PHILO'S INFLUENCE ON VALENTINIAN TRADITION

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Risto Auvinen

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Preface

Since the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Scriptures in 1945, numerous studies concerning Valentinianism have been published. The new Valentinian documents not only open fresh perspectives on the Valentinian theology but help us to critically evaluate the descriptions of the Valentinian teaching by the patristic authors. Although there have been numerous monographs and essay collections on Valentinianism and Alexandrian tradition more broadly, this book is the first monograph dedicated solely to the relationship between Philo of Alexandria and the Valentinian gnostic tradition. I hope that the new perspectives disclosed herein will prompt further investigations and extensions of the findings presented in this book.

The evidence collected in this study confirms that the Valentinians, or at least some of them, were familiar with Philo's writings before Clement of Alexandria gained access to them as head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria. It is possible that the Valentinian teachers belonged among the scholarly circles that were responsible for the preservation of his works in the years after Philo's death. This would mean that also some works of Philo circulated not only in Alexandria but also in Rome even before they arrived in the city via Caesarea in the third century.

The main target of this study is the Valentinian tradition. This means that my aim is not always to present the scholarly consensus on Philo's teachings but to ponder how the Valentinians may have read Philo's works and what they may have thought inspiring in them. Although the widely accepted opinion among modern scholars is that Philo was not a precursor for Gnosticism, some Valentinians may have thought that he was a model allegorical exegete. This may have been why they were convinced, along with other Alexandrian Christian Platonists, that they would find suitable material in Philo's works for their own philosophical exegesis of the Bible.

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The investigation of a common philosophical background was a necessary starting point when comparing Philo and Valentinians. However, my aim was not to search for common philosophical ideas or themes but for exegetical parallels with Philo. The chronological focus of this study is on the formative years of the Valentinian tradition, that is, during the second half of the second century, which means that the primary Valentinian sources come from the patristic authors, that is, Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus, who preserved Valentinian teachings.

I have written this book while also working as a full-time Lutheran parish priest, which created some challenges to my work. I want to thank my wife, Ursula, for her support and patience during this process. I am also extremely grateful to Professors Gregory E. Sterling and Ismo Dunderberg for their encouragement and support. Sterling gave me a five-point list for revisions, which helped to improve my work. Professor Dunderberg, the supervisor of my dissertation, read the final draft of my book, sparing me from some embarrassing mistakes. He also helped me with practical issues without which this book could not have been published. Dr. Sami Yli-Karjanmaa's clear and distinct ideas, as René Descartes would say, of Philo's exegesis also challenged me in a positive way and helped me to improve the argumentation of my writing. Finally, I want to thank Professor Michael B. Cover for his support and extremely valuable comments to my work. It is an honor to have my book published as a part of the Studia Philonica Monograph Series.

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Abbreviations

1 En.	1 Enoch
1QS	Serek Hayaḥad *or* Rule of the Community
4Q417	4Q Instruction[c]
AB	Anchor Bible
Abr.	Philo, *De Abrahamo*
Abst.	Porphyry, *De abstinentia*
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AEML	Arundell Esdaile Memorial Lecture
Aet.	Philo, *De aeternitate mundi*
Agr.	Philo, *De agricultura*
A.J.	Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae*
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
An.	Tertullian, *De anima*
An. procr.	Plutarch, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*
ANF	*The Ante-Nicene Fathers.* Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885–1887. 10 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994
Anim.	Philo, *De animalibus*
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der romischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung.* Part 2, *Principat.* Edited by Hildegard
Ap. Jas.	NHC I 2 Secret Book of James
Ap. John	NHC II 1 Secret Book of John
Apoc. Mos.	Apocalypse of Moses
Bell. civ.	Appian, *Bella civilia*
BG	Berlin Gnostic Codex

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BGU	*Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden*. Berlin. Vol. 4, 1912
BICS	The Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies
B.J.	Josephus, *Bellum judaicum*
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
ca.	circa
Cael.	Aristotle, *De caelo*
Carn. Chr.	Tertullian *De carne Christi*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
Cels.	Origen, *Contra Celsum*
Cher.	Philo, *De cherubim*
Civ.	Augustine, *De civitate Dei*
ClQ	*Classical Quarterly*
Comm. Ezech.	Jerome, *Commentariorum in Ezechielem libri XVI*
Comm. Jo.	Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis*
Conf.	Philo, *De confusione linguarum*
Congr.	Philo, *De congressu eruditionis gratia*
Contempl.	Philo, *De vita contemplativa*
CP	*Classical Philology*
Corp. herm.	Corpus hermeticum
De an.	Aristotle, *De anima*
Decal.	Philo, *De decalogo*
Det.	Philo, *Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat*
Deus	Philo, *Quod Deus sit immutabilis*
Dial.	Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*
Ebr.	Philo *De ebrietate*
ECCA	Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity
Elem.	Proclus, *Elementatio theologica*
Enn.	Plotinus, *Enneades*
Ep.	Plato, *Epistulae*; Seneca, *Epistulae morales*
Epin.	Pseudo-Plato, *Epinomis*
Epist.	Jerome, *Epistulae*
Epit.	Alcinous, *Epitome doctrinae platonicae* (*Didaskalikos*)
Eth. nic.	Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*
Euthyphr.	Plato, *Euthyphro*
Exc.	Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpta et Theodoto*

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FC	Fathers of the Church
FGNK	Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons
Flacc.	Philo, *In Flaccum*
Flor.	Ptolemy, *Epistula ad Floram*; Stobaeus, *Florilegium*
Fr. Matt.	Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in evangelium Matthaei*
frag(s).	fragment(s)
Fug.	Philo, *De fuga et inventione*
FZPhTh	*Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*
Gen. an.	Aristotle, *De generatione anamalium*
Gen. corr.	Aristotle, *De generatione et corruptione*
Gen. Socr.	Plutarch, *De genio Socratis*
Gig.	Philo, *De gigantibus*
GnosSt	*Gnostic Studies*
Gos. Phil.	NHC II 3 Gospel of Philip
Gos. Thom.	NHC II 2 Gospel of Thomas
Gos. Truth	NHC XII 2 Gospel of Truth
HABES	Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien
Haer.	Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*; Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium (Philosophoumena)*
Her.	Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*
Hist. eccl.	Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*
Hist. rom.	Dio Cassius, *Historiae romanae*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
In. Arist. Metaph.	Syrianus, *In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria*
In. Arist. Phys.	Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum*
In Plat. Tim.	Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*
Interp. Know.	NHC XI 1 Interpretation of Knowledge
Is. Os.	Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*
ISNS	International Society for Neoplatonic Studies
JAC	*Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JHI	*Journal of History of Ideas*
JHPS	Journal of the History of Philosophy Series
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JLCRS	Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion Series

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JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JTECL	Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Leg.	Philo, *Legum allegoriae*: Plato, *Leges*
LXX	Septuagint
Math.	Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus mathematicos*
Metaph.	Aristotle, *Metaphysica*
MH	*Museum Helveticum*
Migr.	Philo, *De migratione Abrahami*
Mor.	Plutarch, *Moralia*
Mos.	Philo, *De vita Mosis*
Mot. an.	Aristotle, *De motu animalium*
Mut.	Philo, *De mutatione nominum*
NA^{28}	*Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 28th ed.
Nat. Rulers	NHC II 4 Nature of the Rulers
NHC	Nag Hammadi Codices
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NPNF	Schaff, Philip, and Henry Wace, eds. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. 28 vols. in 2 series. 1886–1889.
NT	New Testament
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
Orig. World	NHC II 5 On the Origin of the World
Opif.	Philo, *De opificio mundi*
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
Paed.	Clement, *Paedagogus*
Pan.	Epiphanius, *Panarion* (*Adversus haereses*)
Parm.	Plato, *Parmenides*
PhA	Philosophia Antiqua
Phaed.	Plato, *Phaedo*
Phaedr.	Plato, *Phaedrus*
Phileb.	Plato, *Philebus*
Phys.	Aristotle, *Physica*
Plac.	Aëtius, *Placita*

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Plant.	Philo, *De plantatione*
PLCL	Philo. Translated by F. H. Colson et al. 12 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–1962.
Pol.	Plato, *Politicus*
Post.	Philo, *De posteritate Caini*
P.Oxy.	Grenfell, Bernard P., et al., eds. *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898–
Praem.	Philo, *De praemiis et poenis*
Praep. ev.	Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*
Praescr.	Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*
Princ.	Origen, *De principiis* (*Peri archōn*)
Prob.	Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit*
Prot.	Plato, *Protagoras*
Prov.	Philo, *De providentia*
QE	Philo, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum*
QG	Philo *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin*
Quaest. conv.	Plutarch, *Quaestionum convivialum libri IX*
Quis div.	Clement, *Quis dives salvetur*
Rab.	Rabbah
RAC	*Reallexikon fur Antike und Christentum*
Resp.	Plato, *Respublica*
RevScRel	*Revue des sciences religieuses*
ROT	Revised Oxford Translation
RSV	Revised Standard Version of the Bible
SAC	Studies in Antiquity and Christianity
Sacr.	Philo, *De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*
SB	*Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten*. Vol. 3, Berlin and Leipzig 1926–1927. Vol. 5, Heidelberg and Wiesbaden 1934–1955.
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
Sobr.	Philo, *De sobrietate*
Somn.	Philo, *De somniis*
Soph.	Plato, *Sophista*
Spec.	Philo, *De specialibus legibus*
SPhilo	*Studia Philonica*

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SPhiloA	*Studia Philonica Annual*
SPhiloM	Studia Philonica Monograph Series
SRHB	Studies in the Reception History of the Bible
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StPatr	Studia Patristica
Strom.	Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*
Theaet.	Plato, *Theaetetus*
Tim.	Plato, *Timaeus*
Top.	Aristotle, *Topica*
Tri. Trac.	NHC I 5 Tripartite Tractate
TS	Texts and Studies
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
Tusc.	Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes*
Util. cred.	Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*
Val.	Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos*
Val. Exp.	NHC XI 2 A Valentinian Exposition
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
VCS	Variorum Collected Studies
Virt.	Philo, *De virtutibus*
Vit. Plot.	Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*
WGRWSup	Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAC	*Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der alteren*

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1
Introduction

1.1. The Aim of This Study

The aim of this study is to compare exegetical and philosophical traditions in the writings of Philo of Alexandria and in Valentinian sources. I will compare these writings systematically with Valentinian systems, which contain protological, cosmological, and anthropological dimensions. Under each thematic heading, I will demonstrate the affinities between Philonic and Valentinian theology. My main argument is that the theology of the Valentinian teachers drew on Philo and cannot be properly understood without recourse to the inventions in his allegorical exegesis of the Scriptures. Although the origin of Gnosticism is not the main concern of this study, comparison of the accounts of Valentinian beliefs with Philo's will shed new light on the topic of the origins and development of the ancient gnostic traditions as well as of the evolution of the school of Valentinus.

Philo (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE) was the most prolific author of Hellenistic Judaism—specifically in Alexandria. Philo's family belonged to the aristocracy, and he presumably inherited multiple citizenships from his father being a citizen of the Jewish *politeuma* of Alexandria, the Greek city of Alexandria, and Rome.[1] Although Philo received a standard Greek educa-

1. Unlike Philo and his family, the Jews of Alexandria did not commonly enjoy full Greek citizenship. They occupied an intermediate position between the Greek citizens and the native Egyptians. From the beginning of the Ptolemaic period, the two ethnic groups, the Jews and the Greeks, existed rather peacefully side by side, but hostilities began to emerge after the Roman annexation of Egypt. The Jews benefited from the annexation, and they preserved their autonomous status and religious privileges because Pompey and Julius Caesar received military aid from the Jews of Alexandria. Jewish privileges were engraved by Augustus on a marble slab, which was set up in the city. Under Roman protection, the Jews of Alexandria sought to improve their

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tion and advanced training in rhetoric and philosophy, he was committed to observing Jewish ritual laws and religious festivals, vital markers of his ethnic and religious identity. Philo valued the achievements of Hellenistic culture, and his Judaism belonged to a well-ordered Roman society, where different cultures and religions lived side by side. Philo did not think that the Jews of Alexandria were exiled from a home country to which they would one day return; rather, he conceived of the Jewish dispersion as voluntary emigration and a part of God's plan for the education of whole of humankind.[2]

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civic status, and it is possible that the pro-Roman sympathies of the Jews were one of the reasons for the anti-Jewish attacks by the Greeks. Philo's brother, Caius Julius Alexander, held the Greek municipal office of alabarch during the reign of Tiberius and Gaius, and he had close relations with both Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, and the Julio-Claudian dynasty in Rome. Josephus informs us that Alexander's fortune was enormous, and he donated nine gates in Jerusalem "overlaid with massive plates of silver and gold." Alexander had two sons. The younger son, Marcus Julius Alexander, was married to Berenice, the daughter of Agrippa I. The older son, Tiberius Julius Alexander, abandoned the Jewish religion altogether. He was procurator of Judea in 45 CE and prefect of Egypt under Nero. During the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE, he commanded the Roman troops. Philo's younger brother, Lysimachus, appears in Philo's *De animalibus*, which describes a dialogue between two brothers. For the political situation of the Jews in Alexandria during the time of Philo, see Ray Barraclough, "Philo's Politics," *ANRW* 21.1:417–553; Daniel R. Schwartz, "Philo, His Family, and His Times," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9–32; E. Mary Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini legatio ad Gaium* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 3–14; Alan Appelbaum, "A Fresh Look at Philo's Family," *SPhiloA* 30 (2018): 93–113. For background on the pogroms against Jews in Alexandria, see Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus: The First Pogrom*, PACS 2 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 18–37.

2. In *Flacc*. 46, Philo writes: "For so populous are the Jews that no one country can hold them, and therefore they settle in very many of the most prosperous countries in Europe and Asia both in the islands and on the mainland, and while they hold the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God to be their mother city [μητρόπολις], yet those which are theirs by inheritance from their fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors even farther back, are in each case accounted by them to be their fatherland [πατρίς] in which they were born and reared, while to some of them they have come at the time of their foundation as immigrants to the satisfaction of the founders." Translations of Philo's texts come from Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker, trans., *Philo in Ten Volumes (and Two Supplementary Volumes)*, 10 vols. and 2 supplements, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959–1969), unless otherwise stated. See Paula Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagan's Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 48–49.

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Philo's social background might have directed him toward business and politics, but he played a remarkable role in politics only later in his life, as the leader of the Jewish delegation to Caligula in 38/39 CE. Philo's main interest otherwise lay in leading a philosophical life, and it is possible that he occasionally withdrew into solitude, spending time among the community of Jewish intellectuals living on the shores of Lake Mareotis. Jean Daniélou points out that Philo's intellectual activity was two-sided: "Part of his activity is directed to believing Jews. It has an esoteric character. It is carried on within the community. On the other hand, Philo's activity has an apologetic component. He is careful to present the Jewish faith to Greeks so as to make it acceptable."[3]

Originally, Philo was a commentator on Scripture. He was not, however, an isolated exegete, but one within a specific hermeneutic tradition. The social setting of Philo's school is not clear, but the most plausible suggestion is that Philo operated a private school, where he taught philosophically orientated spiritual exegesis.[4] The survival of Philo's works after his death and during the turbulent years of the Jewish revolt in 115–117 CE is still an enigma for modern scholarship. Clement of Alexandria is the first ancient author to quote Philo by name at the end of the second century, but the history of the preservation of Philo's works before Clement remains a mystery. The scholarly consensus is that Philo's works must have been rescued by Christian communities, but, as David Runia says, "We cannot know how the rescue operation was effectuated. That it took place is certain."[5]

Valentinus was a famous Christian teacher who was influential in the mid-second century in Alexandria and Rome. His teachings are preserved only in some fragments in patristic sources. We know that Valentinus wrote homilies, letters, and psalms, which were used in the communities of later Valentinian disciples (Tertullian, *Carn. Chr*. 17). The disciples of Valentinus continued the school tradition of Valentinus, which was vehemently attacked by Irenaeus in his multivolume work *Adversus haereses*,

3. Jean Daniélou, *Philo of Alexandria*, trans. James G. Colbert (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 11.

4. See Gregory Sterling, "Philo," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1064–65. On Philo's school, see §3.1 below.

5. David Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*: *A Survey*, JTECL 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 135.

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written in the last quarter of the second century. Irenaeus maintained that the school of Valentinus was a reformation of preceding gnostic tradition (*Haer*. 1.11.1), though the actual relationship between these traditions is a matter of modern scholarly dispute.[6] The Valentinian teachers intended to intellectualize Christian teachings, elevating them to the level of Greco-Roman philosophy.[7]

Indeed, there are parallel allegorical interpretations and biblical themes in Philo's writings and the Valentinian ones. The consensus is that both Philo and Valentinus represent exegetical traditions that integrated the Middle Platonic worldview with an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures. Despite the apparent thematic continuity of thought between Philo and the Valentinian sources, however, there is no scholarly consensus on whether Valentinian teachers had direct access to Philo's writings or played any role in their preservation.[8]

1.2. The Valentinian Tradition and Sethian Gnosticism

The definition of Gnosticism is highly disputed in modern scholarship. Since the international colloquium held in Messina, Italy, in 1966, no scholarly consensus has been reached regarding the essence and origin of Gnosticism.[9] The study of the Nag Hammadi gnostic writings has shown

6. For a short introduction to the research history of the Valentinian tradition, see Christoph Markschies and Einar Thomassen, "Introduction," in *Valentinianism: New Studies*, ed. Markschies and Thomassen, NHMS 96 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1–5.

7. Peter Lampe argues that from the time of Nerva there was a positive change in the imperial attitude toward the philosophers. They were respected as teachers of ethical education and moral rules. Many pagan philosophers affected Christian self-understanding: Christianity was increasingly considered a philosophical school. Justin Martyr was an example of a Christian teacher in Rome who represented himself as a philosopher. Justin argued that the Christians worship God intellectually, and he saw Christianity as the restoration of original philosophy. See Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians in Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. Michael Steinhauser (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 258–61, 272–75, 279–84.

8. See Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 125–26.

9. At the Messina colloquium, it was proposed that the term *Gnosticism* should be used to designate specifically the group of systems of the second century CE described by the patristic authors. The Messina proposal maintains that Gnosticism is a system of thought that contains the idea of "the divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world of fate, birth, and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated." Gnostic cosmol-

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that the narrow definition of the term *Gnosticism* as a second-century dualist and deterministic Christian heresy based on the myth of Sophia is not applicable to all the texts of the Nag Hammadi Library. It is also noted that the term *gnostic* does not appear as the self-designated name in the writings of the Nag Hammadi Library but exists separately as a group designation by second-century patristic authors. Therefore, there have been proposals that we should forgo using the term *Gnosticism*, because it is a dubious category based on the late second-century discourse of orthodoxy and heresy. As soon as we talk about Gnosticism, we decide to talk about something other and apart from original and pure Christianity—that is, something that is not a part of "our" religious and cultural tradition. Karen King points out that, in this way, "a rhetorical term has been confused with a historical entity."[10]

In his 1995 "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," Bentley Layton sets out to identify gnostic texts rather than the essence or origin of Gnosticism. Layton argues that the definition of the category of gnostic writings should be based on the direct testimonials of ancient authors. Layton's starting point is Irenaeus's summary of the gnostic teaching in *Haer*. 1.29–30, which parallels the Secret Book of John in the Nag Hammadi Library. In addition, Porphyry mentions two books found in the Nag Hammadi Library (Zostrianos and Allogenes the Stranger) as well as a third in the Book of Zoroaster, alluded to in the Secret Book of John, which were discussed in Plotinus's seminar in Rome between 262 and 270 CE. Layton proposes, on the grounds of the content of these books, that the bulk of gnostic writings can be expanded to all other writings that contain a similar kind of cosmography, philosophical creation myth, and cast of characters (e.g., the Nature of the Rulers, Three Forms of First Thought, Three Steles of Seth, and Marsanes). Hence, Layton coins the

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ogy is based on the double movement of "devolution and reintegration." This world has its basis in a crisis within the divine realm. The term *gnosis* is broadly defined as "knowledge of the divine mysteries reserved for an elite." See Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le origini dello gnosticismo: colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966*, SHR 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

10. Karen King, *What Is Gnosticism*? (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2–3. Ismo Dunderberg maintains that the situation does not get any better if the terms *gnostic* or *hairesis* are replaced by other terms that are less loaded with theological meaning, such as *sect* or *splinter group*, as these terms are also based on the same discourse of orthodoxy and heresy. See also Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 18–19.

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term *classic gnostic* to signify what Hans-Martin Schenke and most other scholars called the Sethian gnostic system.[11] According to Birger Pearson, Sethian Gnosticism consists of the following elements: "a focus on Seth as a Savior figure and spiritual ancestor of the gnostic elect; a primal divine triad of an ineffable Father, a Mother called Barbelo, and a Son referred to as Autogenes; four emanated luminaries named Harmozel, Oroaiel, Daveithe, and Eleleth, and other superterrestrial beings related to them; a salvation history thought of as three descents of the Savior, or three critical periods marked by flood, fire, and final judgement; and rituals of baptism and ascent."[12]

Layton argues, however, that the Valentinians should be kept apart "as a distinct mutation or reformed offshoot" of these original gnostics. He assumes that some Sethian (or classic gnostic) texts may have influenced Valentinus's followers, but they elaborated on these gnostic traditions extensively. Layton's solution is adopted by David Dawson, who describes Valentinus as a reformer of the Sethian myth in the Secret Book of John and in the Nature of the Rulers.[13] Ismo Dunderberg also suggests that Valentinus may have adopted the creation myth of Adam from Sethian

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11. Bentley Layton, "Prolegomena to the Study of Ancient Gnosticism," in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 334–50. On Sethian Gnosticism, see Hans-Martin Schenke, "The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism," in *Sethian Gnosticism*, vol. 2 of *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 588–616. Many scholars regard Layton's proposal for the definition of Gnosticism as too narrow because it basically excludes the Valentinian texts from the category of gnostic writings. Antti Marjanen has balanced Layton's proposal by offering a bipolar definition of Gnosticism, grouping ancient religious texts and thinkers in way that enables closer analysis and comparison. The two characteristics of a gnostic text or doctrine are, according to Marjanen's definition, (1) the notion of an evil or ignorant world creator(s) separate from the highest divinity, and (2) the presupposition that the human soul or spirit originates from a transcendental world and has the potential of returning there after a life in this world. See Marjanen, "Gnosticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 203–20.

12. Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 60–61.

13. David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 132–33.

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sources but elaborated on these teachings in light of Hellenistic Jewish models, as attested in the Wisdom of Solomon.[14]

In his 1992 book *Valentinus Gnosticus?*, Christoph Markschies presents a novel argument on the debate: Valentinus's teachings were independent from mythological gnostic traditions, but his followers may have been representatives of the gnostic "mythological heresy." This would mean that there was a drastic chasm between the teachings of Valentinus and the beliefs of his disciples, the latter of which may have adopted gnostic influences from Sethian sources.

Markschies's solution, which draws a distinction between Valentinus's teaching and the systems of his followers, is not widely accepted. Although Valentinus's fragments do not contain any explicit reference to the fall and restoration of Sophia, there is nothing in them that would make Valentinus's teachings incompatible with the beliefs of his followers. It is likewise unlikely that Valentinus's followers would have distorted the teachings of the father of their school in such a radical manner. It is more likely that Valentinus also taught some kind of protological myth of Sophia, though its details may have differed from those of the preceding gnostic myth and the systems of later Valentinian theologians.[15]

Markschies's provocative argument has nevertheless left an important legacy for scholarship on Gnosticism. As Dunderberg points out, "Markschies carefully located Valentinus in the intellectual milieu of second-century Alexandria, colored by Platonism and Hellenistic Judaism."[16] King has subsequently proposed that the myth of Sophia's fall and restoration can be seen as "a logical result of the intertextual reading of Platonic cosmology, Genesis and Wisdom literature."[17] Pearson also suggests that the gnostic worldview is dependent on Platonism, though the Platonist

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14. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 51, 104. According to Dunderberg, however, there is no definitive evidence that Valentinus used the story of Adam's creation in the Secret Book of John, despite common motifs between the narratives.

15. Irenaeus describes in *Haer*. 1.11.1 a version of the Sophia myth that can be traced back to Valentinus himself. Tertullian also reports some kind of protological myth that Valentinus purportedly taught, though Tertullian's account of the myth differs from later Valentinian systems (see Tertullian, *Val*. 4.3).

16. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 20. Dunderberg maintains that Markschies's view forms a solid basis for all subsequent study of Valentinus's theology, even though he does not agree in all cases with Markschies's radical view.

17. Karen King, *The Secret Revelation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 221–24, 233.

elements have been reinterpreted in a non-Platonic direction in light of apocalyptically oriented Judaism. In particular, both Gnosticism and the Jewish apocalypses emphasize the revelation of secret knowledge from on high. While the latter focuses on the coming end of the visible cosmos and the beginning of a new world order, ruled by the saints, the former stresses merely the return of the individual soul to its divine origin.[18] Most recently, Dylan Burns argues that four Platonizing Sethian writings in the Nag Hammadi Library (Zostrianos, Allogenes, Marsanes, and Three Steles of Seth) should be read predominantly as Judeo-Christian apocalypses or Platonic ascent manuals through which a reader can gain visionary experiences and participate angelic liturgy.[19]

It is notable that we do not have any evidence of the Sophia myth outside Christian literature. This would mean that the intertextual reading of these sources was actualized within the Christian tradition, possibly in Alexandria, which was the main center of the movement.[20] Although the fall of heavenly Wisdom could be explained in light of Platonic archetypes, Sophia's redemption by the Savior is barely conceivable in isolation from Christian tradition.[21] It seems, then, that the gnostics inherited these views from Pauline and Johannine theology.

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18. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 15–19.

19. Dylan Burns, *Apocalypse of the Alien God: Platonism and the Exile of Sethian Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 1–7.

20. For the Christian origin of the gnostic myth, see Simone Pétrement, *Separate God: The Christian Origin of Gnosticism*, trans. Carol Harrison (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 212; Alastair H. B. Logan, *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy: A Study in the History of Gnosticism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 19–23; Bentley Layton and David Brakke, trans., *The Gnostic Scriptures*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 20–21; Robert McL. Wilson, "Half a Century of Gnosisforschung—in Retrospect," in *Doctrinal Diversity: Varieties of Early Christianity*, vol. 4 of *Recent Studies in Early Christianity: A Collection of Scholarly Essays*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1999), 95–105; Edwin Yamauchi, "The Issue of Pre-Christian Gnosticism Reviewed in the Light of the Nag Hammadi Texts," in *The Nag Hammadi Library after Fifty Years*, ed. John Turner and Anne McGuire, NHMS 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 72–88; David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 29–51.

21. Stead argues that the idea of the fallen heavenly Sophia, as the Universal Soul, may have its archetype in the Platonic notion of the fall of the individual soul before its incarnation. See Christoph G. Stead, "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," *JTS* 20 (1969): 101. Although the fall of Sophia could have been derived from Platonic archetypes, the

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It is also worth noting that there are a number of significantly different accounts of the gnostic Wisdom myth. Irenaeus informs us in *Haer.* 1.29–30 that, in addition to the Valentinian sources, an account of Sophia's fall and restoration forms the basis for the cosmological model in Ophite, Barbeloite, and Sethian accounts. In *Gnostic Truth and Christian Heresy*, Alastair Logan proposes that the Valentinian school of thought reformed the gnostic myth of Sophia, but the myth in question may have differed from its later "Sethianization."[22] Logan suggests that the intellectual basis of the gnostic myth lies in Platonic-Pythagorean theology, which was applied to the interpretation of Genesis and the prologue to John's Gospel by innovative Christian theologians. Logan summarizes his analysis of the origin of Gnosticism as follows:

> The world-view of these Gnostics is undoubtedly Platonic. It reflects the attempt to derive the Many from the One, and to explain the visible universe as the work of a lower god, the Demiurge, emanated from the transcendent One beyond being, in terms of the inexplicable self-revelation and unfolding of the supreme God as Father, Mother and Son … but as the fundamental concept of the self-revelation of the divine triad suggests, it is essentially a Christian scheme. It reflects Christian ideas and ways of interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the message of Paul and John.[23]

In this study, the origin of the gnostic movement is located in mid-second-century Alexandria, which served as an urban milieu for innovative Christian theologians who incorporated Hellenistic Jewish exegetical patterns and neo-Pythagorean transcendental monism into their interpretation of Christianity. John Turner points out, however, "Gnosticism is not phenomenologically reduced to Platonism, nor is Platonism reduced to Gnosticism, but each tends to be treated as an index to a single way of construing the world and interpreting its received symbols and traditions, be they of mythical or of philosophical character."[24]

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idea of the redemption of Sophia can hardly have been derived from Platonic tradition or the Hellenistic Jewish wisdom traditions.

22. Logan, *Gnostic Truth*, 19–23.

23. Logan, *Gnostic Truth*, 22.

24. John D. Turner, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001), 26.

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I suggest that we do not have any historical reason to doubt that there was a group of early Platonizing Christian teachers who were called gnostics by outsiders and who may have used that name as a term of self-designation as well. In fact, Clement of Alexandria did not hesitate to accept the name "gnostics" (γνωστικοί) for his own group of Christians (*Strom*. 5.1.1,5). The gnostics can be seen as nonprofessional Platonists whose Platonism may have been seen as rather peculiar by the professional philosophers.[25] Although some gnostic myths of Sophia may have antedated both Valentinian and Sethian versions, it cannot be ruled out that these traditions might have interacted with each other later on.[26]

With regard to this study, it is crucial to note that the gnostic theologians, whether Sethians or Valentinians, were dependent not only on Middle Platonic philosophy but also on Hellenistic Jewish exegetical traditions of the Scriptures, which may have included some works of Philo. However, the main task of this study is to compare allegorical and philosophical parallels between Valentinian sources and Philo. Therefore, any parallels with Sethian and other gnostic texts are discussed in passing, focusing only on those cases where the Philonic parallels explain any *differences* between Valentinian and Sethian theologians. In these cases, as will be shown below, the Valentinian exegetes downplayed gnostic *mythopoiēsis* and refined the distinctively gnostic motifs, such as the denigration of the God of the Old Testament and radical cosmological dualism, by integrating the cosmic myth more closely with the textual basis of the Bible.[27]

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25. Bianchi states that, rather than "an acute Hellenization of Christianity," the gnostic movement can be regarded as "an acute Christianization of Hellenism" (*Le origini dello Gnosticismo*, 556–58). See also Arthur D. Nock, "Gnosticism," *HTR* 57 (1964): 266.

26. See Logan, *Gnostic Truth*, 48–49, 55–56. Antti Marjanen points out that the Sethian and Valentinian Sophia traditions have a common origin, "but there is no evidence indicating a clear priority of one tradition over the other. It is very possible that they represent two basically independent trajectories which may have had points of contacts." See Marjanen, "The Relationship between the Valentinian and Sethian Sophia Myth Revisited," in Markschies and Thomassen, *Valentinianism: New Studies*, 119–20.

27. A good example of the Valentinian reformation of the gnostic myth is the exegesis of the creation of the first human being, in which the purely gnostic motifs of the fear and jealousy of the creator angels fade away. In Valentinus's fragment, the angels do reflect some tenets of the preceding myth, but in the later Valentinian anthropol-

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1.3. Philo of Alexandria and the Valentinian Tradition

In an article titled "Philo of Alexandria and Gnosticism," Robert McLean Wilson outlines trends of scholarship concerning Philo's relation to ancient Gnosticism: Philo is treated as either a part of the gnostic movement or as a precursor of the later gnostic *haireseis*. Wilson prefers the latter, arguing that Philo is not a gnostic in the strict sense of the term; his writings do contain some affinities with Gnosticism, even though the gnostic repudiation of the God of the Old Testament was totally alien to Philo. The radical dualism of the gnostic myth, which presupposes a rupture between the ideal world and the visible cosmos, is also incompatible with Philo's moderate Platonic dualism. Rather than speaking of Philo as a representative of the gnostic *hairesis*, then, it is more reasonable to examine *gnosis* in Philo's oeuvre.[28]

In his essay "Philo and Gnosticism," Pearson mainly adopts Wilson's view, concluding that, even though there are clearly some parallel themes in Philo and gnostic texts, Philo can be treated neither as a gnostic nor as representative of a proto-gnostic system.[29] Although Philo shared the Platonic view of drawing a sharp distinction between the world of Ideas and the visible cosmos, he did not neglect the blessedness of the whole creation. According to the gnostic system, on the other hand, the creator God was blind, ignorant, and evil, having created the world to deceive human beings. Pearson argues that it is impossible to derive such a hostile

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ogy, the angels are not malevolent archons but rather cocreators and archetypes of the soul of Adam. For details, see §6.3.3 below. David Brakke points out that the differences between Valentinian and Sethian literature indicate different methods of reading and producing texts among these communities. The Valentinians can be placed in the group of early Christians who sought intellectual illumination through authoritative interpretation of the Bible. The Valentinians differed from the gnostic communities, who wrote revelatory literature attributed to persons of the mythological past. See Brakke, "Scriptural Practices in Early Christianity: Towards a New History of the New Testament Canon," in *Invention, Rewriting, Usurpation: Discursive Fights over Religious Traditions in Antiquity*, ed. David Brakke, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, and Jörg Ulrich, ECCA 11 (New York: Lang, 2012), 271–75.

28. Robert McL. Wilson, "Philo of Alexandria and Gnosticism," *Kairos* 14 (1972): 213–19; see also Birger Pearson "Philo, Gnosis, and the New Testament," in *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson*, ed. Alistair H. B. Logan and Alexander J. M. Wedderburn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), 165–82.

29. Birger Pearson, "Philo and Gnosticism," *ANRW* 21.1:295–341.

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worldview from the writings of Philo. Pearson does think, however, that some of Philo's antinomian Jewish opponents may have been predecessors of gnostic theologians, though these Jewish groups cannot be directly equated with the Ophite or Barbelo-gnostic groups mentioned by Irenaeus in *Haer.* 1.29–30.[30]

It is notable that neither Pearson nor Wilson draws a distinction between the systems in the Valentinian sources and those in the Sethian gnostic texts. The Valentinian tradition forms a more intriguing case because the Valentinian teachers significantly downplayed such gnostic motifs as distinguished other gnostic teachers from Philo. In his article "The Valentinian Myth of Sophia," Christopher Stead maintains that "one can reconstruct most of the presuppositions of Valentinus merely by rearranging Philo's mental furniture."[31] The main elements of the Valentinian myth of Sophia were, according to Stead, already "in the margins of Philo's writings." In a later article, "In Search of Valentinus, " Stead elaborated this thesis, reevaluating the alleged contradictions between the Valentinian and the second-century Platonic tradition to prove that the Valentinian myth can in fact be derived from Middle Platonic principles.[32] He locates the Valentinian theory of aeons in the Platonic tradition, according to which ideas are not only intelligible but intelligent.[33] Stead argues that Philo and Valentinus used the same Platonic themes in their biblical exegesis. Valentinus's description of the creation of Adam, for

30. For an example in scholarship of the equation of the extreme allegorists of Philo with the proto-gnostic groups, see Moriz Friedländer, *Der vorchristliche jüdische Gnosticismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989). Although the identification of Philo's antinomian opponents with some proto-gnostic groups is intriguing, we do not have decisive information to confirm this connection. Pearson writes, "Although much of the detail of Friedländer's argument is open to question, he has been vindicated in his basic contention, that Gnosticism is a pre-Christian phenomenon that developed on Jewish soil." See Birger Pearson, "Friedländer Revisited: Alexandrian Judaism and Gnostic Origins," *SPhilo* 2 (1973): 23–39.

31. Stead, "Valentinian Myth of Sophia."

32. Christopher. G. Stead, "In Search of Valentinus," in *School of Valentinus*, vol. 1 of *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the International Conference on Gnosticism at Yale New Haven, Connecticut, March 28–31, 1978*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 75–95.

33. In making this argument, Stead refers to Chaldean Oracles, frags. 37 and 81. He also mentions Xenocrates, who suggested that the ideas were numbers and desired unity, meaning that they were not only archetypes but also living beings.

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instance, is similar to Philo's exegesis of Gen 1:26 as indicating the plurality of the creators (*Opif.* 72) and evidencing the ideal human being that is associated with the Logos. Stead also finds parallels between Philo and the Valentinian threefold division of humankind in *Gig.* 60 (see also 12–15).[34]

Stead's proof of a thematic and intellectual continuity between the Valentinian tradition and Philo's writings led to further scholarly exploration of this lineage. Layton, for his part, supposes that Valentinus's Platonic attitude toward the Scriptures may have come to him through the study of Hellenistic Jewish interpretations of the Bible in the writings of Philo. He also suggests that the motif of the thoughts of God as the plants of paradise in the Valentinian Gospel of Truth (NHC I 36.35–37.2) possibly draws on the allegorical interpretation of Gen 2:8 by Philo in *QG* 1.6.[35] Dawson, in *Allegorical Readers in Alexandria*, places Valentinus in the same exegetical tradition as Philo, but he does not propose any direct historical relationship between them. Valentinus may have been influenced by a similar allegorical framework and intellectual milieu without knowing the exact works of Philo.[36] Francis Fallon also sees parallels in the categorization of the law of Moses in Philo's writings and Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, maintaining that Ptolemy's writing reflects the use of the hermeneutical traditions of Hellenistic diaspora Judaism, which were similar to those of Philo. However, we do not have firm evidence that Valentinus or Ptolemy would have drawn

34. The tripartite division of humankind in Philo was also noted by Hans Jonas in *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and Beginnings of Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Beacon, 2001), 212–14.

35. Layton and Brakke, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 275, 324. See also Gregory Sterling, "The School of Sacred Laws," *VC* 53 (1999): 162. Layton suggests that the author of the Gospel of Truth (NHC I 5) is Valentinus. Irenaeus mentions in *Haer*. 3.11.9 that the Valentinians read a certain book called *Evangelium Veritatis*. While the Gospel of Truth (NHC I 5) does not contain a title for the book, it does begin with the words, "The gospel of truth is a joy for those who have received from the Father of truth the grace of knowing him." Thomassen is of the opinion that the incipit can be read as a title, and it is unlikely that there would have been two independent gnostic works with the same name. See Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the "Valentinians,"* NHMS 60 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 146–48. I suggest that this is only an assumption. It is highly unlikely that the Gospel of Truth is an authentic work by Valentinus. Actually, Irenaeus does not identify Valentinus explicitly as an author of the text but "Valentinians."

36. Dawson, *Allegorical Readers*, 145–82.

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their teachings directly from the works of Philo.[37] Markschies, who draws a sharp distinction between Valentinus and the gnostic tradition, maintains that there is nothing in Valentinus's fragments that indicates direct contact with Philo's works. This does not mean, however, that the contacts with Philo's teachings were not possible—they were even probable. Moreover, Markschies proposes that Valentinus represented an intellectual intermediate stage between Philo and Clement of Alexandria.[38]

Two remarkable studies have recently been published concerning the Valentinian tradition. Einar Thomassen's *The Spiritual Seed* came out in 2006, followed two years later by Dunderberg's *Beyond Gnosticism*. In his monograph, Thomassen presents a systematic analysis of the traditions of the Valentinian school, though his emphasis is mainly on the so-called Eastern branch of Valentinianism. Thomassen sees one possible parallel between Valentinus's psalm *Harvest* (Hippolytus, *Haer*. 6.37.7) and Philo's *Mos.* 2.121, concerning the "cosmic chain" of creation. Although Thomassen detects neo-Pythagorean influences in the Valentinian sources, he stresses the influence of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition on the Valentinian system of thought rather than of the Platonizing Jewish Wisdom theology attested in Philo's writings.[39]

Dunderberg's approach, on the other hand, is a social-historical analysis of the Valentinian movement. He sees aspects in Valentinus's school that connect it with traditions of ancient philosophical schools and Hellenistic Jewish Wisdom theology. Dunderberg notes that Valentinus's view of immortality, quoted by Clement in *Strom.* 4.89.1–3, is closer to Philo's teachings than to early Christian views, which connected immortality to the expectation of Jesus's parousia and the resurrection of the dead.

37. Francis T. Fallon, "The Law in Philo and Ptolemy: A Note on the Letter to Flora," *VC* 30 (1976): 45–51.

38. Christoph Markschies, *Valentinus Gnosticus? Untersuchungen zur valentinianischen Gnosis mit einem Kommentar zu den Fragmenten Valentins*, WUNT 65 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 406–7. Markschies writes: "Von seinem Fragmenten her ist kein zwingender Rückschluß auf direkte Kontakte zu alexandrinischen Mittelplatonikern oder dem hellenistischen Judentum der Stadt möglich. Sie sind wohl wahrscheinlich" (327).

39. Thomassen, *Spiritual Seed*, 315–26, 481–82. Thomassen sees in some Valentinian documents, e.g., Tri. Trac. 118.14–28; Gos. Truth 20.6–24; Ap. Jas. 16.8–11, some notion of the manifestation of the saints and the union with angels at the end of days. A similar theme is attested in Jewish apocalyptic literature (see 1 En. 38.1; 1QS XI, 7–9).

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Dunderberg also points out that some biblical allegories—for example, the allegory of Israel—in the Valentinian sources may go back to the Jewish archetypes attested in Philo's writings.[40]

In Philonic studies, the question of whether Valentinus or his followers knew Philo's works is discussed by Runia in *Philo of Alexandria in Christian Literature*. There, Runia argues that, despite the apparent thematic continuity of thought between the second-century Alexandrian Christian communities and Jewish communities of Philo's time, there is no clear evidence that Valentinus actually had access to Philo's writings. Runia remarks that the closest parallels with Philo before Clement of Alexandria can be found in the group of Platonizing Christians of Alexandria, who made use of Greek philosophical ideas in their attempt to understand the Christian message. An early Christian document, the Teachings of Silvanus, offers an enlightening example of common elements with Philo's thought, which can be categorized as follows:[41]

1. the conception of the transcendence of God, based on Platonic categories of thought;
2. the doctrine of personified Wisdom;
3. an anthropology based on Platonism but also showing Stoic features;
4. emphasis on the importance of virtue and the struggle against the passions, coupled with a decidedly negative attitude toward the body;
5. use of an allegorical method of interpreting Scripture.

However, Runia considers the Christian gnostics of Alexandria as a separate group from other Platonic Christians. Although the gnostics shared much in common with Philo and Hellenistic Judaism, Runia argues, they

40. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 40–41; see also Ismo Dunderberg, "Gnostic Interpretations of Genesis," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb and Emma Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 385–89.

41. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 126. For the results of Zandee's article concerning Philo and the Teachings of Silvanus, see Pearson, "Philo, Gnosis, and the New Testament"; see also Jan Zandee, "Les enseignements de Silvanos et Philon d'Alexandrie," in *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts á H. C. Puech* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974), 337–45.

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"introduced a radical twist" that separated them sharply from Philonic thought: a deterministic soteriology and an anticosmic worldview. In addition, the possession of *gnosis* separated humans radically into the categories of the elect and the others, leading to division at the gatherings of ordinary Christians. For Philo, the freedom of choice was fundamental, and he also held a positive view of the cosmos, which was sustained by an all-pervasive Logos. This positive estimation of the cosmos differs greatly from the teachings of the gnostics, who regarded the world as a hostile place ruled by the malevolent heavenly archons.[42] Therefore, Runia suggests that it is rather unlikely that the gnostics would have found anything of exegetical value in Philo's works.

The findings of recent scholarship on gnostic currents show that the eclectic characteristic of the Valentinian communities did not differ from other philosophical schools, rabbinical schools, or the Hermetic tradition. Dunderberg points out that Irenaeus's information about the Valentinian myth reveals that the Valentinians were interested in discussing cosmological myths with outsiders in an attempt to convert them.[43] The goal of the Valentinian myth was to show the world in a new light and to change how the audience perceived the world and how they should behave accordingly.[44] Moreover, the view of Valentinian tradition as a deterministic and anticosmic religion is based on a biased reading of the Valentinian sources. Although Valentinian teachers saw the body and fleshly impulses as evil, as Philo and contemporary Platonists did, the attitude toward the heavenly powers in some Valentinian sources is rather positive, because they reflect the harmony of the aeons of the intelligible realm.

It is notable that all the elements that Runia takes in the Teachings of Silvanus as proofs of continuity with Philo's thoughts can also be found in various Valentinian sources. In addition, the Teachings of Silvanus contains a tripartite anthropology that parallels Valentinian teaching.

42. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 126.

43. Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 191–95. See also Pheme Perkins, "Valentinians and the Christian Canon," in Markschies and Thomassen, *Valentinianism: New Studies*, 380.

44. See Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 25. On the importance of ethical improvement in Valentinian teaching, see Philip L. Tite, "An Exploration of Valentinian Paraenesis: Rethinking Gnostic Ethics in the Interpretation of Knowledge (NHC XI 1)," *HTR* 97 (2004): 275–304; Minna Heimola, *Christian Identity in the Gospel of Philip* (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2011), 170–85.

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Pearson suggests that the division of humankind in early Christian sources is based on an allegorical reading of Gen 2:7 that goes back to Hellenistic Jewish sources, which were "well known to Philo, if not in fact derived from him."[45]

It is an oversimplification, however, to suggest that the Valentinian cosmic myth can be derived almost exclusively from the writings of Philo. The parallels between Philo and Valentinian teachers may be marginal exegetical similarities, without any essential contribution to the origin of the Valentinian system or the Sophia myth itself. Moreover, the Valentinian tradition was not monolithic, such that the works of Philo may have been known only by the teachers of some Valentinian groups. While the positive reception of Philo's allegories in Valentinian works may indicate the dependency of Valentinians on Philo, their explicit rejection of his thinking may also indicate a connection to Philo's exegesis.

The Valentinian communities were not isolated from the other early Christian communities in Rome or Alexandria; they participated in the early Christian debate on the creation of the world, the law of Moses, the essence of the divine realm, and the correct interpretation of the canonical gospels. Ptolemy's *Letter to Flora*, which I discuss in chapter 2, must have enjoyed remarkable popularity among Christians because Epiphanius still had access to this text about two hundred years after Ptolemy composed it in Rome.[46] Thus, the difference between the Valentinians and other Alexandrian Platonists, such as Origen and Clement, was not as clear-cut as is commonly suggested on the grounds of the rhetorical slander by Irenaeus and other proto-orthodox authorities. In some cases, Clement and other Christian Platonists found certain Valentinian themes and interpretations valuable. They did collect excerpts from Valentinian sources not only to prove their heretical content but also to learn from them.[47] For instance, Origen cites Heracleon's commentary on John's Gospel in his own book, indicating that the exegetical innovations of Valentinian teachers were not only mocked but were rather

45. Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 177–81. See also Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin W. Meyer (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 499–522. Pearson writes: "So it is not out of the question that the author was familiar with Gnostic writings, such as those of the Alexandrian teacher Valentinus."

46. See Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 77–79.

47. See Judith L. Kovacs, "Clement of Alexandria and Valentinian Exegesis in the Excerpts from Theodotus," StPatr 43 (2006): 187–200.

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taken seriously.[48] It stands to reason, then, that Valentinus and his followers would also have had access to the same scholarly sources, including the works of Philo, as their theological rivals in Alexandria and Rome.

1.4. Methodological Considerations

In his article "Comparisons Compared: A Methodological Survey of Comparisons of Religion from 'A Magic Dwells' to 'A Magic Still Dwells,'" David M. Freidenreich outlines four types of approaches to the comparison of religion: "comparative focus on similarity," "comparative focus on difference," "comparative focus on genus-species relationship," and "the use of comparison to refocus." The methodological approach in this study is primarily a combination of the first and second approaches, examining both similarities and dissimilarities.[49]

Jonathan Z. Smith stresses that the similarities as well as the dissimilarities of religions are not objective facts but rather the results of the "mental operations" of the observer.[50] Smith points out that a comparatist is attracted to a particular datum "by a sense of its uniqueness," remembering having seen "something like it" before and seeking therefore an explanation for that resemblance or difference. That is, comparison is a subjective experience, one that can be linked to "an objective connection through some theory of influence, diffusion, borrowing, or the like." Smith thus ponders whether "comparison [is] an enterprise of magic or science? Thus far, comparison appears to be more a matter of memory than a project for inquiry; it is more impressionistic than methodical."[51]

48. See Judith L. Kovacs, "Echoes of Valentinian Exegesis in Clement of Alexandria and Origen: The Interpretation of 1 Cor 3.1–3," in *Origeniana Octava: Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition; Papers of the Eighth International Origen Congress, Pisa 27–31 August 2001*, ed. Lorenzo Perrone (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 1:317–29.

49. David M. Freidenreich, "Comparisons Compared: A Methodological Survey of Comparison of Religion from 'A Magic Dwells' to 'A Magic Still Dwells,'" in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 80–101.

50. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity*, JLCRS 14 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1990), 51–52. See also Niko Huttunen, *Paul and Epictetus on Law: A Comparison* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 10–19.

51. Jonathan Z. Smith, "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberley C. Patton and Benjamin C. Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 23–41.

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William E. Paden stresses the heuristic nature of the comparative enterprise in his article "Elements of New Comparativism."[52] He points out that the comparative study is heuristic because it provides instruments for further discovery. He says, "Just identifying patterns, therefore, is not the end matter but the starting point for investigation."

The subjective dimension in the process of comparison does not, however, mean that it cannot be done scientifically. Mental operations should be subordinated to conceptual self-control, meaning that the framework of comparison should be analytically controlled and the significant aspects of the phenomena in question selected in a theoretically plausible way.

Comparative scholarship not only *presents* the similarities between objects of comparison but seeks to *explain* why they are similar or the historical relationship between them. The emphasis of the historical survey can lead, however, to parallelomania, a tendency not only to exaggerate similarities but "to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction."[53] I would suggest, however, that the opposite attitude, parallelophobia, would be as pernicious for comparative study. Such an attitude would entail exaggerating differences between texts to dismiss their mutual dependency altogether, as if all ancient texts and their traditions had been developed in isolation, without any historical dependency on each other. The methodological pattern of this study is based on the following premises.

1. The starting point for comparison is exegetical. The focus is not in the first place on common philosophical ideas or theological themes but on linguistic similarities or dissimilarities related to the interpretation of specific biblical texts or themes and the use of similar kinds of allegorical schemes. In most cases, comparison is made between interpretations of Genesis. Commonalities therebetween may also be related to a similar philosophical idea that forms the basis for the allegorical interpretation of the text, even if the text used for allegorical interpretation might be different. The crucial issue in drawing comparisons is determining how much context should be taken into account. As more context is taken into consideration, the similarity between objects of comparison inevitably diminishes. In hermeneutical studies, parallel interpretations are rarely absolutely identical, even in the writings of the same author, because the

52. Williman E. Paden, "Elements of New Comparativism," in Patton and Ray, *Magic Still Dwells*, 186.

53. See Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13.

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contexts of the interpretations may be different. As Freidenreich points out, comparative study is not interested in religious texts within absolutely similar contexts, because it is the contextual dissimilarity that makes the comparison interesting in the first place.[54]

2. The objects of comparison in this study are texts in the corpus of Philo's writings and specific Valentinian sources that contain similar kinds of interpretations of the Bible. It is of note that the degree of similarity between these interpretations does not necessarily define the form of dependency. An identifiable quotation can come from secondary source material, notebooks, or through oral transmission, without direct contact with the original text itself.[55] Indeed, in his study *Philo of Alexandria and Early Christianity*, Runia observes that most of the fourth-century references to Philo's texts in Christian literature were not adopted by reading Philo himself but from Christian authors such as Origen, Eusebius, and Ambrose, who incorporated quotations from Philo in their writings. On the other hand, a short reference or allusion that faintly resembles another text can be the result of a careless direct reading of the source or of the ancient scholarly technique of borrowing. The latter is especially apparent in the writing of Clement of Alexandria, which Annewies van den Hoek describes in her study *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the "Stromateis"*:

> Characteristic of his technique is the abrupt way that material borrowed from Philo jumps into his text. These discontinuities give a strange flavor to his sentences and lead to illogical turns of thought. In these various ways, therefore, Philo's text is nearly always presented in a damaged and defective form. Repeatedly, confusion and disorder appear; words are shifted strangely, and sentences are chopped into cryptic fragments. The development of Clement's thought would be entirely incomprehensible in these sections if Philo's text were not at hand. This applies not only to the readers of today but must also have held true for his own contemporaries.[56]

These caveats should warn against drawing conclusions too easily concerning the form of dependency or historical relationship between ancient

54. Freidenreich, "Comparison Compared," 94–96.

55. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 35, 341.

56. Annewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the "Stromateis": An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 214–15.

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texts solely on the grounds of the degree of literal similarity or dissimilarity. It is clear, however, that the degree of textual similarity correlates with the probability of dependency, though the exact form of the dependency may remain beyond any historical study.

3. The historical focus of this study is on to the formative years of Valentinian tradition, that is, on the latter half of the second century. The parallels with Philo in the Valentinian sources written during that time form an intriguing case of direct dependency on Philo, given the lack of any contemporary evidence for extensive borrowings from Philo in the early Christian literature that could have served as source material for Valentinian authors.

4. The historical relationship between objects of comparison is not the only concern of comparative study. The similarities between religions or their literary traditions may also function as a lens (see above on the fourth approach of comparison that Freidenreich outlines). This means that comparative analysis may produce data that can be used to refocus issues in question. Freidenreich defines this approach in the following way: "Much as a microscope offers new insights even into specimens that can be seen with the naked eye, the religious tradition being brought for the purpose of comparison serves to provide a new perspective on the tradition being examined, to raise new questions or offer a new possible way of understanding the target tradition."[57] In this study, the target tradition is the Valentinian tradition. The Valentinian sources are thus read and analyzed in the light of Philo, not vice versa. I will provide new perspectives on interpreting the Valentinian texts on the ground of parallels with Philo. Therefore, the aim of this study is not only to collect parallels between the Valentinian sources and Philo's works but to refocus the Valentinian tradition and to learn from the Philonic parallels. Differences between Philo and the Valentinians do not necessarily imply independence, as is usually presumed, but rather help us to understand how the Valentinian teachers read and modified Philo's interpretations.

1.5. Outline of This Study

Chapter 2 explores the sources of this study and definitions for the category of Valentinian literature. The terms *the school of Valentinus* or *the Valentin-*

57. See Freidenreich, "Comparisons Compared," 91.

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ians do not appear in any of the Valentinian writings in the Nag Hammadi Library. Rather, the Valentinian group designation and the description of the Valentinian heresy come from the patristic sources. The finding of the Nag Hammadi writings in 1945 expanded our knowledge of early Christian traditions in general and Valentinianism in particular. However, the problem remains in deciding which writings in the Library of Nag Hammadi can be defined as Valentinian. Although the leaders of the nascent orthodoxy do not describe the teachings of the Valentinians objectively, we should be careful not to expand the category of the Valentinianism uncritically on the grounds of Nag Hammadi writings alone. Based on an extensive reading of the Valentinian sources, the closest exegetical and thematic parallels with Philo seem to come from the Valentinian source (*Exc.* 43.2–65) that is enclosed in the so-called eighth book of the *Stromateis* by Clement of Alexandria. This particular Valentinian teaching goes back to the Valentinian traditions in Alexandria and is connected to the teachings of the disciples of Ptolemy in Rome, which is described by Irenaeus in *Haer.* 1.1–7.

I begin chapter 3 by investigating the formation of the school of Valentinus and its social-historical contexts in early second-century Alexandria. The Jewish revolt and collapse of the Alexandrian Jewry created an urban social setting for the school of Valentinus and other gnostic *haireseis*. The allegorical method of interpretation connects these early second-century Christian Platonists in Alexandria to the hermeneutical heritage of the Hellenistic Judaism that includes the works of Philo. It is of note that both Philo and the Valentinians were proponents of multiple exegesis, meaning that the interpretation of a given text ought to be presented differently according to the intellectual level of their target audience. At the end of this chapter, I investigate two case studies (the firstborn in Exod 13:2–12 and the division of the law of Moses) that illustrate the multidimensionality of the exegetical tradition of Philo and Valentinians.

Chapter 4 presents a comparative analysis of the protological systems of Philo and the Valentinians. Both Philo and the Valentinians can be regarded as scriptural Middle Platonists who integrated biblical texts with neo-Pythagorean and Peripatetic metaphysics. I argue that the Valentinian protological model system described in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1.1–3, was developed on the grounds of a Platonizing interpretation of the prologue of the Gospel of John attested in *Exc.* 6–7 and Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.8.5. The Valentinian exegetes must have been aware that John 1:1–5 was written as a Platonizing description of the creation account in Genesis. John's prologue

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was therefore not chosen accidentally as a biblical basis for protological speculations in the Valentinian sources. Moreover, the Valentinian exegetes modified the structure of the prologue in a way that indicates that they also were familiar with exegetical patterns in Philo's *De opificio mundi* and the Allegorical Commentary.

In chapter 5, the focus of analysis shifts from the intelligible realm to the creation of the visible cosmos. First, I present a short philosophical introduction to the creation of matter in the Middle Platonic tradition, which formed the basis for speculations concerning the creation of matter both in Philo and in the Valentinian systems. While Philo can be associated with the school of Eudorus of Alexandria, the Valentinian view is closer to Moderatus of Gades. In the Valentinian accounts, Wisdom (or Sophia) has manifold intellectual links, which are related to the dyadic and monadic aspects of the divine world. I will argue that these views are found in a nascent stage in Philo's texts. Although Philo interpreted Gen 1:1 as denoting the intelligible cosmos, Valentinian exegetes saw it as a separation of psychic and hylic essences on the grounds of the ancient theory of *diakrisis*. A similar theory concerning the division of matter according to its physical characteristics into the four cosmic elements can be found in Philo. Notably, both Philo and the Valentinians interpreted Gen 1:3 as the manifestation of the everlasting light, which Valentinians associated with the manifestation of the psychic essence.

In chapter 6, I analyze the interpretations of the creation of humankind in Gen 1:26–27 and 2:7. Both Philo and the Valentinians were dependent on Middle Platonic anthropological theories, which formed the philosophical background for their allegorical interpretation. In the Allegorical Commentary, Philo's anthropological interpretations no longer describe the history of the first human beings; rather, Gen 1:26–27 and 2:7 are seen as universal realities about humankind, the structure of the soul, and ethics. I argue that Valentinian teachers were familiar with similar kinds of anthropological interpretations to that which Philo gives in this work, though they modify them in light of the myth of Sophia. At the end of this chapter, I investigate two anthropological fragments of Valentinus (the creation of Adam in *Strom*. 2.36.2–4 and the psalm *Harvest* in Hippolytus, *Haer.* 6.37.7).

The discussion in chapter 7 is an expansion of the anthropological issues handled in the previous chapter. The tripartite division of humankind is one of the main features of Valentinian anthropology. Although the names of the anthropological categories may have been derived from Paul,

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the division itself is closer to Philo's division of humankind on the grounds of an allegorical reading of Gen 1:26–27 and 2:7. The tripartite division of humankind forms also the basis for the allegory of Abel, Cain, and Seth, as well as the allegory of Israel as a spiritual human being who sees God, which parallel Philo's interpretations in the Allegorical Commentary. At the end of the chapter, I compare theories about the afterlife in Philo and the Valentinian sources. Valentinus maintained that the gift of immortality had been present in the world since the creation of Adam, although it must be activated through the practice of dying. Both the Valentinian teachers and Philo suggest that the ultimate telos of the human soul was assimilation with the intelligible cosmos, described as a translation of the soul into an angel.

Finally, in chapter 8, I offer some concluding remarks on the comparative analysis presented in chapters 4–7. I primarily address two questions. First, what kind of historical relationships can be derived from these parallels? Did Valentinian teachers know the works of Philo personally, or did they learn of these teachings indirectly, through notebooks or oral transmission? This historical conclusion also aims to provide some new insight into the question of the preservation of Philo's library after his death. Second, how can these parallels with Philo help modern scholars interpret the Valentinian texts? Do these parallels offer new insights or focal perspectives into Valentinian source material and the evolution of the gnostic school of thought in general?

Taking into account all the parallels with Philo in the Valentinian sources investigated in this study, I conclude that it is rather likely that there was a historical relationship between Philo's oeuvre and the Valentinian teachers. This study shows that Philo's influence on Valentinian exegesis may have come from various sources and through different groups of Valentinians, each with their own exegetical interests. These notions expand our knowledge not only concerning the preservation and circulation of Philo's texts in the latter part of the second century but also concerning the importance of the allegorical traditions of Hellenistic Judaism on Valentinus's school of thought and on Gnosticism in general.

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