

“Living Well”: A Parallel Comparison of Philo and the Fourth Gospel

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Abstract

Comparison is a debated methodology. This essay sets out a method of parallel comparison based on emic readings of Philo Judaeus and the Fourth Gospel. The next step is to recognise the point well made by Pierre Hadot: that ancient intellectual traditions were significantly concerned with “living well”, whose contours in both the writings of Philo and the FG will be described and then compared. It is recognised that the philosophical and religious schools of antiquity share much common ground, not least in identifying “living well” with “likeness to God” and analogous concepts. Descriptions of “living well” in the Philonic corpus and the Fourth Gospel are then presented, noting key terms, concepts and exemplary figures. In Philo, the value of nature and holiness is expressed in the example of the patriarchs: the Therapeutae provide ideals of living well in accordance with the Mosaic Law. In the FG, Jesus is to the fore, exemplifying and enabling that same end. A final short concluding section then notes that, whilst there is a general interest in living well, the key ideas and terms in the two traditions vary considerably. Both, however, stand on the cusp of Judaism, Hellenism and Romanitas, articulating likeness to God through predominantly Judaic concepts and characters.

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1. Introduction

In his brief biography of Philo Judaeus, David Runia raises the possibility that he travelled to Jerusalem, perhaps even being present “during the dramatic events of the end of Jesus’ life”.¹ Others speculate about his possible encounter with the author of the Fourth Gospel (FG), who likely moved in well-connected circles in Jerusalem (John 18:16) in this same period.² Irrespective of this possible encounter, scholars have long explored the possibility of shared concerns between Philo and the gospel.³ Such reflections take us into the realm of comparative studies. These may remain contested but are still viable. As a consequence, this piece starts with description of the kind of parallel comparison which is envisioned. The next step is to recognise the point well made by Pierre Hadot: that ancient intellectual traditions were significantly concerned with “living well”, whose contours in both the writings of Philo and the FG will be described and then compared.

2. Preliminary Methodological Comments: Parallel Comparison

Within recent scholarship, C. Kavin Rowe offered a substantial criticism of comparison as a methodology.⁴ In response, John M.G. Barclay and Benjamin

¹ David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3. Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), 3.

² Bradford B. Blaine, *Peter in the Gospel of John: The Making of an Authentic Disciple* (Atlanta, GA: Society for Biblical Literature, 2007), 92.

³ For example, Peder Borgen, *The Gospel of John: More Light from Philo, Paul and Archaeology: The Scriptures, Tradition, Exposition, Settings, Meaning* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum 154. Leiden: Brill, 2014); *Philo, John, and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity* (Brown Judaic Studies 131. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987). See the useful overview in Wooil Moon, "The Archetypal Mediator in John and Philo: Logos-Jesus and Nous-Moses." *Journal of Biblical and Ancient Studies* 1/1 (2025): 163–194, here at 167–170.

⁴ C. Kavin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

G. White collected a volume which addressed and repudiated many of his concerns.⁵ The view adopted here is that comparison remains viable but, must be circumspect in what it claims to deliver. It must avoid genealogical connections which cannot be sustained. As Jonathan Z. Smith has noted, it is more realistic to investigate:

analogous processes, responding to parallel kinds of religious situations rather than continuing to construct genealogical relations between them...⁶

Christians should not use comparative studies to inform their own theological controversies; and should also recognise that comparison exists in the mind of the beholder.⁷ This need not mean that comparative exercises are either self-indulgent or solipsistic:

Although we may still be unsure as to an author's intention, even if there is no real doubt about the chronology of the texts, the value of intertextuality as an approach lies in the comparisons between a variety of genres and traditions.⁸

This study will take the form of what Troels Engberg-Pederson has called a parallel, rather than a heuristic comparison.⁹ So,

The purpose is fundamentally analogical: to see the two or more worldviews as deeply parallel to one another with all their similarities and differences, no

⁵ John M.G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (eds), *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, (Library of New Testament Studies 600. London: T&T Clark, 2020),

⁶ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 112–113.

⁷ Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 34, 51.

⁸ Brian Fiu Kolia, *Carrying Qoheleth's Matoa (House): An Australian-Samoan Diasporic Reading* (International Voices in Biblical Studies 17. Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2024) , 32.

⁹ For the distinction, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "The Past is a Foreign Country" in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (Library of New Testament Studies 600. London: T&T Clark, 2020), 40–61, here at 56–61. Note that much of Engberg-Pedersen's work is heuristic.

matter how each worldview has come into being.¹⁰

To borrow ideas and vocabulary from African hermeneutics, the comparator identifies “resonances” and “dissonances” which may emerge from “kindred atmospheres” and “key figures”.¹¹

Heuristic comparisons are liable to overstate connections between different traditions which may be assessed as “provisional”,¹² but ultimately cannot be proven. There is a risk of positing spurious relationships of dependency. This is not to deny that heuristic exercises have any validity, simply that they are not pursued here. I readily concede, following Smith, that this is a personal decision made by the comparator, in whose mind the comparison unfolds. Part of my concern comes from the ease with which heuristic comparisons may become examples of parallelomania.¹³

The comparative method adopted here adopts emic (insider views) rather than etic views (outsider analyses) as a starting point.¹⁴ Such work is crucial to ensure that the analysis does not simply mirror the worldview of the comparator. Owen Barfield usefully described this process as *unthinking*:

Nevertheless, when two consciousnesses differ, as it were in kind, and not merely in relative lucidity—there the problem of sympathy can always be

¹⁰ Engberg-Pedersen, “The Past is a Foreign Country”, 57.

¹¹ Fergus J. King, “More Than a Vapid Sound: The Case for a Hermeneutic of Resonance”, *Journal for Theology in Southern Africa* 148 (2014): 83–98, here at 84–89; Fidon R. Mwombeki, “The Hermeneutic of Resonance: Making Biblical Theology Relevant Today” (Paper presented at TLC Augsburg Convention, 2009), 8–9; Priscilla Pope-Levison and John Levison, *Jesus in Global Contexts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 95, 337–338.

¹² Robert A. Segal, “In Defense of the Comparative Method”, *Numen* 48/3 (2001): 339–373, here at 351.

¹³ Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81/1 (1962): 1–13. For a detailed discussion of these matters, see Fergus J. King, *Stoicism and the Gospel of John: A Study of their Compatibility* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/629. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 3–17.

¹⁴ Rowe, *One True Life*, 190–191. For the emic/etic distinction, see David M. Fetterman, “Emic/Etic Distinction” in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods Volume 1*, ed. Lisa M. Given (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 249.

narrowed down to the problem of the meaning of some one or more fundamental words. One of the most striking examples of this truth is the interpretation of Greek philosophy by modern Europeans. Such a one can read Plato and Aristotle through from end to end, he can even write books expounding their philosophy, and all without understanding a single sentence. Unless he has enough imagination, and enough power of detachment from the established meanings or thought-forms of his own civilization, to enable him to grasp the meanings of the fundamental terms— unless, in fact, he has the power not only of thinking, but of *unthinking*— he will simply re-interpret everything they say in terms of subsequent thought.¹⁵

Or, more bluntly from Pierre Hadot,

One cannot read an ancient author the way one does a contemporary author (which does not mean that contemporary authors are easier to understand than those of antiquity).¹⁶

Thereafter, some etic work follows, otherwise all that is left is reportage which lies beyond criticism.¹⁷ Such work must affirm that the emic readings are sustainable; that their application holds up and avoids both *ad hominem* critiques and inherent biases or prejudices.¹⁸

¹⁵ Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Oxford: Barfield Press, 2010), 129.

¹⁶ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life: Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson and trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 61.

¹⁷ Stephen L. Young, “Let’s Take the Text Seriously”, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 32/4-5 (2019): 328–363, here at 352.

¹⁸ Margaret M. Mitchell, “On Comparing, and Calling the Question” in *The New Testament in Comparison: Validity, Method, and Purpose in Comparing Traditions*, ed. John M.G. Barclay and Benjamin G. White (Library of New Testament Studies 600. London: T&T Clark, 2020), 95–124, here at 111–114. In wider discourse both Ludwig Wittgenstein and Mary Douglas noted these tendencies in modern analyses; Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough” in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Occasions 1912–1951*, ed. James Klagge and Alfred Nordmann (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 118–159, here at 125, 129, 131, 137; Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), v. For a more positive assessment of Frazer, see Segal, “In Defense of the Comparative Method”, 351–352.

3. Preliminary Definition: “Living Well”

Hadot argued that of the three traditional concerns of ancient philosophy (physics, metaphysics, and ethics), priority be given to ethics or “living well”:¹⁹ “philosophy was a mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life”.²⁰ The attendant physics and metaphysics thereafter provide a rationale or worldview on which the ethic is based. He further commented that this marks a significant departure from post-Cartesian philosophy which has tended to prioritise physics and metaphysics. Thus, the first stage in an emic reading of ancient intellectual traditions is to *unthink* the post-Cartesian model. Second is to recognise that philosophy and religious traditions should not be viewed discretely. While Paul B. DeCock makes this point by reference to Hadot’s analysis, the primary literature itself reveals this from the Presocratics onwards.²¹ Plato’s *Symp.* places Socrates on the cusp of philosophy and religion.²² This positioning finds its clearest expression in the *Theaet.* where the “living well” of the sage is described as ὁμοίωσις θεῷ (a likening to God):

διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι.

...we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible; and

¹⁹ Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 2–4; Paul B. DeCock, ‘Philo of Alexandria: Holiness as self-possession and self-transcendence’, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72/4 (2016), a3458, here at page 2 of 7.

²⁰ Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, 265.

²¹ DeCock, “Philo of Alexandria”, 2 of 7; Gregory Vlastos, “Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought” in *Studies in Greek Philosophy, Volume I: The Presocratics*, ed. Gregory Vlastos and Daniel W. Graham (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3–31.

²² Richard Robinson, “Socrates” in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Western Philosophy & Philosophies*, ed. James O. Urmson and Jonathan Rée (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 298–301, here at 299–300.

to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.²³

The phrase becomes all-important in subsequent Platonic thought and behaviour:

[the] interpretation of the *Theaetetus*-formula consists in isolating it so as to make it the sole aim of philosophy. Whatever its original importance in Plato's thought might be, it constitutes an undeniable part of the Platonic legacy.²⁴

The *Theaet.* passage is more than the “digression” which it has sometimes been called.²⁵ Harold Tarrant notes its ubiquity within later tradition:

...the Middle Platonist view of the soul had considerable implications for human life here on earth and within our bodies...Acceptance of *our* assimilation to the divine as the ultimate human goal entailed that our souls and intellects should become as divine as possible within our present lives.²⁶

And this is where we find Philo, firmly entrenched within the Middle Platonist tradition,²⁷ but additionally drawing on the Jewish Scriptures and tradition to articulate a worldview which embraces “living well” ultimately, presenting Moses as “the very father of philosophy, from whom all Greek

²³ Plato, *Theaet.* 176b. Text and translation from Plato. *Theaetetus. Sophist*, trans. Harold North Fowler (Loeb Classical Library 123. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1921), 128–129.

²⁴ François Renaud and Harold Tarrant, *The Platonic Alcibiades I: The Dialogue and its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 122.

²⁵ For example, Eugenio Benitez and Livia Guimaraes, “Philosophy as Performed in Plato's ‘Theaetetus’”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 47/22 (1993): 297–328, here at 307; Suzanne Stern-Gillet, “Ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in the *Theaetetus* and in Plotinus”, *Ancient Philosophy* 39/1 (2018): 89–117, here at 89, 91.

²⁶ Harold Tarrant, “The Middle Platonists on the Soul-Body Relation” in *Lovers of the Soul, Lovers of the Body: Philosophical and Religious Perspectives in Late Antiquity*, ed. Svetla Slaveva-Griffin and Ilaria L.E. Ramelli (Hellenic Studies Series 88. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022), 65–89, here at 89.

²⁷ John M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Revised edition. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 143; Moon, “The Archetypal Mediator”, 175; James W. Thompson, *Strangers on Earth: Philosophy and Rhetoric in Hebrews* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 4.

thinkers take their best ideas”.²⁸ It is, therefore, appropriate to explore what he identifies as “living well”.

4. “Living Well” in Philo

Philo embraces both Greek and Jewish materials in his writing. Epicureanism,²⁹ the Peripatetics,³⁰ Scepticism,³¹ and Cynicism³² are all included in his engagement with Hellenistic thought.³³ Stoicism is particularly prominent.³⁴ Maren Niehoff considers him to be increasingly influenced by it after the delegation to Rome but recognises that he may have encountered it earlier in Alexandria.³⁵

²⁸ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 143.

²⁹ Graziano Ranocchia, “Moses against the Egyptian: Anti-Epicurean Polemic in Philo” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. Francesca Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 75–102.

³⁰ Robert W. Sharples, “Philo and Post-Aristotelian Peripatetics” in *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. Francesca Alesse (Studies in Philo of Alexandria 5. Leiden: Brill, 2008), 55–73.

³¹ Carlos Lévy, “La Conversion du Scepticisme chez Philon d’Alexandrie” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. Francesca Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 103–120.

³² Erkki Koskenniemi, *Greek Writers and Philosophers in Philo and Josephus: A Study of Their Secular Education and Educational Ideals* (Studies in Philo of Alexandria 9. Leiden: Brill, 2019), 110–112.

³³ Erkki Koskenniemi, *Greek Writers and Philosophers*, 68–125.

³⁴ For example, Koskenniemi, “Philo and Greek Poets”, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 41/3 (2010): 301–322, here at 311, 322; Anthony A. Long, “Philo on Stoic Physics” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. F. Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 121–140; Roberto Radice, “Philo and Stoic Ethics. Reflections on the Idea of Freedom” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. F. Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 141–168.

³⁵ Maren Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 11, 17–18. Margaret Graver, “Philo of Alexandria and the origins of the Stoic Προπάθειαι” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. F. Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 197–221, here at 200 reckons Philo’s knowledge of Stoic emotions was formed in Alexandria from Greek texts, independently of the visit to Rome, and without meeting Roman Stoics like Seneca.

Philo's interpreters describe him variously:

Dawson (1994) presents Philo as a cultural revisionist attempting to show that Greek culture is subordinate to Jewish, while Boyarin (1994) suggests a universal worldview which is not restricted by Jewish particularity.³⁶

Philo presses the Jewish Scriptures into service for this task. Thus, he may be considered an exegete of the Jewish Scriptures who uses Hellenistic philosophy in that task as much as a philosopher *per se*.³⁷

In looking at his views on “living well”, both Hellenistic and Judaic vocabulary and concepts intrude. For Philo, living well embraces both interior and exterior movements:

Towards interiorisation in the sense of rationality and freedom and towards universalisation in the sense of a life in harmony with nature and in imitation of God.³⁸

Philo provides two lists of behaviour which assist the task of “living well”. In *Her.*, the list is described using imagery of food and eating:

πάντα γὰρ τὰ τῆς ἀσκήσεως ἐδώδιμα καθέστηκεν, ἡ ζήτησις, ἡ σκέψις, ἡ ἀνάγνωσις, ἡ ἀκρόασις, ἡ προσοχή, ἡ ἐγκράτεια, ἡ ἐξαδιαφόρησις τῶν ἀδιαφόρων.

For all the elements of practice are food fit for eating, inquiry, examination, reading, listening to instruction, concentration, perseverance, self-mastery, and power to treat things indifferent as indeed indifferent.³⁹

³⁶ Fergus J. King, “Ice-Cold in Alex: Philo’s Treatment of the Divine Lover in Hellenistic Pedagogy” in *Alcibiades and the Socratic Lover-Educator*, ed. Marguerite Johnson and Harold Tarrant (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), 164–179, here at 164.

³⁷ Mauro Bonazzi, “Towards Transcendence: Philo and the Renewal of Platonism in the Early Imperial Age” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. F. Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 233–251, here at 233, 250, 251; Graver, “Philo of Alexandria”, 205, 207, 210, 212; David T. Runia, “Philo and Hellenistic Doxography” in *Philo and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. F. Alesse (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 13–54, here at 24.

³⁸ DeCock, “Philo of Alexandria”, 3 of 7.

³⁹ Philo, *Her.* 253. Text and translation from Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues. On the Migration of Abraham. Who Is the Heir of Divine Things? On Mating with the Preliminary*

Alleg. Interp. supplies a list of disciplines which benefit the νοῦς (“mind”) identified with ὁ ἀσκητὴς...Ἰακώβ (Jacob, the one in training):

εἴτα καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ πάντα μέρη τῆς ἀσκήσεως, ἀναγνώσεις, μελέται, θεραπείαι, τῶν καλῶν μνημαί, ἐγκράτεια, τῶν καθηκόντων ἐνέργειαι:...

all his belongings, being portions of his discipline, readings, ponderings, acts of worship, and of remembrance of noble souls, self-control, discharge of daily duties...⁴⁰

These all have strong affinities with “Stoico-Platonic inspired philosophical therapeutics”.⁴¹ They inculcate learning, nature, and exercise which are exemplified by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob respectively.⁴² The embodiment of learning and exercise in Abraham and Jacob explains why their names change, but Isaac’s (nature) does not:

Jacob is the model of the ‘ascetic’ person, the person who struggles, wrestles, exercises, inspired by Genesis 32:24–32. Abraham, on the other hand, is the one who develops by receiving instruction.⁴³

Thus, for Philo, nature (Isaac), ἄσκησις (Jacob), and the pursuit of the listed intellectual disciplines (Abraham) all contribute to living well.⁴⁴ The importance of nature or physics is further seen in a description of the wise as θεωροὶ τῆς φύσεως καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ πάντων ἄριστοι (the closest observers of nature and all that it contains).⁴⁵

Studies, trans. Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker (Loeb Classical Library 261. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1932), 412–413.

⁴⁰ Philo, *Alleg. Interp.* 3.18. Text and translation from Philo, *On the Creation. Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2 and 3*, trans. Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker (Loeb Classical Library 226. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 312–313.

⁴¹ Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, 84–89, here at 84.

⁴² DeCock, “Philo of Alexandria”, 3–4 of 7.

⁴³ DeCock, “Philo of Alexandria”, 4 of 7.

⁴⁴ Philo, *Spec.* 2:44–46. Text and translation at Philo, *On the Decalogue. On the Special Laws, Books 1–3*, trans. Francis H. Colson (Loeb Classical Library 320. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1937), 334–337.

⁴⁵ Philo, *Spec.* 2.45. Text and translation from Philo, *On the Decalogue*, 334–337.

In addition to “living well”, “dying well” may be considered a part of the philosophical quest. This has both literal and symbolic frames of reference. On the one hand, it may mean having an appropriate attitude to death, as, for example, when Epicureans cultivate the view that death is not to be feared in their ataractic programme,⁴⁶ or when the Stoic considers suicide a viable option.⁴⁷ Socrates provided the classic example of “dying well”.⁴⁸ Additionally, it has the symbolic sense of transcending or moving beyond common understandings of one’s place in the world:

an attempt to liberate ourselves from a partial, passionate point of view - linked to the senses and the body - so as to rise to the universal, normative viewpoint of thought, submitting ourselves to the demands of the Logos and the norm of the Good. Training for death is training to die to one’s individuality and passions, in order to look at things from the perspective of universality and objectivity.⁴⁹

Philo makes this point by describing “Abraham’s calling to move away from his *country* as a transcendence of the body, from his *kindred* as transcendence of the outward senses and from his *father’s house* as transcendence of uttered speech”.⁵⁰

Philo’s Moses also teaches how to die well which focusses on a rejection of the material dimensions of life and their associated appetites with their capacity to harm, frustrate or cause terror.⁵¹ Instead, their task is ἐπεσθαι θεῶ

⁴⁶ Fergus J. King, *Epicureanism and the Gospel of John: A Study of their Compatibility* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/537. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 51–55.

⁴⁷ Alex Long, *Death and Immortality in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 195–203.

⁴⁸ Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, 94.

⁴⁹ Hadot, *Philosophy as a way of life*, 94–95.

⁵⁰ DeCock, “Philo of Alexandria”, 4 of 7.

⁵¹ Philo, *Migr.* 7–9. Text and translation from Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 136–137.

(to follow God);⁵² a term which originated in Pythagoreanism.⁵³

The one who wishes to live well follows the commandment to rest on the Sabbath as an opportunity to pursue wisdom, lessons from nature, and happiness.⁵⁴ This may even be described “as a way of imitating God”⁵⁵ which encapsulates the Middle Platonic ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in a particularly Judaic expression. Philo explicitly uses this phrase, basing his description on the *Theaet.*: διὸ καὶ πειρᾶσθαι χρὴ ἐνθένθε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι (“Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is *to become like God*, as far as this is possible; and to become like Him is to become holy, just, and wise”).⁵⁶

Philo’s advice also has a corporate element in his depiction of the Therapeutae (*Contempl.* 64–90). Whilst scholarly opinion debates whether this was a real or fictive group, here it is simply noted that they serve an exemplary or aspirational role.⁵⁷ Philo describes the Therapeutae as an ideal community, committed to living well by their quest for ἐπιστήμη καὶ θεωρία τῶν τῆς φύσεως πραγμάτων κατὰ τὰς τοῦ προφήτου Μωσέως ἱερωτάτας ὑφηγήσεις (knowledge and the contemplation of the verities of nature, following the truly sacred instructions of the prophet Moses).⁵⁸ As in a number

⁵² Philo, *Decal.* 98, 100. Philo, *On the Decalogue*, 56–57.

⁵³ Nélida Naveros Córdova, *Philo of Alexandria’s Ethical Discourse: Living in the Power of Piety* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018), 159–160.

⁵⁴ Philo, *Decal.* 100. Text and translation at Philo, *On the Decalogue*, 56–57.

⁵⁵ DeCock, “Philo of Alexandria”, 5 of 7.

⁵⁶ Philo, *Fug.* 63. Text and translation from Philo, *On Flight and Finding. On the Change of Names. On Dreams*, trans. Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker (Loeb Classical Library 275. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), 44–45. Italics mine.

⁵⁷ Esther Kobel, *Dining with John: Communal Meals and Identity Formation in the Fourth Gospel and its Historical and Cultural Context* (Biblical Interpretation Series 109, Leiden: Brill, 2010), 127.

⁵⁸ Philo, *Contempl.* 64. Text and translation from Philo, *Every Good Man is Free. On the Contemplative Life. On the Eternity of the World. Against Flaccus. Apology for the Jews. On Providence*, trans. Francis H. Colson (Loeb Classical Library 363. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1941), 150–151.

of intellectual traditions, including Platonism,⁵⁹ Stoicism,⁶⁰ Epicureanism,⁶¹ and Cynicism,⁶² women may be members.

Much of Philo's account describes their communal meals: eating well becomes a cipher for living well. Their meal practice shuns the fighting, luxury, ostentation and drunkenness of Hellenistic banquets. There may well be a polemic dimension to the accounts. Their communal meals are further contrasted favourably with the symposia of the philosophers – long recognised as both a social and literary phenomenon.⁶³ The meals of the Therapeutae (*Contempl.* 57-63) are conducted with “order, decorum, lack of excess and praise of God” which even rejects even the few elements of pleasure found at the philosophers' tables.⁶⁴ Philo describes the meal as a preliminary to their main work: to share wisdom based on allegorical and symbolic expositions of the sacred (Jewish) scriptures as well as ritual or liturgy which offers praise to God, in which hymns and music are prominent.⁶⁵

Members engage in a number of desirable behaviours: they avoid profiteering or exploitation,⁶⁶ They also renounce sexual impropriety, are

⁵⁹ Christine Garside Allen, “Plato on Women”, *Feminist Studies* 2/3 (1975): 133–138, here at 134–136.

⁶⁰ King, *Stoicism*, 102–108.

⁶¹ Fergus J. King, *Epicureanism and the Gospel of John: A Study of their Compatibility* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/537. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 152–153.

⁶² Dorota Dutsch, ‘DOG-LOVE-DOG’: Kynogamia and Cynic Sexual Ethics’, in *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World*, ed. Mark Masterson, Nancy S. Rabinowitz, and James Robson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 245–259, here at 252–255.

⁶³ Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 47–65.

⁶⁴ King, “Ice-Cold in Alex”, 167.

⁶⁵ Philo, *Contempl.* 75–90. Text and translation at Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 158–169.

⁶⁶ Philo, *Contempl.* 65. Text and translation at Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 152–153. *Spec.* 2.44 additionally advocates behaviours which reject participation in injustice and the corrupt vagaries of social and political life. Text and translation at Philo, *On the Decalogue*, 334–335.

austere, and reject slavery;⁶⁷ they drink only water, and eat no meat.⁶⁸ They model a love for wisdom superior to the kinds of love (ἔρως) visible in their Greek counterparts: they reject homoerotic or pederastic elements, principally because they promulgate “effeminacy and the destruction of procreative ability”.⁶⁹

In his final remarks about the group, Philo also describes the relationship between the Therapeutae and God as one which will result in φιλία (love, friendship) between them and God.⁷⁰

In short, the Philonic programme identifies living well with fidelity to Jewish scripture and tradition, is marked by behaviour which avoids greed and exploitation and clearly defines the adherent’s recognition of God and his imitation. The focus is on the soul, knowledge and virtue, connection to God and “felicity” (εὐδαιμονία). This word needs to be translated carefully to avoid simplifications like happiness: for Stoics, it involved the attainment of φρονήσις (right thought, wisdom), for Platonists, ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, for Aristotle, “the perfect life in accord with perfect virtue”,⁷¹ for Epicureans, the attainment of ἀταραξία (freedom from psychic or spiritual pain) and ἀπονία (freedom from physical pain).⁷² To this variety, Philo adds εὐσέβεια:

The genuine practice of the virtue εὐσέβεια in words and deeds (observances of the Mosaic law) leads to the τέλος ideal of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, the Platonic τέλος of life.⁷³

Commonly translated as piety or holiness, Philo identifies a virtue inextricably linked to faithfulness to God as revealed in Judaic thought, the

⁶⁷ Philo, *Contempl.* 68–71. Text and translation at Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 154–157.

⁶⁸ Philo, *Contempl.* 73–74. Text and translation at Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 156–159.

⁶⁹ King, “Ice-Cold in Alex”, 168.

⁷⁰ Philo, *Contempl.* 90. Text and translation at Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 168–169.

⁷¹ Córdova, *Philo of Alexandria’s Ethical Discourse*, 158–159.

⁷² King, *Stoicism*, 56.

⁷³ Córdova, *Philo of Alexandria’s Ethical Discourse*, 163.

teaching and law of Moses, as fundamental. Thus, however closely Philo will sit to Hellenistic theory and practice, Judaism provides a non-negotiable and distinctive cultural dimension to underpin the superiority of his whole project.

5. “Living Well” in the FG⁷⁴

Examination of “living well” in the FG starts with the vocabulary, both nouns and verbs, which are employed. The follower of Jesus may be described as μαθητής (a learner) in the FG. The term appears on occasion to be used of the Twelve or an equivalent circle (e.g., John 2:2; 3:22; 4:31; 11:7; 20:19–20; 24–26; 21:1–14). It is applied to individuals, such the other disciple (John 18:15), the Beloved Disciple (John 13:21–30, 18:15–18, 19:26–27; 21:7, 20) or Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38). Elsewhere, it refers to a group (John 6:66). It may also include women. Mary Magdalene is depicted as a model of discipleship:⁷⁵ her “distinctive name not only indicated her provenance but also her position as one of Jesus’s closest disciples, and more”.⁷⁶ Josephine Massynbærde Ford says of the women in the gospel that they are “very individual in character, bold in their speech and energetic in Jesus’ cause” and “unconventional in the roles they play”, “suggest[ing] that women played a lively part in the Johannine community”.⁷⁷

The language of education is further seen in the pairing of διδάσκολος and ῥαββί/ῥαββουνί. Διδάσκολος is used mainly of Jesus (John 3:2; 11:28; 13:13–14), but once of Nicodemus (John 3:10). It is a functional description, of “a comprehensive teaching process by a teacher that combined words and

⁷⁴ This section summarises material found in King, *Stoicism*, 137–157.

⁷⁵ Mary Ann Beavis, “The Deification of Mary Magdalene”, *Feminist Theology* 21/2 (2012): 145–154 shows that some later scholarship makes claims beyond discipleship, reckoning her as putative deity or bride of Christ.

⁷⁶ Joan E. Taylor, “Missing Magdala and the Name of Mary ‘Magdalene’”, *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 146:3 (2014): 205–223.

⁷⁷ Josephine Massynbærde Ford, *Redeemer, Friend and Mother: Salvation in Antiquity and in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 106–107.

deeds”.⁷⁸ His roles as a Jewish teacher may be inferred from the use of ῥαββί/ῥαββουví, particularly in the vocative (John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8; 20:16).⁷⁹ In this role he addresses Israel, not just the disciples.⁸⁰ His own being taught by the Father (John 8:28), and his practice of teaching in the Temple and synagogues imply a particular authoritative role. In addition, he teaches his own disciples in private, provides an example of living well in a mimetic teaching role: “interpreting and continuing the Jewish tradition”.⁸¹ But, Jesus serves as more than a “prime model”.⁸² He also makes living well possible.

Both God and humanity contribute to being a disciple, it is not simply an option chosen by an individual, or an automatic gift from God:

The privilege of becoming children of God is a matter of divine prerogative. Discipleship is granted from above because one can come to Jesus only if the Father draws him (6:44, 65). Yet, discipleship requires human responsibility.⁸³

Divine agency and human response are both needed. Peter provides an example of what that response entails:

Not only does he carry out the activities fundamental to Johannine discipleship during the earthly ministry of Jesus, chief of which are *believing* in Jesus (John 6:69), *following* him (1:42; 6:68; 18:15–16; 20:2–10), and publicly *confessing* him (6:68–69), he demonstrates missionary skills (21:11) and is invested with pastoral responsibilities by the risen Jesus (21:15–17).⁸⁴

Being a disciple is grounded in the christology of the FG, well summarised

⁷⁸ Jan G. van der Watt, *A Grammar of the Ethics of John Vol. 1* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 431. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 197.

⁷⁹ van der Watt, *A Grammar*, 196.

⁸⁰ van der Watt, *A Grammar*, 198–199.

⁸¹ van der Watt, *Grammar*, 199.

⁸² Marianus Pale Hera, *Christology and Discipleship in John 17* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/342. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 172.

⁸³ Hera, *Christology*, 172.

⁸⁴ Bradford B. Blaine, *Peter in the Gospel of John: The Making of an Authentic Disciple* (Atlanta, GA: Society for Biblical Literature, 2007), 183.

by Luke Hase:

this ecclesiological vision is grounded precisely in the Gospel's Christology. Thus, studies have unpacked variously how such axioms as Jesus's status as λόγος (Minear 1982), his incarnation (Schnelle 1991), his being sent (Ferreira 1998; Kysar 2001), his constituting the new temple (Coloe 2001; 2007; Schneiders 2006), even his divine sonship (Akala 2014; Byers 2017) set in John a precedent for the nature of discipleship – situating 'believers as the continuing incarnation of the Word' (Kysar 2001: 375), as the 'ongoing presence and action of Jesus in the world' (Schneiders 2006: 355), 'able to continue the mission the Father entrusted to Jesus' (Coloe 2001: 217; cf. 1.12–14; 15.12; 17.11, 18, 21–23; 20.21).⁸⁵

It is also seen in the behaviour which Jesus models: "doing the Father's will", that is, of the one who sent him (e.g., John 5:30; 6:38; 7:18).⁸⁶ This also involves Jesus as the means of achieving this end: "asking in my name" (John 14:15). Both are grounded in πιστεύειν (e.g., John 1:7; 1:50; 2:22–23; 3:16; 3:36) which comprises three elements: the epistemic (for which the necessary material may be provided by materials preserved in the gospel – John 20: 30–31), the relational, and allegiance.⁸⁷ Thus, "knowing Jesus" is not simply epistemic (facts), but also has a relational or experiential quality. "Belief" and "knowing" are linked (πεπιστεύκαμεν καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν – John 6:69).⁸⁸ They combine factual and experiential knowledge. Thus they include two kinds of knowledge: "believing in" (equivalent of *kennen* [German], *connaître* [French], *cognoscere* [Latin] – relational knowledge) and "believing that" (*wissen* [German], *savoir* [French], *sapere* [Latin] – informative knowledge or

⁸⁵ Luke Hase, "That We Might Die with Him: Jesus' Death and Resurrection as a Paradigm for Discipleship in John 11:1–12:11", *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 46/3 (2024): 294–320, here at 295.

⁸⁶ Christopher Cowan, "The Father and the Son in the Fourth Gospel", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49/1 (2006): 115–135, here at 117.

⁸⁷ Matthew W. Bates, *Gospel Allegiance: What Faith in Jesus Misses for Salvation in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019), 95–96.

⁸⁸ Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 102.

“facts”).⁸⁹ These overlap and defy a glib compartmentalisation.⁹⁰ This is apparent in the FG’s depiction of discipleship in which misunderstanding is a means to gain knowledge (John 1:24–27, 48–51; 2:20–21; 3:4–10; 4:10–15, 31–38; 6: 1–66; 7:33–36; 8:21–24; 11:11–15, 24–25; 13:6–11; 18:37–38): relationship brings wisdom.⁹¹ The evangelist does not provide prescriptions for living well: the gospel itself contains this material in its depiction of Jesus, revealed as Messiah, Lord and God (John 20: 30–31). Φιλέω and ἀγαπάω (which are effectively synonymous and include both love and friendship) are key to describing God (John 3: 16), are modelled by Jesus (e.g., John 13:1–11), and to be adopted as behaviours by the disciples (John 13:15, 34–35).⁹²

The relational aspect is further seen in the language used of meeting and engaging with Jesus. Ἐρχομαι/ὁράω passages constitute an invitation to the world to encounter Jesus (John 1:39), to “come and see” more deeply and become able to share that message (John 1:46; 4:29), and, ultimately, to empathise with, and go out into, the world with it (John 11:34).⁹³

Ἀκολουθέω (follow) indicates an entering into a relationship of pupillage or discipleship with Jesus (John 1:37–42), which, for those who first do so, appears to indicate leaving their former teacher (the Baptist), for him.⁹⁴ In the early stages of the gospel, this is among the first commands given to would-be disciples (John 1:43). Commentators have noted that this is a word used in connection with psychagogy and moral progress in the Greek school, not least by the Stoic writer, Epictetus, for whom it may be linked to either relating to nature or god.⁹⁵ In the FG it indicates the gaining of salvific benefits, seen in

⁸⁹ Iain MacGilchrist, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 96–97.

⁹⁰ Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 233, 409.

⁹¹ King, *Stoicism*, 139–140; *Epicureanism*, 172–173.

⁹² King, *Stoicism*, 152–155.

⁹³ Michael T. McDowell, “An Insider’s Church for Outsiders: “‘Come and See’ Passages and Christian Engagement with the World”, *Religions* 13/9 (2022): 865, 5–10 of 14.

⁹⁴ Fergus J. King, *A Guide to St John’s Gospel* (International Study Guide 51. London: SPCK, 2015), 25.

⁹⁵ Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae*, 7.88. Text at Tiziano Dorandi, *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of*

the participation in the light of life (ὁ ἀκολουθῶν μοι οὐ μὴ περιπατήσει ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ, ἀλλ' ἔξει τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς – John 8:12) as well as sharing in Jesus's life and suffering (ἐὰν ἐμοί τις διακονῇ ἐμοὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω, καὶ ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς ἔσται – John 12:26).⁹⁶

Those who choose to follow, then μένειν (stay, abide – John). This verb indicates a “loyalty or adherence to Jesus”, as seen in the “Jesus gathering” (identified as Galilee) as opposed to the synagogue (Judaea).⁹⁷ It is also indicative of being loved by Jesus.⁹⁸ It appears in the sequence: “vine – branches – *abide* – commandments – even to the point of death” (John 15:1–13).⁹⁹ Jesus's opponents (e.g., John 8:59) fail to μένειν, that is, to remain in relation with him (ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταὶ μου ἔστε – John 8:31).¹⁰⁰ This is a reminder of the human response which is needed to the divine invitation.

The invitation and response also include what might be identified by a symbolic element: new birth (γεννηθῇ ἄνωθεν – John 3:3):

By a “true” believer I mean one who has experienced the new birth (John

Eminent Philosophers (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 526. Translation from Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II: Books 6–10*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Loeb Classical Library 185. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), 195; King, *Stoicism*, 27; Brian E. Johnson, *The Role Ethics of Epictetus: Stoicism in Ordinary Life* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), 60 fn. 42.

⁹⁶ Gerhard Kittel, “ἀκολουθέω” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol. 1*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 210–216, here at 214.

⁹⁷ Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John in Cultural and Rhetorical Perspective* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2009) 66–67.

⁹⁸ van der Watt, *A Grammar*, 298, fn.63.

⁹⁹ Fergus J. King, “Hit or Myth? Methodological Considerations in Comparing Dionysos with the Johannine Jesus”, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 51/2 (2021): 88–100, here at 93. Whilst later read as suggesting the pressing of grapes and martyrdom, this imagery is not in the text (93). The comment about destruction is a warning about a failure to produce fruit; Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale & D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic/ Apollos, 2007), 415–512, here at 492.

¹⁰⁰ King, *Stoicism*, 147.

3:3, 5, 7), who has been born of God (1:13), has been drawn to Jesus by the Father (6:44), and has been given to Jesus by the Father (6:37).¹⁰¹

Their origin is rooted in God's will, the divine invitation, rather than other identifiable generative or creative processes (οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρὸς ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν – John 1:13). It suggests different qualities of existence in which the one ἐκ θεοῦ is qualitatively superior to the others.

For many commentators, this is a sacramental construction. The sacraments are commonly taken as baptism and the eucharist.¹⁰² For some, these are considered later and distorting additions to the earliest forms of the gospel, perpetrated by later redactors. Such thinking begs the question of whether “earliest is best”,¹⁰³ and, indeed, of whether elaborate theories of reconstruction might be shaped by the theological concerns of the commentator.¹⁰⁴ Those who resist sacramental readings, invoke a christological focus. Yet even a scholar like Paul Anderson, who resists sacramentalism, admits:

In the broad sense of the term, John's christology must certainly be considered ‘sacramental’. Through the ‘flesh-and-bloodness’ of Jesus, God has spoken to humanity, and this communion demands a response from the world. It is also clear that John contains no ‘ritual ordinances’ and even seems to de-emphasize the value of such sacramental rites as water baptism and the

¹⁰¹ Tony Costa, “The Use of πιστεύω in the Gospel of John: Some Considerations on Meaning and Issues of Consistency and Ambiguity”, *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 32/1 (2021): 93–109, here at 94.

¹⁰² There is a debate about whether the foot-washing (John 13:1-11) was potentially a sacrament. John C. Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991) makes such a case. van der Watt, *A Grammar*, 450 bluntly comments, “but that is just a projection and no real evidence supports this view”.

¹⁰³ John M.G. Barclay, “The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship” in *Resurrection Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Oxford: One World, 1996), 13–30, here at 27; Kathryn Greene-McCreight, “Dogs at the Foot of the Cross and the Jesus Who Never Tires of Meeting Us” in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 273–294, here at 284–285.

¹⁰⁴ King, *Epicureanism*, 114–124.

eucharist.¹⁰⁵

And more recently:

[T]hey [followers] must be willing to ingest the flesh and blood of Jesus.¹⁰⁶

But consider such reluctance in light of the FG's claim that the Word became flesh (John 1:14). If the "flesh-and-bloodness of Jesus" takes place there, why not elsewhere? This risks swallowing the camel of the incarnation while choking on the tail of the sacraments. The gospel is most certainly dualist, contrasting light/dark,¹⁰⁷ above/below, earth/heaven,¹⁰⁸ but this does not demand a metaphysical "spirit-matter" dualism.

If viewed as sacramental, both baptism and eucharist provide settings in which ordinary items are invested with a spiritual or transcendent purpose usually through a blessing or spoken identification.¹⁰⁹ They provoke a change in status. C. H. Dodd sees baptism (John 3:22–26) as:

The idea of initiation into eternal life (or rebirth), in conjunction with a rich complex of ideas which are required for its proper understanding.¹¹⁰

It brings participation in the πνεῦμα (the spirit), and access to ζωὴ αἰώνιος (eternal life). These come from Jesus himself, identified as the source of benefit (John 7:37–39).¹¹¹ This is both sacramental and christological: the two

¹⁰⁵ Paul N. Anderson, *The Christology of the Fourth Gospel* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 114.

¹⁰⁶ Paul N. Anderson, "Negotiating Complexity within the Dialectical and Cosmopolitan Johannine Situation", *Religions* 15 (2024): 633, here at 11 of 21.

¹⁰⁷ van der Watt, *A Grammar*, 332–344.

¹⁰⁸ William Loader, *Jesus in John's Gospel: Structure and Issues in Johannine Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 422.

¹⁰⁹ Christoph Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the Study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh Look at the Lord's Supper", *New Testament Studies* 33/ 1 (1987): 102–134, here at 117.

¹¹⁰ Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 311.

¹¹¹ Paul S. Coxon, *Exploring the New Exodus in John: A Biblical Theological Investigation of John Chapters 5–10* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 258–259.

are not mutually exclusive. A similar pattern and set of outcomes are seen in the eucharist:

Only the words of Jesus to the crowds beside the Sea of Galilee (6.22–59) seem clearly to have sacramental overtones. Jesus’ call for them to eat his flesh and drink his blood (6.53) has only an utterly revolting meaning unless it refers to the bread and wine of the eucharist. His promise that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood will abide in him, live because of him, and live forever, (6.56–58) further supports a sacramental interpretation.¹¹²

In conclusion, the FG offers a vision of living well which is shaped by both an understanding and relationship with Jesus who exemplifies and makes possible a divine invitation to positive transformation. It demands a human response which includes a sacramental component which extends that invitation and possibility to those who will come after him. Subsequent Christian interpretation of the FG, whilst not using the term ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, will identify the gospel as embracing a telos identified as θέωσις (becoming divine).¹¹³

6. Resonance and Dissonance: A Comparator’s Verdict

Both Philo and the FG share a common concern with “living well”. This much they share with schools of classical antiquity. Their vocabulary is quite different, but there seems to be some conceptual overlap. Both patterns involve a distinctly theological ethos, seen in the models of the patriarchs and Therapeutae (Philo), and Jesus and his disciples (FG). Both are also formed by their Greek and Jewish contexts. For both, God provides and exemplar and model, but dissonances quickly appear. For Philo, the pursuit of the Mosaic Law and the examples of the patriarchs are paramount. For the evangelist, Jesus is supreme, superior to Moses (John 6:27, 32–33, 48–51, 58) and

¹¹² Larry Paul Jones, *The Symbol of Water in the Gospel of John* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 145. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). 236.

¹¹³ E.g., Andrew J. Byers, *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 167. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Michael J. Gorman, *Missional Theosis in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018).

Abraham (John 8:52–58), and identified as the Messiah.¹¹⁴ Philo’s value of nature is not shared by the FG, which sees the κόσμος controlled by ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (John 12:20–36; 14:30–31; 16:8–11).¹¹⁵ It, too, will be transformed by divine act (John 3:17).¹¹⁶

In the broadest terms, there is a convergence with the philosophical aspirations of the post Platonic schools: ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, even if phrased differently. However, the semantic and lexical foci of the respective traditions will always deny more than a broad identity in this regard. Jan G. van der Watt pointed out that there is a significant structural continuity between it and Graeco-Roman traditions.¹¹⁷ So, these traditions share a basic or fundamental pattern or shape.

But this raises one last question: given the obvious differences between the traditions, is such definition of “living well” too general?

Not necessarily. If “living well” is subsumed into the category of ethics, one of the three elements of classical philosophy along with physics and metaphysics, any overview of these three categories will reveal that they encompass diverse, if not, at times, mutually exclusive programmes. Comparison may well involve “proportioning”, which Stanley Tambiah, drawing on the work of Louis Dumont describes as:

...first constituting the total design in terms of the valuations of the socio-cultural tradition entity from within the tradition... This approach, contrary to common misunderstanding is *not averse* to comparison. Explicit comparison comes *after* the totalities have been constructed, and it entails the dialectical opposing of total designs, systems of valuations, and hierarchies of relations. It therefore reveals qualitative differences as well as similarities, and in

¹¹⁴ King, *Stoicism*, 196–197.

¹¹⁵ Judith L. Kovacs, “‘Now Shall the Ruler of this World be Driven Out’: Jesus’ Death as a Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114/2 (1995): 227–247, here at 228–231.

¹¹⁶ King, *Stoicism*, 227–229.

¹¹⁷ van der Watt, *A Grammar*, 101–102.

highlighting the former is sensitive to civilizational options.¹¹⁸

Also important are Ludwig Wittgenstein's comments on "family resemblances":

And we extend our concept of number as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.

But if someone wished to say: "There is something common to all these constructions— namely the disjunction of all their common properties" – I should reply: Now you are only playing with words. One might as well say: "Something runs through the whole thread— namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres."¹¹⁹

Lastly. If, as Tambiah points out, it is possible to draw comparisons between "god" (Christianity) and "deva" (Hinduism) "because they share, or we assume they share, *some* commensurabilities, some amount of base agreement", ¹²⁰ similar steps remain appropriate for comparison of the traditions of antiquity. The discernible pattern and common concept of ὁμοίωσις θεῶν, even if varied in detailed content, points of reference, and terminology, invites a similar conclusion: a base agreement.

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¹¹⁸ Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality. The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures 1984 presented at the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 126–127.

¹¹⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (3rd ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 32e [§67].

¹²⁰ Tambiah, *Magic*, 125; see further, King, *Stoicism*, 14.

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