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Abstract

Philo von Alexandria – Über die Freiheit des Rechtschaffenen. Übersetzt und eingeleitet von Reinhard von Bendemann, Göttingen

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Philo of Alexandria, a Jew living in Egyptian Alexandria around the time of Jesus, was among the educated elite of his day. He is one of the most important representatives of the so-called Hellenistic – that is, Greek-speaking – Judaism. His particular concern was to synthesize Greek culture and education with his Jewish traditions. Philo's writings also provide insights into various areas of ancient philosophy and into the life and thought of a man who today would be called a "cross-cultural." Philo's allegorical, Greek-inspired interpretation of the Old Testament was significant not only for ancient Judaism, but also for early Christianity. The majority of Philo's writings concern the interpretation of biblical scriptures. For instance, Philo provides commentary on the first and second book of Moses, verse for verse, and using allegorical methodology. In other writings, he gives a systematic account of the legislation of Moses. Of the text "On the Freedom of the Righteous," which probably belongs to the early texts of Philo, only the second half is preserved. It takes up a main theme of Greek philosophy: How can the human beings be truly free? What does "freedom" mean in contrast to "slavery"? How are the "freedom" and the "obligation" of human beings connected? How can true freedom be acquired? According to the Stoic view, to which Philo is associated, only the wise person is "free," and therefore "happy." His freedom extends not only to the body, but also to the mind and soul. In the case of "the wise," intention and right action are always in harmony. In his early writings, Philo's ideas are largely consistent with both Greek and Roman convictions; however, he does not justify them based on pagan philosophy, but instead, again and again, according to the Jewish Torah. Thus "wise ones," according to Philo, are found not only in Greece, not only among the Persian magicians or the Indian Gymnosophists, but above all also among the Jewish Essenes. In addition, Philo gives advice on how capable and educated people can orient their lives according to the ideal of freedom. His writings, therefore, can still provide important impulses for today's readers.

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