

Per Jarle Bekken's *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*: A Review Article

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Abstract

This article reviews Per Jarle Bekken's recent book on Philo and Paul (Galatians 3) on Abraham. As a seminal work in Pauline studies, a longer review is justified, delving into Philo and Paul from my own perspective. Bekken is commended for having explored Galatians in light of Philo's view on Abraham as the model convert. Hence, proselytism becomes a key notion in his reading of Galatians. The gentile Christ-believers are included, not as gentiles, but as Jewish proselytes, in analogy with how Philo conceives of proselytes after the model of Abraham. In my view, Bekken's investigation makes Philo too Pauline and Paul too Philonic.

Key words

Abraham, proselytism, law, Spirit, Israel, *paideia*, Paul, Philo of Alexandria

1. Introduction

"Of making books there is no end" (Eccl 12:12). The truth of this ancient dictum is certainly felt in Pauline studies. In the flow of new books and contributions, some stand out, though, due to method, viewpoints, or claims implying a shift in the interpretation of Paul and/or his letters. In a special way, these contributions deserve the attention of fellow scholars. They present fresh readings not only on specific passages or details in the Pauline epistles, but they claim to alter the larger picture or framework of understanding within which present-day Pauline research is taking place. Per Jarle Bekken, Professor at Nord University, Bodø, Norway, has presented such a study. It justifies more than an

ordinary review and prompts an extended response to his book *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham in Galatians 3 in the Jewish Context*.¹

2. Presentation

Bekken's book enters hotly disputed topics in recent Pauline scholarship and claims to have identified keys to unlock the so-called "gentile problem" in Galatians: What do Christ-believing gentiles become? Paul calls them "children of Abraham" in Galatians 3, but how can that be understood? Against the majority view that gentiles are included as gentiles, Bekken contends that they are seen as Jewish proselytes "apart from circumcision and a way of life under the jurisdiction of the Law"². They receive a Jewish identity since they share fundamental traits with Abraham, the model convert or proselyte. The fundamental traits shared are two. Firstly, they receive, as did Abraham, the *Spirit* (Gal 3:1–5), and secondly, they are *transformed* according to virtue, which is also the focal point of how Philo conceives Abraham's biography. Thus, Bekken's study places itself at the center of the Abraham discourse in the Galatian debate.³

Philo is not only the material to which Paul is compared here; he is more or less the *method* by which Paul is interpreted. The Pauline passage Gal 3:6–29 is scrutinized with the Philonic Abraham treatises as mirrors. Bekken shows himself as a student of a doyen within Philonic New Testament studies, Peder Borgen; albeit he also differs from his teacher.⁴ Bekken argues that Paul and Philo are not as different as often claimed by scholars who traditionally contrast the reading of Gen 15:6 in Paul (Gal 3) with that found in Philo. Bekken illustrates this by citing various scholars like H. Najman. Najman says, with regard to Philo, "the perfect authoritative copy of the Law of Nature is to be found, not only in the unwritten law, exhibited by the life of the sage (=Abraham), but also in the written law of Moses."⁵ Bekken argues against this by pointing to the two jurisdictions "which Philo is careful to keep apart, i.e.,

¹ Per Jarle Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham in Galatians 3 in the Jewish Context: The Galatian Converts—Lineal Descendants of Abraham and Heirs of the Promise*, BZNBW 248 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

² Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 2.

³ Per Jarle Bekken, "Abraham og Ånden: Paulus' anvendelse av Genesis 15:6 i Galaterbrevet 3:6 belyst ut fra jødisk materiale," *Tidsskrift for Teologi og Kirke* 71 (2000): 265–276 gave a first presentation of the thesis which he now develops in detail.

⁴ Per Jarle Bekken had previously published two studies in which Philo plays a similarly significant role; see his *'The Word is Near You': A Study of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 in Paul's Letter to the Romans in a Jewish Context*, BZNBW 144 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007) and *The Lawsuit Motif in John's Gospel from New Perspectives: Jesus Christ, Crucified Criminal and Emperor of the World*, NovTSup 158 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

⁵ H. Najman, "The Law of Nature and the Authority of Mosaic Law," *SPhiloA* 11 (1999): 55–73 (59).

between the divine Law in Nature manifested in Abraham's life, and the written Law revealed through the particular ordinances of Philo."⁶

Regarding Philo and Paul, he also refers to, e.g., Karl Olav Sandnes, "Philo offers extensive testimony to an interpretation of the Abraham biography where all parts are coming together, forming a continuum of events that Paul emphatically keeps apart."⁷ Bekken concurs that this view was commonly held in Paul's Judaism as attested in, e.g., 1 Macc 2:52; Sir 44:19–22, and Jub. 18:15–16 and 21:2–3,⁸ and among the later Rabbis. With Philo, however, it is different. According to Bekken, these scholars, and most Pauline scholars, fail to account for Philo's intramural Jewish debate with interlocutors. Now there enters a fundamental distinction for Bekken's study, between two views on Torah being kept apart, namely the "Abraham jurisdiction" versus the "Moses jurisdiction." Bekken argues that previous research has not taken this distinction into account. What happens if Philo's view on Abraham is compared to Paul's in Galatians 3? In opposition to the view that "Paul appeals to Abrahamic texts and disjoins them from Torah,"⁹ Bekken argues that Abraham is "a legal norm that served to define the identifying marks of Abrahamic kinship and descent from him."¹⁰

Informed by Philo's reading of Gen 15:6, Bekken argues that the Galatian converts are not, as frequently argued, included as gentiles but "as Jewish proselytes to the Jewish community."¹¹ Two distinct jurisdictions are discerned in Philo's concept of the Torah, and this distinction paves the way for much in the Bekken's study. The latter is the law of Moses, while the first, attributed to Abraham, is his trust in the promise of God as his adherence to the natural law. The latter jurisdiction, to which both Philo and Paul testify, albeit in somewhat different terms, becomes a biblical warrant for Paul to claim that his Galatian converts have status as legitimate descendants of Abraham. Paul interpreted the death of Jesus as grounded in God's initial promise to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3) and his trust in God (Gen 15:6). His death as Abraham's ultimate "seed" brought the blessing of the Spirit to all descendants, be they Jews or gentiles.

3. Two Jurisdictions

As pointed out by Bekken, many scholars find that Paul in Galatians 3 opposes Abraham and Torah or Moses. The argument is that the apostle thus sets himself

⁶ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 95.

⁷ Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul Perceived: An Interactionist Perspective on Paul and the Law*, WUNT 412 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 150.

⁸ Abraham's abandoning idolatry (Jub. 11:14–17 and 12:12) is seen as anticipating his obedience to Torah.

⁹ Thus, e.g., John M. G. Barclay, "Paul, the Gift and the Battle over Gentile Circumcision: Revisiting the Logic of Galatians," *ABR* 58 (2010): 36–56 (44).

¹⁰ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 20.

¹¹ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 151.

apart from how the Abraham biography was commonly understood in contemporary sources, namely a tradition in which Gen 15:6, 22:16–18, and 26:3–5 were seen as a continuum of events that together made up Abraham's biography. Thus, Abraham's trust in Gen 15:6 emerges as faithfulness, according to the Torah. This is stated explicitly in Gen 26:5, "since your father Abraham obeyed (ὑπήκουσεν) my voice and kept my ordinances and my commandments and my statutes and my precepts" (NETS) (ἐφύλαξεν τὰ προστάγματα μου καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τὰ δικαιώματά μου καὶ τὰ νόμιμά μου).

This tradition conveys that Torah was more or less identical to the natural law and that Abraham observed the law of Moses. According to Bekken, Philo was familiar with this tradition but deviated from it as he engaged it in a way that may be compared to how Paul reads the Abraham biography. Thus, Philo serves to root Paul's Abraham biography firmly within a Jewish tradition, albeit different from the dominant one: "Philo argues, Against the view that Abraham was a worthy recipient of the promise because of his observance of the Law of Moses (Gen 26:5) even before it was written. To the extent that Abraham was described as 'lawful,' I [i.e., Bekken] shall argue that Gen 26:5 is rather attributed by Philo to Abraham's adherence to the divine Law in Nature, manifested in his trust in the promise (Gen 15:6)."¹² To substantiate Philo's distinction between an Abraham and a Moses jurisdiction, Bekken turns primarily to *Abr.* 275–276. From this closing of *De Abrahamo*, it is worth quoting the last line on which Bekken's interpretation depends: "Such is the life of the first (τοῦ πρώτου) and founder of the nation—as some would have it (ὡς μὲν ἔνιοι φήσουσι), one who obeyed the law (νόμιμος), as (δ') my account has made clear, himself a law (νόμος) and an unwritten statute."¹³ Bekken finds that Philo here sets himself against "interlocutors" or "opponents." Thus, Philo finds himself in a situation to be compared with Paul in Galatians. Greek δέ involves a contrast which "some will say" fills in. Furthermore, Philo, like Paul, separates the law of Moses from Abraham: "By claiming that Abraham was himself a law and an unwritten statute (*Abr.* 276), Philo delineates Abraham as distinct from the written Law of Moses, as one who was not living under the Law of Moses, because his own instincts matched the divine Law in Nature."¹⁴

Philo's "some will say" paves the way for seeing a contrast involved here. Is Bekken here overdoing his case? How much can be deduced from Philo's "some say"? Bekken refers to Maren Niehoff, who has worked out the dialogical nature of Philo's work, as he was engaging other Jewish interpreters of Scripture in Alexandria as "quarrelsome." Niehoff refers to a group of literal exegetes

¹² Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 95–96.

¹³ Translation of Ellen Birnbaum and John Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham: Introduction and Translation*, Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

¹⁴ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 110.

whom Philo dismissed.¹⁵ This may be exemplified with *Abr.* 178, where these “quarrelsome” exegetes compare the story of Isaac’s binding (*Akedah*) to cases of child sacrifice in the ancient world. In *Migr.* 89–92, however, Philo’s colleagues are found to be *too* spiritual or one-sided allegorical in their interpretation of circumcision. This shows that Philo faced different kinds of colleagues.

In her book *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship*, Maren Niehoff works out the complexity of Jewish exegesis in Alexandria when applying practices from Homeric exegesis to the Bible.¹⁶ According to Niehoff, Philo engaged the literal exegetes in *De Abrahamo* since their historical perspective was a challenge to “his own strategy of anchoring Scripture in Nature.”¹⁷ This runs against Bekken’s reading of the closing of *De Abrahamo* since he holds that they argued exactly what Niehoff defines as Philo’s point. Furthermore, the level of disagreement cannot be taken for granted by Philo mentioning that “some say.” Worthy of notice is that Niehoff, in her book, does not mention *Abr.* 275–276. On the contrary, she argues that Philo links the laws of nature with the divine commandments of Torah: “Philo insists on an intrinsic connection between Nature, Mosaic Law and the lives of the patriarchs.”¹⁸ She finds this not only in *De Abrahamo* but also in *Somn.* 2.174–175, where it says that God delights “when the human race turns away from its sins and inclines and reverts to righteousness, following by a free-will choice the laws and statutes of nature. ‘For the Lord, thy God,’ he says, ‘will turn to be glad over thee for good, as He was glad over thy fathers, if thy shalt hear His voice, to keep all His commandments and ordinances and the judgments which are written in the book of his law (ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τούτου). What could be better able to implant the yearning for virtue or an ardour for noble living than this?” Niehoff comments: “It is implied that keeping the Divine commandment and living in accordance with Nature are virtually identical. Nature is moreover identified now in typically Stoic fashion with righteousness.”¹⁹

According to Niehoff, Philo grounds Jewish law in Greek moral principles, as seen in his exposition of the Ten Commandments. These unfold as targeting desire (“you shall not covet...”) or as conforming to natural impulses, as, e.g., to reciprocate parental care (the commandment to honor the

¹⁵ Maren Niehoff, “Homeric Scholarship and Bible Exegesis in Ancient Alexandria: Evidence from Philo’s ‘Quarrelsome’ Colleagues,” *Classical Quarterly* 57.1 (2007): 166–182.

¹⁶ Maren Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, 96.

¹⁸ Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, 97; thus, also Sze-Kar Wan, “Abraham and the Promise of Spirit: Points of Convergence Between Philo and Paul,” in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, ed. Esther G. Chazon et al., *JSJSup* 89 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 209–224 (220–221).

¹⁹ Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, 97.

parents).²⁰ While Niehoff argues that *De Abrahamo* attests that Philo in effect identified the law of nature with Torah, Bekken argues, with reference to “some say,” that this is the view of opponents to which Philo objects. We cannot assume the same people behind every critical question, and Bekken seems to bring Niehoff’s “quarrelsome exegetes” into “some say” in *Abr.* 276, but that is not warranted.

Furthermore, “some will say” is not necessarily to be taken agonistically, as Bekken does. The recent commentary *On the Life of Abraham* says, with reference to *Abr.* 276, that Philo here puts forward two somewhat different notions. On the one hand, the early figures themselves were laws; on the other hand, they followed particular laws before they were written. Philo acknowledges the difference and says he holds Abraham himself “a law and an unwritten ordinance.”²¹ Birnbaum and Dillon say that “though different, the two rationales are compatible...”²² There are certainly passages in Philo where the unwritten laws are actually laws themselves. It is worth considering that Philo wants to add a more philosophical argument to the view that the ancestors followed particular laws. What separates him from the other shadowy exegetical figures is the philosophical tint he adds with reference to Stoic universalism. The importance given to the slightly different notions in *Abr.* 276 can hardly carry the weight Bekken gives this observation.

With Niehoff, I also find that *De Abrahamo* attests that the law of nature, to which Abraham adhered, and the Mosaic law are not two different jurisdictions. The law of Moses is instead a copy (εἰκλών) of the life that Abraham and the patriarchs lived.²³ Without learning, instruction, and *paideia* (see about this below), they “embraced the conformity with nature, accepting that nature itself was—as in truth it is—the eldest of statutes, and thus they were subject to good rule all their lives long” (*Abr.* 6). Abraham is in *Abr.* 276 called νόμιμος, clearly because he obeyed God’s τὰ νόμιμά, as it says in *Her.* 8–9, where Gen 26:3–5 sums up the obedience of Abraham toward Torah.

In short, Abraham fits nicely into how Philo introduces *De Opificio Mundi*, arguing that the world’s creation is in harmony with nature. Hence, “that man who observes the law (τοῦ νομίμου ἀνδρὸς) is constituted thereby a loyal citizen of the world, regulating his doings by the purpose and will of Nature, in accordance with which the entire world itself also is administered” (*Opif.* 3). To

²⁰ Maren Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 149–170. I find it unwarranted when Bekken refers to Niehoff to substantiate his interpretation of *Abr.* 275–276.

²¹ Birnbaum and Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham*, 8, 407.

²² Birnbaum and Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham*, 10. They refer to their comments in § 275 (p. 406), where this view is demonstrated about Sir 44:19–29; CD 3:2; m. Qidd. 4.14 etc., where laws in the Pentateuch are included.

²³ Birnbaum and Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham*, 407 says that Philo “ends by declaring of Abraham what he set forth about several ancient figures at the beginning of the treatise.”

sum up so far, the distinction between the two jurisdictions which Bekken insists on, based on *Abr.* 275–276, seems to be strained and too much inspired by Paul. The way Philo brings together the law of Moses with Abraham through the law of Nature is downplayed in Bekken’s study.

4. A Subtle Distinction

Bekken is, of course, sensitive to Philo’s concern to bring the law of nature into harmony with Torah and is aware that his interpretation of *De Abrahamo* runs the risk of disturbing this. In several places, we notice his concern with defining the relationship between his exegesis and the nature-oriented view of Torah in Philo in meaningful ways. Here are some examples on p. 95: According to Philo, “the Law of Moses is *not identical* [Bekken’s emphasis] with the divine Law of Nature, but in conformity with it....”²⁴ Similarly, on p. 107, he says that “the Law of Moses is *not identical* (Bekken’s emphasis) with the divine Law in Nature, but is rather *consistent* (Bekken’s emphasis) with Nature and the legal normative force of Abraham.”²⁵ According to p. 109, “the unwritten divine laws are embodied in the form of Abraham’s life as part of the written code of Moses, and thus as congruent, consistent, and in harmony with the norm of divine Law enacted in Nature.” According to p. 112, the law of Moses was to Philo “*the best possible written imitation and authentic source of the divine Law in nature.*” Page 114 says that against a too literal understanding of the Torah and Abraham, “Philo *hellenizes* Judaism by advocating that the Law of Moses is not identical with the divine Law in Nature, but that it is nevertheless fully in conformity with the unwritten statutes in Nature.” Page 170 says that the law of Moses is “the best way to get access to the unwritten Law of Nature” and that “Philo can even compare the obedience to Abraham to the divine Law and adherence to the Mosaic Law.” Page 181, however, says that Philo and Paul, despite their differences, both “separate Abraham’s trust in the promise from his obedience to the Law.” How “distinctive” these two jurisdictions are in Philo is, therefore, not apparent to me.²⁶ It is difficult to capture Philo’s concern both to Judaize Hellenism and to Hellenize Judaism, and I appreciate Bekken’s attempts to do so. I get lost somewhere in Bekken’s distinctions, since the distinguishing line

²⁴ Birnbaum and Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham*, 152, define this in the following way: Abraham’s conformity with nature is “according to Philo embodied both by the early biblical figures and the later Mosaic laws.”

²⁵ On this page, Bekken also says that to regard the Law of Moses as a written copy of the Law of Nature “goes too far.” This is stated *pace* H. Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, JSJSup 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 99.

²⁶ On pp. 4 and 192, Bekken speaks about “two distinctive jurisdictions in the Torah and Scripture.” Especially from p. 223, this combination of two jurisdictions in “Torah and Scripture” becomes increasingly frequent. I miss some clarifications on how two jurisdictions *of* Torah relate to two jurisdictions *in* Torah and Scripture. My impression is that as Paul increasingly moves into focus, the terminology becomes more ambiguous.

between the law of nature and Torah becomes so thin that his exegesis of *Abr.* 275–276 is jeopardized. Even more, I wonder what help such a subtle distinction offers the exegesis of Paul in Galatians 3.

We noticed above that Philo presents Abraham as the “first νόμιμος” (*Abr.* 276). The term “first” is in itself indicative of people following in his footsteps (cf. Rom 4:12: “who follow the example of the faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised”). Hence, this adjective implies, by necessity, a continuation. From the beginning of Philo’s biography, we know that Abraham was also distinguished from later observants of the Torah. For sure, there is a distinction here. But this distinction is primarily formulated in terms of Abraham being “not taught by any other,” (*Abr.* 22–24, 30, 66–67), implying that Abraham’s followers, different from himself, were subjected to *instruction*.²⁷ Here lies, in my view, an important distinction that is not sufficiently addressed in Bekken’s study. While Abraham was self-taught, his followers were in Torah given the means for developing the piety he attained before the law of Moses.

From the ancient discourse on *paideia*, Philo adopted the idea that encyclical studies, or learning in general, were stepping stones to real knowledge. Ps. Plutarch takes Homer’s *Odyssey* (i.e., a journey narrative; see below) as an allegorical illustration of the pro-paideutic role of encyclical studies (*Mor.* 7C–E). Penelope represents philosophy, or the goal of the journey, and her maidservants the studies which are not estimated as highly as philosophy.²⁸ Philo takes Gen 16 with Hagar and Sarah similarly, corresponding to the maidservants and Penelope, respectively, when he works out the pro-paideutic role of Greek learning in his *De Congressu Quaerendae Eruditionis Gratia*, well formulated in the English title *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*.²⁹ To Philo, the summit or the goal of the *Odyssey*’s *nostos* (homecoming motif) was the life taught by the law of Moses, which is achieved as “seeing God” (see later). Abraham, however, was exempt from this progressive learning toward “seeing God.”

Bekken’s understanding of the relationship between the law of Moses and natural law as two separate entities might find some support in *Ios.* 28–31, though he does not mention this text. There Philo gives his allegorical interpretation of the Joseph story. It goes like this: The world (ὁ κόσμος) has a single law of Nature, “commanding what should be done and forbidding what should not be done.” However, the local cities are subjected to diverse laws since “different peoples have different customs and regulations which are extra inventions and additions.” The laws of the different states are additions to the reason, which is in accordance with nature. The diversity of local laws causes a lack of fellowship, which is caused by greed (πλεονεξία) and mutual mistrust.

²⁷ Birnbaum and Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham*, 152–153.

²⁸ Karl Olav Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity*, LNTS 400 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 59–61, 64–66, 188–195.

²⁹ Sandnes, *Homer*, 68–78, Birnbaum and Dillon, *On the Life of Abraham*, 199–200, 371.

From this text, one might think that Philo considered the law of Moses a similar local law to which the Jews were subjected. Hence, this might exemplify the distinction urged by Bekken. However, Philo claims *superiority* for the law of Moses (*Mos.* 2.12–30). Moses “was the best of all lawgivers in all countries, better in fact than any that have ever arisen among either the Greeks or the barbarians, and that his laws are most excellent and truly come from God.” Likewise, *Mos.* 2.44 says that all people embraced the law of Moses because it represents “the purest of Spirit.” Under inspiration, Moses spoke the Law (*Mos.* 2.37–40), and Philo envisages each people to leave behind their own laws to honor “our laws alone” (*Mos.* 2.44). The proof given for this claim is its ability to master desires, excess and lavishness, and greed mentioned above (see also *Mos.* 1.154). The safest way to master the desires is to follow the law of Moses or for gentiles to become proselytes.³⁰ Failure to master the desires is precisely the weakness Philo pointed out regarding the laws to which different cities were subjected in *De Iosepho*. At first sight, *Ios.* 28–31 seemingly supports Bekken’s view, but after more consideration, I do not think so.

According to Bekken, Philo and Paul are analogous, not only concerning the two jurisdictions but also that both developed this distinction within a context of a dispute or debate on the conditions for being “children of Abraham,” an “inner Jewish debate on Abraham.”³¹ Hence, the colleagues of Philo hinted at in “some say” in *Abr.* 275–276 corresponds to Paul’s opponents in Galatia. When Bekken envisages that a “similar discussion is attested in Philo’s writings,”³² I find that the evidence for that is scant and questionable. Paul’s engagement with the Abraham biography is “within Judaism,” since he addresses an issue, albeit differently, which is also addressed by Philo, namely the question of how the law of Moses and Abraham in Gen 15:6 relate. Ole Jakob Filtvedt has made a good case that when Paul and his contemporary Judaism are compared, it is helpful to distinguish between questions or issues raised and the answers given.³³ This means that even when his answers may be labeled distinctive, Paul remains “within Judaism.” When Paul raises issues hardly addressed by others, it becomes relevant to consider how he might have “separated” himself from his Jewish context.

5. Abraham—A Model for What?

In Bekken’s book, Abraham is primarily the model proselyte, a gentile who leaves behind idolatry to embrace the one God of Israel, as found in, e.g., *Virt.* 175–186 (περὶ μετανόιας). This picture of Abraham finds an analogy in the

³⁰ See Karl Olav Sandnes, *Belly and Body in the Pauline Epistles*, SNTSMS 120 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108–132.

³¹ Bekken, *Paul’s Negotiation of Abraham*, 247, 275.

³² Bekken, *Paul’s Negotiation of Abraham*, 247.

³³ Ole Jakob Filtvedt, “Jødedom eller jødedommer i det første århundrede?” *Teologisk Tidsskrift* 4 (2015): 238–252.

situation of the addressees of Galatians, illustrated in 4:8–9: “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods. Now, however, that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again?” Intuitively, Bekken’s analogy between Philo and Paul on Abraham is, therefore, adequate. This is also, in my view, the merit of this study, to have scrutinized this relationship closely.

Why am I not convinced, then? I do not contest that Abraham is a model proselyte.³⁴ My hesitancy grows out of the way Abraham is portrayed in *Galatians*. For sure, Abraham is a model to the addressees of this epistle. However, I find that this is attached primarily to his πίστις, his trust, mentioned in Gen 15:6, not to his being a proselyte as such, albeit it is not irrelevant as the addressees are gentiles. Fundamental to Philo’s portrayal of Abraham is his journey from Haran, which symbolizes his turning to God. This is an ever-present aspect in Philo’s use of Abraham. The journey motif may be identified in Gal 4:8–9, but it is not spelled out in a way that is analogous to Philo, even if one accounts for the difference in the genre (biography and epistle).

Furthermore, this journey is absent in Galatians 3, where Abraham’s biography is at the center of Paul’s discussion. This is worth noticing since Bekken argues that the entire chapter 3 of Galatians is an exegetical paraphrase or treatise of Gen 15:6. In my view, it is Abraham’s πίστις that holds center stage. This observation finds corroboration in Paul’s reading of Gen 15:6 together with Hab 2:4 (Gal 3:11), which emphasizes πίστις with no connection to proselytism. Paul’s mentioning of Hab 2:4 indicates what aspect in Abraham’s narrative Paul is working with here, and the linkage between Gen 15:6 and Hab 2:4 is no other than faith or trust. Neither in Romans 4 is Abraham’s journey a motif addressed by Paul. It is worth taking a closer look at how Abraham’s journey works in Philo’s texts.

6. Journey

Bekken considers the journey motif connected primarily to Abraham as a model for proselytes. This does not give justice to the way this motif deserves. “Journeying” was in antiquity a standard motif in another discourse as well, undoubtedly well documented also in Philo, that of *paideia*. Journey and knowledge interconnect as knowledge and are thereby conceived as progress or growth in life experience and a motif at home in educational discourses.³⁵ The

³⁴ Karl Olav Sandnes, *A New Family: Conversion and Ecclesiology in the Early Church with Cross-Cultural Comparisons*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 91 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 41–46.

³⁵ Chiara Ferella and Cilliers Breytenbach, eds., *Paths of Knowledge: Interconnection(s) Between Knowledge and Journey in the Graeco-Roman World*, Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 60 (Berlin: Topoi, 2018). In this volume, Albert Joosse, “Philo’s *De*

journey motif as *progress in knowledge* permeates all Abrahamic treatises of Philo. Being a model for proselytes is connected to his growth in knowledge, which culminates in Torah paving the way for God to be seen: “Throughout his works, Philo understands Abraham to be not only the historical personage described in the Bible, who, for him, represents the ideal proselyte, but he also interprets the biblical character as symbolizing a type of soul, which learns through teaching in order to progress toward perfect virtue.”³⁶

By framing Abraham’s life in these terms, Philo can portray him not only as a proselyte but also as a person mastering his desires and striving for the knowledge so highly valued in the surrounding culture. The beginning of *Abr.* (7) speaks about the first steps on this “road” (ὁδός), which is a cultural stereotype for discourses on progress toward knowledge.³⁷ It reappears at the end of this treatise (*Abr.* 269–270), soaked in the metaphor of road and walking the road. Worth noticing is that the context in which this metaphor works is precisely Philo’s interpretation of Gen 15:6 (*Abr.* 262–276), a passage carrying much weight in Bekken’s analysis. But his analysis does not account for this aspect.³⁸

Philo’s allegorical interpretation serves to generalize Abraham’s biography in which Greek virtues are prominent: “The migrations set forth on the literal level of the text were performed by a wise man, but in accordance with the laws of allegory by a virtue-loving soul in search for the true God” (*Abr.* 68). It is about journeying roads that are uphill, toilsome and slow, thus climbing toward the peak which is “to see God” (*Abr.* 56–59). Climbing to the top is, like the road, a stereotype in ancient discourses on *paideia*.³⁹ Raffaella Criboire introduces her book on Greek education by pointing out the importance of the road metaphor.⁴⁰ The progress in knowledge toward “seeing God” comes to full expression in Philo’s treatise on the encyclical studies (*De Congressu*), particularly in the idea, inherited from Greek *paideia* discourses, of instruction taking place in progressive steps, from *pro-paideia*, toward full knowledge (see above).⁴¹

Migratio Abrahami: The Soul’s Journey of Self-Knowledge as Criticism of Stoic *oikeiōsis*,” 111–136, reads Philo along these lines.

³⁶ Phoebe Makiello, “Abraham and the Nations in the Works of Philo of Alexandria,” in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Martin Goodman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 139–162 (139).

³⁷ Sandnes, *Homer*, 33–36, 180–181.

³⁸ This is pointed out by Wan in “Abraham and the Promise of the Spirit,” 214–217 as well, as she addresses this as progress through different stages to the higher stage, which is to perceive God.

³⁹ See Karl Olav Sandnes, “Markus—en allegorisk biografi?” *DTT* 69 (2006): 275–297 (277–285).

⁴⁰ Raffaella Criboire, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1–12, 45.

⁴¹ See also Erkki Koskeniemi, “Philo and Classical Education,” in *Reading Philo: A*

By keeping in mind that *paideia* frames Philo's reading of the Abraham narrative, the distance to Paul, in my opinion, grows. Abraham is in Galatians not the patriarch embarking on a journey, an educational road toward Torah and knowing God in full. Growth and progress are certainly Pauline notions, but they hardly grow out of the role he assigns to Abraham. Abraham served different intertwined purposes for Paul. He was, as made most evident by Bekken, a model proselyte. Paul calling Abraham "godless" (Rom 4:5) is probably an example of that. But Abraham was also a figure of trusting in God (πίστις), connected particularly to Gen 15:6. Finally, he was also an example of God's grace, as pointed out in Rom 4, and most pointedly stated in the language of God calling into being what did not exist (v. 17).⁴² Perhaps Rom 4:17 brings out what is implicit already in Galatians, namely that Abraham is a model of grace, which comes into being as a result of God who calls into being what is not there beforehand.

7. Abraham and Spirit

Bekken is to be commended for addressing the unsolved question of Abraham and Spirit in Galatians 3. Bekken reads Gal 3:6, which introduces Gen 15:6, as a scriptural reference for the claim presented in the preceding verses, namely that the Galatians had received the Spirit. This view finds support in Gal 3:14, where the blessing promised to Abraham is the Spirit given by faith. This raises the question: Where in the Abraham tradition is the idea of him receiving the Spirit at home? There is, of course, a possibility that this idea was Paul's own creative scripture-based invention.⁴³ Bekken, however, seeks antecedents for Paul's argument and finds that Philo's reading of the Abraham biography provides a key here. This is one of the most intriguing parts of Bekken's book.

Handbook to Philo of Alexandria, ed. Torrey Seland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 102–128.

⁴² See Karl Olav Sandnes, "Justification and Abraham: Exegesis of Romans 4," in *God's Power for Salvation: Romans 1,1–5,11*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach, Colloquium Oecumenicum Paulinum 23 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 147–181 (170–172); Karl Olav Sandnes, "Resurrection on the Road to Damascus: Exploring Paul's Purview on His Damascus Experience," *Sacra Scripta* 19 (2021): 158–174 (Festschrift Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr).

⁴³ Wan, "Abraham and the Promise of Spirit," 212: "At the end, however, the most probable author of the 'promise'/'Spirit' equation is Paul." Chee-Chiew Lee, *The Blessing of Abraham, the Spirit & Justification in Galatians: Their Relationship and Significance for Understanding Paul's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 193–198 argues that it refers to the fulfillment of the prophetic promises in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Joel. Inspired by Richard B. Hays, she refers to Isa 44:3 ("For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring") to exemplify how these promises realize the Abraham blessing for the nations. I find her suggestion attractive as it coincides with my emphasis on the Spirit-reception as a matter of identity in Galatians; *pace* Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 197.

The biblical Abraham narrative shows no sign of the patriarch receiving the Spirit. However, Bekken argues that in the Jewish exposition of Gen 15:6, Abraham's trust in God led to his reception of the Spirit.⁴⁴ For this, he refers to *Virt.* 217: "Everything in him changed to something better, eyes, complexion, stature, carriage, movements, voice. For the divine spirit which was breathed upon him from on high made its lodging in his soul, and invested his body with singular beauty, his voice with persuasiveness, and his hearers with understanding." This is a most interesting and relevant passage in Philo's Abraham narrative. Bekken sees the role of the Spirit at home in how proselytes are transformed by joining the fellowship of Israel's God, as is the case with Abraham. Seemingly, Bekken has identified an analogy between Philo and Paul.

The following will argue that while Paul's use of the reception of Spirit is an issue of *identity*, an identity marker, so to say (Gal 3:29–4:7), Abraham's reception in Philo is more about being *inspired*; in short, identity versus ability. Abraham's reception of the Spirit in Philo is not only a proselyte motif but intrinsically tied up with the journey as progress in wisdom toward perfection. This context offers a somewhat different interpretation of his reception of the Spirit. Worth noticing in the quotation given above from *Virt.* 217 is the importance of sight or seeing, a recurrent motif in texts associating Spirit with Abraham.⁴⁵ The Spirit reception in this text marks the peak of Abraham's progress toward wisdom (*Virt.* 215–216).

As in *De Virtutibus*, large parts of *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* are occupied with interpreting Gen 15:6. Here, his journey is perceived as having its goal in prophetic inspiration, through which God is known and seen (*Her.* 69–70). Hence, prophets are called "seers" (οἱ ὀρωῦντες) (1 Sam 9:9), says Philo (*Her.* 78). This inspiration, a God-given virtue, comes as the culmination of ancient *paideia* which Philo portrays as a movement from Hagar to Sarah (*Her.* 258–259). Abraham is portrayed as a sage on whom a prophet-like inspiration or the divine Spirit has fallen (*Her.* 265–266).⁴⁶ Philo envisages this as a heightened level in *paideia*, as stated directly in *Her.* 272–274, where the encyclical studies are seen as preparing the ground for this more revelatory insight. Hence, Philo calls this education ἀποσκευή, which announces the stereotype pro-paideutic perspective. Philo takes this from Gen 15:14 and sees the lore of the schools as giving a longing for higher contemplation (θεωρία). This propaedeutic logic, which in Gen 15:14 is spelled out in terms of baggage that the nations bring,⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 152–158.

⁴⁵ See also *Abr.* 57–59, 164; *Virt.* 179; *Congr.* 143; *Her.* 98.

⁴⁶ Walter T. Wilson, *Philo of Alexandria On Virtues: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 408 understands Abraham's possession of the Spirit in terms of prophetic inspiration.

⁴⁷ This brings to mind how "the gold and silver of the Egyptians" (Exod 3:21–22; 11:2; 12:35–36) in early Christian interpretation justified the need for making use of pagan knowledge; Sandnes, *Homer*, 144–147; Joel S. Allen, *The Despoliation of Egypt in Pre-*

echoes Philo's *De Congressu*, which follows this pattern in how it conceives of *paideia* and Torah for those following in the footsteps of Abraham.

Gaining a higher sight or contemplation is an issue in *Congr.* 20–23 and 71–73, where Abraham's relationship to Hagar and Sarah is laid out, *i.e.*, his relationship to ancient *paideia*. His perceptions are formed by Sarah, who is virtue, and Hagar, as concubine or encyclical studies. Sarah alone begets higher wisdom, albeit Hagar prepares for it (*pro-paideia*). These two are not women, says Philo, "it is minds—on the one hand the mind which exercises itself in the preliminary learning, on the other, the mind which strives to win the palm of virtue and cease not till it is won" (*Congr.* 180). Hagar and Sarah, respectively representing *pro-paideia* and full knowledge, are Philo's Scripture-based correspondence to the role assigned to Penelope and the suitors in ancient discourses on *paideia* (Ps. Plutarch, *Mor.* 7C–E; see above).

The palm of virtue, the peak, so to say, is to reach the full meaning of IS-RA-EL, "a man who sees God" (*Congr.* 51). This is a frequently used motif or notion in Philo's writings.⁴⁸ Israel is the name given to Jacob, meaning seeing God, since it is "identical with knowledge which opens wide the soul's eye" (*Migr.* 39–40). Accordingly, Abraham represents not only IS-RA-EL but also the perfection of the Greek philosophical legacy abbreviated in the Delphic maxim "Know yourself" (*Somn.* 1.55–60). This demonstrates Philo's overall purpose in bridging his Judaism and the Greek philosophical legacy. In a passage heavily marked by educational language, Philo presents Abraham as having progressed and improved "toward the acquisition of the highest knowledge," abbreviated in the maxim. According to Philo, this is Nature's law to know oneself in such a way that it paves the way for knowing "He who IS." However, this law of nature is in basic agreement with Torah to Philo (see above).

In *Migr.* 127–130, he addresses the means how perfection is reached, and he does so by turning to Gen 12:4, according to which "Abraham journeyed (ἐπορεύθη)." This paves the way for the road metaphor and other terms for "walking," but also for Gen 26:5, cited here. Thus, the meaning of Gen 12:4 is spelled out in Gen 26:5. The two passages are bridged by the verb, which brings to mind that the ethical commandments of Torah were called *halakah*, derived from the Hebrew verb *halak*.⁴⁹ The Greek verb is used in this way also in *Congr.* 86: "You shall do (ποιήσετε) my judgments and you shall keep (φυλάξεσθε) my ordinances, walk (πορεύεσθε) in them..." which cites Lev 18:1–5.⁵⁰ Philo

Rabbinic, Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition, Supplements to VC 92 (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Philo, however, takes these references quite literally. The Egyptians were indebted to the Jews (*Mos.* 1.141–142).

⁴⁸ E.g., *Abr.* 57; *Migr.* 39, 201; *Praem.* 43–47; *Somn.* 2.177; *Ebr.* 82–83.

⁴⁹ Karin Finsterbusch, *Die Thora als Lebensweisung für Heidenchristen: Studien zur Bedeutung der Thora für die paulinische Ethik*, SUNT 20 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 113–118.

⁵⁰ See Preston M. Sprinkle, *Law and Life: The Interpretation of Leviticus 18:5 in Early*

considers πορεύεσθαι identical with φυλάσσειν and ποιεῖν, words closely attached to observing Torah. Through Gen 12:4, Abraham is written into this, which undermines Bekken's idea of two more or less separate jurisdictions regarding the law.

Furthermore, *Migr.* 127–130 is interesting as Abraham's way to Torah is given in detail: As a life praised by philosophers, Abraham lived in accordance with nature (ἀκολουθῶς τῇ φύσει ζῆν). A term for "walking" occurs here and forms a bridge to Philo, citing Gen 12:4 about Abraham's journeying, which is then connected to Gen 26:5 and Lev 18:1–5 with explicit references to Torah. The law of Nature,⁵¹ Abraham's journey, and Moses' law form a continuum here. A certain tension comes into view in how Philo portrays Abraham's relationship to Torah. On the other hand, precisely as a model for proselytes, he illustrates the need for proper instruction given by the law of Moses. On the other hand, he is self-taught.

Keeping in mind Ole Jakob Filtvedt's distinction between questions/issues addressed and answers in Paul vis-à-vis other relevant Jewish sources, it is worth noticing that although Paul separates Gen 15:6 from Torah obedience, this example demonstrates that he engages a question to which also Philo had an answer, albeit another one. In other words, although the two had different answers, they still address the same question: At what time in his life did Abraham become obedient to the Torah?

This Philonic context for Abraham's reception of the Spirit should not be overlooked before comparing it with Paul. A possible link between Philo and Paul could be the miraculous aspect in Gal 3:1–5. Nonetheless, I find that the context and use of Abraham's reception of the Spirit are so different that it hardly warrants considering Philo a backdrop for an exegesis of Gal 3:6–9. The tradition which comes into play in Philo, developed most certainly from Gen 15:12 LXX (ἑκοστασις ἐπέσεν τῷ Ἀβραμ), may well have inspired Paul to interpret the blessing in terms of Spirit-reception. But to Paul, this idea is rooted in the question of the identity of his gentile converts, not in a progress toward perfection provided in full only by Torah, as we saw above in *Mos.* 2.38–44.

8. Gal 3:28: "Neither Jew nor Gentile"

Bekken's emphasis on a Jewish identity for the gentile Christ-believers, due to their status as proselytes, is worthy of some consideration. I think it blurs a key issue in Galatians, namely the issue of a Christ-based identity for all, be they Jews or gentiles. I find that καινή κτίσις in Gal 6:15 is hardly accounted for by saying that it refers to proselytes who have embraced Judaism, albeit without being circumcised. The passage in Gal 3:26–29 naturally holds a significant place in Bekken's study. His view is summarized on p. 265. He claims that the ethnic

Judaism and in Paul, WUNT 2.241 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 101–114. Sprinkle's focus is primarily on life, not "walking."

⁵¹ For nature as teaching without teachers, being self-taught, see *Migr.* 29.

distinction between Jew and Greek should be understood in the context of Jewish proselytism. This distinction has been relativized in light of the superiority of spiritual kinship with Abraham and the emphasis on unity within the Jewish community.

Philo, as well as Paul, take the national lineage of Abraham's descent seriously. Hence, they both had to solve the problem of the non-Jewish lineage of the proselytes: "Unlike Philo, who defends the inclusion of the proselytes by granting them fellowship and citizenship within the Jewish community on the basis of virtues in accordance with the law of Moses, Paul carves out a room for the Jewish converts by linking them to Abraham through their trust in Christ and reception of the Spirit, so that he can claim that they too were descendants of Abraham in spite of their lineage."

This summary is interesting and clarifying but also confusing. The interesting and clarifying part is that Bekken claims that Gal 3:28 somehow relativizes the ethnic distinctions between Jews and gentiles. By saying this, he separates himself from the view held by most advocates of "Paul within Judaism," namely that Paul's theology in Galatians is not involved with Jews at all.⁵² It is simply a theology for non-Jews. In the quotation given above, Bekken distances himself from that view. However, there is a confusing part here as well. As I read Bekken throughout his book, and well captured in his quotation above, the Abraham discourse is more or less reserved for "the gentile problem." Abraham serves to include gentiles among the Jews, "transforming a non-Jew into a Jew."⁵³ It is all about the "Jewish identity" of the gentile Christ-believers. His thesis is about the room carved out by Paul for the converts who have no biological Abrahamic descent, to use his own metaphor. In this way, Bekken seems to walk in the footsteps of "Paul within Judaism."

Hence, my question is the following: Is Galatians 3:28 only about this room? Is this epistle only about "the gentile problem"? I am not sure that Bekken intends to reserve the Abraham discourse in Galatians for non-Jews, but he comes close to doing precisely that. His study is not sufficiently clear on what Abraham's interpretation of Paul does to the Jews. Bekken might have said with "Paul within Judaism" that Paul's theology, including his Abraham discourse, applies to non-Jews only since the letter was written to them. He might join Karin B. Neutel in arguing that Abraham is a "universal" ancestor, uniting Jews and gentiles.⁵⁴ Or that Gal 3:28 coins the primary identity of all Christ-believers,

⁵² E.g., Magnus Zetterholm, "Paul Within Judaism: The State of the Questions," in *Paul Within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 31–51.

⁵³ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 252.

⁵⁴ Karin B. Neutel, "'Neither Jew Nor Greek': Abraham as a Universal Ancestor," in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham*, ed. Martin Goodman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 291–306; see also Karin B. Neutel, *A Cosmopolitan Ideal: Paul's Declaration 'Neither Jew Nor Greek*,

be they Jews and gentiles, over against all other secondary identities, including also ethnic identities such as being a Jew.⁵⁵ In Bekken's study, this burning issue remains hanging in the air.

I am not claiming that it is evident what Paul says here. His dictum's visionary and rhetorical nature in Gal 3:28 is undoubtedly beyond the obvious. But Paul's involvement with Abraham's traditions in Galatians 3 ends in that verse; at least it reaches a summit in this dictum. In other words, we know where Paul's argument about Abraham is heading. Therefore, it is of help to start unwinding the matter from there and consider how Bekken's exegesis sheds light on that passage. His overstated emphasis on the proselytism issue shows that the Jews themselves become only shadowy figures in Gal 3:28's claim that there is neither Jew nor gentile in Christ. In my view, this undercuts the message of Galatians. Galatians 6:16 ("As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God") is an enigmatic passage raising questions both regarding the method (is the phrase to be interpreted in light of Galatians alone or may anticipate Romans 9–11?) and content (what is really said here, or in short, who is "God's Israel"?). Without entering the debate on these issues,⁵⁶ it is worth considering why this dictum comes at the very end of the letter, and in a way which—with no regard to how Gal 3:28 is interpreted—seems to destabilize the unity claimed there.

The best explanation is that Paul, at the end of this very situational letter, realizes that Gal 3:28 may be taken as doing away with Jewish identity.⁵⁷ Galatians 6:16 indicates an awareness that this epistle has questioned the role of Israel. I think that is precisely what happens in the argument which leads up to Gal 3:28. This is nagging to Paul, and, therefore, he throws in a blessing with no or little foundation in the letter, but which needs to be elaborated elsewhere. Galatians 6:16 is Paul's attempt to balance Gal 3:28, thus foreshadowing "for the Jews first" in Romans. This can, of course, be challenged and discussed on

Neither Slave Nor Free, Nor Male and Female' in the Context of First-Century Thought, LNTS 513 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁵⁵ William S. Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, T&T Clark Biblical Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2008), 156–158.

⁵⁶ Susan Eastman, "Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11," *NTS* 56 (2010): 367–395; Ole Jakob Filtvedt, "God's Israel in Galatians 6.16: An Overview and Assessment of Key Arguments," *Currents in Biblical Research* 15 (2016): 123–140.

⁵⁷ Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 152–157, 232–251 argues that Paul's emphasis on equality (Gal 3:28) involved a "human sameness" which by necessity deconstructed Jewish identity as in some way distinctive. Although he does not use the term "theological holocaust," Boyarin's argument implies that Paul's "sameness" is a theologically grounded abandonment of Jewish identity. For Gal 6:16, as an unexpected passage in Galatians, if judged by the letter itself, see Karl Olav Sandnes, *Var Paulus kristen? Har kirken forstått hans teologi og tro* (Follese: Efrem, 2021), 140–143.

various grounds. If there is some truth in that, Gal 6:16 requires an interpretation of 3:28 which affects Jewish identity in such a way that Paul, already within Galatians, finds it necessary to add a note on Israel. I notice that Gal 6:16 does not figure in Bekken's study,⁵⁸ and I am curious about how he might have dealt with it in a framework that is all about *proselytes*. The question is then: Is the "Abraham's children" notion in Galatians reserved for Galatian "proselytes"? Or put another way: Is *οἱ ἐκ πίστεως* to be understood exclusively against the backdrop of Jewish proselytism with Abraham as the model proselyte? This question comes from Bekken's narrow emphasis on proselytism and his logic that the Abraham story used by Paul primarily revolves around proselytism.

According to Bekken, the backdrop for Paul's use of Abraham is that the Galatian converts are not Abraham's natural descendants. Hence, "a special provision" warrants that they are not only legitimate proselytes but Abraham's children and partakers of the promise. "A special provision" holds a key in Bekken's analysis of Galatians⁵⁹ and refers to how Paul solves "the problem of non-Jewish lineage of the Jewish proselytes."⁶⁰ This may be read as though Paul's use of Abraham is meant solely for gentiles who become Jewish proselytes through the death of Christ, Abraham's offspring. Hence, they become *οἱ ἐκ πίστεως*. How exclusive is this? Is the only purpose of Abraham in Galatians 3 to warrant how gentiles become Jewish proselytes and children of Abraham (the gentile problem), or does it in any way also apply to Jews?

However, Bekken points out that Gal 3:26–28 unites both Jews and Greek, as Jewish identity is not defined by Abraham's genealogical kinship and physical descent. In terms that bring to mind Campbell's primary Christ-identity, he says that physical descent and ethnic origin are relativized precisely in a "discussion of who belongs to Abraham's true kinship."⁶¹ In a way analogous to Philo's emphasis on equal rights for the proselytes as citizens within the Jewish *politeia*, Paul likewise makes ethnicity irrelevant because Abraham has formed "a new basis for kinship ties within the lineage of Abraham." Thus, it is clear that Bekken also gives the Abraham story relevance for Jews. However, the way he lays out the Abraham story in Galatians as "a special provision" for gentiles leaves a gap in his study since this is not sufficiently addressed, and it calls to question how Gal 6:16 (God's Israel) is to be interpreted.

9. Conclusion

⁵⁸ See his index.

⁵⁹ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 247, 277, 282.

⁶⁰ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 265.

⁶¹ Bekken, *Paul's Negotiation of Abraham*, 249–250.

Bekken's book is an impressive and erudite work demonstrating familiarity with both Philo and Paul in Galatians. Nonetheless, my impression is that Paul has provided too much of the agenda for the Philonic reading and Philo too much when Paul's gentile Christ-believers become Jewish proselytes. Surely, Bekken has noticed some similarities between the two that are worth investigating, but more sensitivity to the discourses in which these similarities work is wished for. Naturally, the question of proselytism can be seen as bridging Philo and Paul in their treatment of the Abraham figure. But the *paideia* discourse, which is so important in Philo's exposition of Abraham's biography, seems not to fit Paul's use of Gen 15:6.

Furthermore, Bekken has downplayed Philo's overall purpose of grounding Torah in the natural law. Progress in research depends on scholars' willingness to explore new grounds and see where overlooked perspectives might lead, and Bekken is to be commended for having done precisely that in this book. In this case, however, this was not as fruitful as claimed.