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# Πνεῦμα in the Writings of Flavius Josephus: A Jewish Adaptation of Middle Platonic Trichotomic Anthropology?

## Abstract

Several recent studies have advanced the thesis that ancient Judaism and the emerging Christian movement took up the Middle Platonic trichotomic model of the human being. This article analyzes all instances of πνεῦμα in the works of Josephus. All passages in which Josephus talks about πνεῦμα in relation to living people can most plausibly be interpreted in the sense of “breath.” In addition, he uses the lexeme for demons, for the divine spirit and for wind, i.e. in the entire breadth of common language usage. A philosophical concept of πνεῦμα cannot be identified and there are no traces of a Jewish adaption of Middle Platonic anthropology in Josephus. He does not use πνεῦμα to denote a connection between human beings and the divine, nor does he have a πνεῦμα/ψυχή/σῶμα-model of humanity.

## Keywords

Josephus; anthropology; Middle Platonism; *pneuma*

## 1 Introduction

Several recent studies have advanced the thesis that ancient Judaism and the emerging Christian movement took up the Middle Platonic trichotomic model of the human being.<sup>1</sup>

Plato's anthropology is not uniform. It offers points of reference for various, sometimes contradictory, developments across the Hellenistic schools of philosophy. The Stoics developed a unified cognitive model of the mind based on statements made by Socrates in Plato's early dialogues. By contrast, in Platonism the idea of several competing mental faculties in the human being remained the guiding principle. Plato's prevailing model of a tripartite soul (λόγος as the rational part of the soul, θυμός and ἐπιθυμία as irrational parts) was modified in Middle Platonism to a trichotomic anthropology (νοῦς, ψυχή, σῶμα).<sup>2</sup>

According to the studies cited at the beginning, this model was taken up by Philo of Alexandria, Paul and also Flavius Josephus. The model underwent a specifically Jewish modification in that νοῦς was identified with πνεῦμα on the basis of Gen 2:7. With regard to Philo, this thesis is certainly plausible, even if many details remain unclear.<sup>3</sup> With regard to Paul, the

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<sup>1</sup> Van Kooten, “Trichotomy,” 99, 112; idem, *Anthropology*, 280; Förster, “Schöpfung,” 168; Feldman, *Judean Antiquities*, 13; Wyss, “Cosmogony,” 105. Cf. also Isaacs, *Concept*, 35-37.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g., Runia, “God and Man”; Reydams-Schils, “Philo of Alexandria”; Lee, *Transformation*, 49-102.

<sup>3</sup> Esp. the question of stoic influence. Cf. Runia, “God and Man”; Reydams-Schils, “Philo of Alexandria”; O'Connor, “Genesis 2:7”; Wyss, “Philon.”

thesis is highly controversial.<sup>4</sup> What about Josephus? Does he use πνεῦμα to denote, within a Platonizing trichotomic anthropology, the human's supreme mental faculty?

## 2 Overview: πνεῦμα in Josephus's writings

The lexeme πνεῦμα is attested 34 times in the works of Josephus. The evidence is unevenly distributed across his writings: There are only 5 attestations in Josephus's earliest extant work *De Bello Iudaico* (probably published in 81 CE), but 29 in *Antiquitates Iudaicae* (finished in 94 CE). Josephus does not use πνεῦμα in his last two works, "*Vita*" and "*Contra Apionem*."<sup>5</sup> This imbalance becomes even clearer when the evidence is preliminarily sorted according to meaning: πνεῦμα in the sense of "wind" can be found 3 times in *Bellum* and 13 times in *Antiquities*. The meaning "evil spirit/demon" is attested twice in *Bellum* and twice in *Antiquities*. Only in *Antiquities* does Josephus use πνεῦμα in relation to God (9 times), to animals (once) or to living people (4 times).

From this rough overview one can already draw a first conclusion: Should there really be a Jewish modification of Middle Platonic anthropology in Josephus, then only in *Antiquities* and not yet in *Bellum*. So, one would have to reckon with the fact that such philosophical topics became known to him only in the approximately 13 years between these two works. In order to be able to judge this, however, it is necessary to examine all passages in detail.

## 3 πνεῦμα as "Wind" in *Bellum* and *Antiquities*

The most common meaning of πνεῦμα both in *Bellum* and in *Antiquities* is "wind" as a meteorological phenomenon (Jos. Bell. 3.422; 4.77; 4.477; Jos. Ant. 2.343; 2.349; 4.55; 8.346; 9.36; 9.210; 10.279; 12.75; 14.28; 16.17; 16.20; 16.62). This is also the most plausible understanding of Jos. Ant. 1.27: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἔκτισεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν. ταύτης δ' ὑπ' ὄψιν οὐκ ἐρχομένης, ἀλλὰ βαθεῖ μὲν κρυπτομένης σκότει, πνεύματος δ' αὐτὴν ἄνωθεν ἐπιθέοντος, γενέσθαι φῶς ἐκέλευσεν ὁ θεός. Here, πνεῦμα is anarthrous, without the clarifying adjective θεῖον (unlike in all other places in the *Antiquities* where it is used in relation to God) and in parallel to "darkness." So, this probably does not refer to God's spirit, but to wind.<sup>6</sup>

## 4 πνεῦμα as "evil spirit/demon" in *Bellum* and *Antiquities*

The second usage of πνεῦμα attested in both *Bellum* and *Antiquities* is "evil spirit/demon." The warlike spirit that fills soldiers (Jos. Bell. 3.92: καὶ τινοσ ἀρηϊοσ πνεύματος ὑποπιμπλάμενοι) could be interpreted as an emotion, i.e. as a kind of collective frenzy (cf. Jos. Bell. 3,58: φρονήματός τε ὑπεπλήσθησαν ... Ἑβραῖοι "the Hebrews were filled with arrogance"). However, the passage could also, and perhaps more plausibly, be understood in the sense of aggression entering the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. e.g. Songe-Møller, "Body"; Engberg-Pedersen, "Transformation"; O'Connor, "Genesis 2:7"; Weissenrieder, *Körper*, 162-64.

<sup>5</sup> This is also true for *spiritus* in the part which is extant only in Latin translation.

<sup>6</sup> Contra Förster, "Schöpfung," 159.

soldiers like a demon. In Jos. Bell. 7.185 (τὰ γὰρ καλούμενα δαιμόνια, ταῦτα δὲ πονηρῶν ἐστὶν ἀνθρώπων πνεύματα τοῖς ζῶσιν εἰσδύμενα καὶ κτείνοντα τοὺς βοηθείας μὴ τυγχάνοντας) πνεῦμα must refer to some part or aspect of deceased evil people that invades (εἰσδύνω) and harms others. This can be understood against the background of widespread ancient ideas about spirits of the dead, ghosts and demons. It need not be a reference to a trichotomic anthropology.

In *Antiquities* Josephus seems to imagine the infiltration of demons into a person and their work in this person in a similar way. They come into the psyche from outside and can be driven out of it again. In this writing Josephus distinguishes demons from the divine πνεῦμα by calling them πονηρὸν πνεῦμα (Jos. Ant. 6.211) or δαιμόνιον πνεῦμα (Jos. Ant. 6.214).

## 5 πνεῦμα as “Divine Spirit” in *Antiquities*

This leads us to the usage of πνεῦμα in relation to God, which is attested only in *Antiquities*. At one point Josephus refers to the divine presence in the temple as “part of your [God’s] πνεῦμα” (πρὸς δὲ τούτοις ἵκετεύω καὶ μοῖρὰν τινα τοῦ σοῦ πνεύματος εἰς τὸν ναὸν ἀποικίσαι, Jos. Ant. 8.114<sup>7</sup>). He speaks of a “divine pneuma” (θεῖον πνεῦμα) several times in connection with prophecy (Jos. Ant. 4.108; 4.118, 119 (τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεῦμα<sup>8</sup>); 6.166, 222, 223; 8.408; 10.239). This πνεῦμα is not a faculty in human beings, but like the demons comes into them from outside and speaks through them (also against their will).

## 6 The πνεῦμα of Living (Human) Beings in *Antiquities*

Before discussing the passages in *Antiquities* in which πνεῦμα is used in relation to living (human) beings an observation can be made concerning the non-use of πνεῦμα in such cases.<sup>9</sup> Large parts of *Antiquities* are paraphrases of biblical texts.<sup>10</sup> The Septuagint translates phrases with *נח* which refer to mental or emotional processes with πνεῦμα (e.g. Num 5:14, 30; 2Par 36:22; cf. also Est 5:1e; 1Macc 13:7).<sup>11</sup> Πνεῦμα is also used with the genitive of the personal pronoun or with the possessive pronoun (1Kdms 30:12; 2Kdms 13:21; 3Kdms 20:5). Such compounds are almost never attested in texts which are originally written in Greek.<sup>12</sup> The compound πνεῦμα + noun in the

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<sup>7</sup> This is the only evidence in Josephus for πνεῦμα + possessive pronoun; there is no evidence for πνεῦμα + genitive of personal or demonstrative pronoun.

<sup>8</sup> πνεῦμα + noun in the genitive only here and Jos. Ant. 4.119; 9.210; Jos. Bell. 7.185.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Best, “Use,” 219-20.

<sup>10</sup> On the difficult question of which text form(s) of the biblical books Josephus has used cf. e.g. Spilsbury, “Josephus”; Begg, “Genesis”; Satlow, “Knowledge.”

<sup>11</sup> On the relation between *נח* (“wind,” “breath,” “animating principle,” “psychic state,” “spirit”) and its most common equivalent in the Septuagint πνεῦμα cf. Horn, “Holy Spirit,” 261-62; Muraoka, *Lexicon*, 567; Schoemaker, “Use,” 13-41; Tengström, “*נח*,” 395-96.

<sup>12</sup> Only Eur. frag. pap. 65.73 (ψυχαι μὲν οὖν τῶνδ’ οὐ βεβᾶσ’ [“Αἰδ]ην πάρα, εἰς δ’ αἰθέρ’ αὐτῶν πνεύμ’ ἐγὼ [χ]ατῶικισα “whose souls did not descend into Hades, their breath of life I brought back to the ether”) and Aristot. part. an. 669a (ὥστ’ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι αὐτῶν εἶναι τὸ τέλος τοῦ ζῆν “so that their breathing volume limits their [scil. the marine mammals’] survival”). πνεῦμα with possessive pronoun outside Jewish or Christian literature only in Bion, Epitaphius Adonis 48 (χειρὶς ἐμὸν ἦπαρ πνεῦμα τεὸν ῥεύσῃ “and your breath flows into my liver”). All the more striking is the frequency with which Paul uses such phrases (Rom 1:9; 8:16; 1Cor 2:11; 5:4; 14:14; 16:18; 2Cor 2:13; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; Phlm 25; 1Thess 5:23).

genitive, denoting an emotion or character trait, is never attested in non-Jewish and non-Christian Greek texts. That is a plausible reason why Josephus avoids such formulations in his paraphrases of the corresponding biblical texts.<sup>13</sup> In their place he uses either the personal pronoun (Jos. Ant. 6.360; 7.173; 8.356) or a common Greek word to express the particular nuance of the mental process in question (Jos. Ant. 3.271: ζηλοτυπία; 11.3: παρορμήσας ... τήν ... ψυχὴν; 11.237: τὴν διάνοιαν μετέβαλεν; 13.201).

What about the *use* of πνεῦμα in relation to living (human) beings in *Antiquities*? When referring to living people, Josephus uses πνεῦμα twice without doubt in the sense of breath.<sup>14</sup> Jos. Ant. 3,291 is about the breathing of air into musical instruments. In a medical context, Jos. Ant. 17.169 deals with the shrill whistling sound in respiratory distress (πνεύματός τε ὀρθία ἔντασις).

In two other passages, πνεῦμα is also used in a medical or biological context: Jos. Ant. 3,260 concerns the prohibition on eating the blood of animals. This prohibition is justified by the fact that Moses considered the blood to be “the life and breath” of animals (ψυχὴν αὐτὸ καὶ πνεῦμα νομίζων). Since the text deals with animals that are eaten, it is impossible that ψυχή and πνεῦμα mean “soul and mind” within a trichotomic anthropology. The idea that breath is distributed in the body by the blood circulation is widespread in ancient medicine and biology.<sup>15</sup>

Jos. Ant. 11 is about queen Esther's feeling faint. She falls at the feet of those who stand beside her with her mouth open (τοῖς παρὰ πλευρὸν οὖσιν ἀχανῆς ἐπέπεσεν, 11.236). ἀχανῆς can mean “with mouth wide open” or “with mouth closed.” It refers to a physiological reaction to something unexpected or overwhelming, i.e. “breath-taking fright” (Hegesippus frag. 1.22-27; Polyb. 7.17.5). When Esther regains consciousness, she explains to her husband what happened: ὑπεχώρει μου<sup>16</sup> τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ κατελειπόμην ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς (Jos. Ant. 11.241). In connection with the preceding description, this can best be translated as “it took my breath away and I fell unconscious.”<sup>17</sup>

This brings us finally to the crucial passage Jos. Ant. 1.34. It is a paraphrase of Gen 2:7: Καὶ δὴ καὶ φυσιολογεῖν<sup>18</sup> Μωυσῆς μετὰ τὴν ἐβδόμην ἤρξατο περὶ τῆς τάνθρώπου κατασκευῆς λέγων οὕτως· ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς λαβὼν, καὶ πνεῦμα ἐνῆκεν αὐτῷ καὶ ψυχὴν. In the Septuagint the verse reads: καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοὴν ζωῆς, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν. Josephus thus first quotes Gen 2:7a in a version that corresponds to the Septuagint but with slight stylistic improvement. In Gen 2:7b, however, his wording differs greatly from the Septuagint. As stated at the beginning, some scholars interpret it as a specifically Jewish form of a Middle Platonic trichotomic anthropology: Josephus assumes here that the human being consists of

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<sup>13</sup> On a similar phenomenon in *some* parts of the Septuagint cf. Tengström, “ΠΙΓ,” 395.

<sup>14</sup> Josephus never uses the synonym πνοή (not even when it occurs in the corresponding passage of the Septuagint, cf. Gen 7:22 with Jos. Ant. 1.89; 3Kdms 15:29 with Jos. Ant. 8.298; 2Esdr 16:1 with Jos. Ant. 11.177); πνέω refers always to wind (Jos. Ant. 7.77; 10.207; Bell. 7.318). ἐκπνέω (Ant. 8.273; 12.358; Bell. 1.272, 660; 5.517; 6.195) means “to die” (i.e. “to breathe out” in the sense of “to stop breathing”).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Weissenrieder, *Körper*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> This is not a possessive genitive, rather ὑποχωρέω + genitive means “to withdraw from.”

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hesych. s.v. ἀψυχίη· λειποθυμία (“*apsychia* means falling in a faint”); Eustathius Thessalonicensis, Comm. ad Homeri Iliadem, 3.205.28: ἡ ἀναψυχὴ ψυχῆς ἀνάκτησιν ἐκ λειποθυμίας (“the regaining of the *psyche* after falling in a faint”); Weissenrieder, *Körper*, 165.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Förster, “Schöpfung,” 166-67.

body, soul and spirit. The πνεῦμα is the highest mental faculty that transcends earthly human nature and connects human beings with God. However, this interpretation is rather far-fetched. Josephus does not write that God blows in the human being's face. This fits with his tendency to avoid anthropomorphism. The fact that he does not use πνοή but πνεῦμα is in keeping with his usual practice.<sup>19</sup> The combination of πνεῦμα and ψυχή corresponds to Jos. Ant. 11.241 and especially 3.260.<sup>20</sup> His formulation is an abridgement of the biblical text. πνεῦμα ἐνήκεν αὐτῶ takes ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνοήν ζωῆς and means "God gave breath to the human being." ἐνήκεν αὐτῶ καὶ ψυχὴν takes ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν and means: "God made the human being alive."

## 7 Conclusion

To conclude, all of the passages in *Antiquities* in which Josephus talks about πνεῦμα in relation to living people can most plausibly be interpreted in the sense of "breath."<sup>21</sup> In addition, he uses the lexeme for the divine spirit, for demons and for wind (the last two meanings also already in *Bellum*), i.e., in the entire breadth of common language usage of his time. Unlike in Philo's works, a philosophical concept of πνεῦμα cannot be identified and there are no traces of a Jewish adaption of Middle Platonic anthropology in Josephus.<sup>22</sup> He does not use πνεῦμα to denote a connection between human beings and the divine, nor does he have a πνεῦμα/ψυχή/σῶμα-model of humanity.<sup>23</sup> No similarities with Paul can be discerned in this respect either.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. footnote 14.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. πνεῦμα and ζωή (breath and life) in 2Macc 7:22-23; 14:46.

<sup>21</sup> Contra Isaacs, *Concept*, 37-38.

<sup>22</sup> On the influence of philosophy of mind on Josephus's use of νοῦς cf. van Henten, "Use."

<sup>23</sup> There are, however, clear influences of Platonic *dualistic* anthropology in Josephus, cf. e.g. Jos. Bell. 3.372, 378; Jos. Ap. 2.203.

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