Courtney J. P. Friesen

Attending Euripides: Philo of Alexandria's Dramatic Appropriations

Abstract: Philo of Alexandria speaks with fondness of his experience in the audience at a performance of Euripides, and throughout his corpus he quotes from this playwright on 21 occasions and from 10 different plays. As a writer whose driving interest was the exposition of Jewish scriptures in conjunction with Hellenistic philosophy, Philo's repeated recourse to tragedy is noteworthy and illustrative of his intellectual milieu. This study will consider why and how Philo deploys Euripides. Most often, his quotations are gnomic sayings and philosophical proof texts which were common currency among contemporary writers. With respect to at least one drama, however, the satyr-play *Syleus*, Philo engages in a more extensive discussion of its context, producing a string of five fragments, four of which are unattested elsewhere. By surveying his use of Euripides, I aim to make evident the extent to which Philo was dependent upon received philosophical and literary sources, along with moments of his own innovation as he reads Attic drama in connection with his distinctive Jewish religious commitments.

At first glance, Philo of Alexandria and Euripides appear to have little in common. They were divided by four centuries, inhabited separate continents, and identified with different religious traditions. Euripides' works were performed at Dionysiac festivals; his plays both celebrate and interrogate the ideals of Greek religion and society; by contrast, Philo's prose treatises are steeped in Jewish thought and frequently engage in the exposition of authoritative scriptural texts. In some other respects, however, the intellectual projects of Philo and Euripides converge. Both inherited established generic and literary models – dramatic conventions for Euripides, and accepted modes of biblical exegesis for Philo. Each adopted these, respectively, while at the same time transforming them in numerous and, at times, unexpected directions. And while their remarkable literary outputs had profound influences, the trajectory of their innovations were not directly realized: Euripides is the last of the celebrated Attic playwrights, and Philo's distinctive approach to the Bible would largely not be taken up by his fellow Jews, though many early Christians would appropriate it.

Additional similarities are evident. Euripides and Philo inherited corpora of literature consisting of heroic legends, whose meanings they probed and tested; for both, cultural or mythological heroes become, on occasion, vehicles for expressing contemporary philosophical problems. For instance, in a fragment of Euripides' *Chrysippus* (fr. 839 Kannicht), the chorus relate the cosmological views of the philos-

opher Anaxagoras.¹ Analogously, Philo depicts the divine calling of Abraham from the land of the Chaldeans as an experience akin to Plato's allegory of the cave, as the biblical patriarch awakens to the tenets of Middle-Platonism (*Abr.* 68–84). Elsewhere, both writers deploy mythology to illustrate their moral ideals, for example, that freedom with death is preferable to life as a slave.² In short, Euripides and Philo were critics of their respective cultures who appropriated traditional religious and mythological materials while at times filling them with radically new meanings.

These cursory observations foreground potential points of salience for thinking about Philo's reception of Euripides. That Philo, a Jewish philosophical interpreter of scripture, should have paid close attention to Euripides is, to my mind, inherently interesting. Indeed, Philo quotes from Euripides as many as 21 times, plus eight possible allusions, from 10 plays distributed across 14 of his treatises.³ By comparison, he quotes Aeschylus 6 times and Sophocles once, and Homer is quoted 25 times; these distributions reflect broader literary preferences of this time period.⁴ In this essay, my aim will not be an exhaustive treatment of these; rather, by analyzing a few representative examples, I hope to address larger questions of *how* and *why* Philo appropriates Euripides. That is, first by what means did he encounter the playwright, and what sources did he use? Here, a range of possibilities are considered, including attending public performances, reading directly from individual plays, and second-hand quotations from florilegia or other prose authors.⁵ Second, for what purpose did Philo deploy Euripidean poetry? Here likewise there is a variety of potential reasons: as moral exempla, as proof texts for philosophical doctrine, as sources of gnomic wisdom, or as advertisements of his level of education. These issues are largely interconnected and will resurface throughout the following analysis, which is organized primarily around two philosophical treatises. In the first section, I consider *De aeternitate mundi* in which Philo employs an oft-quoted fragment from the *Chrysippus*. Second, I turn to the *Quod omnis probus liber sit*, which involves the highest volume of Euripidean material. Here, I survey several relevant passages, culminating in Philo's most expansive use of a Euripidean drama, the *Syl-eus*. Finally, in the third section I take up Philo's claim in the same treatise to have

1 See below pp. 261–263.

2 See below on Polyxena and Heracles, pp. 264–268.

3 These are tabulated from Lincicum 2013b. Euripides is mentioned by name three times in the corpus, all in the *Quod omnis probus liber sit* (99; 116; 141).

4 These relative frequencies can be compared with surviving papyri. Garland 2004, 53 enumerates 176 for Euripides, 38 for Sophocles, and 35 for Aeschylus. See also Cribiore 2001, 198–99; Morgan 2003.

5 Poetic anthologies, or *florilegia*, were commonly collected and re-used widely in antiquity. For discussion, see Chadwick 1969; Konstan 2010. Aristobulus, for example, a second-century BC Jewish author, compiled “pagan” verses (esp. from Homer, Hesiod, and Linus) in support of Jewish beliefs and practices, such as the Sabbath (e.g., in Eus. *Praep. ev.* 13,12,9–16); similarly Ps.-Justin, *De monarchia* 2–5 contains excerpts especially from dramatic passages (including some forgeries) with similar objectives; see Gruen 2001, 72–74; Doering 2005, 4–15.

attended a performance of Euripides, exploring the significance of Philo placing himself in the audience.

There are numerous reasons why scholars of Euripidean drama and its reception might turn to Philo as a resource. Most immediately, he preserves several otherwise-lost fragments from the satyr-play *Syleus*, and given the poor preservation of this genre, this is most useful. In most cases, however, Philo's Euripidean material is attested elsewhere. Consequently, his distinctive contribution is that he offers a perspective on Euripides from the vantage point of educated Jewish culture. That is, Philo's use of Euripides reveals the breadth of the playwright's popularity and influence across antiquity, which were not limited to "pagans." Moreover, given Philo's own subsequent reception, his appropriation of Euripides may also have influenced early Christian intellectuals after him.⁶

1 Euripides' *Chrysippus* in *De aeternitate mundi*

In *De aeternitate mundi* one popular fragment of Euripides' *Chrysippus* (fr. 839 Kannicht) is repeated on three occasions in connection with the nature of the cosmos (*Aet.* 5, 30, 144; and also *Leg.* 1,7), making it (along with the *Syleus*) the most quoted Euripidean play in the Philonic corpus.⁷ Construal of how and why Philo deploys this excerpt is distinctly challenging, however, because the treatise is a doxography and reports numerous ideas and arguments that are not Philo's own.⁸ *De aeternitate mundi* explores the question of whether the world was created (γενητός) and whether it is destructible (ἄφθαρτος). Three options are possible, each of which corresponds to particular philosophical schools. First, that the world is created and destructible (Stoics, Democritus, and Epicurus); second, that it is uncreated and indestructible (Aristotle); and, third, that it is created and indestructible (Plato). Philo's position agrees with the third, which he argues was also held by Hesiod and taught by Moses before him (*Aet.* 17–19). In the remainder of the treatise (20–149), he outlines the arguments for the Aristotelian view, and closes by anticipating

⁶ Several studies of Philo and Greek drama have appeared in recent years: see Koskeniemi 2006; Bloch 2009, 66–67, 70–72; Jay 2013, 221–232; Lincicum 2013a; Jay 2017; Friesen 2017. On Philo and classical poetry more broadly, see also Koskeniemi 2010; Berthelot 2011; Niehoff 2012; Nieto Hernández 2014; Friesen 2015a. Also especially relevant for Philo's intellectual and literary milieu and his educational background: Alexandre 1967, 105–129; Mendelson 1982, 25–46; Collins 1997, 148–153; Alexandre 2009; Niehoff 2011, 133–185; Koskeniemi 2014.

⁷ On this treatise, see Arnaldez and Pouilloux 1969; Runia 1981; Niehoff 2006; Fuglseth 2006; Runia 2008, 34–39.

⁸ Some Philo scholars have questioned its authenticity precisely because the majority of the treatise advocates a position clearly at odds with that of Philo. Now, however, many are inclined to accept it: see esp. Arnaldez and Pouilloux 1969, 12–37; Runia 1981; Niehoff 2006; Runia 2008, 34. Against authenticity, see Fuglseth 2006.

his exposition of counter-arguments (150); but this was either not completed or has not survived.

It is within the context of Philo's exposition of the Aristotelean position that he provides the longest fragment of the *Chrysippus*:

κατὰ γὰρ τὸν τραγικὸν⁹
 χωρεῖ δ' ὀπίσω
 τὰ μὲν ἐκ γαίης φύντ' εἰς γαῖαν
 τὰ δ' ἀπ' αἰθερίου βλαστόντα γονῆς
 εἰς οὐράνιον πόλον ἦλθε πάλιν·
 θνήσκει δ' οὐδὲν τῶν γιγνομένων,
 διακρινόμενον δ' ἄλλο πρὸς ἄλλο
 μορφήν ἰδίαν ἀπέδειξεν.

For according to the tragedian,

The things which by nature come from earth return back into the earth, and the things which are born from ethereal stock go back into the heavenly sphere. None of the things coming to be dies, but as one thing dissolves into another, it displays its own form. (*Aet.* 30; fr. 839,8–14 Kannicht)¹⁰

It is easy enough to see that this fragment fits well within the context, as it expresses succinctly the eternal nature of matter.¹¹ Because these lines are cited as support for the Aristotelean position he is reporting, it is highly probably that Philo derived them from one of his philosophical sources. Indeed, the larger section in which this Euripidean excerpt occurs has been identified as a fragment of Aristotle (*Aet.* 28–34 = *Arist.* fr. 20 Rose). Likewise, later in the treatise when Philo quotes 3 lines of the same fragment (*Aet.* 144), it falls within a passage that Philo himself attributes to Theophrastus (*Aet.* 117–149 = *Theophr.* fr. 184 Sharples). Of course, it is impossible to be certain to what extent Philo maintains or alters the language of his doxographical materials, and some have argued that the style is decidedly Philo's own.¹² As

⁹ Briefer quotations of the same fragment (839.12–14) occur at *Aet.* 5, 144; and *Leg.* 1.7. Cf. the introductory formulae: καὶ ὁ τραγικός (*Aet.* 5); κατὰ τὸ φιλοσοφηθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ τραγικοῦ (*Aet.* 144); ὥστε ἀληθὲς εἶναι τὸ λεγόμενον ὅτι (*Leg.* 1.7).

¹⁰ All translations are my own throughout.

¹¹ On the relationship between Euripides and contemporary metaphysics and theories of cosmic origins, see Dillon 2004, 49–61.

¹² This is argued by Wiersma 1940 on the basis of vocabulary and prose-style; see also Kidd 1996, 137; Sedley 1998, 333. In fact, Sedley takes the quotation of fr. 839 Kannicht in *Aet.* 144 as evidence for Philonic intervention because the same fragment had already been quoted at 5 and 30; however, it seems just as likely that Philo found this in his Aristotelean sources, that of Theophrastus or otherwise. Runia 2008 has clearly demonstrated the challenges of precisely delineating Philo's sources in this treatise, and his conclusions caution against certainty: "There is no way of determining whether Philo used this or any other source directly. The various arguments in *De aeternitate* most likely have a disparate origin. Philo's doxography makes use of existing source material, but its innovative structure is his own contribution" (at 39). On Philo and philosophical doxography, see also Lévy 2005.

such, the possibility that Philo himself inserted the poetic fragment within his philosophical sources cannot be excluded, though it seems more likely, to me at least, that he encountered it already imbedded within them.

It is also noteworthy that by the time of Philo this Euripidean fragment had developed a life of its own within philosophical discourse quite removed from any dramatic context. Lines 1–7 are quoted by Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 6,17), and Lucretius adapts the entire 14 lines to Latin (2,991–1006). Vitruvius deploys the same lines and takes them as evidence that Euripides was a student of Anaxagoras, and thus a “philosopher of the stage” (*philosophus scaenicus*, 8 praef. 1); in the context of Vitruvius’ argument they support his own claims regarding the necessity of the four elements – air, fire, water, and earth – for all life. Numerous others quote the fragment, including Heraclitus (*All.* 22,11), Marcus Aurelius (7,50), and Clement (*Strom.* 6,2,23).¹³ As with these other authors, Philo shows little interest in or knowledge of the play itself. While he is aware that it comes from a tragedy, he offers no further details regarding its playwright, speaker, or plot. Indeed, ancient writers who comment on the dramatic content of the *Chrysippus* do so with a view to one issue, namely, the practice of pederasty (Chrysippus was raped by Laius and in some sources killed himself).¹⁴ If Philo was aware of this feature of the tragedy, he gives no indication. Indeed, it is unclear how the metaphysical speculation in the fragment quoted by Philo relates to the wider context of the play.¹⁵

In short: although several questions remain open, Philo’s use of the *Chrysippus* fragment provides a valuable starting point for his engagement with Euripides. In this case, he is concerned with the philosophical aspects emerging from the tragedy quite detached from its dramatic context, which is, of course, perfectly consistent with the playwright’s reputation as “the philosopher of the stage.” It is most likely that Philo has taken his quote from its place within a pre-existing philosophical tradition, in which this poetic passage had an established function as a proof text.¹⁶

¹³ Cf. Pacuvius, *Chrysaë* fr. 6 Ribbeck.

¹⁴ See Ael. *NA* 6,15; *VH* 2,21; Cic. *Tusc.* 4,71

¹⁵ One might speculate that in fr. 839,1–7 Kannicht, where the chorus celebrates the reproductive fertility of the earth mother (Gaia) and sky god (Zeus), they are advocating for heterosexual relationships in opposition to Laius’ violent desire for Chrysippus.

¹⁶ Elsewhere I have argued for a similar phenomenon in Philo’s use of Hesiod; Friesen 2015a. In *Ebr.* 150, he quotes *Works and Days* 287, 289–292 in support of his contention that the road to virtue is more difficult. The same Hesiodic lines were also deployed with similar moral applications by Plato (*Rep.* 2, 364d; *Lg.* 4, 718e), Xenophon (*Mem.* 2,1,20), and Plutarch (*De aud. poet.* 24D–F).

2 *Quod omnis probus liber sit*: Euripides and Moral Exempla

Similar processes of poetic appropriation are evident in the *Quod omnis probus liber sit*. Like *De aeternitate mundi*, this is a philosophical treatise, though, by contrast, it takes up an ethical topic, namely, the stoic paradox that every good person is free even if enslaved.¹⁷ The treatise is structured around numerous exempla that corroborate its thesis, most of which come from Greek and Roman culture, commonly known from history, literature, and contemporary society.¹⁸ It is, of course, not unusual that a learned author such as Philo would employ Greek poetry throughout such a work. Of Philo's 21 quotations from Euripides, 10 occur in the *Probus*; in addition, more explicitly than any of his other treatises, in the *Probus* Philo offers programmatic statements regarding the value of poetry: he maintains that it is "fitting to heed poets" (ποιηταῖς προσέχειν ἄξιον):

διὰ τί δὲ οὐ μέλλομεν; παιδευταὶ γὰρ οὗτοί γε τοῦ σύμπαντος βίου, καθάπερ ἰδίᾳ γονεῖς παῖδας καὶ οὗτοι δημοσίᾳ τὰς πόλεις σωφρονίζοντες.

Why shouldn't we? They are educators through our entire life, just as parents train their children in moderation privately, so also they do for their cities publicly. (*Prob.* 143)¹⁹

In keeping with this, Philo frequently inserts Euripidean lines as common aphorisms with little or no attention to the source or context. Sometimes these include introductory formulae as in *Prob.* 22: "The author of the following trimeter is praised by some: 'Who, while taking no thought of dying, is a slave?'" (ἐπαινεῖται παρά τισιν ὁ τὸ τρίμετρον ἐκεῖνο ποιήσας "τίς δ' ἐστὶ δοῦλος τοῦ θανεῖν ἄφροντις ὢν;" fr. 958 Kannicht).²⁰ But elsewhere there is no formula, as in *Prob.* 145: "moderate means are sufficient for me" (ἄρκεῖ μετρία βιοτά μοι, fr. 893,1 Kannicht).²¹

¹⁷ On this treatise, see Petit 1974. The same Stoic paradox is discussed in similar ways by Cicero (*Paradoxa Stoicorum* 5) and Epictetus (*Diss.* 4,1); for comparison, see Petit 1974, 54–57. Along with clear correlations with Stoicism, Cynic influence on the treatise is also evident. As with Stoicism, Cynicism was concerned with slavery and freedom as moral categories; see Hense 1892; Helm 1906, 141–144.

¹⁸ Nevertheless the most prominent exemplar for Philo is the Jewish community of the Essenes (*Prob.* 75–91); cf. his idealization of the Therapeutae in *De vita contemplativa*. For an outline of the treatise and list of exempla, see Petit 1974, 29–34.

¹⁹ Compare the comment of Dio Chrysostom in his *Alexandrian Oration* that this city lacked dramatic poets, such as those who flourished in Athens where they had the freedom "to reproach not only individual men but also the city collectively" (μὴ μόνον τοὺς κατ' ἄνδρα ἐλέγχειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινῇ τὴν πόλιν, *or.* 32,6).

²⁰ The same verse is quoted elsewhere: Plut. *De aud. poet.* 34B; *Cons. ad Apoll.* 106D; Cic. *Att.* 9,2a,2; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 4,7,49,4.

²¹ Four lines of this fragment are quoted by Athenaeus (4,158e).

On other occasions, however, Philo expresses interest in the context of the drama. For instance, he identifies Polyxena as the speaker of the following lines:

Πολυξένην δὲ ὁ τραγικὸς Εὐριπίδης ἀλογοῦσαν μὲν θανάτου φροντίζουσαν δὲ ἐλευθερίας εἰσάγει δι' ὧν φησιν·

ἐκοῦσα θνήσκω, μή τις ἄψηται χροὸς
τοῦμοῦ· παρέξω γὰρ δέρην εὐκαρδίως,
ἐλευθέραν δέ μ', ὥς ἐλευθέρα θάνω,
πρὸς θεῶν μεθέντες κτείνατε.

Euripides the tragedian presents Polyxena as paying no heed to death but pondering freedom through what she says:

I die willingly, lest someone touch my body; for I shall offer my neck gladly, but, by the gods, allow me to be free when you kill me, so that I might die free. (*Prob.* 116, quoting *Hec.* 548–551)

Here, Philo's citation of Euripides provides him with a moral exemplum illustrating his central thesis regarding the freedom of the virtuous person. Citing additional examples of women and children he deploys an *a fortiori* argument:

εἴτ' οἰόμεθα γυναῖοις μὲν καὶ μειρακίοις, ὧν τὰ μὲν φύσει ὀλιγόφρονα τὰ δὲ ἡλικία εὐολίσθω χρώμενα, τοσοῦτον ἐλευθερίας ἔρωτα ἐντήκεσθαι [...] τοὺς δὲ σοφίας ἀκράτου σπάσαντας οὐκ εὐθὺς ἐλευθέρους εἶναι;

Can we suppose that such a love of freedom be absorbed in women and boys, the former possessing little understanding by nature, the latter an unstable age, but that those who draw in unmixed wisdom not be free immediately? (*Prob.* 117)²²

This gendered application of Polyxena is consistent with Philo's ideology elsewhere, as he often portrays moral and spiritual advancement as a progression from feminine to masculine (e.g., *Opif.* 165; *Leg.* 2,38–39; *Spec.* 1,200–201; *Post.* 177; *Ebr.* 33, 55, 59–60).²³ At the same time, as with the *Chrysippus* discussed above, excerpts from and references to the *Hecuba* are frequent in antiquity.²⁴ Indeed, Polyxena's noble death was a common exemplum and, occasionally, as in Philo, applied with an emphasis on gender. For instance, in a statement attributed to Demosthenes immediately prior to his suicide to circumvent enslavement by Antipater, the orator quotes *Hecuba* 568–569 and comments, “even a girl did these things; but will Demosthenes choose an ugly life over a noble death?” (κόρη καὶ ταῦτα· Δεμοσθένης δὲ εὐσχήμονος θανάτου βίον προκρινεῖ ἀσχήμονα, Ps.-Lucian, *Dem. Enc.* 47). Likewise, in a narrative closely dependent on Euripides, Ovid foregrounds Polyxena's gender, portraying her

²² Along with Polyxena, Philo notes a Laconian child who took his own life to avoid becoming a slave (*Prob.* 114); and certain Dardanian women who, when captured, threw their children into the river to prevent their enslavement (115).

²³ See Mattila 1996; Friesen 2015b, 198–206.

²⁴ On reception of the *Hecuba* generally, see Heath 1987; on Philo in particular, Friesen 2016, 630–639.

as “a brave and miserable girl, and more than a female” (*fortis et infelix et plus quam femina virgo*, *Met.* 13,451).²⁵ Given the frequency with which the *Hecuba* was cited with similar moral applications, there is a strong possibility that Philo encountered these lines already excerpted for use in ethical instruction.

In contrast to these examples, Philo’s use of the *Syleus* in *Prob.* 99–104 stands out in several regards.²⁶ This is by far his most sustained and extensive deployment of a play by Euripides (or any other poet) consisting of 5 fragments (fr. 687–691 Kannicht) totaling 17 lines, and after the first, fourth, and fifth fragments Philo offers plot summary and analysis. Nevertheless, the opening fragment is in some regards characteristic of his use of Euripides elsewhere, as has already been noted above.

ἴδε γοῦν οἷα παρ’ Εὐριπίδῃ φησὶν ὁ Ἡρακλῆς·
 πίμπρα,²⁷ κάταιθε σάρκας, ἐμπλήσθητί μου
 πίνων κελαινὸν αἶμα· πρόσθε γὰρ κάτω
 γῆς εἰσὶν ἄστρο γῆ τ’ ἄνεισ’ εἰς αἰθέρα,
 πρὶν ἐξ ἐμοῦ σοι θῶπ’ ἀπαντῆσαι λόγον.

See, then, what kinds of things Heracles says in Euripides:

Ignite and burn up my flesh, be filled with drinking my dark blood; for the stars will come down to earth, and the earth ascend to the sky before a flattering word from me meets you. (*Prob.* 99; fr. 687 Kannicht)

Like Polyxena, Heracles’ willing acceptance of death establishes the nature of true freedom. As Philo notes, to speak a word of flattery is “most befitting a slave” (δουλοπρεπέστατα, *Prob.* 99), and here the hero rejects any expectation that he should do so – he would prefer to die.²⁸ Moreover, as with the *Hecuba*, these lines appear to have had a popular and independent function: the fragment is also attested in Artemidorus (4,59), Eusebius (*Praep. ev.* 6,6,2), and Michael Psellus (*Poemata* 21,275–276). Philo himself was fond of these lines and quotes them on multiple occasions (*Leg.* 3,202; *Ios.* 78; *Prob.* 25) as he did with the *Chrysippus*; in each other instance, however, he makes no mention of the identity of the speaker or of the dramatic context.²⁹ In short, Philo’s quotation of fr. 687 Kannicht has the hallmarks of a popular

25 Additional citations of the *Hecuba* that focus on Polyxena’s heroic courage in death include Plin. *Ep.* 4,11,9; Hermog. *Inv.* 4,12; Clem. Al. *Strom.* 2,23,144,2; see also Sen. *Tro.* 1118–1164; Lucian, *Nigr.* 11,8; *Pisc.* 31,16.

26 For discussion and reconstruction of the *Syleus*, see Galinsky 1972, 83–84; Sutton 1980, 66–67; Pechstein 1998, 243–283. On Philo’s application of this play in *Prob.* 99–104, see Koskenniemi 2006, 139–141.

27 *Prob.* 25 reads ὅπτα in place of πίμπρα.

28 On flattery, see also Epict. *Diss.* 4,1,55.

29 In *Prob.* 25, this fragment is introduced as a generic response of a free person to the abuses of enslavement: “acting with youthful vigor, he proclaims in response, ‘roast and burn up my flesh’” (νεανιενυσάμενος δὲ ἀντικηρύξει· ὅπτα, κάταιθε σάρκας). Elsewhere, it is introduced with “the tragic expression in the face of suffering” (τὸ τραγικὸν πρὸς τὴν ἀλγυδὸνα, *Leg.* 3,102) and “as the tra-

excerpt which, as in other instances, Philo could have accessed second hand via a florilegium or excerpted within a philosophical treatise.³⁰

By contrast to Philo's first fragment from the *Syleus*, his supplementary addition of further quotations and extended exposition of the play differ substantially from his treatment of other Euripidean plays. First, importantly, the remaining four fragments (fr. 688–691 Kannicht) are completely unattested elsewhere. To these, Philo adds relevant details from the plot. Hermes brings the disguised Heracles to the slave market in order to sell him to Syleus as a ruse to destroy the cruel tyrant. Although Heracles endeavors to disguise himself, his heroic character shows through. To illustrate, Philo quotes Hermes' comments:

ὁ γοῦν Ἑρμῆς πυνθανομένῳ μὲν, εἰ φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἀποκρίνεται·
 ἥκιστα φαῦλος, ἀλλὰ πᾶν τοῦναντίον
 πρὸς σχῆμα σεμνὸς καὶ ταπεινὸς οὐδ' ἄγαν
 εὐογκος ὡς ἂν δοῦλος, ἀλλὰ καὶ στολὴν
 ἰδόντι λαμπρὸς καὶ ξύλῳ δραστήριος.

Hermes answers the one inquiring whether [Heracles] is base:

Is he most base? Rather, quite the opposite, he is honorable and not humble in form, nor overly bulky as a slave would be, but to an observer he is sharply dressed and effective with a club. (*Prob.* 101; fr. 688 Kannicht)

Because of this, a speaker (either Hermes or Syleus) expresses some doubt as to his capability of assuming the role of a slave:

οὐδεὶς δ' ἐς οἴκους δεσπότης ἀμείνονας
 αὐτοῦ πρίασθαι βούλεται [...]
 τὸ εἶδος αὐτό σου κατηγορεῖ
 σιγῶντος, ὡς εἴης ἂν οὐχ ὑπήκοος,
 τάσσειν δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ ὑπακούειν θέλοις.

No one wishes to purchase masters for his house that are stronger than himself [...] Though you are silent, your form itself indicates that you would not be obedient, but that you would rather give orders than take them. (*Prob.* 101; fr. 689–690 Kannicht)³¹

gedian says" (ὡς ὁ τραγικός φησιν, *Ios.* 78). See also Koskenniemi 2006, 143–44; Oertelt 2015, 217–218.

30 The possibility that this fragment existed as an independent excerpt is strengthened by its conflation with *Phoen.* 521 in *Ios.* 78, a combination shared by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 2,18). Assuming that this shared conflation is not mere coincidence, it must be the case that either (i) Eusebius derived it from Philo, or (ii) they had independent access to a source containing the conflation. Against (i) it should be noted that Eusebius was apparently unaware of Philo's *Ios.*, as it is absent from his enumeration of the latter's works (*Hist. eccl.* 2,18). Note also that Philo, *Leg.* 3,201–202 which quotes fr. 687 Kannicht is included by von Arnim among the fragments of Chrysippus (SVF 3,676).

31 Although Philo inserts no break preceding fr. 689 Kannicht, but quotes it in continuity with 688, it is probable that the speaker of 689 and 690 is Syleus; see Pechstein 1998, 263–64.

Philo moves on to summarize in brief what happens next: Syleus did in fact purchase Heracles, who not long thereafter indulges himself on his master's meat and wine:

τὸν μὲν γὰρ ἄριστον τῶν ἐκεῖ ταύρων καταθύσας Διὶ πρόφασιν εὐωχεῖτο, πολὺν δ' οἶνον ἐκφορήσας ἀθρόον εὖ μάλα κατακλιθεὶς ἡκρατίζετο.

Having sacrificed the best of the bulls there to Zeus as a pretense, he was feasting, and having plundered much wine, he consumed it unmixed all at once after reclining very happily. (*Prob.* 102)

Syleus returns from the field and angrily confronts his gluttonous slave. Still, Heracles is undaunted and in the final fragment quoted by Philo he dares his “master” to a drinking contest:

κλίθητι καὶ πῖωμεν, ἐν τούτῳ δέ μου
τὴν πείραν εὐθὺς λάμβαν', εἰ κρείσσων ἔσῃ.

Lie down, and let us drink; take the test at once to see whether in this you are stronger than I. (*Prob.* 103; fr. 691 Kannicht)

With this humorous conclusion, Heracles' unwavering persistence in excessive eating and drinking establish him as a true master rather than a slave, as his comic persona shines through.³² This reveals, Philo argues, that it is rather the institution of slavery itself which is “a joke” (γέλως) and “much folly” (φλυαρία πολλή, 104).³³

With this play, then, unlike many other instances, Philo has done much more than merely adopt a second-hand quotation. Whereas his use of fr. 687 fits such a model, his expanded discussion together with further quotations and summary of the play exhibits a sustained engagement with his source. Of course, we cannot be certain by what means Philo acquired these 17 lines, but it is clearly possible that he had access to a complete or abbreviated text of the *Syleus*.³⁴

³² Defeating his foes in eating and drinking competitions is attested elsewhere for Heracles; see, e.g., Athenaeus 10,411e–412b on Lepreus. Heracles as a buffoon, a glutton and drunkard, was a stock character in Greek comedy (cf. Athenaeus 10,411b). This is evident in the earliest surviving fragments (e.g., Epicharmus, fr. 18 Kassel-Austin), and had developed into a stereotype by the time of Aristophanes (see *Pax* 741–742; *Av.* 1604; cf. *Ra.* 503–548; Eur. *Alc.* 747–772). See Hošek 1963. If we accept Dio Chrysostom's assessment, the Alexandrians were especially fond of this comic hero. While they are not amused by drunken slaves on stage in general, Dio claims that “they think it hilarious when they see such a Heracles carried about and, as customary, dressed in saffron” (τὸν δὲ Ἡρακλέα τοιοῦτον ὁρᾶσι γελοῖον δοκεῖ, παραφερόμενον, καὶ καθάπερ εἰώθασιν, ἐν κροκωτῷ, *Or.* 32,94). Early Christian writers seize upon the excessive of Heracles in their denunciations of paganism (e.g., Orig. *c. Cels.* 3,22; Euseb. *Theoph.* 3,61; Lactant. *Div. inst.* 1,9).

³³ Philo omits the conclusion of the myth in which Heracles diverts a river in order to flood Syleus' fields and ultimately kills him and his daughter; see Apollod. 2,6,3; Diod. Sic. 4,31,7; Tzetz. *Chil.* 2,435; *Prol. Com.* 2,59–70; for discussion, Pechstein 1998, 252–254.

³⁴ Classical satyr plays were apparently still performed in the imperial period; on evidence from Asia Minor, see Graf 2015. Helm 1906, 141–144, following Hense 1892, 224–28 proposed that Philo may

3 Philo in the Alexandrian Audience?

Having surveyed Philo's textual engagements with Euripidean excerpts, we can now consider the question of his attendance at the theater. Among the five plays of Euripides quoted by Philo in the *Probus*, in the case of one, he claims to have seen it performed:

πρώην ὑποκριτῶν τραγωδίαν ἐπιδεικνυμένων καὶ τὰ παρ' Εὐριπίδῃ τρίμετρα διεξιόντων ἐκεῖνα
τοῦλεύθερον γὰρ ὄνομα παντὸς ἄξιον,
κἂν σμίκρ' ἔχη τις, μεγάλ' ἔχειν νομιζέτω,
τοὺς θεατὰς ἅπαντας εἶδον ἐπ' ἄκρων ποδῶν ὑπ' ἐκπλήξεως ἀναστάντας καὶ φωναῖς μείζοσι καὶ
ἐκβοήσεσιν ἐπαλλήλοις ἔπαινον μὲν τῆς γνώμης, ἔπαινον δὲ καὶ τοῦ ποιητοῦ συνείροντας, ὅς οὐ
μόνον τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἔργοις ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦνομα αὐτῆς ἐσέμνυνεν.

Recently when actors were performing a tragedy and they came through these trimeters by Euripides –

Freedom is a name worthy of everything, even if someone has little, let him understand that he has much (fr. 275,3–4 Kannicht) –

I saw all the audience members standing up on their tip-toes from amazement, and with great voices and responsive shouts jointly declaring their praise of the maxim and praise also of the poet, who revered not only freedom in actions but also its very name. (*Prob.* 141)³⁵

This passage is one of two instances in which Philo mentions attending a play (see also *Ebr.* 177), and it is worth exploring its implications. Like other elite Greeks and Romans, Philo can be critical of public entertainments and he disliked the spectacles of games and festivals (*Agr.* 35, 111–126).³⁶ Professional actors were much derided, and in keeping with this Philo disdained Emperor Gaius for his theatrical pretensions, not least because he impersonated gods and demigods in a misguided attempt to attain divine honors (*Legat.* 78–113; see also Suet. *Calig.* 54,2; Cass. Dio 59,5,5). Moreover, Philo likens Gaius' treatment of the Jews to a theatrical production of trag-

have taken these lines from the Cynic Bion of Borysthenes, who according to Stobaeus (3,2,38; 4,19,42 = F11 Kindstrand) wrote “virtuous slaves are free, but wicked freemen are slaves of many passions” (οἱ ἀγαθοὶ οἰκέται ἐλεύθεροι, οἱ δὲ πονηροὶ ἐλεύθεποι δοῦλοι πολλῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν). Bion reportedly composed a diatribe entitled, “On Slavery” (Περὶ δουλείας). Helm observes, moreover, striking correlations between the *Syleus* and Cynic valorization of Heracles in Lucian's *Philosophies for Sale*. When Diogenes the Cynic comes up for auction, Hermes notes that he represents a “free life” (βίον ἐλεύθερον, 7). A prospective buyer fears him due to his savage appearance, not least that he “wields a club” (διήρται τὸ ξύλον, 7). Asked whom he imitates (ζηλοῖς δὲ δὴ τίνα;), he answers Heracles (τὸν Ἡρακλέα, 8), though his is a figurative rather than literal lion's skin. While these parallels are striking and relevant, direct textual evidence for the use of the *Syleus* in Cynic writings is entirely absent, and consequently Hense's and Helm's theory of Philo's dependence remains inconclusive.

³⁵ Although Philo does not provide the play's title, it is identified as the *Auge* by Stobaeus, who quotes the same fragment with two additional lines (4,8,3).

³⁶ On this Roman sentiment, see Edwards 1993, 98–136.

edy (*Legat.* 233–236, 349–367).³⁷ Such moral sentiments regarding the theater, it seems, however, did not keep people away from performances of plays.

Two features of Philo's depiction of his own experience attending the theater should be pointed out. First, he was apparently more interested in the reaction of the audience than the play itself. This emerges from the structure of the sentence, in that the quotation is embedded within a genitive absolute ("when the actors were reciting..." *πρῶην ὑποκριτῶν τραγωδίαν ἐπιδεικνυμένων*). Only thereafter does the main clause follow ("I saw all the audience members," *τοὺς θεατὰς ἅπαντας εἶδον*), focalizing interest on the spectators rather than the drama itself. A similar interest underlies Philo's other mention of theater attendance in *Ebr.* 177, where he notes the range of responses in the audience to illustrate how various stimuli affect people differently. In this way, Philo distances himself from the audience, positioning himself as a meta-observer of the tragedy.³⁸

Second, it is relevant that Philo identifies Euripides as the playwright of the performance he attended. This is not surprising given his popularity throughout antiquity, but there is an additional dimension to be considered. Euripidean performances had a distinct intellectual pedigree; in particular, Socrates, a nearly-universal philosophical hero, was reputed to have been especially fond of this playwright.³⁹ While this connection had been ridiculed by Aristophanes (*Ra.* 1491–1499), in the later biographical tradition details of their relationship grew and came to be viewed in a more positive light. It was said in the *Vita* of Euripides that Socrates collaborated with him in composition (*Vit. Eur.* T 1, IA,3 Kannicht).⁴⁰ Moreover, Diogenes Laertius reports that Socrates attended the *Auge*, the very same play apparently viewed by Philo; in the case of Socrates, however, the philosopher disapproved of at least one aspect of the play's moral sentiment (2,22). In addition, Aelian claims that Socrates rarely attended the theater, except when Euripides was staging a new play (*VH* 2,13 = T 47a Kannicht). This tradition of Socrates' partiality for Euripides, provides a clear incentive for Philo to place himself in that audience. While this need not cast doubt on the historical veracity of Philo's theater-attendance, it does highlight the intellectual self-fashioning underlying it. That is, it is possible to take his claim at face value: Philo heard the two trimeters in a performance and recalled them suffi-

³⁷ See Friesen 2015b, 90–92; Friesen 2017. Philo was similarly contemptuous of Flaccus' treatment of the Jews in Alexandria, especially because of its theatricality (e.g., *Flacc.* 34–39; 72); see Calabi 2003; Bloch 2009, 73–74; Jay 2017.

³⁸ Jay 2013, 226 compares Philo's approach to the theater with Horace's comment (*Ep.* 2,1,197–198) on Democritus who likewise watched the crowd more than the show. A similarly detached mode of viewing tragedy is advocated by Epictetus, who warns against identifying with the grief of tragic suffering; rather, he counsels the sage to find in tragedy illustrations of undue fixation on externals (*Epict. Diss.* 1,4,26). On this, see Nussbaum 1993, 128–130; Halliwell 2005, 405–409.

³⁹ On the possibility and nature of an interaction between Socrates and Euripides, see Dodds 1964, 186–188; Irwin 1983; Dillon 2004, 70–73.

⁴⁰ Also Diog. Laert. 2,18; cf. T 2,4; T 3,2 Kannicht. On the *Vita*, see Lefkowitz 1979; Lefkowitz 2012, 87–103.

ciently to reproduce them later in his treatise. It is suggestive, however, that the very same lines also appear as an excerpt in Stobaeus, raising the possibility that Philo in fact encountered them via a gnostic anthology as he did in so many other cases.⁴¹

4 Conclusions

I conclude briefly by returning to my opening question: how and why did Philo appropriate the dramas of Euripides? The texts surveyed herein have indicated the commonest reason Philo quotes the playwright is to bolster or illustrate a philosophical argument. In this regard, Philo's approach to Euripides is not unique. Indeed, Euripides' reputation as the "philosopher of the stage," reveals that this approach was commonplace. Many of the excerpts deployed by Philo are frequently found in other authors often addressing similar topics ranging from metaphysics to ethics. This leaves the clear impression that Philo's Euripidean verses came to him second hand, already excerpted as gnostic aphorisms or embedded within established philosophical discourse. This is the case even when Philo claims to have heard the verses for himself performed in the theater. With his attendance of Euripides, Philo places himself squarely in a philosophical tradition connected with Socrates. Yet, whereas much of Philo's engagement with this playwright is plainly derivative, one case stands out as a counterexample: Philo quotes five fragments from the *Syleus*, four of which are unattested elsewhere. Along with these verses, he displays considerable knowledge of the play, summarizing its dramatic action.

What emerges clearly from this study is that Euripides continued to be a popular poet in first-century Roman Alexandria. In particular, his dramatic poetry – both tragedy and satyr play – was of interest not merely to educated "pagan" Greeks and Romans, but also to a Jewish intellectual, one immersed in biblical law and piety.

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⁴¹ In two other instances where Philo quotes Euripidean fragments as gnostic sayings, the same fragment is preserved in a fuller form by Stobaeus: *Antiope* fr. 200 Kannicht in *Spec.* 4,47 and *Stob.* 4,13,3; *Ino* fr. 420 Kannicht in *Somn.* 1,154; *Mos.* 1,31; and *Stob.* 4,41,1.

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