greek is a feminine noun, so 'his' (αὐτοῦ) cannot refer to the flesh destroying its own way. Rather, 'his' must refer to something masculine; Philo maintains that this must be God, concluding that all flesh attempts to destroy the way of God.

Philo begins his discussion of anthropomorphic descriptions of God by emphasising that in truth God is not like humans at all (*Deus* 51–59). Human souls who are fully oriented towards immaterial and divine things are able to grasp this essential truth. They see God as singular existence. They apply no other characteristics to God, especially no imagery based on created things. God in truth cannot have emotions such as wrath or anger. Philo reasons that emotions are part of the body, and God has no body. The parts of the body serve the several needs of human beings; God, having no such needs, needs no body. Anthropomorphic descriptions of God are essentially false, and are used in the Bible only for pedagogical reasons.

As Philo explains (in *Deus* 60–69), God is described in the Bible like humans, because God also wants to reach human souls that are primarily oriented towards material and earthly things. Such souls can only think of God in earthly and bodily terms. They need anthropomorphic imagery to gain at least some conception of God. The Bible presents God as a wrathful Lord for such earthly human souls, so that through fear of punishment they will better their ways. Philo compares this approach to that of physicians who pedagogically use untruths so that patients will accept their treatment.

After these preliminary remarks, Philo brings forward what he thinks the statement means that God became angry for having made man (*Deus* 70–72). Philo reasons that humans are always condemnable under God's judgement, for no human being can go through life without ever sinning. It is fitting, therefore, to say that God is always angry with the human race – although anger should still be seen as a metaphor, for it is a human emotion. God's anger should not be seen as the result of a change of mind.

However, if God can righteously condemn the whole human race, how then can the human race still subsist? In response to this question, Philo adds (*Deus* 73–76) that God tempers his righteous judgement by mixing it with mercy. Philo further explains (*Deus* 77–85) that God is experienced in such a mixed way when seen from creation. Philo compares this difference to how God tempers the rays of the sun with cool air, preventing them from burning humans by the time they reach them. Philo emphasises that God's judgement only appears as tempered when seen from the human perspective. In truth and from God's perspective his judgement remains unmixed and unaltered.

### 2.3.3.2 *Analysis part 1: Embodied souls require anthropomorphic descriptions of God*

In the following section I will explore Philo's view on anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible as brought forward in *Deus* 51–85. I want to explore Philo's handling of such descriptions, because divine pardon implies an anthropomorphic presentation of God like, for example, becoming angry or

being appeased again. Philo, however, maintained that God is not like humans. At the same time, he was confronted with how the Bible often depicts God in anthropomorphic ways. This seeming contradiction is addressed by Philo in *Deus* 51–85, in the context of two biblical quotes that provide him with the solution to this contradiction. In Num. 13:19 God is declared to be 'not like humans'; and in Dt. 8:5 God is described as 'to train his son like humans.' Philo concludes from these two statements that anthropomorphic descriptions of God are intended to educate and warn humans, but not to say anything about God's nature.[264] How does this work, according to Philo?

First, in *Deus* 20–32, Philo has discussed that God is not like humans, because he is not as unreliable and fickle (ἀψίκορος) as they are.[265] Humans are fickle and God is not, according to Philo, for two reasons. First of all, humans change their opinions all the time due to the influence of their sensations.[266] God, however, is not under the influence of any sensations.[267] Another cause for humans to constantly change their opinions, is that humans are part of the created world and have no full understanding of creation.[268] God, however, is not part of creation and has full knowledge of that creation, which means that he fully knows everything and therefore never has to change his mind.[269]

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[264] As Philo writes in *Deus* 54: 'These descriptions are intended for training and admonition, but not to declare God's nature to be that way.'

[265] See *Deus* 20–32. According to Philo, fickleness is a characteristic of politicians, who switch masters all the time (*Ios.* 36). Fickleness is also a characteristic of love, and more specifically of love under the influence of ὁρμαί and πάθη (*Spec.* III, 79; *Virt.* 113; *Legat.* 61). Finally, fickleness is a characteristic of the pleasure-lover (*Sacr.* 32). Not being fickle is a characteristic of students of wisdom (*Det.* 118, *Aet.* 16, *QE* II, 40). An essential part of the study of wisdom is to learn to control the storming surge of the sensations (*LA* III, 128, 134; *Det.* 53; *Spec.* I, 145; II, 163; *Praem.* 60). Philo's view on the relation between reason and the sensations will be further explored in Chapter 4 (see pp. 149–163). The constancy of the sage is also due to his control over the sensations (see *SVF* III, 431–42, which includes *Migr.* 156 as fragment 436). See also Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, pp. 206–207, where Long describes how the Stoics saw control of reason over the sensations as proof that someone is a true sage. Philo argues: if wisdom can instigate such a resolve in the sage to stand firm against the attack of the sensations, how much firmer must God be standing who is the source of wisdom itself?

[266] I prefer to use 'sensations' as translation for πάθη, as it is more neutral than 'emotions' or 'passions' (which imply strong or very strong feelings) and because 'sensation' expresses a connection to the senses. Both elements (a more neutral description and the connection to the senses) fit well with Philo's presentation of what a πάθος is and does.

[267] In *Post.* 3–4, Philo explains that it is impious to ascribe a body to God, for that would suggest that he is subjected to sensations just like humans. Alkinoos (*Did*. X, 7) explains that a body is a compound of matter and form. Given that God is simple and original, he cannot have a body. For an elaborate background to the doctrine of the emotionless state of the gods, see Frohnhofen, *Apatheia*, pp. 42–50 especially.

[268] As Philo argues in *Som*. I, 154 and 192, change is inherent in the human soul and body.

[269] The argument that God has full knowledge of the course of creation is reminiscent of the Stoic view that the full course of creation is determined and that God, the world-mind, has complete knowledge of the course of creation (see Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, pp. 164–165).

In *Deus* 55 Philo takes the argument even further: not only does God not have a human form, he has no form or quality (ποιότης) at all, he is 'simple being'.[270]

According to Philo, a 'characteristic' (ποιότης or χαρακτήρ) is something that belongs to things appearing in the material world; it is what defines the character of things. Indeed, formless matter becomes something definite through the imprint of a defining shape.[271] This is why Philo considered matter to be completely passive: it can only exist if it 'suffers' the imprint of the original concepts.[272] God, according to Philo, is completely different from matter and only active. As Philo argues in *Deus* 55, the blessed nature of God implies that he has no defining characteristics (ἄνευ χαρακτῆρος): God does not have to 'suffer' the imprint of a defining shape.[273] God simply *is*, which also meant, for Philo, that God cannot be related to anything else.[274] Philo considered only God's

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[270] This statement in *Deus* 55 is reminiscent of the fundamental difference between God and humans already discussed in the analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12. God and humans are fundamentally different, because humans as material beings belong to the world of becoming, whereas God is pure being (see pp. 61–67).

[271] See also the analysis of *Deus* 33–50 in Chapter 3, especially pp. 117–118.

[272] As discussed in the analysis of *Opif.* 13–36a (see pp. 75–79).

[273] Similarly to *Deus* 55, Philo uses in *LA* I, 51 the term ἄποιος for God in a superlative sense. Here, he reasons that not only does God not have a human form, he has no form at all. God is ἄποιος – that is, he does not have any characteristic qualities (see also *LA* I, 36 and III, 36). According to Wolfson, Philo held that God being one, also has one property, which is action. Different names for God identify different properties, which stand for different powers, which are all combined into one power and property: action. These powers and the activity of God are how humans know God (Wolfson, *Philo vol. 2*, pp. 131–140; compare above note 75 and see also Sandmel, *Philo*, pp. 91–92). Calabi refutes the conclusion that Philo identified God completely with action, by pointing out that in *Cher.* 77 Philo writes that God alone can be said to act, not that God is only action (Calabi, *God's Acting*, pp. 31–33). In a sense for Philo, God is not completely without qualities, however. For Philo maintained that one thing is positively known about God, as he writes in *Fug.* 10: God is the mind who shaped and ordered creation, and who stills rules that creation. The powers are closely connected to God and share characteristics with God. Where in *LA* I, 51 God is said to be ἄποιος, Philo says in *LA* II, 80 that his powers (or 'graces' as he calls them here) are without quality as well. In *Spec.* I, 47 the powers are said to be in their essence unknowable, as Philo also believed the essence of God to be. Nevertheless, humans may experience the powers and may know that they exist, through their activity in creation: they give quality to what of itself is without quality. Furthermore, as Philo writes in *Post.* 168–9, through these activities of the powers, man through reasoning may not only infer the existence of the powers, but of God himself, who is the source of these powers. The connection between God and the material world is a two-way street: through the powers God gives and maintains order in the material world, and by seeing this order in the material world, humans may develop knowledge of the existence of God.

[274] Philo brings forward in *Gig.* 41–42 that God cannot be compared (and thus linked) to anything in creation, because the identification of everything that exists in creation, happens through a distinction between things that are in opposite pairs and at the same time related to each other (such as light and darkness, odd and even, day and night). God, according to Philo, cannot be related to anything else, as he writes in *Mut.* 27: τὸ γὰρ ὄν, ᾗ ὄν ἐστιν, οὐχὶ τῶν πρός τι. Runia explains that πρός τί is a technical term referring to relative objects. Philo maintained that God is absolute and not a relative object (Runia, 'Naming and Knowing', p. 80 nt. 41, see also Wolfson, *Philo vol. 2*, p. 138 and

powers to be related to other things, although he emphasised that they too should be considered to belong 'as it were' (ὡσανεί) to the category of relational things.[275]

Philo's use of 'as it were' even when describing the attributes of God's powers, makes one wonder what Philo believed *could* be said about God in an adequate way. For if Philo considered God to be without form or qualities and as unrelated to anything else and if his powers need to be described using the qualification 'as it were', what is then left for humans to say about God in a truthful fashion? For example, can he be adequately described as merciful or forgiving?

As it is, Philo considered human language and knowledge as always falling short in their ability to describe God adequately.[276] This is because he held that human language and knowledge are always based on division. To Philo, the process of identifying things already implies division: division between the object and its properties as well as between objects themselves. Furthermore, as Philo argues, division is an inherent aspect of human language uttered in speech.[277] As discussed in the section describing the identity between God and the intelligible world, Philo regarded that which can be divided as less perfect than that which remains whole.[278] Given that human language and knowledge are based on division, Philo held that contemplation of the divine should take place within the mind and not by means of speech.[279]

However, Philo also saw severe barriers within the human mind itself to apprehend the true nature of God. He even considered the statement that God is one to be not wholly accurate, as it also implies division: between God and one; and God and existence.[280] This led Philo to conclude that it is impossible

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FRICK, *Providence*, p. 77). According to Philo, the only thing to which God is related is existence itself (see *Mos.* I, 75: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν ... ᾧ μόνῳ πρόσεστι τὸ εἶναι).

[275] As Philo writes in *Mut.* 28.

[276] Samuel Sandmel discusses Philo's view on the limitations of human language in SANDMEL, *Philo*, pp. 93–96

[277] He also associated speech and hearing with the dyad, as they are of a divided and mixed nature, because sound is a mixture of breath, air, pitch, windpipe and tongue (see *Deus* 84).

[278] See pp. 72–75.

[279] *Gig.* 52. As Philo writes in *Her.* 72, human speech, because of its divided nature, can never express the true nature of things in general, let alone of God. As Philo explains in *Deus* 83, God's speech is not divided; he speaks in monads. Compare *Migr.* 47–48, where Philo explains that the words of God are seen by the mind, rather than heard by the ears.

[280] Plato in *Parmenides* discusses such paradoxical notions with regard to the monad, for to say that the monad exists is to divide between the monad and its existence (Plato, *Parm.* 142D); the notion that the monad is 'beyond Being' was later developed by Speusippus and Plotinus (cf. DILLON, *Middle Platonists*, p. 16). Sextus Empiricus argued against the existence of God, on the basis that these

for human beings to speak about God in any fully truthful way, so he preferred to regard God's true nature as ἄρρητος and beyond understanding.[281]

Philo claims (in *Deus* 55) that only humans who orient themselves towards the soul, instead of the body, will see God as he truly is – as absolute being – without assigning any characteristics to God and probably also without the difficulties implied in human language and knowledge. Is such a pure apprehension of God possible, according to Philo, while the soul is still in the body? In *Deus* 51–85, this does not become clear. In *Sacr.* 94–96, where a similar reasoning as in *Deus* 51–85 can be found, Philo does state explicitly that as long as humans are part of the mortal world, it is impossible to escape the limitations of human apprehension. This means that while the soul is still in the body, it is impossible to think of God without assigning a form, qualities or relationships to him – that is, it is impossible to think of God in non-anthropomorphic terms.[282] Philo argues that it is precisely for this reason that anthropomorphic descriptions are used in the Bible. These descriptions appear for the benefit of souls connected to the body. For they can only gain some apprehension of God if he is presented to them in human language and in anthropomorphic terms.

In *Deus* 65–68, Philo compares this approach to that of a healer. Sometimes a healer does not state the facts as they are, to be able to better treat a patient. Similarly, an untruth is used in the Bible to better people who do not have the capacity to see God as he truly is, namely as pure existence.[283] In other instances Philo distinguishes between statements about God that are 'proper' (κυρίως) or 'analogous' (καταχρηστικῶς). As Philo sees it, the only truly 'proper' statement that can be made about God is that he exists.[284] All other statements should be

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paradoxes cannot be solved (*Adv. Phys.* I, 130–150). Dillon and Calabi suggest influences derived from Plato's *Parmenides* at work in Platonic tradition for the concept of the unknowability of God to appear before Philo (see ibid., p. 155 and CALABI, *God's Acting*, p. 48). Billings suggests that Plato expressed the thought that God can only be seen through Eros and 'divine madness' (cf. *Phdr.* 249C–E and *Symp.* 211E–212B, see also BILLINGS, *Platonism*, p. 17). I find the arguments for a philosophical precursor more likely than the suggestion of Bréhier that Philo was inspired by Deutero-Isaiah to claim that God cannot be known (BRÉHIER, *Les idées*, p. 73), or that Philo invented the concept of the incomprehensibility of God (WOLFSON, *Philo vol. 2*, p. 113, DANIÉLOU, *Philon*, p. 147 and see also note 59).

[281] See *Her.* 170; *Mut.* 14–15; *Som.* I, 67. God is described as one and ineffable also in Sib. Or. III, 11–12.

[282] Compare a statement by Alkinoos (*Did.* X, 1), who writes that human thinking can never be pure, because inevitably the mind will model its thought after the patterns of the input of the senses.

[283] A similar reasoning can be found in Plato *Rep.* II, 382d and especially III, 389b. Plato reasons that the gods, like healers, can use an untruth about themselves to inspire humans to good words and deeds. Plato calls this the concept of a noble lie, in *Rep.* III, 414b–415d.

[284] See *Abr.* 121. According to Philo, the truth of the matter is that God with his proper name can only be called ὁ ὤν. In this section, the explanation that this name implies that humans can only understand that God exists is not given, but it appears as an interpretation of God's name elsewhere in Philo's treatises. See for instance: *Mut.* 11; *Post.* 168; *Som.* I, 231. Just before, in *Abr.* 120, while exploring the

regarded as 'analogous' or even 'misuses of language'.[285] Such descriptions of God in human language allow humans some approximate knowledge of God while they live in the earthly realm, but always fall short of describing God as he truly is.

**To sum up.** Philo saw God as fundamentally different from humans, so much so that he deemed it impossible for humans to say anything about God in a truthful fashion, at least while the human soul is connected to a body. At the same time, he believed that God also wants humans in their earthly existence to know him. According to Philo, this is why he is described in the Bible in anthropomorphic ways. These descriptions do not confer any knowledge of who God truly is, but they do allow humans to know that God exists. But is this all? One wonders why the Bible then presents God by ascribing all kinds of qualities and characteristics to him, including that he is merciful and inclined to forgive. Did Philo believe that the only reason for these detailed stories is to convince humans of God's existence? As we will see in the next section, there is more to it than only that.

### 2.3.3.3 *Analysis part 2: The difference between how God is and how humans experience him*

In the previous section, we saw how Philo distinguished between God as he truly is and God as he is seen and described by human beings. In the following part of the analysis, we will see how this distinction presents Philo with the opportunity to propose a twist of perspective: God can be described from the divine perspective as he truly is, or he can be described from the human perspective as he is seen or experienced while humans are still connected to a body.[286] It should be interesting to see what function and meaning Philo believed these human descriptions of God in fact had, even if they cannot confer actual knowledge about God.

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allegorical meaning of Gn. 18:1–15, a story of Abraham receiving a visit from God and two angels, Philo applies a contrast between κυρίως and καταχρηστικῶς. Philo writes that one cannot really say (μὴ … κυριολογεῖσθαι) that the angels are shadows of God. Only metaphorically speaking (κατάχρησις) can they be called shadows of God. Another example is *Mut.* 27, where Philo explains that 'I am your God' (appearing in Gn. 17:1), should not be seen as proper (κυρίως), but as an analogue or metaphor (καταχρηστικῶς), because in reality God cannot be anyone's possession.

[285] The verb καταχράομαι, from which καταχρηστικῶς is derived, has 'to abuse' as its connotation. Runia discusses Philo's use of this term in Runia, 'Naming and Knowing', pp. 83–86. Colson translates these connotations by formulating 'use by license of language,' for example as a translation for καταχρῆσθαι in *Mut.* 12.

[286] For suggesting that the differences in perspective with regard to knowledge of God (the difference between God as regarded by God himself and as experienced by humans) are important, see also Calabi's analysis. As Calabi puts it, one should realise that according to Philo 'it is man who changes, and therefore his perception of God's acting also changes'; moreover, 'the question is not how God acts in the world, but how God appears to those who see Him' (Calabi, *God's Acting*, p. 100 and 108, see also ibid., pp. 47, 55, and 86–89). The argument of perspective is also brought to the fore in Frick, *Providence*, p. 58.

According to Philo, one way in which human descriptions of God might be meaningful is that they are an indication of where people stand on the road towards moral perfection. As he describes in *Deus* 68–69, those who see God as he truly is, serve and honour him out of love. All others serve him out of fear. Anthropomorphic descriptions of God also aid in making moral progress. Fearful presentations of God, representing him as a dreadful human tyrant full of wrath, even though incorrect, are used in the Bible as necessary means to stop 'the foolish' (ὁ ἄφρων) from doing evil.[287]

Philo regularly distinguished between various types of people who see God in different ways and serve him for different reasons.[288] Philo argued that how people see God and how much they have progressed in virtue are closely intertwined.[289] The most perfect gain a conception of the existent (τὸ ὄν) through the existent alone, needing nothing else. They truly see God as one. These perfect souls are the most noble, serving God for the sake of God alone. The other types gain some understanding of God through his actions, manifesting themselves in the created world through his powers. They know him as the creative power named 'God' (θεός), or as the kingly power named 'Lord' (κύριος).[290] These types have a fainter vision of God, for they see him as a complex of three.[291] They rank second-best, serving God out of some measure of self-interest: to gain blessings or to avoid punishment.[292] These types of people represent different stages in moral progress.[293]

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[287] The same reasoning can be found in short in *Conf.* 98, and also in *Mut.* 23, where Philo writes that the more dim-witted people serve God out of fear for punishment. They believe that God may become angry with them if they do not follow his laws.

[288] See, for example, *Fug.* 95–105; *Mut.* 15–53; *Abr.* 119–132.

[289] The connection between knowledge of God and moral progression in Philo's works has already been noted by Bréhier (BRÉHIER, *Les idées*, p. 142).

[290] It was only with great reluctance that Philo accepted that any name could be used for God. Philo writes in *Mut.* 12 that God gives a name only 'as if it were his proper name' (ὡς ἂν ὀνόματι κυρίῳ). Sandmel suggests that Philo believed God to be nameless, because he cannot be limited; naming something implies limitation of that something (SANDMEL, *Philo*, p. 93).

[291] For a similar description of the vision of God and his powers, see *QG* IV, 2–8 and *QE* II, 68.

[292] As Philo puts it in *Mut.* 23–24, the most perfect souls are guided by the truly Existent as the Lord and are blessed by him as God, but they also understand that in reality God is one. Mansfeld interprets the theological exposition in the *Didaskalikos* of Alkinoos as a similar description of various ways of knowing God, where the best way is also the most abstract. The notion that there are various degrees in knowing God explains how Alkinoos could combine positive statements about God with the statement that God is ἄρρητος (see MANSFELD, 'Compatible Alternatives', pp. 100–101 and 109–111 especially).

[293] See, for example, *Mut.* 15–18. Here, Philo interprets the statement in Gn. 17:1 that Abraham saw the Lord. Philo sees Abraham as a symbol for someone who used to belong to the Chaldean creed, holding the stars to be in control of the fate of the world. If this type of person is said to 'see the Lord', Philo takes this as an indication that such a person is on the road towards a better understanding, seeing that there is a Lord, an entity beyond the heaven and the stars who is in control of creation.

God allows different names to be used for him to accommodate these different types of people.[294]

One way in which human descriptions of God were meaningful for Philo is in indicating different stages of moral progress. Before describing the other way in which Philo held them to be meaningful, I wish to consider whether he believed it is possible for human souls living on earth to leave the state of foolishness behind, to see God as he truly is, to serve God out of love and not out of fear and to become virtuous instead of only avoiding evil. The reason for this question is to establish to which types of people Philo found the description of God as forgiving to be relevant: those on the road towards perfection, or the perfected souls?

The answer is that Philo held both full acquisition of virtue and full understanding of God to be impossible for humans as long as they are still in the body. Philo's support for this conclusion is that humans are unable to fully grasp the nature of their own mind, let alone the nature of God.[295] The highest form of knowledge of God available to humans in the material world is knowledge of God gained on the basis of his actions, i.e., knowledge of his kingly and creative powers.[296] Even knowledge of those two powers is severely

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Philo explains that what such a person sees is not God himself, not the Existent, but an appearance of one of God's powers, namely the kingly power. As we have seen above, the kingly power is one of two chief powers that Philo regarded as the head of all other powers (see note 217). These powers are part of the intelligible world through which God brings constant order and harmony in the world of creation (see above, pp. 68–79). According to Philo, to see that there is such an intelligible world is a first step towards betterment, for it leads a person to see that there is a creator. Another way in which Philo regularly described different stages of moral progress is by connecting them to the names of the biblical patriarchs. He saw Abraham as a symbol for those who progress in virtue through learning, Isaac for those who are virtuous by nature and Jacob for those who progress in virtue through practice (see for example *Som.* I, 166–170). For a more elaborate discussion of Philo's presentation of the patriarchs as symbols for different stages in moral progress, see, for example, Sandmel, *Philo*, pp. 56–76.

[294] Dirk Obbink presents an example of an allegorical interpretation of Orpheus' poems from the 4th century BCE, where the various names for different gods are similarly interpreted as to 'accommodate their audiences in some fashion, so that a single entity might have multiple designations' (Obbink, 'Allegory', p. 21).

[295] See *Mut.* 10 and *Som.* I, 30–33. Similarly, Seneca in *Ep.* 121.12 states that humans can know *that* they have a soul, but not *what* that soul is. Human knowing is described as limited also in Sap. Sal. 9:16–17, 4 Ez. 4:21 and Sib. Or. Frag. 2, 15–16.

[296] Runia identifies knowing God through his actions as one way to know God. According to Runia, Philo believed that there is also the possibility to come to know God in a more direct, intuitive way (Runia, *Timaeus*, p. 437). I agree that Philo believed that these two ways were possible. For example, in *LA* III, 97–103 Philo draws a picture of two types of persons who gain knowledge about the deity. There are those who apprehend God by inferring his existence through observing the visible world. There is also a more perfect type of mind, who gains his knowledge of God not through looking at created things, but directly from God himself. However, I conclude that Philo did not believe that this way was an option for souls that are still in the body.

limited while the human soul is contained in the body. As long as humans are living in a body, they can only know and serve God as 'Lord'. To Philo, this implies that avoidance of sin is the highest form of virtue available to humans in bodily form.[297] Perfect knowledge of God and true virtue are available only to incorporeal souls.[298] For Philo, it is reasonable to conclude that to describe God as forgiving is relevant to human souls living in the earthly realm. This conclusion will be confirmed when I next explore the other way in which Philo held human descriptions of God to be meaningful.

The second way in which Philo regarded human descriptions of God meaningful is by seeing them as descriptions of how humans experience God, even when these descriptions do not adequately describe how God actually is. This approach becomes apparent when Philo addresses what he considers the central question in his analysis of Gn. 6:7 in *Deus* 70–85: did God indeed change his mind in that he became angry about having made humans? Philo argues that from God's perspective he did not change his mind, for he can be justly (although still metaphorically, for anger is a human emotion) said to always be angry with humans. According to Philo, there is not one human being who will run the course of his or her life without ever making a mistake or doing something wrong (*Deus* 75). Therefore, if God is said to condemn humans, this implies no change of mind of God.

To conclude that God was justified in condemning the whole human race introduces a new question: how is it possible that God allows humans to subsist? Philo explained that God, because he is good, mixes mercy (ἔλεος) into his condemnation and saves the human race from destruction. The combination of goodness and mercy appears more often in his works as saving not only humans but the whole of creation from destruction. Philo considered goodness the cause for creation to exist in the first place and mercy as the cause for creation to *remain* in existence.[299] One way in which God has mercy for

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[297] See *Mut.* 50. Similarly, Philo explains in *Fug.* 103–105 that even knowing the Existent as God, or as Lord, is available to humans while living on earth only in an indirect way, namely through injunctions telling humans to do what is right and admonitions of what not to do.

[298] See *Sacr.* 94–96, as discussed in the previous section (see pp. 85–90). Similarly, in *Mut.* 33 Philo writes that those who are pleasing to God (i.e., virtuous and wise) are 'minds without bodies' (ἀσώματοι διάνοιαι). Moreover, in *Mut.* 38 he writes that perfect souls do exist, but they cannot be found among mortal humans. The sage, as he writes, transitions 'from the mortal life to the immortal.' In *Mut.* 255 we find something similar: on earth virtuous humans are scarcely found, but heaven is full of them. Compare this also to the statement in *Som.* I, 232, where Philo writes that souls while still in the body have no true understanding of God, whereas souls in heaven possibly know God truly as he is. These two statements combined provide more support for the strong link that Philo sees between knowledge of virtue and knowledge of God as well as the position of Philo that on earth, in the material realm, this true knowledge cannot be reached.

[299] As Philo notes in *Mos.* II, 132, everything exists due to God's goodness (ἀγαθότης) and his merciful power (ἵλεως δύναμις). In *De Vita Mosis* I and II Philo often describes God's nature as merciful, see

creation is that he allows something that is inherently less perfect than himself to exist.[300] Another way is that God, being merciful, keeps the original forms in existence, thereby guaranteeing the continued existence of everything, even though individual material manifestations of those forms perish all the time.[301] We can recognise Philo's description of God's providential care for creation in how he presents God's mercy for creation.

However, the view that God dilutes condemnation with mercy presented a new problem for Philo: is God then mixed, or a composite of different things instead of one and undivided?[302] Philo solved this apparent contradiction by using a shift in perspectives. He explains in *Deus* 77–81 that there is difference between how God is to himself and how he appears to humans. God as he is to himself is one, unmixed and pure. Humans (and the whole of creation) would become overwhelmed, however, if they were to experience God as he truly is.[303] Humans therefore see and experience God in a mixed or diluted way.

As discussed earlier in this section, humans can, according to Philo, see God in different ways. While living on earth, they can only see him as 'Lord' or 'God', whereas when they are no longer confined by a body, they can see him as he truly is. According to Philo, characteristics like goodness and mercy are part of the divine manifesting itself as the creative power, for which humans use the name 'God'.[304] This means that the manifestation of God as merciful belongs to the sphere of the material realm.[305] In that realm humans experience God as divided between a merciful 'God' and a judging 'Lord' and also as softening his judgement with mercy.[306] In truth, however, God is undivided and undiluted.[307]

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*Mos.* I, 101, 198; II, 5, 238. For references where Philo identifies God's goodness as the cause for creation see further note 179.

[300] In *Deus* 104–108, Philo writes that everything exists due to God's grace (χάρις), which he then describes as an aspect of God's goodness (similarly in *LA* III, 78). In *Virt.* 160 God is described as showing mercy and kindness to all living things. Compare also *Opif.* 21, as discussed above on pp. 75–79.

[301] *Mos.* II, 61.

[302] As Philo shows in *Mut.* 3, he holds everything that is apprehended by the senses to be mixed (σύγκριτος) and the divine as unmixed (ἀσύγκριτος).

[303] *Deus* 77 and similarly in *Ebr.* 32.

[304] *Som.* I, 163; *QE* II, 68.

[305] *Fug.* 104–105.

[306] As noted by Wolfson, the Stoics considered ἔλεος (mercy) an emotion (Wolfson, *Philo vol. 2*, p. 269). Herbert Frohnhofen suggests that Philo primarily rejected anger and repentance as possible emotions for God, because they are closely related to fickleness and change and Philo was foremost concerned to maintain the immutability of God (see Frohnhofen, *Apatheia*, p. 112).

[307] As Philo writes in *Conf.* 171: 'God is one, but all around him he has numberless powers that benefit and protect (δυνάμεις ἀρωγοὺς καὶ σωτηρίους) everything that has come into existence.'

**To sum up.** Even though humans can never adequately describe God as he truly is, Philo identified two ways in which descriptions of God from the human perspective can be meaningful. One way is that they are an indication of different stages of moral progress. Humans who see God as he truly is are also completely virtuous. However, such a stage of moral perfection is impossible to attain while humans live as embodied souls. Philo was quite reticent regarding the moral progress humans can make while they live on earth. Avoidance of sin and serving God out of fear are what most people can hope to attain while they live on earth. Their fear is in a sense justified, as Philo's second way of seeing meaning in human descriptions of God shows. According to Philo, God as he is to himself would be justified in condemning the entire human race because of humans' unavoidable imperfections. However, humans while living on earth do not experience God as he truly is. They experience God's judgement as mixed with mercy, allowing them to subsist, whereas in truth God is unmixed and undivided.

### 2.3.3.4 *Results from the analysis of* Deus *51–85*

In *Deus* 51–85, Philo brings forward his view on why in the Bible human characteristics like regret, changing one's mind or becoming angry are ascribed to God. We saw in the first part of the analysis that Philo held that the Bible uses anthropomorphic descriptions of God because there simply is no other way for humans while they live in the earthly realm to gain at least some apprehension of God. Such anthropomorphic descriptions, however, can confer no truthful knowledge about God.

This result from the first part of the analysis led me to explore, in the second part, whether Philo held that these human descriptions of God can be meaningful at all. We saw how Philo proposed a twist in perspective: such descriptions confer no knowledge about God, but do reveal characteristics of the humans using them and are also meaningful descriptions of how humans experience God. We can now apply these results to the main topic of this study, and specifically to how Philo approached the anthropomorphic traits being ascribed to God implicated in the idea of God showing mercy and granting pardon.

### 2.3.4 *Conclusions: Anthropomorphic descriptions of God and divine forgiveness*

Sections from *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* have been analysed to find an answer to the second question of this chapter: does divine pardon imply that human actions can hurt and anger God and that God can be made to change his mind? If God is said to pardon perpetrators of evil, how can that change of attitude be understood? First of all, my analysis of *Deus* 51–85 has shown how Philo concluded that anthropomorphic descriptions of God, presenting him as becoming angry or changing his mind, do not describe God as he truly is. According to Philo, God simply *is* and humans cannot ascribe any

characteristics truthfully to him. A true perception of God is only possible when the human soul is no longer attached to a body. Embodied souls can only 'think' of God in bodily terms.

Nevertheless, according to Philo, anthropomorphic descriptions of God do have meaning. He held that God allows these descriptions to be used for him, because he wants humans to have some knowledge of who he is while they are living in the material world. Even though such bodily depictions of God are incorrect, they are useful to help humans improve their ways. God, as it were, dilutes the full truth about himself with untruths. Embodied souls are unable to receive the undiluted truth about God.

Philo introduced a shift in perspective. From the divine point of view, God can be described as simply being, with no defining characteristics at all. Anthropomorphic and diluted descriptions of God belong to the human view on God. They do not confer true knowledge about God. They are meaningful, however, for the humans who use these descriptions. The presentation of God as wrathful can help someone turn away from evil. These descriptions are also meaningful in that they describe how humans experience God. Humans, for example, experience God as limiting his justified condemnation with mercy, allowing them as imperfect beings to subsist. Such descriptions and experiences, including describing and experiencing God as forgiving, although inaccurate, are meaningful and helpful for human beings to improve their ways.

## 2.4   Conclusions to Chapter 2

Two difficulties with divine forgiveness in Philo's works relate to his doctrine of God. The first is whether Philo believed a connection between a transcendent God and the created world is possible. Two passages from *De Opificio Mundi* have been analysed to explore Philo's views on this matter. We have seen that Philo considered the connection between the transcendent God and his creation not only a possibility, but a necessary requirement for creation to subsist as beautiful and well-ordered whole, and as a necessary expression of God's benevolence.

Philo also claimed that God first created the world of concepts, before he created the material world. First in order, that is, because this intelligible world exists outside the dimension of time. It exists eternally, just as God exists eternally. The innumerable abstract concepts, that Philo also identified as ideas or powers and that together form the intelligible world, guarantee the continued existence of the concrete objects appearing in the material world. The material world is a world of change and decay; physical objects appear and disintegrate continuously in it. The concepts provide these material objects with consistent forms and qualities. The concepts connect the divine world of 'being' to the

material world of 'becoming'. Without them the material world would only be defined by change and decay, through them the material world shares in the beauty and goodness of true being.

Philo effectively transformed the personal notion of God's providential care for the world and for individual humans into a more detached process of powers and ideas used to bring creation into existence and to sustain it. Divine amnesty can clearly be identified as a part of this process, as an aspect of one of the countless powers that allow creation to subsist. In the subsequent chapter, I will explore the human side, the receiving end of divine pardon, and investigate how this aspect of God's powers functions according to Philo.

The second question explored in this chapter was: how did Philo reflect on the emotional presentation of God, including the suggestion that God changes his mind? An analysis of sections from *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis* has provided insights into how Philo reconciled his intellectual theological outlooks with biblical statements where human characteristics are attributed to God. It is Philo's view that these biblical statements, even though they do no justice to what he believes to be the truth about God, still have a relevant function, namely to allow for humans while they live on earth to attain some approximate knowledge of God. Philo furthermore maintained that these descriptions are not meaningless. He introduced a shift in perspective, explaining that these human descriptions of God do not reveal qualities or properties of God, but rather of the humans who use them, indicating different stages of their moral progress.

When applying these findings to the concept of divine forgiveness, I can conclude that Philo regarded the statement 'God is forgiving' as an inaccurate description of God. As Philo saw it, no characteristics can be accurately ascribed to God. However, 'God is forgiving' is still a meaningful statement for Philo when we consider it from the human perspective, even though it does not comply with how God, as pure being, truly is. If a human describes God as forgiving, this can be expected to inform us not about who God is, but about the stage of moral progress of the person using that description for God. To what stage of moral progress would such a statement conform? To find an answer to this question we will have to investigate Philo's view on humans.

Both the exploration of how Philo saw the relationship between God and creation and how Philo interpreted the attribution of human characteristics to God, direct our attention towards the human recipients of divine pardon. The next logical step, therefore, is to investigate Philo's view on humans. Given that divine forgiveness is something that happens between God and humans, the focus of the next chapter will be on the following question: how can humans interact with and relate to the transcendent God?