ON HUMANITY
CHAPTERS 12–13
PROSELYTES AND METICS (§§ 102–108)

Analysis/General Comments

As this juncture the survey of Mosaic legislation on humanity shifts from laws pertaining to fellow Jews to those pertaining to non-Jews, beginning with two classes of individuals to whom προσώποι, or “privilege” (§§ 102, 107), ought to be extended: those who have joined the Jewish community (§§ 102–104) and those who have settled in its midst (§§ 105–108). This structure reflects a number of biblical texts (Lev 5:23, 35, 47; Num 35:15) where the proselyte is paired with the alien.

References in the Torah to gerim (“strangers” or “aliens”) are usually rendered in the LXX with προσώποι (Wevers 1990, 23, 192), which Philo takes to mean proselytes, though his more customary designation for such individuals is ἐπηλυτοὶ or related terms (Birnbaum 1996, 195). In the biblical ambit, προσώποι are often associated with other types of marginalized or dispossessed people (Exod 22:20; Lev 19:9–10; 23:22; Deut 24:14; cf. Philo, Somn. 2.272–273; Spec. 1.308–309; 4.176–178), which would help to explain why they are introduced at this point in the treatise, immediately after a lengthy discussion of laws on the humane treatment of the poor (§§ 82–101). The subject of proselytism is one that earns special consideration in Philo’s Exposition, including De virtutibus. For a review of some of the issues involved, see the Analysis/General comments for De paenitentia.

(1a) The section opens in § 102 with a general statement on the honorable reception to be accorded proselytes. Given the total resocialization they must undergo, abandoning not only previous beliefs but also previous associations, they are deserving of every consideration.

(1b) The nature of their treatment is then specified with reference to two laws that speak of the obligation to love (ἀγαπᾶν) the proselyte, Lev 19:33–34 (§ 103) and Deut 10:17–19 (§ 104). Philo infers from the former that native-born Jews are to love the proselyte “in both body and soul,” that is, both practically and emotionally, so as to further the harmony of the community, which ought to function as a single organism. The
Deuteronomic passage, meanwhile, obligates the community to provide proselytes with the basic necessities that they need for daily life.

The biblical basis for the next paragraph, §§ 105–108, is Deut 23:8–9. This is one of a handful of occasions in which the Pentateuch’s *ger* is rendered by the LXX not with *προσήλυτος* but with *πάροικος* (Kidd 1999, 118–119). Philo, in turn, takes the latter not in its usual sense, “temporary sojourner,” but interprets it with reference to a similar but politically more distinct term, *μέτοικος* or “resident alien” (Birnbaum 1996, 204). In most Greek cities, a legal distinction was observed between foreigners (*ξένοι*) and metics, non-citizens permitted to reside and work in a city under certain conditions. Such individuals, mostly immigrant artisans and traders, would have been afforded certain legal protections, though they were barred from holding office, owning certain types of property, serving in the military, or sharing in public honors (e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 3.3.1, 6; *Eth. eud.* 3.5.20; *Oec.* 2.2.3; Whitehead 1977, 140–173; Hennig 1994). Additionally, each metic was required to obtain the sponsorship of a citizen, who served as his legal representative, or *προστάτης* (Aristotle, *Pol.* 3.1.3; *Ath. pol.* 57.3). Generally, the metic population (which could be quite large, e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 7.7.4) was viewed with suspicion, as a source of political and social instability (e.g., Philo, *Legat.* 200), and had a reputation for valuing private gain over public good: “they think that their homeland is not the *polis* but their possessions” (Lysias, *Or.* 31.6; cf. Bakewell 1999). In Plato’s *Leges*, metics are not ordinarily allowed to remain in the city more than twenty years, so as to limit the “corrupting” influence of their banausic activities (845a, 850a–c, 866b–c, 881b–c, 919c–920a; Morrow 1960, 138–148; Whitehead 1977, 129–136).

In biblical law the alien is sometimes paired with the (landless) hireling, e.g., Exod 12:45; Lev 25:6, 40; cf. Milgrom 2000, 1493–1501. Like Abraham before them (Abr. 209, 231, 252; cf. Nob. 214), the Jews who migrated to Egypt were metics, or at least in Philo’s judgment deserved to be treated as such, “for strangers . . . must be regarded as suppliants of those who welcome them, and not only suppliants but also metics and friends, eager to obtain equal rights with the citizens because they differ little from the native inhabitants” (Mos. 1.35). It is probably safe to infer that elements of this characterization reflect the political environment of Philo’s own time: “The Jews of Alexandria . . . were ‘citizens’ only in relation to each other as members of the *politeuma*. Their status vis-à-vis the Greeks was that of metics, aliens with the right of domicile. They occupied an intermediate position between the Greek citizens of Alexandria and the wholly unprivileged Egyptians, who lacked any sort of franchise”