

A PLATONISTIC MODEL FOR TWO OF JOSEPHUS' ACCOUNTS
OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE PHARISEES CONCERNING
PROVIDENCE AND MAN'S FREEDOM OF ACTION

by

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In an article in *Iyyun* a few years ago,¹ David Flusser remarked that Josephus used Stoic philosophical terms in transmitting the teachings of the three main Jewish sects of his day – Essenes, Sadducees and Pharisees. This is particularly true, in his opinion, for the account on the views of the Pharisees. In this regard, Flusser points to the remark made by Josephus in his autobiography (*Vita* 12), that the Pharisees resemble the Stoics.

Flusser believes that it was the intention of Josephus' accounts to show that the Pharisees had Stoic views on the problem of man's freedom of action, yet the attempt was (at least to some extent) the result of the Jewish historian being unfamiliar with the Stoic texts. Flusser is aware, of course, that the Stoics thought all of man's actions to be completely determined by the chain of causes and effects, whereas the Pharisees Josephus was dealing with believed good and evil acts to be primarily the result of human freedom aided by destiny.

The terms that Josephus uses, and which Flusser identifies as Stoic are *είμαρμένη* (destiny), *ἐφ' ἡμῖν*² (our potential), *ὄρμη* (drive), and *ἐκλογή* (choice). The last word appears in a report on the doctrine of the Sadducees. It must be noted, however, that in the period under discussion none of these terms were purely Stoic; they all belonged to the general philosophical lexicon.³

The Latin equivalents of *είμαρμένη* and *ἐφ' ἡμῖν* are to be found, among other places, in the delivery by Apuleius, in *De Platone et Eius Dogmate*, concerning the views of Plato on Providence, destiny and the freedom of man's action.

The following comparison between this text and the two excerpts from Josephus stresses the similarity between the presentation of the Jewish historian and that of the Latin Platonist.

¹ D. Flusser: "The Pharisees and the Stoics according to Josephus", *Iyyun*, Vol. XIV (תשכ"ד), pp. 318 - 329.

² This expression appears already in Aristotle.

³ The lexicon was, of course, at that time greatly influenced by Stoic terminology.

Apuleius: On Plato and His Doctrine

I xii 205:

Yet whatever happens naturally and thus correctly is ruled by Providence; and one must not attribute to God the cause of any evil. Thus he [Plato] maintains that not everything can be ascribed to destiny . . .

Ibid I xii 206:

And, indeed, he does not think that everything can be ascribed to the rule of destiny; rather, we have something in our power and something else in the power of chance. And he admits that unexpected events which are caused by chance are unknown to us.

Joseph ben-Matityahu: The History of the Jewish War with the Romans

II xiv 162-165 N (viii 14):

And of the first sects the Pharisees who . . . say that everything depends on destiny and God, and only a righteous act or its contrary are for the most part in the hands of man, notwithstanding that destiny helps him in everything . . .

The Sadducees, the second sect, deny destiny altogether, saying that God is far removed from an evil act and has no providence over it. They say that man may choose either good or evil and every person turns to the one or the other of his own accord.

Jewish Antiquities XIII ix 172:

The Pharisees say that some things are an act of destiny, yet not everything, and some of them we have in our power to do or not to do.

The text in *The Jewish War* (which we will see is summarized in a sentence quoted from *Antiquities* 13) and the excerpt from Apuleius clearly have a few points in common in the vocabulary and the teachings they present. *Fatum* parallels εἰμαρμένον, and *in nobis* ἐφ' ἡμῖν; the expression ἐπι ταῖς ἀνθρώποις which Josephus uses is but a variation of the latter philosophical term.

Both the Pharisees and Plato, according to the Jewish writer and the Latin text, respectively, are said to have been of the opinion that both destiny and the free will of man have a share in shaping events.⁴

The similarity between the two excerpts is emphasized by a matter of style. Josephus begins by saying that the Pharisees attribute everything to destiny and God, and Apuleius begins his lecture with a similar comment about Plato, that to him is ascribed the view that everything which occurs in a natural and correct way occurs under the supervision of Providence.

⁴ It is said of the Greek philosopher – but not about members of the Jewish sect – that he saw chance or coincidence (as distinguished from destiny), in this regard, as a third factor.

The similarity between the two expressions becomes pronounced with the definitions of Apuleius (not given above) which immediately follow the words *esse referenda* (see 584-585, I): "He [Plato] gives the following definition: Providence is divine thought which successfully achieves that for which it was appointed. Destiny is a divine law by which the inevitable intentions [activities] performed by God are executed. Thus, if something was done through Providence, it also took place according to destiny; what was determined by destiny must appear as though performed by Providence."

These definitions demonstrate that, as concerns the doctrinal content, the two claims in the opening sentences under discussion, that of Josephus and of Apuleius, are very close to one another.

The uniqueness in the presentation of the two authors lies in the fact that what follows the generalizations in the opening sentences, immediately or almost immediately after, are claims that intend to point to the limited validity of these generalizations, yet which appear – perhaps out of some unevenness of style – to be contradicting the opening sentences. Thus, with Josephus, the claim *φαραισαῖται . . . εἰμαρμένην καὶ Θεῷ προσάπτουσι πάντα* appears, at first glance, to contradict the statement which immediately follows: *καὶ τὸ μὲν πράττειν τὰ δίκαια καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὸ πλείστον ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις*.

Similarly, the first sentence with Apuleius *Sed omina quae naturaliter et propterea recte feruntur Providentiae custodia gubernantur* appears – due to the close relationship between *providentia* and *fatun* – at least on the surface, not to fit the very next sentence: *Quare nec omnia ad fati sortem arbitratur esse referenda*.

The treatment of sentence order could have been derived from the Platonic source shared in common by two texts, and which Josephus could have taken as a model for this section. The existence of this kind of common source is hypothetical.

I have still to mention some evidence of interest which seems to me to give added weight to this hypothesis. The second sentence of Apuleius says: *nec ullius mali causa Deo poterit adscribi*. This sentence has no equivalent in the report by Josephus on the Pharisees. It is clearly paralleled, however, in the sentence discussing the Sadducees (see above): *καὶ τὸν Θεὸν ἔξω τοῦ θράντι καθὼς ἢ ἐφροῦν τίθενται*. Combined with the other data, this fact suggests the conclusion that Josephus, wishing to use the sentence from the Platonic source which stated that God is not the cause of evil, and seeing that this claim had no place in the presentation of the views of the Pharisees, used it in his presentation of the views of the Sadducees.

If one may draw conclusions from the words of Our Sages about the teachings of the Pharisees, then it is completely clear that the sentence under discussion did not fit in with Pharisaic views; as some Mishnaic texts (and Talmudic as well) express the view, coming out of the debate against more or less dualistic sects, that God is the creator of evil no less than he

is the creator of good. In this regard, it is possible that Josephus sentence is implying that this sect believed in the freedom of action of man so as to free God from the responsibility for evil; to give only one example, this was the outlook of the *Muatzila* and of the Jewish theologians who followed in their path. However, the few sources of information at our disposal give no indication that the Sadducees mentioned in *The Jewish War*⁵ were motivated by such moralistic considerations.

It is possible, then, that the statement made by Josephus, now under discussion, was adapted from some Greek text and he used it in his report on the Sadducees, not because it characterized their teachings but because it fits the framework of their doctrine; since, as Josephus says in the sentence directly following the one referred to, it was their belief that God was responsible for neither the good nor the evil performed by man.⁶

The following conclusions are indicated: there is strong internal evidence that the report in *The Jewish War* and in *Antiquities* on the views of the Pharisees concerning the freedom of action of man is an adaptation of a philosophical text which apparently resembled the Greek original of the section by Apuleius quoted above. This is not to say that Josephus gives an unjust presentation of Pharisaic doctrine.

That *δικαία καὶ μὴ* is related to the *The Jewish War* might be possible proof (certainly being, of course, impossible) that Josephus tried to alter this text in order to emphasize the accord between this doctrine and some basic concepts of the Pharisees. Presumably for the same reason, Josephus does not relate to the influence of *Fortuna* on events in his transmission of the teachings of the Pharisees. It appears that the text of *Antiquities* is derived from that of *The Jewish War*. On the one hand, the text of *Antiquities* 18, 3, 13-14, which also contains a lecture (not discussed) on the Pharisaic doctrine of free will, is not an adaptation of the Greek text which is the source of *The Jewish War*. Most likely, in this instance, Josephus used another Greek source. Nevertheless, the transmission of the views of the Pharisees that is given in this text is similar to that in the other two texts.

According to this hypothesis, the source of *The Jewish War* was similar to the Platonic source of Apuleius. The fact that in his autobiography Josephus compares the Pharisees to the Stoics is not, in my opinion, a valid refutation of this hypothesis; as Josephus sheds no light whatsoever on those points in common which he makes reference to, and, moreover, as

⁵ It is possible that there existed more than one sect with this name.

⁶ "They say that man can choose good or evil and everyone turns to the one or the other of his own accord" (see above). In the medieval translation of *The Jewish War* into Russian (see Appendix), coming after the statement that the Sadducees "do not point to God as the creator of evil" is the following sentence: "But (referring to Him) as the giver of life, who placed in man the will to have either a good or an evil nature (nrav)".

his autobiography – published approximately twenty years after *The Jewish War*⁷ – does not fit the earlier book on a number of issues.

What Greek sources did the section from Apuleius derive from, and what philosophical text – similar or identical to this source – did Josephus use in transmitting the views of the Pharisees? As mentioned above, Apuleius was a Platonist, and there can be no doubt that in the composition *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* he used first and foremost, perhaps even exclusively, Platonic compositions. Regrettably, we know very little about what is commonly called Middle Platonism. Concerning his philosophical views, Apuleius is said to have been the pupil of Albinus and/or of his teacher Gaeus. Nothing has remained of the writings of Gaeus. It appears, however, that he lived in the first half of the second century, whereas *The Jewish War* was composed earlier. Thus, it is not unlikely that at the time of the writing of this composition Josephus was acquainted with the teachings of that Platonist, and it seems impossible that he could have known anything at that time about the composition of Albinus. This chronological fact intimates that the latter text derives, directly or indirectly, as the former, from an earlier Platonist. In this regard the name of Antiochus of Ashkelon comes up. This philosopher lived in the first century B. C. E., was deeply influenced by Stoicism and denied the scepticism of the Second Academy. He is credited with a sizeable role in formulating the teachings of the late Platonists, not only of Gaeus and Albinus but also the neo-Platonists. Among other things, it is assumed that he has some influence on Apuleius. The connection indicated between the text of Apuleius on the freedom of action of man and the transmission of Pharisaic doctrine in *The Jewish War* lends support to this assumption, as it suggests that the doctrine set forth by Apuleius, which resembles that of the Pharisees as presented in this text, was formulated before the time of Albinus. Within the framework of Platonic history, in so far as it is known to us, this conclusion seems to imply that the doctrine under discussion was possibly formulated by Antiochus of Ashkelon. It must be clearly understood, however, that as concerns this matter we are dealing exclusively in probabilities.

A P P E N D I X

According to the medieval Russian translation of *The Jewish War* (ed. N. A. Mescerskiy, Moscow-Leningrad, 1958, p. 256r), the Pharisees were of the opinion that everything is determined by God, or destiny. Although I contend that the Russian version, particularly the section pertaining to our text, cannot be regarded as worthless in reconstructing the position(s) and stories of Josephus, it nonetheless appears that, in this case, the diver-

⁷ Some say that the autobiography is based on notes from the war days. However, this assumption does not appear to relate to his general view of the Pharisees.

gence of this text from the Greek must be seen as the result of an intentional or unintentional act – on the part of the translator or of a later Greek scribe – of skipping over a few words.

It must be added that strict determinism does not appear to be a typical Pharisaic position; it certainly departs from the views of the Tanna'im, who are viewed as the continuation of the sect (cp. A. A. Auerbach: *פרקי אמונות ודעות חז"ל*. (Jerusalem 1969), pp. 277ff.).

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