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## **Philo of Alexandria on divine forgiveness**

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# 5

## **Philo's view on divine forgiveness**

## 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I established that seeking and obtaining divine pardon for sins can be seen as an intellectual paradox for Philo. Aspects we associate with divine forgiveness, such as going to the temple to bring a sacrifice and ask for the remission of sins, are at home in uncritical expressions of practical religion. Philo, who as an intellectual reflected on the nature of God, the world and humans, saw this practice as a conceptual challenge. When we took a preliminary glance at *Spec. I*, 235–238, the specifics of this challenge came into focus. This section from *De Specialibus Legibus I* appeared as particularly suited for an inquiry into Philo's view on divine forgiveness, because here Philo uses three words related to the semantic domain of forgiveness: συγγνώμη, ἀμνηστία and ἄφεσις. When such terms are applied to the relationship between God and humans, they imply attributing characteristics to God that an intellectual like Philo would find inappropriate, such as God being offended by human actions and able to change his mind, or the fundamental question of how the transcendent God would be troubled by human affairs at all.

In the previous three chapters these intellectual stumbling blocks were explored through an analysis of sections from Philo's treatises. These analyses resulted in the paradox formulated at the end of Chapter 4: on the one hand, Philo maintained that humans remove themselves from God when they do evil; on the other hand, he also believed that humans need God's wisdom to leave the path of evil behind and return to the right path of following good reason. How did Philo overcome the intrinsic contradiction of this scenario? Did he think some form of divine intervention was required? But any direct action or reaction from God's side, such as intervening to save humans from their self-chosen path of destruction, would contradict Philo's emphasis on God's transcendence and immutability. If this is not an option, how then would humans be able to return from evil and what would God's role be in it? With these results from the previous chapters and the new questions they brought to mind, I return to *Spec. I*, 235–238.

To answer these questions, *Spec. I*, 235–238 will now be analysed in detail. The analysis of this passage will be presented in light of its place and function within *De Specialibus Legibus I* as a whole. However, before analysing *Spec. I*, 235–238 in order to present Philo's view on aspects we associate with divine forgiveness, I need to begin with an exploration into Philo's general approach to Jewish laws. The Jewish laws and customs contained more elements, apart from the notion of divine pardon, that required explanation in the context of an intellectual approach to religion such as Philo's. Understanding Philo's general approach to such elements helps us appraise his specific approach towards divine remission of sins.

## 5.2 *Philo's general approach to Jewish laws*

The four books of *De Specialibus Legibus* contain several examples of religious customs that apparently presented Philo with an intellectual challenge and the desire to explain them to fellow-intellectuals. Customs, such as circumcision or bringing a sacrifice, belong to the sphere of daily-life religion and become problematic within the context of a well-considered framework that meets contemporaneous intellectual standards when approaching religion. In this subchapter, I want to demonstrate how Philo handled such elements in general, because Philo's approach to aspects we usually associate with divine forgiveness, such as God granting pardon to a sinner, can be expected to comply with his overall approach to give expressions of popular and daily-life religion a meaningful place within a well-considered framework. How did Philo achieve this?

### 5.2.1 *Philo's selection of Jewish laws and his approach in discussing them*

Philo's approach to Jewish laws very much depends upon the existence of a guiding principle for selecting the laws he wants to discuss. Is there anything like it? At first glance, the selection of laws Philo discusses in the four books of *De Specialibus Legibus* may appear as arbitrary. However, a more careful examination shows that he selected relevant laws according to the overall aim of these books, namely to convince his readers of the universal character of the Jewish laws.<sup>596</sup> The general argument of Philo in the four books of *De Specialibus Legibus* is to show the agreement between Jewish laws and the universal law of nature as expressed in intellectual circles.<sup>597</sup> This is his guiding principle. A brief comparison between Philo and other Jewish authors who made similar claims, in particular Pseudo-Aristeas and Josephus, will add depth to my analysis of Philo's approach to the Jewish laws and customs. It will also illuminate why divine pardon belongs to discussing them.

The aim of these authors was to present Judaism as an intellectually satisfying religion, claiming it to agree with the best that Greek philosophy had to offer or even to surpass it.<sup>598</sup> This approach had advantages as well as disadvantages.

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<sup>596</sup> As illustrated in Chapter 2, note 173. *De Specialibus Legibus* I–IV are part of the Exposition of the Laws, for an overview of the treatises contained in that exposition see Chapter 2, note 172.

<sup>597</sup> On the widespread notion in Philo's context of the existence of an unwritten, divine and universal law which those who aspire wisdom should follow see, for example, HOLLANDER, 'Human Hearts', pp. 113–116 and the contributions in RUNIA/STERLING (eds.), *Law and Nature*.

<sup>598</sup> For example, Josephus writes in CA II, 123 that the Greek and Jewish customs are mostly in agreement with each other, and that indeed this has led 'many people' to adopt the Jewish laws. Further examples are: Sap. Sal. 18,4; Sir. 18,13–14; Sib. Or. III, 194–195, 710–723 (see also TROMP, 'Idolatry', pp. 114–115 and BUITENWERF, *Sibylline Oracles*, pp. 203, 258–264 and 348–385). Philo even expresses astonishment at how non-Jews fail to see the universal truth of Jewish worship – or worse: laugh at non-Jews who accept the Jewish faith (see *Spec.* II, 164–167). Philo seems to share in the astonishment of the author of *Sapientia Salomonis*, who expresses his amazement at how

Common ground between Jewish religious beliefs and Hellenistic philosophy was found in the claim that there is only one, universal God who should not be worshipped by means of man-made idols nor be presented in anthropomorphic terms. The practice of idolatry was ridiculed and denounced by Jewish authors and some pagan intellectuals alike.<sup>599</sup>

At the same time, certain Jewish customs very obviously contradicted the claim of universality of Jewish institutions since they were perceived as addressing the Jewish people alone. These Jewish practices and beliefs were difficult to reconcile with what intellectuals saw as the universal law of nature.<sup>600</sup> The customs of circumcision, Sabbath-observance and dietary laws in particular were seen as alien, incomprehensible or downright barbaric.<sup>601</sup> Circumcision was a source for ridicule, Sabbath-observance was considered a sign of laziness, and the abstention from eating pork was baffling to most Greeks and Romans.<sup>602</sup>

Next to these intellectual stumbling blocks, many Greek and Roman intellectuals saw Jewish sacrificial worship in the temple of Jerusalem as a

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the philosophers have gathered so much knowledge and still fail to see God as the one ruler of the universe (Sap. Sal. 13, 1–9) (see also TROMP, 'Idolatry', p. 115). Philo mentions laughter at conversion (μεταβολή) as well in QG IV, 43. It is clear from evidence in several sources that non-Jews did join the Jewish community. Philo uses the Greek terms προσήλυτος or ἔπῃλυς for such a person (Spec. I, 52–53, 308–309; II, 118; IV, 176; Som. II, 273; Virt. 102, 182; Praem. 152). This is in line with the Septuagint where προσήλυτος is used for a foreigner who joins the Jewish people (Lv. 16:29; 17:8–15; 18:26; 19:34; 20:2; 22:18; 24:21; Num. 15:14–30; 35:15; Dt. 10:19; 14:29; 26:12–13; 29:10; 31:12). Similarly, Josephus speaks of foreigners who were accepted into the Jewish community in BJ II, 463; V, 559–562; VII, 44–45 and describes several individual cases of converts in AJ XVIII, 82 and XX, 7.139. It is impossible, however, to estimate the number of non-Jews joining the Jewish community. Moreover, it is a grave mistake to use these and pagan sources to suppose that the Jews were involved in an active mission to convert non-Jews, as is shown in WILL/ORRIEUX, *Prosélytisme*, pp. 108–115.

<sup>599</sup> See TROMP, 'Idolatry', pp. 109–110 for an overview of Jewish critique of idolatry, and *ibid.*, pp. 110–111 for an overview of pagan authors; see also HEINEMANN, *Bildung*, p. 48.

<sup>600</sup> As Tromp writes: 'It is unlikely that the Greeks would ever have understood the conclusion Jews drew from this [i.e., the uniqueness of God and the powerlessness of images, FJT]; namely, that it was their God, the Jewish God, who was identical with the unique God. From the very start, Xenophanes had denounced just that silly chauvinism' (TROMP, 'Idolatry', p. 117).

<sup>601</sup> Exactly because of their exotic nature some people appreciated these customs: for example, abstention from eating pork was sometimes valued as a *pars pro toto* for complete vegetarianism. Seneca describes in *Ep.* 108, 22 how he was a vegetarian for a while in his youth, during the reign of emperor Tiberius when, according to Seneca, all kinds of exotic rituals were popular among Romans. Abstention from eating pork or other meat was not an exclusively Jewish custom, but practiced by various communities (see MEYERS, 'Material Culture', pp. 156–158 and ZANGENBERG, 'Multidimensional', p. 183). Shaye J.D. Cohen notes how circumcision came to be primarily associated with Jews in Greek and Roman sources, despite the fact that it was also known to be a practice of other peoples (cf. COHEN, 'Common Judaism', p. 76).

<sup>602</sup> See Tacitus, *Historiae* 5, 4–5; Juvenalis, *Satyra* 14, 86–106; Horatius, *Satyra* 1.9, 70; Petronius, *Satyra* 102, 14; Martial *Epigramma* 7, 30; 11, 94; Seneca, *Ep.* 95, 47; 108, 22 (see also GOODMAN, *Rome and Jerusalem*, p. 367 and GRUEN, *Diaspora*, pp. 48–51).

strange phenomenon too. Some philosophical schools and religious sects denounced the practice of sacrifice altogether.<sup>603</sup> Even those intellectuals who saw sacrifice as acceptable, brought forward objections against important aspects of Jewish sacrificial injunctions. The claim that sacrifices could be made at only one location has no parallel in Greek nor Roman thought.<sup>604</sup> Furthermore, the sacrifice of domestic animals was viewed with amazement by some.<sup>605</sup>

Any Jewish author who wanted to claim the universality of the biblical laws needed to explain the tension between this claim of universality and the perceived and sometimes ridiculed particularity of certain Jewish customs.<sup>606</sup> Some authors chose to simply dismiss these particular customs.<sup>607</sup> Others, like Philo, upheld the biblical standards and attempted to explain why these customs, despite all misapprehension by non-Jews, actually fitted well within a universal and intellectually satisfying religious framework.<sup>608</sup>

<sup>603</sup> Most notably the Pythagoreans and the Orphic cults, see VERNANT, 'Théorie générale', p. 10; and BRUNDSCHWIG, et al., *Le savoir grec*, p. 988; according to Long, the Stoics in general 'rejected sacrifices, temples and images' (LONG, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, p. 149; and similarly in ULLUCCI, *Sacrifice*, p. 101); for more philosophical forms of critique on animal sacrifice, see also SISSA, *La vie quotidienne*, pp. 92–93. Geoffrey S. Kirk suggests that there might have been a trend in Greek culture of de-incarnation of the Greek gods, which implied a reduction of actual animal sacrifices (see KIRK, 'Pitfalls', pp. 79–80). The denouncement of animal sacrifice in certain intellectual circles did not mean that animal sacrifice was in overall decline, as discussed in PETROPOULOU, *Animal Sacrifice*, pp. 290–295; for a description of the practice and meaning of animal sacrifice in Roman everyday life see SCHEID, 'Animal Sacrifice'; and Bickerman notes how the sacrificial cult in temples, including the one in Jerusalem, was a generally accepted phenomenon (BICKERMAN, *Jews*, p. 139). Nevertheless, intellectuals might have perceived it as messy, which could be the reason that Pseudo-Aristeas emphasises that, due to an excellent drainage-system, the Jerusalem temple is extraordinarily clean (GORDON, 'Sightseeing', pp. 276–277).

<sup>604</sup> PETROPOULOU, *Animal Sacrifice*, p. 206. Sanders also notes how there were two factors that did distinguish Jewish worship from that of other Hellenistic religions: the one temple, and the cost involved in the sacrificial cult there (see SANDERS, *Judaism*, pp. 49–50). Non-Jews considered it peculiar privileges of the Jews to be exempt from official sacrifices and that they were allowed to send money to the temple in Jerusalem instead, cf. Tacitus *Historiae* 5, 5 and Cicero, *PF* 28; see also GOODMAN, *Rome and Jerusalem*, pp. 374–375 and COHEN, 'Common Judaism', p. 77.

<sup>605</sup> As can be deduced from Josephus' defence against Apion's accusations, in *CA* II, 137–138 and also the defence of the custom by Pseudo-Aristeas (see note 612). See also VERNANT, 'Théorie générale', pp. 17–18, where Jean-Pierre Vernant explains how the sacrifice of domestic animals could be felt as especially uncomfortable, because of their close relationship with humans.

<sup>606</sup> Trent A. Rogers writes: 'But Philo must explain how this universal Law could be transmitted to a very particular people' (ROGERS, 'Universalization', p. 86).

<sup>607</sup> For example, the allegorists Philo opposes in *Migr.* 89–93 (see also note 130); another example is Sib. Or. IV, 28–34 (cf. SANDERS, *Judaism*, p. 54 and 144).

<sup>608</sup> In his works, Philo generally emphasises the intellectual component of worship (as will be more elaborately discussed in my analysis of *Spec.* I, 235–246, see pp. 212–214). This emphasis on the intellectual component of Jewish worship should not be mistaken as representative of the general religious attitude of Jews in Philo's time. For most of them, thereby not any different from their non-

Philo addressed the allegedly problematic nature of certain Jewish customs head-on and especially selected those laws and customs for discussion that other intellectuals perceived as strange.<sup>609</sup> In light of the intellectual objections discussed above, it becomes evident why seeking divine pardon is part of Philo's discussion of specific Jewish customs: it implies presenting God in anthropomorphic terms and it evokes objections against the sacrificial cult. As discussed in Chapter 1, Philo often used allegory to reveal the deeper meaning of these laws and customs.<sup>610</sup> He applied allegorical methods to present an argument as to why they should not be denounced as strange but in fact be embraced as beneficial for all mankind.<sup>611</sup>

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Jewish contemporaries, the focus of religion was on common ritual *practice*, rather than *reflecting* the possible meaning of those acts; cf. Sanders' description of 'common Judaism' in *ibid.*, pp. 53, 144 and 236–237, and also BICKERMAN, *Jews*, p. 257 and 279, MEYERS, 'Material Culture', pp. 153, 155 and 169, ZANGENBERG, 'Multidimensional', p. 177. Nevertheless, Philo's emphasis on the intellectual component of worship did not mean that he wanted to completely abandon the concrete practice of sacrifice (as his discussion of the sacrificial cult in *Spec. I*, 198–256 shows); compare *Sir.* 7:29–31; 35:4–7 (SANDERS, *Judaism*, p. 253) and *Sib. Or.* III, 575–579 (BUIENWERF, *Sibylline Oracles*, p. 259) where the sacrificial cult is described as an integral part of the correct worship of God. In line with most other forms of intellectual assessment of sacrifice, Philo's intent is not to abolish it, but to present his readers with a proper understanding of it (cf. ULLUCCI, *Sacrifice*, p. 122; for further discussion of Philo's stance towards sacrifice see also NIKIPROWETZKY, *Études*, pp. 79–97 and PETROPOULOU, *Animal Sacrifice*, pp. 149–188).

<sup>609</sup> Colson, in his introduction to *De Specialibus Legibus*, claims that no principle can be found on which Philo bases the selection of laws that he discusses in the four books of the treatise (COLSON, *Philo vol.* 7, p. xi and xiii). However, Philo is very much aware of the arguments that pagan authors use to illustrate the strangeness of Jewish worship or to disqualify it, and engages those arguments in particular. He immediately begins his treatise with the often ridiculed practice of circumcision (*Spec. I*, 2); he makes great effort to explain the universal character of the sacrificial worship in the temple of Jerusalem (*Spec. I*, 65–298); he knows that the rest on Sabbath is associated with laziness (*Spec. II*, 60); he resorts to allegory to explain the seeming randomness of the dietary laws (*Spec. IV*, 95–131) and explains the logic of eating tame animals as compared to eating wild animals (*Spec. IV*, 103).

<sup>610</sup> Philo's allegorical method is discussed in Chapter 1 (see pp. 34–42).

<sup>611</sup> Pseudo-Aristeas offers the closest parallel to how Philo structured his exposition of Jewish customs. Both Pseudo-Aristeas and Philo begin their argument by mentioning a Jewish custom that is perceived as especially problematic, for Pseudo-Aristeas the dietary laws (*Ep. Arist.* 128), for Philo the practice of circumcision (*Spec. I*, 2). Both Pseudo-Aristeas and Philo then explain how a seemingly random or backward custom is actually beneficial to both body and soul. Pseudo-Aristeas' argument is that the dietary laws serve to keep the Jews pure in body and soul (*Ep. Arist.* 139) and, further, that because of these laws Jews eat only tame animals, and the calmness and well-disposed nature of these animals strengthens the character of those who eat them as well-balanced people (*Ep. Arist.* 145–149) – arguments that can also be found in 4 Macc. 1:34–35 and 5:25–27. Philo argues that circumcision offers protection against certain diseases, promotes hygiene, promotes the generation of wisdom and increases fertility (*Spec. I*, 4–7). Josephus, in *Contra Apionem*, rather than focusing on one Jewish custom that was perceived as strange, seeks to counter all the accusations that Apion has made against the Jews.

5.2.2 **Conclusion: Reconciling seemingly particularistic customs with the claim for universality**

In the four books of *De Specialibus Legibus*, Philo chose to discuss precisely those Jewish laws and customs that Hellenistic intellectuals perceived as strange and particularistic, seeking divine pardon being among them. He did this to convince his readers of the universal and intellectually satisfying nature of Jewish religion.<sup>612</sup> He presented his readers with expositions, often using allegorical methods, to support his claim that they are in fact beneficial for all mankind. With Philo's reader-oriented selection principle and general approach to Jewish laws and customs in view, I can now move to the analysis of those sections in *De Specialibus Legibus* I, where divine pardon and amnesty for sins appear.

5.3 **Philo's view on divine forgiveness**

5.3.1 **The relevance of *De Specialibus Legibus* I to this topic**

Elements we associate with divine forgiveness appear in Philo's discussion of the Jewish sacrificial cult in *De Specialibus Legibus* I. What was the place and meaning of these elements, such as bringing a sacrifice to placate God, in Philo's presentation of Jewish religion as an intellectually satisfying belief? This question will be explored through an analysis of the specific sections where aspects of divine forgiveness appear in *De Specialibus Legibus* I. As in the

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<sup>612</sup> Philo's intended public may have been pagan readers. It is, however, highly unlikely that these works were actually read by pagans. They served more to build and maintain Jewish self-esteem (see TROMP, 'Idolatry', p. 116 and MÉLÈZE MODRZEJEWSKI, *Jews*, p. 67). Philo discusses the excellence of Jewish worship at length in the first book of *De Specialibus Legibus*. Three themes recur regularly in this discussion: the first is Philo's claim that the best form of worship is to serve the One True God, the Creator of all, and the One who truly exists (*Spec.* I, 20, 31, 34–35, 52, 210–211); secondly, Philo claims that the Jewish temple worship is closely linked with the structure of the Universe (*Spec.* I, 65–97, 172, 177–180); thirdly, Philo maintains that sacrifices serve the needs of humans, most importantly their need for moral improvement (*Spec.* I, 191–193, 206, 260, 288) and not the needs of God (*Spec.* I, 67, 152, 218–219, 237, 271, 282, 294). Similarly, Pseudo-Aristeas writes in his letter that there is only one universal God whose power is present in the whole universe (*Ep. Arist.* 132) and that Moses denounced the uselessness of worshipping man-made idols (*Ep. Arist.* 135–138). The author finishes his exposition of the Jewish law with the claim that Jews only eat tame animals for the same reason why they only sacrifice tame animals (*Ep. Arist.* 170–171). He then continues his letter with the claim that the goal of life itself is to know God as the one Lord of the Universe, and that everything a human being achieves is not due to his own success, but a gift from God (*Ep. Arist.* 195). The best way to honour God is not through gifts and sacrifices, but 'with purity of soul and holy conviction,' as fitting the character of God in the most appropriate way (*Ep. Arist.* 234, translation by H.T. Andrews). Compare also Josephus, who in the second book of *Contra Apionem*, begins his exposition of the Jewish customs with the properties of the Jewish God (CA II, 190). He cannot be captured in any single image. He can be known through his work, the creation of the world (CA II, 191–192). It makes sense that God is worshipped in one temple alone, because he is one (CA II, 193). Josephus then continues by explaining the role of the priests and the sacrifices (CA II, 193–198). He also writes that the purpose of these sacrifices is not to bribe God into doing something, but to prepare human beings in order for them to receive God's gifts (CA II, 197).



previous chapters, the structure of the whole treatise will be presented first to find out how these sections fit in with the whole of this treatise.

### 5.3.2 **De Specialibus Legibus I: Structure of argumentation**

Philo's *De Specialibus Legibus* I is part of the larger body of treatises known as the Exposition of the Laws.<sup>613</sup> In the four books *De Specialibus Legibus*, Philo continued his exposition of the written laws he had started in *De Decalogo*. He regarded the detailed laws to be human creations stemming from the overarching divine Ten Commandments and linked each specific law to one of the Ten Commandments.<sup>614</sup> For that purpose, he picked out selected laws from Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri and Deuteronomy, sometimes jumping back and forth between them, sometimes adhering closer to the text of a larger body of prescriptions.<sup>615</sup> After discussing the specific laws in *Spec.* I–IV, Philo continued the Exposition with treatises dealing with various virtues, because he believed that following these laws leads to a virtuous life.<sup>616</sup> The treatise *De Specialibus Legibus* I is structured as follows.

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<sup>613</sup> See also note 596.

<sup>614</sup> In *Spec.* I, 1 Philo describes the Ten Commandments as the 'classes' (τὰ γένη) for 'the specific laws' (τῶν ἐν εἰδεί νόμων) which he also calls 'the distinct rules' (τὰ δ' ἐν μέρει διατάγματα). The way he phrases the relation between the Ten Commandments and the specific laws is reminiscent of how he describes the relation between the species (τὸ γένος) of human beings, the genders as subclasses (τὰ εἶδη) of the species, and individual humans again as distinct members (τῶν ἐν μέρει μορφήν λαβόντων) of each gender in *Opif.* 76. Philo held that the species were created by God directly, whereas the individual members of a species were generated by nature (cf. *Opif.* 62–64); somewhat similarly, in *Praem.* 2 he contrasts the Ten Commandments, which were spoken by God through a miraculous voice and without a human intermediary (cf. *Dec.* 32–35), with the special laws, which were uttered by a human prophet. In *Spec.* II, 1 Philo explains that in the first book he has discussed the specific laws he associated with the first two commandments and will now move on to discuss those he associates with the following three; in *Spec.* III, 8 he informs his readers that he is moving to the laws he links to the sixth commandment; in *Spec.* III, 83 he moves to the seventh, but without explicating the transition; in *Spec.* IV, 1 he summarises that in the previous treatise he has discussed the specific laws he links to the sixth and seventh commandments and will now move to the eighth; in *Spec.* IV, 41 he signals the transition to the ninth commandment; and finally, in *Spec.* IV, 78 he indicates that he will move to the tenth commandment.

<sup>615</sup> For example, in the sections where Philo discusses how Jews worship the one and truly existing God (*Spec.* I, 12–65a) he moves back and forth through Exodus, Leviticus, Numeri and Deuteronomy; whereas in the sections discussing the sacrificial cult (*Spec.* I, 198–256), he mostly follows Leviticus, although still moving back and forth between chapters, again switching to Numeri in *Spec.* I, 247, when he discusses the Great Vow (cf. Colson's notes to these sections in COLSON, *Philo* vol. 7).

<sup>616</sup> As Philo describes in *Virt.* 1, he has discussed the virtue of righteousness in a preceding treatise now lost to us, and will discuss the virtues of courage, piety, humanity and repentance in the current treatise. He concluded the exposition with an overview of the blessings that those who follow the laws can expect as rewards and the curses that are the punishments for those who do not (*De Praemiis et Poenis*). Although Philo believed the best way to live a good life is to seek virtue for virtue's sake alone, he also maintained that this best way was not attainable by everyone and that most humans need rewards or punishments to motivate them in doing good and avoid evil (cf. *Dec.* 176–178; see also *Mut.* 50; *Fug.* 103–105, and note 297).

**Introduction: The excellence of Jewish worship exemplified by circumcision.**

**1–11:** Philo aims to convince his readers of the excellence of Jewish worship. He begins by discussing a Jewish custom that is ridiculed by many, namely circumcision. Countering the mockery, he explains the great benefits for both body and soul of this particular, often misunderstood Jewish custom.<sup>617</sup>

**The excellence of Jewish worship: There is only one truly existing God.**

**12–65a:** Having shown that one particularly ridiculed element of Jewish law is actually most beneficial for both body and soul, Philo continues his demonstration of the excellence of Jewish worship by explaining how Jewish law teaches that there is only one true God, the creator and ruling mind of the universe.

**The correct worship of the one true God: In one temple.**

**65b–78:** How should the one true God be worshipped? Philo argues: since there is only one God, it is logical that there is only one temple. Although in truth the whole universe is this one temple, God has also provided the temple in Jerusalem and the sacrificial system there as a concrete place for humans to worship him.

**The correct worship of God: By priests excelling in body and soul.**

**79–116:** The priests who serve the one God should excel in body and soul and maintain that state of excellence; therefore, the Jewish law provides several injunctions regarding the physique, the dress and the conduct of the priests.

**The correct worship of God: By a professional priesthood.**

**117–161a:** The priests should be able to dedicate themselves fully to the service of God, therefore the Jewish law provides them with various means of sustenance: they receive the first fruits, the temple tribute and (parts of) the sacrifices. God gives these to the priests, because he does not need them for himself.

**The correct worship of God: The animals suitable for sacrifice.**

**161b–167:** Philo zooms in on several aspects of the sacrifices. He begins by discussing which animals are suitable for sacrifice: they should be tame and docile and without blemish, reflecting the disposition of the one who brings the sacrifice.

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<sup>617</sup> The benefits for the soul are: a) circumcision is a symbol for the control over pleasures; b) it is a symbol for knowing oneself, especially knowing the limitations of human knowledge. The theme of the limitations of human knowledge recurs in the next larger section of the treatise (*Spec.* I, 38–41, 49–50), and Philo repeats this aspect of his argumentation at the end of the treatise (*Spec.* I, 332–345).

**The correct worship of God: sacrifices for all mankind.**

**168–189:** There are two kinds of sacrifices: those for the whole human race, and those for individual humans. The sacrifices intended for all mankind provide protection from disasters, preserving mankind. They are offered during seasonal festivals that celebrate the harmony of the universe.

**The correct worship of God: Sacrifices for individuals.**

**190–256:** From general sacrifices and the festivals Philo moves to the three types of individual sacrifices: the whole burnt-offering (τὸ ὁλόκαυστον, cf. Lv. 1–2) that expresses one's honour to God; the preservation-offering (τὸ σωτήριον, cf. Lv. 3), meant to incur blessings; and the sin-offering (τὸ περὶ ἁμαρτίας, cf. Lv. 4–5), meant to provide deliverance from evil.<sup>618</sup> He discusses literal and symbolical aspects of these three types and concludes with a discussion of the Great Vow, because he sees this vow as combining aspects of all three.<sup>619</sup> This discussion prepares the way for Philo to move from the sacrificial cult towards discussing the characteristics of the person who offers a sacrifice.

**The correct worship of God: Purity of one's soul and living virtuously.**

**257–298:** Philo explains how very important the purity is of the person's soul that is bringing the sacrifice. One's soul is purified through the scrutiny of reason, a scrutiny leading to a change of conduct, for to live virtuously is the best sacrifice one can bring.

**Virtuous living: Some lessons in piety gained from Moses' speeches**

**299–345:** Philo dedicates the final sections of the treatise to several admonitions and exhortations regarding piety from Moses' speeches, referring to Deuteronomy. According to Philo, only acknowledging the existence of God and the ideal forms brings true happiness and eternal life, while the denial of the existence of God and the ideal forms will harm one's soul and might even destroy it.

Divine pardon appears in *De Specialibus Legibus* I within the context of Philo's discussion of the universally beneficial nature of Jewish sacrificial cult (*Spec.* I, 161b–256). He first links the prescriptions about animals suitable for sacrifice to the moral qualities of the one bringing the sacrifice (*Spec.* I, 161b–167). He next explains how the Jewish sacrificial cult benefits the whole of mankind (*Spec.* I, 168–189) and then moves on to explain how sacrifices benefit individual human beings (*Spec.* I, 190–256). Divine pardon specifically comes into view when Philo discusses sacrifices 'for sins, aimed at healing what the soul has done wrong' (*Spec.* I, 197).<sup>620</sup>

<sup>618</sup> Philo introduces the three types of individual sacrifices in *Spec.* I, 194.

<sup>619</sup> Philo mentions the three types of sacrifices again in *Spec.* I, 247 and then proceeds to explain (in *Spec.* I, 247–256) how the Great Vow described in Num. 6, 1–12 combines the aspects of these three types of sacrifices, all together meaning that people fully dedicate themselves to God.

<sup>620</sup> τὴν δὲ περὶ ἁμαρτίας ἐπὶ θεραπεία ὧν ἐπλημμέλησεν ἡ ψυχὴ.

Philo distinguishes between involuntarily and voluntarily committed wrongs and discusses aspects of the required sacrifice in turn. In *Spec. I*, 226–234, Philo discusses the rules of Lv. 4:1–35 and 5:14–19 regarding the sacrifices to receive amnesty (ἀμνηστία, 229) for involuntary sins. In *Spec. I*, 235–246, Philo focuses on Lv. 5:20–26, on what he describes as rules regarding sacrifices for voluntary wrongdoings, although they are not introduced as such in the biblical text.<sup>621</sup> Here, he uses three words related to the semantic domain of forgiveness: συγγνώμη, ἀμνηστία and ἄφεσις. Therefore, this passage is particularly relevant for exploring Philo's view on divine forgiveness. We will now turn to it.

### 5.3.3 *Spec. I, 235–246: On sin-offering for voluntary sins*

#### 5.3.3.1 *Paraphrase*

Philo begins his discussion of how one can remedy voluntary wrongdoings with a paraphrase of Lv. 5:20–26 (*Spec. I*, 235–237). There are some notable differences between Philo's paraphrase and the biblical text. Philo emphasises the role of conscience, which is not mentioned as such in Leviticus.<sup>622</sup> He points out that while perpetrators may escape conviction by human judges, they will never be able to elude conviction by their conscience (συνειδός, 235). Evildoers should listen to the accusation of their conscience and acknowledge that they have done something wrong. Then, they should confess their crime, another element not present in Leviticus, and ask for pardon (συγγνώμη, 235). Philo, however, does not explain to whom the confession and the plea for pardon are to be made, an issue that will be discussed in the analysis.

Another difference compared to Leviticus is that Philo does not mention the role of the priest in the process of obtaining pardon. Instead, Philo mentions the actions required from the perpetrators: first, to propitiate (ἱλάσθαι, 237) the injured party by repaying the damages done with a fifth of the value added; and then, to go to the temple and ask for remission (ἄφεσις, 237) of their sins while sacrificing a ram. However, it remains unclear in Philo's deliberations who exactly is asked to remit sin. Philo does not mention the priests nor describe the sacrifice as propitiating God. Rather, he presents these actions as verification of the perpetrator's repentance which ensures their amnesty (ἀμνηστία, 236) and emphasises how their true intentions are confirmed by the careful scrutiny (ἐλεγχος, 237) of one's soul.

<sup>621</sup> The word ἀκούσιος is used to describe involuntary sins in Lv. 5, however the opposite ἐκούσιος to describe a voluntary evil act does not appear in this chapter. Philo was probably inspired by Plato and Aristotle to explicitly distinguish between the opposite pair of ἀκούσιος/ἐκούσιος, for references to Plato see note 490, and to Aristotle see note 569.

<sup>622</sup> Philo possibly takes his lead from ἡμέρα ἐλεγχθῆ mentioned in Lv. 5:24. Josephus, who discusses the sacrifice for voluntary sins in *Ant. III*, 232, somewhat similarly refers to the conviction of one's conscience as follows: ὁ δὲ ἁμαρτῶν μὲν αὐτῷ δὲ συνειδῶς καὶ μηδὲνα ἔχων τὸν ἐξελέγχοντα κριὸν θύει.

Having discussed the steps necessary to correct voluntarily committed evil, Philo continues in *Spec. I*, 238–239 with the observation that there is a similarity between the sacrifice for voluntary sins committed against fellow humans, and those committed involuntarily against sacred objects. He explains that both offenses were probably considered forms of desecration by Moses, although the important point is that such desecrations are rectified when the evildoer returns to the better (τρόπος πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον, 238). Then Philo notes a similarity of the sin-offering to the preservation-offering and explains the logic of this similarity as follows: a preservation-offering preserves someone's health and protects him from a sickness of the body. In a somewhat similar fashion, the sin-offering preserves someone from the more grievous consequences of an unchecked sickness of the soul. Philo's intention to connect, systematise and translate the traditional regulations in one intellectual process is evident.

In *Spec. I*, 240–243, Philo then notes that there are three differences between the sin-offering and the preservation-offering and explains the logic of these three differences. First of all, the sacrifice is to remain in the temple; the reason for this is that a sin should not be broadly publicised. Second, only male priests are allowed to eat the sacrifice – the reasons for this are: to honour the bringers of the sacrifice, which is also why the priests who eat from this sacrifice need themselves to be fully without fault; and to reassure sinners that they have obtained full amnesty, for otherwise God would not allow his priestly servants to eat of the gift of the person who brought the sacrifice.<sup>623</sup> Third, the sacrifice is to be eaten in one day, which is explained as a symbol for people to be slow in sinning and quick to do what is good.

In *Spec. I*, 244–246, Philo concludes his discussion of the sin-offerings for both involuntary and voluntary wrongdoings by emphasising how one's intention (γνώμη, 246) is essential in defining the moral quality of an act. He goes as far as to say that evil acts committed by those who have consciously dedicated themselves to God, could in a way still be considered righteous acts; whereas righteous acts accidentally done by wicked fools (φᾶυλοι, 246) in a way should still be considered evil.<sup>624</sup> This is reminiscent of the conclusions reached in Chapter 4 regarding the importance of the orientation of the human soul for Philo, namely to enable humans to do either good or evil.<sup>625</sup> In the analysis, I will discuss whether divine forgiveness is an equally important factor for Philo to achieve or regain the good orientation of the soul.

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<sup>623</sup> Otherwise it would be bribery, as Philo explains in *Spec. I*, 277.

<sup>624</sup> Philo's argument in these sections is quite difficult to disentangle. The theme of eating the sacrifices discussed in *Spec. I*, 240–243 brings him back to the sacrifices for involuntary sins of the high-priest and the nation, which are not to be eaten at all, but are to be burnt whole (cf. *Spec. I*, 232). This again leads Philo to identify them as whole burnt-offerings, which as he has explained in *Spec. I*, 198–211, are a symbol for the mindset of the truly virtuous, who intentionally dedicate themselves to God.

<sup>625</sup> See my analysis of *Conf.* 60–82 (pp. 163–169).

**5.3.3.2 Analysis part 1: The presentation of divine forgiveness in Spec. I, 235–238**

The focus of the analysis will be on what Philo writes about forgiveness in *Spec. I*, 235–238 while paraphrasing Lv. 5:20–26. This long and grammatically difficult passage will be translated in full, as it is pivotal for this study. Philo writes:

<sup>[235]</sup> Having framed these and similar laws regarding involuntary sins, Moses next made arrangements for those concerning voluntary sins.<sup>626</sup>

He says:

“When someone

5        would lie about a partnership or about a deposit or a robbery or having found  
a lost property,  
and would swear – while being suspected and being put upon his oath;  
and would become his own prosecutor – being interrogated inwardly by his  
conscience (ἐνδον ὑπὸ τοῦ συνειδότος ἐλεγχθεὶς), while seeming to have  
10        escaped the conviction of his prosecutors;  
and would reproach himself for what he has denied and has committed  
perjury for; as well as would ask for pardon (συγγνώμη) – while straightway  
confessing (ὁμολογῶν) the injustice he has done,”

<sup>[236]</sup> Moses orders that:

15        “Amnesty (ἀμνηστία) can be granted to such a person, provided that he proves his  
regret (μετάνοια) to be sincere not just by a promise, but by actions:  
returning the deposit and what he has robbed or found or whatever he has  
usurped from his fellowman;  
and paying an additional fifth of its worth as consolation for the offended  
20        party.”

<sup>[237]</sup> When he has thus appeased (ιλιάσεται) the wronged person, Moses says:

“After this,

he should go to the temple,  
asking for remission (ἄφεσις) of the sins he has committed (ὧν ἐξήμαρτεν),  
25        bringing along as an impeccable advocate (παράκλητον) the scrutiny  
throughout his soul (κατὰ ψυχὴν ἔλεγχον), that has saved (ἐρρύσατο) him  
from fatal disaster, by removing a deadly disease and restoring him to  
perfect health.”

30        <sup>[238]</sup> For such a person, too, the sacrifice prescribed is a ram, just as for someone who  
has committed a sin against sacred matters. For Moses declared the involuntary sin  
in sacred matters as being equal to the voluntary sin in human matters – although it  
could also be that it is like an involuntary sin in sacred matters, since through his turn  
to the better he set right an oath which was unwisely added.

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<sup>626</sup> Philo uses νομοθετίας in *Spec. I*, 235 and has identified Moses as the νομοθέτης in *Spec. I*, 13–15, cf. *Spec. I*, 8, 59–60, 262. For reasons of clarity, I will add Moses’ name in the remainder of the translation, although Philo does not explicitly repeat it. It is worth noting that in Lv. 5:20 God is identified as the one speaking, not Moses.

As noted in the paraphrase, Philo's divergences from the LXX text of Lv. 5:20–26 are noteworthy; I have included the Greek terms in the translation to further highlight these divergences. The concluding verse of the presentation in Leviticus also helps to highlight these differences: 'The priest will make atonement for him before the Lord, and he will be forgiven for any of all the things he has done with which he has offended the Lord' (Lv. 5:26).<sup>627</sup> This verse helps to identify three notable differences between Leviticus and Philo's paraphrase.

First, Philo does not mention the priest and he does not mention God in his paraphrase of the injunctions in Leviticus. Rather, Philo emphasises that the offended party is a fellow human being, who needs to be appeased through compensation (lines 17–20).

Second, the setting in Leviticus is the sacrificial cult and the term used for forgiveness (ἀφίημι, med. fut.) is the one usually associated with that setting. Philo, however, before using ἄφεσις in relation to the prescribed sacrifice (line 24), uses two different words related to forgiveness (συγγνώμη and ἀμνηστία, lines 12 and 15) which are more at home in a forensic than a cultic setting.

Philo may have found reason to present these injunctions primarily in a legal light because of ἐλεγχθῆ used in Lv. 5:24. But, if this was indeed the case, he saw the use of ἐλέγχω above all as an opportunity to introduce and expand on an element not at all present in Leviticus, which forms the third notable difference: Philo's seems to be especially interested in what is going on *inside* the wrongdoer, the internal scrutiny of one's soul by conscience (συνειδός) leading to regret and a confession of sin (lines 8–13 and 25–28).

These differences between the LXX version of Lv. 5:20–26 and Philo's paraphrase of it determine the structure of my analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–238. I will begin with the first observation and examine how Philo saw God's involvement in obtaining 'remission of sins' (ὧν ἐξήμαρτεν ἄφεσις, *Spec. I*, 237). For that purpose, I will use the results from Chapter 2 to explore what role Philo thought God has in forgiveness.

In the second part of the analysis, I will focus on the second observation and examine the role of sacrifice in achieving remission from sins, in light of what appears as a shift in focus by Philo from a sacrificial to a forensic setting, also using the results of Chapter 2.

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<sup>627</sup> Καὶ ἐξιλάσεται περὶ αὐτοῦ ὁ ἱερεὺς ἔναντι κυρίου, καὶ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ περὶ ἐνὸς ἀπὸ πάντων, ὧν ἐποίησεν καὶ ἐπλημμέλησεν αὐτῷ.

In the third part of the analysis, I will follow the lead of the third observation and investigate the human side, exploring in particular Philo's presentation of conscience in *Spec. I*, 235–246, using the results from Chapters 3 and 4.

The goal of my analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246 is to explore whether Philo's view on divine pardon can provide a solution to the paradoxical scenario he considered evildoers to be in. According to Philo, evildoers distance themselves from God, while at the same time they need God's wisdom to stop doing evil and return to goodness. Does divine pardon help to overcome this paradox and can Philo avoid the intellectually problematic implications it evokes?

### 5.3.3.3 **Analysis part 2: Amnesty and pardon as expressions of God's merciful power**

In this part of the analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246, I want to focus on the first observed difference between *Lv. 5:20–26* and Philo's paraphrase of it. At first sight, Philo does not clarify who is asked to grant forgiveness, expressed here with the terms 'pardon' (συγγνώμη, 235), 'amnesty' (ἀμνηστία, 236 and 242) and 'remission' (ἄφεσις, 237). Philo's use of different terms related to forgiveness diverges from *Lv. 5:20–26* where only one term is used: 'to be remitted' (ἀφίημι, med. fut.). As it is, Philo does not use one principal term for forgiveness in *De Specialibus Legibus I*. He uses 'remission' (ἄφεσις) in relation to the sacrificial cult, in the sections currently analysed (237) as well as in two other sections of *De Specialibus Legibus I* (190 and 215). He additionally uses 'pardon' (συγγνώμη) and 'amnesty' (ἀμνηστία).<sup>628</sup> In the sections currently analysed (235, 236 and 242), it remains unclear who is asked to grant pardon or amnesty. However, through zooming out from these sections into the wider context, God comes into view as the one who is asked for amnesty and the one granting pardon, although Philo does not ascribe the granting of amnesty and pardon to God directly. Instead, he presents God's merciful power as the addressee from whom amnesty can be asked and from whom pardon is to be expected.<sup>629</sup>

The fact that Philo attributed the divine involvement in aspects of forgiveness, namely amnesty and pardon, explicitly to one of God's powers agrees well with the conclusions of Chapter 2. God's powers were identified in Chapter

<sup>628</sup> In the Septuagint, 'amnesty' (ἀμνηστία) and 'pardon' (συγγιγνώσκω, συγγνωμονέω, συγγνώμη and συγγνωστός) appear only in books written in the Hellenistic age (see Sir. *prol.* 18; 3:13; Sap. Sal. 14:26; 19:4; 2 Macc. 14:20, 31; 4 Macc. 5:13; 8:22). Metzler shows that, in general, Philo's use of συγγνώμη, similarly to Josephus' use of it, fits in well with its use in Greco-Roman sources (see METZLER, *Verzeihens*, pp. 250–259).

<sup>629</sup> Philo connects amnesty (ἀμνηστίαν) to God's merciful power (τῆς ἰλεω τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως) in *Spec. I*, 229. Zooming out from *De Specialibus Legibus I*, *Spec. II*, 15 comes into view, where Philo describes mercy as one of God's powers, in relation to pardoning (συγγνώς). Zooming still further out, *Som. II*, 292 comes up, where Philo describes how people will receive amnesty when they appease (ἐξευμενισάμενοι) the merciful power of the truly existent (τὴν ἰλεω τοῦ ὄντος δύναμιν).



2 as manifestations of the concepts contained in the intelligible world. These concepts and powers were further identified as the link between the eternal and unchanging God and the material world of becoming and change. They sustain the orderly existence of the material world.<sup>630</sup> We saw that Philo used the powers to maintain the transcendence of God *and* at the same time was able to explain how a transcendent God can interact with creation and care providentially for the world. We also saw how Philo described God's providential care as God showing mercy towards creation.<sup>631</sup> Philo furthermore connected the 'merciful power' (ἰλεως δύναμις) to the title 'God' (θεός) applied to the divine, a title that identifies the divine as the beneficent creator and providential sustainer of creation.<sup>632</sup>

God's providential care also manifests itself in the form of divine amnesty and pardon, which Philo saw as expressions of God's merciful power. However, Philo could also describe God directly as merciful (ἱλαος) and disposed to pardon (συγγνώμων).<sup>633</sup> He furthermore wrote how humans – Moses in particular – prayed to God and then received amnesty and pardon from him.<sup>634</sup> A section from *De Vita Mosis* II is especially noteworthy: in *Mos. II*, 147 Philo writes that without propitiation through prayers and sacrifices, the divinity (τὸ θεῖον) will become agitated and inflict punishment, because of the general imperfection of created things.<sup>635</sup> Such a statement, when read in isolation, appears to contradict Philo's often repeated claim that God does not change or react. However, when read in light of Philo's interpretation of such descriptions of God as brought forward in *Deus* 51–85 (another insight from Chapter 2), namely that Philo applied a shift in perspective from God to humans, this apparent contradiction is resolved.

Chapter 2 demonstrated how Philo emphasised that humans during their earthly existence are never able to describe God as he truly is.<sup>636</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>630</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 68–81.

<sup>631</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 90–95.

<sup>632</sup> For the connection between 'God' as creator and 'merciful power' (ἰλεως δύναμις), see Chapter 2, note 299. Wolfson and Zeller express a similar thought (see Chapter 1, note 100).

<sup>633</sup> Philo describes God as merciful (ἰλεω τὸν θεόν) in *Spec. I*, 242; and in *Spec. III*, 121 he describes God as merciful and disposed to pardon (τὸν ἰλεω καὶ συγγνώμονα θεόν).

<sup>634</sup> *Mos. I*, 184; *II*, 24 (where Philo writes that prayers 'propitiate the father of all,' ἱλασκόμενοι τὸν πατέρα τοῦ παντός); *II*, 166.

<sup>635</sup> *Mos. II*, 147: ταῦτ' ἐπιτελέσας εὐαγὼς ἀχθῆναι κελεύει μόσχον καὶ κριοῦς δύο· τὸν μὲν, ἵνα θύσῃ περὶ ἀφέσεως ἁμαρτημάτων, αἰνιττόμενος ὅτι παντὶ γενητῷ, κὰν σπουδαῖον ἦ, παρόσον ἦλθεν εἰς γένεσιν, συμφυὲς τὸ ἁμαρτάνειν ἐστίν, ὑπὲρ οὗ τὸ θεῖον εὐχαῖς καὶ θυσίαις ἀναγκαῖον ἐξευμενίζεσθαι, μὴ διακινηθὲν ἐπιθῆτο. In Chapter 2 I have discussed that Philo, when describing creation as prone to sin, means that it is lacking perfection because it is always 'becoming' and never truly being (see especially pp. 61–67 and note 213).

<sup>636</sup> See my analysis of *Deus* 51–85 in Chapter 2, pp. 85–95.

Philo regarded such inaccurate human descriptions of God as meaningful, because they help humans to morally improve themselves. He connected different presentations of God to different stages in moral progress: the least perfect humans serve God out of fear, they see him as the judging ruler, to which the name 'Lord' (κύριος) belongs; the more perfect ones see God as the beneficent creator, to which the name 'God' (θεός) belongs, and serve him to incur blessings; the most perfect souls, who are scarcely found upon earth, see God as he truly is (ὁ ὄντως ὢν) and serve him out of love.

What do these insights from Chapter 2 imply for Philo's descriptions of God as merciful and disposed to pardon, as wrathful and inflicting punishment, or as changing from one state to the other as the result of prayer and sacrifice? They imply that when Philo described God in this way, his intention was not to describe changes in the divine itself, but to indicate different ways by which humans perceive, experience and approach the divine. These different perceptions, experiences and approaches of God will enable all humans to progress morally.

How does this work? As Philo saw it, if someone chooses evil over good, God's providential care will manifest itself as divine punishment in the form of all kinds of curses befalling the evildoer.<sup>637</sup> Philo argued that these curses may appear as something evil to that person, but in fact it is better to see them as warnings aimed at guiding the evildoer back to good sense.<sup>638</sup> When people realise that they have done evil, Philo even advised them to actively seek divine punishment, rather than to be abandoned by God, because the latter will leave them a slave of the material and perishable world.<sup>639</sup> The aim of punishment is pedagogic and beneficial, namely the betterment of the person being punished.<sup>640</sup>

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<sup>637</sup> In the second half of *De Praemiis et Poenis*, Philo provides a long list of the curses that befall someone who persists in doing evil. As was discussed in Chapter 4 (on pp. 184–190), Philo considered the punishments that will befall a person doing evil, as an expression of God's providential care, working as an almost mechanical system that God has included in creation, where the ultimate penalty for persisting in evil is the death of the soul.

<sup>638</sup> Compare *Congr.* 177–179; *Fug.* 206–207; *Virt.* 75; *Praem.* 163. Philo explains that one should be happy when God sends punishments as warnings, for it provides someone with the opportunity to return to good sense. In *Abr.* 104, Philo goes as far as to say that God can send virtue to torture someone in his soul, because to someone who is unjust, the call to justice is experienced as something painful.

<sup>639</sup> See *Det.* 144–146, here the punishment that God sends is his reason (τὸν ἑαυτοῦ λόγον) manifesting itself as conscience that scrutinises the soul – the manifestation of the logos as conscience will be further discussed below (see pp. 214–221).

<sup>640</sup> In *Legat.* 7, Philo therefore writes that God's punitive power can be considered as beneficial, as it is intended to lead offenders to wisdom, or at least those who observe how the offender is punished.

Philo considered the acknowledgement of divine punishment for what it is, namely an expression of God's providential care for creation and a pedagogical measure to better one's ways, as a first step in moral progress.<sup>641</sup> The perception and experience of God as a wrathful Lord belongs to this first step. When evildoers indeed improve their ways, their moral progress will allow them to perceive and experience God in a new way: namely as merciful and disposed to pardon. By changing their ways and repenting from their evil ways, God will appear to transform for them from a punishing Lord into a forgiving God.<sup>642</sup> This does not mean that Philo believed God would ever change; instead, Philo maintained that the evildoers have changed. They have changed from humans consciously choosing to do evil into humans regretting this choice, realising the foolishness of their ways, realising they have ignored God and now turning to God for help to return to good reason.<sup>643</sup>

Evildoers who do not change, will not experience the transformation in their perception and experience of God. They will only experience God as a wrathful Lord, but never as a forgiving God. As a consequence, if they persist in choosing evil and do not repent, they cannot be pardoned.<sup>644</sup> They will continue to experience the unavoidable consequences of their intentional choice for evil.<sup>645</sup> Evildoers in their delusions may even mistakenly see such bad consequences as desirable.<sup>646</sup> Only when they return to good sense can they begin to see these consequences for what they actually are. Philo appealed to his readers to recognise when they follow the path of evil and turn away from it, by identifying the consequences of following that path as being punished by God.

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<sup>641</sup> See *Spec.* II, 163 and IV, 6 where Philo presents the various actions of God towards someone who does evil as measures to correct the person involved that increase in intensity, ranging from warnings which should put the sinner to shame, to punishments which should instil fear.

<sup>642</sup> A similar change not in who God is, but in how humans perceive and experience God, as wrathful when they do wrong and again merciful when they repent, is described as part of Plato's philosophical outlooks as well in BORDT, 'Zorn', especially p. 151.

<sup>643</sup> Compare how in *Mos.* I, 147 Philo identifies the Egyptians who joined the exodus with people who through punishments have converted to the truth.

<sup>644</sup> Philo discusses at length in the conclusion of *Spec.* I, 324–345, how no one can join the correct and beneficial beliefs regarding God as long as they keep adhering to their mistaken beliefs.

<sup>645</sup> As with mercy and pardon, Philo held that God does not inflict penalties on evildoers directly. Curses and penalties are also applied through God's powers: God's justice and the ruling power, both connected to 'Lord' (κύριος) as the name for the divine. Philo held this view for two reasons. First, because, according to him, God cannot have direct interaction with the material world. Second, Philo saw punishments as somewhat evil, since they cause damage or inflict pain, and he held that God cannot be connected to something evil (cf. *Dec.* 176–178; *Conf.* 180–182).

<sup>646</sup> The treatise *De Confusione Linguarum*, analysed in Chapter 4, provides quite a few examples of evildoers who mistake what is actually a punishment for something that is to be desired, such as those who rush to welcome the flood of sensations, which will eventually drown and destroy the soul (*Conf.* 30 and 70–72), or those who believe that being able to achieve everything the mind comes up with is something desirable, whereas in fact it means that someone is being abandoned by God (*Conf.* 164–167).

Philo saw different perceptions of God as belonging to different stages in human moral progress and uses such presentations as encouragement for his readers to change for the better and to increasingly perceive God as he truly is.<sup>647</sup> He saw both punishment and pardon as expressions of God's powers and regarded these powers as different ways in which humans perceive and experience God. When evildoers are punished by God, they experience the kingly and ruling power identified with the name 'Lord'; if they then repent from the evil they commit, they will experience divine pardon, which is connected to the beneficent and creative power identified as 'God'.<sup>648</sup> Each step forward in moral progress also means that humans perceive God more and more as he truly is. Therefore, Philo considered the perception of God as merciful, compassionate and disposed to pardon, although still not completely accurate, as closer to how God truly is than the perception of God as a wrathful Lord, which is also why he can describe God as preferring pardon over punishment.<sup>649</sup>

**To sum up.** God's involvement in divine forgiveness can first of all be understood as having created pardon and amnesty as aspects of one of his countless powers that together sustain the material world and form God's providential care for creation. Philo saw the effects of divine providential care more or less as an inevitable system that God has included in creation. God is not personally involved, so to speak, in the day-to-day care of the material world. His involvement works through his powers. Amnesty and pardon are aspects of these powers, in particular aspects of God's merciful power.

However, Philo also described God directly as merciful and more inclined to pardon than towards unrelenting punishment. We saw how such descriptions of God do not imply for Philo that there is any imbalance within God. Rather, these different descriptions of God belong to different human perceptions of God, indicating different stages of moral progress. Philo could describe God as more inclined to pardon, because the human experience of God as the beneficent and creative power brings humans closer to how God truly is, rather than when they experience him as a wrathful Lord.

<sup>647</sup> Cf. *Spec.* I, 242–243, 299–300.

<sup>648</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2 (see especially note 217 and 290), Philo saw the names 'God' (θεός) and 'Lord' (κύριος) as the names for God's two chief powers. He explains in *Spec.* I, 307 that the name 'God' belongs to the beneficent (εὐεργέτις) and creative manifestations of the divine, and 'Lord' to the punitive (κόλαστήριος) and ruling manifestations.

<sup>649</sup> Philo writes in *Spec.* II, 196 that God prefers pardon (συγγνώμη) over punishment (κόλασις), due to his gracious nature, and in *Deus* 74–76 he describes how God mitigates his judgement. Further places where Philo describes God's nature as gracious are *Fug.* 99 and *Spec.* II, 23. Similarly, Philo can describe God as taking pity and being compassionate (ἐλεον καὶ οἶκτον λαμβάνει) towards people in need (immigrants, orphans and widows) in *Spec.* I, 308–310.

⋮ In this part of the analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246, I have discussed two terms  
⋮ associated with divine forgiveness, namely pardon (συγγνώμη) and amnesty  
⋮ (ἀμνηστία). The third term associated with divine forgiveness appearing in these  
⋮ sections, namely ‘remission of one’s sins’ (ὡν ἐξήμαρτεν ἄφεσις, 237), has not yet  
⋮ been discussed. What does this remission entail according to Philo? This will be  
⋮ the topic of the next part of the analysis.

#### 5.3.3.4 **Analysis part 3: Sacrifice as an expression of being remitted from sins**

Having discussed pardon and amnesty as expressions of God’s merciful power in the previous section, I now want to focus on the second observed difference between Lv. 5:20–26 and Philo’s paraphrase of it. In his paraphrase, Philo mentions remission (ἄφεσις) from sins after pardon and amnesty, which is remarkable, because in Lv. 5:20–26 only remission (with ἀφεθήσεται, in vs. 26) is mentioned as an aspect of what we call forgiveness. In *Spec. I*, 237, as well as in other places in *De Specialibus Legibus I*, Philo uses ἄφεσις in relation to sacrifice.<sup>650</sup> Therefore, my approach will be to explore Philo’s view on ‘remission from one’s sins’ in relation to his view on sacrifice.

Philo puts ‘remission from one’s sins’ (ὡν ἐξήμαρτεν ἄφεσις) forward in *Spec. I*, 235–246 as part of his discussion of the meaning of certain sacrifices prescribed in the Bible. As was discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the sacrificial system of the Jewish religion presented Philo with an intellectual challenge.<sup>651</sup> He felt the need to explain the reasons for this sacrificial system, since it conflicted with his more intellectual views on the divine. The sacrificial system would seem to imply once more that human characteristics are attributed to God. In the case of sacrifices, God might be misunderstood to act like a human king, who can be placated through gifts and whose benevolence can be bought. However, according to Philo, it is unthinkable that God could be bribed. To avoid creating the impression of God being bribed, Philo applied the same shift of focus from God towards humans that we already encountered in Chapter 2 when I examined anthropomorphic descriptions of God in the Bible.<sup>652</sup> He shifted the epistemological focus from God towards the human person bringing the sacrifice, and similarly from God granting remission from sins to the one whose sins are being remitted.

<sup>650</sup> See *Spec. I*, 190, 215. In *Mos. II*, 147, Philo also mentions ἄφεσις in relation to sacrifice. In other treatises, he connects ἄφεσις to the jubilee year (see *Sacr.* 121–122; *Det.* 63; *Migr.* 32; *Congr.* 89, 108–109; *Mut.* 228; *Spec. II*, 39, 122 and possibly 176) and this connection to the jubilee year leads Philo to associate the number 50 with ἄφεσις. Philo uses ἄφεσις in a more general meaning of ‘release’ or ‘liberation’ in *Det.* 144; *Her.* 273; *Mos. I*, 123; *Spec. II*, 67; *Flacc.* 84; *Legat.* 287.

<sup>651</sup> See pp. 195–199.

<sup>652</sup> See the analysis of *Deus* 51–85 in Chapter 2 (see pp. 84–96).

What does this shift of focus entail? In several instances in *De Specialibus Legibus* I, Philo makes clear that God himself does not actually need sacrifices. God does not need anything from creation.<sup>653</sup> Nevertheless, God has provided humans with the sacrificial system to accommodate the human need to bring sacrifices.<sup>654</sup> As Philo expresses repeatedly throughout *De Specialibus Legibus* I, sacrifices do not benefit God in any way, they are appropriate and beneficial for the humans who bring them. Sacrifices neither influence nor change God in any way either; instead, Philo sees them as a sign of positive changes that took place in the person who offers the sacrifice.<sup>655</sup> He relates these changes for the better in particular to a transformation in the offerer's thinking: incorrect thoughts (that have led to incorrect words and actions) have been removed and replaced by correct thoughts, as the following examples from *De Specialibus Legibus* I show.

Instances of sacrifices symbolising changes towards better thoughts can readily be found in *De Specialibus Legibus* I. For example, Philo presents the requirement to sacrifice in the one temple in Jerusalem as an expression of the correct belief that God is one and not many.<sup>656</sup> He interprets the ordinances for the whole burnt-offering in particular as allegoric references to those whose mind controls their irrational part and is filled with good thoughts and judgements, leading to best actions and a clear conscience.<sup>657</sup> The whole burnt-offering furthermore symbolises the deliberate commitment of someone to serve God.<sup>658</sup> It is a sign of someone truly understanding that God is the only existent and the beneficent creator and sustainer of creation.<sup>659</sup>

What light do Philo's views on sacrifice shed on his thoughts on remission from sins? Philo maintained that a sacrifice should not be seen as a placating gift to God or a fine that someone needs to pay to be released from further punishment. Rather, it is a symbol of the state of mind of the person bringing the sacrifice, signifying that the mind has been cleared from wrong beliefs and is now filled with the correct beliefs. In other words, a sacrifice does not lead to remission from any sins. Rather, it is a testimony that the remission from sins – that is, the purging the human mind from wrong beliefs, has been achieved.

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<sup>653</sup> *Spec.* I, 67, 152, 191–193, 206, 218–219, 237, 260, 271, 282, 294; a similar argument can be found in Plato, *Eut.* 14E–15A.

<sup>654</sup> *Spec.* I, 67.

<sup>655</sup> Zeller discusses how Philo reinterprets the sacrificial cult as primarily an expression of thankfulness in ZELLER, *Charis*, pp. 119–125.

<sup>656</sup> *Spec.* I, 67.

<sup>657</sup> *Spec.* I, 202–203.

<sup>658</sup> *Spec.* I, 205.

<sup>659</sup> *Spec.* I, 209.

**To sum up.** Philo held that sacrifices do not benefit God, but are instead a symbol of the mindset of the one who brings the sacrifice. A quote from *Spec. I*, 277 serves as a concise illustration of Philo's shift of focus from God to humans.<sup>660</sup> Here, Philo writes that:

Not the quantity of the victims sacrificed is valued by God, but the completely clear rational spirit of the one bringing the sacrifice (τὸ καθαρώτατον τοῦ θύοντος πνεῦμα λογικόν).

The shift of focus encountered in Chapter 2 regarding anthropomorphic descriptions of God can be recognised in how Philo the significance of sacrifices from God towards humans. The sacrifice does not change or influence God, neither does God receive anything through sacrifice. Instead, a sacrifice is testimony to a change for the better in the one offering it – that is, testimony of ‘the completely clear rational spirit of the one bringing the sacrifice.’<sup>661</sup>

This insight introduces a new question: if the change does not take place in God's mind, but in the humans bringing sacrifices, what exactly happens with them? How is the purging of wrong beliefs achieved, if it is not accomplished through sacrifice? How does someone's rational spirit become completely clear? For, as discussed in Chapter 4, according to Philo, humans do evil because their ability to reason has become polluted by wrong thoughts and irrationality.<sup>662</sup> This question brings us to the final part of the analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246, where I will discuss the role of conscience.

#### 5.3.3.5 ***Analysis part 4: Conscience as an expression of the special connection between God and humans.***

In the previous section, we saw how Philo maintained that the true and proper meaning of bringing a sacrifice is that, ideally, it signifies that those who bring the sacrifice now think and act rationally, because their mind is purged from wrong beliefs. This purging from wrong beliefs constitutes the ‘remission from sins’. How is this purging from wrong beliefs achieved, according to Philo? I will explore this question in light of the third observed difference between Philo's paraphrasing of Lv. 5:20–26 and the original verses in the Septuagint. I observed that Philo introduces an element in his paraphrase that is not present in Leviticus, namely the focus on what is going on *within* the evildoer's soul. The specific agent of these processes is what Philo calls the conscience (συνειδός, 235).

<sup>660</sup> In the larger context of *Spec. I*, 257–298 Philo discusses many specifics of the sacrificial requirements and repeats throughout this discussion that these sacrifices are symbols for the purity of the soul of the one bringing the sacrifices (for references see note 653).

<sup>661</sup> Similarly, in Sir. 7:8–9 the uselessness of making sacrifices while continuing to do evil is emphasised, and in 34:23 how the sacrifices themselves do not bring forgiveness.

<sup>662</sup> See the first part of my analysis of *Conf.* 14–59 (pp. 149–155).



What is the role of conscience, according to Philo?<sup>663</sup> He presents conscience in *Spec. I*, 235–246 as an inescapable prosecutor and judge. Sinners can escape conviction by human judges, because humans can be deceived.<sup>664</sup> However, they are inevitably confronted with a judge they cannot escape from, a judge that resides within themselves, this judge Philo calls ‘conscience’.<sup>665</sup> Why one cannot escape the conviction of one’s conscience becomes evident when we see how Philo connected conscience to God.

How is conscience connected to God? The connection is not immediately clear in *Spec. I*, 235.<sup>666</sup> But Philo wrote more often about conscience, and elsewhere in his extant treatises the connection between conscience and reason, and between conscience and God becomes more explicit. For example, conscience is identified by Philo with the ‘true man’ – that is, reason.<sup>667</sup> Reason can function as a thorough examiner (ἐλεγχος) that interrogates the soul.<sup>668</sup> Philo notes that

<sup>663</sup> For a fundamental study of Philo’s concept of conscience, especially how it fits well within his general intellectual context shared by Jewish and non-Jewish authors see NIKIPROWETZKY, ‘L’élenchos’, a more recent discussion of Philo’s concept of conscience is BOSMAN, *Conscience*.

<sup>664</sup> Cf. *Spec. I*, 235. Similarly, in *Mut.* 195–198 Philo writes that evil people use an abundance of words to deceive human judges and escape conviction. That humans can be deceived, is in line with Philo’s repeated emphasis on the limitations of human knowledge, for example in *Spec. I*, 44, and also as discussed in the previous chapters (see especially my analysis of *Deus* 51–85, pp. 85–90).

<sup>665</sup> The sinner ‘would become his own prosecutor – being interrogated inwardly by his conscience,’ αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ γένηται κατήγορος, ἔνδον ὑπὸ τοῦ συνειδότος ἐλεγχθεὶς (*Spec. I*, 235). As noted in the paraphrase of *Spec. I*, 235–246 (see also note 622) the internal accusation of one’s conscience is not present in *Lv.* 5:20–26.

<sup>666</sup> Richard T. Wallis discusses whether conscience in Philo’s view is an immanent or transcendent feature of human beings in WALLIS, ‘Conscience’. In this article, Wallis provides many useful references to sources that can illustrate Philo’s intellectual context regarding conscience. He furthermore suggests solving the possible conflict between the immanent and transcendent nature of conscience in human beings, by comparing it to how Aristotle presents the functioning of reason in humans: as the passive immanent mind being activated by transcendent active thought. Wallis concludes (on p. 214): ‘Philo’s doctrine of conscience could similarly have postulated two entities, the “irradiation” being man’s inherent possession (as at *Dec.* 87), but remaining a mere potentiality until actualised by the divine Logos.’

<sup>667</sup> *Det.* 22. Here Philo also explains that ‘true man’ (ὁ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἄνθρωπος) is another name for the mind capable of articulated speech and reasoning (ἡρθρωμένης καὶ λογικῆς διανοίας) (compare *Fug.* 131). Philo continues in *Det.* 23 how the ‘true man’ – that is, the capacity for rational thought – resides in every human soul. When necessary, a human’s reason functions as judge, witness or accuser, convicting humans unseen and from within (ἀφανῶς ἡμᾶς ἐνδοθεν ἐλέγχει). Philo presents this scrutiniser (ἐλεγχος), this accuser and judge in *Dec.* 87 as a ‘birth-fellow’ and ‘house-mate’ present in every human soul. Such passages of Philo on the internal accusations of conscience, are somewhat reminiscent of Socrates mentioning of having to confront a ‘close relative’ of his ‘who lives in the same house,’ and who continually confronts Socrates (ἀεί με ἐλέγχοντος) (see Plato, *Hipp. Maj.* 304D). Arendt identifies this ‘close relative’ with conscience, emphasising that it is an innate feature of humans, rather than the (external) voice of God (see ARENDT, *Mind*, pp. 190–191), a view critically discussed and elaborated upon by Mika Ojakangas in OJAKANGAS, ‘Conscience’.

<sup>668</sup> *Det.* 24.



the Bible ascribes such interrogation to God, for example in Gn. 4:9 when God asks Cain about his brother. Of course, since Philo saw God as omniscient, he did not believe that he would pose such a question to learn anything he did not already know. Instead, Philo interpreted it as an interrogation by divine reason in the form of conscience, i.e., one's inner voice that benefits those being questioned, so that they get to know themselves better.<sup>669</sup> He held that the scrutiny of conscience is not a direct activity of God, rather it is a manifestation of divine reason within a human being.

The connection between conscience and divine reason explains the inevitability of the confrontation with one's conscience. Philo held that divine reason pervades the whole of creation.<sup>670</sup> It is the medium through which God applies his providential care across the whole of creation, as it manifests itself in countless powers that sustain it.<sup>671</sup> One of these manifestations is the voice of conscience within humans. This conscience is a faculty of human reason, but remains connected to God, as it is connected to divine reason that permeates the whole creation.<sup>672</sup>

Philo used several metaphors, inspired by the Bible, to describe the activities of conscience. In *Spec.* I, 235, and elsewhere, Philo presents conscience in a forensic light, performing various roles that are part of a trial: that of the prosecutor and judge interrogating the suspect, collecting and presenting evidence, accusing and convicting the perpetrator.<sup>673</sup> Unlike human prosecutors and judges, however, conscience can neither be bribed nor deceived, and it will not stop its pursuit of justice. It will pursue the evildoer unrelentingly until justice is done.<sup>674</sup> Another metaphor that Philo applied elsewhere in his treatises to conscience is that of the (high-)priest, performing the task of meticulously identifying signs of potentially life-threatening diseases.<sup>675</sup> Both these

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<sup>669</sup> *Det.* 58–59. Philo applied – again – a similar twist of perspective that was discussed regarding sacrifices (see pp. 212–214): the scrutiny of conscience does not benefit God, only the one being scrutinised, just as sacrifices do not benefit God, but only the one bringing them.

<sup>670</sup> Cf. my analysis of *Deus* 33–50 in Chapter 3 (see pp. 112–138).

<sup>671</sup> Cf. my analysis of *Opif.* 6b–12 in Chapter 2 (see pp. 56–67).

<sup>672</sup> The special connection between the human mind and divine reason was discussed in Chapter 3 (see especially pp. 105–112 and 124–137).

<sup>673</sup> In addition to *Spec.* I, 235–236, see also *Opif.* 128; *Post.* 58–59; *Dec.* 87–91; *Virt.* 206; *Flacc.* 7.

<sup>674</sup> See also *Conf.* 121–126, where evildoers are constantly warned and rebuked by their conscience and compare *Flacc.* 145, where Philo describes how someone who flees is constantly harassed by his conscience.

<sup>675</sup> Philo writes in *Deus* 125–126 about the 'examiner' (ἐλεγχος) present in every healthy soul. It shows to the soul which of its deeds are contrary to 'right reason' (ὁρθός λόγος), the soul 'then perceives itself to be foolish, licentious, unjust and full of stains.' Philo further (in *Deus* 135) compares this examiner to the priest who enters a house to inspect for signs of leprosy. In *Fug.* 117–118 Philo identifies conscience with the high-priest; in *Gig.* 52 he identifies the high-priest with divine reason.

metaphors share the element of bringing to light what would otherwise remain unnoticed and therefore irremediable.<sup>676</sup>

These metaphors explain how Philo thought conscience works in the process of achieving 'remission from one's sins' (ὡν ἐξημαρτεν ἄφεσις) and what this remission means. In light of these metaphors, for Philo, being remitted means that conscience will stop its torment of incessant accusations and will begin to clean and heal the soul. It is not that the examination of conscience goes without pain, but the goal is always beneficial and pedagogical. Those who listen to its voice allow God's wisdom to purify and enlighten their minds.<sup>677</sup> Philo therefore associated the scrutiny of conscience with the study of philosophy, as both are aimed at the improvement of one's character to be able to lead a more virtuous life.<sup>678</sup> As soon as one heeds the warnings of conscience, the process of 'remission from sins' can begin – that is, the cleaning and healing of the soul as it is purged from wrong beliefs and filled with correct ideas.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>676</sup> QG IV, 202b. Light appears regularly in connection to conscience, see, for example, *Post.* 58–59; *Ios.* 68; *Fug.* 27; *Som.* I, 90–91. Conscience is presented as a manifestation of wisdom in *Congr.* 151 and *Fug.* 5–6. The light implied in this process is the intellectual light of reason and wisdom – in *LA* III, 49 Philo writes that for this reason only the mind can be subjected to the scrutiny of conscience. For the connection between reason and the intellectual light see also Chapter 2 (pp. 68–82) and Chapter 3 (pp. 124–137).

<sup>677</sup> Only when sinners accept all the judgements of their conscience does their conscience become clear – 'without deceit or disguise' as Philo puts it in *Praem.* 163. Furthermore, Philo emphasises in *Spec.* I, 282 that only God can truly clean the soul; a thought which agrees well with the fact that Philo maintained that humans can only scrutinise and purify their minds when they orient themselves towards God, as we saw in Chapter 4 where the role of God in attaining wisdom was discussed (see pp. 159–162).

<sup>678</sup> As Philo writes in *Opif.* 128, the seventh day of each week is reserved by Moses for the purpose of the study of philosophy and the scrutiny of conscience. In his commentary on *Opif.* 128, Runia summarises Philo's concept of conscience as 'an internal monitor which accompanies the person in all his thoughts and actions, examining and judging them in the light of reason and commandments of the Law (for Philo there is no absolute distinction between these two sources of ethics)' (RUNIA, *Creation*, p. 298 and compare also *Mos.* II, 215–216).

<sup>679</sup> In *Spec.* I, 219, Philo compares sleeping to the process by which the liver cleans the blood. Similarly, Philo equals atonement to the cleansing of the soul in *Spec.* I, 228, 259, 282. As Philo further explains in *Spec.* I, 219, sleep helps to clean the soul in order for it so see, as if in a mirror, the concepts most clearly (see also *Som.* I, 79–84). When the senses function properly, they allow the human mind to see the reflection of the intelligible world as a manifestation of God's creative powers in the material world (see *Dec.* 105; *Migr.* 105). Backgrounds in Plato (for example in *Rep.* 508D) for this idea of reflection of the truth which the human mind can perceive are discussed in STEAD, 'Knowledge of God', p. 235. Helleman describes how Philo held that ideally the human mind should be a 'faithful reflection of its original' in HELLEMAN, 'Deification', p. 63; as discussed in Chapter 3, humans then achieve their purpose in becoming an 'image of God' (see pp. 105–111).

Right reason and the soul will then be reconciled and inner peace will be restored.<sup>680</sup> Yet, evil deeds will leave their mark on the soul like scars.<sup>681</sup>

The cleaning and healing of the soul can, according to Philo, only begin when evildoers listen to their consciences. As long as they choose to ignore their conscience and the voice of right reason, they continue to suffer the grave consequences of that choice.<sup>682</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, they ultimately risk the 'death of their soul' – that is, losing the special connection with God, the ability for right reason.<sup>683</sup> They then become defined by the decay of the material realm alone. Philo warned that anyone remaining on the path of evil will end in ruin (φθορά), with their sensations applying the fatal stroke.<sup>684</sup> The illnesses of the soul will progress from difficult to cure to completely incurable.<sup>685</sup> Philo appealed to his readers to instead listen to their consciences and allow God's wisdom to restore the rule of right reason in their soul.<sup>686</sup>

If evildoers do listen to their consciences, they then undergo a process of shame (αἰδώς) and a regretful change of mind (μετάνοια). Shame is a sign that someone has come to realise that nothing can be hidden from God.<sup>687</sup> Shame ensues

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<sup>680</sup> Compare Bosman's description of Philo's view on reconciliation (BOSMAN, *Conscience*, p. 186):

'Reconciliation in this regard is directed at restoring inner harmony and order, bringing processes back under the control of the λόγος/νοῦς.'

<sup>681</sup> Philo describes how the soul of the repentant still contains scars (οὐλᾶι) of its earlier wrongdoings (ἀρχαίων ἀδικημάτων) in *Spec.* I, 103; a similar thought of wrongdoings scarring the soul, but without the mention of repentance, can be found in Plato *Gorg.* 524C–E (cf. COLSON, *Philo* vol. 7, p. 620); for a discussion of how Plato in the *Gorgias* relates the scarring to the soul to its internal interrogation by the ἑλεγχος see EDMONDS III, 'Whip Scars'.

<sup>682</sup> In *Deus* 181–183, Philo presents his interpretation of the story of Balaam as an example of someone who completely ignores the internal scrutiny of divine reason in his soul. Left unchecked, Balaam's folly (ἀφοροσύνη) eventually completely overwhelms him (ἐπικλύζω, pass.) (*Deus* 181, see also *Mut.* 170).

<sup>683</sup> Compare how Philo describes in *Spec.* II, 27 how someone who ignores God will also be ignored by God. Without God, sins become incurable (see *Cher.* 2; *Det.* 149; *Fug.* 84). Winston describes (in WINSTON, *Logos*, p. 40) how Stoics could similarly warn to not pass a 'point of no return' in doing wrong. The meaning of the 'death of the soul' is discussed in Chapter 4, in the analysis of *Conf.* 83–106 (see pp. 184–190): when the soul dies, one is completely abandoned by good reason.

<sup>684</sup> *Deus* 183.

<sup>685</sup> Therefore, in *Spec.* I, 239, Philo describes 'sickness of the soul' (νόσον ψυχῆς) as much more dangerous than those of the body.

<sup>686</sup> Philo concludes in *Deus* 183 with the appeal to his readers to take the example of Balaam as a serious warning, and to 'attempt to maintain the goodwill of the judge within.' As he writes in the last sentence of *Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis*, the goodwill of the judge within will be maintained by anyone who gives heed to the accusations of conscience, instead of making an effort to ignore them. A similar incentive to abandon the ways of evil, to be purified by water and ask God for forgiveness can be found in *Sib. Or.* IV, 62–67.

<sup>687</sup> *Fug.* 5–6, 160; *Som.* I, 90–91; *Prob.* 124; in *Ios.* 47–48 and 215 Philo describes several outward signs of the conscience's internal conviction (and in 230 he describes how Joseph's brothers attempt to avoid looking like they have been convicted by their conscience).

because sinners now view their deeds and thoughts in light of divine reason and become aware of their ignorance and ill judgement.<sup>688</sup> Being ashamed means sinners begin to accept the judgement of their conscience, which has constantly tried to show them that a deed or thought is actually evil.

The regretful change of mind means, according to Philo, that someone accepts the insight provided by right reason into the evil nature of their acts and thoughts.<sup>689</sup> In Chapter 4, I discussed how, according to Philo, evil deeds have their roots in evil or wrong thoughts.<sup>690</sup> When evildoers begin to listen to the voice of their consciences, they begin to realise how wrong their thinking and acting have been. This leads to shame and regret. Philo may speak of this process of repentance, of realising the error of one's ways, also in terms of a conversion. Conversion at its core means to turn around from wrong thoughts to correct thoughts.<sup>691</sup> Repentance and conversion indicate that a person accepts correct thoughts and listens to the voice of right reason.

According to Philo, repentance in a way transforms the intentionality of an evil act. As also discussed in Chapter 4, for Philo, the conscious decision to willingly do something evil is what makes an act truly evil.<sup>692</sup> As also discussed in the previous chapter, only humans are capable of committing such voluntary evil and only humans can be blamed for the evil they choose to do. When humans repent, they do so because they now allow the light of God's wisdom to shine on their decisions and reveal them to their insight. The result is shame and regret: with hindsight they realise the folly of their acts and wish they had not done what they did. In a way the intentionality of the act is transformed: if evildoers were able to go back in time, they would now make a different choice.<sup>693</sup>

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<sup>688</sup> See *Som.* I, 90–91, where Philo compares God to the sun revealing everything hidden, which results in evildoers repenting from their evil opinions. See also *Som.* II, 292, where Philo describes repentance as something comparable to sobering up from intoxication, those who experience this 'will feel ashamed and reproach themselves because of what they have done wrong while they were led by ill-judging judgement' (see also *Deus* 126).

<sup>689</sup> Philo's concept of repentance is elaborately discussed in WINSTON, 'Repentance', WILSON, *Virtues*, pp. 359–362 and LAMBERT, *Repentance*, pp. 155–171.

<sup>690</sup> See the first part of my analysis of *Conf.* 83–106 (pp. 171–177).

<sup>691</sup> Compare *Spec.* I, 51 and 227, where he describes how people 'set sail' (μεθορμίζω, used in 51 and 227) for piety (εὐσέβεια, 51) and a blameless life (ζωὴ ἀνυπαίτιος, 227); see also, for example, *Virt.* 182, where Philo writes that 'the proselytes' (by which Philo means those who have repented from the delusions and ignorance that once controlled their actions, as he has described in *Virt.* 180–181) 'immediately become prudent, self-controlled, modest, civilised, good, philanthropic, honourable, just, confident, truth-lovers, superior to the influence of money or desire.' Other examples are *Mos.* II, 167–168; *Praem.* 15–21, 162–163.

<sup>692</sup> See the second part of my analysis of *Conf.* 83–106 (pp. 177–184).

<sup>693</sup> The aspect of having to regret one's decisions was an important reason why repentance was not held in high regard by Plato, Aristotle or the Stoics; good persons carefully consider their actions beforehand and know how to avoid having to regret them afterwards, as discussed with references

However, changing one's thoughts and intentions alone does not suffice: sinners need to verify their change of thinking by a change in their speech and acts. Philo stressed that the process of repentance cannot remain an internal affair only. He adhered to the view that wise persons should exhibit congruency in their thoughts, words and actions.<sup>694</sup> Sinners must first accept the judgement of their conscience in their thoughts. However, what must then follow is a verification of their repentance in words: they need to make an outspoken confession of their sins.<sup>695</sup> Next, sinners should verify their repentance through their actions, completing the harmony of thoughts, words and actions. According to Philo, persons who only say they have changed their ways for the better, but refuse to change their actions, are mad.<sup>696</sup>

The actions that Philo mentioned as required to verify one's repentance may vary. Overall, however, he held that people who have repented from wrong thoughts and returned to the ways of wisdom should in the future act in a manner expected from the wise. He described such actions in terms similar to those generally used in his intellectual context for wise behaviour, for example, in acting prudently, honourably and philanthropically.<sup>697</sup> When dealing with specifics of Mosaic Law, as is the case in *Spec. I*, 236–237, Philo also mentioned specific actions prescribed by the law: compensating the victim and offering sacrifice. He considered these specific actions as concrete examples of the more general attitude of the wise. To compensate the victim for one's sin is a concrete

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in BILLINGS, *Platonism*, pp. 84–85, WINSTON, 'Repentance', p. 29, METZLER, *Verzeihens*, pp. 198–199 and FULKERSON, *No Regrets*; on the interaction between intellectual and religious notions as sin, repentance and the role of conscience in the Hellenistic age see also BICKERMAN, *Jews*, pp. 268–279. Philo agreed that regret and shame ideally should be avoided (cf. BOSMAN, *Conscience*, pp. 177–178), however, he also saw that ideal as unattainable when humans live in the material realm (cf. *Fug.* 104–105; *Virt.* 177; see also my analysis of *Deus* 51–85, on pp. 90–95). While humans live in a body their knowledge is inherently limited, making repentance necessary. Philo therefore considers repentance a virtue (cf. *Virt.* 175–186) and equates it to being free from sin (*Spec. I*, 187), because it is an expression of acknowledging the limitations of human abilities and the consequent dependence of humans on God. As discussed in Chapter 4, Philo believed such an acknowledgement to be essential if someone wants to become wise (see pp. 159–162).

<sup>694</sup> Philo establishes an explicit connection between repentance and the congruency of thoughts, words and actions in *Virt.* 183–184; for Philo's general emphasis on the congruency of thoughts, words and actions see also note 534. Roskam also brings forward how for Philo true remorse implies a change in behaviour (see ROSKAM, *Virtue*, p. 169).

<sup>695</sup> According to Philo's statements in *Praem.* 163, this confession serves as an incentive for other people to change their ways. This outspoken confession is an extension of the warning or educational character of punishments. In *Spec. I*, 241, however, Philo makes it clear that the sin should not be broadly advertised, to protect the reputation of the sinner.

<sup>696</sup> In *Fug.* 159–160, Philo compares such a person to someone who is sick, but pretends to be healthy, which will result in him becoming even more sick.

<sup>697</sup> Philo describes the attitude of those who have repented and converted in *Virt.* 182 (see note 691). Righteous conduct was an important virtue in Philo's intellectual context, as described with references in BUITENWERF, *Sibylline Oracles*, p. 200.

and specific example of the generally just and humane attitude that one may expect from the (now) wise person. And, as discussed in the previous part of my analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246, bringing sacrifice was also considered by Philo primarily as a symbol of one's wise insights.<sup>698</sup> The emphasis for Philo is on the improvement of people's mentality, rather than on the actual sacrifice.<sup>699</sup>

**To sum up.** Philo saw conscience as a manifestation of the innate human ability to reason, an ability given by God to humans, connecting them to his own reason and wisdom. Even though doing evil removes someone from God, a connection to God remains, as right reason manifests itself as the voice of conscience. Conscience will point out to humans that their deeds are evil. It will do so in steps of increasing intensity: from giving warnings, to accusing and rebuking someone, transforming even into punishment, tormenting someone, but all the time with the beneficial intent to change someone's way to the better. The intent of conscience is to motivate sinners to turn away from evil and orient themselves towards God's wisdom and right reason again.

If sinners listen to the voice of their conscience, which is the voice of divine reason within them, the process of remission of their sins may begin: punishments will stop and their soul begin to be cleansed and healed. This process of cleansing and healing first begins in one's thoughts. It involves shame and a fundamental change of mind. One is healed from thinking the wrong thoughts to thinking the correct thoughts, which is the basis to turn from committing wrong acts to doing good. The process of restoration is complete when thoughts are accompanied by correct words and actions. Confessing the evil one has done and following that confession up with wise behaviour verifies that one has truly changed from evil to good. Receiving remission from sins means that this process of transformation, this change towards goodness, has been completed.

### 5.3.3.6 **Results from the analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246**

The analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246 was structured around three notable differences between Philo's paraphrase of Lv. 5:20–26 and the original verses in the

<sup>698</sup> See pp. 212–214.

<sup>699</sup> Note how in *Praem.* 163, where Philo also describes the restoration of right reason using terminology comparable to what he writes in *Spec. I*, 235–246, Philo does not mention bringing a sacrifice, illustrating how sacrifice is not essential for him to ensure divine pardon. He writes: 'So, if they accept these powers as aimed at warning, instead of as aimed at destruction; and feeling ashamed with a completely changed soul; indeed reproaching themselves for going astray; declaring and also confessing every sin – first towards themselves, with a mind cleansed to the point where the conscience is without deceit or disguise; then also out loud, for the betterment of the hearers – they will receive goodwill from the saviour, the merciful God (εὐμενείας τεύχονται τῆς τοῦ σωτῆρος καὶ ἵλεω θεοῦ), who has provided the species of man with a special and most great gift, the kinship with his own reason, on the archetype of which the human mind was created.'

Septuagint. These differences led me to explore how Philo saw the role of God and the role of sacrifices for sinners to be granted pardon and amnesty, and also what Philo believed should happen in the soul of the evildoer for sins to be remitted. This exploration led to the following results:

First of all, we have seen that, according to Philo, God's involvement in granting pardon and amnesty to sinners consisted in having created pardon and amnesty as aspects of the merciful power, one of the countless powers God created to sustain creation. At the same time, Philo could also describe God himself as merciful and more inclined to pardon than to wrath and punishment. Such descriptions of God do not imply that Philo held God to be imbalanced or susceptible to change. Rather, such descriptions of God refer to progressive stages in how humans can perceive and experience God. Humans who do evil will experience God as wrathful and punishing. As they make moral progress, for which God in his goodness allows them time, they will experience God as merciful and forgiving. However, such an experience of God as merciful and forgiving, although more accurate, is still not the same as perceiving God as he truly is.

Secondly, Philo held that God contributed to the process of achieving remission from sins in having provided humans with the sacrificial cult. Philo presented bringing sacrifices as tangible confirmation of the sinner's change for the better and not as something that could influence or change God. Sacrifices serve the human need for such tangible confirmation. They do not serve God's needs, because God needs nothing. When humans bring sacrifices, this confirms that their mind has been purged from foolish, irrational and evil thoughts.

Thirdly, according to Philo, God provided humans with the means to purge their mind from wrong thoughts in having created them with the ability for reason. This purging of one's mind will happen when evildoers listen to their conscience, a manifestation of divine reason within every human soul. Conscience is an inescapable persecutor and judge, which will warn, accuse, rebuke and even torment sinners within their soul, always with the aim of making them change their ways. Evildoers who listen to their conscience will go through a process of shame and repentance. This process is essential for leaving the wrong thoughts that have led to evil actions behind and allowing God's wisdom to fill them with correct thoughts leading to good words and actions. In a way, this process will in hindsight change the intentionality of one's evil deeds: originally having done them voluntarily, sinners now wish they had not done them, regretting their earlier choice to do evil.

All in all, God in his goodness provided humans with all the means necessary to keep them on the good way or return to it. He created pardon and amnesty as aspects of the merciful power to sustain creation and allow humans the



opportunity to abandon their evil ways. Moreover, God created humans with the ability for right reason which will manifest itself as the voice of conscience when they have committed evil and will guide them back to God's wisdom when they listen to their consciences. Their souls will then be purged from wrong and evil thoughts and they will be restored to right reason. God has also given the sacrificial cult to humans, accommodating the human need for tangible confirmation of their change for the better.

#### 5.4 *Conclusions to Chapter 5*

This final chapter began with a recapitulation of the intellectual challenge divine forgiveness presented to Philo. These challenges were explored in Chapters 2 to 4 and with the results from this exploration in mind, we returned to *Spec. I*, 235–238, one of the more substantial passages in Philo's works, where he writes about divine forgiveness of sins, using the words pardon (συγγνώμη), amnesty (ἀμνηστία) and remission (ἄφεσις). Before analysing these sections, I have explored Philo's general approach to the Jewish laws, because elements of these laws presented Philo with intellectual challenges similar to those of divine forgiveness.

Philo's general approach in discussing the Jewish laws was shown to be comparable to that of other Jewish authors who claimed that the Jewish law was in complete agreement with the universal law of nature which all humans should follow. To substantiate this claim for universality, Philo explicitly focused on those Jewish laws and customs that were perceived as the most peculiar and therefore had been criticised. To defend them, Philo argued that such laws and customs were in fact beneficial not only for Jews alone, but for all mankind. Demonstrating the universal benefit of these laws and customs supports his general argument for the universality of the whole Jewish law and the overall intellectual soundness of Jewish religion.

Does divine amnesty have a meaningful place in what Philo saw as a universal and intellectually satisfying form of religion? The analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246 provides the elements for a positive answer to that question. Philo avoided what he, and other intellectuals alike, considered inappropriate implications of divine forgiveness: presenting God as emotional, subject to change and impressionable, even prone to being bribed through sacrifices. How did Philo achieve this? One element is that he distinguished between how God truly is and how humans perceive his activity in creation. God, as he truly is, is immutable and does not involve himself directly in human affairs. He is not actually angered by human evil nor does he change his mind when he pardons the evildoer. Rather, Philo presented divine amnesty and pardon as aspects of God's merciful power, one of the innumerable powers God created to sustain creation. Mercy, and by implication pardon, is even essential for creation to



remain in existence. Mercy means that God allows something inherently less perfect than himself to remain.

Furthermore, Philo emphasised that the distinction between God and his powers belongs to how humans perceive God. In truth, however, God is one and indivisible. Humans also perceive a hierarchy in God's powers. God can be perceived as more inclined towards pardon and mercy than to punishment and wrath. Philo further emphasised how the variance in perceptions of God is the result of different stages in human moral progress, not of an actual imbalance in God himself. Humans doing evil will perceive God as wrathful and punishing; when they improve their ways, they will perceive God as merciful and forgiving. Although this perception of God is more accurate, it is still removed from perceiving God as he truly is.

In this way, Philo avoided presenting God in ways commonly denounced by intellectuals. He shifted the perspective from how God truly is to how humans perceive God and he applied the same shift with regard to sacrifices. He emphasised that sacrifices cannot influence God. God has provided the sacrificial cult to humans, because he knows that humans need tangible rituals and symbols. God himself, however, needs nothing from creation. Offering sacrifices is above all a human expression of thankfulness and honouring God. They are a testimony of more correct thoughts and judgements having entered into someone's mind – for example, that a person has understood that there is only one God who is the creator and sustainer of the world.

How can evildoers clear their mind from wrong ideas and gain true knowledge instead, according to Philo? It became apparent that being remitted from sins, an aspect we associate with divine forgiveness, forms an important element in how humans can leave behind evil and turn to goodness instead. However, God is again not directly involved in the remission from sins. Rather, it is achieved by means of the innate human ability to reason. According to Philo, God, when he created humans, provided them with the ability to share in his own reason and wisdom. When humans do evil, their ability to reason will manifest itself as the voice of conscience. Conscience informs, warns or accuses them of the evil they are doing. Evildoers should listen to their consciences. When they do so the process of being remitted from sins can begin: the consequences of doing evil will stop and the mind will be cleansed by God's wisdom from wrong and evil ideas, replacing them with goodness and right reason. The cleansing of the mind is accompanied by shame, because evildoers now realise how evil and foolish they have been. It also involves a fundamental change of mind: abandoning the wrong ideas that have led them to commit the evil acts and allowing themselves to reorient towards the correct ideas instead.

Finally, Philo pointed out that the cleansing of the mind from wrong ideas that have led to acts of evil can only be completed if it is accompanied by a change in words and in actions. The change in words is verified by a confession of the sins one has committed. The change in acts is verified in behaving in a way that is fitting for someone who is growing in wisdom: compensating the victim of one's evil acts and bringing a sacrifice as testimony of one's change for the better.

For Philo, divine pardon and amnesty as aspects of God's merciful power mean that such a change for the better is possible for those who do evil, even though in doing evil they remove themselves from God's right reason. He emphasised God's inclination towards pardon as an incentive for his readers to leave evil behind and allow God's wisdom to help them grow in virtue. No divine intervention is necessary to liberate humans from evil, because God has initially created all the means necessary for this liberation to happen. It happens when humans listen to their God-given ability for right reason that manifests itself as the voice of conscience when they commit evil. If they learn from their consciences, right reason will reassert itself and allow humans to again patiently train themselves on the way to wisdom.

The results from the analysis of *Spec. I*, 235–246 and the conclusions of this final chapter provide the final pieces of the puzzle that allow me to propose an answer to the overall question of this study: what did Philo mean when he writes that evildoers obtain divine pardon? I will therefore move on to the summary and general conclusions of this study.

