

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE *ALLEGORICAL COMMENTARY*

- by -

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a context-sensitive study of key epistemological commitments and concerns presented in Philo's two series of exegetical writings. The major conclusion advanced in this thesis is that two theological epistemologies, distinct yet related, can be detected among these writings. The first epistemology is specific to the *Allegorical Commentary*. The second epistemology is specific to the 'Exposition of the Law.'

The epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary* reflects a threefold conviction: the sovereignty of God, the creaturely contingency of the human mind and its inescapable limitations. In conversation with key epistemological notions of his day, Philo develops this threefold conviction in exegetical discourses that are grounded in Pentateuchal texts portraying the God of Moses as both possessing epistemic authority and aiding the aspiring mind to gain purification and perfection in the knowledge of God. Guided by this threefold conviction, Philo enlists key metaphors of his day – initiation into divine mysteries and divine inspiration, among others – in order to capture something of the essence of Moses' twofold way of ascending to the divine, an approach which requires at times the *enhancement* of human reason and at other times the *eviction* of human reason.

The epistemology of the 'Exposition' reflects Philo's understanding of the Pentateuch as a perfect whole partitioned into three distinct yet inseverable parts. Philo's knowledge discourses in the 'creation' part of the 'Exposition' reflect two primary movements of thought. The first is heavily invested with a Platonic reading of Genesis 1.27 while the second invests Genesis 2.7 with a mixture of Platonic and Stoic notions of human transformation and well-being. Philo's discourses in the 'patriarchs' segment reflect an interest in portraying the three great patriarchs as exemplars of the virtues of instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac), and practice (Jacob) which featured prominently in Greek models of education. In the 'Moses' segment of the 'Exposition,' many of Philo's discourses on knowledge are marked by an interest in presenting Moses as the ideal king, lawgiver, prophet and priest who surpasses Plato's paradigm of the philosopher-king. In keeping with this view, Philo insists that the written laws of Moses represent the perfect counterpart to the unwritten law of nature. The life and laws of Moses serve as the paradigm for Philo to understand his own experiences of noetic ascent and exhort readers to cultivate similar aspirational notions and practices.

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LONG ABSTRACT

I begin the thesis by situating this project in the present state of research and offering an overview to the project (Chapter1). Following this introduction, I move into the main interpretive chapters of the thesis. In Chapter 2 I explore the threefold conviction that gets to the core of the theological epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary*: the sovereignty of God, the creaturely contingency of the human mind and its inescapable limitations. From each one follows the next. The first understands God as the uncreated cause and possessor of all things, including the human mind. As such, Philo rejects outright the epistemological agenda espoused by Protagoras of Abdera, a self-centric way of knowing associated with the doctrine that *anthropos* is the measure of all things. Philo also urges restraint when it comes to the role of the *Logos*, conceived as all-pervasive in the Stoic imaginations of his day. In Philo's reckoning, the *Logos* is the chief intermediary between God and humanity, but nonetheless created, and on this basis, unequivocally inferior to the uncreated God of Moses.

A necessary corollary is that the human mind is a created entity, domiciled in the non-rational soul and subject to the array of contingencies that attend human existence. Philo trades on notions of spiritual impregnation and human assimilation to the divine, enlisting these philosophical commonplaces to conceive of the human mind as endowed with the potential to ascend to its divine creator. Equally clear is Philo's interest in blending this line of thought with Mosaic descriptions of the varied gifts of knowledge which God out of his beneficence confers on the aspiring mind. Such conferrals are part of the aspirant's journey to the divine. Through his various agencies, God wants the aspiring mind to gain purification and perfection and thereby to experience therapy and transformation of knowledge.

A third necessary consequence is Philo's insistence on the creaturely limitations of the human mind. Even in the superlative paradigm case of Moses, the unmediated knowledge and experience of the divine which he most longs for is the very thing he cannot attain to full measure. A limited strand of contemporary scepticism can be detected, confined to specific exegetical contexts which Philo sees as supporting the Mosaic doctrine of divine incomprehensibility.

In Chapter 3, I examine the distinctive set of epistemological concerns that animates the 'Exposition.' Philo underwrites his commitment to the Judaism of his day with a wider batch of Mosaic material, presenting the particular character and content of these Jewish ideas vis-à-vis the wider Graeco-Roman imaginations of his day.

Writing to a perhaps more mixed audience of Jews and non-Jews with little if any

knowledge of Moses, Philo presents the Pentateuch as a perfect whole partitioned into three distinct yet inseverable parts. In Philo's reckoning, Moses' excellence is seen in how the first part of the 'Exposition' (the double creation account of Genesis 1-3) moves into a second part (the patriarchal accounts of Genesis), which then feeds into the third and lengthiest part (the legislative material in the Pentateuch).

In recognition of these lines of partition, Philo writes about theological knowledge in three distinctive ways. Because Philo, like other Jewish interpreters, identified in the Mosaic testimony two separate accounts of the creation of humanity, his knowledge discourses in the first part of the 'Exposition' moves in two primary directions. The first direction is heavily invested with a Platonic reading of Genesis 1.27 while the second invests Genesis 2.7 with a mixture of Platonic and Stoic notions of human transformation and well-being.

The first Mosaic account of the creation of humanity (Genesis 1.27) prompts Philo to envisage Plato's intelligible world of being and leads him to employ the language from Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus*. Here, in his portrayal of noetic ascent, Philo insists that the knowledge gained is apophatic in character. In this ecstatic state of mind, the aspirant experiences vertigo, her intellect evicted in the face of overwhelming divine realities.

Philo sees the second Mosaic account of the creation of humanity (Genesis 2.7) through the window of Genesis 1.27 and this provokes him to consider the possibilities of noetic ascent in the world of becoming and constant flux. In this context, Philo enlists the language of human assimilation to God from Plato's *Theaetetus*, a text he also exploited in the *Allegorical Commentary*. Here, the knowledge gained is not apophatic in character. Rather, the aspirant's state of mind is marked by the full enhancement of human reason predicated on the recovery of her self-taught nature. Compared to the mind's ascent to the divine which Philo derives from his reading of Genesis 1.27, this portrait of noetic ascent is more fully conversant with mainstream Stoic and eudaemonistic approaches to human transformation in Philo's day.

Turning to the segment of the 'Exposition' concerned with the three great patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), I explore how and why Philo draws on a longstanding model of Greek education that featured the interlocking virtues of instruction, nature, and practice. Philo presents the patriarchal exemplars, respectively and relatedly, as unwritten laws who embody the best of Greek speculations on these three virtues.

In addition, Philo shows his interest in more mystical imaginations of human knowledge of God. In one striking instance which recalls the sort of language seen more regularly in the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo probes the non-literal dimensions of Genesis 18, the account of Abraham's encounter with the divine, in

order to convey the possibility that God, as a plenipotentary being, can reveal himself to human minds in two ways: as a single entity to purified (initiated) minds and as a pair of divine powers to less purified (uninitiated) minds.

Such mystical speculations, on balance, are few and far between in this segment of the 'Exposition.' Philo instead tends to trade on the notion that the patriarchs anticipate a reality signified by the life and laws of Moses, the recipient of the divine Ten Words and the revealer of the particular human laws that fall under each of the Words. In Philo's attention to the primacy of laws, one can detect, at least in the distance, the suggestion raised by Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics* Book 10) that the triadic approach to human transformation – signified by the interrelated virtues of instruction, nature, and practice – is secondary to the promulgation and practice of divinely conferred human laws.

Having moved from the 'creation' segment to the 'patriarchs' segment, I turn to the 'Mosaic' segment of the 'Exposition.' Philo's epistemological discourses are not easy to ascertain, not least because of the scale and scope of the material which falls under his purview. Yet, one can detect a connective thread, namely, the idea that the written laws of Moses collectively represent the perfect counterpart to the unwritten law of nature. On Philo's testimony, these two sets of laws are presented as divine in origin yet disclosed for the well-being of humanity. Philo's approach to laws as both universal and particular in scope and substance leads him to enlist one

of Plato's most famous epistemological constructs, his ideal of the philosopher-king in Book 5 of the *Republic*.

The exact relationship between this Platonic ideal and Philo's conception of Moses is far from clear. What is offered more explicitly, however, is Philo's keen interest in presenting Moses as the ideal king, lawgiver, prophet and priest, one whose fourfold excellence signifies the paradigmatic philosopher whose quest to know and experience God illuminates Philo's account of his first-hand experiences of noetic ascent. In this light, Philo exhorts some of his readers to cultivate similar kinds of aspirational notions and practices. The basic idea here is not far removed from what one finds in portrayals of Moses in related Hellenistic Jewish literature, notably Josephus.

Returning to the threefold conviction that guides Philo's epistemological discourses in the *Allegorical Commentary*, it is striking that Philo enlists the language from two key metaphorical fields of his day – initiation into divine mysteries and divine inspiration of the human mind – to capture something of the essence of Moses' twofold way of knowing the divine, an approach which requires at times the *enhancement* of human reason and at other times the *eviction* of human reason. In Philo's view, Moses brings together human rationality *and* human non-rationality as compatible ways of knowing and experiencing the divine. What is perceived as a harmony in Moses, Philo insists, is not for everyone, however: it is to be understood according to the aptitudes of Philo's more advanced readers of the *Allegorical*

Commentary. This adds a layer of esotericism to some of Philo's epistemological discourses in this series.

To sharpen our view of Philo's distinctive epistemologies as developed in the two main interpretive chapters of the thesis (Chapters 2 and 3), in Chapter 4 I investigate a more narrow question: what, if anything, does Philo's language of initiation into divine mysteries have to do with his theological epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*? In exploring this question, I consider an ancillary one that was significant for Philo and other Middle Platonists of his day, namely, what is the measure of all things? In at least two ways, the exegetical and philosophical reasons for Philo's varied use of initiation language come into sharper focus when we consider Philo's ways of bringing the main claims of Protagoras into conversation with those of Moses.

First, Philo's use of this language corresponds with his wider interest in *de-particularising* the Greek Jewish Bible by investing it with contemporary Middle Platonic commitments. Like other Jewish writers in Alexandria and elsewhere, Philo's interest in de-particularising the scriptures fits into a wider apologetic agenda, namely to make a case for the ancient credentials and contemporary intellectual merits of Jewish beliefs and practices.

In line with this agenda, Philo applies the language of mystery initiation to the book of Genesis – the biblical account of the birth and actions of Cain (Gen 4) – in order to engage the challenges associated with the so-called ‘measure’ doctrine of Protagoras of Abdera. This doctrine, as it was construed in antiquity, challenged prevailing notions of epistemic authority by eliminating the criterion of absolute truth, endorsing instead a notion of truth that is relative to the one to whom something appears. In the symbolic world of Moses, Protagoras is an offspring of Cain, born out of madness. Those influenced by this way of thinking, Philo insists, must be initiated into the Mosaic way of thinking.

Second, Philo uses this language in ways that correspond with his interest in taking seriously the particularity of noetic ascent as portrayed in the Greek Jewish Bible. This is seen in varied ways, but one striking way is in Philo’s frequent recourse to the book of Exodus. Drawing on key knowledge texts from Exodus, Philo uses the language of mystery initiation to re-present key events and experiences of Moses and Israel. From this comes a sense of actualisation: what Moses experienced in the past as the hierophantic leader of Israel can be experienced again to some degree in the lives of keen-sighted disciples who constitute the way of ‘Israel’ in Philo’s own day. Taken together, these strands of de-particularising and particularising the Greek Jewish Bible of his day enable Philo to achieve two things at once: to present his views regarding Moses in a way congenial to the Middle Platonic schools of his day whilst teaching his more advanced readers of the greater mysteries of Moses.

In an effort to sharpen our picture of the theological epistemology Philo presents in his *Allegorical Commentary*, in Chapter 5 I explore the questions: does Moses prescribe only a rational way to knowledge about and from God? If not, to what extent, if any, does Mosaic epistemology allow for non-rational ways of attaining such knowledge? These questions take us to a wider debate, longstanding in the history of Greek thought, that centred on the role (and limits) of human reason in relation to the varied phenomena of divine inspiration, but they also lead us to consider the interwoven relationship between Philo's language of mystery initiation, on the one hand, and his language of divine inspiration, on the other.

Philo conceives of one way of the divinely inspired mind which features the mind's capacity to exert active reason over the bodily passions. In this line of thought, Philo can speak of the mind's capacity to be inspired to a higher order of reasoning whereby it can recognise the passions for what they truly are. This, says Philo, is tantamount to the metaphorical notion of initiation into the lower mysteries of Moses.

Philo envisages a second, equally valid, way that the mind can be divinely inspired. It is here that Philo focuses on the eviction of human reason. Although the aspirant in this non-rational state is rendered ecstatic and even unconscious, the upshot is a human experience of divine realities which Philo equates with the highest sort of experience of God.

The extended case studies I offer in Chapters 4 and 5, when taken together, showcase one of the more remarkable sets of interwoven exegetical features in the epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary*, i.e. Philo's metaphorical language of mystery initiation and his metaphorical language of divine inspiration. Apart from exceptional cases, Philo in the 'Exposition' does not deploy these two metaphors as literary devices nearly as much as he does in the *Allegorical Commentary*. The case studies in Chapters 4 and 5, therefore, further substantiate the major conclusion advanced in this thesis, namely, that there are two distinct yet related theological epistemologies in Philo's main exegetical series.

More broadly speaking, all of this points to the central clue when it comes to Philo's approach to this subject: Philo's views of human knowledge of God must be sought with his exegetical encounters with the Pentateuch. At virtually every turn, Philo grounds his discourses on the nature, potential and limits of human knowledge of the divine in the the Greek Jewish scriptures of his day at both the literal and non-literal levels of meaning. For Philo, the Mosaic world of ideas offers significant solutions to the key epistemological problems of his day.

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CHAPTER 1

1.1

Introduction

This thesis investigates the varied epistemological interests presented in the exegetical writings of Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE – 45 CE), a first-century Jewish interpreter of Moses whose literary output reflects key philosophical and political developments in Alexandria, the capital of Roman Egypt. In what follows, we sketch Philo’s life and literary output (§§1.1.1-2), state the main claims of this thesis (§1.2), situate our study in present scholarship (§1.3), and spell out the method (§1.4) and plan (§1.5) of this project.

1.1.1 Philo’s life

Born around 20 BCE, Philo lived in two worlds. Like many pious Jews of his day, Philo identified with Jerusalem, the *metropolis* of his religious heritage.¹ He also identified with Alexandria,² a hub of cultural and intellectual activity in Roman

¹ Cf. *Prov. fr.* 2, 64; see also *Flacc.* 46; *Legat.* 291; in the *Allegorical Commentary: Fug.* 84; *Somn.* 2.246-53; cf. Amir 1980:52-64. On Philo’s self-understanding as a Jew: Borgen 1984:138-54; Mendelson 1988:1-28; Niehoff 2001:1-13. Pearce 2004a:19-37 suggests Philo is perhaps ‘the first to state that the Jews think of Jerusalem as their *metropolis*, their “mother-city”’ (quote from p. 19). On Philo’s description of Jerusalem in largely Hellenistic terms: Schmidt 1950:244-47.

² Cf. Birbaum 2004:125-60, esp. 147-57; on Jewish self-definition in Alexandria: Sterling 1995:1-18; Barclay 1996:82-102.

Egypt.³ A scion of one of the city's leading families⁴ which included an extremely wealthy brother⁵ and well-connected nephews,⁶ Philo held a privileged status by the standards of his day.⁷

Philo's considerable training in the Greek ways of education⁸ is evident from his explorations of the Greek Jewish Bible of his day.⁹ As one who possessed little, if any, knowledge of the Hebrew language,¹⁰ Philo relied on what he called the traditions of the elders of his nation.¹¹ Above all, Philo turned to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, 'a widely known standard text form of Scripture'¹² in Philo's day which was seen as equal in authority and inspiration to the original writings.¹³

³ On Alexandria in Philo's time: Sly 1996; Haas 1997:91-98; Harris/Ruffini 2004 (esp. Abd-el-Ghani 2004:161-178). On Jews and Christians in first-century Alexandria: Pearson 1986; Pearce 1998:70-105.

⁴ Philo talks about his residence in Alexandria in *Legat.* 22; the status of his family is attested in Eusebius, *His. eccl.* 2.4.

⁵ Josephus, *A.J.* 20.100.

⁶ Cf. Turner 1954:54-57; Burr 1955:16-20; see numerous references to Philo's family in Morris 1987:815 n. 14.

⁷ On Philo's social status: Barclay 1996:158-63.

⁸ Cf. *Congr.* 74-80; see further Alexandre 1967:105-30; Mendelson 1982; Pearce 2007:171-75.

⁹ Cf. Sandmel 1979:4 on Philo as 'a legatee of both Jewish and Greek culture.'

¹⁰ Cf. Nikiprowetzky 1977:50-96. Counterinterview: Belkin 1940:29-48; Wolfson I 1948:88-90; Hanson 1967:128-37.

¹¹ Philo, *Mos.* 1.4 (τοῦ ἔθνους πρεσβυτέρων); cf. Segal 1977:178-80; Boyarin 2004:59-75.

¹² Cf. Salvesen 2002:328.

¹³ Cf. Dines 2004:141.

Philo's explorations of the writings of Moses as a philosophy of the highest sort likely started as a private activity¹⁴ but later generated widespread interest and recognition in Alexandria¹⁵ and beyond.¹⁶ Constrained by the modes of transmission in his day,¹⁷ the influence of Philo's studies was likely limited, at least initially, to household or perhaps synagogal settings of communal learning typical of his era.¹⁸

In the later stages of his literary career, Philo assumed the mantle of political leadership, a role which at first he seems to have resisted.¹⁹ A mystic by his own measure, Philo preferred and pursued the life of intellectual contemplation.²⁰ When tensions between and within groups in Alexandria reached a boiling point around 38 CE,²¹ Philo was enlisted to head a delegation of the city's prominent

¹⁴ Cf. Runia 1986b:190.

¹⁵ On Philo as a teacher of Torah in Alexandria: Siegert 1996:176.

¹⁶ Josephus, *A.J.* 18.259. On Josephus' familiarity with Philo: Schwartz 1990:52-54.

¹⁷ On apologetic literature in the Hellenistic period: Tcherikover 1956:169-93.

¹⁸ One of Philo's examples is the *Therapeutae*, a first-century Jewish ascetic group based near Lake Mareotis and the subject of one of Philo's books (*De vita contemplativa*). On Philo's school context(s): Nikiprowetzky 1977:174-77; Tobin 1983:172-76; Kraft 1986:178-89; Sterling 1999:148-64, esp. 158-63; Snyder 2000:130-32; Royse 2009:33, 39.

¹⁹ *Spec.* 3.1-6. On Philo's testimony of the status of Jews in Alexandria: Wolfson 1944:165-68; Barclay 1996:161-63.

²⁰ Cf. Winston 1982, 1985, 1996.

²¹ Cf. *Legat.* 120-37; *Flacc.* 41-96; Tacitus, *Annales* 12.54. The most likely date of Alexandrian riots is 38 August (cf. Smallwood 1961:214; Sandmel 1979:39-47). See now Gambetti 2009 for a comprehensive analysis of Alexandrian riots; more broadly, see Rajak 1984:107-23.

Jews to settle matters with emperor Gaius Caligula in Rome.²² In this respect, Philo is an important witness to some of the key first-century developments in and around Roman Egypt.²³ Details of Philo's death are difficult to pin down, though indirect clues from his writings hint with some historical plausibility to a date of death between 45-50 CE.²⁴

1.1.2 *Philo's literary output*

A prolific writer, Philo composed a collection of nearly four dozen books.²⁵ 'The work of Philo,' writes John Dillon, 'tedious though it undoubtedly is in parts, deserves to be ranked as one of the more considerable *tours de force* in the history of thought.'²⁶ In some sense, Philo was simply part of an era of Greek and Roman history which featured a shift towards reading and the production of books, Alexandria being one of the chief literary centres of the Hellenistic world.²⁷

²² Cf. Josephus, *A.J.* 18.259-60. On Roman politics toward Jews in Philo's time: Smallwood 1981:220-55, 364-68, 389-412; more broadly: Zeev 1998; Rabello 2000.

²³ Cf. Tcherikover 1957:55-78; Pearce 2007:xxviii.

²⁴ Cf. Schwartz 2009:9-12 and sources cited therein.

²⁵ Per the listing offered in Runia 1993a:37.

²⁶ Dillon 1977:143.

²⁷ Cf. Kenyon 1951:25-27; Niehoff 2011:1-17 (esp. pp 9-16).

Marked by a plurality of compositional devices and styles, Philo's literary output consists of both non-exegetical and exegetical material. In the first group of books, Philo considers subjects in contemporary history, philosophy and politics which, at least in his mind, elucidate the writings of Moses.²⁸ In all likelihood the non-exegetical books were composed in a later stage of Philo's literary career.²⁹

Philo's exegetical material divides into three distinct series of commentaries on the Pentateuch³⁰ of Moses.

The *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, perhaps the earliest set of sequenced material, represents the extant parts of Philo's question-and-answer ('zetematic') approach to elementary topics derived from the first two books of the Pentateuch.³¹ It has been suggested that Philo arranged the *Questions* in rough accordance with the *sedarim* of the later Babylonian (i.e. annual)

²⁸ On the relationship between Philo's historical and philosophical books: Nock 1943:77-81.

²⁹ Cf. Terian 1984:272-94.

³⁰ Following Sterling (2012b:428 n.17), the term 'Pentateuch' is used rather than 'Torah' in keeping with the consensus opinion that Philo worked primarily with a Greek text of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, for ease of reference, I have followed the conventions used in Kamesar/Royse 2009:32-64 in italicising the *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* and the *Allegorical Commentary* and placing the 'Exposition' in single quotations.

³¹ The *Questions and Answers on Genesis* covers the texts of Gen 2.4-28.9; the *Questions and Answers on Exodus* covers Exod 12.2-28.24 (with gaps). See Hay (ed.) 1991 for a useful collection of essays. On key aspects of the works forming the corpus of 'Armenian Philo,' see Sirinian 2011:7-44.

lectionary system.³² This suggestion remains tenuous at best. It is more likely the case that Philo simply trades on a longstanding literary format favoured by other non-Jewish writers,³³ though within the more restricted class of Hellenistic Jewish writers, Philo's use of the zetematic format can be seen as distinctive in both scale³⁴ and scope.³⁵

In the so-called *Allegorical Commentary*, most likely composed as a companion to the *Questions*,³⁶ Philo addresses readers with more advanced knowledge of the Pentateuch, on the one hand, and the world of Greek philosophy and popular imagination, on the other.³⁷ The *Allegorical Commentary* represents the Alexandrian's elaborate attempt, marked by varied uses of allegory,³⁸ to

³² Cf. Marcus 1953a:xiii-xiv; Royse 1976-77:48-63.

³³ The zetematic works of Plutarch (e.g. *Quaest. conv.*; *Quaest. plat.*; *Quaest. rom.*) represent perhaps the closest literary parallel to Philo's *Questions and Answers* (cf. Runia 2001:xi). Zetematic works in Plutarch's corpus discussed in Jones 1966:61-74.

³⁴ According to Royse (1976-77:41-78; 2001:76-85), Philo's *Questions* was considerably longer in its original form, consisting of six books on Genesis and six books on Exodus.

³⁵ Previous Jewish authors, i.e. Demetrius (frags. 2 and 5) and Aristobulus (frag. 2), used the format, but 'Philo is the first known Jewish author to cast a full-scale commentary in a zetematic form' (Sterling 2012a:417).

³⁶ On the relationship between the *Questions* and the *Allegorical Commentary*: Sterling 1991:105-08. The question of priority remains open to much debate. Marcus 1953a:x (note a) follows Cohn 1899:391 in arguing for the priority of the *Questions*; for the opposing (now majority) view: Sandmel 1954:249 and 1979:79; Nikiprowetzky 1977:235 n. 216; and especially Terian 1991:29-46.

³⁷ On Philo and Middle Platonism, see the collection of essays in Runia (ed.) 1993.

³⁸ Cf. Hay 1994:55-68.

interpret most of the book of Genesis in ways congruent with – and at times usurping – extant Greek and Jewish interpretive traditions in Alexandria.³⁹

Addressed to a wider range of readers,⁴⁰ the so-called ‘Exposition of the Law’ represents Philo’s more systematic account of the life, laws and legacy of Moses. Philo presents Moses from a double perspective. In keeping with his Jewish commitments, Philo draws upon preexisting traditions of the elders in order to portray Moses and his laws as particular manifestations of the universal law of nature. In line with his intellectual commitments, Philo invests his reading of the Pentateuch with a wide array of Platonic, Stoic and Pythagorean ideas which featured prominently in the Middle Platonic milieu of his day.⁴¹ Internal evidence suggests that the ‘Exposition,’ at least in part, was written at a later stage of Philo’s literary career,⁴² with many of the books composed after the *Allegorical Commentary*.⁴³

³⁹ Cf. Dawson 1992:73-126.

⁴⁰ Cf. Birnbaum 1996:19-20.

⁴¹ On the rebirth of Platonism in the early imperial age: Bonazzi 2008:233-51.

⁴² Cf. *Spec.* 3.1-6; *Spec.* 4.178-86; *Praem.* 169-72; Morris 1987:841-44.

⁴³ A view which traces back to Cohn 1899:132-34 followed by widespread support in the guild (cf. Morris 1987:842). For reverse order: Massebieau/Bréhier 1906:24-64, 164-85, 267-89.

Philo's exegetical books, taken together, touch on numerous topics. Of central significance is the concept of human knowledge about and from God.⁴⁴ Scholars have recognised this feature for more than a century, as seen in the landmark study by Max Freudenthal⁴⁵ on Philo's epistemology, key findings from which were later developed in seminal pieces by E. R. Goodenough,⁴⁶ Harry Wolfson,⁴⁷ and David Winston.⁴⁸

As we shall see in our summary of the relevant history of research below, more recent studies⁴⁹ have confirmed the *communis opinio* which David Runia articulates as follows:

Because of Philo's emphasis on man's role as a rational creature, *the concept of knowledge plays a central role in his thought....* What interests him most is the knowledge that man in general can attain of the divine, which is identified with the knowledge that the man of God, the prophet Moses, has attained and laid down in scripture.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Goodenough 1935:46.

⁴⁵ Freudenthal 1891.

⁴⁶ Goodenough 1935.

⁴⁷ Wolfson 1948.

⁴⁸ Winston 1981; 1985.

⁴⁹ Bockmuehl 1990:69-81; Birnbaum 1996; Calabi 1998; Hayward 2005; Pearce 2007:236; Deutsch 2008:83-105; Mackie 2009:25-47, 2013:147-79; Makiello 2009; Anderson 2011:168-85.

⁵⁰ Runia 1993a:41-42 (*italics added*).

The centrality of this subject begs us to consider: on what grounds is another study on Philo's theological epistemology warranted? Prompted by this question, the ensuing section summarises the nucleus of this research project, beginning with a brief statement of the thesis (§1.2) before then delineating the distinctiveness of the present thesis in light of pertinent developments in Philonic research (§1.3).

1.2

Thesis statement

This thesis is a context-sensitive study of the set of epistemological concerns presented in Philo's two series of exegetical writings. The major conclusion advanced in this thesis is that two theological epistemologies, distinct yet related, can be detected among these writings. The first epistemology is specific to the *Allegorical Commentary*. The second epistemology is specific to the 'Exposition of the Law.'

The epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary* reflects a threefold conviction: the sovereignty of God, the creaturely contingency of the human mind and its inescapable limitations. In conversation with key epistemological notions of his day, Philo develops this threefold conviction in exegetical discourses that are grounded in Pentateuchal texts portraying the God of Moses as both possessing

epistemic authority and aiding the aspiring mind to gain purification and perfection in the knowledge of God. Guided by this threefold conviction, Philo enlists key metaphors of his day – initiation into divine mysteries and divine inspiration, among others – in order to capture something of the essence of Moses' twofold way of ascending to the divine, an approach which requires at times the *enhancement* of human reason and at other times the *eviction* of human reason.

The epistemology of the 'Exposition' reflects Philo's understanding of the Pentateuch as a perfect whole partitioned into three distinct yet inseverable parts. Philo's knowledge discourses in the 'creation' part of the 'Exposition' reflect two primary movements of thought. The first is heavily invested with a Platonic reading of Genesis 1.27 while the second invests Genesis 2.7 with a mixture of Platonic and Stoic notions of human transformation and well-being. Philo's discourses in the 'patriarchs' segment reflect an interest in portraying the three great patriarchs as exemplars of the virtues of instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac), and practice (Jacob) which featured prominently in Greek models of education. In the 'Moses' segment of the 'Exposition,' many of Philo's discourses on knowledge are marked by an interest in presenting Moses as the ideal king, lawgiver, prophet and priest who surpasses Plato's paradigm of the philosopher-king. In keeping with this view, Philo insists that the written laws of Moses represent the perfect counterpart to the unwritten law of nature. The life

and laws of Moses serve as the paradigm for Philo to understand his own experiences of noetic ascent and exhort readers to cultivate similar aspirational notions and practices.

1.3

Reasons for this study in light of present scholarship

The arguments and contributions of this thesis can be sharpened by considering them in light of previous approaches to this Philonic *topos*. Given the vast literature on Philo, an exhaustive survey will not be undertaken here, a task done well elsewhere.⁵¹ Instead, key past attempts will be considered in light of two broader trends within Philonic scholarship.⁵²

One broad trend, dominant in the first half of the twentieth century, concentrated on the debate of whether Philo's primary orientation was as a thoroughly Hellenised mystic ('Philo Alexandrinus') or as primarily a Jewish philosopher *par excellence* ('Philo Judaeus').⁵³ Though it is now seen as either dated or deadlocked, this debate over Philo's primary identity has generated some of the more enduring and insightful studies on Philo.

⁵¹ Key works include, but are not limited to, Goodhart/Goodenough 1938; Feldman 1963; Nikiprowetzky 1973:309-29; Dellings/Maser 1975:56-80; Hilgert 1978:47-97; Radice 1983; Borgen 1984:98-154; Runia/Radice 1988, 2000, 2012; Birnbaum 2006:241-76. See further the *Studia Philonica Annual* (annotated bibliography section).

⁵² This section has profited considerably from Runia 1986:7-27.

⁵³ Cf. Borgen 1984:139-42; Runia 1994a:1-27.

Building on the findings of Hans Leisegang⁵⁴ and Isaac Heinemann's study of the synthetic character of Philo's understanding of Jewish ideas,⁵⁵ E.R. Goodenough created a stir in 1935 by publishing his views on the thoroughly Hellenised nature of Philo's presentation of Mosaic thought, going so far as to claim that in Philo one encounters a key instantiation of an Alexandrian brand of mystery religion, what he calls 'a distinctly non-Jewish type of salvation.'⁵⁶ Goodenough's study remains perhaps the highwater mark of the Philo Alexandrinus view, one which continues to find traction in more recent scholarship.⁵⁷

The other end of the spectrum is represented by Harry Wolfson. Following the general direction of Walther Völker's study, Wolfson in 1947 published his two-volume treatment of Philo's Jewish piety and philosophy⁵⁸. Among other things, Wolfson argued that in Philo one meets a philosopher who was sufficiently aware of Palestinian traditions and the Hebrew language and whose work became the springboard for later Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophies of

⁵⁴ Leisegang 1919.

⁵⁵ Heinemann 1932, repr. 1962. Sandmel 1984:31 concurs with this view, identifying Heinemann's work as the best on this topic.

⁵⁶ Goodenough 1935:7, 254; see also Goodenough 1940:14.

⁵⁷ Cf. Winston 1989:41-42; Mackie 2012:167-69.

⁵⁸ For Wolfson 1948 1:200, 'the starting point of Philo's philosophy is the theory of the ideas.' Wolfson essentially sees Platonic doctrine as co-efficient with biblical doctrine.

the Middle Ages up to the time of the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-77 CE).⁵⁹

Between the poles represented by Goodenough and Wolfson, one finds numerous studies which portray Philo as a thinker who lacks originality, whose writings are fraught with banalities and inconsistencies. André-Jean Festugière's appraisal would be an example of this view of Philo.⁶⁰

Given the dominance of this debate over Philo's primary orientation, it comes as no surprise to find that investigations into Philonic discourses on our subject have yielded divergent pictures of Philo's approach to theological knowledge. Do such discourses evince Philo's primary orientation as a thoroughly Hellenised mystic (Heinemann, Goodenough) or a Jewish philosopher *par excellence* (Wolfson)?

In this era marked by a lack of consensus on how to appreciate and assess Philo and his corpus, there was one area of general agreement among scholars, as David Runia notes, namely that Philo's writings represent a significant deposit of evidence on how the writings of Moses were exegetically interpreted and presented in the first century, though views varied widely on the contexts that

⁵⁹ Wolfson 1948 2:149-64, 439-60 (esp. pp. 457-60). Marcus 1949:368-81 remains a useful summary and appraisal of Wolfson's claims.

⁶⁰ Festugière 1945-54:519-85 (vol. 2).

shaped Philonic exegesis.⁶¹ On this common platform a second trend emerges and takes hold of the guild from the latter half of the twentieth century to the present day.

This trend moves the locus of scholarly activity beyond the dated dichotomy described above and instead focuses on the webs of exegetical structures and tendencies reflected in Philo's writings. Key explorations by Ingrid Christiansen,⁶² Burton Mack,⁶³ Valentin Nikiprowetzky,⁶⁴ and David Runia,⁶⁵ among others, have invited researchers over the past twenty years to scrutinise the varied character of Philo's exegesis and recognise its centrality in Philo's œuvre.

As such, there has been an ancillary surge of renewed interest in Philo as an exegete of Moses who wrote with varied aims and audiences in mind. In her book, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes* (1996), Ellen Birnbaum sheds light on the 'striking' ways in which Philo adapts his discussions of theological knowledge and *visio Dei* to suit the needs of his

⁶¹ Philo's exegetical treatises have been seen as compilations [Bousset], synagogal homilies [Völker], study-guides for Sabbath schools [Wolfson]; cf. Cf. Runia 1986:19.

⁶² Christiansen 1969; cf. Harl 1966:16-22.

⁶³ Mack 1974-75:71-112.

⁶⁴ Nikiprowetzky 1977 passim.

⁶⁵ Especially Runia 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 2001; 2010:87-109.

different audiences.⁶⁶ 'Birnbaum's exposition of the case for Philo's different audiences,' observes Sarah Pearce, 'represents a *major advance in thinking on the issue*.'⁶⁷ In her study, Birnbaum uncovers a key deficiency in the present state of Philonic scholarship: 'This question of how Philo may approach this topic [human attainment of visionary knowledge of God] differently in his various writings requires further investigation.'⁶⁸

More recently, Maren Niehoff has called for further context-sensitive studies of key Philonic topics such as the one considered in this thesis.⁶⁹ Devoting sufficient attention to questions of context as well as questions of content, says Niehoff, 'holds the key to explaining two characteristics of Philo's *œuvre*, namely the diversity of genres he chose to write in and the diversity of ideas, which has often been interpreted as evidence of thoughtless eclecticism.'⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Birnbaum 1996:61-127.

⁶⁷ Pearce 2007:23 n. 736 (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ Birnbaum 1996:89 n. 83 (bracketed explanation added), with a further suggestion that 'Philo's discussion of intermediaries in the three series require further investigation' (n. 84).

⁶⁹ Niehoff 2011b:4: 'Following [the analysis of Ellen Birnbaum, Gregory Sterling, and James Royse], the *Allegorical Commentary* addresses highly educated readers, while the *Exposition* provides a more thematic introduction to a wider and possibly non-Jewish audience. *These important insights deserve to be explored further*' (emphasis added).

⁷⁰ Niehoff 2011b:1-21 (quote from p. 4).

1.3.1 Key studies on Philonic epistemology

Having considered the wider trends above, the following section offers a selective account of key studies that bear more directly on our subject. Due to present constraints, our discussion will focus on studies published within the past thirty-five years (1977-2012). Our starting point for discussion, however, is not randomly chosen. For at least two reasons, the year 1977 marks the beginning of an important chapter in the history of Philonic scholarship. Among numerous works on Philo published that year, two studies in particular continue to represent two of the more dominant points of reference for subsequent studies on Philonic epistemology. The first of this heralded pair can be situated within the second major trend which we summarised above.

The detailed study by French scholar Valentin Nikiprowetzky (1977) established convincingly both the complexity of Philo's concepts of God and humanity, and more influentially, the 'exegetical intention' that animates Philo's approach to these ideas.⁷¹ By insisting on Philo as first and foremost a scriptural exegete, Nikiprowetzky stood on the shoulders of earlier studies, but what Nikiprowetzky did was bring his learning in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman materials to illuminate the scriptural character and contents of Philo's literary

⁷¹ Nikiprowetzky 1977:3-10 (esp. p. 7).

activities.⁷² Pertinent for our study is Nikiprowetzky's claim that the motif unifying much of Philo's writings is the migration or ascent of the human mind/soul to the divine.⁷³

A renowned classicist, John Dillon's study of Middle Platonism (1977) strengthened Philo's place in the history and development of Platonism. Dillon showed how the texts of Plato commingled with other currents of thought in the increasingly transcultural settings of the early imperial period, not least the vibrant milieu of first-century Alexandria. Dillon's study outlined in full form, perhaps for the first time, the body of ideas which feature prominently in Philo's literary output: (1) the centrality of the *Logos* principle;⁷⁴ (2) a blending of transcendental tendencies from Platonic and Neopythagorean thought;⁷⁵ (3) a mixture of Stoic and Aristotelian categories of philosophy;⁷⁶ and (4) an overarching commitment to the philosophy and piety of Moses.⁷⁷ Dillon's study challenges longstanding assumptions held within the guild by problematising the view – tracing back at least to the days of Bousset, Dodds, Colson, and Festugière – that Philo is completely unoriginal as a philosophical thinker.⁷⁸

⁷² Nikiprowetzky 1977:162, 170-235.

⁷³ Nikiprowetzky 1977:236-42 (esp. p. 239).

⁷⁴ Dillon 1977:153-62.

⁷⁵ Dillon 1977:155-60, 163, 168-74, 182-83.

⁷⁶ Dillon 1977:145-55.

⁷⁷ Dillon 1977:141-44.

⁷⁸ The impact of Dillon's study considered in Winston 2010:235.

Since 1977, these two studies have cast a long shadow. They have been received within the guild as complementary (rather than competing) frameworks within which Philo can be understood and taken seriously *on his own terms* as a distinctively Alexandrian Middle Platonist exegete of Moses. One can nonetheless detect in several recent studies germane to ours that one framework is often more weighted than the other.⁷⁹

In his study of ascent material in Philo, Peder Borgen (1993) attempts to show the points of affinity between Philo's views and those found in related Jewish literature. Borgen marshals an impressive array of evidence, but his claims concerning the character of Philonic ascent texts invite further exploration of the contextual factors that move Philo to write about noetic ascent in different ways depending on his literary aims and audiences.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Instructive in this respect is the juxtaposition of Philonic portraits offered in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Kamesar 2009). Philo's theology is presented in two different ways. C. Termini (pp. 95-123) claims that Philo's theology is best understood in terms of Middle Judaism. R. Radice portrays Philo in light of first-century Stoicised Platonism (pp. 124-45). In his review of this collection of essays, Gregory Sterling (2009:63-72, esp. pp. 68-70) observes the juxtaposition of treatments and remarks: 'How can such divergent judgments spring from the same texts?' (quote is from p. 69).

⁸⁰ Borgen 1993:246-68 (esp. 248-51). In one instance, Borgen recognises the distinction between the *Allegorical Commentary* and the 'Exposition' but he does so in order to claim more broadly that Philo's writings 'have some features in common with apocalyptic writings' (p. 256).

This awareness, as noted already, is seen in Ellen Birnbaum's 1996 study of Philo's discourses on key terms like 'Israel' and 'Jews.' Birnbaum investigates for the first time the exegetical and philosophical contexts within each series of works which then shape Philo's discourses on the set of concepts and concerns signified by each term. Birnbaum's study is far more sensitive to Philo's aims and audience than earlier studies on this subject, such as F. Gerald Downing's synthetic study of what he calls an 'asymmetry of knowing' in Philo,⁸¹ Gerhard Delling's sketch of the idea of 'seeing God' in Philo,⁸² and Frederick Brenk's selective account of texts which point to the intractable ambiguity of Philo's approach to *visio Dei*, a feature which Brenk compares with similar notions in contemporary and later Middle Platonist writings.⁸³

Indeed, moving beyond what Downing, Delling, and Brenk could attempt within their respective constraints, Birnbaum offers a far more nuanced account of Philo's attempts to strike a balance between the Mosaic insistence on the *particular* status of Israel, as perceived in the Greek Pentateuch, on the one hand, and the emphasis, also found in Moses, on the more *universal* appeal and

⁸¹ Downing 1990:423-40 (esp. 427-32). While Downing's use of the term 'asymmetry' is motivated by an appreciation for the complexity of Philo's approaches to epistemology and ontology, his efforts to critique the use of Philo in J. Dunn's study of early Christology (1980) leads him to collect Philonic references with minimal, if any, regard to the contexts and audiences which variously provoke Philo's views on theological knowledge.

⁸² Delling 1984:27-41.

⁸³ Brenk 1993:39-60 (esp. 46-51) followed by a brief catalogue of vision-related texts in Plutarch, Alcinoüs, Atticus, Numenius, and Justin Martyr (pp. 51-60).

applicability of the Jewish way of life as Philo understood it within his world of first-century Diaspora, on the other hand.⁸⁴

Since the publications of the works by Borgen and Birnbaum, numerous studies have appeared which use Philo's interpretive tendencies as a starting point to explore Philo's attitudes toward theological knowledge. In what follows, I will briefly consider some works with which we will interact throughout this study. As the reader will note, the following remarks on each study are commensurate with the study's relevance to the present work.

In his monograph on soteriological themes in Philo, Christian Noack (2000) scrutinises the variety of mystical experiences described in Philo's writings under the concept of 'Gottesbewusstsein'.⁸⁵ Noack turns to three principal Philonic texts, two from the exegetical series (*On the Virtues* 211-19; *Who is the Heir?* 63-74), and one from the zetematic collection (*Questions and Answers in Exodus* 2.29).⁸⁶ Noack's chief aim is to challenge the status quo that sees the goal

⁸⁴ See Birnbaum 1996:220-30; see also Berkowitz 2012:41-59, 241 on the difficulty of determining how Philo may be matching 'Israel' with an identifiable social group.

⁸⁵ Defined as 'Gottesbewusstsein meint die sich in der mystischen Erfahrung vollziehende hingebungsvolle Ausrichtung des Bewusstseins auf Gott, die das menschliche Bewusstsein qualitative verändert' (Noack 2000:3-4).

⁸⁶ Noack 2000:40-215.

of Philo's soteriology as a type of divinely-inspired ecstasy that is self-negating in essence and temporally limited in experience.⁸⁷

Noack's detailed study of the 'soteriological profile' of each Philonic text cannot be treated here in adequate measure, but pertinent for our present discussion is the main thrust of Noack's study that Philonic discourses on divine inspiration are far more complex and context-specific than earlier synthetic studies have suggested.⁸⁸ Philo's soteriological goal, Noack insists, is better seen as a set of three 'soteriological profiles': one's experience of the divine on the basis of enhanced rationality and exalted creaturely status;⁸⁹ one's union with the divine via her active use of contemplative intuition,⁹⁰ and one's experience of the divine that involves the perfect co-operation of one's mind, body, and senses.⁹¹

Noack's study, however, invites further exploration of areas essential to any investigation of an epistemological motif in Philo. More specifically, Noack's research calls for more attention to Philo's varied perspectives on the nature, potential and limits of the human mind in its quest to know and experience the divine, the kinds of fundamental epistemological questions that are considered more fully in this study. Furthermore, Noack's selection of texts has been

⁸⁷ Noack's primary interlocutor is Jonas 1954: 100-07.

⁸⁸ Noack 2000:216-39.

⁸⁹ Noack 2000: 216-21 (*Virt.* 211-19).

⁹⁰ Noack 2000: 221-26 (*QE* 2.29).

⁹¹ Noack 2000:226-43 (*Her.* 63-74).

questioned as to whether the three texts actually represent Philo's wider views on noetic inspiration and one's attainment of divine knowledge.⁹² By investigating these fundamental questions and drawing on a wider range of Philonic texts and ideas (not just those limited to ecstatic inspiration), our study aims to build on Noack's basic claim that the mystical goal in Philo cannot be confined to ecstatic self-negation.

In her treatment of Philo's representation of Egypt, Sarah Pearce (2007) explores 'the significance of Egypt as a symbol of "the land of the body"' as seen, among other ways, in Philo's treatment of the migrations of Israel's ancestors in the Pentateuch's Egypt.⁹³ Using the Pentateuch as his ideological map, Philo draws on earlier interpretive traditions that used Platonist texts and themes to variously portray the relationship between the mind and the body.⁹⁴

Pearce's study of Philo's approach to Egypt-related migrations and motifs in the Pentateuch alerts us to the significance Philo attaches to the progress (and escape) of one's soul vis-à-vis the bodily passions.⁹⁵ Our study builds on many of Pearce's interpretations which support her broader claim that Philo's reading of the Pentateuch in both series is shaped by epistemological motifs derived from

⁹² As raised by Borgen 2002:170.

⁹³ Pearce 2007:45-177 (esp. 81-177).

⁹⁴ Pearce 2007:82-103.

⁹⁵ Pearce 2007:103-27.

an exegetical understanding of Egypt as the locus of the passions, with the consequences associated with the 'Egyptian' failure to 'see God' offering a striking contrast to the divine conferrals upon Israel as 'the one who sees God.'⁹⁶

In an unpublished Oxford dissertation, Phoebe Makiello (2009) concurs with previous researchers concerning the claim that Philo's notions of *visio Dei* are limited to perceptions of divine existence, not essence, a constraint that applied to Moses until the very end of his life.⁹⁷ Makiello goes beyond earlier studies⁹⁸ by introducing the role of memory in Philo's approach to the human quest for visionary experience of the divine. Makiello criticises some studies for systematising Philo's thought without taking careful account of the distinctive contexts of Philo's reflections on the subject.⁹⁹ Vulnerable to the same charge, Makiello's analysis invites further work on the varied character and philosophical contexts of Philo's writings and audiences. Her claims on the importance of memory, as a faculty of the mind which preserves an impression of the image of God, are supported mainly by texts taken from the *Allegorical Commentary*.¹⁰⁰ This is followed by her analysis of Moses' ascent to God as a type of metaphysical (rather than epistemological) transformation through

⁹⁶ Pearce 2007:129-59, 295-308.

⁹⁷ Notably Birnbaum 1996:85-90; Calabi 1998:102.

⁹⁸ Notably Calabi 1998

⁹⁹ Makiello 2009:10-12 (critiquing Hayward 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Makiello 2009:139-58. Weakening the force of her claim is the fact that Philo makes no explicit references to the memory of God in conjunction with ascent visions, as Makiello herself concedes (p. 216).

knowledge gained in the immaterial afterlife. The latter idea Makiello derives from texts from *On the Life of Moses*.¹⁰¹ Makiello pays minimal attention to the interpretive and philosophical contexts specific to key Philonic discourses which come into her purview. The absence of such explanations leaves much room to contribute to Makiello's suggestive study of the relationship between memory and Moses' metaphysical experience of the divine.

Finally, Scott Mackie (2009, 2012) explores elements of mystical thought and praxis in Philo's *visio Dei* discourses. Mackie's findings are in line with earlier offerings; David Winston's lectures on Philonic mysticism come immediately to mind. What is fresh about Mackie's work is his close attention to the varied character of Philo's exegetical works and implied audiences.¹⁰²

In his article on *visio Dei* material in Philo, Mackie (2009) explicitly locates his study with reference to Birnbaum's call for further context-sensitive study of Philonic epistemology, though he concludes that audience is not a completely reliable factor for understanding the purported inconsistencies in Philo's epistemology.¹⁰³ Mackie focuses on a few passages from each series and this allows him to bring out some general themes in each text. One can, however,

¹⁰¹ Makiello 2009:159-208, following the suggestion (Brenk 1992:39-60) that Philo makes allowances for *visio Dei* in the next life.

¹⁰² Mackie 2012:157-58; cf. Mackie 2009:31-44.

¹⁰³ Mackie 2009:45-46.

detect minimal engagement with the broader philosophical currents that shape Philo's discourses on *visio Dei*. As a result, Mackie seems to overstate his case when he claims that Philo is deliberately ambiguous in his approach to this subject.¹⁰⁴ By engaging more fully with these currents, our study suggests that Philo, far from being deliberately ambiguous, is rather intentional in exploiting different philosophical ideas suitable to each exegetical context and the needs of his varied audiences.

In a later article, Mackie (2012) continues exploring *visio Dei* passages in Philo. He seeks to illustrate how in some contexts Philo stresses the centrality of divine agency¹⁰⁵ while in other instances Philo insists on the primacy of human agency.¹⁰⁶ In this 'synergistic mutuality' between God and the aspirant,¹⁰⁷ Philo's approach to *visio Dei* is predicated on exegetical text work, which Mackie suggests is not simply a metaphorical shorthand for the possibility of knowing God but rather actual phenomena Philo regularly experiences firsthand and further associates with the way of the Therapeutae.¹⁰⁸ One cannot help but detect echoes of Goodenough's thesis that historical realities stand behind Philo's mystic references, a thesis which has been regarded as tenuous at best for more than five decades.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Winston 1985:14.

¹⁰⁵ Mackie 2012:150-52.

¹⁰⁶ Mackie 2012:152-68.

¹⁰⁷ Mackie 2012:155-56.

¹⁰⁸ Mackie 2012:167-69.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Mackie's research is fresh, and thus his findings will be considered, where pertinent, throughout the course of our study. For now, it is worth noting that Mackie's attempts are similar to ours in so far as there is a common interest in unpacking a subject of central importance to Philo. Exploring fields of ideas that lie beyond the scope of Mackie's brief article, this thesis offers a more comprehensive account of the subject by examining how Philo variously conceives of the nature, potential, and limits of the human mind in its quest to know God. These questions, on which the foregoing studies touch tangentially or not at all, will be addressed here in ways that promise to enrich and expand the many significant gains witnessed in the past three and a half decades.

Having considered briefly some recent studies which devote primary (though not exclusive) attention to the primacy of exegesis in Philonic epistemology, we turn now to recent studies which consider the Middle Platonic character of Philo's approach to theological knowledge. Following Dillon's stress on the logos-centric character of Philo's thoughts,¹⁰⁹ David Winston (1985) explores the fusion of Jewish and non-Jewish ideas which frame some of Philo's more

¹⁰⁹ Winston 1985:25.

mystical portraits of human ascent to the divine. Human participation with the divine, claims Winston, is possible only through the *Logos*.¹¹⁰

In keeping with this view, Winston renders Philo as one who identifies the human psyche as the primary locus of this participation, a way of thinking about ascent that also featured in the Platonism of Philo's day and also in the scriptural account of Abraham's migration.¹¹¹ Winston rightfully notes that 'the precise destination of the soul's ascent ultimately depends on the different theories regarding its origin'¹¹² and to this end Winston skillfully delves into the Platonic and Stoic currents running through Philo's theology. Winston's analysis sheds light on Philo's understanding of the soul's ascent to God by way of perfection or by way of progress.¹¹³

Relevant for our purposes is Winston's summary of the substance of Philo's mystical theology.¹¹⁴ Key steps are schematised, starting with one's attainment of self-knowledge which leads to a mystic visionary experience of the divine *Logos*. Winston's analysis, however, pays insufficient attention to evidence of Philo's desire to write in different ways about this subject depending on his audience and literary aims. If one accepts Winston's reconstruction of Philo's

¹¹⁰ Winston 1985:14-25.

¹¹¹ Winston 1985:27-42.

¹¹² Winston 1985:37.

¹¹³ Winston 1985:41-42.

¹¹⁴ Winston 1985:54-55.

main epistemological doctrines, one must be prepared to do so without much regard for the contexts that frame these very doctrines.¹¹⁵

Markus Bockmuehl (1990) explores how Philo conceives of revelation and mystery as interwoven motifs of epistemological and hermeneutical import from the standpoint of Philo as a Middle Platonist interpreter of Moses. Central Philonic texts on the potential and limits of human knowledge of God are illuminated in relation to other key concepts in Philo such as divine inspiration¹¹⁶ and the disclosure of mysteries.¹¹⁷ While an attempt is made at exploring the *Sitz im Leben* of Philo's uses of mystery language,¹¹⁸ Bockmuehl's study invites further exploration along similar lines in the 'Exposition.'

In his wide-ranging account of the history of pre-kabbalistic Jewish mysticism, Peter Schäfer offers a close reading of several key texts reflecting Philo's main views of God,¹¹⁹ the constituent parts of the human being,¹²⁰ and the soul's vision of God.¹²¹ Drawn largely from texts in the *Allegorical Commentary* and a couple of well-known ascent texts from the 'Exposition,' Schäfer's account concludes by recognising Philo as 'the truly exceptional phenomenon' in early Jewish

¹¹⁵ Cf. Runia 1986:25.

¹¹⁶ Bockmuehl 1990:71-73.

¹¹⁷ Bockmuehl 1990: 76-78.

¹¹⁸ Bockmuehl 1990:78-81.

¹¹⁹ Schäfer 2009:155-60.

¹²⁰ Schäfer 2009:160-64.

¹²¹ Schäfer 2009:164-74.

mysticism. In this regard, Philo is exceptional because he splits the unity of the human body and soul whilst favouring the fate of the soul, a movement of thought that goes far beyond the visionary accounts found in biblical and postbiblical literature.¹²²

In line with mainstream scholarship, Schäfer rightly identifies the the prospect of human ascent to the divine as a central unifying theme in Philo. Yet Schäfer overplays a strand of thought in Philo which he calls 'the transformation of the seer.' This, coupled with his neglect of the varied character and contexts of Philo's discourses on ascent, leads Schäfer to overstate his conclusion that Philo's understanding of noetic ascent 'becomes a truly individualistic experience.'¹²³ 'Hence,' Schäfer asserts, 'Philo's program is deeply elitist and not particularly concerned about the destiny of the community.'¹²⁴

A full and context-specific accounting of Philo's epistemological discourses promises to reveal the partiality of Schäfer's assessment of Philo. Schäfer neglects a substantial amount of evidence in both exegetical series which undercut his conclusions. As we shall see,¹²⁵ Philo is quite keen to say that spiritual and social benefits are available to those who identify with others who

¹²² Schäfer 2009:174.

¹²³ Schäfer 2009:352-53.

¹²⁴ Schäfer 2009:353.

¹²⁵ Chapter 2 (§§ 2.6.1 and 2.6.2) below.

follow the ways and writings of Moses and the prophets. As such, Schäfer's partial study of Philo stands as a cautionary tale for us and as further proof of the need for the kind of study on Philo's theological epistemology undertaken here.

Finally, and most recently, Maren Niehoff (2010) sees Philo as a product of his Alexandrian intellectual milieu, but one who invests Middle Platonic commonplaces with Mosaic theological convictions. Pertinent for our discussion is Niehoff's analysis of two of the more striking features in Philo's epistemology.

First, Niehoff observes that Philo, in his earlier works (*Allegorical Commentary*), privileges the ideal of human assimilation to God and further infuses this Platonic parlance with Mosaic notions of divine impregnation. Philo's erotic language, in Niehoff's view, holds the key to understanding Philo's way of presenting the 'positive epistemology' of Moses in the *Allegorical Commentary*. This distinctively Alexandrian way of discourse depicts the apex of assimilation to God as one's encounter with the divine powers.¹²⁶

Second, Niehoff claims that Philo in his later works ('Exposition') shifts his attention from Plato's *Theaetetus* in order to concentrate more fully on another key part of Plato's library, the *Timaeus*. Political sensitivities heightened by the

¹²⁶ Niehoff 2010:41-45.

Alexandrian riots of 38 CE play a big part in Niehoff's theory, for such turbulence causes Philo to enlist Roman-Stoic notions of an immanent *Logos* in his reading of the *Timaeus*. For Niehoff, this move reflects Philo's interest in translating Platonic ideas into more material (i.e. Stoic) terms to suit the philosophical tastes of his Roman readers. Cast in this light, Philo's treatise, *On the Creation of the Cosmos*, is 'an epoch-making synthesis between Alexandrian and Roman discourses.'¹²⁷

Such claims are suggestive and illuminating (as shown in our engagement with her work throughout the thesis). Yet Niehoff's efforts to show the significance of a Roman context for Philo's 'Exposition' seem strained under the full weight of relevant evidence. Niehoff's assessment of Stoic influence on Philo is of course correct in a limited sense, namely if one focuses solely (as she does) on the passages she selects from *On the Creation of the Cosmos*. Yet if one accepts this assessment, one must also be ready to overlook the significance of the Platonic concept of human assimilation to God which profoundly shapes Philo's epistemological discourses in the latter part of *On the Creation of the Cosmos*,¹²⁸ the very treatise which Niehoff offers as prime evidence for the dominance of Stoic thought in the 'Exposition.' In the end, then, Niehoff's claims seem too tidy

¹²⁷ Niehoff 2010:53-57

¹²⁸ *Opif.* 134-47 (an interpretation of Genesis 2.7).

in the face of the complexities in Philo's epistemological discourses. We shall return to this point in more detail in Chapter 3.¹²⁹

The preceding survey allows us to delineate the current state of affairs which calls for this study. Moving from one broad observation to a couple of more specific ones, we generally observed that most recent studies on Philo engage this subject in a partial, often tangential, manner. Yet, somewhat ironically, this perhaps reflects an area of wider agreement in the guild, namely that human knowledge of God is a topic of considerable importance for Philo and his readers. Turning to a specific batch of recent studies that bear more directly on Philo's approach to this topic, we observed that such treatments offer room for further contribution. More pointedly, they do not account fully for the context-sensitive character of Philo's epistemological discourses as such discourses occur within each exegetical series, and for that matter, within specific segments of an exegetical series. As such, the varied and contextual characteristics of these discourses are often overlooked or even presented as indications of Philo's incoherence when it comes to reading both Mosaic and Greek writings.

Another set of treatments adopts the aforementioned approach to Philo, but they do not engage the full range of materials in Philo's theological epistemology. Despite significant gains in related areas of Philonic thought, it remains the case

¹²⁹ Cf. Chapter 3 (§§ 3.3.5 and 3.3.6) below.

that Philo's theological epistemology has yet to be fully and satisfactorily studied in this context-sensitive way, a research gap which was identified in one of the more celebrated studies of Philo in recent memory (Birnbaum 1996).

Rectifying this deficiency, then, is the chief warrant for (and main contribution of) this study. By employing an interrogative approach that differs significantly from Birnbaum's approach, this study goes beyond previous attempts and promises to deliver results which broaden key findings on aspects of particularity and universality in Philo's knowledge discourses whilst bringing these tensions into closer conversation with relevant Graeco-Roman ideas which have not been treated as fully as they are in this study.

1.4

Methodological Considerations

In his essay entitled 'The Beginnings of the End: Philo of Alexandria and Hellenistic Theology,' David Runia observes the evidentiary challenges with which every historian needs to cope, what he calls 'the problem of the double unknown':

Every historian of philosophy who wishes to exploit Philo's evidence thus needs to cope with what we might call 'the problem of the double unknown.' When you assess a Philonic doctrine, you have to determine not only its relation to contemporary philosophical views, but also the extent to which it reveals Jewish traits that go beyond the literal starting-point in the biblical text. But in both cases there is a dearth of comparative evidence. On the Greek side we have only the tiniest scraps, while in Jewish studies too Philo is virtually *sui generis*.¹³⁰

In the face of this 'problem of the double unknown,' Runia calls for the following methodology:

It is worth pointing out that scholars have succeeded in determining the internal organisation of the *corpus Philonicum*, plainly centred around three independent series of commentaries, but that they have not been able to determine the relative chronology of these works. For this reason any kind of application of a genetic approach...is doomed to failure.

Nevertheless I am becoming more and more convinced that we should take this situation into account when analysing Philo's writings, i.e. *that it is sound methodology first to work within the framework of the separate commentaries before mixing together results from all three (and the remaining treatises as well). It is reasonable to expect that the internal doctrinal consistency of these large-scale works will be greater than that of the corpus as a whole*. If Philo even then apparently cannot achieve a measure of coherence, then either we still do not understand him, or he is a lost cause.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Runia 2002a:286-87.

¹³¹ Runia 2002a:287-88 (emphasis added).

In keeping with the above, we will not take a genetic approach to pertinent epistemological texts in Philo. We will adopt Runia's prescription to 'work within the framework of the separate commentaries' and attempt thereafter a synthetic analysis of key findings. This context-specific approach will be supplemented with the widely accepted guidelines offered by David Runia in his programmatic essay, 'How to Read Philo.' For ease of reference, these guidelines, consistent with many of the principles formulated earlier by E. R. Goodenough,¹³² are listed in summary form in Appendix A.

Before drawing this section to a close, it is worthwhile to mention three ways in which the scope of this thesis is limited.

1.4.1 Limitations of the present study

Our explorations of Philo's theological epistemology will be restricted in the following three ways.

¹³² Goodenough 1939:51-58, esp. 56-58.

1.4.1.1 Philo and Rabbinism

Scholars continue to debate whether Philo can be located in proximity to popular or more academic developments in early Rabbinism.¹³³ One line of studies traces back more than a century and regards Philo as one who depended on the ways of Palestinian halakhah in Philo's time.¹³⁴ Much of the proffered evidence, however, remains rather tenuous at best for any connection to be secured between Philo's thought and early rabbinic literature, or, for that matter, to secure any historical connection between Philo and Jewish courts in first-century Alexandria.¹³⁵ In keeping with current consensus, the open yet critical position of Geza Vermes, Jenny Morris, and Martin Goodman will be adopted here.¹³⁶ The issue will not be explored in any real depth as part of our study.

¹³³ Key developments in this area summarised in Grabbe 1991:153-66 and Birnbaum 2006:253-55.

¹³⁴ Earlier views include Lauterbach 1905:15-18; Belkin 1940; Wolfson 1948 I:188-93; more recently: Cohen 1995:8-10, 18-29 who suggests that Philo's major works are best situated in the mainstream of Jewish midrashic tradition. A recent concurrence is found in Termini 2009:114-15.

¹³⁵ Goodenough 1929:214-55 (esp. 216).

¹³⁶ Morris 1987 writes: 'Philo certainly did not possess an accurate, formal knowledge of Palestinian Halakhah, but a general familiarity with it might be suggested by one remark, and especially by his work *On the Special Laws*' (p. 874).

1.4.1.2 Philo and Gnosticism

A second area of disagreement is Philo's relationship, if any, to Gnostic thought. A minority of scholars¹³⁷ continues to posit arcs of continuity or development between Philo and later Gnostic writings. The majority of the guild regards these suggestions as tenuous at best in the absence of more direct evidence. Given these issues, coupled with the researcher's limitations in these fields, we will tread with caution, noting suitable points of possible contact that have been raised in modern scholarship.

1.4.1.3 Philo's zetematic writings

Finally, the *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* do not fall within the purview of this thesis in light of (a) major differences in genre between this series and Philo's two main exegetical series, and (b) the patchy preservation of the *Questions and Answers* in Greek, with Armenian being the principal witness to a longer version. Along with pertinent remarks offered in Appendix B, references to salient passages will be integrated into the chapters below.

¹³⁷ See McWilson 1972:213-19 and Pearson 1984:295-343 for discussions; more recent treatments at Couliano 1992:121-24; Bos 2000:52-63.

1.5 Thesis Plan

Having considered these methodological points, it is appropriate to sketch the overall plan of the present study.

1.5.1 Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis

In many ways, these two chapters represent the bulk of the interpretive work of this thesis. When read in tandem, they offer a detailed, though not exhaustive, comparison of the theological epistemologies in the *Allegorical Commentary* (Chapter 2) and the 'Exposition' (Chapter 3), respectively. The complexity and sheer scale of the material demand that the interpretive task in each chapter be guided by the following set of questions:

- (1) How does Philo conceive of the *origin* and *nature* of the human mind?
- (2) How does Philo conceive of the *potential* of the human mind in its ascent to the divine?
- (3) How does Philo conceive of the *limitations* of the human mind in its ascent to knowledge of such divine realities?

It is useful here to reflect briefly on my rationale for using the interrogative method outlined above. I submit that it will help me strike some sort of balance between two realities that pressurise every student of Philo. There is, on the one hand, the importance of respecting what Samuel Sandmel calls the ‘architectonic’¹³⁸ character of Philo’s thought and style, a shorthand way of acknowledging that many of Philo’s central concepts are highly constellated in expression. There is, on the other hand, the need to organise and analyse the pertinent Philonic material as coherently and concisely as possible. Ancillary questions and ideas will be considered, where useful, within the frame of these three questions.

1.5.2 Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis

The interpretive work in these chapters differs from the comparative work undertaken in Chapters 2 and 3. Having established in Chapters 2 and 3 our central thesis on exegetical foundations, the two extended case studies in Chapters 4 and 5 offer instructive and interrelated portraits of the epistemology specific to the *Allegorical Commentary*. Chapter 4, then, explores the reasons why Philo gives epistemological value to the metaphorical – not historical – language of mystery initiation. In a related vein, Chapter 5 examines the epistemological significance Philo attributes to the metaphorical language of divine inspiration.

¹³⁸ Sandmel 1954:248.

What is the central thread that connects these two case studies? In short, it is Philo's insistence that the human quest to know and experience the divine necessarily involves *both* the enhancement *and* the total eviction of human rationality. By exploiting these two metaphorical *topoi*, Philo brings together – distinctively in the *Allegorical Commentary* – two contexts for noetic transformation (rationality and non-rationality) that were widely seen in his day as incompatible or even conflicting states of the human mind.

Finally, we touch briefly on two reasons why our restricted study of Philo's *Allegorical Commentary* is warranted. First, as already stated, it comports with the prevailing view that exegesis is key to understanding any major topic in Philo.¹³⁹ The *Allegorical Commentary*, scholars agree, offers an instructive example of this nexus between exegesis and epistemology in Philo. Peder Borgen captures this sentiment:

The task of the Philonic scholar is therefore to concentrate on the exegetical themes without severing them from the scriptural passages as a set of independent ideas.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Nikiprowetzky 1977:97-108; cf. Runia 1987:10.

¹⁴⁰ Borgen 1997b:37.

Mystery initiation and divine inspiration are two of the more notable exegetical and philosophical *topoi* in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*. In this series, Philo includes these metaphorical themes in his repertoire of interpretive strategies, trading on such evocative language in order to intensify his epistemological discourses in the *Allegorical Commentary*.

Second, and more briefly, it is worth noting that although much attention has been given to Philo's approach to each exegetical theme, minimal attention has been given to the interwoven character of these two themes. As we shall see, one strand cannot be seen without relation to the other: Philo weaves together these two themes in order to write about the necessity (and the obviation) of human rationality as equally legitimate aspects of one's quest to attain knowledge of the divine.

The upshot of narrowing our focus of investigation is twofold. This focus allows us to both *substantiate* and *illustrate* the overarching claim of the thesis, i.e. that there are two distinct yet related theological epistemologies in Philo's main series of exegetical writings.

Chapter 2

Knowledge of God in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*

The aim here is to examine Philo's set of epistemological interests as seen in his so-called *Allegorical Commentary*.¹ As explained in the previous chapter, the following set of three questions will be used as a springboard into what many consider Philo's magnum opus.

- (1) How does Philo conceive of the *origin* and *nature* of the human mind?
- (2) How does Philo conceive of the *potential* of the human mind in its ascent to the divine?
- (3) How does Philo conceive of the *limitations* of the human mind in its ascent to knowledge of such divine realities?

The argument of this chapter will unfold in the course of addressing these questions but a brief preview is offered at the outset.

¹ In what follows, I have generally used the Loeb Classical Library text and translation of Colson and Whittaker. To keep references as accessible as possible, in the main body of the thesis I have used the English title of any given Philonic work; for example, *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies*. In the thesis footnotes, however, I have used the traditional Latin abbreviations, e.g. *Congr.* for *De congressu eruditionis gratia*. A full list of these abbreviations may be found in volume 1 of the LCL edition (pages xxiii-xxiv) and in the Bibliography below.

2.1

Chapter Preview

On the first of our three principal questions, pertinent evidence from the *Allegorical Commentary* suggests that Philo's approach to the human mind rests on a threefold conviction: the sovereignty of God, the creaturely contingency of the human mind, and its inescapable limitations. From each one follows the next.

First, Philo subscribes to the notion, resurgent in the Middle Platonism of his day, that a categorical difference exists between the transcendent uncreated mind of God, on the one hand, and the created human counterpart, on the other. Second, Philo divides the mind into two loci of rationality, a divine part called 'the mind above us' and a human part called 'the mind within us.' This bipartition follows the philosophical conventions of his day. Third, Philo asserts that the rational mind is domiciled in the soul and is entombed in a physical body. With unseverable ties to these non-rational domains, the mind is by nature subject to a constant state of flux and contingency.

This threefold conviction provides Philo with the conceptual means by which to view Moses and Plato as part of the same philosophical agenda. This enables Philo to present readers of the *Allegorical Commentary* with grounds for

rebutting the relativism associated with Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490 – 420 BCE) and certain aspects of Stoic thought on the activity and divinity of the *Logos*.

As we shall see, Protagoras and his idea that ‘the human being is the measure of all things’ is a key part of Plato’s approach to knowledge in a dialogue (*Theaetetus*) which in turn influences Philo’s approach to knowledge of God. In this chapter, we will consider broad features of Philo’s engagement with Protagorean epistemology; in Chapter 4, we will return to this engagement with specific reference to Philo’s use of the metaphorical language of human initiation into divine mysteries.

Second, how does Philo conceive of the potential of the human mind to ascend to knowledge about and from God? As a Middle Platonist interpreter of the writings of Moses, Philo blends prophetic and sapiential strands of the biblical material, pressing into service two of the more dominant modes of revelation as understood in the late Second Temple period.

This blending offers Philo the resources to recast the idea of noetic potential in two ways: (1) the aspirant’s initiation into the higher mysteries by recourse to a scriptural locus of authority (Pentateuch), and (2) the aspirant’s summons to a state of inspiration and ecstatic possession by recourse to a pneumatic locus of authority (divine breath or divine spirit).

Both models feature prominently in Philo's pluriform way of describing the Mosaic doctrines of divine parentage and potencies. Through his various agencies, God wants the aspiring mind to gain purification and perfection and thereby to experience therapy and transformation of knowledge.

Finally, how does Philo conceive of the limitations of the human mind in such aspirational contexts? Despite its aspirational potential, the mind is limited in at least four primary ways. First, the mind in its native state is limited on the principle of like discerning like. On this ontological account, the corporeal mind cannot apprehend anything that is incorporeal in nature, including all things in the intelligible universe. Second, the mind is limited by its dependence on the human senses. Third, the mind is limited in its innate capacity to apprehend systems of causation. Absent this body of knowledge, the mind has no means to acquire knowledge of God in his essence. Finally, the mind in its native disposition is unable to apprehend the nature and location of its own intellect.

Notable also are points of affinity between the *Allegorical Commentary* and strands of contemporary sceptical thought, and in particular, the ideas associated with the first-century BCE sceptic Aenesidemus. In principle, Philo offers little resistance to the Pyrrhonian interest in the equipollence of appearances and thoughts. On this plane, the prevalence of such phenomena demands one's suspension of judgment. Philo's turn to this sceptical imperative,

as formulated in Aenesidemus' Ten Modes, can be explained largely by exegetical exigencies.

These principal questions will also enable us to consider two additional aspects of Philo's theological epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*: Philo's twofold insistence that one's knowledge of the divine, as least as he sees it in Moses, is therapeutic in effect and social in character. Bearing in mind the foregoing preview, a brief orientation of one dominant literary feature and three key themes of the *Allegorical Commentary* will be offered before turning to the first of our research questions.

2.2

Philo's *Allegorical Commentary* at-a-glance

According to David Runia, 'Philo is the first philosopher to base his philosophy on the acceptance of an authoritative body of scriptural writings.'² Philo's authoritative base is the writings of Moses, the Hebrew philosopher-king³ and prophet⁴ who had in Philo's estimation attained the pinnacle of philosophy (by

² Runia 2009b:144.

³ Cf. *Mos.* 2.2, 66. On the place of this concept in the 'Exposition': Chapter 3 (§ 3.5.5.3).

⁴ Cf. *Her.* 262; in the 'Exposition': *Mos.* 2.292; *Spec.* 1.345. The two types of Mosaic prophecy (ecstatic and noetic) are usefully explored by Winston (1989:50-60; 2010:244-46).

means of his educational upbringing in a rigorous Hellenistic curriculum⁵) *and* secured the sacred doctrines of nature (by means of receiving and interpreting divine oracles at Sinai).⁶

2.2.1 *Dominant literary feature*

Philo's approach to this authoritative body of writings is driven in the first instance by his anticipation of interpretive knots at the literal level of a particular text under review.⁷ The Alexandrian's essentialist universe compels an unequivocal acceptance of the Mosaic corpus as a living organism whose soul resides at non-literal levels.⁸ Consistent with this worldview, each interpretive knot represents an invitation for one to contemplate intellectually the nature of the God of Moses and the meaning of human life.⁹

This task of intellectual contemplation moves on the vehicles of grammatical (esp. etymological) analysis,¹⁰ literary and philosophical precedence (with

⁵ Cf. *Mos.* 1.48.

⁶ Cf. *Mos.* 2.67, 97; *Cher.* 124; *Mut.* 125; in the 'Exposition': *Opif.* 8; *Spec.* 4.192.

⁷ Cf. *Post.* 1-7; *Sobr.* 31-32; *Congr.* 172.

⁸ Cf. *Migr.* 93; cf. Matusova 2010:1-51.

⁹ Cf. *Conf.* 191; *Congr.* 54; cf. Bockmuehl 2009:24-29.

¹⁰ The question of Philo's knowledge of Hebrew remains outstanding. On Philo's lack of Hebrew, see e.g. Stein 1929:20-26, Rokeah 1968:70-82; Nikiprowetzky 1977:50-96. For a dissenting view: Hanson 1967:128-39. Hanson 1967:130 arrives at a conclusion which will be adopted for our purposes: "The most reasonable solution, and that adopted by most scholars today, is to assume that Philo used various sources for his etymologies,

particular deference accorded to Homer and Plato¹¹), and perhaps most striking of all, the serial linking of secondary and often tertiary Mosaic texts which reflects Philo's overriding interest in reading Moses in the light of Moses.¹²

The driving force behind the *Allegorical Commentary*, concatenative exegesis aids Philo in his desire to apply Mosaic material to a wider range of ideas and issues not necessarily implicated – at least in the first instance – by the primary biblical text under review. As wide-ranging as it may be, Philo's concatenative exegesis features the recurrence of three clusters of ideas: (1) the scope and substance of divine gifts of knowledge; (2) key conditions and contexts for the divine conferral of such varied gifts, and (3) key case studies of aspirants (real or symbolic) who have attained or rejected such gifts. These clusters are identified below and discussed in greater detail throughout this chapter.

and that some of these were better than others.' In any case, caution needs to be exercised, as Feldman 1993:55 urges that 'in view of the fact that in Philo's time Hebrew was almost unknown in Egypt the burden of proof rests on those who assert that he did know Hebrew' (citing Sandmel 1971:13). Grabbe 1988 is the most recent comprehensive work on this issue.

¹¹ See the indices of Earp 1962 for a listing of Philonic references to Homer (p. 323) and Plato (p. 404); on Philo's use of Homer: cf. Koskenniemi 2010:301-22; on Plato: Runia 1986b passim.

¹² Formal similarities have been identified with commentaries in the philosophical tradition, e.g., the Platonic *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary*, Plutarch's *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*, and Porphyry's *On the Cave of Nymphs*. See further: Dillon 1983:77-87. Sterling 2011:xi identifies thematic unity as one key feature which distinguishes Philo's *Allegorical Commentary* from the others listed.

2.2.2 Key thematic features

Turning now to the main themes of the *Allegorical Commentary*, it is helpful to note that the *Allegorical Commentary* consists of at least three recognisable (though incomplete) anthologies.¹³ Each anthology bears a particular thematic orientation. The anthologies of the *Allegorical Commentary* are listed in the diagram below.

Diagram 2.1
Anthologies of the *Allegorical Commentary*

AC Anthologies	Contents
Anthology A	<i>The Allegories of the Laws books I—III (Leg. All.)</i> <i>On the Cherubim (Cher.)</i> <i>On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Sacr.)</i> <i>That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better (Det.)</i> <i>On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile (Post.)</i> <i>On the Giants (Gig.)</i> <i>On the Unchangeableness of God (Deus)</i>

¹³ Sterling 2009:66-67 calls for an increased measure of awareness by scholars concerning the presence of a system of cross-referencing works within Philo's treatises and his broader corpus and the significance of such references to understanding the development and distinctiveness of Philo's thought. As an example of Philo's movement between these anthologies see *Her.* 50. In that passage, Philo explores a particular aspect of Deut 21.15-17 and in the course of this discussion calls attention to his allegorical interpretations in three other treatises in the *Allegorical Commentary* (*Leg. All.* 2.48; *Sacr.* 19; *Sobr.* 21f). What we have in this example is a reference from a treatise in Anthology C to allegorical interpretations of the same biblical text (Deut 21.15-17) in Anthology A (*Leg. All.* 2.48; *Sacr.* 19) and B (*Sobr.* 21f).

Anthology B	<i>On Husbandry (Agr.)</i> <i>On Noah's Work as a Planter (Plant.)</i> <i>On Drunkenness (Ebr.)</i> <i>On Sobriety (Sobr.)</i> <i>On the Confusion of Tongues (Conf.)</i>
Anthology C	<i>On the Migration of Abraham (Migr.)</i> <i>Who is the Heir of Divine Things? (Her.)</i> <i>On Mating with the Preliminary Studies (Congr.)</i> <i>On Flight and Finding (Fug.)</i> <i>On the Change of Names (Mut.)</i>

In anthology A, Philo maps the protological relationship between God and his powers, on the one hand, and the created compound of the human mind, sense-perception, and body, on the other hand. Considerable attention is given to the origins of wisdom, virtue, passion and pleasure and the varied influences of the offspring of each thing on these protological relationships.

In Philo's reckoning, Cain – the first murderer recorded in the book of Genesis – serves as the chief exponent of the mindscape that organises itself according to the epistemological creed associated with Protagoras of Abdera, namely, 'the human being is the measure of all things.' To this end, a number of key

epistemological passages in Anthology A focus explicitly on the so-called 'measure' doctrine of Protagoras.¹⁴

According to the Pyrrhonist sceptic Sextus Empiricus (2nd century CE)

Protagoras opened his book entitled *Truth (Alētheia)* with the following words:

The Measure Doctrine of Protagoras of Abdera

Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν.	The human being is the measure of all things; of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not. ¹⁵
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In the *Theaetetus* Plato examines Protagoras' attempt to dissolve the line between epistemic and non-epistemic appearances. According to Lloyd Gerson, Plato takes direct aim at Protagoras on the grounds that the position arising

¹⁴ Cf. *Post.* 33-38. An indirect reference to Protagoras of Abdera is found at *Conf.* 122-27; cf. *Theatet.* 172A1-177C2, the so-called 'Digression' segment of the treatise wherein Plato represents Socrates' focus on gods as the philosophical way to respond to both intellectual and moral forms of relativism. For review of scholarship on Protagoras up to 1938: Neumann 1938; more recent reviews at Guthrie 1969; Huss 1996. Collected fragments at Capizzi 1955.

¹⁵ Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.60 (D-K 80b1); also quoted in *Theaet.* 152A2-4; cf. *Theaet.* 160D-162C, 170A-172A, 178B-E; *Crat.* 385E6-386A3; *Phaedr.* 267C; *Resp.* 10.600C; *Soph.* 232E; *Laws* 4.716C; Diog. Laert., *Lives* 9.51. See further Winter 2002:69-75. Versions of such sophistic views featured widely in antiquity: e.g. the purported claim of Gorgias (c. 485-c.380 BCE) that 'nothing is,' and even if anything is, it cannot be known, or indicated by one person to another; cf. *OCD*, 622 and attestations cited therein. For Philonic perspectives on Gorgias: Pearce 2007:156-57.

from the ‘measure’ doctrine would lead to ‘the abandonment of the entire philosophical project,’ a consequence appropriate for the sophist (ὁ σοφιστής) – Plato’s pejorative term for Protagoras – but not so for the wise person (ὁ σοφός).¹⁶

The rich afterlife of the ‘measure’ doctrine in the Greek worldview has been a topic of renewed interest among students of Plato and Aristotle (384-22 BCE),¹⁷ but Philonic scholars have yet to take sufficient account. We shall return to this aspect in Chapter 4 below.¹⁸

In anthology B, Philo describes the set of conflictual relationships between the human mind and soul. Philo unpacks the allied concepts of soul-husbandry and education in the encyclical subjects as key means by which the aspirant gradually progresses and achieves the states of perfection and purification in the knowledge of God.

These two states are preconditions for further aspiration to knowledge of God, as we will consider below. By insisting on soul-husbandry and encyclical training,

¹⁶ Gerson 2009:20-21; pertinent Philonic evidence upholding the Platonic distinction: *Leg. All.* 3.232; *Cher.* 10; *Det.* 71; *Sobr.* 9; *Fug.* 208-09. On sophistry in Philo’s world: Winter 2002 passim.

¹⁷ Cf. Schiappa 1991:190-94 for the view that Plato and Aristotle assimilated – rather than rejected – key aspects of Protagorean relativism. On the influence of Protagoras on Aristotelian categories of qualities: Evans 1974:193-203.

¹⁸ Chapter 4 (§ 4.4.2-4).

Philo leaves little doubt that the Mosaic construal of noetic ascent and transformation takes place through gradual toil and training.

In anthology C, Philo revisits the relationships featured in Anthology A. Here, however, he maps them onto a different conceptual plane, one which is dominated by teleological (not protological) commitments and concerns. Philo endorses Plato's notion of human assimilation to God, but he pours into this Platonic commonplace a medley of Mosaic allegories and ideas on flight (Levitical cities of refuge) and finding (Moses and other self-taught learners), the changing of names (Jacob/Israel), and the life of sojourning (Abraham). The result is an epistemological agenda which lays hold of how the mind's ascent to God brings about human transformation of the highest sort.

The foregoing summary orients us to the task of interrogating Philo with the first of our three questions: *how does Philo conceive of the origin and nature of the human mind?*

2.3

How does Philo conceive of the origin and nature of the human mind?

It comes as no surprise to find that Philo, consistent with that which animated the agendas of his primary tutors (Moses and Plato), pays close attention to *diairesis*¹⁹ – the method of division and philosophical inquiry which features prominently in the later dialogues of Plato – when going about the task of articulating a model of the human mind. Philo's model consists of three main theses.

2.3.1 *The first thesis of Philo's model of the human mind:*

The impassibility of the preexistent divine mind

First and foremost, Philo's approach to the human mind features the thesis that the impassable mind of God is the exclusive cause of all that exists.²⁰ Uncreated

¹⁹ Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 265D-E; and subsequent Aristotelian literature (e.g. *Metaph.* 1031a). On Aristotle's theory of division: *An. Post.* (Book 2) 96b-97b. Philo's interest in *diairesis* pervades the entire *Allegorical Commentary*. To gain a sense of appreciation for Philo's practice of *diairesis*, see his treatise *On Husbandry* (*De agricultura*). Philo explores the nature and limits of soul-husbandry by recourse to three segments of *diairetical* thinking: §§1-25 (the division between a husbandman and a soil-worker), §§26-66 (shepherd versus a cattle-rearer), and §§67-124 (horseman versus rider). On the relationship between *Logos* and *diairesis*: Hay 1973; Hammerton-Kelly 1976:45-56; Tobin 1993:147-50; on possible Alexandrian influence on the nomenclature used by rabbis (e.g. *diairesis*): Daube 1977:165-82 (esp. pp. 181-82).

²⁰ On the centrality of *nous* as the cause of order to the physical universe in Platonic conceptions of God, and how this idea shaped Plato's philosophy (as seen especially in

in nature, unchanging in disposition, and unlimited in power, the mind of God is everything that the human mind is not. In keeping with this thesis Philo defines the human mind in restrictive terms, at most, an imprint (ἐκμαγεῖον),²¹ fragment (ἀπόσπασμα),²² or effulgence (ἀπαύγασμα)²³ of the divine *Logos*. Availing himself of the Mosaic portfolio of resources (both literal and non-literal), Philo consistently presses the significance of one's recognition of this relationship between divine and human rationality.

Our understanding of Philo's theology of humility can be enriched when we note roughly similar ways of appreciating epistemic humility in the Hebrew Bible,²⁴ Josephus (b. 37 CE),²⁵ and writings associated with Qumran²⁶ and nascent Christianity.²⁷

the later dialogues), see Menn 1995 passim; on the broader concept of *nous* in Greek mythological concepts of return: Frame 1978.

²¹ Cf. *Her.* 57, 181, 231; *Fug.* 12; *Mut.* 223; *Somn.* 2:206.

²² Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.161; *Det.* 90; *Her.* 283; *Mut.* 223; *Somn.* 1:34.

²³ Cf. *Plant.* 50.

²⁴ LXX Num 12.3; Pss 33.19; 130 (131).1; Job 5.11; 1 Macc 14.14; Sir 10.15; 13.20.

²⁵ Appraisals of the virtue of humility in Josephus are closely linked with his elaborate portrayal of Moses as the most humble man on the face of the earth (Num 12.3). Josephus describes Mosaic humility in his relationship with Jethro his father-in-law (*A.J.* 3.74), his recording of the prophecies of Balaam (*A.J.* 4.157), and his attire (*A.J.* 3.212). Feldman 1993:276 suggests that 'Josephus was well aware that the pagans frowned on modesty and that Aristotle in particular (citing *Eth. nic.* 4.1125B7-27) is critical of the unduly humble man who, though being worthy of good things, robs himself of what he deserves.'

²⁶ See Kuhn 1966:27-29 who detects a theology of humility (*Niedrigkeitsdologie*) in the following *Hodayot* passages: 1.21-27; 7.28-33; 10.2-12; 10.32-11.2; 12.24-36; 13:14-18; see also Lichtenberger 1980:73-92; Tanzer 1987:20-21. Humility is one of the features

Despite many differences, these compositions reflect varying degrees of agreement with the belief that the mind's attainment of knowledge is, in the first place, grounded in the recognition that a categorical difference exists between the divine mind and the mind of each human aspirant. This conjunction of divine loftiness and human lowliness, for Philo, represents a 'living doctrine' for any aspirant of Mosaic philosophy.²⁸

This theology of humility, coupled with Platonic notions of divine transcendence, aided Philo in his efforts to dismantle competing conceptions of a more immanent and corporeal God.²⁹ What we see in Philo is an approach to humility which undoubtedly represented a sharp contrast to other agendas associated with contemporary Hellenistic philosophy.³⁰

which marks one's assimilation into the community in 1QS V 1-4 (cf. Murphy 2002:130-31). Borgen 1999:299-300 also observes the same theology of humility in the Rule of the Community (1QS 11.21-22).

²⁷ Cf. Luke 1.52; Rom 12.16; 2 Cor 7.6; Jas 1.9; 1 Pet 5.5; *1 Clem.* 21.8; 30.8. Prayer is an important context for the attainment and exercise of one's humility of mind in *1 Clem.* 56.1; *Herm. Sim.* 5 3.7; *Herm. Vis.* 3 10.6.

²⁸ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.35.

²⁹ Cf. Dillon 1997:377-79 who asserts that Philo's philosophical position can be best seen as a form of Middle Platonism which 'firmly reject[s] Stoic materialism and their doctrine of an immanent divinity....' (quote from p. 378).

³⁰ A point hardly disputed among scholars. As Robin Lane Fox notes, 'Among pagan authors humility had almost never been a term of commendation. It belonged with ignoble and abject characters. Men were born "sons of God," said the Stoics, and thus they should cherish no "humble or ignoble" thoughts about their nature. The humble belonged with the abject, the mean, the unworthy. Christianity, however, ascribed humility to God's own Son and exalted it as a virtue of man, his creature whom he had redeemed' (Fox 1986:324; cf. Bell 1953:194). Hezser 2005:149-78 observes 'great

2.3.2 *The second thesis of Philo's model of the human mind:*

The human mind is the locus of two types of rationality

Philo's approach also features the thesis that the mind is a locus of two distinct types of human rationality. Although there are glimpses of this thesis in several passages in the *Allegorical Commentary*,³¹ it finds arguably its sharpest formulation in a particularly rich epistemological segment of the treatise *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?*

In §232, Philo locates the mind in the human soul, taking up residence as the only rational part of the soul, the part which is closest to God in both nature and operation. We will return to the issue of the mind's domicile shortly. In §234, Philo speaks of the mind – indivisible (ἄτμητος) in nature – as comprised of two types of reasoning faculties: (i) the reasoning faculty within us (ἡ τε ἐν ἡμῖν τοῦ λογισμοῦ) and (ii) the reasoning faculty above us, i.e. the Divine *Logos* (ἡ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς τοῦ θείου λόγου):

differences' in the view of humility in Jewish and Graeco-Roman society. In her view, the Jewish appraisal of humility can be, at least in part, to the scriptural concept of 'the servant of God' (p. 215). Ciliers 2004:349 suggests that 'the physical origin of human beings was regarded a reason for humility in Jewish literature' (citing in support portions of Niddah 3a and Mishnah *Aboth*).

³¹ Cf. *Leg. All.* 1.22; *Det.* 82.

περιστερᾶ μὲν οὖν ὁ ἡμέτερος
νοῦς, ἐπειδὴ τιθασὸν καὶ
σύντροφον ἡμῖν ἐστι τὸ ζῶον,
εἰκάζεται, τῷ δὲ τούτου
παραδείγματι ἢ τρυγῶν.

For our own mind is here
compared to a dove, since that is
a creature which is tame and
domesticated among us; and the
turtle dove is compared to the
model presented by the other,
that is to say, by the mind of the
world, the heaven.

ὁ γὰρ θεοῦ λόγος φιλέρημος καὶ
μονωτικός, ἐν ὅχλῳ τῷ τῶν
γεγονότων καὶ φθαρησομένων
οὐχὶ φυρόμενος, ἀλλ' ἄνω φοιτᾷν
εἰθισμένος αἰεὶ καὶ ἐνὶ ὁπαδὸς εἶναι
μόνῳ μεμελετηκώς.

For the word of God is fond of
retirement, and solitude, and
privacy; not mixing itself up with
the crowd of things which have
been created and will be
destroyed, but being at all times
accustomed to roam on high, and
being anxious to be an attendant
only on the one supreme Being.

ἄτμητοι μὲν οὖν αἱ δύο φύσεις, ἣ
τε ἐν ἡμῖν τοῦ λογισμοῦ καὶ ἣ
ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου,
ἄτμητοι δὲ οὔσαι μυρία ἄλλα
τέμνουσιν.

Therefore, the two natures are
indivisible; the nature, I mean, of
**the reasoning power in us, and
of the divine word [or reason]
above us**; but though they are
indivisible themselves, they
divide an innumerable multitude
of other things.

The foregoing passage is just one of several ways in which Philo formulates the close relationship between the divine *Logos* and the human intellect. In describing the human mind as an imprint of the divine *Logos*, Philo is conversant with the Middle Platonic parlance of his day.³³ When the mind within us and the mind above us co-operate in the task of dividing and distinguishing all things

³² Translation adapted from Yonge 1993:296.

³³ Cf. Winston 2010:249 citing Plut. *Virt. Mor.* 441f and *Quaest. plat.* 1001a-b.

material and immaterial, this compound mind moves in a circular fashion, a movement which Philo – following Plato³⁴ – sees as most akin to a pure mind and also in line with incorporeal stars, which are souls divine.³⁵ Moreover, when the parts of the compound mind work together, it serves as evidence of the mind's likeness to God the Father and Maker.

Philo's commitment to this construct reflects a degree of Aristotelian influence on some Middle Platonists in Alexandria. One leading theory of intellection rested on Aristotle's division between two types of intellect, one's 'active intellect'³⁶ and its counterpart, one's 'passive intellect.'³⁷ Subsequent readers of Aristotle debated whether this distinction pointed to, as Miira Tuominen puts it, 'a difference between aspects of human intellect or whether we must postulate different kinds of intellect, where the active one comes to be associated with divine intelligence.'³⁸

Writing in this time of debate, Philo seems at times ambivalent on the issue, but on the whole, he seems to regard the human intellect as conjoined indivisibly to a divine intellect. His commitment on this point, however, leads him to another

³⁴ On this aspect of Platonic epistemology: Lee 1976.

³⁵ Cf. *Gig.* 8.

³⁶ νοῦς ποιητικός, νοῦς ἐν ἐνέργεια; for Philonic counterparts: *Leg. All.* 2.24-45; *Her.* 108, 119; *Mut.* 257.

³⁷ παθητικός νοῦς, cf. *De an.* (book 4) 429a10–430a9; in Philo: *Opif.* 8-9.

³⁸ Tuominen 2009:190.

commitment, one which is twofold in character. In its domicile in the soul, the mind is dominant over the non-rational senses. Yet at the same the mind is dependent upon the senses. This tension between the mind's dominance over the senses and its dependence on the senses points us to a third thesis which forms Philo's theory of the human mind.

2.3.3 The third thesis of Philo's model of the human mind:

The rational mind is domiciled in the non-rational soul

Philo adheres to a longstanding insistence in Greek philosophy that the mind ($\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$) is not to be confused with the soul. A particular strand of Platonist thought, which spanned from Xenocrates (fourth century BCE) to Plotinus (205-270 CE), assigned higher ontological status to $\nu\omicron\tilde{\upsilon}\varsigma$.³⁹ Philo insists that the mind, despite this ontological distinction, is domiciled in the human soul. Philo's view of the human soul and its constituent parts may be schematised as follows:

³⁹ On this point, see Menn 1995 passim.

Diagram 2.2

Philo's understanding of the human soul and its constituent parts⁴⁰

Composition of the human soul			
Rational Part	Non-rational Parts		
Mind	Five senses	Speech	Generation

Domiciled as such in the non-rational soul with the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch and the faculties of speech and generation, the mind is subject to incessant conflicts with the passions aroused by the material universe. Apprentices of Moses are not immune to contingencies and variegations of all sorts. How one applies one's mind to such forces is a question which Philo engages in many ways and by recourse to numerous Mosaic texts. Not surprisingly, Philo sharpens this engagement by resorting to Peripatetic ideals of moderation and toil.⁴¹

The threefold conviction above reflects Philo's multifaceted engagement with a problem much debated in his intellectual environment. If the human mind, though endowed with a type of rationality which reflects its divine maker, is nonetheless a created entity that is domiciled in the non-rational body and soul, how is it possible for the human mind to have any sort of contact or transaction

⁴⁰ This model of the human soul is stated, with modifications caused by specific exegetical pressures, in *Det.* 168-76; *Agr.* 30; *Her.* 232-34; *Mut* 111.

⁴¹ Cf. Winston 2010:251-52.

with its creator (God) without conceding that the superior party (God) would suffer any sort of diminishment?

Troels Engberg-Pedersen suggests that Philo offers no attempt to develop an answer to this problem, a silence which can be traced back to Plato. According to Engberg-Pedersen, Philo accepts the Stoic accusation that Plato's construal of divine transcendence leads to apophatic brands of cosmology and epistemology, but Philo does so by recourse to silence on the issue, just like Plato.⁴² 'Thus there will always remain a deep unclarity at the heart of Philo's philosophizing,' concludes Engberg-Pedersen, 'just because a genuine combination of Stoicism and Platonism in these matters verges on being a contradiction in terms.'⁴³

This assessment overlooks key passages like *The Allegories of the Laws* §§2.22-23 which reflect Philonic affinity to the Stoic theory of causation. Under the Stoic theory, all entities, both natural and non-natural, are outgrowths of the blending of active and passive causes.⁴⁴ For Philo, this theory allows him to speak of the human mind as an instantiation of the blending of principles both active (God) and passive (created mortals).

⁴² Engberg-Pedersen 2010:25.

⁴³ Engberg-Pedersen 2010:25 discussing Wis and Philo as contexts for 1 Cor 15.

⁴⁴ Cf. Annas 1992:50f. On how this theory connects with the question of how Stoic theories of logic and causation along with those of Aristotle contributed to Galenic philosophy of nature and psychology, see Gill 2010:18-84 (esp. pp. 64-84) for connections with Stoic speculations in Philo.

Philo allows this blending of causes, but only to a certain point. That the human mind is preeminent among all things in the created order is an indisputable principle in Philo's worldview, but more pressing for him seems to be this: under what class of created entities does the mind fall, the class of things created by God's power *and* through His agency, or, the class of things created by God's power *but not* through His agency?

Arguing for the former, Philo recasts the Stoic language of blending to suit the Mosaic doctrine of divine mediation, a move which on the one hand allows Philo to concede the philosophical commonplace that the created order consists of distinctions small and large which are simply too numerous to count. On the other hand, Philo can insist on the impossibility of God suffering any sort of diminishment.

Divine immutability and human variegation offer two initial leads to follow as we turn to Philo's varied statements on the *potential of the human mind to aspire and ascend to knowledge about and from God*.

2.4

How does Philo conceive of the potential
of the human mind to ascend to the divine?

As mentioned above, Philo exploits the Stoic language of blending to account for the variegated reality of the created order. That includes the human mind, which he depicts as that which is subject to constant flux and conflict with the bodily passions. Under the weight of such forces, on what grounds, if any, can Philo speak of the mind's potential to aspire and even ascend to knowledge about and from God?

In what follows, we will explore Philo's discourses on noetic ascent in the *Allegorical Commentary* under two main headings:

- (A) divine gifts of knowledge, and
- (B) human conditions for receiving such gifts (noetic perfection and purification).

These broad headings will then lead us to consider more specific notions of transformation in Philo's epistemological system.

2.4.1 *Philo on the variety of gifts of knowledge conferred by God on human aspirants*

Philo finds in the Mosaic corpus a stock of terms which he uses to describe the varied nature of God's epistemic beneficence. Given the presence of varied gift language in antecedent Greek sources,⁴⁵ in Hebrew scripture,⁴⁶ and other proximate Jewish and early Christian writings,⁴⁷ Philo cannot be seen as innovative in this area.

To map our ensuing discussion of Philo's way of speaking about divine gifts of knowledge, the diagram below lists four key gift terms along with the scope and substance of endowment relative to each term.

⁴⁵ Greek myths of the origins of humanity feature the language of gifts of knowledge in the accounts associated with Prometheus and Pandora (lit. trans. 'all gifts'); cf. Miles 1999:37. On prayer in Greek religion: Pulleyn 1996 passim (but esp. 207-08) on the nexus between gifts and knowledge in the context of ancient Greek prayer); on broader streams of Hellenistic and Roman reflection on ideals of knowledge as derived from 'natural gifts': Hunter 2003:213-15.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gen 2.9, 17; Exod 35.31; 2 Chron 1.10-12; Isa 40.14; Dan 1.17.

⁴⁷ In Wis 7.15-26, for instance, God is represented as the guide of wisdom, the giver of knowledge to humanity through the patterns of the natural world; see also Wis 8.19-9.18. Grabbe 2000:227-29 discusses the gift language from Wis in connection with Philo's treatments of the epistemic roles of divine *Logos* and wisdom. On gift language in Ezek. Trag.: Horbury 1986:37-51. On the language of gifts in the NT: Rom 9.4-5; 11.33; 1 Cor 7.7; Eph 4.7; Heb 6.4; Jas 1.17. On the seven prerogatives bestowed on the Israelites in Rom 9.4-5, see Käsemann 1980: 256-60; Fitzmyer 1993:545-49.

Diagram 2.3

Philo's varied language on divine gifts of knowledge

GIFT TERM	SCOPE OF RECIPIENTS	DIVINE CONFERRAL(S)
ἀγαθός	Broadest class of recipients	Aspirant's mind is endowed with generic benefits
σπέρμα	Broad class	Aspirant's soul is implanted with generic virtues
δόμα	Particular class	Aspirant's soul is implanted with specific virtues and energies corresponding to soul, sense, and speech
δωρεά	Most particular class	Aspirant's mind is granted restricted access to a vision of all things material and immaterial below the Existent

As Diagram 2.3 shows, Philo's language of divine gifts of knowledge and virtue is graded. The term with the broadest range of meanings is ἀγαθός. In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo uses this term as shorthand for benefits which God confers to the mind.⁴⁸ Most restricted in scope is δωρεά, a term frequently used to denote the primary gift of knowledge about and from God.

⁴⁸ In the 'Exposition,' by contrast, this term occurs with far more frequency and relates to the moral good which comes from one's obedience to the laws of Moses.

For example, in *On the Change of Names* §8, Philo reflects on the prayer of Moses for unmediated knowledge of God (Exodus 33.13-23). Moses may have faltered, concedes Philo, but God nonetheless confers on Moses

a most ample gift (αὐταρκεστάτης δωρεᾶς) even for the best sort among mortals, namely, knowledge (ἐπιστήμης) of all things material and immaterial below the Existent, but not the very nature of God.⁴⁹

Divine beneficence also takes the form of partial and particular grants which are essential for those who wish to excel in the practice of knowledge and the virtues, as he maintains in *On Drunkenness* §119.⁵⁰

Leading up to this passage, Philo meditates on the universe as God's great gift to man (τὸ μέγα δῶρον θεοῦ). Human enjoyment of this gift is made possible by God's giving of particular grants. In this vein, Philo can speak of God giving to aspirants the virtues and their corresponding energies or operative powers (ἀρεταὶ καὶ αἱ κατ' αὐτὰς ἐνέργειαι) (§119). Threefold in nature, the ἐνέργειαι correlate to God's

⁴⁹ For discussion of this text in relation to wider theological themes in Philo, not least (κατάχρησις) 'the deliberate misuse of language,' see Runia 1988b:69-91. On the influence of Exod 33.13-23 and other *visio Dei* texts from the Hebrew Bible: cf. Birnbaum 1996:77-80.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Migr.* 94 for a related notion where the idea of small gifts (δόματα) is contrasted with the kind of greater gifts akin to the philosophical term (ὕπαρκτη); cf. Colson 1937:563 and citations therein.

giving of the soul, external sense, and speech. Even non-rational things, in Philo's world of thought, are to be seen as gifts from God.

Toward the end of the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo develops this threefold understanding of the ἐνέργειαι in *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things?* §§107-08, an exegetical reflection on the phrase λάβε μοι ('take for me') in Genesis 15.9 which raises in Philo's view the philosophical question of what it means to be a steward entrusted with the particular energies (§107).

In contrast to Cain and his offspring who each has appropriated (τῶν νοσφιζομένων) the energies of his or her minds in such a way that he or she consider such things as dependent entirely on the human self (§107), Philo draws attention to those who see all epistemic capacities as gifts from God. In this respect, Philo focuses on the following three ἐνέργειαι which correspond to the gifts of soul, speech, and external sense, respectively:

reflections of the mind (τοῦ νοῦ τὰς διανοήσεις), the language in which speech expresses itself (τοῦ λόγου τὰς ἐρμηνείας), and the pictures presented to sense (τῆς αἰσθήσεως τὰς φαντασίας).⁵¹

⁵¹ *Her.* 108.

The fourth key term we will discuss is σπέρμα, a word that carried a wide range of meanings in antecedent Greek literature.⁵² In keeping with this range, Philo uses the term in a number of ways to express the idea that the conferral of gifts of knowledge is a vital part of God's activity of implanting or impregnating the human soul with virtues.⁵³ According to Maren Niehoff, the significance that Philo assigns to the concept of divine impregnation sets him apart from contemporary Alexandrian Platonists,⁵⁴ and we might add, the Stoics as well.⁵⁵

Niehoff compares Philo's approach to that of the anonymous commentator of the *Theaetetus*, who focused on the religious dimensions of Socratic midwifery

⁵² Cf. Homer (*Od.* 5.490) was the first literary composer to use this term. It would become a fixture in subsequent Greek systems of thought (cf. Plato, *Theaet.* 149E; *Phaedr.* 277A; *Resp.* 497B; *Tim.* 73C, 74B, 86C). Aristotle's writings feature over 240 occurrences of the term. σπέρμα also features significantly (29 occurrences) in the fragments attributed to the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus. Finally, in light of the frequency (182x) of σπέρμα in the Septuagintal writings, Philonic frequency (121x) should come as no surprise. In the Philonic corpus, occurrences of σπέρμα appear in the more philosophically oriented treatises, *Leg. All.* (19x), *Aet.* (17x), *Post.* (12x), and *Her.* (10x); cf. Friedrich 1967:543; BDAG, 937.

⁵³ Numerous passages make this point: *Post.* 135 (one's estrangement from bodily interests is seen as the condition leading to divine implanting of seeds of wisdom); *Post.* 170-74 (the mind of Seth is implanted with seeds which yield heavenly aspirations, τὸ μηδὲν τῶν θείων σπερμάτων χαμαὶ πίπτειν, ἅπαντα δὲ εἰς τὸ ἄνω χωρεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν περιγείων ἐξανιστάμενα).

⁵⁴ Niehoff 2010:42. On divine impregnation in Philo: *Leg. All.* 3.104, 180; *Cher.* 57; *Det.* 60, 147; *Deus* 5; *Mut.* 134, 144; *Somn.* 1.200. For Philo's related use of the language of divine midwifery: *Migr.* 34-35; 139-42; *Congr.* 129-32.

⁵⁵ It has been suggested (Morris 1987:887-88) that for Philo the human aspirant requires the help of God for the planting and fostering of knowledge, virtues and wisdom in his or her soul, a view which would have contrasted starkly with the Stoic view that the *anthropos* has the innate capacity and resources to attain perfection.

(*Theaet.* 149A, 150B-D) and developed the idea of God's active role in the birthing of knowledge (col. 55:27-34).

Philo, however, takes the idea in a radical direction, construing divine impregnation as a replacement for human epistemology.

While the anonymous commentator on the *Theaetetus* had already led the way from a devaluation of the senses to a greater trust in God, Philo fully developed this approach into a distinctly religious belief. He was encouraged to do so by his close readings of the Mosaic Scriptures. Rejecting the critical approach of his Jewish colleagues in Alexandria, Philo believed in the truth of the Biblical text and was eager to uncover hidden meanings in order to justify what would otherwise appear to be flaws. For him, Scripture not only affirmed the existence of God, but also showed His benevolence towards man.⁵⁶

Niehoff rightly identifies the Mosaic writings as the driving force behind Philo's interest in the epistemological significance of divine impregnation. In light of σπέρμα usage in the Pentateuch,⁵⁷ Philo's use of implantation language is not entirely surprising.⁵⁸

What is rather striking, however, and a point that Niehoff overlooks, is Philo's move from the concept of divine impregnation to the concept of divine

⁵⁶ Niehoff 2010:42-43.

⁵⁷ E.g. Gen 3.15; 4.25; 15.3; 17.7; 22.17; 26.3-4; Exod 32.13; Num 14.24.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.65-106 on Gen. 3.14; *Post.* 170-80 on Gen 4.25; *Her.* 8, 34-39 on Gen 15.2

parentage. By moving in this direction, Philo can speak more concretely to the question of how human beings are to go about learning from *both* divine and human sources of instruction once the process of divine midwifery is finished.

This is apparent in Philo's construal of divine parentage in *On Drunkenness* §§30-94. This passage offers an instructive case study of how Philo, drawing on Mosaic legislation, shapes the imagination of his readers by inviting them to see the relationship between two major epistemic sources that stem from God. The first source is signified by 'right reason' (a divine locus of knowledge), the second by the school subjects (a human locus of knowledge).

2.4.2 *Case study: divine parentage and four types of offspring*

(*On Drunkenness* §§30-94)

In an extended allegorisation on Mosaic rules for dealing with a rebellious child (Deut 21.18-21), Philo portrays God as both father and mother of the universe. In his purported masculinity, God signifies 'right reason.' In his apparent femininity, God signifies the full range of 'school subjects,' the range of conventional sources of human knowledge (§§30-34). Philo can speak of four

types of children that are produced under this model of divine parentage,⁵⁹ with each offspring signifying a particular approach to divine and human sources of knowledge.

Casting in the first place the child who loves to listen to only the father, Philo unequivocally affirms the importance of the divine locus of knowledge (§§65-76). In keeping with salient Philonic statements,⁶⁰ Philo likens this type of child to the Levitical priesthood, charged with the task of rendering prayer, sacrifice, and worship to God (§§67-68). Under certain circumstances, Philo counts Israel among this type of offspring.⁶¹

Three other children fill out the family portrait. The child who listens only to the mother possesses knowledge drawn solely from the range of human conventions. An inferior way of learning, this way of life is marked by constant variegation and instability, as evidenced in the Pentateuch by the likes of Jethro, Laban, and

⁵⁹ Winston 1981:337 n. 76 finds this idea of double divine gender in the *Zohar* (2.3a) and the writings of Plutarch with reference to the description of Selene as both male and female in *Moral.* 368C.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ebr.* 121-26; in the 'Exposition': *Abr.* 50-57.

⁶¹ Such references, however, are found in the 'Exposition'; cf. *Spec.* 1.97; 229; *Abr.* 57. Hayward 2005:156-79 suggests that Gen 28 – not Gen 32 or Gen 35 – is for Philo the key biblical text 'displaying how it is that Israel signifies "the one who sees God"' (quote from p. 177). Moreover, Hayward speculates that it may have been the Therapeutae who were, in Philo's appraisal, the highest and noblest example of the contemplative life that characterises Israel as the one who sees God under the hierophantic and prophetic guidance of Moses (pp. 192-93).

Rachel (§§36-58). At the bottom of the scale is the type of child who disdains both father and mother (§§77-79).

Key for our discussion is the offspring who listens to both father and mother (§80). Such compliance with divine parentage represents the way of life that walks with one foot in the realm of divine instruction and the other foot in the realm of human teachings (§§81-82). In this line of thought, Philo formulates the kinds of epistemic benefits which God grants as part of this way of life:

Diagram 2.4
Endowments based on both divine instruction and human teaching
(*On Drunkenness* §94)

Divine gift conferred	Paradigm (παράδειγμα) of gift
Natural gifting λογισμούς εύφυείς	Reuben
Scholarship φιληκόους καὶ φιλομαθεῖς ἐτέρους	Simeon
Supplication πρόσφυγας καὶ ἰκέτας θεου	Levi
Gratitude τὸν εὐχαριστητικὸν ὕμνον ᾄδοντας οὐ γεγωνῶ φωνῇ μᾶλλον ἢ διανοίᾳ	Judah
Toiling in virtue διὰ τὴν μετὰ πόνων ἀρετῆς κτῆσιν ἐκούσιον μισθῶν καὶ δωρεῶν ἀξιωθέντας	Issachar
Contemplation of divine things μετανάστας ἀπὸ τῆς Χαλδαϊκῆς μετεωρολογικῆς θεωρίας γεγονότας εἰς τὴν περὶ τοῦ ἀγενήτου σκέψιν	Abraham

Self-acquired virtue αὐτήκοον καὶ αὐτομαθῆ κτησαμένους ἀρετὴν	Isaac
Courage and strength λήματος καὶ ἰσχύος πλήρεις καὶ φίλους τῷ θεῷ	Moses

Other taxonomic approaches to divine gifts of knowledge could be listed. For instance, in *The Allegories of the Laws* §§3.69-103, Philo is prompted by Genesis 6.8 to formulate a menu of divinely endowed natures or dispositions. As the diagram below shows, this menu features a different cast of Pentateuchal characters (with only Isaac and Moses remaining from the list above):

Diagram 2.5
Types of divine endowments
(*The Allegories of the Laws* §§3.77-100)

<i>Leg. All. III</i>	Paradigm	Divine gift conferred
§77	Noah	Grace
§79	Melchizedek	Peace, priesthood
§83	Abraham	Ascent
§85	Isaac	Joy
§88	Jacob	Reason, liberty
§90	Ephraim	Memory
§95	Bezalel	Apprehension of God by recourse to human reasoning
§100	Moses	Apprehension of God by recourse to noetic vision

What do the foregoing observations suggest? At a minimum, it is reasonable to suggest that in Philo's approach to divine beneficence, no single Mosaic term or text captures the depth and diversity of the gifts which God confers on aspiring

minds. To be sure, Philo's approach in the *Allegorical Commentary* is convoluted, confusing at times, but one can nonetheless detect two preconditions – *perfection* and *purification* – which feature prominently in Philo's approach to noetic aspiration to God.

2.4.3 Two necessary conditions for noetic ascent to the divine

To appreciate more fully these two conditions, it is helpful to place them within a wider orbit of Philonic ideas. Because Philo views knowledge, wisdom, and philosophy as key parts of the process of perfecting and purifying the aspiring mind, it is imperative that we grasp Philo's complex understanding of 'knowledge,' and in particular, the relationship between knowledge, wisdom and philosophy. These concepts, as we shall see, are clustered and figure significantly in Philo's discourses on the mind's ascent to the divine. After we consider these matters, we can turn to the task of examining the two conditions for noetic aspiration to God, perfection and purification.

Three lines of inquiry merit attention: How does Philo conceive of knowledge (§2.4.3.1 below)? Does Philo classify knowledge into domains which are comprehensible and incomprehensible, and if so, how does he approach this (§2.4.3.2)? What is the relationship, if any, between knowledge and wisdom in

Philo's conceptions and classifications of knowledge (§2.4.3.3)? Let us briefly consider each question.

2.4.3.1 How does Philo conceive of knowledge?

In *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* §141, Philo is prompted by the figure of Hagar in Genesis 16.4 to define knowledge as follows: ἐπιστήμης δέ κατάληψις ἀσφαλῆς καὶ βέβαιος, ἀμετάπτωτος ὑπὸ λόγου ('a sure and certain apprehension which cannot be shaken by argument').⁶²

Central to this definition is κατάληψις, the act of grasping an impression (φαντασία). In antiquity, the role of imagination was a hotly contested subject. Plato used the concept of imagination (φαντασία) as a way to signify the blending of judgment and perception.⁶³ Similarly, Aristotle designated it as an intermediary between perceiving (αἰσθητικῆς) and thinking (νόησις).⁶⁴ Promoting it to a higher status, the Stoics⁶⁵ and Epicureans⁶⁶ used φαντασία as the main criterion of truth.

⁶² On this basis, Dillon 1977:145 argues that Philo's epistemology is Stoic in its primary character; for dissent: Sharples 1989:234-35 citing *QG* 3.3 among other Philonic passages.

⁶³ Plato, *Theaet.* 195D.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *De an.* 3.427b-429a; Plotinus, *Enn.* 4.4, 12; cf. Peters 1967:156.

⁶⁵ Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.247-52 (*SVF* 2.65); Cicero, *Acad. post.* 1.40-42 (*SVF* 1.55, 60-61); Diog. Laert., *Lives* 7.54 (*SVF* 2.105, Posidonius fr. 42); see further the collection

Whether the dialectical tension between apprehension and argument (λόγος) in Philo's definition reflects Stoic usage is difficult to ascertain, but what is rather apparent is this: Philo's relatively straightforward definition above – though notable for its clarity – represents only one piece of a more complex Philonic puzzle on this subject. To sharpen our view, two additional questions warrant consideration.

2.4.3.2 How does Philo go about classifying knowledge into specific domains?

Philo upholds a triadic division of knowledge, one which coheres with a longstanding interest in the number three as the signified reality that all things have a beginning, middle, and end.⁶⁷ Philo applies similar triadic divisions to the structure of the universe⁶⁸ and the structure of human knowledge of the universe.

of Stoic texts in *LS* 1:241-53; Peters 1967:156; BDAG, 1049. Seminal here is Frede 1983:65-93 but see also Sandbach 1971:9-21; Graeser 1975:39-68; Annas 1980:84-104; for later developments cf. Long 1978:35-49.

⁶⁶ Cf. Diog. Laert. 10.31, 33; Epicurus, *Key doctrines* 24.

⁶⁷ 'And in three ways have all things been divided, and to each has been apportioned his own domain,' as the poet states in *Il.* 15.189 (trans. from Murray 1999:121).

⁶⁸ This triadic cosmology is seen across his corpus; in the QGE: *QG* 4.8; in the 'Exposition': *Abr.* 120ff; in the *Allegorical Commentary*: see Fug. 97ff. See further Dillon 1977:168-74.

As summarised in Diagram 2.6 below, the domains are as follows:

- (A) Domain of knowledge that exists beyond the human realm (incorporeal knowledge);
- (B) Domain of knowledge that exists around the human realm (corporeal, sensory knowledge); and
- (C) Domain of knowledge that exists within the human realm (self-knowledge).⁶⁹

Diagram 2.6

Knowledge beyond, around, and within the human aspirant

	(A) Intelligible Cosmos	(B) Sensory Cosmos	(C) Psychic Cosmos
Domain of knowledge	This knowledge relates to the world beyond the human aspirant	This knowledge relates to the world around the human aspirant	This knowledge relates to the world within the human aspirant (one's soul)

⁶⁹ It may also be suggested that this tripartite structuring of knowledge bears some resemblance to the tripartite structuring of what is good in later Aristotelian thought (*Eth. Nic.* Book 1, 1098b9-29). Both systems feature three kinds of good things: that which pertains to the outside world, that which pertains to the body, and that which pertains to the soul. The satisfaction of all three was seen as necessary for human happiness.

Philonic terminology/construal	τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον (<i>Deus</i> 31-32)	τὸν αἰσθητὸν κόσμον (<i>Deus</i> 31-32)	ὁ γὰρ, οἶμαι, ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ ψυχῇ, τοῦτο οὐρανὸς ἐν κόσμῳ. τὰς οὖν νοεράς καὶ λογικὰς δύο φύσεις, τήν τε ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ παντί, συμβέβηκεν ὁλοκλήρους καὶ ἀδιαιρέτους εἶναι (<i>Her.</i> 233)
Relation to God the Existent	Elder of the two sons of God	Younger of the two sons of God	Impression of the <i>Logos</i> or Archetypal Image of God

Given the significance of wisdom (σοφία) in Philo's system of thought, Diagram 2.6 prompts us to consider the following question: *how does Philo see wisdom fitting into the triadic structure of knowledge schematised above?* This leads us to the third piece of the puzzle.

2.4.3.3 What is the relationship, if any, between knowledge and wisdom in Philo's conceptions and classifications of knowledge?

In Philo's system of thought, knowledge and wisdom represent distinct realms which originate from the same source: God.⁷⁰ On this principle, Philo develops his views on knowledge and wisdom in different directions. In several instances,

⁷⁰ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.179.

Philo describes knowledge as variegated, comprised of numerous branches, and generated by the mind's interaction with sense.⁷¹ This interaction leads to the acquisition of self-knowledge, an essential vehicle for one's attainment of knowledge of God.⁷²

Philo's understanding of the variegated nature of knowledge is closely tied with his belief that there are different types of knowledge relative to different types of aspirants. For instance, Joseph – the biblical figure who represents a paragon of statesmanship – learns by amalgamating the things of the sensory world, the things of the body, and the things of the soul in order to come to an understanding of what is good.⁷³ Isaac, however, possesses a superlative nature, one which exceeds human instruction and is capable of apprehending self-taught wisdom (τὴν αὐτομαθῆ σοφίαν).⁷⁴

In a related vein, Philo talks about knowledge as a generative process which moves at a pace relative to the capacity of the particular aspirant. In this sense,

⁷¹ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.161; *Cher.* 68; *Her.* 53.

⁷² Cf. *Migr.* 184-90. In another passage (*Ebr.* 136-37), Philo can speak of a type of knowledge which is part of the mind's original condition. This knowledge of the virtues – easily forgotten due to ignorance or bad instruction – can be recovered when the aspirant, endowed by God, comes into a state of perfection (more on this below).

⁷³ Cf. *Det.* 16; *Conf.* 72. Philo's ambivalence toward Joseph is seen in places like *Leg. All.* 3.179-80, *Deus* 120, and *Migr.* 158-60. On the set of narrative and philosophical tensions within Philo's *bios* of Joseph: Frazier 2002:1-30.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Det.* 29-30.

knowledge is not a static thing, but rather becomes true and sound – ἐπιστήμης ἀληθοῦς καὶ ὑγιοῦς⁷⁵ – by the exercise of one's memory⁷⁶ and the related task of distinguishing (διαίρειω).⁷⁷

Wisdom is a type of special knowledge, immaterial in its essence⁷⁸ and mediated through the divine *Logos* (a subject to which we will return shortly). In *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* §79, Philo describes wisdom as follows: σοφία δὲ ἐπιστήμη θείων καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ τῶν τούτων αἰτίων ('wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human, and their causes').⁷⁹ In the same breath, Philo presents a hierarchy of knowledge. As the one advances in the encyclical studies,⁸⁰ he or she attains philosophy.⁸¹ The aspirant uses philosophy to increase his or her measure of wisdom.

Depending on the points of pressure exerted by an exegetical context, Philo can speak about wisdom as representing the restricted form of knowledge which we have just noted. In other exegetical instances, however, another – and equally

⁷⁵ Cf. *Cher.* 127.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.91-93; *Post.* 151; *Sobr.* 27-29; *Agr.* 172-73.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Agr.* 125-43.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.152.

⁷⁹ Similarly in Aristotle, *Metaph.* (book 1) 981b 28, 982a 1.

⁸⁰ Cf. Alexandre 1967:29-33 on Philo's lexicon for the Encyclia.

⁸¹ There are, not surprisingly, resonances in the writings of Plato. For example, in the *Laws*, numerous passages suggest that one's study of astronomy and mathematics lead to that student's attainment of theology; see e.g. 7.809C-E, 817E5-818D8, 820E-822D; 12.967D-968A.

important – corollary can be detected: wisdom can also be that which co-operates with the aspirant in his or her training and toil in the very domains of knowledge which stand distinct from wisdom.⁸²

To summarise, there is a commingling of perspectives which captures something of the essence and complexity of Philo's formulation of wisdom. One perspective allows wisdom to be seen as a body of knowledge for one to attain, specialised and distinct from the domains of knowledge associated with human instruction. Another perspective, however, presents wisdom as a vehicle which – like a midwife – guides the one who wishes to attain that special body of knowledge.

What, if anything, is the joint which allows Philo to hold these two perspectives in dynamic tension? A partial clue can be found in *On the Cherubim* §9.

Describing the instrumental role of wisdom, he asserts: 'Wisdom studies truth and thus obtains that great source of profit to the mind, knowledge of right reason (ἐπιστήμην ὀρθοῦ λόγου).'

The phrase 'right reason' (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος) is noteworthy. In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo uses this phrase and allied expressions to describe the varied functions of wisdom. Philo variously portrays wisdom as the divine seed of all

⁸² *Post.* 101-02.

noble things,⁸³ the indwelling of the divine spirit,⁸⁴ the inward monitor (ἐλεγχος) of the soul,⁸⁵ and the law of nature.⁸⁶ Heading this list is the expression, the divine word (ὁ θεῖος λόγος).⁸⁷ In what follows, we explore how Philo uses the *Logos* concept in the second perspective mentioned above, as a guide to those who wish to attain knowledge of the divine.

2.4.3.4 The *Logos* concept in Philo

Used in both common and technical senses, the *Logos* concept has its earliest associations with Heraclitus (fl. c. 500 BCE) who postulated the view that the universe is organised and activated by a proportion (λόγος) or a tension of opposites held in harmony which operates at two primary levels, the noetic level (Fragments 54; 114) and the material level (Fragments 41, 64).⁸⁸ In Philo's intellectual environment, the *Logos* concept was widely used to convey a range of philological and philosophical connotations, the more notable of which were as follows:

⁸³ *Leg. All.* 3.150.

⁸⁴ *Gig.* 48.

⁸⁵ *Deus* 134-35; on its place in the history of dialectic: *OCD*, 444.

⁸⁶ *Ebr.* 142; cf. Chapter 3 (§ 3.5.1).

⁸⁷ *Post.* 129.

⁸⁸ Cf. Miller 1981 for refutation of the so-called cosmic or metaphysical *Logos* concept in Heraclitus, and in particular, pp. 166-67 for reasons why these fragments express, clarify, and relate to more metaphysical and theological aspects of the *Logos* idea in Heraclitean thought.

- (A) Plato's formulations of the *Logos* concept as (i) the faculty of reason,⁸⁹ (ii) that which added to true opinion makes it knowledge (ἐπιστήμη),⁹⁰ and a kind of divine knowledge coming from God;⁹¹
- (B) Aristotle's formulations of the *Logos* concept as (i) human reason or rationality itself⁹² and (ii) the definition or essence of a thing;⁹³ and
- (C) the Stoic formulations of the *Logos* concept as an organising principle of the universe, an all-pervading active agent, material in substance, which was associated variously with fire, nature and Zeus. Under the shorthand 'living according to nature,' the Stoics found in the *Logos* concept the linchpin for ethical behaviour that normalised both human thought (inner λόγος) and human relations (λόγος as speech).

One can hardly underestimate the degrees to which these connotations exerted pressure on Philo's reading of *Logos* material in Moses.⁹⁴ Yet, as we noted above, it is by far the Mosaic vision of the *Logos* as the authoritative word(s) of God

⁸⁹ *Laws* 689D; *Tim.* 89D; cf. Guthrie 1969:420-24.

⁹⁰ *Phaed.* 76B; *Theaet.* 201C-D, 206C-210D.

⁹¹ *Soph.* 201C; for Plato's use of *Logos* as that which causes the harmony of the eternal and immutable order of things, see *Resp.* 500C.

⁹² *Nic. eth.* 1102b 26.

⁹³ *Metaph.* 993a 17.

⁹⁴ On the possibility of Philonic indebtedness to the Stoic thinker Posidonius (c. 135-c. 51 BCE), see Long 1986:117: 'the Stoic who may have influenced [Philo] most deeply was probably Posidonius.' A range of suggestions have been offered. For the view that Philo's *Logos* theory 'evolved directly from his secular environment' and with resemblances to Thrasyllus, a contemporary of Philo, see Tarrant 1993:109-17.

which exerts the greatest hermeneutical pressure on Philo, as recent scholarship has demonstrated.⁹⁵ For Philo, Moses offers an antinomy which allows him to say with apparently no hesitation that the *Logos* is God and that the *Logos* is not God.⁹⁶

This way of speaking about the Mosaic *Logos*, in turn, allows Philo to highlight two of its more dominant properties: the instrumentality of the Mosaic *Logos* in creation (*Cher.* 35, 126-27) and the role of the Mosaic *Logos* as the vehicle by which divine wisdom is conferred on human aspirants (*Cher.* 28, 97; *Migr.* 28).⁹⁷

Moreover, Philo stresses the *Logos* as the primary means by which wisdom and knowledge are transacted (albeit asymmetrically) between God and human aspirants. This raises a corollary question: *what value, if any, does Philo assign to other domains of knowledge and learning?*

⁹⁵ The case for the primacy of biblical exegesis in the Philonic enterprise has been made cumulatively and convincingly in a number of recent studies (as noted above in Chapter 1), but the more forceful cases have been advanced by Christiansen 1969; Nikiprowetzky 1977; Cazeaux 1983a, 1983b, 1984; Runia 1984, 1987; Borgen 1997.

⁹⁶ Philo's twofold stance in some ways recalls the Stoic theory of divine immanence, but when he agrees with the Stoics, he usually does so in exegetical discussions of the origins and nature of the visible world, e.g. *Plant.* 2, 8-9; *Fug.* 2, 12; *Mut.* 23, 135. It would strain the evidence to say that Philo believes that the immanent *Logos* is God (cf. *Migr.* 32, 179-81).

⁹⁷ In addition to these *Logos* connotations, Philo explores the contours and functions of wisdom by recourse to a number of metaphors, such as wisdom as a royal road (*Post.* 101-02; *Deus* 143; *Migr.* 146-47), a school (*Cher.* 71), a midwife of the soul (*Congr.* 129-32; *Migr.* 139-42), and a rider mounted on a horse (*Agr.* 67-77).

Evidence points to a rather high appraisal. Exegetical reflections on handmaiden figures in the Pentateuch offer readers of the *Allegorical Commentary* an invitation to envisage a pathway to higher wisdom and theological knowledge which commences in the rudimentary fields of grammar, mathematics, music, and rhetoric. In Philo's reckoning, progress and toil in the encyclical domains of knowledge are allied with one's ongoing exercise of virtues.

One of the best places in the *Allegorical Commentary* to grasp this linkage is *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* §§15-18. Diagram 2.7 below summarises Philo's thoughts on how each of the main school subjects corresponds to the particular virtues to be exercised and the corresponding vices to be avoided:

Diagram 2.7
 Philo's catalog of school subjects
 and corresponding sets of virtues and vices
 (*On Mating with the Preliminary Studies* §§15-18)

<i>Congr.</i>	(A) School subject	(B) Virtue(s) gained	(C) Vice(s) avoided
§15	Grammar (γραμματική)	▪ Intelligence ▪ Wealth of knowledge ▪ Gain insights into the history of human experience	Vain delusions of empty imaginations
§16a	Music (μουσική)	▪ Concord ▪ Harmony ▪ Melody	Discord
§16b	Geometry (γεωμετρία)	▪ Equality ▪ Proportion ▪ Logical continuity ▪ Justice	The opposites of the values (left)

§17	Rhetoric (ῥητορικὴ)	▪ Sharpening of mind ▪ Observation of facts ▪ Training and practice in use of speech	Improper speech
§18	Dialectic (διαλεκτικὴ)	▪ Distinguishing true argument from false ones ▪ Identifying and correcting plausibilities of sophistry	Deceit

The conjunction of (A) and (B) in general, and the acquisition of rhetoric in particular,⁹⁸ move the aspirant to the higher realm of philosophy.⁹⁹ From this realm, wisdom is within the aspirant's grasp, as Philo states below in way that recalls Stoic thought:¹⁰⁰

On Mating with the Preliminary Studies §79

καὶ μὴν ὥσπερ τὰ ἐγκύκλια
 συμβάλλεται πρὸς φιλοσοφίας
 ἀνάληψιν, οὕτω καὶ φιλοσοφία
 πρὸς σοφίας κτῆσιν. ἔστι γὰρ
 φιλοσοφία ἐπιτήδευσις σοφίας,
 σοφία δὲ ἐπιστήμη θείων καὶ
 ἀνθρωπίνων καὶ τῶν τούτων
 αἰτίων. γένοιτ' ἂν οὖν ὥσπερ ἡ

And indeed just as the school subjects contribute to the acquirement of philosophy, so does philosophy to the getting of wisdom. **For philosophy is the practice or study of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human and their causes.** And therefore just as the culture of the schools is the

⁹⁸ Cf. *Det.* 32-42

⁹⁹ Consisting of logic, physics, ethics and praxis (τοῦ λογικοῦ, τοῦ ἠθικοῦ, τοῦ φυσικοῦ καὶ πράξεις, as stated in *Leg. All.* 1.57). Few scholars doubt that Philo is following the philosophical convention established by the Platonist Xenocrates (cf. Diog. Laert. 7.39) and later followed by the Stoics. For more on the specific contours of the Stoic tripartite understanding of philosophy: Long 1986:118-209.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Hülser 1988 (vol. 1, p. lxvii) cites this text, along with *Congr.* 140f. as part of those that contribute to the reconstruction of Stoic thought.

ἐγκύκλιος μουσικὴ φιλοσοφίας,
οὕτω καὶ φιλοσοφία δούλη
σοφίας.

bond-servant of philosophy, so
must philosophy be the servant of
wisdom.

This movement from the encyclical stage to the higher realms of philosophy and wisdom is exemplified supremely by Moses,¹⁰¹ though Philo on occasions goes out of his way to disclose firsthand experiences of this movement.

2.4.4 *First condition for noetic aspiration to the divine:*

Perfection of the human mind

The process of perfecting the mind takes place in the domains of encyclical education and training.¹⁰² Drawing on Greek philosophical antecedents,¹⁰³ Philo portrays the imperfect mind as one which requires study and practice in the rudimentary domains listed above in Diagram 2.7.¹⁰⁴ As the mind learns in the encyclical context, it is subject to discipline.¹⁰⁵ This subjection, in turn, leads to a

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Mos.* 1.48.

¹⁰² Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.244; see further Mendelson 1982 *passim*.

¹⁰³ Primarily Plato and Aristotle. Plato (*Resp.* 487A) acknowledges the possibility that human beings can be – and have been – perfected by the process of education and growing up. Following Plato, Aristotle (*Eth. nic.* 1153a 12-13) used *teleiosis* in the sense of making something complete by perfection. Furthermore, both Plato and Aristotle used *teleios* to convey the idea that something had reached a state of unsurpassed excellence (Plato: *Resp.* 384b; Aristotle: *Metaph.* 1021b 12; *Eth. nic.* 1098a 18); cf. Urmson 1990:163-64.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Post.* 96-97; *Det.* 63-64; *Sacr.* 7.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.15; see also *QGE* 3.26.

type of gradual change which is formed and forged in the context of toil and training.¹⁰⁶

Absent such discipline, the mind's capacity for sensory apprehension goes unchecked, resulting in mental states which Philo variously associates with notions of anarchy¹⁰⁷ and blindness.¹⁰⁸ Under the right circumstances, encyclical training prepares the imperfect mind for sudden apprehensions of subjects of greater scope and substance,¹⁰⁹ namely, the Law of Nature¹¹⁰ and its counterpart in the corporeal realm, the Law of Moses.¹¹¹

On a related plane, the school subjects – with their varied ways of bringing harmony and healing to the mind and soul – facilitate the aspirant's encounter with the divine potencies.¹¹² In some instances, Philo identifies those who are 'in the stage of youth' as suitable candidates for such encounters.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Ebr.* 80-83 on divine granting of eyes to the mind of Jacob, the one who toils in the practice of virtue; for discussion of this passage: Hayward 2005:169-72.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Agr.* 44-46.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.109; see also *Ebr.* 108-09 for the assertion that the mind's blindness is the cause of idolatry.

¹⁰⁹ Philo's firsthand experience of this swift apprehension is described as the enjoyment of light, a most penetrating sight, on his mind (*Migr.* 35; see also *Sacr.* 78).

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Deus* 106; *Agr.* 52; *Migr.* 220; *Her.* 98. On the law of nature in the 'Exposition': Chapter 3 (§ 3.5.1) below.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Post.* 173; *Migr.* 174-75.

¹¹² Cf. *Cher.* 105-06.

¹¹³ Cf. *Agr.* 18; *Plant.* 94.

Equally important is the opportunity afforded by the encyclical subjects for aspirants to improve and perfect their faculties of reason and speech, respectively, the two divisions of *logos* which form every rational human being. Perfection of the mind must be achieved in two realms which are inseparable – reason and speech – as Philo states in *On the Migration of Abraham* §73¹¹⁴:

χαρίζεται δὲ ὁ θεὸς τοῖς
 ὑπηκόοις ἀτελὲς οὐδέν, πλήρη
 δὲ καὶ τέλεια πάντα· διὸ καὶ νῦν
 τὴν εὐλογίαν οὐχ ἐνὶ λόγου
 τμήματι, τοῖς δὲ μέρεσιν
 ἀμφοτέροις ἐπιπέμπει δικαίων
 τὸν εὐεργετούμενον καὶ
 ἐνθυμεῖσθαι τὰ βέλτιστα καὶ
 ἐξαγγέλλειν τὰ νοηθέντα
 δυνατῶς

ἢ γὰρ τελειότης δι' ἀμφοῖν, ὥς
 ἔοικε, τοῦ τε ὑποβάλλοντος τὰ
 ἐνθυμήματα καθαρῶς καὶ τοῦ
 διερμηνεύοντος αὐτὰ
 ἀπταίστως.

But God bestows on those who obey him no imperfect boon. All his gifts are full and complete. And so, in this case also, he does not send the blessing or 'logos-excellence' in one division of logos, but in both its parts, for he holds it just that the recipient of his bounty should both conceive the noblest conceptions and give masterly expression to his ideas.

For perfection depends, as we know, on both divisions of logos, the reason which suggests the ideas with clearness, and the speech which gives unfailing expression to them.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Pearce 2007:164-66 on wider themes related to sophistic rhetoric in this passage and *Det.* 34-45.

2.4.5 *Second condition for noetic aspiration to the divine:*

Purification of the human mind

The process of perfecting the aspiring mind leads to another process, one which involves a different way of engaging the divine realities. Only the purified mind is capable of seeing God through Himself.¹¹⁵ Philo uses *καθαίρω* and its cognates to stress the purification of the mind,¹¹⁶ intellect,¹¹⁷ and the reasoning faculty.¹¹⁸ Possession of a purified mind is a prime mark of those who are initiated into Moses.¹¹⁹

The subject of initiation in Philo is beset with many issues, as we shall explore further in Chapter 4. For now we note that the question whether these initiation passages refer to actual historical situations has long baffled and divided scholars.¹²⁰ Setting this aside for the moment, what is striking is that Philo, in

¹¹⁵ *Plant.* 64: τῷ γὰρ ὄντι ὁ τελείως ἐκκεκαθαρμένος νοῦς καὶ πάντα τὰ γενέσεως ἀπογινώσκων ἐν μόνον οἷδε καὶ γνωρίζει τὸ ἀγέννητον, ᾧ προσελήλυθεν, ὑφ' οὗ καὶ προσεῖληπται. Philo immediately relates the prospect of *visio Dei* to biblical notions associated with the Levites. The significance of Levites in Philo's approach to divine inspiration is discussed further in Chapter 5.

¹¹⁶ *Leg. All.* 3.200.

¹¹⁷ *Cher.* 107.

¹¹⁸ *Leg. All.* 3.127.

¹¹⁹ *Cher.* 48.

¹²⁰ See introduction to Chapter 4 below.

many of these passages, emphasises the central figure of Moses¹²¹ as the one who directly or indirectly opens and purifies the initiate's ears.¹²²

The concept of purified ears is also shorthand for Philo's broader interest in the divine *Logos*, and in particular, the ways in which the *Logos* facilitates the process of purifying one's mind and soul. As the ruling, kingly part of God's being and power,¹²³ the divine *Logos* is the source of the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, self-control, and justice, likened to reason floating on the constant stream of words and doctrines.¹²⁴ Philo's portrait of the *Logos* often implicates the act of hearing, which in turn, implicates the practice of intellectual contemplation.

Instructive on this point is *The Allegories of the Laws* §§3.172-73, an exegetical reflection on the need for the mind to be purified in order to experience liberation from bodily passions. Prompted by this interpretive context, Philo identifies the divine *Logos* as the facilitator of one's fixed reflection or

¹²¹ In light of *On the Creation of the World* §8 and similar passages, David Runia observes that Philo often links initiation with key events in the life of Moses, a pattern which leads Runia to conclude that Philo is 'no doubt thinking of his experiences on the mountain as recorded in Exodus 3, 20, 33' (Runia 2001:114 citing also *Leg. All.* 3.100; *Post.* 173; *Gig.* 54; *Mos.* 2.71; *Spec.* 1.32-50; *Virt.* 178).

¹²² Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.199; *Cher.* 48-49; *Sacr.* 62-68; *Gig.* 54; *Mut.* 138; *Mos.* 2.114; *Spec.* 1.191; 4.59. The opening of ears to mysteries also features in certain Palestinian compositions: cf. 1QHa 9.23-26.

¹²³ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.218.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Post.* 129.

contemplation on the Word of God.¹²⁵ No other agent, in Philo's reckoning, can facilitate this engagement with the Word of God.

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, the divine *Logos* is presented as both the *content* of divine teaching and the *vehicle* by which human beings come to understand such content. As both content and conveyance, the divine *Logos* enables one who 'sees God' (ὁ τὸν θεὸν ὁρῶν) to experience the unification of his constituent parts – mind, soul, and body (§172) – and delight in the teaching of the hierophant and prophet Moses (§173).

The aspirant's contemplation on the word of God leads to what Philo calls 'the best and most perfect form of purification' (τὸ μὲν οὖν ἄριστον καθάρσεως καὶ τελεώτατον τοῦτ' ἐστι), namely, the purification of the mind of non-rational and irresistible thoughts.¹²⁶ This is the state of mind – likened to the Levite attitude of mind¹²⁷ – in which the truest form of worship can be rendered to God.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Philo interchanges ῥῆμα and λόγος to convey the concepts of the word of God and the reason of God, respectively. According to Philo, the laws of Moses consist of both the words and reason of God, and taken together, the laws of Moses represent the true and genuine philosophy (*Post.* 102).

¹²⁶ Cf. *Mut.* 240.

¹²⁷ *Plant.* 63-64; cf. in relation to Philo's language of divine inspiration, see Chapter 5 below.

¹²⁸ Cf. *Sacr.* 139.

2.4.6 *Further ascent of the mind to the divine*

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that the aspirant's twofold experience of the conditions of perfection and purification occurs gradually, with the aspirant attaining the fundamental building blocks of knowledge and virtue in the contexts of encyclical training (perfection) and intellectual contemplation of the divine words as disclosed to Moses (purification).

The fulfillment of these two conditions seems to lead to an even higher level of noetic ascent, one which in Philo's view is so sublime that he resorts to (and switches between) two ways of describing it, either as (a) one's initiation into the higher mysteries (as in *The Allegories of the Laws* §§3.100-105), or (b) one's experience of a form of divine possession marked by ecstasy and inspiration.¹²⁹ These two aspects are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5 below.

Before turning to Philo's approach to the limits of the human mind – our third and final research questions for this chapter – it is worth considering, by way of a brief excursus, Philo's portrayal of a contemporary group of aspirants who in his estimation embodied some of the notions of perfection and purification discussed above. So striking is Philo's depiction of the so-called *Therapeutae*, a

¹²⁹ A finding reached independently but one which is considered (without attention to the interwoven character of initiation and inspiration motifs) in Makiello 2009: 152-58.

first-century community of students of Moses near Lake Mareotis,¹³⁰ that one can posit that for Philo these principles of perfection and purification were not mere abstractions but rather concrete and contemporary paradigms for human well-being as defined principally by the determined and shared quest to know and experience the divine.

2.4.6.1 Excursus: Philo on the Therapeutae

Philo devotes an entire book – *On the Contemplative Life* (*De vita contemplativa*) – to the aspirations and activities of the Therapeutae.¹³¹ Of prime importance is how the community epitomises the way of Moses by contemplatively reading and ritually enacting the inspired writings of Moses. This has the effect of perfecting and purifying members of the aspiring community and brings benefits to the wider society.¹³²

¹³⁰ For a comprehensive archaeological study of the nature of Lake Mareotis and the role it played in the economy of ancient Alexandria, see now Blue/Khalil 2011.

¹³¹ On the questions of identity and character of the group, see Riaud 1987:1189-1295, esp. 1241-64 (discussion of possible Essene connections). In light of references in Philo (*Prob.* 75-91), Josephus (*BJ.* 2.119-161; *Ant.* 12.17f, 18.18-22), and Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* 5.37), scholars (cf. Vermes 1977:125-30) have made the case for a Qumran association with the Essenes. The historicity of the group described by Philo has been widely accepted (see Hay 1992), though more specific historical associations have been rightly disputed. On the question of Egypt as the setting of Philo's Therapeutae, see Davies/Taylor 1998:13-24. On the influence of the Cult of Isis: Richardson/Heuchan 1996:226-51.

¹³² Cf. *Contempl.* 77-78; see Bockmuehl 2009: 19-27 for discussion of Philo's interest in the interpretive activities of the Essenes and Therapeutae in connection with wider Jewish and Graeco-Roman commentary traditions in and around first-century

A notable feature of Philo's portrait is the community's offering of perfect prayers, an aspect that vividly recalls (and to some extent re-enacts) the prophetic and unified activity of a biblical Israel led by Moses and Miriam at the Red Sea.¹³³ The sense of recall brought about in prayer, suggests Hindy Najman, points to the idea of human progress from one type of knowledge to a higher (even visionary) form of knowledge of God:

Philo's comparison to Moses and Miriam's inspiration at the Red Sea is about actualizing self-taught knowledge into knowledge of the law of Moses, which is the perfect copy of the perfect cosmic Natural Law. The prayers of the Therapeutae are themselves perfect expressions of their own contemplation of nature and the honoring of God. Through these prayers, in which they actualize their own potential divinity, the Therapeutae [*sic*] come to *see* God, just as Israel did at the Red Sea after the Exodus from Egypt.¹³⁴

This feature of Philo's portrayal of the Therapeutae relates to a broader interest in the Philonic writings concerning the inspired translation of the laws of Moses from Hebrew to Greek. On Philo's testimony, as seen also in Josephus,¹³⁵ the island of Pharos near Alexandria served centuries earlier as an epicenter of

Alexandria; also Newman 2008:457-68 for discussion of the practices of the Therapeutae from the perspective of ritual performance studies.

¹³³ *Contempl.* 83-90.

¹³⁴ Najman 2007:107 (*italics in original*).

¹³⁵ Notably *A.J.* 12.107-09; cf. Collins 2000:165-72 for discussion of how and why Philo and Josephus respectively modified the account in *Aristeas*.

supernatural activity,¹³⁶ not unlike how Mount Sinai served as a locus of divine revelation to Moses in the first instance and then to Israel in the second instance.¹³⁷

On this view, a transaction of knowledge of the highest type took place at Pharos, one which was made possible – at least in significant measure – in the context of communal prayer:

On the Life of Moses II §36

τοῦτον ἐξ ἀπάντων τῶν ἐν κύκλῳ
κρίναντες ἐπιτηδειότατον εἶναι τὸν
τόπον ἐνησυχᾶσαι καὶ ἐνηρεμῆσαι
καὶ μόνῃ τῇ ψυχῇ πρὸς μόνους
ὁμιλῆσαι τοὺς νόμους, ἐνταυθοῖ
κατέμειναν καὶ τὰς ἱερὰς βίβλους
λαβόντες ἀνατείνουσιν ἅμ' αὐταῖς
καὶ τὰς χεῖρας εἰς οὐρανόν,
αἰτούμενοι τὸν θεὸν μὴ διαμαρτεῖν
τῆς προθέσεως.

ὁ δ' ἐπινεύει ταῖς εὐχαῖς, ἵνα τὸ
πλεῖστον ἢ καὶ τὸ σύμπαν γένος
ἀνθρώπων ὠφελῇ χρησόμενον
εἰς ἐπανόρθωσιν βίου φιλοσόφοις
καὶ παγκάλοις διατάγμασι.

Judging this [Pharos] to be the most suitable place in the district, where they [the translators of Moses] might find peace and tranquility and the soul could commune with the laws with none to disturb its privacy, they fixed their abode there; and, taking the sacred books, stretched them out towards heaven with the hands that held them, asking of God that they might not fail in their purpose.

And He assented to their prayers, to the end that the greater part, or even the whole, of the human race might be profited and led to a better life by continuing to observe such wise and truly admirable ordinances.

¹³⁶ *Mos.* 2.25-44; cf. Harl 1988:46-47.

¹³⁷ Contrasting with the depiction of the Pentateuch as a purely human composition in the *Letter of Aristeas*; cf. Scott 2010:1-28.

In several ways, Philo departs from the antecedent account in the *Letter of Aristeas*.¹³⁸ One notable departure is Philo's accent on the translators' shared practice of communal prayer for knowledge and success. Divine response to such human prayers, in turn, enables and ensures the task of producing a body of authoritative writings.¹³⁹

Such Philonic portrayals of communal prayer as a context for divinely inspired knowledge fit within broader streams of religious speculation which feature a range of analogous Jewish and non-Jewish models. In terms of Greek models, one might consider the exemplar described in Book 10 of Plato's *Laws*. From the outset, Book 10 of the *Laws* provides numerous instances of Plato's attitude to religion and philosophical theology.¹⁴⁰ By most scholarly accounts Book 10 – with its stress on the theme of impiety – offers the clearest indication of Plato's belief in the existence and goodness of the gods.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Cf. Wasserstein/Wasserstein 2006:35-45 for fuller account of main differences.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Contempl.* 12, 16, 27.

¹⁴⁰ England 1921 remains the standard commentary on the *Laws*. Recent introductions include Stalley 1983 and Laks 2000. Morrow 1960 attends to historical questions, Bobonich 2002 deals primarily with philosophical themes. Saunders/Brisson 2000 offers a comprehensive bibliography of the *Laws*. On religion in the *Laws*: Gerson 1990:71-79; Schofield 2003.

¹⁴¹ In this connection, numerous references to prayer are made, some of which draw on Plato's statements on prayer in earlier books of the *Laws*; cf. Mayhew 2008:189 and abundant references cited therein.

Here, one meets the so-called 'Nocturnal Council,' a group of high-ranking officials who over the course of five years form a community around those who are regarded as afflicted by the disease of impiety.¹⁴² In its role of admonishing offenders of impiety, this council – also called the Sound-Mind Centre¹⁴³ – focuses on the human reasoning faculty as a prime locus of therapeutic activity.

On this point, Robert Mayhew observes:

Note that the word translated 'admonishment' is *nouthetêsis*, which literally means placing or implanting reason (*nous*) in a person. That is what the (very philosophical) members of the Nocturnal Council will (in each case) spend five years trying to do: to move the heretic's mind from a state of folly or lack-of-reason about the gods to a proper, rational state. No details are given, but I assume the person will repeatedly hear the arguments, with full explanation, for the existence and nature of the gods.¹⁴⁴

Salient Qumran evidence suggests that aspirations for knowledge of God featured significantly in the community's prayer patterns¹⁴⁵ and notions of divine anthropology.¹⁴⁶ In numerous instances, prayers for theological knowledge are allied to the vision of human aspirants as those who are

¹⁴² E.g. *Laws* (book 10) 907B-910D.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Laws* (book 10) 908A6, 908E9-909A9.

¹⁴⁴ Mayhew 2008:199.

¹⁴⁵ See Falk 1999:870-72 and numerous texts cited therein.

¹⁴⁶ See Fletcher-Louis 2002:92-93 citing 4QDibHam [4Q504, 506] and Sir 50, among other texts.

summoned to heaven and invited to join a worshipping community of 'divine beings of knowledge.'¹⁴⁷

Given the scope of this vision, it is not surprising that no single form of prayer held sway at Qumran,¹⁴⁸ a point demonstrated by Daniel Falk's study of the variety of forms, functions, and contexts of the daily, Sabbath, and festival prayers at Qumran and the varied points of affinity between this evidence and proximate notions of Jewish and early Christian prayer.¹⁴⁹ One might add to this discussion Richard Sarason's observation that the Therapeutae's pattern of daily group prayer at fixed times represents 'the context in which to locate the evidence for regular communal prayer and liturgies at Qumran.'¹⁵⁰

It is far too speculative to say whether Philo was aware of other Jewish piety groups. In *On Providence* §2.64, Philo recounts his pilgrimage to the place of his

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Falk 1999:860 for listing of relevant texts; also Najman 2007:108-10.

¹⁴⁸ Nitzan 1994 represents the first book-length study of the diverse range of poetic and prayer patterns at Qumran. Building on Nitzan's findings, Chazon (1994, 1998/89, 2003) has written extensively on this subject. Reif 2004:133-49 is also a useful summary of this evidence in relation to wider liturgical evidence from the Second Temple period. See Schuller 2000:29-30 for useful schema to organise the Qumran prayer texts.

¹⁴⁹ Falk 1998:93, 217-51; cf. Werline 1998:109-59, 194-95 and Sarason 2004:170-72 for discussion of wider notions and developments of prayer in Second Temple Judaism and relations to Qumran communal penitence.

¹⁵⁰ Sarason 2004:154.

spiritual heritage, Jerusalem. Elsewhere, however, Philo remains silent on whether he was aware of Qumran or other Jewish pious groups.

What stands out most prominently is Philo's preoccupation – reflected also in Josephus¹⁵¹ – with the piety and place of Moses as the kind of philosopher-king (*Mos.* 1.21-24; 2.2) idealised by Plato.¹⁵² This interest, however, is not restricted to his idealisation of Moses. What we find is a corresponding (albeit rather general) picture of pupils who follow in the footsteps of Moses, meeting together on the Sabbath to 'occupy themselves with the philosophy of the fathers (τὴν πατρίων φιλοσοφίαν), dedicating that time to the acquiring of knowledge and the study of the truths of nature' (*Mos.* 2.216).

In Philo's reckoning of the Mosaic world of thought, then, the specific portrait of the Therapeutae in *On the Contemplative Life* is not inconsistent with the more general pictures of theological activity undertaken regularly by Mosaic disciples on the Sabbath. Both offer contemporary paradigmatic examples of the Mosaic approach to noetic perfection and purification.

As just seen, Philo's epistemological discourses often soar to dizzying heights, but they are nonetheless grounded in a keen awareness of the range of real-life

¹⁵¹ Cf. *A.J.* 3.179-80; *C. Ap.* 1.279.

¹⁵² On the place of this concept in the 'Exposition,' see Chapter 3 (§ 3.5.5.3).

contingencies and conflicts that affect the rational human mind. Philo's insistence that the mind is domiciled in the soul and dependent on its non-rational parts leads us to consider our third and final question.

2.5

How does Philo conceive of the limitations of the human mind
in its ascent to the divine?

For Philo, the mind may have the position of dominance in the soul,¹⁵³ but it is still a created thing. In keeping with this view, Philo explores at least four ways in which the mind is innately limited in its aspiration to knowledge of God.

2.5.1 *First, the human mind is limited on an ontological basis.*

Here, Philo relies on the principle of like discerning like (τῶν ὁμοίων τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρεῖται), a philosophical straight-edge common in Philo's day which he applies in *On the Giants* §9. In this passage, Philo asserts that anything which is corporeal in nature, such as the human mind, simply cannot apprehend anything which is incorporeal in nature. Absent divine endowment, the mind cannot apprehend the entire realm of beings which fills the universe (angels and stars).

¹⁵³ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.185; *Post.* 58.

In applying this principle throughout the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo varies his language and exegetical foci, but his stance remains consistent: given the ontological gulf between the creator God and the created human mind, the latter is utterly incapable of recognising God as the source which strengthens it to reach the limits of full knowledge.¹⁵⁴

2.5.2 *Second, the mind is dependent on the human senses.*

Another central tenet of Philonic epistemology and psychology is the recognition that the mind is enchained to sense-perception and the objects of sense.¹⁵⁵

Absent the data supplied by the senses, the mind is inoperative and imperfect.¹⁵⁶

At the same time, the mind is prone to becoming enslaved to the senses,¹⁵⁷ a recurring threat which, as Philo himself has experienced on many occasions,¹⁵⁸ signals an adversarial state of affairs between mind and the senses marked by disturbance and dissolution.

In this conflictual context, the mind may attain a certain level of self-knowledge which in turn leads to other forms of knowledge,¹⁵⁹ but, at virtually every turn,

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Agr.* 169-81.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Leg. All.* 1.28-30; *Gig.* 29.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Leg. All.* 1.25-26; *Cher.* 58-59.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Leg. All.* 2.49; *Deus* 117-21.

¹⁵⁸ E.g. *Leg. All.* 3.155-56.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.157; *Migr.* 184-91.

Philo reminds readers that the mind cannot be severed from the senses, a truth which renders partial and provisional the mind's capacity to apprehend the world beyond it. In a related vein, Philo speaks about the mind as dependent on the powers of the speech faculty.¹⁶⁰

2.5.3 Third, the mind cannot apprehend the study of causation.

This body of knowledge remains outside the reach of any human mind, including that of Moses.¹⁶¹ For Philo, this premise extinguishes any notion that the human mind, on its own, can attain knowledge of God in his essence.¹⁶² Without access to knowledge of the causes of the created universe, the mind is perennially vulnerable to seeing the universe as its own locus of origination and operative power, as was the case of the biblical Abraham before he was transformed into a sage. The mind is equally vulnerable to seeing itself in such ways, a false creed associated with Cain and his offspring, the line of biblical figures who symbolises the way of life and thinking espoused by Protagoras of Abdera (more on this in Chapter 4 below).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Migr.* 78.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Fug.* 163.

¹⁶² Cf. *Fug.* 164-65.

2.5.4 Finally, the mind cannot apprehend the nature and location of its own intellect.

Philo maintains this view throughout the *Allegorical Commentary*. For instance, in *On Dreams*, Jacob's dream of a ladder ascending to heaven (Genesis 28) provokes Philo to formulate his ideas on the mind's native inability to know two specific domains of knowledge.

In *On Dreams* §§1.14-33 Philo considers two particular details in the biblical narrative. First, he detects in the Well of the Oath (Genesis 28.10) a symbol of knowledge (*Somn.* 1.6). Noting that Jacob's ladder dream occurs while he is sojourning from that well, Philo focuses on a second detail: the relationship of the Well of the Oath to the other wells in this narrative. The Well of the Oath is the last of the four wells dug by Abraham and Isaac.

The first point prompts Philo to consider the topic of knowledge. The second point invites Philo to propose two specific fields of knowledge: the cosmos and the world within the human aspirant. In this particular instance, each of the four wells represents components which form two parallel fields of knowledge. A degree of symmetry between cosmology and epistemology can be detected in Philo's figural approach to these two fields of knowledge, as the diagram below

indicates. Note how Philo's parallel schema highlights the incomprehensibility of the dominant mind:

Diagram 2.8
Fields of Knowledge Beyond the Native Reach of the Human Mind
(*On Dreams* §§1.14-33)

FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE	COSMOS	HUMAN BEING
That which is knowable	1. Earth 2. Water 3. Air	1. Body 2. Sense 3. Speech
That which is un-knowable	4. Heaven (ὁ δ' οὐρανὸς ἀκατάληπτον ἔχει τὴν φύσιν, οὐδὲν ἑαυτοῦ σαφὲς γνώρισμα πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀποστείλας; <i>Somn.</i> 1.21)	4. Intellect (ἄρ' οὖν καὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς, ὁ ἡγεμὼν νοῦς, καταληπτὸς ἐστίν; οὐ δήπου; <i>Somn.</i> 1.30)

2.5.5 Suspension of judgment

In light of the foregoing considerations, it may not be altogether surprising to find elements of scepticism scattered throughout the *Allegorical Commentary*.¹⁶³

In a particularly striking instance (*On Drunkenness* §§166-205), Philo resorts to

¹⁶³ Dillon 1977:143-44 suggests that Philo's Jewish piety leads to 'a downgrading of the ability of the human intellect (unaided by God's grace) to comprehend truth, which comes out curiously, at times, as Scepticism' (quote is from p. 144); on the place of scepticism in relation to Philo's approach to wider questions of philosophy: Nikiprowetzky 1977:184-92.

the language of the first-century BCE Pyrrhonian sceptic Aenesidemus of Cnossus. To enhance our understanding of this instance of Philonic scepticism, a brief discussion of salient developments in the first centuries is warranted.¹⁶⁴

As noted below, developments occurred on three key fronts.¹⁶⁵ To minimise confusion, I will refer to Philo of Alexandria as 'Philo'; I will refer to Philo of Larissa (159–84 BCE) as 'Philo of Larissa.'

2.5.5.1 *Philonic scepticism with reference to developments in Stoic philosophy*

The Stoic definition of knowledge prevailed in the first century BCE. According to two key witnesses, the Stoics defined knowledge in a way that rendered all things *acataleptic*. Nothing can be apprehended.¹⁶⁶ Philo of Larissa, the last sceptical Academic scholarch, stood in a tradition that traced its origins to Arcesilaus (316–241 BCE)¹⁶⁷ and developments in Carneades (214–129 BCE)¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Comprehensively studied in Zeller 1923; Vogel 1959; Krämer 1971; Giannantoni 1983–5; Long 1986; Moraux 1973, 1984; on socio-political aspects: Fraser 1972; Gruen 1984.

¹⁶⁵ The following discussion draws significantly on relevant portions of Brittain 2001:1–128 (esp. pp. 5–26).

¹⁶⁶ Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 1.235; Cicero, *Acad.* 2.18; cf. Brittain 2001:138–45.

¹⁶⁷ On Arcesilaus as crypto-dogmatist: Lévy 1978:335–48; more generally, cf. Ioppolo 1984:317–63.

¹⁶⁸ Key features of Carneadean philosophy discussed in Long 1967:59–90; Burnyeat 1982:315–38. On Carneades' contributions to philosophical debates: *LS* 1.465–67.

and his pupil Clitomachus (187-110 BCE).¹⁶⁹ Although Philo of Larissa affirmed the Stoic definition of knowledge that things *in principle* are inapprehensible (*acataleptic*), he nonetheless supplemented the Stoic criterion with a claim that things *in fact* are apprehensible and cataleptic. On this point, Sextus Empiricus attests:

Philo's adherents say that as far as the Stoic criterion, that is, the cataleptic impression, goes, things are non-cataleptic; but as far as the nature of the things themselves goes, they are cataleptic.¹⁷⁰

2.5.5.2 *Philonic scepticism with reference to developments in academic scepticism*

This position – what John Glucker calls ‘sceptical in practice but not in theory’¹⁷¹ – sparked controversy among members of the Academy. Indeed, the scholarchate of Philo of Larissa (110 – c. 83 BCE) was marked by defection in two distinct directions. First, Aenesidemus (first century BCE) revolted from the Academy, indicting Philo of Larissa’s proposal of *acatalepsia* with the charge of dogmatic inconsistency. Aenesidemus sought to re-establish a brand of anti-

¹⁶⁹ Brittain 2001:5. According to Diog. Laert. (*Vitae philosophorum* 4.10.67), Clitomachus was head of the Academy from 129 BCE to his death in 110/9. On the work of Philo of Larissa: Glucker 1978 passim; Tarrant 1981:66-97; Tarrant 1985 passim.

¹⁷⁰ *Pyr.* 1.235.

¹⁷¹ Glucker 1979:82.

dogmatic scepticism associated with the fourth century figure Pyrrho.¹⁷² We will return to Aenesidemus shortly.

At around the same time, Antiochus of Ascalon (b. c. 130 BCE) led a group of those who referred to themselves as the 'Old Academy.'¹⁷³ Under this shorthand, this band of dissenters intensified interest in dogmatism,¹⁷⁴ resulting in a movement which went in the opposite direction of Aenesidemus.

The 'Old Academy' of Antiochus – whose activity may have flourished in Alexandria in the 80s or perhaps more likely in Athens¹⁷⁵ – claimed the authority of Plato and combined that material with elements of early Peripatetic and

¹⁷² Brittain 2001:6-7. Dating this defection is difficult. Caizzi 1992:176-89 posits the late 90s BCE, though allowance is also made for the possibility that Aenesidemus defected in the 60s or 50s. Critical text and commentary for Pyrrho at Caizzi 1981; on Pyrrhonist terminology: Janáček 1972.

¹⁷³ Cf. Cicero, *Acad.* 2. 69-71. Testimonia for Antiochus found in Luck 1953; on the relationship between Philo of Larissa and Antiochus and the place of the *Sosus* affair, cf. Sedley 1981:67-75; Barnes 1989:68-78.

¹⁷⁴ So concludes Barnes 1989:77-89. On Cicero's testimony (*Fin.* 5.59), Antiochus is attributed with saying 'the mind on the other hand she [nature] has endowed with its remaining faculties in the same perfection as the body, equipping it with senses already adapted to their function of perception and requiring little or no assistance of any kind to complete their development.' On this passage, Barnes 1989:89 finds that Antiochus' ethical system 'thus presupposes a dogmatic epistemology...it underlines the fact that the two major parts of Antiochus' philosophy were necessarily linked one to the other.'

¹⁷⁵ On this disputed aspect of Antiochus' biography: Barnes 1989:55-57 following Glucker 1978:90-97 in regarding as 'a figment of modern scholarship' the theory that Antiochus founded an influential school of philosophy in Alexandria in the 80s.

contemporary Stoic philosophy,¹⁷⁶ a synthetic project which aimed to press the significance of accepting the Stoic notion of *catalepsis* as the basis for the definition of knowledge.¹⁷⁷

2.5.5.3 *Philonic scepticism with reference to developments in Platonic philosophy*

This movement to dogmatism suggests another key area of development: Platonism. In this period (100 BCE – 100 CE), major rifts in the Academy formed. Holders of institutional authority like Philo of Larissa and Metrodorus were viewed rather pejoratively by dissenters as the ‘New Academy,’ a deviation from what Plato originated centuries earlier. Claims to the past, then, dominated the epistemological discourses of this period. Aenesidemus claimed the authority of Arcesilaus and Pyrrho. Antiochus asserted the authority of Plato.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Cicero testifies (*Acad.* 1.35, 43) that Antiochus viewed his proposal as a correction of the Old Academy rather than the start of something novel. For more on the synthetic nature and complexity of Antiochus’ ‘Old Academy’ proposal, see Barnes 1989, esp. 83ff. For the view that Antiochus did not embrace Stoicism to any significant degree: Lévy 1992.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. *LS* 1.236-59, 445-49, calling this ‘one of the high points of Hellenistic philosophy’ which ‘fostered much that was best in their [Antiochus and his proponents] contributions to the theory of knowledge’ (quote is from p. 249).

¹⁷⁸ Sketched at *LS* 1.448-49.

On these two fronts, Philo of Larissa tried to defend the legitimacy of the Academy (and by implication his own stake as its scholarch¹⁷⁹) by refuting the radical brand of scepticism of Aenesidemus whilst trying to outflank Antiochus in the latter's bid to claim the right of priority on Plato.¹⁸⁰

With respect to Philo of Larissa's reading of Plato, David Sedley observes a point which is germane to our present discussion. According to Sedley, Plato's *Timaeus* – not the *Theaetetus* – 'held the field as the official handbook to Plato's doctrines, including epistemology.'¹⁸¹ In reading the *Timaeus* as an ἡθικός μῦθος (a 'likely story'),¹⁸² Philo of Larissa – following prominent Platonists and Peripatetics of his era¹⁸³ – may have been following an earlier tradition which shaped the views of Arcesilaus and Carneades.¹⁸⁴

This approach to the *Timaeus*, Sedley suggests, may have been the motivating force behind Philo of Larissa's two-sided approach to knowledge:

¹⁷⁹ Gucker 1979:88-89 represents the scholarly consensus in portraying Philo of Larissa's opposition to Antiochus by recourse to such sociological analysis.

¹⁸⁰ Antiochus' reception of Philo of Larissa's so-called Roman Books in Alexandria is found in Cicero in the form of a speech by Lucullus (*Acad.* 2.11-12). On the question whether Philo of Larissa and the Fourth Academy directly or indirectly facilitated the shift from scepticism to Platonism, see Tarrant 1985. The rift between Philo of Larissa and Antiochus forms the central episode of the important work of Gucker 1978.

¹⁸¹ Sedley 1981:72.

¹⁸² Plato, *Tim.* 29C-D.

¹⁸³ Cf. Niehoff 2008:164-70.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Epiphanius *Adv. Haer.* III 29-30.

That there is in the sensible world a reality capable of being known, and perhaps actually known to god, but inaccessible to human cognitive capacities, was a compromise between out-and-out scepticism and the newly resurrected Platonic dogmatism. It sanctioned philosophical speculation while maintaining the principle of (ἀκαταληψία), and could with some plausibility be fathered on both Plato and the New Academy. It was, indeed, entirely consistent with the policy of qualified belief already adopted by Philo himself.¹⁸⁵

For present purposes, this brief review sharpens our picture of the character of Philonic scepticism in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*. In light of Sedley's suggestion, Philo's turn to the Ten Modes of Aenesidemus may not be as surprising as initially understood.

Aenesidemus argued that appearances and impressions are equal in power and signification. When conflicts arise, only one response is warranted: the aspirant's suspension of epistemic judgment. Suspension, Aenesidemus claimed, leads to a state of tranquility, a *telos* which Philo seems to be comfortable with so long as

¹⁸⁵ Sedley 1981:73. Sedley also suggests that Philo of Larissa, in developing his two-sided approach to knowledge, may have read Plato's *Timaeus* in such a way that he was influenced by an earlier tradition which may have also shaped the views of Arcesilaos and Carneades.

this construal supports his belief in God as the sole locus of epistemic authority and beneficence.¹⁸⁶

As noted by David Runia, Philo holds the distinction of being ‘our earliest surviving witness to the celebrated tropes of Aenesidemus,’¹⁸⁷ and in *On Drunkenness* §§166-205, an exegetical reflection on Genesis 19.33-35, we have ‘a remarkable example of how Philo can press into service for his exegesis philosophical material which seems quite antithetical to his own philosophical sympathies.’¹⁸⁸

In this exegetical context, the biblical figure of Lot symbolises the mind in its native state of ignorance. Without divine endowments, the mind is severely limited, even when it has the cooperation of deliberation and assent, symbolised by Lot’s two daughters. In this regard, Philo places the tropes on the same philosophical agenda as the Mosaic scriptures, and by so doing, Philo leaves little room to entertain the notion that the human mind – in its native state – falters in the absence of secure knowledge:

¹⁸⁶ Cf. Runia 2008:13-54 for further discussion of Philo’s use of Hellenistic doxography as a way to classify diverse *corpora* of contemporary debates and philosophical argumentation but always in the service of Mosaic exegesis.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Striker 1983b:95-115; for critical translation and commentary: Annas and Barnes 1985:19-30, 175-80. On subsequent Pyrronist interpretations of Aenesidemus: Frede 1984:255-78.

¹⁸⁸ Runia 2008:29.

The mind, it seems, does not grasp clearly or firmly either sleeping or waking, or yet rest or motion, but it is just when it thinks it has shown its powers of deliberation at their best, that it proves to be most lacking in that power, for the issue of events bears no resemblance to its expectations.... The conclusion is that since things so often turn out the opposite of what we expect, the safest course is to suspend judgment (ὥστε εἰς τὰ ἐναντία, ὧν ὑπετόπησέ τις, εἰωθότων περιστάσθαι τῶν πραγμάτων ἀσφαλέστατον τὸ ἐπέχειν εἶναι).¹⁸⁹

To sum up: on the limits of human knowledge, Philo's priority is by no means the formulation of sceptical doctrines.¹⁹⁰ Rather, in his quest to uncover the range of meanings and truths in the Mosaic text, Philo is willing to exploit any intellectual capital on the principle that all philosophical truth finds its source in Moses. In appropriating the tropes of Aenesidemus, Philo in *On Drunkenness* seems to have been drawn to a particular strand of scepticism in his day, one that – as discussed already – sought to re-establish a brand of anti-dogmatic scepticism associated with the fourth century BCE figure Pyrrho.

¹⁸⁹ *Ebr.* 204-05.

¹⁹⁰ Runia 2008:50 states: 'Philo is acutely aware of the limits of human knowledge, but he is far from being a true sceptic. The wise man sits in judgment and delivers his verdict on the really important questions. For Philo this certainly does not mean any kind of autonomy of thought, but a deference to Scripture written by the wise man *par excellence* with the aid of divine inspiration.'

2.6

Two additional aspects of Philo's theological epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*

Based on our interrogation of Philo on the nature, potential and limits of the human mind, we are positioned to consider two additional aspects of theological knowledge in Philo.

2.6.1 *Theological knowledge as therapeutic in character*

First, Philo's theory of the mind rests on the ancillary conviction that theological knowledge is also therapeutic in its various outcomes. This is indeed a straight edge that Philo consistently applies in order to exhort his readers to become apprentices of Moses who benefit others, not sophists who deceive and ruin others.

Casting Philo as innovative in this regard would, I think, strain the evidence, especially in light of the pertinent material in the *Allegorical Commentary* which points to Philo's agreement with a truth nearly universally acknowledged by thinkers in his proximate era, namely, that philosophy offers aspirants the resources to experience the healing of any number of psychic maladies.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ In antiquity, attitudes to those engaged in the medical arts ran the gamut, but evidence points to positive appraisals. There are hints in Homeric literature of the

In keeping with this insistence, Philo portrays Moses as a healer of the mind *par excellence*. Indeed, Philo presents Moses as the best of all physicians, a paragon of human happiness and health who, by divine accord and endowment, offers help for those who suffer from the conflicts between mind, soul, and body.¹⁹²

Although it is not exhaustive, Diagram 2.9 summarises elements of Mosaic philosophy which Philo sees as offering cures or treatments for a range of key cognitive and psychic afflictions:

Diagram 2.9
Cognitive maladies and corresponding Mosaic treatments

	Malady	Mosaic Therapy
A.1	Ignorance of Mind (ἀμαθία)	▪ Right teaching (διδασκαλία; variously τὸν ὀρθὸν λόγον)¹⁹³ in conjunction with persistence (ἐγκαρτερέω)¹⁹⁴ ▪ Allowance of anthropomorphic conceptions of God for purposes of instruction and/or rehabilitation¹⁹⁵

power and value of healers (*Il.* 9.506; 11.514-15; *Od.* 17.382-84). Plato drew a link between medicine and rhetoric, comparing the craft of a physician with that of a rhetorician (cf. *Phaedr.* 270A-B). Cicero picks up on this link in *De or.* 2.44.186 (also *Tusc.* 3.1.5-6). Hellenistic philosophers also presented themselves as physicians, their activities related to both the health of the body and the soul (cf. Edelstein 1967:350). See Griffith 2009:46-93 for references to more ancient sources on this point. For more on the literary sources pointing to the intrinsic therapeutic nature of the Hellenistic philosophical systems of Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Scepticism, see the celebrated work of Nussbaum 1994.

¹⁹² Cf. *Deus* 61-69; Moses as pointer to God as divine healer (e.g. *Sacr.* 70; *Det.* 144-46).

¹⁹³ *Sacr.* 48.

¹⁹⁴ *Det.* 149.

A.2	Labouring under 'plausible falsehood' (τὴν εὐπαράγωγον ἀπάτην)	▪ Soul-husbandry (γεωργικῆς τέχνης) ¹⁹⁶
B	Generic weakness induced by variegation (τὴν εὐπαράγωγον ἀπάτην)	▪ Healthy principles (ὕγιεινους λόγους) by means of a training under the law (δι' ἀγωγῆς νομίμου) or good education (παιδεύσεως ὀρθῆς ἀντισταγαγεῖν) ¹⁹⁷
C	Fear (φόβος)	▪ Invoking the divine names: κύριος (sovereign power) and θεός (beneficence) ¹⁹⁸
D	Grief (λύπη)	Right reasoning (τὸν δίκαιον λογισμόν) ¹⁹⁹
E	Forgetting (λήθη)	Recollection (ὑπόμνησις) ²⁰⁰
F.1	Passion produced by wrath and anger	Temporary compliance to the sensory pleasures with the aim of subduing this state of arousal ²⁰¹
F.2	Passion (generic)	▪ Right teaching in conjunction with persistence ²⁰² ▪ Activity of one's inner <i>elenchus</i> (ἐλεγχος; also called divine reason, λόγος δ' ἐστὶ θεῖος) ²⁰³ ▪ Self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια) ²⁰⁴
G	Folly (ἀφροσύνη)	A deathless evil, this condition cannot be cured ²⁰⁵
H	Impiety ²⁰⁶ (ἀσέβεια)	Repentance (μετάνοια) ²⁰⁷

¹⁹⁵ *Deus* 61-69.

¹⁹⁶ *Agr.* 1-19.

¹⁹⁷ *Det.* 16.

¹⁹⁸ *Plant.* 88.

¹⁹⁹ *Det.* 110, 121.

²⁰⁰ *Congr.* 39-41.

²⁰¹ *Migr.* 211.

²⁰² *Post.* 71-72.

²⁰³ *Deus* 180-83. For more in Philo (and Paul) on the relationship between *elenchus* and the concept of conscience, see Bosman 2003 *passim*.

²⁰⁴ *Agr.* 98-99; see also *Leg. All.* 2.82-86.

²⁰⁵ *Det.* 178.

²⁰⁶ On Plato's view that impiety is an illness or disease, see e.g. *Laws* 888B8, 906C (vice), 908C.

²⁰⁷ *Post.* 177-79.

The foregoing diagnostics and cures suggest that Philo may have departed in certain instances from the garden-variety conventions of his day,²⁰⁸ but what Philo shares with leading contemporaries is an interest in the nature of human emotions. Most thinkers in Philo's era understood emotions to be cognitive in essence, with notable exceptions of course (to which we will return shortly).

This construal of philosophy as psychotherapy, as Richard Sorabji suggests, goes back to Presocratic thinkers like Democritus of Abdera (b. 460-57 BCE) and features in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, Pyrrhonian sceptics, and the Stoics.²⁰⁹ As an important corollary, these philosophers subscribed to the notion that the word (*logos*) possessed the ability to change attitudes and emotions, an essential catalyst for health and happiness.²¹⁰

In a more religious sense, the premise that the mind is the locus of therapy was often conjoined with a belief in the existence and beneficence of the gods or divine reason. According to Lucretius (*ca.* 94-55 BCE), Epicurus (341-270 BCE) claimed that all philosophical activity is meaningless unless it heals aspirants of

²⁰⁸ Cf. particularly in the conflation of the meanings for joy (*eupatheia*), as noted by Sorabji 2000:50-51.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Sorabji 2000:17-28, 194-210. On the therapeutic role of inspiration in Plato, see Carter 1967; on the theme of *katharsis* and its relation to Plato's theory of inspiration, see Brunius 1966.

²¹⁰ Cf. Lain Entralgo 1970. On the related issue of the therapeutic dimension of the Socratic practice of dialectic: Maranhao 1986. For the role of fine arts in the cognitive therapy of Plato: Cavanos 1977:266-90.

their mental maladies.²¹¹ In this regard, Epicurus is associated with the following saying:

Empty is that philosopher's argument by which no human being's emotion is cured; for just as we have no need of medicine that does not expel the body's diseases, so we have none of philosophy which does not expel the soul's emotion.²¹²

This Epicurean insistence on the nexus between one's healing of emotions and one's engagement with philosophy rests on the conviction that the gods are models of friendship and tranquility, two of the more prominent features of later Epicurean doctrine. From these models humans can learn the importance of avoiding pain and withholding harm to others.²¹³

The Stoics, by contrast, held to the belief that the healing and transformation of one's mind and emotions comes by one's achievement of harmony between the faculty of human reason and divine reason.²¹⁴ Though envisaged in various ways, mainstream Stoic thinkers can speak about the sage as operating with the

²¹¹ Cf. Nussbaum 1986:31-74. On Lucretius' exaltation of Epicurus: Duban 1979. Critical edition of primary Epicurean material at Arrighetti 1973 with key indices at Usener 1977. On Lucretius' portrayal of Epicureanism: Boyancé 1963b; Konstan 1973.

²¹² As quoted in Annas 1992:195, citing Gigante 1975 and Nussbaum 1985.

²¹³ Cf. Long 1986; cf. Purington 1993. In this respect, Sorabji 2000:27 suggests that Plato (*Symp.* 506E-509E) may have influenced the Epicurean approach to human desires.

²¹⁴ Cf. Gould 1974.

rational emotions arising from his or her rational soul.²¹⁵ On this cognitive basis, the sage is capable – on the principle of ‘appropriation’ (οἰκείωσις)²¹⁶ – of discovering what is good and natural in the world around, beyond and within oneself.

Scholars are divided over the specific question of Philo’s place on this scale of therapeutic approaches to the mind, but there is hardly any doubt that Philo’s therapeutic insistence hits on a number of key epistemological registers. The occurrences of ‘winged chariot’ parlance in Philo’s *The Allegories of the Laws* §2.94 and §3.118 reflect the Alexandrian’s indebtedness to the vision of the soul’s ascent toward truth and knowledge in Plato’s *Phaedrus*.

Philo certainly is not alone in this regard. Roman Stoics like Posidonius (c. 135-c. 51 BCE), Cicero (b. 106 BCE), and Seneca (b. 4 BCE-1 CE) admired this Platonic

²¹⁵ Cf. Frede 1986:93-110. For further insight on the Stoic theory of emotions in relation to cognate theories of the mind, see Annas 1992:188-95.

²¹⁶ This follows the view of Long 2006:351-52 who suggests that οἰκείωσις ‘refers to a process or activity, innate in all animals, which explains why, from the moment of birth, they behave in self-regarding ways’ (quote is from p. 352). For the Hellenistic Stoa, this term carried two related senses, as Erskine 1990:114 states: ‘*Oikeiōsis* has two related senses for the Stoa. It is the affinity between an animal and its constitution which begins at birth and ensures its survival (Diog. Laert. 7.85-6, *SVF* 3.178). Because man has reason this affinity with his own constitution develops into an affinity with other human beings, so that he behaves justly to them (citing Cicero, *De Fin.* 3.62-8).’ This concept is notoriously complex: for a representative range of views, see further Striker 1983a:145-67; Engberg-Pedersen 1986:145-83; Lesses 1988:95-127. Algra 2003:265-96 discusses this Stoic theory in relation to the Epicurean theory of friendship and the Aristotelian models of social appropriation.

vision of cognitive transformation animated principally by passionate love, which, as Nussbaum writes, 'creates a beautiful harmonious movement, as the noble character of the horse representing the soul's emotions forms a partnership with reason and gives reason new motivational and cognitive power.'²¹⁷

This partnership became part of the 'structure of Stoic self-sufficiency' which for many thinkers – including Philo – represented the cure for a life of passion and its array of vices and vicissitudes.²¹⁸ Richard Sorabji suggests that the Stoic approach to the passions (πάθος) underlies Philo's view of the therapeutic efficacy of theological knowledge.

But Philo does not simply follow the crowd. Notable are Philo's attitudes to repentance and pity as virtuous marks of the wise person and his accompanying belief that an emotion moderated by reason is not unlike a pre-passion

²¹⁷ Nussbaum 1994:443. For critical texts and commentary for Posidonius: Edelstein/Kidd 1989; see also Nock 1959:1-16. For critical editions of Cicero and Seneca, see *LS* (vol. 1) 1987:493-44 and 498-99, respectively; on Stoicism at Rome: Arnold 1911 and esp. Pohlenz 1980.

²¹⁸ Nussbaum 1994:443. See Bockmuehl 2008:498-513 for discussion of Nussbaum's emphasis on the prospect of cognitive and affective transformation in ancient models of philosophical therapy with particular reference to this idea in the New Testament and patristic writings and subsequent Christian moral reflection in late antiquity.

(*propatheia*).²¹⁹ 'Philo started a tradition,' observes Sorabji, 'which is still found in his Jewish successor Maimonides in the twelfth century, of seeing moderation and eradication of emotion (*metriopatheia apatheia*) as ideals for different people.'²²⁰

Along with this endorsement of moderation,²²¹ Philonic therapy is distinctive for another reason. Philo seems to find in several biblical prayers – featuring Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Moses in particular – the language he needs to describe the ways in which an aspirant's mind and soul are healed by knowledge of God. Philo is undoubtedly familiar with the prevailing notion, mentioned earlier, that the word (λόγος) possessed the properties to heal the mind.

On this principle, Philo seems to go one step further in his therapeutic approach. He finds in Moses a vivid scriptural model of the therapeutic nature of theological knowledge. For Philo, Moses not only offers superlative therapeutic

²¹⁹ In this vein, Philo's view of hope as a moderated emotion departs from conventional Stoic thought on the emotions, as Sorabji 2000:346 claims with *QG* 1.29 cited as supporting evidence.

²²⁰ Sorabji 2000:385.

²²¹ Concerning one's exercise of moderation in relation to one's own capacity or disposition, Philo emphasises Aaron and Abraham as representatives of moderation, Moses and Isaac as representatives of eradication: *Leg. All.* 3.128-43; 3.140-47; *Migr.* 67; *Abr.* 256-57; *QG* 4.177.

material, i.e. the word(s) of God, but he also offers superlative therapeutic methods, one of which is the practice of individual and communal prayer.²²²

2.6.2 Theological knowledge as conspicuous and social in character

Having considered Philo's view of theological knowledge as therapeutic in character, we turn now to a second key aspect in Philo's theological epistemology, namely, the principle that theological knowledge is conspicuous in its outworking. In other words, such knowledge, when acquired, is intended to be actualised in the public square. Our recognition of this Philonic impulse, of course, does not diminish Philo's repeated insistence on restricting theological knowledge to a privileged class of individuals who are deemed qualified to attain – and in some cases to teach – knowledge of certain mysteries in the Mosaic library.²²³

Taking stock of such evidence, Peter Schäfer casts the Philonic enterprise in largely esoteric terms.²²⁴ Schäfer's characterisation of Philo, however, as one

²²² Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.177ff; *Sacr.* 121-24; *Conf.* 163.

²²³ Cf. *Ebr.* 112-13.

²²⁴ Schäfer 2009:352-53, a view which is longstanding: cf. Fairweather 1924:215-16 ("Philo has no gospel for humanity"). For a summary of Schäfer's views in our survey of pertinent history of research, see Chapter 1 (§ 1.3.1).

who is ‘not particularly concerned about the destiny of the community’ seems to me an impoverished appraisal of the evidence.²²⁵

In the first instance, Philo’s assertions in *On Flight and Finding* reveal the Alexandrian’s conviction that theological knowledge is sociable in its essential outworking. This point is most pronounced in Philo’s reflections on the phases of gradual transformation in the Mosaic program. In this respect, the aspirant who by divine agency progresses in the ways of virtue and wisdom is called to master the private and public affairs of a citizen’s life (*Fug.* 33).

Indeed, in Philo’s view, the aspirant must conduct himself or herself as ‘an adjunct for all’ in society, a standard which Philo himself upheld during the period of riots in his city around 38 CE.²²⁶ Such conduct evinces his or her identity as one who ‘begets for God’:

On the Unchangeableness of God §19

παραιτητέοι δὴ πάντες οἱ
γεννῶντες αὐτοῖς, τὸ δ’ ἐστὶν ὅσοι
τὸ ἴδιον λυσιτελεῖς μόνον
θηρώμενοι τῶν ἄλλων
ὑπερορῶσιν, ὥσπερ αὐτοῖς μόνοις
φύντες, οὐχὶ δὲ μυρίοις ἄλλοις,
πατρί, μητρὶ, γυναικί, τέκνοις,

We must indeed reject all those
who ‘beget for themselves,’ that is
all those who pursue only their
own profit and think not of
others. For they think themselves
born for themselves only and not
for the innumerable others, for
father, for mother, for wife, for

²²⁵ Cf. Schäfer 2011:353.

²²⁶ Cf. *Spec.* 3.1-6.

πατρίδι, ἀνθρώπων γένει, εἰ δὲ δεῖ
προελθόντας τι περαιτέρω φάναι,
οὐρανῷ, γῇ, τῷ παντὶ κόσμῳ,
ἐπιστήμαις, ἀρεταῖς, τῷ πατρὶ καὶ
ἡγεμόνι τῶν συμπάντων· ὧν
ἐκάστῳ κατὰ δύναμιν
ἀπονεμητέον τὸ ἀρμόττον μὴ τὰ
πάντα προσθήκην ἑαυτοῦ, **ἑαυτὸν**
δὲ τῶν πάντων νομίζοντα.

children, for country, for the
human race, and if we must
extend the list, for heaven, for
earth, for the universe, for
knowledge, for virtues, for the
Father and Captain of all; to each
of whom we are bound according
to our powers to render what is
due, not holding all things to be
an adjunct of ourselves, but
rather **ourselves an adjunct of**
all.

Situated in a treatise featuring many Stoic terms and themes,²²⁷ the foregoing passage is in keeping with Philo's endorsement of the social character of theological knowledge as revealed in Moses.²²⁸ Philo expresses this endorsement in various ways throughout the *Allegorical Commentary*, but some of the more instructive ones relate to

- (A) Philo's core belief that God revealed his word(s) to Moses for the benefit of the entire world (cf. *Leg.* 3.175; *Mos.* 2.36),
- (B) the concomitant rationale Philo puts forward concerning the Pharos translation of these sacred word(s) into the language of both Jews and non-Jews,²²⁹

²²⁷ Cf. Rist 1976:1-12.

²²⁸ E.g. *Sacr.* 121-24; *Gig.* 25-26; cf. Pearce 2007:14 n.85.

²²⁹ See Chapter 2 (§ 2.4.6.1); Chapter 5 (§ 5.3.2.5).

- (C) Philo's portrayal of the Therapeutae as a case study of a group of knowledge seekers and the distinctively social and transactive dimensions of their communal way of life,²³⁰ and
- (D) the many instances of Philonic exhortations to communal prayer for knowledge.²³¹

2.7

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for a multi-dimensional account of Philo's approach in the *Allegorical Commentary* to the nature, potential, and constraints of the human mind. Our discussion has focused on three main theses.

First, Philo articulates the thesis that God is the uncreated cause and possessor of all things, including the human mind. This thesis is sharpened by recourse in the first place to Platonised formulations of divine and human rationality. In this respect, Philo's agenda is not inconsistent with those of his Middle Platonist contemporaries. But what sets Philo apart is the degree to which the Mosaic writings exert pressure on his response to the question of locating the centre of

²³⁰ See Chapter 2 (§ 2.4.6.1); Chapter 5 (§ 5.3.1).

²³¹ See Chapter 6 (§ 6.3.2).

epistemic authority and beneficence: the mind of God or – as claimed by Protagoras – the mind of the human being.

Philo leans heavily on Mosaic construals of divine parentage and powers as part of his wholesale rejection of Protagorean relativism. Using Mosaic language to caution against the notion of an all-pervading *Logos* that held the place of privilege if not divinity in the Stoic imaginations of his day, Philo urges restraint, tasking the *Logos* with the more prescribed role of chief intermediary between God and humanity, unrivaled among created things but nonetheless inferior to the uncreated God. In keeping with this more restrictive view of the divine *Logos*, Philo can speak with ease of the aseity and epistemic authority of the God of Moses whilst speaking of a way for the mind to aspire to know this divine being.

As a corollary, we considered a second thesis. This is Philo's insistence that the mind is a created entity domiciled in the non-rational soul and subject to contingencies of all sorts. Despite its conflicts with the non-rational parts of the soul, the mind is nonetheless endowed with the potential to ascend and return to its divine creator. There is hardly any doubt that Philo endorses Plato's commitment to human assimilation with God, at least as far as the idea is presented in Plato's *Theaetetus*.

What is equally clear is that Philo recasts this philosophical commonplace in a distinctive way, turning primarily to Mosaic descriptions of the varied gifts of knowledge which God, out of his beneficence, is seen to confer on the aspirant's mind. For Philo, this is no stand-alone construal of divine gifts. Rather, these divine endowments are re-presented as part of the student-sage's journey, necessary helps from an all-possessing *and* all-providing God who through his various agencies wants the aspiring mind to gain purification and perfection and thereby to experience therapy and transformation of knowledge.

Finally, Philo insists that even in the superlative case of Moses the thing which the aspirant most yearns for – assimilation by means of unmediated knowledge and vision of God – is the very thing which he or she cannot attain. In this respect, a notable strand of contemporary sceptical thinking catches our eye, particularly in connection with Philo's mandate that every student-sage in the school of Moses must also be an 'enquirer' in the original sense of σκέψις or σκεπτικός.

Indeed, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Philo interacted with the currents of scepticism in his day, even going so far as to quote material from a more radical strand of that philosophical worldview. Yet, Philo's scepticism is limited in scope, triggered by a specific exegetical question or two but on the whole tempered by his broader interest in holding together his firm convictions on the epistemic limits of the mind, on the one hand, and his desire to teach

readers a set of principles and practices which actualise the Mosaic concept of the mind's potential to aspire to knowledge of God, on the other hand.

Chapter 3

Knowledge of God in Philo's 'Exposition of the Law'

3.1

Introduction

Having considered the portfolio of key epistemological discourses Philo presents in his *Allegorical Commentary*, our aim here is to investigate the 'Exposition of the Law' ('Exposition') with a similar brief in mind. As a way into this material, the same set of questions used in Chapter 2 will offer initial guidance. For ease of reference, the questions are as follows:

- (1) How does Philo conceive of the origin and nature of the human mind?
- (2) How does he conceive of the potential of the human mind in its ascent to the divine?
- (3) How does Philo conceive of the limitations of the aspiring mind in its quest to know divine realities?

3.1.1 The 'Exposition' at-a-glance

To get our bearings, it is worth recalling that the 'Exposition,' composed in the later stages¹ of Philo's literary career, is a series of fourteen books² of varied content and length which nevertheless reflects Philo's overarching interest in presenting the Pentateuch of Moses in a more or less systematic fashion. On Philo's *modus operandi*, Gregory Sterling writes:

Unlike the *Questions and Answers* and the *Allegorical Commentary* where he worked directly from biblical lemmata, Philo rarely cited the biblical text as a basis for his exegesis in the *Exposition*.... His standard procedure was to summarize the biblical text and to provide a commentary on his summary in much the same way that a contemporary homilist summarizes a biblical text and then comments on her or his summary.³

¹ Scholars widely agree that Philo's account of his participation in civil affairs in *Spec.* 3.1-6 is best understood in connection with the pogrom in Alexandria and his role in the embassy to Gaius in approximately 39-40 CE. Secondary prefaces which link the 'Exposition' and cross references between the 'Exposition' and the *Allegorical Commentary* further suggest that the 'Exposition' may have been written sequentially in the same period of time as *Spec.* 3. Cf. Sterling 2012b:434 n. 46.

² Two works no longer survive: *On Isaac*; *On Jacob*. Philo composed the two-book biography *On the Life of Moses* as an introduction to the 'Exposition,' a view which has longstanding support e.g. Goodenough 1933; Morris 1987:847 n.137, 854-55; Terian 1997:30-33; Feldman 2007:11-33; Sterling 2012b:435-36. For a dissenting view, see Nikiprowetzky 1977:194-97.

³ Sterling 2012b:436. For discussion of possible parallels between Philo's mode of working with the biblical text and cognate texts characterised by the phenomenon called 'rewritten Bible' (e.g. *Jubilees*, the *Genesis Apocryphon*, Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, and Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*), see Borgen 1997:63-79.

Philo's handling of biblical material in the 'Exposition' has led some scholars to note the 'exoteric' character of the 'Exposition.'⁴ In part, this is substantiated by Philo's explicit instructions on how readers are to approach the Pentateuch.

In the prologue of the final treatise of the 'Exposition' (*On Rewards and Punishments*), Philo offers a set of instructions, advising his readers that the Pentateuch consists of three distinct parts that are sequenced in a particular way, as shown in the following diagram.

Diagram 3.1
Philo's view of the exegetical progression *within* the Pentateuch
(*On Rewards and Punishments* §§1-3)

Part of the Pentateuchal progression	Biblical material covered	Philo's summary of the contents of each part of the Pentateuchal progression	Corresponding title/s in the 'Exposition'
(A) Creation	Genesis 1-3	This segment focuses on primordial history, the origins of heaven and the framing of humanity. Heaven is the immortal counterpart of mortal humanity. In this framework, the principles which signify the law of nature are given (<i>Praem.</i> 1).	1 composition <i>On the Creation of the Cosmos</i> ⁵ (<i>Opif.</i>)

⁴ Royse 2009:47.

⁵ Does this treatise belong at the head of the 'Exposition,' or does it introduce Philo's other series of commentaries on the book of Genesis, the so-called *Allegorical Commentary*? Scholars are divided on this issue. For support of the placement at the head of the 'Exposition,' see e.g. Schürer/Vermes III.1 1987:840-56; Terian 1997:19-36; Runia 2001:2-4. For an opposing view: e.g. Nikiprowetzky 1977:197-200.

(B) The Patriarchs	Genesis 4-50	This segment continues the theme of the law of nature, but the point of focus shifts to patriarchal history, or what Philo calls 'the record of good and bad lives' (<i>Praem.</i> 2). The Jewish patriarchs are offered as embodiments of the law of nature and exemplars of the laws that he would later write down.	2 compositions⁶ <i>On Abraham (Abr.)</i> <i>On Joseph (Jos.)</i>
(C) Moses and his Laws	Exodus - Deuteronomy	This segment considers the written laws under two primary headings in accordance with the ways they were disclosed: the ten words (unmediated) and the particular laws that fall under each general head (mediated by Moses). It closes with a set of homilies on the virtues, rewards, and punishments that accompany his laws (<i>Praem.</i> 2-3).	7 compositions <i>On the Decalogue (Decal.)</i> <i>On the Special Laws (Spec.)</i> I-IV <i>On Virtues (Virt.)</i> <i>On Rewards and Punishments (Praem.)</i>

By Philo's own measure, the Pentateuch is to be read with a kind of progression in mind. Using cross-references, Philo moves between earlier and later works in the 'Exposition,' criss-crossing from one part to another. This lends a certain dynamic quality to Philo's reading of the Pentateuch and at the very least reflects Philo's interest in reminding readers of the interwovenness of this exegetical progression in the Pentateuch.⁷

⁶ Philo's separate treatments of Isaac and Jacob no longer exist.

⁷ Cf. Cohen 1997:78.

Yet at the same time Philo seems to insist on the distinctiveness of each part of the exegetical progression within the Pentateuch. This may have been due to Philo's interest in Peripatetic scholarship, as Adam Kamesar suggests:

[T]he tripartite classification of the Pentateuchal genres preserved in Philo seems to represent an early Jewish attempt at understanding the genres of the Pentateuch from the Greek perspective. For we find an approximate correspondence between the scheme found in Philo and a Peripatetic scheme which probably goes back to the Hellenistic period.⁸

In keeping with this interest, Philo enlists a set of discourses on theological knowledge which Philo sees in the Pentateuch. Each segment of the Pentateuch prompts Philo to trade on a specific philosophical *topos* or set of ideas and this in turn feeds into a particular way of writing about the mind's ascent to the divine.

3.1.2 Chapter preview

In a moment we will get to the details of all this, but by way of brief preview, we might illustrate the correlation between a particular segment of the 'Exposition' and that segment's set of epistemological discourses as follows:

⁸ Kamesar 1997:187. Reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* as 'a single course of lectures, the former anticipating the latter' Salkever 2009:209-42 suggests more specifically a three-part movement from (i) *eudaimonia* to (ii) eudaimonic exemplars to (iii) laws for communal well-being, a progression not unlike what we find in the 'Exposition.'

Diagram 3.2
Exegesis and philosophy in Philo's reading of the Pentateuch

Philo's Reading of the Pentateuch <i>On Rewards and Punishments</i> §§1-3		
(A) CREATION segment	(B) PATRIARCHS segment	(C) MOSES segment
<u>Main exegetical contexts</u> Genesis 1.27 and 2.7 <u>Main philosophical contexts</u> Gen 1.27: Plato's model of forms (<i>Timaeus</i>) and ascent leading to the ecstatic obviation of human intellection (<i>Phaedrus</i>) Gen 2.7: Plato's concept of assimilation to God (<i>Theaetetus</i>) leading to εὐδαιμονία and the intensification of human intellect	<u>Main exegetical context</u> Genesis 4-50 <u>Main philosophical context</u> Greek educational triad of instruction, nature, and practice	<u>Main exegetical context</u> Exodus - Deuteronomy <u>Main philosophical context</u> Plato's model of philosopher-king (<i>Republic</i>)

In the 'Creation' segment of the 'Exposition' (designated 'A' in Diagram 3.2 above), Philo formulates two distinct models of the mind's ascent to the divine. The first model derives from Genesis 1.26-27, the other from Genesis 2.7. Philo

invests both models with Platonic ideas but he does so to paint two strikingly different portraits of noetic ascent and transformation.

In his first model, Philo reads the first creation account of Genesis 1.26-27 in line with pertinent parts of Plato's *Timaeus*. The mind is portrayed as an imprint or copy of the mind of God. Noetic ascent is depicted in the imagery and language of Plato's *Phaedrus*. In keeping with these points, God is presented as an overwhelming and incomprehensible being. Yet the mind of the Genesis 1.27 ἄνθρωπος, like Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 33.13-23), can yearn for knowledge of the divine. As it ascends in this quest for theological knowledge, this mind is rendered totally passive as it is divinely seized and summoned to a condition marked by ecstatic phenomena and spiritual vertigo. It is an ascent of the mind that climaxes with the complete obviation of human intellection.

In his second model, Philo reads the second creation account of Genesis 2.7 in light of the Platonic concept of human assimilation to God (*Theaetetus*). The human mind is still portrayed as an imprint or copy of the divine mind. But one key difference can be detected: Philo's attention is drawn to this mind in its role as the ruling part of the composite human being of Genesis 2.7. As such, this mind is allied with the non-rational senses, inescapably entombed in the physical body. The mind of this first earth-born human being, then, inhabits the Platonic world of becoming.

In this world of constant flux, noetic ascent is described in the language of assimilation to the divine, which unmistakably recalls Plato's *Theaetetus*. Philo supplements this with the notion of recollection, which he transposes into the idea of the mind's retrieval of its 'self-taught wisdom.'

In this vein, God is portrayed less as an overwhelming being and more as a teacher who aids and scrutinises the keen-sightedness of his pupil. Isaac signifies this pupiled mind, one that is able to apprehend and name things according to their true nature. This is apprehension at the highest human level, roughly in line with the Stoic criterion of truth. The apex of the mind's ascent is the complete retrieval of human intellection and fulfillment of one's natural capacities, a state of mind and life that the Greeks (and Philo) saw as human well-being.

In the 'patriarchs' part of the 'Exposition' (B in Diagram 3.2), Philo broadens his scope to cover the patriarchal narratives that occupy the rest of the book of Genesis. When writing about noetic ascent in this segment, Philo gives pride of place to the patriarchal constitution of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Philo enlists this patriarchal triad for two primary (and interwoven) purposes. First, as founders of the special nation or race of Israel, this triad promotes Philo's interest in defending the particular character of the Mosaic way of noetic

aspiration to God. Second, since for Philo the three patriarchs signify universal ideals of human perfection, he can use this triad to advance his interest in engaging wider non-Jewish notions of human enlightenment and transformation. Here, as elsewhere in Philo's theological epistemology, what is universal inhabits the particular, and vice versa.

Finally, in the 'Moses' part of the 'Exposition' (C in Diagram 3.2), Philo focuses on the fourfold excellence of Moses. His portrayal of Moses as the ideal king, legislator, priest, and prophet frames his biography of Moses and indeed serves to bracket the entire 'Exposition.'⁹

Philo trades on this fourfold schema in order to converse with an important commonplace in his day: Plato's concept of the ideal person, the philosopher-king described in Book Five of his *Republic*. This represents one of the more dominant ways in which Philo reads, exposit, and defends the codified laws of Moses.

In light of these considerations, we will proceed as follows. We will follow Philo's understanding of the tripartite structure of the Pentateuch and his suggestion that we read the 'Exposition' as segments of an integrated whole (*On Rewards and Punishments* §§1-3). To each segment we will apply the set of questions

⁹ Cf. Goodenough 1933:109-25; Borgen 1997:48; Sterling 1992b:790.

listed at the outset of this chapter in an attempt to sharpen our understanding of the discourses on theological knowledge that feature prominently in each particular segment of the 'Exposition.'

Having considered these preliminaries, we will take a moment to consider the broader principles which frame Philo's varied epistemological discourses in the 'Exposition.'

3.2

Wider epistemological principles in the 'Exposition'

In what follows, we briefly consider four key principles which frame Philo's epistemological discourses in the 'Exposition.' The principles touch on divine incomprehensibility (§3.2.1 below), divine beneficence (§3.2.2), divine mediation (§3.2.3), and the primacy of the Mosaic text (§3.2.4).

3.2.1 Divine incomprehensibility

God is not an *ἄνθρωπος*. Indeed, as one who is uncreated (*ἀγέννητος*), God as revealed in Moses is 'the perfectly pure and unsullied mind of the universe, transcending virtue, transcending knowledge, transcending the good itself

and the beautiful itself.’¹⁰ This principle of divine incomprehensibility anchors Philo’s discourses on noetic ascent in the ‘Exposition.’

As a corollary, Philo affirms the unbridgeable chasm between the infinite divine creator and finite created beings. This affirmation raises key implications. First, the uncreated God does not enter into the affairs of humanity.¹¹ Second, any and all human aspiration to know and experience God must occur on terms and conditions established by God.¹²

In working through these implications, Philo is not reticent to using Greek philosophy. For example, Philo finds no difficulty in using the contemporary philosophical commonplace that a superior being or force will always move upon the inferior one, not vice versa.¹³ Moreover, Philo draws on Pythagorean speculations involving divine realities signified by numbers.¹⁴ We might add to this Philo’s frequent recourse to Plato’s idea of *theoria*.¹⁵ These devices, among others, represent some of Philo’s favourite ways of

¹⁰ *Opif.* 8; see also *Spec.* 1.274-77.

¹¹ Cf. *Abr.* 207.

¹² Cf. *Decal.* 81.

¹³ See e.g. *Decal.* 69. There, Philo draws on Homer, Hesiod, and Plato to press home the universal commonplace that the efficient or active is superior to that which is passive: the principle is stated as “the efficient element is held in higher esteem than the passive effect.”

¹⁴ On this see Kenney 1995:141-76.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. *Opif.* 77-78; *Abr.* 164; *Decal.* 98; *Spec.* 1.269, 288; *Spec.* 3.1-2; *Mos.* 2.66, 69.

substantiating the Mosaic principle that God is not an *ἄνθρωπος*. It is helpful to note that Philo's view of divine incomprehensibility exerted considerable influence on later interpreters of the sacred writings of Israel.¹⁶

3.2.2 *Divine beneficence*

Like the so-called 'unmoved mover' in Aristotle's later writings,¹⁷ the infinite and uncreated cause of all things as revealed in Moses exists independently in a realm that lies beyond the reach of finite created beings. Without diluting the principle above, Philo holds as equally true the Mosaic principle that the unknowable being of the Pentateuch is the divine father of the cosmos, one who cares for created beings by ordering the universe and conferring gifts of knowledge to human beings.¹⁸ This principle is frequently explained in the metaphorical language of pregnancy and midwifery, which touches key areas of Platonic thought.¹⁹

¹⁶ See e.g. Norris 2009:9-36 (esp. pp. 15-23) who notes Philo's influence on Justin Martyr (*Dial.* 5.4), Theophilus of Antioch (*Autol.* 2.3), Irenaeus (*Haer.* 4.20.2), and Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 6.5.39); cf. wider survey at Runia 2009a:210-30. It has been suggested (Kadushin 1965:303-24) that biblical notions of divine otherness and incomprehensibility are accented more strongly in rabbinic literature, with little if any influence from Philo.

¹⁷ Cf. Easterling 1976:252-65.

¹⁸ A prominent theme, variously formulated, in Platonic thought (e.g. *Tim.* 28C).

¹⁹ Cf. Pender 1992:72-86, esp. helpful references cited in note 1 therein.

Outgrowths of this principle are many and varied in the 'Exposition.' Notable is Philo's conviction that the unwritten laws of nature and the written laws of Moses, respectively and relatedly, represent *prima facie* evidence of divine beneficence and providence. These two laws, in Philo's view, point to the prospect that the human mind can be moved beyond its mortal confines and summoned to the limits of human comprehension of divine realities. But in what ways is this prospect attainable?

3.2.3 *Divine mitigation*

A third key principle is that God discloses his attributes and activities to human beings in a number of mediated ways. To this end, Philo sees in the world of the Pentateuch a company of agents, both incorporeal²⁰ and corporeal.²¹ Philo assigns arguably the chief role of agency to the divine *Logos*, a consideration seen in the *Allegorical Commentary* and elsewhere in other conceptions of *Logos* in Greek philosophy.²² Philo portrays the *Logos* as the deputised maker of the intelligible and sensible universes, the archetype

²⁰ Angelic beings as mediators in *Abr.* 115-18; Moses' metaphysical ascent in *Mos.* 2.288; on the Philonic notion that some can apprehend the divine through the divine being: *Praem.* 43-46.

²¹ Moses in *Spec.* 1.59; 2.201; *Praem.* 53; human parents in *Decal.* 107.

²² Cf. Chapter 2 (§ 2.4.3.4).

from which the human mind is copied.²³ The divine spirit is another key intermediary. In Philo's reading of Genesis 2.7, the divine spirit mediates a human aspirant's attainment of predictive truths and experience of inspired, ecstatic forms of divine realities.²⁴

A notable element in Philo's approach to divine mediation is his belief that any disclosure of intelligible realities is proportionately measured and distributed according to the cognitive limits of each human recipient.

Consider, for instance, Philo's reflection on the significance of the whole-burnt offering in Leviticus 1.3 in Book I of *On the Special Laws*. For Philo, Moses' institution of this offering is pregnant with several important truths, not least the human mind as the locus of aspiration to God (*Spec.* 1.201-05).

In this context, Philo describes the hallmark of one's advancement in knowledge as the recognition that God is both one and many. In keeping with his nature, God discloses himself to human beings in and through a variety of mediated ways:

²³ Cf. *Opif.* 16-20. A little later, Philo distills the *Logos* principle as follows: 'If you wish to use a formulation that has been stripped down to essentials, you might say that the intelligible cosmos is nothing else than the *Logos* of God as he is actually engaged in making the cosmos' (*Opif.* 24).

²⁴ Cf. Verbeke 1945:237-56.

ἐμοὶ δὲ εὐθυβολώτερον
σκοπούμεν· δοκεῖ τοῦτο
δηλοῦσθαι· ἢ τιμῶσα ψυχὴ τὸ ὄν
δι' αὐτὸ τὸ ὄν ὀφείλει μὴ
ἀλόγως μὴδ' ἀνεπιστημόνως
ἀλλὰ σὺν ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ λόγῳ
τιμᾶν. ὁ δὲ περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγος
τομὴν ἐπιδέχεται καὶ διαίρεσιν
καθ' ἐκάστην τῶν θείων
δυνάμεων καὶ ἀρετῶν· ὁ γὰρ
θεὸς ἀγαθὸς τέ ἐστι καὶ ποιητὴς
καὶ γεννητὴς τῶν ὄλων καὶ
προνοητικὸς ὧν ἐγέννησε, σωτὴρ
τε καὶ εὐεργέτης, μακαριότητος
καὶ πάσης εὐδαιμονίας
ἀνάπλεως· ὧν ἕκαστον καὶ καθ'
αὐτὸ ἰδίᾳ σεμνὸν καὶ ἐπαινετὸν
καὶ μετὰ τῶν ὁμογενῶν
ἐξεταζόμενον.

The soul which honours the
Existent having the Existent
Himself only in view, ought to
honour Him not irrationally nor
ignorantly, **but with**
knowledge and reason. And
when we reason about Him
we recognise in Him partition
and division into each of the
Divine powers and
excellences. For God is good,
He is the maker and begetter of
the universe and His
providence is over what He has
begotten; He is a savior and a
benefactor, and has the
plenitude of all blessedness and
all happiness. Each of these
attributes calls for veneration
and praise, both separately in
itself and when ranked with its
congeners.

Philo later presents the Mosaic understanding of divine powers on the same conceptual plane as the Platonic notion of Forms. Both are equally valid ways of expressing the principle of divine mediation.²⁵ The notion of Plato's Forms being co-efficient with the thoughts of God was a prominent feature of Philo's Middle Platonic milieu, as seen in Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE)²⁶ and Atticus and Alcinous, both second-century Middle Platonists.²⁷ Philo's tendency to commingle the Mosaic concept of divine powers or creative *logoi* in the mind

²⁵ *Spec.* 1.327-29.

²⁶ E.g. Seneca, *Ep.* 65.7-10.

²⁷ Cf. Sorabji 2004:144-45 for discussion of Atticus and Alcinous in relation to Philo, *Opif.* 20-22.

of God, on the one hand, with the Platonic concept of Forms, on the other, reflects one of the more prominent metaphysical moves in Middle Platonism.²⁸

3.2.4 *Primacy of the Pentateuch of Moses*

Close inspection of the 'Exposition' reveals that Philo typically works within the set of principles considered above. Yet, by Philo's own measure, the 'Exposition' does not centre on a set of abstract principles. Nor does it treat the subject of theological knowledge, or any other subject for that matter, in a purely systematic fashion.²⁹

Philo instead keeps his nose close to the biblical text. First and foremost an interpreter of the Greek Jewish Bible of his day, Philo's approach to theological knowledge is borne out of Mosaic materials which, when invested with philosophical ideas, take further shape as varied discourses on the mind's aspiration to attain knowledge about and from the divine.

²⁸ Cf. Haas 2003:268; Osborn 2005:152. See also Daniel 1975:134 n.1 who observes on the basis of *Spec.* 1.209: 'Le premier pourrait bien être une sorte de décalque grec de *middôth* («mesures», «qualités»), qui s'applique aux attributs de Dieu dans l'hébreu mishnique.'

²⁹ As recognised at least as far back as Drummond 1888:10 (vol 2).

As we turn to key discourses that fall under the first of our research questions, it is worth remembering that what we have in this series is not a single viewpoint or perspective from Philo on this subject. Rather, what we have is a kind of exegetical progression whereby Philo highlights (1) creation, (2) the patriarchs, and (3) Moses as his core philosophical and allegorical anchor points within the Pentateuch.³⁰ As we shall see, this progression corresponds roughly with Philo's varied discourses on noetic ascent within the 'Exposition.'

Following Philo's exegetical progression and correlating this with Philo's way of arranging his 'Exposition' promises to offer us a sharper picture of the set of epistemological discourses that animates the 'Exposition' in ways congruent with non-Jewish literary and philosophical sensibilities.

3.3

Philo's approach to the human mind in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition'

The influence that Plato's account of creation exerted on philosophers and religiously-minded thinkers in antiquity was substantial and varied. The *Timaeus*, in particular, served as a foundational text for many communities in

³⁰ Cf. Borgen 1997:52-53.

Philo's first-century environment.³¹ As we shall see, Platonic perspectives on creation and the human mind provide key interpretive parameters within which Philo reads the creation accounts of Moses.³² As such, it is useful to start with a brief sketch of Plato's views on this subject and how they were adapted in the period leading up to and including Philo's first-century setting.³³

In what follows, we will consider Plato's approach to the human mind (§3.3.1 below), related Aristotelian perspectives (§3.3.2), and pertinent aspects of Philo's engagement with Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives (§3.3.3). This will enable us to consider our first research question (§3.3.4) as stated at the outset of this chapter.

3.3.1 Plato's model of the human mind

In Plato's era, there were two dominant approaches to what human beings can know and how they can know such things. On the one hand, Sophists affirmed the Heraclitean portrait of a material, sensory world in which a

³¹ Cf. Niehoff 2008:161-91 (esp. 170-77).

³² Cf. *Opif.* 9-22. Winston 1985:47 notes that Plato's *Timaeus* 'served as Philo's prime model for his own treatise on creation....' On how Philo's conceptions of mind are rooted in his conceptions of God: Heitman 1940:47-64; Winston 1984:372-416 (esp. 372-77).

³³ On this point, scholars generally see Stoic influences as secondary to Platonic ideas; but see Radice 2006:127-49 for discussion of how Philo maintains Stoic commitments vis-à-vis his Platonist tendencies.

state of unending flux was normative. Out of this came the recognition that human knowledge of this world, derived from the senses, is at best partial and uncertain.

On the other hand, philosophers following the monistic approach of Parmenides, remarkably influential,³⁴ envisaged an immutable reality that existed beyond the material realm. Human knowledge of this reality, it was claimed, derives from human reason and the concomitant act of contemplating the true nature of things. In this vein, the human senses produced mere opinion (δόξα) about the fluctuations of this world.

Plato's views reflect a commingling of these two dominant approaches. In keeping with his Parmenidean commitments, Plato endorses the idea of a divine first principle that is singular not variegated in essence,³⁵ unchangeable in character,³⁶ the existence of which lies beyond the domain of being.³⁷ Yet Plato concedes that human beings, though inhabiting a world

³⁴ On Parmenides' challenge to the procedure of his day (which featured primarily a move from effect to primary cause), Gerson 1990:21 writes: 'Parmenides' challenge is so penetrating and his arguments are so powerful that the history of Greek philosophical theology after Parmenides can be illuminatingly read as a series of responses to this great figure.'

³⁵ *Parm.* 137C-D; cf. Gerson 1990:68-69.

³⁶ *Resp.* 380D-381C.

³⁷ *Resp.* 509B.

of constant flux, can nonetheless attain some knowledge of the physical world through the senses.³⁸

An outgrowth of this mixture of views, Plato sharply divides what is intelligible and transcendent, on the one hand, from what is sensible and immanent, on the other. The former belongs to the domain of being (i.e. the world of the Forms), the latter to the domain of becoming.³⁹ By portraying this divine first principle as a kind of noetic sun,⁴⁰ Plato regards it as *both* the singular, supreme object of human intellection and vision *and* the only means by which such vision is possible. Consistent with this view, Plato insists the first principle is higher and more beautiful than knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) itself, just as the sun is superior to light and sight.

Not only is human knowledge of the world of Forms possible, says Plato, it represents an entirely suitable and satisfying end for human life. Here we

³⁸ Cf. Fine 1990:85-115; but note Plato's sceptical view of the human capacity to attain knowledge of the physical world, as seen in many passages in the *Phaedo* and the metaphors in the *Republic* e.g. the Sun (*Resp.* 6.508B-509C), the Line (*Resp.* 509D-511E), and the Cave (*Resp.* 7.514A,-518C; 532B, 539E).

³⁹ *Tim.* 28A-C; on the distinction between being and becoming in Plato: Bolton 1975:66-95; see further Frede 1988:37-52 who endorses a conception of the metaphysical picture involved in the Platonic distinction between the domain of being (wherein inhabitants are endowed with essences or essential natures) and the domain of becoming (wherein inhabitants are not endowed); but note Code 1988:53-60 for a critique of Frede's claims primarily on linguistic grounds.

⁴⁰ *Resp.* 508A-509B.

encounter two important strands of thought in Plato, the first of which illuminates the second strand on the nature of the human mind.

First, Plato introduces an element of plurality whereby his account of reality allowed an absolutely pure and singular first principle to co-exist alongside other elements of his ontology, e.g., Forms, the Form of the Good, a demiurge, and *nous*, among others.⁴¹

This account of pluriform divine realities shapes Plato's thoughts on the origins and nature of the human mind. Among created things, Plato reckons, only human beings occupy a twofold residence in both the intelligible world of Forms and the sensible world of material things. Endowed in this way, each human mind has a native desire⁴² and capacity – developed by the rational processes of refutation,⁴³ division,⁴⁴ and recollection⁴⁵ – to move

⁴¹ Cf. Winston 1985:49-50 (further identifying young gods and the World Soul); see also Gerson 1990:49-81 who suggests that these elements of Plato's 'later ontology' are evident in the middle dialogues as well, the *Republic* in particular (esp. pp. 79-81).

⁴² *Symp.* 201-12.

⁴³ For a brief overview: Mittelstrass 1988:126-42; on the place of *ἐλεγχος* in Plato's early and middle dialogues: Robinson 1984. Vlastos (1983:27-58; 1985; 1988) remains seminal on this matter, but note counterviews in Kraut 1983:59-70 and Polansky 1985:247-59. On the place of *ἐλεγχος* in Aristotle's *Republic*: Taran 1985:85-109; O'Neill 1988:167-85. On the limits of Socratic *ἐλεγχος*: Benson 1987:67-85.

⁴⁴ For an overview: Philip 1966; on Aristotle's use of division: Battin 1975:155-70.

⁴⁵ Esp. *Meno* 81C; see also *Phaed.* 73C-75C. On Plato's theory in the *Meno*: Cornford 1971:108-27; in the *Phaedo*: Ackrill 1973:177-95; Morgan 1984:237-51; Lindenmuth 1988:11-18; in the *Phaedrus*: Lebeck 1972:267-90. More generally see Thomas

from the world of sense to do what the demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* is portrayed as productively doing, namely, contemplating the intelligible Forms.⁴⁶

One of Plato's more well-known sayings from the *Theaetetus* captures this view:

But bad things cannot be destroyed, Theodorus, for there must always be something opposed to the good. Nor can they gain a place among gods. Rather, by necessity they haunt mortal nature and this place here. That's why one must try to flee from here to there as quickly as possible. Fleeting is becoming like god so far as one can, and to become like god is to become just and pious with wisdom.⁴⁷

Similarly, Plato writes in the *Republic*:

...the instrument of knowledge (*nous*) can only be turned by a movement of the whole soul from the world of becoming to the world of being, and learn

1977:328-49; Scott 1987:346-66. Plato's theory of *anamnesis* remained influential to the compositional period of Plotinus: McCumber 1978:160-67.

⁴⁶ Cf. Gerson 1990:79-81. For a similar idea, see Solmsen 1942:92: 'The place of [Plato's] god is on the boundary between Being and Becoming. He is the principle through which the physical world of Becoming partakes of the qualities of Being.'

⁴⁷ *Theaet.* 176A5-B2; cf. *Phaedr.* 246A-249D. Assimilation features more prominently in Plato's early and middle dialogues (Gerson 1990:63).

by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of beings, the Good.⁴⁸

Upon reaching the Form of the Good in the intelligible domain of being, says Plato in the *Symposium*, the aspirant attains immortality, akin to friendship with God.⁴⁹ In this general line of thought, Plato can say elsewhere that it is possible for the rational soul to experience kinship with the incorporeal Forms.⁵⁰

The notion of one's otherworldly assimilation to God (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) would serve useful for some of his later students as a sort of shorthand for describing the goal of the philosophical life.⁵¹ But would other students dissent with this approach to the human knowledge of the divine?

⁴⁸ *Resp.* 518C; cf. *Tim.* 90A-92C. On Plato's approach to the Form of the Good in relation to his doctrines of soul and mind, see Gerson 1990:57-71.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Symp.* 210-12.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Phaed.* 79D; *Resp.* 490B; 611E; *Tim.* 47C; 90A-D; cf. Winston 1984:373.

⁵¹ See Armstrong 2004:172 n.2 for references to Eudorus, Alcinous, Plutarch, and the so-called Anonymous Commentator on Plato's *Theaetetus*. For a related notion in Plotinus: *Enn.* 1.2.19.

3.3.2 Aristotelian perspectives on the Platonic views of the mind

Although Aristotle and Plato share principal Parmenidean commitments,⁵² the former's engagement with the latter's views is complex and on some matters highly contentious.⁵³ According to ancient sources, Aristotle was familiar with his teacher's views on the divine first principle or the Good.⁵⁴ Indeed, with Cicero comes an indication of a major rift between master and student: 'Plato's god in the *Timaeus* created the world' while in Aristotle things 'have always existed.'⁵⁵ Notwithstanding this difference, the Platonic divide between the intelligible and sensible domains is a key area of general agreement which Aristotle adapts for his own aims.⁵⁶

In this regard, Aristotle offers an equivocal account, sometimes denying the Platonic notion of an ideal world and claiming that any form was inseparable from its matter.⁵⁷ On other occasions, Aristotle affirms the chasm between

⁵² Cf. Gerson 1990:27, 134-41.

⁵³ For instance, the issue of pre-cosmic chaos based on *Timaeus* 28B and 30A; for discussion of Aristotle's critique of the Platonic position (*Cael.* 279b32ff), see Dillon 2005:98-103.

⁵⁴ According to Simplicius (Commentary on Aristotle's *Phys.* 151.6 and 453.25), Aristotle, Speusippus, and Xenocrates, among others, wrote down Plato's lectures on the Good. Aristotle himself alleges that Plato in his later years lectured in the Academy on the generation of the Ideas from the One and the Indefinite Dyad, these speculations being part of the 'unwritten tradition.' See further Aristotle, *Metaph.* 1036b13-15, 1090b20-32.

⁵⁵ *Tusc.* 1.63 (reference to Plato), 1.70 (reference to Aristotle).

⁵⁶ As shown by Menn 1992:543-73 (esp. pp. 562-63).

⁵⁷ *De an.* 403a 3; *Metaph.* 1072b 21.

intelligible beings and sensible beings.⁵⁸ Above both groups of beings, however, Aristotle posits an immaterial cosmic intellect⁵⁹ and ultimate source of all movement, what he calls his 'unmoved mover.'⁶⁰ At the human level, this immaterial being is the highest form of human self-knowledge.⁶¹

In keeping with these views, Aristotle regards the human mind as imperfect but not ontologically different in kind from the transcendent intellect.⁶² Less clear is whether Aristotle allows for any notion that the human mind can ascend to the divine.⁶³ In this way, Aristotle seems to depart from Plato, though this picture is complicated by a host of interpretive and textual difficulties.⁶⁴ We come to more firm ground when we consider Aristotle's view of the mind's kinship with the

⁵⁸ *Metaph.* 1073a4-13.

⁵⁹ But see Lang 1981:321-336 for suggestion that Aristotle's unmoved mover is not moving outside the realm of physical science.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Metaph.* 1074a31-38; but see *Metaph.* 1074a14 for a suggestion of a plurality of such unmoved movers. This concept is fraught with interpretive difficulties and textual complexities. For overview of key issues: Easterling 1976:252-65; Stewart 1973:522-47.

⁶¹ Cf. Oehler 1974:493-506.

⁶² *Metaph.* 1072b14-16: 'And its activity [i.e. *noesis*] is like the best which we can have, but for a little while. For it exists in this manner eternally, which is impossible for us.' On this cf. Patzig 1979:33-49.

⁶³ *Eth. nic.* 1179a24-32.

⁶⁴ Solmsen 1971:171-82, for example, suggests that Aristotle's refutation of Plato's notion of a prime mover (*Phys.* 8.259b1-28) may have been composed for another context but inserted by a later editor.

divine: for Aristotle, those who think human beings can experience friendship with God are misguided.⁶⁵

3.3.3 *Stoic perspectives in relation to Platonic views of the mind*

By contrast, leading Stoics like Cicero and Seneca held that the human mind did indeed possess some degree of knowledge of the existence of a being of the highest possible power and purity.⁶⁶ In keeping with this view, the world came to be seen as the most superior thing that can be humanly conceived.⁶⁷ Within some Stoic orbits of ideas, then, it was believed that the existence of God was imprinted as part of the rational human mind.⁶⁸ In keeping with their view that the concept of God is imprinted on the human mind (which itself is a portion of the divine mind), some Stoics could say that the movements of human minds are nothing more than instruments for carrying out determined decisions since it is necessary that they be performed through such minds by the agency of fate.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Mag. Mor.* 1208b28-32. On the authenticity of this work: Cooper 1973:327-49; for counterview: Rowe 1975:160-72.

⁶⁶ Cf. collection of Stoic texts at *LS* 1.313-23; *BDAG* 680.

⁶⁷ Cf. Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.46-47: 'Mundo autem certe nihil est melius. Nec dubium quin quod animans sit habeatque sensum et rationem et mentem id sit melius quam id quod his careat. Ita efficitur animantem, sensus mentis rationis mundum esse compotem; qua ratione deum esse mundum concluditur' (LCL [Rackham] 1933:166); Seneca, *Nat.* 1.11-15.

⁶⁸ On this see Winston 1981:26-30; cf. Cicero, *Leg.* 1.22-25.

⁶⁹ Cicero, *Div.* 1.125-27; also *Fat.* 7-8.

3.3.4 Philo's engagement with non-Jewish perspectives

The leading schools which shaped Philo's first-century intellectual environment continued to debate Plato's understanding of the physical world.

According to John Dillon

[T]here had been a good deal of discussion in the Hellenistic schools, in the wake of Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's response in the *De caelo*, as to the logical and ontological status of the physical world, and...Philo was pretty well acquainted with the ins and outs of this.⁷⁰

One of these principal debates was whether the cosmos was eternal or created.⁷¹ In non-Jewish intellectual circles of Philo's day, this question was hotly debated (as sketched briefly above) and likely discussed (though not explicitly formulated) in ancient Jewish⁷² and early Christian⁷³ contexts. The details are too many to rehearse within the parameters of our present discussion.⁷⁴ What is helpful to recognise at this point is a fundamental

⁷⁰ Dillon 2005:106-07. For an analysis of Philo's ambivalence toward the physical world in light of motifs in Graeco-Roman Judaism: Anderson 2011.

⁷¹ On this debate in antiquity: Baltes 1976 *passim*.

⁷² References to creation *ex nihilo* in ancient Jewish literature at Sterling 1992a:15-41 (esp. 33-39); recent assessment at Bockmuehl 2012:253-70.

⁷³ Young 1991:144 suggests that only two passages from the New Testament (Rom 4.17; Heb 11.3) support the notion that 'a Jewish doctrine [of creation *ex nihilo*] was simply assumed by early Christianity.' See further Salvesen 1991:1-2 and references therein.

⁷⁴ On the idea of God's creation of matter itself in ancient Jewish sources composed or extant in Hebrew or Aramaic, see Bockmuehl 2012:253-70 (esp. 259-68). The doctrine

tension which Philo identifies and can be seen as animating his ways of reading the creation accounts of Moses.

In some sense, Philo seems to find the notion of creation at a point in time rather inconceivable.⁷⁵ It is a stance which seems to put Philo on the same broad conceptual plane as other contemporaries trained in Greek philosophy.⁷⁶ Though he is prepared to dismiss this conception of creation, Philo faces a theological problem in Moses' account of the cosmos in Genesis 1.1-5, as John Dillon notes:

He is certainly unwilling to give up the principle that the world is created by God; but his philosophical training alerts him to the problem of postulating creation at a point in time, with the attendant problem of the status of a pre-existing chaotic 'matter.' The device of postulating priority in order, or dignity, instead of time, will only work if one abandons, either explicitly or tacitly, the notion that there was a stage when the world was not, and when the Creator brought it into existence. This is something that Philo is quite unwilling to do in any explicit way, so we are left with a conundrum which has exercised the minds of the chief authorities in the field. It seems to me that, if we have to choose, Philo actually comes nearest to a version of the

finds no explicit terminological basis in scripture, finds Bockmuehl, but the 'meaning and substance' of the doctrine is 'firmly rooted in scripture and pre-Christian Jewish literature' (p. 270).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Opif.* 26-27; see further references given in Copan 1996:83 nn. 29-32. Sterling 1992a:32-39 conducts an extensive survey of the relevant Philonic evidence and concludes that 'Philo held a form of *creatio aeterna*' (p. 40).

⁷⁶ Cf. Dillon 2005:104-05.

original defence of Plato's position put forward by Speusippus and Xenocrates, which Aristotle criticizes in the *De caelo*.⁷⁷

To resolve this tension, Philo philosophically reinterprets Genesis 1.1-5 as an account of reality which Plato also described in the *Timaeus*.⁷⁸ 'Philo considered the biblical and the Platonic accounts of creation to be so congenial,' claims Maren Niehoff, 'that he claimed Mosaic origins for the ideas later expressed in the *Timaeus*.'⁷⁹ In keeping with this view, Philo affirms that all created things – including the human mind – are dependent upon a superior and external cause, namely the divine νοῦς and πρόνοια as revealed in the creation account of Moses.⁸⁰

Strikingly, on this view Philo constructs two lines of thought on the origin and nature of the human mind, taking advantage of the fact that Moses offers not one – but two – distinct yet related creation accounts in the book of Genesis.⁸¹ Given Philo's tendency to preserve different philosophical traditions on major areas of thought, as Thomas Tobin has suggested,⁸² it is

⁷⁷ Dillon 2005:105-06, citing Wolfson 1948:300-10; Winston 1981:10-21; Runia 1986b:287-89; Radice 1989:247-50.

⁷⁸ Dillon 2005:106, citing *Opif.* 13, 29-30.

⁷⁹ Niehoff 2008:43-44, citing *Aet.* 19; quote is from p. 44.

⁸⁰ *Opif.* 13; cf. Runia 2001:114-19, 152-55.

⁸¹ Cf. Kannengiesser 1967:277-96.

⁸² Cf. Tobin 1983, esp. 36-44.

useful to view these two lines as forming an interwoven whole. We turn now to these two lines of epistemological discourse.

3.3.5 *How does Philo variously conceive of the origin and nature of the human mind in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition'?*

Having considered key views in the relevant antecedent sources, we are prepared to consider the first in our set of three questions which forms our interrogative approach to Philo in Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis. Bearing in mind Philo's explicit outline of his 'Exposition' (as stated in *On Rewards and Punishments* §§1-3), we will probe this question with specific reference to his treatise, *On the Creation of the Cosmos*.

Philo interprets Genesis 1.27 and 2.7 in light of each other, as he does elsewhere in the 'Exposition'⁸³ and in the *Allegorical Commentary*.⁸⁴ This is certainly not original to Philo. It is a tendency that can be detected in other Jewish interpretations of creation around Philo's era.⁸⁵ This does not diminish the fact that Philo appreciates the merits and meanings of each text.

⁸³ *Spec.* 1.171; *Virt.* 203-05; see Tobin 1983:28-29, 87-90.

⁸⁴ Worthington 2011:143 n.19 cites *Her.* 55-57; *Det.* 83; *Plant.* 18-22; *Mut.* 223.

⁸⁵ E.g. *Wis.* 9.1-2 (drawing on Gen 1.28) and *Wis.* 9.15 (Gen 2.7); *Sir* 17.1-8; for more discussion: Tobin 1983:56-101.

Turning to Philo's appropriation of Genesis 1.27, it is notable that he draws on it not once *but twice*, interpreting it initially in *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §§69-88 and then using it later (§§134-47) as a sort of 'window' text through which he interprets another exegetical context, Genesis 2.7. In considering these factors, we are moving closer to understanding how these two readings animate Philo's rich and varied approach to the origins and nature of the human mind.

In what follows, we will examine how Philo conceives of the origins and nature of the human mind based on his reading of Genesis 1.27 (§3.3.5.1).

Then we will consider how Philo formulates his ideas on the same subject based on his reading of Genesis 2.7 (§3.3.5.2). This will lead us (§3.3.6) to the second of our research questions, how does Philo conceive of the potential of the human mind in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition'?

3.3.5.1 Philo's reading of Genesis 1.26-27

(On the Creation of the Cosmos 69-88)

In his first reading of Genesis 1.26-27, Philo concentrates on the relationship between God and humankind.⁸⁶ The biblical text prompts him to formulate two imperatives, the first of which is theological in orientation, the second more epistemological in orientation.

⁸⁶ Cf. Runia 2001:225.

After praising the excellence of Moses' words,⁸⁷ Philo establishes a theological imperative: 'God does not have a human shape' (§69).⁸⁸ In soundly rejecting any notion that God has a physical body, Philo is perhaps drawing on earlier interpretive traditions in Alexandria.⁸⁹ Such traditions were influenced at least in part by a blending of Stoic⁹⁰ and Platonic⁹¹ impulses to reinterpret or remove anthropomorphic conceptions of the divine. At a minimum, Philo is in line with indications in the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures to critique and correct anthropomorphisms used by early Hebrew writers.⁹²

In keeping with his theological imperative, Philo stresses an epistemological one. Prompted by the thought that God is incorporeal by nature, Philo uses Genesis 1.27 to illuminate the relation between God and humankind in terms of the incorporeal powers of intellect (νοῦς):

⁸⁷ Cf. *Opif.* 76, also 148.

⁸⁸ τὴν δ' ἐμφέρειαν μηδεὶς εἰκαζέτω σώματος χαρακτηρί· οὔτε γὰρ ἀνθρωπόμορφος ὁ θεὸς οὔτε θεοειδὲς τὸ ἀνθρώπειον σῶμα (*Opif.* 69).

⁸⁹ Tobin 1983:36-55; on the host of theological problems presented to interpreters before and after Philo: Salvesen 1991:2-7 (esp. p. 4).

⁹⁰ On Stoic uses of allegory to reinterpret anthropomorphisms in Homer and other epic material: Dawson 1992:23-72; Long 1992:41-66.

⁹¹ E.g. Plato, *Resp.* 377-81; cf. Menn 1992:564-67; Runia 2001:225.

⁹² To list a few (of many) examples: Exod 33.11; Num 6.25; Deut 34.10; Ps 34.16; Prov 15.3; Jer 5.3; Amos 9.8; Sir 11.12; 23.19; Bar 2.17. The tendency towards anti-anthropomorphism in the Greek translation, suggests Fritsch 1943:65, was 'strong enough to give the LXX a unique and a somewhat different conception of God from that which is found in the Hebrew Old Testament.' Anti-anthropomorphic tendencies can be seen in a variety of early Jewish works (e.g. 11Q^tgJob on Job 38.3; 40.7).

ἡ δὲ εἰκὼν λέλεκται κατὰ τὸν
τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμόνα νοῦν· πρὸς
γὰρ ἓνα τὸν τῶν ὅλων ἐκεῖνον ὡς
ἂν ἀρχέτυπον ὃ ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν
κατὰ μέρος ἀπεικονίσθη, τρόπον
τινὰ θεὸς ὢν τοῦ φέροντος καὶ
ἀγαλματοφοροῦντος αὐτόν· ὃν
γὰρ ἔχει λόγον ὁ μέγας ἡγεμὼν
ἐν ᾧ παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, τοῦτον ὡς
ἔοικε καὶ ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς ἐν
ἀνθρώπῳ·

The term ‘image’ has been used here with regard to the director of the soul, the intellect. On that single intellect of the universe, as on an archetype, the intellect in each individual human being was modeled. In a sense it is a god of the person who carries it and bears it around as a divine image. For it would seem that the same position that the Great Director holds in the entire cosmos is held by the human intellect in the human being.

ἀόρατός τε γάρ ἐστιν αὐτὸς τὰ
πάντα ὁρῶν καὶ ἄδηλον ἔχει τὴν
οὐσίαν τὰς τῶν ἄλλων
καταλαμβάνων·

It is itself invisible, yet it sees all things. Its own nature is unclear, yet it comprehends the natures of other things.

In this rich passage, Philo characterises the origins and nature of the human mind in a single stroke. First, regarding its *origins*, Philo locates the human intellect in the realm of incorporeality by advancing his thesis, to use Runia’s words here, ‘that it is in respect of his intellect that the human being is created in the divine image.’⁹³

To make this point, Philo refers to both God and the human mind with the language of νοῦς (‘intellection’) and not in the broader term διάνοια,

⁹³ Runia 2001:228. For the view that Philo’s use of the *Timaeus* may have been mediated through Platonist commentaries of his day, see Boyancé 1963a:64-110.

‘understanding.’⁹⁴ Given that νοῦς was ‘a standard way of naming one divine principle’ which featured prominently in philosophical currents of Philo’s day,⁹⁵ Philo’s choice of term perhaps reflects his interest in conversing with broader Jewish⁹⁶ and non-Jewish⁹⁷ notions of God as one who exists beyond anthropomorphic conceptions. Philo’s focus on intellection would feature less prominently in later rabbinic literature.⁹⁸

Second, regarding *the nature of the human mind*, Philo maintains a rather sceptical stance. ‘It is itself invisible, yet it sees all things,’ says Philo. ‘*Its own nature is unclear*, yet it comprehends the nature of other things’ (*Opif.* 69, italics added). The human being can certainly apply his or her intellect to the arts (τέχναις) and sciences (ἐπιστήμαις) in order to investigate and contemplate the

⁹⁴ On the difficult question of what this word meant in antiquity, see Menn 1992:554-55 who observes that *nous* is typically associated with that which someone possesses when she acts or thinks rationally, and on this basis, tentatively translates it as ‘reason’ or ‘intelligence.’

⁹⁵ Cf. Menn 1992:551-53, quote is from p. 553. It has been suggested (Arnaldez 1961:186 n.1) that Plato, *Laws* 12.963A is a primary influence; Tobin 1983:45 however is more likely on target in seeing Plato’s *Timaeus* (30A-C, 46D) as the primary Platonic context for *Opif.* 69.

⁹⁶ Cf. Levison 1988: 66-68 (noting a similarity with Wis 2.23); Runia 1988a:48-75 (observing the portrayal of rational mind in *Opif.* 69 with Philonic readings of Exod 7.1 and Ezek. Trag.).

⁹⁷ On Philo’s Stoic commitments in this passage: Tobin 1983:44-46; Radice 2006:127-49; on pertinent notions in wider Greek thought and culture, see Sandelin 2001:122-38.

⁹⁸ Cf. Urbach 1987:249, Runia 2001:229-30; but see Borgen 1997:236 who suggests that Philo’s focus on intellection in *Opif.* 69 is similar to what one finds in writings such as *Lev. Rab.* 4.8; *Midr. Ps.* 103.4-5; *b. Berakoth* 10a. He also compares Philo’s *Opif.* 69 and *b. Ber.* 10a with Seneca, *Ep.* 65.24.

nature of all sensible things. Yet, Philo maintains a sceptical stance: one cannot know the nature of his or her own mind.⁹⁹

To be sure, Philo adopts a sceptical stance elsewhere in his *Allegorical Commentary*.¹⁰⁰ In this interpretive context, however, Philo's scepticism is perhaps borne out of his fundamental worldview, particularly as it is instantiated in his belief that the domains of God and the cosmos are analogous with the microcosmic domain of the human intellect, respectively.¹⁰¹ In keeping with his essentialist worldview, Philo adheres to the notion that if God is incomprehensible, then *both* the nature of the heaven *and* the nature of the mind are not fully comprehensible.¹⁰²

3.3.5.2 Philo's reading of Genesis 2.7 in light of Genesis 1.27 (*On the Creation of the Cosmos* 134-47)

Having considered how Genesis 1.27 provokes Philo to describe the origin and nature of the human mind vis-à-vis the image of God (*Opif.* 69-71) which in turn prompts him to examine the place of human beings in relation to the cosmos

⁹⁹ On these themes in relation to broader notions of cosmic dance in antiquity: Miller 1986:56-80.

¹⁰⁰ cf. *Leg. All.* 1.91; *Mut.* 10; *Somn.* 1.30-32; Nikiprowetzky 1977:184-92; Runia 2001:228; cf. Chapter 2 (§ 2.5.5).

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Abr.* 74; in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Migr.* 192-94. As Runia 2001:227 notes, this also features in Stoic thought, e.g. Cicero (*Somn. Scip.* 26) and Seneca (*Ep.* 65.24).

¹⁰² Cf. Mansfeld 1990:3117-21.

(*Opif.* 77-88), we will now examine Philo's interpretive encounter with Genesis 2.7, the second of Moses' accounts of the creation of man.

Elsewhere in the *Allegorical Commentary*,¹⁰³ Philo uses Genesis 1.27 and 2.7 as a pair of companion texts, with one text sharpening the other, and vice versa. In notable places in that series,¹⁰⁴ Philo depicts the ἄνθρωπος of Genesis 1.27 as the model/genus from whom the ἄνθρωπος of Genesis 2.7 derives as a copy/species. This is what he does in his first reading of Genesis 1.27 (cf. *Opif.* 76). Does he make a similar interpretive move here?

Characteristically, the answer is yes and no. Yes in the sense that Philo draws on Platonic exegesis to compose Mosaic portraits of two vastly different types of human beings. But the answer is no insofar as Philo does not use the contrastive language of genera and species. Philo writes:

¹⁰³ *Leg. All.* 1.31-32; cf. Tobin 1983:126 suggests that the 'heavenly human being' of *Leg. All.* 1.31-32 is the human being in *Opif.* 134; cf. also Dillon 1977:176; but see Runia 2001:323 for critique and a call for caution on this question of relationship.

¹⁰⁴ *Leg. All.* 2.13; *Mut.* 223; *Her.* 164. Note the use of Gen 1.27 and 2.7 in the *Questions* (*QG* 1.4; *QE* 2.29, 40, 46). On this point, Runia, 1988:69 n.91 further cites Goodenough 1935:226f; Meeks 1967:364; Meeks 1968:124ff; Van der Horst 1983:25.

ὁ μὲν γὰρ διαπλασθεὶς αἰσθητὸς
ἤδη μετέχων ποιότητος, ἐκ
σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς συνεστώς,
ἄνθρωπος ἢ γυνή, φύσει θνητός· ὁ δὲ
κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα ἰδέα τις ἢ γένος
ἢ σφραγίς, νοητός, ἀσώματος,
οὔτ' ἄρρεν οὔτε θῆλυ, ἀφθαρτος
φύσει.

For the human being who has
been moulded as sense-
perceptible object already
participates in quality, consists
of body and soul, is either man
or woman, and is by nature
mortal. The human being after
the image is a kind of idea or
genus or seal, is perceived by
the intellect, incorporeal,
neither male nor female, and is
immortal by nature.

Commenting on this passage, David Runia highlights these major differences,
which are set forth below in table form:¹⁰⁵

Human Being after the Image (Gen 1.27; <i>Opif.</i> 69-88)	Human Being Moulded from the Earth (Gen 2.7; <i>Opif.</i> 134-47)
Object of thought	Object of sense-perception
Kind of idea or genus or seal	Participating in quality
Incorporeal	Composed of body and soul
Neither male nor female	Either man or woman
By nature immortal	By nature mortal

In portraying the ἄνθρωπος of Genesis 2.7 as a composite being (*Opif.* 134-47),
Philo is in line with similar currents of Greek thought.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, his portrayal
of the composite formation of man is not far from descriptions which feature in

¹⁰⁵ Runia 2001:321.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1177b30-1178a8. Aristotle defines the human being as an animal with a tripartite soul (*Top.* 133a30-34) and the capability to acquire knowledge (*Top.* 130b8-10) and deliberate (*Hist. an.* 488b24; *Pol.* 1332b5).

some Qumran,¹⁰⁷ early Jewish,¹⁰⁸ and rabbinic literature.¹⁰⁹ To sharpen his point, however, Philo deepens his analysis of the functions of God and how this relates to the creation of the composite human being.

First, Philo focuses on the *question of divine functions*. Reading Genesis 2.7 philosophically, Philo draws a key distinction: in one sense, God is the ‘Father and Director of all things.’¹¹⁰ This entails the view that God is the one who brings the incorporeal soul of this human being into existence. In another sense, and without suffering any diminishment or injury, God is the ‘Craftsman’ (τεχνίτης), the one who takes clay and moulds the body of this human being.¹¹¹

Philo’s bipartite formulation seems consistent with his view of God as both incorruptible *and* inherently good and thereby one who is completely absolved

¹⁰⁷ See Hughes 2006:46 for numerous references of the idiom ‘creature of clay, kneaded with water’ in the *Hodayot*; these references, says Hughes, suggest an indirect connection to Gen 2.7 in the first instance, though possibly also to other biblical texts like Job 10.9; 33.6; Isa. 29.16; 41.25.

¹⁰⁸ E.g. Wis. 15.11; Sir. 17.1-12; perhaps John 20.22. On similarities with Wis: Poirier 1994:1-22; on related views on the origins of humanity in Sirach: Levison 1988:33-48; Collins 2004:293-308. On indications of Gen 2.7 in John 20.22: Menken 2012:91.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Kovelman 2004:123-45 (esp. 133-35) citing e.g. *Gen Rab.* 8.1; see further Boyarin 1993:78-80, 231-34 for difference in Philonism and rabbinism on notions of genders.

¹¹⁰ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ ἡγεμόνος τῶν πάντων (*Opif.* 135).

¹¹¹ *Opif.* 135; cf. Fossum 1985:207 suggests that Philo privileges the ‘Father and Director’ over the Craftsman based on the latter’s contact with the sensible realm; for critique, see Runia 2001:326.

from any responsibility for human evil, suffering or variegation.¹¹² It is inconceivable, says Philo (in line with Plato), for the incorporeal and uncreated God to come into contact with any made and mortal substances in the domain of becoming.

As part of his theological commitments, Philo exploits the phrase ‘inbreathed into the face’ in Genesis 2.7 to identify a suitable intermediary (the divine spirit) and align its activity with ‘Father and Director of all things.’ Invested in this way, Genesis 2.7 speaks to both the aseity of God, on the one hand, and the accommodation of God to humanity via the divine spirit.

This feeds into Philo’s discussion of the *question of a twofold human nature*. To see the contrast, it is helpful to recall that Philo reads Genesis 1.27 (*Opif.* 69-88) with attention cast almost entirely on the relationship between God and the image-bearing human intellect (νοῦς). Here, Philo reads Genesis 2.7 with an alternative portrait in view: the human being is a composite creature, formed of *both* divine spirit *and* corporeal body, a mix of mortal and immortal natures.

In this vein, Philo sharpens his analysis, upholding the human mind and soul as divine in origin and thus immortal in nature whilst regarding the senses of the

¹¹² Cf. *Opif.* 75. Philo’s adherence to the Platonic notion of the world as eternally evil is more pronounced in the *Allegorical Commentary*. See e.g. *Plant.* 53; *Det.* 177; *Fug.* 61-63 where Philo explicitly quotes Plato’s *Theaetetus* 176A-B.

human body as not divine in origin and thus mortal in nature (*Opif.* 134-39).¹¹³

Guided by this analysis, Philo considers the origins and nature of this type of human mind.

3.3.5.3 Origin and nature of the human mind (διάνοια) based on Genesis 2.7

Philo's interpretation of Genesis 2.7 occurs in *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §§134-47. We immediately notice two things. First, in his portrayal of the human mind, Philo uses *διάνοια* instead of *νοῦς* (which he used earlier in his first reading of Genesis 1.27). By using this term, Philo seems to step back from the philosophical notion of an intelligible *νοῦς*; at the same time, he moves closer to how Plato might have perhaps construed *διάνοια*, namely as a state of mind that operates primarily in the domain of sense-perception.¹¹⁴

In this state, the mind is aware of its quest for divine knowledge but unable to distinguish any of the Forms from its particulars.¹¹⁵ This terminological shift perhaps reflects Philo's broader approach to the creation accounts in Genesis 1

¹¹³ On the relationship between God and the rational human mind from theological and philosophical perspectives, see Runia 1988a:48-75.

¹¹⁴ Plato, *Resp.* 511D 4-5.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Bedu-Addo 1979:89-110.

and 2, with the former (Gen 1) representing the world of intelligible being, the latter (Gen 2) signifying the world of sense-perceptible becoming.¹¹⁶

This shift also raises an obvious and important point of tension for Philo: *how does one conceive of the origins and nature of the human mind from the standpoint of the mind's domicile in the physical body? And to what extent, if any, does the mind's alliance with the senses relate to what Moses says in Genesis 1.27 concerning the origins and nature of the human mind?*

This point of tension seems to explain at least in part why one Greek concept dominates Philo's reading of Genesis 2.7. This is the concept of συγγένεια (lit. partaking in the same *genos*), the idea of a family relationship between the human and the divine. In what follows, we consider how Genesis 2.7 prompts Philo to enlist this concept to address this key tension in ancient epistemology.

3.3.5.4 Kinship with God based on the agency of the divine spirit

Philo notably employs the language of the divine spirit. Consider how Philo conceives of this divine agent in this exegetical context:

¹¹⁶ Cf. Sterling 1995:380-81.

ὁ γὰρ ἐνεφύσησεν, οὐδὲν ἦν
ἕτερον ἢ πνεῦμα θεῖον ἀπὸ τῆς
μακαρίας καὶ εὐδαίμονος
φύσεως ἐκείνης ἀποικίαν τὴν
ἐνθάδε στειλάμενον ἐπ' ὠφελείᾳ
τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν, ἵν' εἰ καὶ
θνητόν ἐστι κατὰ τὴν ὁρατὴν
μερίδα, κατὰ γοῦν τὴν ἀόρατον
ἀθανατίζεται. διὸ καὶ κυρίως ἄν
τις εἴποι τὸν ἄνθρωπον θνητῆς
καὶ ἀθανάτου φύσεως εἶναι
μεθόριον ἑκατέρας ὅσον
ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι μετέχοντα καὶ
γεγενῆσθαι θνητὸν ὁμοῦ καὶ
ἀθάνατον, θνητὸν μὲν κατὰ τὸ
σῶμα, κατὰ δὲ τὴν διάνοιαν
ἀθάνατον.

What he breathed in was
nothing else than the divine
spirit which has emigrated [lit.
'has established a colony'¹¹⁷]
here from that blessed and
flourishing nature for the
assistance of our kind, in order
that, even if it is mortal with
regard to its visible part, at
least with regard to its invisible
part, it would be immortalised.
For this reason it would be
correct to say that the human
being stands on the borderline
between mortal and immortal
nature. Sharing in both to the
extent necessary, he has come
into existence as a creature
which is mortal and at the same
time immortal, mortal in
respect of the body, immortal in
respect of the mind.

Philo's recourse to the concept of πνεῦμα θεῖον is striking. Up to this point in his reading of Genesis 1.1-2.6 (*Opif.* 1-133), Philo has used πνεῦμα and its variants to signify the naturalistic effects of wind.¹¹⁸ As he encounters Genesis 2.7 (*Opif.* 134-47), Philo seems to enlist πνεῦμα per its field of meanings as a permeating

¹¹⁷ Cf. Runia 2001:327, citing further *Virt.* 217; *Her.* 283, *Plant.* 18.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Opif.* 29, 30, 41, 58, 80, 113, 131. Laurentin 1951:390-437 still remains quite useful for discussion of the primary fields of meaning of πνεῦμα in Philo: (1) air; (2) active bond between created elements; (3) human soul; and (4) prophetic inspiration. On breath as understood in Stoic material terms: e.g. Galen, *On bodily mass* 7.525, 9-14 (*SVF* 2.439); further examples at *LS* 1.282-85.

principle of divine intelligence,¹¹⁹ a move further strengthened by the key verb 'breathed' (ἐνεφύσησεν).¹²⁰ Indeed, it is this text which prompts Philo to use the phrase 'divine spirit' (πνεύματος θει) for the first time in the 'Exposition.'¹²¹

Along with his insistence on the agency of the divine spirit, Philo concedes a point that to him is rather obvious from the evidence of human history: within each human being, the alliance between one's reason, soul, and senses has degenerated.¹²² But rather than read this state of human affairs into his interpretation of Genesis 2.7, Philo puts a more positive spin on his appraisal of the human body and senses, upholding instead on several occasions what he calls the beauty and perfection of the body of this moulded human being.¹²³

This comports with some Stoic views which located πνεῦμα in its original medical or therapeutic context.¹²⁴ Given Philo's eclectic interest elsewhere in Stoic ideas,¹²⁵ it is entirely plausible that Philo is investing his reading of the *Timaeus*

¹¹⁹ Cf. Diog. Laert. 7.138-39 (*SVF* 2.634); BDAG, 832-36.

¹²⁰ The Hebrew נָשָׁא qal in Gen 2.7 was typically rendered with the verb ἐμφυσάω and related cognates; see also Wis. 15.11 and seen later in Aquila's translation of Gen 2.7.

¹²¹ Twice in *Opif.* 135, once in *Opif.* 144. Elsewhere in the 'Exposition,' Philo uses the phrase 'divine spirit' in *Jos.* 116; *Spec.* 4.49, 4.123; *Virt.* 217. In the *Allegorical Commentary*, see *Leg. All.* 1.33; *Gig.* 23, 28, 29, 47, 53; *Deus* 2; *Plant.* 24; *Her.* 55, 57. In the *Questiones*, see *QGE* 1.51; 2.59.

¹²² *Opif.* 140-41.

¹²³ *Opif.* 136-38, 140, 145.

¹²⁴ Verbeke 1945:11-15.

¹²⁵ For a brief overview of Philonic areas of interest, see Levy 2009:146-71.

with nuances of a more Stoic bent that saw πνεῦμα as an agent that brings about therapeutic well-being.¹²⁶

To enrich his positive appraisal of the body and senses of the Genesis 2.7 man, Philo employs the language of *human assimilation to God*. Here we move closer to seeing the significance Philo assigns to the agency of the divine πνεῦμα.

Exploiting this Platonic commonplace,¹²⁷ Philo portrays the harmony existing between the mind, soul, and body of the human being depicted in Genesis 2.7:

On the Creation of the Cosmos §144

συγγενῆς τε καὶ ἀγχίσπορος ὢν
τοῦ ἡγεμόνος, ἅτε δὴ πολλοῦ
ρύντος εἰς αὐτὸν τοῦ θείου
πνεύματος, πάντα καὶ λέγειν
καὶ πράττειν ἐσπούδαζεν εἰς
ἀρέσκειαν τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ
βασιλέως, ἐπόμενος κατ' ἵχνος
αὐτῷ ταῖς ὁδοῖς, ἃς λεωφόρους
ἀνατέμνουσιν ἀρεταί, διότι

He was closely related and akin
to the Director, because the
divine spirit had flowed into
him in ample measure, and so
all his words and actions were
undertaken in order to please
the Father and King, in whose
footsteps he followed along the
highways that the virtues mark
out, because only those souls

¹²⁶ For more on how Philo exploits Stoic nuances located in his (and contemporary) readings of Plato's *Timaeus*, see Reydam-Schils 1995:85-102.

¹²⁷ Plato, *Theat.* 176b1; *Resp.* 500c5, 613b1; *Tim.* 90c8; cf. Runia 2001:342-44 for further references to numerous Middle Platonic and patristic texts. Verbeke 1945:236-60 posits Posidonius as a significant but not overriding influence on Philo's approach to the divine spirit. This view might reflect a consensus view, popular in earlier decades (1940-50s), that Philo was influenced primarily by Stoic ideas; this is no longer the majority opinion, though there has been a recent surge of interest in understanding Philo's supposed ambiguous attitude to the Stoicism of his day, as has been suggested recently (cf. Buch-Hansen 2010:105-57, esp. 108-10). In this Philonic passage, the Platonic link is more apparent than the Stoic one.

μόναις ψυχαῖς θέμις
προσέρχεσθαι τέλος ἡγουμέναις
τὴν πρὸς τὸν γεννήσαντα θεὸν
ἐξομοίωσιν.

are permitted to approach him
who consider the goal of their
existence to be assimilation to
the God who brought them
forth.

3.3.5.5 Kinship with God based on the agency of the divine *Logos*

The rather remarkable picture above of human kinship with God, Philo insists, is an instantiation of the agency of the divine spirit. This is in keeping with what he states explicitly in an earlier passage (*Opif.* 139) and holds implicitly here: the divine spirit is active not only in the domain of human reason (διάνοια) but also in the domain of human senses.

A little later, Philo revisits the idea of family relationship, but noticeably he drops the language of divine spirit. In place of it, and perhaps as a way to shield Moses from charges of an overly materialistic or immanentistic system of thought, Philo revisits the Mosaic notion that the mind's kinship is with the divine *Logos*:

ἢ δὲ συγγένεια τίς; πᾶς
ἄνθρωπος κατὰ μὲν τὴν διάνοιαν
ὠκείωται λόγῳ θεῷ, τῆς
μακαρίας φύσεως ἐκμαγεῖον ἢ
ἀπόσπασμα ἢ ἀπαύγασμα
γεγονώς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν τοῦ
σώματος κατασκευὴν ἅπαντι τῷ
κόσμῳ· συγκέκερται γὰρ ἐκ τῶν
αὐτῶν, γῆς καὶ ὕδατος καὶ ἀέρος
καὶ πυρός, ἐκάστου τῶν
στοιχείων εἰσενεγκόντος τὸ
ἐπιβάλλον μέρος πρὸς
ἐκπλήρωσιν αὐταρκεστάτης
ὕλης, ἣν ἔδει λαβεῖν τὸν
δημιουργόν, ἵνα τεχνιτεύσῃ τὴν
ὁρατὴν ταύτην εἰκόνα·

What does this family relationship consist of? Every human being, as far as his mind is concerned, is akin to the divine *Logos* and has come into being as a casting (*ἐκμαγεῖον*) or fragment (*ἀπόσπασμα*) or effulgence (*ἀπαύγασμα*) of the blessed nature, but in the structure of his body he is related to the entire cosmos. For it is a compound made of the same things, earth and water and air and fire, each of the elements making the required contribution for the completion of an entirely sufficient material, which the creator had to take to hand in order to fabricate this visible image.

What are we to make of Philo's use of assimilation language? It has been suggested that Philo's blending of this Platonic concept with notions of the spirit's agency points to an effort on Philo's part to restrict the significance of the *Logos* concept.¹²⁸ More broadly, it has also been suggested that this usage points to a measure of Philo's awareness of multiple traditions of Alexandrian exegesis.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Cf. Merki 1952:35-44.

¹²⁹ Cf. Tobin 1983:20-21, 123-24, 170-71.

What seems more likely, however, is that these passages coexist rather easily in Philo's system of thought. At one level (*the sensible realm of becoming*), Philo can exploit the language of divine spirit to describe how the mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος can experience a measure of kinship (or assimilation) with the divine. This, as David Runia suggests, reflects a degree of influence from Stoic understandings of *Logos* as πνεῦμα more so than Platonist influences where πνεῦμα is not used for anthropological purposes.¹³⁰

At another level (*the intelligible realm of being*), however, Philo can just as easily use the language of the divine *Logos* to remind¹³¹ readers of how the mind of the Genesis 1.27 ἄνθρωπος can experience kinship with the divine in the realm of being, i.e. the human mind as an immaterial casting, fragment, and effulgence of 'the blessed nature.'¹³² For Philo, each passage – one more pregnant with Platonic notions of mind-body duality (Gen 1.27), the other with more Stoic ones (Gen 2.7) – are simply two sides of the same epistemological coin.¹³³

¹³⁰ Cf. Runia 1988a:67.

¹³¹ As Runia 2001:345 notes, the first term in this triad points back clearly to Philo's reading of Genesis 1.26-27 in *Opif.* 71.

¹³² Cf. *QG* 2.62.

¹³³ Cf. Baer 1970:83-88; Tobin 1983:26-28.

3.3.5.6 Summary

Using philosophy to interpret scripture, Philo invests his readings of Genesis 1.27 and 2.7 with contrasting pictures of Jewish and Greek anthropology and epistemology.¹³⁴ While his language varies depending on the exigencies of each text, Philo on balance sees the human mind as divine in origin.

Yet as one looks closer at his discourses on the origins and nature of the human mind, one can detect notable shifts in his thinking on the subject of divine agency in general, and a more pointed question in particular: *by what means does God create the human mind and confer a sense of mutual kinship?*

In his reading of Genesis 1.27 (*Opif.* 67-88), Philo considers the origins and nature of the human mind with reference to God. Trading on the term νοῦς, Philo simultaneously constrains his discourse to the more specific idea of ‘intellect’ whilst conversing with theological ideas popular in the Aristotelian and Platonic circles of Philo’s day.¹³⁵

In keeping with a more Greek philosophical view of God, Philo makes two interpretive moves. First, he claims that the human intellect originates in the

¹³⁴ Cf. Worthington 2011:141-50, esp. 149-50.

¹³⁵ Cf. Runia 2001:116, pointing to references in Leisegang’s Index, PCW 7.536b.

incorporeal realm, and second, the human intellect is incapable of knowing its own nature. Such moves invariably grow out of Philo's belief that the incorporeal God of Moses cannot be fully known (principle of divine incomprehensibility).

In his reading of Genesis 2.7, Philo uses Genesis 1.27 as a sort of window text to bring into sharper relief another kind of mind portrayed by Moses. To fill out the portrait of this human mind, Philo uses the language of divine agency to stress not the infinite chasm that exists between the incorporeal God and the corporeal human being, but rather the possibility of kinship that exists between them. Using the language of divine agency, Philo develops this prospect in a twofold manner.

First, using *the language of divine spirit*, Philo concentrates on the human mind's relation to (and command over) the bodily senses. As king or god over the human faculties, the mind can be moved by the divine spirit to attain a lofty and well-known Platonic ideal, assimilation with God.

Second, using *the language of divine Logos*, Philo brackets the exegetical discussion by returning to the mind's relation to the noetic cosmos, a point

which he made earlier in the book.¹³⁶ With this bracket in place, Philo seems more at ease with describing the origins and nature of the mind in the metaphorical language of casting, fragment, and effulgence (*Opif.* 146) that featured in both the Stoic¹³⁷ and Hellenistic Jewish¹³⁸ discourses of his day.

This commingling of discourses on divine agency seems to tell us something about Philo's broader interest in using both Platonic and Stoic notions of knowledge to appeal to the sensibilities of non-Jewish readers of his 'Exposition.'¹³⁹ To what extent, if any, does this interest animate Philo's discourses on the mind's potential to attain knowledge of God?

3.3.6 How does Philo conceive of the potential of the human mind in its ascent to know God?

In what follows, we will consider the two primary ways in which Philo writes about the mind's aspirational potential to attain knowledge about and from God. Both modes come out of Philo's reflections on the meaning of the fifth day (Genesis 1.20-23) and how the number five bears upon the relationship between God and time.

¹³⁶ *Opif.* 24-25; 67-88.

¹³⁷ Cf. Diog. Laert. 7.143.

¹³⁸ Wis 7.26; Heb 1.3; cf. Winston 1979:186; Tobin 1983:185.

¹³⁹ On the 'Exposition' in a Roman context: Niehoff 2011b:1-21.

In *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §67, Philo suggests a way of holding in tension the idea of rapid time and the idea of gradual time. Rapid time governs the domain of 'being.' Gradual time governs the domain of 'becoming.' According to Philo's reading of Moses' account of the fifth day of creation, all things came into existence in the domain of 'being.'

Yet something equally true occurred on that same day of creation: each created thing variously entered the process of growing into its full existence in the domain of 'becoming,' a process marked by divinely ordered movement and nourishment. The human mind, like all other created things, is subject to this twofold reality of rapid and gradual time. This seems to shape Philo's twofold way of writing about the mind's potential to know God.

3.3.6.1 Philo's model of noetic ascent based on Genesis 1.26-27

In Genesis 1.24-31, Moses describes the creation of the *ἄνθρωπος* on the sixth day. Provoked by this account, Philo insists that in the domain of being, the mind – and in particular the intellect (*nous*) – 'has come into existence after God's image and after his likeness.'¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ *Opif.* 69.

In keeping with this insistence, Philo affirms the mind's kinship with its divine maker. In the same breath, Philo asserts that the mind exists as a created thing in the domain of becoming. This double perspective leads Philo to spot a tension. Whilst the mind can comprehend all things around it, it still does not know its own nature.

Indeed, as mentioned already, though the mind by recourse to the arts and sciences (τέχναις καὶ ἐπιστήμαις)¹⁴¹ can attain knowledge of the harmonies and rhythms that form the sensible universe, the way of astronomy leads to a sobering point of arrival: the mind realises that it is invisible by nature, but everything around and above it is sensible and material in nature (*Opif.* 69).

In other words, the ἄνθρωπος of Genesis 1.27 comes to realise that it is not in its true abode. This sense of displacement, as Philo reads Genesis 1.27, is the first step of the mind's move from the sensible domain of becoming to the intelligible domain of being. But displacement soon gives way to desire, the second step of noetic ascent.

¹⁴¹ *Opif.* 69. Later in this treatise, Philo will identify grammar and music as two of the best sciences (*Opif.* 126).

In this line of thought, Philo can speak of this mind as one that yearns to follow 'the guidance of its love of wisdom.'¹⁴² Filled with this *eros*,¹⁴³ it longs to move 'beyond the whole of sense-perceptible reality and desires to attain the intelligible realm.'¹⁴⁴ Scholars have long noted¹⁴⁵ that this language draws explicitly on the myth of the winged soul flying to join Zeus and other gods in Plato's *Phaedrus*.¹⁴⁶ This myth features elsewhere in Philo's writings for different reasons.¹⁴⁷ In this context (*Opif.* 71), however, the myth is part of Philo's portrayal of the mind's ascent from sensible to intelligible realities. This portrayal is marked by at least two prime features.

First is the question of agency. To the extent that the mind of the Genesis 1.27 *ἄνθρωπος* can aspire to know God, such aspirational potential is predicated on *divine* – not human – agency. No longer sufficient are the powers of human intellection, even when aided by the arts, sciences and other means of human agency Philo considers in *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §69. In working with

¹⁴² *Opif.* 70.

¹⁴³ This recalls Plato (e.g. *Symp.* 211-12) and is similar to Maximus Tyrius (*Who is God according to Plato*, *Diss.* 11.9-10); cf. Runia 2001:230.

¹⁴⁴ *Opif.* 70.

¹⁴⁵ Festugière 1949:442; Borgen 1997:235-42.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Phaedr.* 246D-249D.

¹⁴⁷ On the influence of the *Phaedrus* myth on Philo's angelology: Decharneux 1994:55-66, 139-40. Philo applies the myth to illustrate self-control in *Agr.* 67-94 and *QG* 3.3. A similar appropriation of the *Phaedrus* myth can be detected in Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 12.118-21 and *Strom.* 5.52f) and Origen's interpretation of Matt 21.1-7; see further König 1995:45-58.

this tension between divine and human agency, Philo is much like other Jewish writers in his period.¹⁴⁸

With Philo accepting the mind's summons into the intelligible domain of being (*Opif.* 70), he is prepared to say that the human intellect is rendered a more or less passive instrument. On this point, Philo's language is quite instructive: the mind, he says, is 'lifted up on high' (καὶ πάλιν πτηνὸς ἀρθείς), it is the one 'being carried around' (συμπεριποληθεὶς¹⁴⁹), and it becomes seized by sober drunkenness (μέθῃ νηφαλίῳ κατασχεθείς). In reformulating the question of agency, Philo is ready to scrutinise an allied question, the role of human intellection or rationality in the quest to know God.

This brings us to a second feature: Philo's striking emphasis on the *complete obviation* of human intellection. Consider how Philo describes the final frontier of the intellect's ascent in the domain of being. Trading on provocative images that occur in Plato¹⁵⁰ and in the world of Greek mythical lore,¹⁵¹ Philo blends the *Phaedrus* myth with the image of Corybantic

¹⁴⁸ On this debate in Second Temple Judaism: Boccaccini 2008:9-26; Maston 2010 passim; cf. Barclay/Gathercole 2008 on this tension in the writings and contexts of the Apostle Paul.

¹⁴⁹ Runia 2001:230 notes that Philo uses this term only in ascent contexts in the 'Exposition': *Spec.* 1.37; 2.45; 3.1; *Praem.* 121.

¹⁵⁰ *Theat.* 155C10; *Soph.* 264C11; *Laws* 892E7-893A-2.

¹⁵¹ On the role of Corybants in Greek antiquity: Miller 1986:74-76.

enthusiasm to describe an ecstatic – and indeed apophatic – end of the intellect’s ascent to God (*Opif.* 70-71).

This, in Philo’s view, is a space featuring the allied phenomena of overwhelming brightness (μαρμαρυγαῖς) and spiritual vertigo (σκοτοδινηῖν). Philo makes this point elsewhere in his exegetical writings.¹⁵² In the ‘Exposition,’ consider *On the Special Laws* §§1.32-50. Based on a biblical ascent text (Exod 33.13-23), Philo meditates extensively on the character and limits of the mind’s ascent to God. This line of meditation would appear later in some rabbinic literature wherein Moses’ encounter with the divine on Sinai is depicted as a heavenly ascent.¹⁵³ Using the same two words (μαρμαρυγαῖς σκοτοδινηῖν), Philo depicts the final outcome of Moses’ prayer for divine knowledge, one which ends in vertigo and a partial vision of God (§1.37).

The desire to detect an associative link between Genesis 1.27 and Exodus 33.13-23 may be worthwhile, but it is fraught with many difficulties. Yet, as some scholars have noted, it is hard to ignore the way both passages stress

¹⁵² E.g. *Her.* 69-70, 263-65; full discussion in Birnbaum 1996:61-90 (esp. 79-80).

¹⁵³ See numerous references in Meeks 1968:354-71.

the idea of divine incomprehensibility and the obviation of human intellection.¹⁵⁴

As noted already, Philo goes in a different direction in his treatment of an ascent to God based on the mind described in Genesis 2.7. This biblical text prompts Philo to say unequivocally that this mind's *assimilation* to God is borne out of the agency of the divine spirit. What Philo hints at in *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §144 comes into clearer view in §§148-50 as Philo describes noetic ascent in the language of a 'self-taught and self-instructed' nature (αὐτομαθῆς καὶ αὐτοδίδακτος).

A different portrait of God is rendered, along with a different sense of the role that the powers of human intellection play in this type of ascent to the divine.

3.3.6.2 Philo's model of noetic ascent based on Genesis 2.7

Like many early Jewish interpreters, Philo dwells on the fact that Moses offers not one but two accounts of the creation of humankind. Philo leverages this feature by locating the mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος in the domain of becoming. As discussed above, the mind of this composite ἄνθρωπος, as the

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Runia 2001:232-33. On cultic elements in Philo's use of the metaphor of vertigo: Leisegang 1939:211.

head of the human race, is endowed with the inbreathing of the divine spirit.¹⁵⁵ It is an endowment that the Genesis 1.27 ἄνθρωπος does not receive. This prompts Philo, for reasons not explicitly stated, to enlist a different philosophical commonplace associated closely with Plato – human assimilation to God¹⁵⁶ – to describe the aspirational potential and telos of the mind depicted in Genesis 2.7.

If assimilation to God represents the apex of ascent for the mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος, what hints, if any, does Philo offer as to what this might actually entail? Here, a distinctively down-to-earth picture is offered, as indicated by three clues detected in *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §§148-50.

First, it is Isaac – not Moses – who serves as the focal point of interpretive reflection. Philo's earlier (and more general) reflection on the rational soul of the first ἄνθρωπος (*Opif.* 139) has given way to a more focused attention on the intellectual powers of the Genesis 2.7 mind. To this end, Philo describes the noetic potential of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος in the language of 'self-taught

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Opif.* 135. Levison 1995:279-280 observes the similarity between Philo's interpretation of the divine inbreathing of Genesis 2.7 with Seneca's description of the human soul in *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium* 41.5: 'Just as the rays of the sun do indeed touch the earth, but still abide at the source from which they are sent; even so the great and hallowed soul, which has come down in order that we may have a nearer knowledge of divinity....'

¹⁵⁶ Plato, *Theaetetus* 176B; also *Resp.* 500C; *Tim.* 90C.

and self-instructed wisdom' (*Opif.* 148). It is a way of description that invokes the profile of Isaac, the chief symbol of nature¹⁵⁷ and εὐδαιμονία¹⁵⁸ in Philo's orbit of ideas. In one swift move, then, Philo blends the idea of assimilation to God with the prospects of recovering one's natural or innate wisdom and knowledge.

But how does this recovery take place? This question leads us to a second clue. Along with his shift in exegetical concentration to Isaac, Philo adapts the Greek motif of *paideia*¹⁵⁹ and presents God in terms not used so far in his treatise. No longer emphasised is the overwhelming power of an incomprehensible God (as is the case in *Opif.* 69-71).

Instead Philo depicts God as a teacher *par excellence* who instructs the uncorrupted mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος (*Opif.* 149; also *Spec.* 1.41-42). This divine teacher tests the keen-sightedness of his pupil and scrutinises the latter's ability to name each thing of creation based on a wholly unblemished apprehension of a thing's true nature (*Opif.* 149-50).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. *Abr.* 52, 54; *Praem.* 31; in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Plant.* 168; *Congr.* 36-38; *Fug.* 168; *Mut.* 88; *Somn.* 1.160, 167-71.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.217-19; *Cher.* 8, 106; *Det.* 60; *Post.* 134.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Runia 2001:351.

This train of thought animates Philo's model of noetic ascent based on Genesis 2.7. Endowed with a self-moving nature (αὐτοκίνητος), the mind can attain a level of cognitive apprehension which the Stoics equated with the criterion of truth.¹⁶⁰ On the unblemished rational nature of this Genesis 2.7 mind, Philo writes:

[T]he rational nature (τῆς λογικῆς φύσεως) in his soul was still uncorrupted (ἀκράτου), and not a single weakness or disease or passion had found its way in. So he took in wholly unblemished impressions of things material and immaterial, and made appellations that were accurate, taking aim in excellent fashion at what was revealed, so that their natures were pronounced and understood at the very same time. In this way, he distinguished himself with every fine attribute, attaining the very limit of human well-being (τὸ πέρας φθάνων τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης εὐδαιμονίας).¹⁶¹

Three points merit brief attention.

First, the Edenic mind described above is one which has yet to be influenced by the passions. This reference to the absence of disease and passion seems to reflect a specific point of philosophical reference. By Platonic measure, Philo is here assuming the sensible domain of becoming. This immediately

¹⁶⁰ As Long/Sedley observe, the most persistent line of Stoic epistemology, one which traced back to Zeno, is the notion that 'all normal human beings have a natural faculty to make secure discriminations between discoverable truths and falsehoods,' a principle grounded in the idea of 'cognitive impression' that served as the basis for the Stoic 'criterion of truth' (cf. *LS* 1.241-53; quote is from p. 249).

¹⁶¹ *Opif.* 150.

distinguishes this discussion from the Genesis 1.27 model above and the ideas that animate the Genesis 2.7 model.

Second, compared to Philo's model of ascent based on his reading of Genesis 1.27, this model places considerably more weight on the role of human agency and reason. Indeed, what we have is a picture of ascent that requires active intellection. As such, Philo says that this mind is called to apprehend the twofold reality of things: what is material and what is immaterial. Upon apprehension of a thing's nature, the mind of the Genesis 2.7 *anthropos* – the biblical counterpart of the Stoic wise man¹⁶² – can accurately and rapidly name the thing according to its nature.

This immediacy between thought and speech, as seen elsewhere in the 'Exposition,' is a prime mark of the self-taught nature. On the basis of such optimised intellectual powers, the Genesis 2.7 *ἄνθρωπος* is extolled 'attaining the very limit of human well-being.'¹⁶³

¹⁶² Cf. Baynes 2002:31-47, esp. 41-43, for discussion of this passage (and *Leg. All.* 2.15) in light of wider Stoic notions of language.

¹⁶³ *Opif.* 150; cf. *Opif.* 135 (first occurrence of *eudaimonia*) and *Opif.* 172. On the importance of the term in Hellenistic and Imperial philosophy: Völker 1938:340-50; Runia 1986:344-45; 2001:342. On Stoic eudaimonism: Lesses 1988:95-127; Long 1996:179-200. On eudaimonism in Hellenistic-Jewish literature near Philo's time: Runia 2002b:131-57.

This leads us to our third and final point: Philo's insistence that *εὐδαιμονία* (human well-being) signifies the apex of ascent of the Genesis 2.7 mind. On what basis? As noted just above, Philo strikingly connects his view of one's heightened, 'self-instructed' rationality, on the one hand, with the idea of human well-being (*εὐδαιμονία*), on the other hand.¹⁶⁴

In all likelihood, Philo appropriates this *topos*¹⁶⁵ – a regular feature in non-Jewish literature but absent in the Greek Jewish Bible of his day – to accentuate his discourse on Genesis 2.7 and prepare his readers for a similar point of climax at the end of the treatise (*Opif.* 172). Philo's patterned way of using the language of *εὐδαιμονία* is not unlike what can be seen in many other works in antiquity, as David Runia has shown.¹⁶⁶

Beyond this rhetorical pattern, Philo's insistence on human well-being is congruent with ideas in the Graeco-Roman world of thought. Some traditions of Philo's day regarded *εὐδαιμονία* as signifying a set of realities deeper than the psychological condition known today as happiness.¹⁶⁷ This shorthand,

¹⁶⁴ Pace Tirosh-Samuelson 2003:81-99 who argues that Philo sees *εὐδαιμονία* as ending in an ecstatic encounter of the type we considered in Philo's model of ascent based on Genesis 1.27.

¹⁶⁵ Philo often goes beyond the Stoa and Plato in his construal of this *topos*; see further Amir 1983b:207-19.

¹⁶⁶ Runia 2001:352.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Dybikowski 1981:185-200; but see Kraut 1979:167-97.

suggests John Cooper, conveyed the fulfillment of the natural capacities of the human being,¹⁶⁸ akin to the goal of philosophical circles in Philo's era.¹⁶⁹

Aristotle conceives of *εὐδαιμονία* in various ways, but at the core he regards it as a good of the highest sort, a point which both the cultivated and the non-cultivated among his readers can agree upon. 'Happiness,' says Aristotle, 'follows living well and acting well.'¹⁷⁰ Aristotelian approaches to *εὐδαιμονία*¹⁷¹ are of course quite complex, but what is noteworthy is Aristotle's view that the gods would reward the mind (*νοῦς*) that attained this *telos*.¹⁷² This notion, in turn, influenced Stoic ideas of the goal of human life,¹⁷³ though in many ways the Stoics remained distinctive for defining well-being as a life lived in accordance with nature.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁸ Cooper 1977:89.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Mason 1996:187-228.

¹⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1095a 18-19 (Loeb translation); cf. Salkever 2009:211-18.

¹⁷¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1144a2-6; 1177a1-18; *Eth. eud.* 1219a39-40. On Aristotle's approach to well-being: Nagel 1972:252-59; Ackrill 1974:339-59; Engberg-Pedersen 1983:3-36; Asselin 1989 *passim*.

¹⁷² *Eth. nic.* 1179a25-30; cf. Kirchner 1986:41-54. It was not lost upon Aristotle that *εὐδαιμονία* literally meant 'good spirit,' *eu* + *δαίμων*, with *δαίμων* understood more literally as 'god' as opposed to the Platonist understanding of *δαίμων* as *νοῦς*; cf. BDAG, 404; Tirosch-Samuels 2003:20. For a similar sentiment in Stoic thought: e.g. Seneca, *Ep.* 92.1-3, 27-31.

¹⁷³ Cf. Long 1968:72-85, esp. 74-76.

¹⁷⁴ E.g. Seneca, *Ep.* 92.3; Cicero, *Tusc.* 5.81-2; cf. *LS* 1.394-401; Long 1988:77-101.

Moving closer to Philo's field of ideas, the concept of εὐδαιμονία gained some currency in Hellenistic Jewish literature,¹⁷⁵ notably in Josephus. As part of the central thesis for his *Judean Antiquities*,¹⁷⁶ Josephus trades on this commonplace in order to 'present Judaism as an option, the preferred option, in the philosophical marketplace.'¹⁷⁷

Not unlike Josephus, Philo's way of investing Genesis 2.7 with notions of εὐδαιμονία calls to mind other instances in his corpus where εὐδαιμονία is presented in rather positive terms:¹⁷⁸ Studying the Mosaic laws leads to εὐδαιμονία for the entire human race,¹⁷⁹ a utopian state Philo reckons as manifested in the group at Lake Mareotis (Therapeutae).¹⁸⁰ It is perhaps not entirely unreasonable to follow Runia in seeing this rendering of Genesis 2.7 as another attempt on the Alexandrian's part to touch the intellectual sensibilities of many of his readers in and beyond his city.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ As a descriptive term in *Artap.* 1 and *Let. Aris.* 108-09; more rhetorically in *T. Job.* 35.4; 41.4.

¹⁷⁶ *A.J.* 1.14, 20.

¹⁷⁷ Mason 1996:199.

¹⁷⁸ In the zetematic writings: e.g. *QG* 2.51 (the beginning and end of *eudaimonia* is identified with *visio Dei*); cf. *Abr.* 58 (*visio Dei* as 'crowning point of happiness').

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Virt.* 118-19.

¹⁸⁰ *Contempl.* 11, 90; *Prob.* 91; cf. Tirosh-Samuelson 2003:86-99; Graffigna 2004:193-215.

¹⁸¹ Cf. Runia 2002b:131-57.

3.3.6.3 Summary of Philo's models of noetic ascent in the 'Creation' segment of the 'Exposition'

To sum up: in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition,' Philo formulates two distinct models of noetic ascent to knowledge of God. The first model is based on Philo's reading of Genesis 1.26-27, the other from Genesis 2.7. Each model features a distinctive set of philosophical ideas.

In his first model, Philo invests his reading of Genesis 1.26-27 with a cosmological scheme that approximates the one set forth in Plato's *Timaeus*. In this scheme, the mind is portrayed as an imprint or copy of the divine mind. Noetic ascent is depicted in the vivid language of Plato's *Phaedrus*.

In keeping with these commitments, God is presented as an overwhelming and incomprehensible being. Yet like Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 33.13-23) the mind yearns for knowledge of the divine. The mind is rendered totally passive, divinely seized and summoned to a condition of the mind that is marked by ecstasy and spiritual vertigo. This ascent reaches its apex with the complete obviation of human intellection.

In his second model, based on Genesis 2.7, Philo enlists the Platonic concept of human assimilation to God (*Theaetetus*). The human mind is still portrayed as an

imprint or copy of the divine mind. But there is a key difference: the mind is seen as the ruling part of the composite ἄνθρωπος of Genesis 2.7. Enjoined to the senses and entombed in the physical body, the mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος inhabits the Platonic domain of becoming.

Noetic ascent in this domain is described in the language of Plato's *Theaetetus*. This is supplemented further by the notion of recollection, which in Philo's reading of Moses means the mind's retrieval of its 'self-taught and self-instructed wisdom.' By portraying God as a teacher who aids and examines the keen-sightedness of his pupil, Philo seems intent to cast God in more accommodating light. Isaac signifies the keen-sighted mind, one that is able to apprehend and name things according to their true nature and so fulfil one's natural capacities. Philo takes a decidedly Stoic turn in describing the apex of this ascent as a state of mind and life that the Greeks (and Philo, for that matter) saw as human εὐδαιμονία.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Philo's eudaimonistic notions approximate Hebrew imaginations of the comprehensive character of divinely conferred שלום, i.e. total well-being of an endowed person and community (e.g. Num 6.26; Ps 28.11; Jer 29.11). In this sense, the 'Stoic turn' would already be prepared for, as it were, in the tradition(s) of Philo's native heritage.

3.3.7 *How does Philo conceive of the limitations of the human mind?*

We have touched on this question throughout the course of our discussion above (3.3.1-6). In many ways, Philo's doctrine of divine incomprehensibility defines his view of the limitations of the human mind. Moreover, Philo's twofold belief that the mind, though an imprint of the divine *Logos*, is inescapably (a) allied with the non-rational senses and (b) encased in the physical body entails that he also find the mind impaired and constrained by the bodily senses.

Having considered Philo's varied ways of writing about noetic ascent in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition,' we will turn shortly to his discourses in the historical, or 'patriarchs,' segment. Of the two models of the human mind that Philo formulates on the basis of Moses' creation account, it is the model that portrays the mind in the sensory realm of becoming (drawn from Genesis 2.7) that takes centre stage.

Of course, this is not to say that Philo in the 'patriarchs' segment does not occasionally revisit the idea of the human mind as an imprint of the divine mind (a feature of his reflections on Genesis 1.26-27). Yet far more pronounced is Philo's interest in coming to grips with the mind's domicile in the physical body with its hosts of passions and pleasures. For Philo, the

patriarchs – separately and collectively – represent the Mosaic ways of overcoming the conflictual realities that arise out of the mind’s domicile in the material domain.

As exemplary embodiments of the unwritten law of nature, the triad of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob provoke Philo to bring exegesis and philosophy to bear on the subject of human knowledge about and from God.

3.4

Philo’s approach to the human mind in the ‘patriarchs’ segment of the ‘Exposition’

In this segment of the ‘Exposition,’ Philo takes up the task of interpreting the patriarchal narratives in the book of Genesis. Based on Philo’s preamble in the final installment of this four-work set,¹⁸³ this segment consists of the following works: *On Abraham*, *On Isaac* (now lost), *On Jacob* (now lost), and *On Joseph*.

In Philo’s view, the way Moses orders his material is highly instructive. Moses composed the patriarchal accounts before the divine conferral of written laws, and this for Philo signifies the reality that the patriarchs are ‘unwritten laws.’ As such, the patriarchs evince the harmony between the law

¹⁸³ *Jos.* 1.

of nature and their subsequent codification by Moses. In light of this evidence, aspirants are called to imitate the unwritten laws of nature embodied in the lives of the patriarchs.

Philo enlists the patriarchal narratives for several purposes. Philo's main goal, it seems, is to use them to write in a threefold way about noetic ascent to knowledge of God. In this vein, Philo stresses the kinship between Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. As founders of the special race of 'Israel,' this triad animates Philo's interest in defending the constitution of the Mosaic commonwealth. To the extent that these founders were exemplary, says Philo, so too were the Mosaic commonwealth and way of life.

In the same breath, Philo presents this triad as the composite ideal of human perfection by way of instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac), and practice (Jacob). As such, this triad furthers Philo's interest in engaging contemporary philosophical notions of human transformation. Indeed, what Philo does with the triad of biblical patriarchs resembles what antecedent schools did in formulating a triad of educational virtues that became a universal commonplace in Philo's day.

3.4.1 How does Philo conceive of the origin and nature of the human mind?

Strikingly, Philo offers few, if any, explicit statements about the nature of the human mind in this segment. At first glance, this is a bit puzzling. What might account for Philo's relative silence on this question? The more obvious explanation could be that Philo is not prompted by the biblical texts to consider the nature of the human mind.

Perhaps another explanation lies in Philo's prologue to his treatise, *On Abraham*. By way of introduction, Philo offers two reasons why Moses shifts from giving an account of creation to presenting the good and blameless lives in Genesis chapters 4-50. On Moses' twofold intention, Philo writes:

On Abraham §5

οἱ γὰρ ἔμψυχοι καὶ λογικοὶ
νόμοι ἄνδρες ἐκεῖνοι γεγονάσιν,
οὓς δυοῖν χάριν ἐσέμνυνεν· ἐνὸς
μὲν βουλόμενος ἐπιδείξαι, ὅτι τὰ
τεθειμένα διατάγματα τῆς
φύσεως οὐκ ἀπάδει, δευτέρου δὲ
ὅτι οὐ πολὺς πόνος τοῖς ἐθέλουσι
κατὰ τοὺς κειμένους νόμους ζῆν,
ὁπότε καὶ ἀγράφῳ τῇ
νομοθεσίᾳ, πρὶν τι τὴν ἀρχὴν
ἀναγραφῆναι τῶν ἐν μέρει,
ῥαδίως καὶ εὐπετῶς ἐχρήσαντο
οἱ πρῶτοι· ὡς δεόντως ἂν τινα

For in these men [Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph] we have laws endowed with life and reason, and Moses extolled them for two reasons. First he wished to show that the enacted ordinances are not inconsistent with nature; and secondly that those who wish to live in accordance with the laws as they stand have no difficult task, seeing that the first generations before any at all of the particular statutes was set in writing followed the

φάναι, τοὺς τεθέντας νόμους μηδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ ὑπομνήματα εἶναι βίου τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀρχαιολογοῦντας ἔργα καὶ λόγους, οἷς ἐχρήσαντο.	unwritten law with perfect ease, so that one might properly say that the enacted laws are nothing else than memorials of the life of the ancients, preserving to a later generation their actual words and deeds.
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What might this passage tell us? For one thing, Philo seems to be concerned with the way Moses ordered the books of Genesis and Exodus in the Pentateuch. Why do the patriarchal stories occur between the account of primordial history (Gen 1-3) and the giving of the particular laws of Moses (Exodus 20 onwards)?¹⁸⁴ To resolve this point, Philo portrays the patriarchs as special symbols of universal knowledge of God.¹⁸⁵ They are enacted ordinances (τεθειμένα διατάγματα) marked by the kind of self-taught nature that conforms with nature itself (*On Abraham* §6):

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Termini 2006:265-97; a similar concern discernible in a comment typically attributed to Rashi, a medieval rabbinic commentator, but likely goes back, on Rashi's own account, to a third-fourth century sage: 'Said Rabbi Isaac: There was no reason to begin the Torah, but from "This month shall be to you" (*Exod* 12.2, introducing the laws of Passover), which is the first commandment with which Israel was [collectively] commanded. So why did he open with "In the beginning"?' On this, see Fraade 2005:81-96 (quoted text is translated by Fraade and given on p. 82).

¹⁸⁵ Similar notions detected in *Opif.* 1-3 and *QG* 2.42; cf. Birnbaum 1996:154-58; Siegert 2003:67-85.

On Abraham §6

ἐκεῖνοι γὰρ οὔτε γνώριμοι καὶ
φοιτηταὶ γενόμενοί τινων οὔτε
παρὰ διδασκάλοις ἃ χρὴ
πράττειν καὶ λέγειν
ἀναδιδαχθέντες, αὐτήκοοι δὲ καὶ
αὐτομαθεῖς, ἀκολουθίαν φύσεως
ἀσπασάμενοι, τὴν φύσιν αὐτὴν,
ὅπερ ἐστὶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν,
πρεσβύτατον θεσμὸν εἶναι
ὑπολαβόντες ἅπαντα τὸν βίον
ἡννομήθησαν

For they were no scholars or
pupils of others, nor did they
learn under teachers what was
right to say or do: they listened
to no voice or instruction but
their own: they gladly accepted
conformity with nature, holding
that nature itself was, as indeed
it is, the most venerable of
statutes, and thus their whole
life was one of happy obedience
to law.

It is helpful to remember Philo's way of using the ideal of a 'self-taught nature' to describe the noetic potential of the human depicted in Genesis 2.7.¹⁸⁶ Here, a related line of thought can be detected, but with an important difference.

The mind Philo envisions in Genesis 2.7 is pure and uncorrupted, free from any weakness, disease and passion arising from the material domain. Such noetic purity, however, does not characterise the minds of the model patriarchs, a point Philo concedes in *On Abraham* §6:

They committed no guilty action of their own free will or purpose, and *where chance led them wrong* they besought God's mercy and propitiated Him with prayers and supplications, and thus secured a perfect life guided aright in

¹⁸⁶ *Opif.* 150; see Chapter 2 (§§ 3.3.5-6) above.

both fields, both in their premeditated actions and in such as were not of freely-willed purpose.¹⁸⁷

By acknowledging that the type of mind signified by the founding patriarchs can be led to wrongful ways of purpose and conduct, Philo introduces an element of corruptibility in his discourse on the mind that is not part of either of his models of noetic ascent in the creation segment of the 'Exposition.' Philo's acknowledgement has to do with his exegetical sensitivity to the book of Genesis. Many of the patriarchal narratives, says Philo, invite figural readings and thus require careful exegetical moves. This perhaps accounts for the absence of any explicit Philonic statements in this segment concerning the origin and nature of the human mind.

Far more appealing for Philo in this segment is the subject of noetic transformation in the knowledge of God.

3.4.2 How does Philo conceive of the potential of the mind in its ascent to know God?

In keeping with the exigencies of exegeting Moses, Philo shifts from his model of noetic ascent based on Genesis 2.7 – with his insistence on the

¹⁸⁷ LCL translation (italics added).

uncorrupted nature of the human mind – and toward a model that accepts the reality that the human mind is no longer pure and uncorrupted. Indeed, with so much of the patriarchal narratives featuring accounts of conflict and contingency associated with human affairs, Philo seems to accept the fact that the mind is diseased and enslaved to the bodily passions.

Philo's ideas are rich and varied, to be sure, but the dominant one is a construal of noetic transformation that brings together three distinct yet related pathways, with each pathway corresponding to a biblical patriarch. Abraham represents noetic transformation by way of instruction, Isaac by nature, and Jacob by practice. Because Philo's threefold approach draws from philosophical currents of his day, it is useful to consider similar threefold models of attaining knowledge and virtue which featured in Philo's context.

3.4.2.1 Nature, instruction, and practice in antiquity

Approaches to education in antiquity were animated by a variety of debates over the roles that nature (φύσις), instruction (διδασκαλία), and practice (ἄσκησις, ἐπιμέλεια, μελέτη) played in the process of one's transformation of mind and character. Sophistic in origin, this triad of ideals was typically associated (if we follow Plato's view) with Protagoras of Abdera.

In a move away from Greek aristocratic ideals, Protagoras purportedly stated that 'education requires nature and practice.'¹⁸⁸ This formula, with its unprecedented emphasis on practice,¹⁸⁹ exerted considerable influence on leading traditions of Greek philosophy. 'In its somewhat differing verbal forms,' notes Leonard Woodbury, 'the triad is widely used in discussions of education from the time of the earliest sophists.'¹⁹⁰

In line with Plato,¹⁹¹ Aristotle appraises the merits of these factors in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Appreciating the role that these factors play in a person's attainment of goodness, Aristotle writes:

Now some thinkers hold that virtue is a gift of nature; others think that we become good by habit, others that we can be taught to be good. Natural endowment is obviously not under our control; it is bestowed on those who

¹⁸⁸ Diels-Kranz B 3; cf. B 10; cf. Woodbury 1976:349-57 (esp. 351-53); Ford 2001:85-109 (esp. 96-97).

¹⁸⁹ Ford 2001:96-97 notes that Protagoras' emphases on nature and instruction were in line with precedence, his stress on practice 'was new and noteworthy' (p. 97). This emphasis on practice is seen in the *De Liberis Educandis* of Pseudo-Plutarch; on this see Berry 1958:392-93 and references cited therein.

¹⁹⁰ Woodbury 1976:351-53 for chief variants of this formula and pertinent attestations. Quote is from page 352. For more on context of this sophistic formula, see Marrou 1956:48-50. This triadic formula was a standard *topos* in Philo's first-century era. According to Richard Hunter, 'It was the almost unanimous of ancient critics that the aspiring poet or orator needed in fact a mixture of natural gifts and studied craftsmanship: the requirements, as listed by Dionysius of Halicarnassus [*On Imitation* frag. 2 Usener-Radermacher], are "natural gifts, careful study, laborious practice"' (Hunter 2003:213-15, quote is from p. 215).

¹⁹¹ Plato, *Phaedrus* 269D: 'If you have a natural ability for rhetoric, you will become a famous rhetorician, provided you supplement your ability with knowledge and practice' (trans. Cooper 1997:546).

are fortunate, in the true sense, by some divine dispensation. Again, theory and teaching are not, I fear, equally efficacious in all cases: the soil must have been previously tilled if it is to foster the seed, the mind of the pupil must have been prepared by the cultivation of habits, so as to like and dislike aright.¹⁹²

Aristotle however tempers his appreciation with a measure of emphasis on the overarching value of legislation:

But doubtless it is not enough for people to receive the right nurture and discipline in youth; they must also practise the lessons they have learnt, and confirm them by habit when they are grown up. Accordingly we shall need laws to regulate the discipline of adults as well, and in fact the whole life of the people generally....¹⁹³

Relevant for our present discussion is Aristotle's insistence on the privileging of legislation in his treatment of the Greek triadic formula of nature, instruction, and practice. This insistence, as W. Guthrie notes, is partly due to the tension Aristotle sensed between what he saw from his biological studies as the superiority of rational humankind, on the one hand, and the substandard conduct that he often observed as a moral aristocrat, on the other hand.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.1179b.

¹⁹³ Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 10.1180a.

¹⁹⁴ Guthrie 1981:331-400, esp. 362-64; see further Gerson 1990:67 who, on the basis of several references in Plato (*Symp.* 201C5; 206A-B; 209A-C; 212A; *Resp.* 540A-B), posits

This interplay of factors in Greek approaches to education brings us closer to appreciating what Philo is doing in the 'patriarch' segment of his 'Exposition.' More specifically, Aristotle's approach gives us a rough point of reference for understanding Philo's way of seeing the patriarchs of Genesis as coextensive with these ideals in Greek philosophy. Invested with such meanings, the patriarchs in Philo's accounting play a central role in grasping the Mosaic approach to human transformation in the knowledge of God.

In what follows, then, we will consider how Philo uses these concepts as part of his discourses on theological knowledge. These discourses, as we shall see, split into two strands, the first of which deals with the idea of a universal law of nature (§3.4.2.2 below), the second with the notion of a more particular law of Moses (§3.4.2.3).

a similar nexus between one's contemplation of the Form of the Good with one's education in knowledge and virtues, a conjunction which leads to the more practical cognitional activities of ordering the civic state and one's own state.

3.4.2.2 Relative perfection of the human mind in the law of nature

This model is based on an allegorical reading of Moses' genealogy of Enos, Enoch, and Noah.¹⁹⁵ Philo's starting point is Enos, a universal symbol of hope, the biblical figure who yearns for the unseen realities signified by the number four. This number, writes Philo in *On Abraham* §13, is associated with 'the study of immaterial and conceptual realities' (τὰς ἀσωμάτους οὐσίας καὶ νοητάς). Yet, as Philo writes later in the 'Exposition,'¹⁹⁶ the Enos-type of mind hopes for intelligible knowledge but in fact cannot attain it. A change of mind, or abode, is required. It is this idea which Philo invests in the next member of the triad.

One's unrequited hope for the intelligible realities leads to a second stage of advancement, the way of repentance as signified by Enoch.¹⁹⁷ In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Enoch symbolises the pathway of immortality,¹⁹⁸ and in a more negative vein, the perpetuation of human-centred epistemology (by virtue of his biblical tie with Cain).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ For further discussion of Philo's handling of this triad in relation to his exposition of Abraham, see Goodenough 1935:129-52; on Philo's use of this triad in relation to Philo's interest in the biographical nature of Genesis, see Sterling 2012b:441-42.

¹⁹⁶ *Praem.* 13-14, 72; in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see *Det.* 138-40.

¹⁹⁷ *Abr.* 17-26.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Post.* 40-44; *Mut.* 34-38; also *QG* 1.86.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *Conf.* 122-27; see also *QG* 1.82-86.

Here, Enoch symbolises the virtue of repentance and one's turning from sins and desire for improvement. This is animated by the divine conferral of grace, which Philo associates with the very name of Enoch.²⁰⁰ In this stage, divine mediation is central: one's repentance and improvement of mind are 'brought about by the forethought of God. For all that is done with God's help is excellent and truly profitable, as also all that has not His directing care is unprofitable.'²⁰¹

Such persons, however, are rarely found, as Philo states in *On Abraham* §19. Most people know vice and evil, but the Enoch-type of mind comprehends virtue. Absent repentance, the human being becomes a worthless man, defined as 'a creature naturally malicious, a hater of good and lover of evil.'²⁰² In this stage, then, Philo insists on one's self-mastery of the passions, which in turn leads to keen-sightedness.

This, then, feeds into Philo's discussion of the third and final stage of this model of ascent to relative perfection. Noah comes in for scrutiny. The

²⁰⁰ *Abr.* 17 [χεχαρισμένος]. Josephus uses this term to describe a Jew who prays for others and puts the welfare of others before his own; this other-centredness renders him acceptable to God (*C. Ap.* 2.196).

²⁰¹ *Abr.* 18.

²⁰² *Abr.* 21.

symbolic figure of the lover of virtue,²⁰³ Noah is the sage whose right reasoning of mind allows him to gain a vision of the excellent.²⁰⁴ In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo's primary emphasis is on divine grace as the sole basis for Noah's nature,²⁰⁵ but he also explains Noah's more perfected state of mind on numerological grounds, i.e. Noah is tenth from Adam, with ten signifying perfection).²⁰⁶

Here, Philo explains this higher state of mind on numerological grounds.²⁰⁷ Noah, says Philo, signifies the state of serenity and rest that is equated with the incorporeal and anthropological realities of the number 7.²⁰⁸ This, then, serves as the basis for the mind's aspiration to a state of rest:

On Abraham §30

ἡ δ' ἐβδόμη δύναμις ἡ περὶ τὸν
 ἡγεμόνα νοῦν, ὃς ὅταν
 ἐπικυδέστερος γένηται τῶν ἑξ
 καὶ δυνατωτέρα ῥώμῃ
 κατακρατήσας ἀναχωρήσῃ,
 μόνωσιν ἀσπασάμενος καὶ ταῖς
 ἑαυτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν χαίρων

But the seventh faculty is that
 of the dominant mind (τὸν
 ἡγεμόνα νοῦν), which, after
 triumphing over the six and
 returning victorious through its
 superior strength, welcomes
 solitude and rejoices in its own
 society, feeling that it needs no

²⁰³ τὸν φιλόρετον (*Abr.* 31).

²⁰⁴ *Abr.* 26.

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Leg. All.* 3.77.

²⁰⁶ *Post.* 173-74.

²⁰⁷ On how this arithmetological division of soul relates to other Philonic ways of partitioning the soul: Bouffartigue 1998:59-76 and references therein.

²⁰⁸ *Abr.* 28.

ὁμιλίαις ὡς ἀπροσδεῆς ὦν ἑτέρου καὶ αὐταρκέστατος ἑαυτῷ, τηνικαῦτα φροντίδων καὶ πραγματειῶν ἀπαλλαγείς τῶν ἐν τῷ θνητῷ γένει βίον εὐδιον καὶ γαληνὸν ἀσπάζεται.	other and is completely sufficient for itself, and then released from the cares and concerns of mortal kind gladly accepts a life of calmness and serenity.
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As the climax of this first triad, Noah represents a state of perfection which constitutes what it means to be ‘well-pleasing to God.’ In Philo’s view, this is a condition conferred by nature.²⁰⁹ Yet it is important to note Philo’s way of restricting this triad. Noah’s perfection, says Philo, is not absolute but relative, confined to his particular generation.²¹⁰ Indeed, the triadic model above represents for Philo three distinct types of mind which, respectively and relatedly, form ‘a series of regular gradation’ that affirm the universal and unwritten dimensions of Mosaic virtues that form the foundation of the human race.²¹¹

This is an example of Philo taking account of the sequence of the Mosaic material. It is also perhaps an instance of Philo’s indebtedness to the Hellenistic mode of *exempla*.²¹² To stress the particularity and preeminence of Israel’s patriarchs as models of the attainment of virtue, Philo moves from

²⁰⁹ *Abr.* 34-35.

²¹⁰ *Abr.* 36; this point is connected with Philo’s view of Noah as the last of the pre-flood race of humans and the first of the post-flood race of humans (*Abr.* 46).

²¹¹ *Abr.* 47.

²¹² Cf. Reed 2009:194-95.

the triadic model of relative perfection (Enos, Enoch, Noah) to a triad of three superior types of soul, beginning with Moses' account of Abraham in Genesis.²¹³

3.4.2.3 Absolute perfection of the human mind in the laws of Moses

In what follows, I want to focus on three facets of Philo's discourses on noetic ascent on the basis of his reading of the patriarchal segment of the Pentateuch.

The first facet is the basis of Abrahamic ascent and perfection: divine grace. Philo's interpretive springboard is Exodus 3.15, a passage wherein Moses recounts the disclosure of the divine name (*Abr.* 50-51). Philo's anti-anthropomorphic conviction is reflected here: the divine name is relative, not absolute, says Philo, on the conviction that 'God indeed needs no name' (*Abr.* 51).

Strikingly, on this principle Philo blends the dominant Greek triadic concept of education discussed above with the Mosaic portrait of God as one who confers the gifts and means of knowledge to humankind: 'yet, though he

²¹³ Cf. Mendelson 1982:62-65.

needed it not, he [God] nevertheless vouchsafed to give to humankind a name of himself suited to them' (*Abr.* 51).

Shortly thereafter (*Abr.* 54) Philo reinforces this point, moving beyond conventional Greek notions by using the term graces (Χάριτας) to describe the three virtues represented by the patriarchs, i.e. instruction, nature, and practice. But an interim stage of development, Philo reckons, must be taken before these virtues can be obtained.

The second facet is the scope of Philo's notion of the Abrahamic way of perfecting the mind. Philo now makes it clear that the triad of Enos, Enoch and Noah represent a threefold way of perceiving God by means of the human senses (*Abr.*52). In this vein, it is notable that Philo looks back to his interpretation of the first earth-born man of Genesis 2.7 (cf. *Opif.* 134-47), assigning the first triad to this line of offspring which operates in the sensible domain whilst identifying on the basis of Exodus 19.6 a more 'august and precious trinity' which is signified as Israel or 'he who sees God' and operates in the noetic domain:

... while Moses represented the first man, the earth-born, as father of all that were born up to the deluge...the oracles speak of this august and precious trinity (τὴν δὲ περίσεμνον τριάδα καὶ περιμάχῃτον) as parent of one species of that race, which species is called 'royal' and 'priesthood' and 'holy nation' (Ex 19.6).

Its high position is shown by the name; for the nation is called in the Hebrew tongue Israel, which being interpreted, is 'He who sees God' (ὁρᾶν θεόν)...the sight of the mind, the dominant element in the soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμονικου), surpasses all the other faculties of the mind, and this is wisdom which is the sight of the understanding.²¹⁴

There is nothing in the foregoing passage, strictly speaking, to suggest that Philo is excluding the threefold way of Enos, Enoch, and Noah. Rather, he is alerting readers of the 'Exposition,' both Jews and non-Jews, to a critical dimension of Mosaic epistemology: the patriarchs are exemplars or significations of the type of divinely transformed mind which particularly marks the Mosaic concept of 'Israel.'²¹⁵ This commingling of views suggests that Philo himself would resist the modern dichotomy of universality versus particularity.²¹⁶

The foregoing leads us to the third and final facet of Philo's discourses: the apex of the Abrahamic ascent and transformation of mind. Philo clearly sees

²¹⁴ *Abr.* 56-57.

²¹⁵ Plato's *Timaeus* (28C, 90A) represents Philo's main point of philosophical reference; cf. Nock 1962:79-86, esp. 82; on a different analysis, see more recently Birnbaum 1996:222-24.

²¹⁶ Concurring with Birnbaum 1996:144-52; this passage (*Abr.* 56-59) is notable in that Philo, interpreting Exod 19.6, virtually ignores the particularity of God's choosing of the nation Israel (Birnbaum 1996:145 n.18).

the patriarchal exemplars, severally and together, as pointing to the possibility of human ascent to visionary knowledge of God:

On Abraham §58

ὅτω δὲ μὴ μόνον ἐξεγένετο
τᾶλλα ὅσα ἐν τῇ φύσει δι'
ἐπιστήμης καταλαμβάνειν,
ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν πατέρα καὶ
ποιητὴν τῶν συμπάντων ὁρᾶν,
ἐπ' ἄκρον εὐδαιμονίας ἴστω
προεληλυθώς· οὐδὲν γὰρ
ἀνωτέρω θεοῦ, πρὸς ὃν εἴ τις τὸ
τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα τείνας ἔφθακε,
μονὴν εὐχέσθω καὶ στάσιν.

But he to whom it is given not
only to apprehend by means of
knowledge all else that nature
has to show, but also to see the
Father and Maker of all, may
rest assured that he is advanced
to the crowning point of
happiness; for nothing is higher
than God, and whoso has
stretched the eyesight of the
soul to reach Him should pray
that he may there abide and
stand firm;

Lest any of his readers think that it is possible to apprehend God to the fullest extent of his essence, Philo sharpens this picture of what he calls 'the height of happiness' (ἄκρον εὐδαιμονίας). He identifies the potencies of God as the utmost limits of human apprehension of the divine:

On Abraham §59

αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀνάντεῖς ὁδοὶ
καματηραὶ καὶ βραδεῖαι, ἡ δὲ
κατὰ πρानοῦς φορά, συρμὸν
ἔχουσα τὸ πλεόν ἢ κάθοδον,
ταχεῖα καὶ ῥάστη. πολλὰ δὲ τὰ

For journeys uphill are toilsome
and slow, but the downhill
course where one is swept
along rather than descends is
swift and most easy. And many
are the forces which would

κάτω βιαζόμενα, ὧν οὐδὲν ὄφελος, ὅταν ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ δυνάμεων ἀνακρεμάσας τὴν ψυχὴν ὁ θεὸς ὀλκῇ δυνατωτέρα πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐπισπάσῃται.	bear us down, yet none of them avail when God sets the soul suspended to His potencies and with a mightier attraction draws it to Himself.
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The last of the three facets above allows us to turn briefly to Philo's treatment of Abraham as an exemplary way to knowledge of God. Philo is in line with similar treatments of the patriarch's exemplarity in related Jewish literature.²¹⁷ At the same time, Philo seems to follow a rich strand of Greek epistemological thought in presenting Abraham as an example of a three-stage process that leads to a universal philosophical goal, beginning with a move from (1) sensory knowledge to (2) self-knowledge to (3) knowledge of a transcendent God.²¹⁸

In his figural reading of Genesis 11.31-12.4,²¹⁹ Philo sees the phases above as corresponding to Abraham's migration from Chaldea (the locus of counterfeit knowledge) to Haran (the locus of self-knowledge).²²⁰ Called out of Haran, Abraham in Philo's reckoning is experiencing a power higher than the mind

²¹⁷ Cf. Reed 2009:188-89.

²¹⁸ It has been suggested (Bos 2002:108-27) that Philo follows epistemological notions in Plato and Aristotle of metaphorically awakening from a deep dream/sleep; cf. Reddoch 2011:283-302 and related references therein. On *Abr.* 56-58 as evidence of Philo's view that *visio Dei* is a universal philosophical goal: Birnbaum 1996:122-23.

²¹⁹ *Abr.* 68: 'The migrations as set forth by the literal text of the scriptures are made by a man of wisdom, but according to the laws of allegory by a virtue-loving soul in its search for the true God' (Loeb).

²²⁰ *Abr.* 70-78. In the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Congr.* 1-11 for a similar emphasis on the progression from a generally educated state of mind (Hagar) to a more particularly enlightened state of mind (Sarah).

itself, a point he makes in the *Allegorical Commentary* but in the language of ecstatic divine inspiration.²²¹

This idea of a way higher than the mind itself leads us to consider a key knowledge text in *On Abraham* wherein Philo probes the potential of the human mind to attain knowledge about and from God.

In his interpretation of the episode of Abraham and his visitors at Mamre (Genesis 18.1-14), Philo offers a more or less literal exegesis (*Abr.* 107-18) before turning to the figural meaning of the passage (*Abr.* 119-32). It reads in pertinent part as follows:

When, then, as at noon-tide God shines around the soul, and the light of the mind fills it through and through and the shadows are driven from it by the rays which pour all around it, the single object presents to it a triple vision (τριπτὴν φαντασίαν), one representing the reality, the other two the shadows reflected from it.... the central place is held by the Father of the universe, who in the sacred scriptures is called he that IS as his proper name, while on either side of him are the senior potencies, the nearest to him, the creative and the kingly (ἡ μὲν ποιητική, ἡ δ' αὖ βασιλική). The title of the former is God (θεός), since it made and ordered the All; the title of the latter is Lord (κύριος), since it is the fundamental right of the maker to rule and control what he has brought into being (*Abr.* 119-21).

²²¹ This is discussed in further detail below in Chapter 5 (§ 5.5).

Philo then elaborates on how the central being and his powers appear in various ways to the human mind:

On Abraham §122

δορυφορούμενος οὖν ὁ μέσος ὑφ' ἑκατέρας τῶν δυνάμεων παρέχει τῇ ὁρατικῇ διανοίᾳ τοτὲ μὲν ἐνὸς τοτὲ δὲ τριῶν φαντασίαν, ἐνὸς μὲν ὅταν ἄκρως τύχη καθαρθεῖσα καὶ μὴ μόνον τὰ πλήθη τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γείτονα μονάδος δυάδα ὑπερβᾷσα πρὸς τὴν ἀμιγῆ καὶ ἀσύμπλοκον καὶ καθ' αὐτὴν οὐδενὸς ἐπιδεᾷ τὸ παράπαν ἰδέαν ἐπείγεται, τριῶν δὲ ὅταν μήπω τὰς μεγάλας τελεσθεῖσα τελετὰς ἔτι ἐν ταῖς βραχυτέραις ὀργιάζεται καὶ μὴ δύνηται τὸ ὄν ἄνευ ἐτέρου τίς ἐξ αὐτοῦ μόνου καταλαβεῖν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῶν δρωμένων, ἢ κτίζον ἢ ἄρχον.

So the central Being with each of his potencies as his squire presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three: of one, when that mind is highly purified and, passing beyond not merely the multiplicity of other numbers, but even the dyad which is next to the unit, presses on to the ideal form which is free from mixture and complexity, and being self-contained needs nothing more; of three, when, as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries, it is still a votary only of the minor rites and unable to apprehend the Existent alone by itself and apart from all else, but only through its actions, as either creative or ruling.

It has been suggested that the passage above represents one of the clearest views of Philo's mysticism.²²² The complexity of Philo's interpretive steps compels us to limit our discussion to the following comments.²²³

²²² Cf. Cazeaux 1987:21-41.

²²³ On the structural and rhetorical features of *Abr.* 107-32, see Alexandre Jr. 1998:35-48; on contextual factors: Birnbaum 1996:79-90.

The first feature to be noted is Philo's insistence that God is incomprehensible in his uncreated essence and by his proper name (*Abr.* 120-21). As noted already, Philo consistently maintains this position in the 'Exposition.'²²⁴

It is striking what Philo does next: he conjoins this point about divine incomprehensibility with the notion that *some* human knowledge of God is entirely possible, at least in his pluriform character (*Abr.* 122). Philo's interest in this conjunction appears elsewhere: in his reading of Exodus 25.21 in the *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, for instance, Philo can quite easily speak of a sevenfold divine appearance to convey the prospects of human knowledge of plurality in the one God.²²⁵

Here, Philo formulates a threefold divine appearance. This is not unlike what we see in Jewish traditions near and after Philo's time which featured similar notions of divine agency.²²⁶ Of utmost importance for Philo is what he calls the central being, incorporeal in nature and incomprehensible to created being. Influenced perhaps by Plato,²²⁷ Philo expands this portrait to include

²²⁴ Cf. *Opif.* 171; *Decal.* 64-65; in the *Allegorical Commentary: Leg. All.* 3.82.

²²⁵ Cf. *QE* 2.67-68.

²²⁶ Cf. Segal 1977:180; on the subsequent influence of Philo's reading of Gen 18: Hofrichter 1992:187-93 (Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 56-59).

²²⁷ Cf. Plato, *Tim.* 70B; on this metaphor as mediated through Hellenistic philosophy: Denningmann 2005:123-46; *pace* Roukema 2002:343-57 (esp. 346-48) who speculates

two powers, with each one flanking the central being. One power goes by the title 'God' (θεός, the creative, benevolent agency of God), the other goes by 'Lord' (κύριος, the ruling, punitive agency of God). From what Philo says elsewhere (e.g. *Deo* 12²²⁸), the powers are neither separate from God nor differentiated from each other.

The second feature to be noted is a key epistemological implication that arises from Philo's portrait of the single and pluriform God. In *On Abraham* §122, Philo identifies two types of theophanic visions specific to two distinct states of mind. To the mind (διανοία) that is 'highly purified' (ἄκρως...καθαρθεῖσα), the plenipotentiary of God is a single appearance.²²⁹ By contrast, for the mind that is 'as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries,' a threefold appearance (τριῶν φαντασίαν) is granted.²³⁰ This uninitiated mind, says Philo, 'cannot apprehend the Existent alone by itself ... but only through its actions, as either creative or ruling' (*Abr.* 123).

that Philo's discussion of the threefold divine appearance reflects an interest in ancient Israelite conceptions of the pantheon similar to those found in Ugaritic texts. In the absence of more attention to the contextual factors which animate Philo's epistemological discourses, Roukema's attempt to read *Abr.* 121-22 in light of other Philonic passages which derive from Deut 32.8-9 seems strained at best.

²²⁸ Cf. Siegert 1998:1-33 for critical text; the pertinent fragment is found at pp. 7-8.

²²⁹ Cf. Birnbaum 1996:91 n.1; Pearce 2007:121 posits Platonic influence (*Timaeus*) on Moses' construal of the exodus.

²³⁰ See further Chapter 4 below.

To what extent, if any, does this seem to imply the possibility that the purified mind can attain knowledge of God the Existent? As we have observed, Philo tends to reject this possibility in the 'Exposition' and elsewhere.²³¹ Is Philo perhaps drawing an exception here?

The answer, at least in part, lies in paying close attention to how Philo describes this way of the purified mind as superior to the way of the uninitiated mind.

Concerning the purified mind, Philo says:

It is in itself the divinely-approved way, or rather it is the truth, *higher than a way of thinking*, more precious than anything which is merely thought (*Abr.* 123).²³²

We see here Philo's tendency to describe the apex of noetic ascent by recourse to the language of human non-rationality, i.e. the overriding of human reason and thought. This metaphysical turn is one key to understanding Philo's way of holding together the idea of divine incomprehensibility and the idea of human ascent to the divine. At the highest level, in other words, the human quest for

²³¹ Cf. *Deo* 4.

²³² δεύτερος μὲν οὖν, ὥς φασι, πλοῦς οὗτος, μετέχει δ' οὐδὲν ἥττον δόξης θεοφιλοῦς· ὁ δὲ πρότερος τρόπος οὐ μετέχει, ἀλλ' αὐτός ἐστι θεοφιλῆς δόξα, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ δόξης πρεσβυτέρα καὶ παντὸς τιμιωτέρα τοῦ δοκεῖν ἀλήθεια.

knowledge of God becomes the ‘way’ (τρόπος), akin to truth itself, which transforms and transcends that very quest.²³³

3.4.2.4 Isaac and Jacob and the educational triad in Greek thought

The second part of Philo’s three-part model of noetic aspiration centres on the figure of Isaac. In *On Abraham*, Philo has limited things to say about Isaac: he is equated in the sensible realm with Laughter and in the intelligible form with ‘Joy,’ an emotional reality most closely associated with God Himself (cf. *Abr.* 201-02). Unfortunately Philo’s treatise *On Isaac* no longer exists. In his prologue to *On Joseph*, Philo reminds readers that the treatise covered ‘the excellence and life of nature (τὸν αὐτομαθῆ)’ (*Jos.* 1).

The third and final part of Philo’s three-part model of noetic aspiration centres on the figure of Jacob. Like Isaac, Philo devoted an entire treatise to the figure of Jacob, covering the idea of excellence and life of practice (τὸν ἀσκητικόν) (*Jos.* 1). Like the passages on Isaac, Philo returns to the symbolic significance of Jacob in his final treatise.

²³³ Cf. Dillon 1975:1-6.

3.4.3 *How does Philo conceive of the limitations of the human mind
in the 'Patriarchs' Segment*

As noted above, Philo spends a considerable amount of time writing about the potential of the human mind to ascend to know and experience God. In this vein, Philo gives paradigmatic significance to the patriarchal triad in Genesis. But what does Philo claim about the limitations of the mind?

Compared to the cosmological segment, which hardly mentions the bodily passions, the historical segment features many discourses on the passions. In this segment, Philo tells us that the passions are fourfold in character, consisting primarily of pleasure (ἡδονή), desire (ἐπιθυμία), fear (φόβος), and grief (λύπη) (*Abr.* 236). The passions, in whole or in part, are the natural antagonist of human reason (*Abr.* 256). Indeed, anyone who is consumed by the bodily passions becomes like one who is truly beast-like (*Abr.* 32).

To illustrate this state of mind, Philo exploits the figure of Pharaoh, the Egyptian, whose mind is presented as the antithesis to the mind that aspires to know God under Mosaic tutelage.²³⁴ The mind of Pharaoh signifies one who has been consumed by the passions of the body (*Abr.* 103). Philo concedes, in a rare symbolic turn, that this specific Pharaoh-like mind may be

²³⁴ Cf. Pearce 2007:17-159 (esp. 141-59).

somewhat drawn to virtue (just as Pharaoh wanted to have intercourse with Sarah in Gen 12.10-20),²³⁵ but in the end, this verdict remains:

On Abraham §103

διὸ καὶ ὁ τῆς Αἰγύπτου βασιλεύς,
ὅπερ ἐστὶ συμβολικῶς νοῦς
φιλοσώματος, καθυποκρινόμενος
ὡς ἐν θεάτρῳ προσποιήτον
ἐπιμορφάζει κοινωνίαν, πρὸς
ἐγκράτειαν ὁ ἀκρατὴς καὶ πρὸς
σωφροσύνην ὁ ἀκόλαστος καὶ πρὸς
δικαιοσύνην ὁ ἄδικος, καὶ καλεῖ τὴν
ἀρετὴν ὡς ἑαυτὸν τῆς παρὰ τοῖς
πολλοῖς εὐφημίας γλιχόμενος.

And so the king of Egypt, under
which figure is **symbolised the
mind which loves the body**,
acts a part as in a theatre and
assumes a counterfeited
fellowship, he, the licentious
with chastity, the profligate
with self-control, the unjust
with justice, and in his desire to
earn a good repute, with the
multitude invites virtue to join
him.

In Philo's system of ideas, there simply is no allowance for this mixture of virtues and vices. Indeed, in *On Abraham* §§217-24 (especially §222), Philo makes it clear, using an allegorical reading of Abraham's dealings with quarrelsome Lot (Gen 13.5-11), that the body and the mind are always at war,²³⁶ with no common principle between them:

²³⁵ Cf. Pearce 2007:141. On the interpretation of this passage in light of its broader context (*Abr.* 90-109) and wider notions of intemperance (ἀκολασία) and inhospitality (ἄξενον) in biblical and Greek moral discourse, cf. Pearce 2007:197-200.

²³⁶ A theme featuring prominently in *On Joseph*. Present constraints require us to note Gen 45.25-46.7 as a key vehicle that drives Philo's discourse (*Jos.* 252-55) on Jacob's changing states of mind in relation to the body (Egypt). On this point in relation to Josephus and *Jubilees*: Begg 2008:499-518 (esp. 508-12). For detailed analysis of *Jos.* and its relation to *Somn.* 2 and *Spec.* I-IV: Cazeaux 1995:41-81.

γίνεται οὖν φυσική τις αὐτοῖς ἡ
διαμάχη μηδὲν ἐγνωκόσι τῶν
αὐτῶν, ἀλλ' ἀπάδουσι καὶ
διαφερομένοις αἰεὶ περὶ
πράγματος συνεκτικωτάτου τῶν
ἐν βίῳ, τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἡ κρίσις
τῶν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀγαθῶν.

So there is a natural conflict
between them [lovers of body
and lovers of mind] since they
have no common principle but
are forever jangling and
quarreling about the most
important thing in life, and that
is the decision what are the true
goods.

3.4.4 Summary and Preview

To sum up: in the 'patriarchs' segment of the 'Exposition,' Philo writes in a *three-dimensional way* about noetic ascent to knowledge about and from God. Philo broadens his interpretive scope to cover the patriarchal narratives that occupy the rest of Genesis (chapters 4-50). In so doing, Philo enlists the patriarchal triad of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for two interwoven purposes.

On the one hand, as founders of the special nation or race of Israel, this triad advances Philo's interest in defending the particular character of the Mosaic approach to theological knowledge. On the other hand, as figures signifying the Greek ways of instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac), and practice (Jacob), this biblical triad advances Philo's interest in engaging contemporary philosophical notions of human enlightenment and transformation.

As we shift our attention to Philo's discourses in the third and final segment of the 'Exposition,' it is worth recalling Aristotle's insistence on situating the Greek triadic model of education (instruction, nature, practice) with reference to a broader insistence on the primacy of human laws. Not unlike Aristotle, Philo moves from the patriarchal exemplars of instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac) and practice (Jacob) toward the central significance of laws, and more crucially, the unrivalled excellence of Moses, the lawgiver of Israel.

Turning then to the 'Moses' segment of the 'Exposition,' one encounters Philo's engagement with a paradoxical concept that lies at the heart of the Platonic orbit of ideas, the philosopher-king of the *Republic*. For Philo, it seems that the biographical and legislative materials in the Pentateuch afford him the chance to portray Moses in these terms, as the kind of ideal figure Plato envisions but concedes as a paradox and Aristotle later rejects as a virtual impossibility. Philo's epistemological discourses in this segment, as we shall see, grow out of a fourfold portrayal of Moses that thematically brackets the entire 'Exposition.'

3.5

Philo's approach to the human mind in the 'Moses' or 'Laws' segment of the 'Exposition'

This is by far the lengthiest part of the 'Exposition,' consisting of seven commentaries on Mosaic legislation: *On the Decalogue*, *On the Special Laws I-IV*, *On Virtues*, and *On Rewards and Punishments*. These books represent Philo's selective reading of four of the five books that form the Pentateuch, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

It is useful, at the outset, to briefly consider how Philo views the nature and character of Mosaic legislation. This raises the question of the relationship, if any, that Philo finds between the written particular laws and the more universal set of laws and principles which Philo associates with 'the law of nature,' a shorthand widely used in philosophical circles of his day. This relationship needs to be unpacked before we can attempt to understand Philo's approach to the written laws of Moses and the ways in which these laws prompt Philo to write about the subject of the mind's ascent to knowledge of God.

In what follows, we will consider Philo's views concerning the relationship between two sets of laws that derive from God and direct all spheres of human existence: *the unwritten law of nature* and its perfect counterpart, *the*

written laws of Moses. In Philo's reckoning, only Moses could divine the distinct yet related character of these two sets of laws and how one informs the other in a virtually limitless range of reciprocal ways. For Philo, this Mosaic insight is indeed reflected in the ordered sequence of his writings (cf. *Abr.* 3).

To unpack the significance of this relationship, we shall consider one set of laws at a time, starting with the unwritten law of nature (§3.5.1 below). After this, we will briefly consider Philo's views of the written laws of Moses (§3.5.2). Then we will provide a few case studies that illustrate how Philo regards this relationship at work in the way of Moses (§3.5.3). This will then allow us to address the first of our three research questions (§3.5.4): *how does Philo variously conceive of the origin and nature of the human mind?*

3.5.1 The Unwritten Law of Nature

Formulations of a universal law of nature feature variously in the writings of early Greek thinkers²³⁷ and are developed significantly in the extant Stoic

²³⁷ For early Greek sources, see e.g. Anaximander's fragment (12B1 DK) and Heraclitus (22B114 DK); cf. Runia 2001:106. On the early Greek reticence about law as a positive ingredient of scientific discourse, see Long 2005:412-30.

sources.²³⁸ Attitudes to nature range widely in texts from Graeco-Roman Judaism, and in some cases, accounts of creation and nature are composed with an apparent intention to appeal to readers with sensibilities formed by popular Hellenistic philosophy.²³⁹

In non-Jewish texts of Philo's era, Stoicised notions of the law of nature commingle with Roman perspectives on law and politics.²⁴⁰ Consider some of the writings of Cicero, a pupil of Posidonius. Cicero's affirmation of *lex naturalis*²⁴¹ and his rejection of any notion of a written copy of the universal law of nature²⁴² give us a fair approximation of at least one mainline view from the Graeco-Roman world of thought. But to say that Cicero's approach was novel would strain the evidence, for in Cicero one can detect echoes of Aristotle's earlier insistence that the law of nature is an unwritten law,

²³⁸ Cf. Cleanthes (331 - 232 BCE) in his *Hymn to Zeus*, as attested in Diog. Laert. 7.168-76; cf. *SVF* 1.537. See also *SVF* 1.161, 262 for Stoic evidence that common law is identified with ὁρθὸς λόγος.

²³⁹ Cf. Himmelfarb 1993:72-94, especially her discussion of the nexus between biblical notions of nature and the idea of ascent in 2 *Enoch* (pp. 83-87); Fraade 2005:85-86 considers *Book of Jubilees* 49-50 as a Jewish example of the view that knowledge and observance of divinely revealed law extends back to the creation.

²⁴⁰ Approaches to natural law in Plato, Aristotle, and Stoics summarised in Brown 2009:343-56.

²⁴¹ Cicero, *Rep.* 3.22.33; also *Leg.* 1.6.16; 2.4.10. For more on Cicero's perspectives on natural law, see Koester 1968; Horsley 1978. Ferrary 1995:67-68 offers a critique of Horsley's claim that Platonist influence accounts for Cicero's view of natural law in Book I of *De Legibus*.

²⁴² Cicero, *Off.* 3.69; cf. Griffin/Atkins 1991:125-26.

inscribed on human minds and hearts rather than on material pillars or tablets.²⁴³

What separates Moses from all other legislators? For Philo, it is Moses' stress on the perfect correspondence between the rational law of nature and his own written laws.²⁴⁴ 'There is a direct relation between legislation for human life and the rational structure of the cosmos,' notes David Runia in his treatment of Philo's exposition of Genesis 1. 'The person who observes the Law of Moses will feel at home within the cosmos as totality. The guiding thought behind this idea is the concept of the law of nature.'²⁴⁵

It has been suggested that this approximation of laws featured prominently in many Second Temple Jewish sources. Philo's development of natural law theory, writes Markus Bockmuehl, 'is in fact indebted not only to Stoic ideas of the preceding two generations but to a well-documented and long-standing tradition within Second Temple Judaism.'²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1368b7; 1373b6; 1375a 32.

²⁴⁴ Cf. *Spec.* 4.61; *Virt.* 139-40.

²⁴⁵ Runia 2001:99.

²⁴⁶ Bockmuehl 1995:17-44 (quote is from p. 44); but see Urbach 1979:323-24 for the suggestion that Philo's theory of the law of nature stands 'opposed to Jewish teachings regarding supernatural revelation.'

3.5.1.1 Primacy and paradox of rationality in the cosmos

At first glance, however, this concept of natural law raises a host of related paradoxes, as Philo himself seems to concede. How is it possible to say that nature, in all of her manifold diversities, reflects the operation of a unifying law or set of laws? Even if this point is granted, one runs into the equally difficult issue of what grounds, if any, can one describe this law as an unwritten phenomenon?

Philo refuses to flatten the underlying tensions. Rather, he employs four key metaphors to characterise the law of nature. By way of preview, the metaphors can be illustrated with the following diagram:

Diagram 3.3
Philo's four key metaphors for the law of nature

(1) Cosmos as a megapolis with a single constitution	(2) Cosmos as an instantiation of the sacred number seven
(3) Cosmos as a partaker of the nature of God	(4) Cosmos as father and husband of the human mind

The first metaphor is the cosmos as a megalopolis with a single constitution, 'the right reason of nature.'²⁴⁷ Trading on a widely held Greek notion of the cosmos as a great city, Philo affirms Moses' insistence that the cosmos is not an independent entity but rather one that is governed by rational laws commanding what should be done and what should not be done.²⁴⁸

If nature is thoroughly rational, how can it also be so variegated in all of its expressions and operations? Variegation of any sort, Philo frequently notes, is the antithesis of rationality.²⁴⁹ How does Philo address this apparent difficulty?

This leads to a second key metaphor, the number seven. Indeed, one of the chief ways Philo reconciles the problem of variegation in nature is by resorting to speculations involving numbers, and in particular, the hebdomadic character of Moses' creation account. Philo's tracing of Mosaic logic on this point merits brief attention.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Philo, *Opif.* 16-18, 143; *Spec.* 1.13, 33-34; 3.189 *Praem.* 33. Similar lines of thinking can be detected in the *Allegorical Commentary*, e.g. *Leg. All.* 3.98; *Conf.* 170. Further discussion and references at Runia 2000:364-72.

²⁴⁸ Cf. Philo's language varies, which is not entirely surprisingly in light of Philo's approach to philosophy and exegesis; for instance, Philo brings such rational laws of the cosmos under the heading of 'law of nature' in *Opif.* 3, 142; he describes such rational laws under the heading of *Logos* in *Jos.* 29-30.

²⁴⁹ Cf. *Jos.* 32.

Though the cosmos can be seen as a single created thing, temporally bound and finite,²⁵⁰ it can also be seen as a dynamic twofold reality. It is twofold in the sense that the cosmos consists of all that is visible and sense-perceptible (the Platonic realm of 'becoming'), on the one hand, but simultaneously consists of all that is intelligible and eternal (the realm of 'being'), on the other hand. But this twofold reality is also dynamic insofar as every finite thing in the visible universe, like a seed designed to grow, is compelled to move from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality.

What dictates this movement? It is the intelligible universe, which is characterised by an overwhelming love for perfect rationality. This rationality, in Philo's view, is signified in the number seven and 'extends to the whole of the visible reality, reaching as far as heaven and earth, the limits of the universe.'²⁵¹ On this hebdomadic principle, says Philo, Moses can claim that creation *in toto* is thoroughly rational in ways more superlative than what was imagined by 'the earliest men' (a Philonic signal for Greek thinkers).

²⁵⁰ Cf. *Opif.* 12; 171; *Spec.* 3.189; for a similar viewpoint in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Post.* 7; *Ebr.* 101; in the non-exegetical works, see e.g. *Prov.* 2.49, 99.

²⁵¹ *Opif.* 111.

A third key metaphor is the cosmos as a partaker of the nature of God. On this basis, one frequently used in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition,'²⁵² Philo sees the singularity and diversity of the cosmos as reflecting the very character of God. As was disclosed to Abraham,²⁵³ God is both One and the Many. In a derivative way, the cosmos is perfectly ordered as one composite entity that is harmonised by its many cycles and processes.

Having considered Philo's way of dealing with the paradoxical nature of the concept of the law of nature, we now need to briefly see how Philo describes the functions of the law of nature. This leads us to *the fourth and final metaphor*: nature's right reasoning as both father and husband of the human mind.

A key representative passage is *On the Special Laws* §§2.29-30, Philo's figurative reading of the rules governing oaths made by virgins, wives, and widows. Philo views the universal law of nature as functioning in a twofold manner: first, it deposits seeds of knowledge, virtue and wisdom into human minds and second, it brings these seeds to bear.

²⁵² E.g. *Opif.* 21, 27-28, 33; 44.

²⁵³ *Abr.* 121-23, on Genesis 18; see §3.4.2.3 above.

Reflecting on the non-literal meaning of Numbers 30.4-9, Philo states:

On the Special Laws II §29

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν αἱ ῥηταὶ
προστάξεις περιέχουσιν. ἔστι δὲ
καὶ ἀλληγορῆσαι τὰ περὶ τὸν
τόπον ἔχοντα θεωρίαν τὴν διὰ
συμβόλων.

Such is the sum and substance
of these ordinances taken
literally. But we may also
allegorise such parts of the
subject as admit of being
studied in a figurative sense.

εἰδέναι τοίνυν προσήκει ὅτι ὁ τῆς
φύσεως ὀρθὸς λόγος πατὴρ
ὁμοῦ καὶ ἄνδρὸς ἔχει δύναμιν,
ἐπινοίαις διαφόροις· ἄνδρὸς μὲν,
ἐπειδὴ τὸν ἀρετῶν σπόρον
ὥσπερ εἰς ἀγαθὴν ἄρουραν τὴν
ψυχὴν καταβάλλεται, πατὴρ δ'
ὅτι βουλὰς ἀγαθὰς καὶ πράξεις
καλὰς καὶ σπουδαίας γεννᾷ
πέφυκε καὶ γεννήσας ἐκτρέφει
ποτίμοις δόγμασιν, ἃ παιδεῖα
καὶ σοφία χορηγοῦσι.

We should know, then, that
nature's right reasoning has the
functions both of a father and a
husband, though the
conceptions attached to each
are different. It acts as a
husband because it deposits the
seed of virtue in the soul as in a
fertile field. It acts as a father
because its nature is to beget
good intentions and noble and
worthy actions, and then to
foster its offspring with the
water of the truths which
education and wisdom
abundantly supply.

Philo then considers the way of the mind relative to each function:

On the Special Laws II §30

διάνοια δ' ἀπεικάζεται τοτὲ μὲν
παρθένῳ, τοτὲ δὲ γυναικὶ ἢ
χρηρευούσῃ ἢ ἀνδρὶ ἔτι
ἡρμοσμένῃ· παρθένος μὲν
διάνοια ἀγνήν καὶ ἀδιάφθορον
διαφυλάττουσα ἑαυτὴν ἀπὸ τε

The mind is likened on the one
hand to a virgin, on the other to
a woman either in widowhood,
or still united to a husband. As a
virgin it keeps itself pure and
uncorrupted from the
malignant passions, pleasures

ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ λυπῶν καὶ φόβων, ἐπιβούλων παθῶν, ἧς τὴν προστασίαν ὁ γεννητὴς ἀνῆπτει πατὴρ· τῆς δ' ὡς γυναικὸς ἀστείω λόγῳ τῷ κατ' ἀρετὴν συμβιούσης τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος οὗτος ἐπαγγέλλεται σπείρων ἀνδρὸς τρόπον ἐννοίας ἀρίστας.	and desires and griefs and fears. Over this virgin mind the father who begat it has assumed authority. But when, like a wife, it dwells with virtuous reasoning as its worthy mate, that same reasoning promises to take charge of it and impregnates it husband-like with thoughts of highest excellence.
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In keeping with this non-literal reading of Numbers 30, Philo is able to say that the non-rational soul cannot be the locus of nature's reasoning activities (*Spec.* §2.31). The law of nature, we can reasonably conclude, operates in the field of rationality in the human mind.

These two passages can be summarised with the following diagram:

Diagram 3.4

Two functions of the law of nature vis-à-vis the human mind
(*On the Special Laws* §§2.29-31)

Function	Law of Nature	Human Mind
1	Acts as a husband	Governed by the law of nature in this function, the mind takes the place of a wife. The mind dwells with the virtuous reasoning of Nature. The law of nature impregnates the mind with rational thoughts of highest excellence.

2	Acts as a father	Governed by the law of nature in this function, the mind takes the place of a virgin, pure and unpolluted from passions. Like a father, the law of nature exerts authority over the mind, particular in the mind's relationship to the body.
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Philo's way of using metaphors to characterise the varied functions of the law of nature can be compared, broadly speaking, with what we find in political writings from one of his leading contemporaries. As Eric Brown observes, Cicero uses two key metaphors to describe the law of nature which gradually became 'among the most influential ideas from ancient political thought.'²⁵⁴

Chief among Cicero's metaphors²⁵⁵ are (a) the law of nature as 'right reason' for humanity,²⁵⁶ and (b) the law of nature as a divine gift through which kinship between the human and the divine is possible.²⁵⁷ Because both metaphors trace back to much earlier Greek philosophers,²⁵⁸ the notion of a

²⁵⁴ Brown 2009:331-32 (quote is from p. 332).

²⁵⁵ Cf. Brown 2009:332 n. 2 for references to further Ciceronian metaphors for the law of nature in *Leg.* 1.33, 42; 2.8-13; *Rep.* 1.16-29 (esp. 27).

²⁵⁶ Cicero, *Leg.* 1.17-20.

²⁵⁷ Cicero, *Leg.* 1.23.

²⁵⁸ Cf. Brown 2009:333.

shared intellectual tradition – rather than any direct influence – accounts for the presence of similar features in Philo and Cicero.²⁵⁹

Having considered four key metaphors Philo uses to address difficulties associated with the concept of an unwritten law of nature, we are poised to examine what Philo says about the nature and character of the written laws of Moses.

3.5.2 *The ‘Written’ Laws of Moses*

According to Elias Bickerman, a key part of Philo’s approach to the two sets of laws is the translation of the term ‘torah,’ which became *nomos* (law) in the Septuagint. The translators on the island of Pharos translated ‘torah’ into the Greek singular –rather than the plural (*nomoi*) – and this is not lost on Philo, says Bickerman: ‘for them the Torah was not just another code, but the revealed, fundamental order within which man, all other creatures, and all the elements of the cosmos as well ought to live.’²⁶⁰

²⁵⁹ On other points of possible similarity between Cicero and Philo: Lèvy 1992:509-21; Niehoff 2001:249-51.

²⁶⁰ Bickerman 1988:114, with concurrence in Runia 2001:106. On a broader note, Dodd and Sandmel variously contend that the translation of Torah by νόμος played a part in the separation of Judaism and Christianity; but see Segal 1984:19-27 for a critique of this view.

Bickerman's suggestion moves us closer to understanding Philo's perspectives on the apparent congruence between the law(s) of Moses and the law of nature. As stated above, Philo sees the cosmos as evidence of both the singular and varied natures of God. The cosmos reveals knowledge of divine realities, to be sure, but the cosmos is also constrained in a major way. As a copy of the divine *Logos*, the cosmos cannot fully disclose the essence of God. The law of nature, therefore, is tempered by the principle of divine incomprehensibility.

In many ways, Philo approaches the laws of Moses in a similar manner. Like the cosmos, the laws of Moses do not enable the human mind to know God in his true essence. Yet, the laws of Moses function as a 'fully harmonious choir,'²⁶¹ each law perfectly attuned to the others and together capture something of the distinctive character of God.

In this vein, Philo divides and ranks the legislative material into two groups. The first and higher ranked group consists of unmediated divine oracles, namely, the Ten *Logoi* or Words. The second and lower ranked group consists of laws that are divinely inspired but mediated through a company of human interpreters, with Moses as the preeminent figure.

²⁶¹ *Virt.* 145.

According to Ellen Birnbaum, ‘Most of Philo’s discussions about the episode at Sinai, narrated in Exodus 19-24, focus upon specific verses and laws rather than the significance of the event.’²⁶² Internal evidence seems to support this claim, but what is striking is Philo’s insistence that the grouping of the commandments reflects the very nature of God.²⁶³

In his introduction to *On the Decalogue*, Philo discloses a principle that shapes his understanding of the Ten Words:

Some of them [the laws] God judged fit to deliver in His own person (αὐτοπροσώπως θεσπίσαι) alone without employing any other, and some through His prophet Moses whom He chose as of all men the best suited to be the revealer of verities.²⁶⁴

Although this division is not seen perhaps as sharply in rabbinic thought,²⁶⁵ it serves as a straight-edge for Philo in his approach to Mosaic legislation.

Indeed, Philo revisits this principle of division at the end of *On the Decalogue*.

²⁶² Birnbaum 1996:125-26 n. 47, further citing *Her.* 167-73.

²⁶³ On Philo’s insistence on the centrality of the Decalogue vis-à-vis perspectives in early Jewish texts and traditions, cf. Kellerman 2001:161-70.

²⁶⁴ *Decal.* 18-19. For discussion of Philo’s knowledge of early *halakhoth* and the relation, if any, between Philo and the rabbis who held that there were 613 commandments, see Winston 2009:231-53 (esp. 247-51).

²⁶⁵ The writer of *Genesis Rabbah*, for instance, portrays God as speaking Hebrew to angels and others before the creation of humans (*Gen. Rab.* 8.4-5; 11.8); see further Eilberg-Schwartz 1987:769-88; Aaron 1999:96-100.

Concerning these two ways of revelation, Philo says that this bifurcation captures something of the nature of God:

On the Decalogue §175

τοσαῦτα καὶ περὶ τῆς δευτέρας
πεντάδος ἀποχρώντως λέλεκται
πρὸς ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν δέκα
λογίων, ἅπερ ἱεροπρεπῶς
ἔχρησεν αὐτὸς ὁ θεός. ἦν γὰρ
ἁρμόττον αὐτοῦ τῇ φύσει,
κεφάλαια μὲν τῶν ἐν εἶδει
νόμων αὐτοπροσώπως θεσπίσαι,
νόμους δὲ τοὺς ἐν τῷ μέρει διὰ
τοῦ τελειοτάτου τῶν προφητῶν,
ὃν ἐπικρίνας ἀριστίνδην καὶ
ἀναπλήσας ἐνθέου πνεύματος
ἐρμηνέα τῶν χρησμοδουμένων
εἶλετο.

This is all that need be said regarding the second five to complete our account of the ten oracles which God gave forth Himself as well befitted His holiness. For **it was in accordance with His nature** that the pronouncements in which the special laws were summed up should be given by Him in His own person, but the particular laws by the mouth of the most perfect of the prophets whom He selected for his merits and having filled him with the divine spirit, chose him to be the interpreter of His sacred utterance.

Philo here describes the Ten Words as heads promulgated by the divine lawgiver ‘in his own person’ (αὐτοπροσώπως θεσπίσαι), a striking phrase that rarely occurs in Philo – only here (*Decal.* 175) and earlier in the book (*Decal.* 19) – and so seems to recall Philo’s discussion of the character of revelation at Sinai (*Decal.* 18-50).²⁶⁶ But what is Philo getting at when he describes the

²⁶⁶ The presence of this Sinai theme in *Decal.* is not inconsistent with a recent suggestion (Himbaza 2002:411-28) that Philo’s version of the Decalogue agrees more with the LXX text of Exod 20.2-17 (part of the so-called ‘Elohistic’ *Code of the Covenant*) than that of LXX Deut 5.6-18 (part of the so-called ‘Yahwistic’ *Code of Renewal of the Covenant*).

divine conferral of the Decalogue as a phenomenon according to God's nature?

A clue can be found in *On the Decalogue* §51, a passage which marks the start of Philo's commentary on the Decalogue:

On the Decalogue §51

ἡ μὲν οὖν ἀμείνων πεντὰς τοιάδε ἦν· περὶ μοναρχίας, ἣ μοναρχεῖται ὁ κόσμος· περὶ ξοάνων καὶ ἀγαλμάτων καὶ συνόλως ἀφιδρυμάτων χειροκμήτων· περὶ τοῦ μὴ λαμβάνειν ἐπὶ ματαίῳ θεοῦ πρόσρησιν· περὶ τοῦ τὴν ἱερὰν ἐβδόμην ἅγειν ἱεροπρεπῶς· περὶ γονέων τιμῆς καὶ ἰδίᾳ ἑκατέρου καὶ ἀμφοτέρων κοινῇ· ὥς εἶναι τῆς μιᾶς γραφῆς τὴν μὲν ἀρχὴν θεὸν καὶ πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν τοῦ παντός, τὸ δὲ τέλος γονεῖς, οἱ μιμούμενοι τὴν ἐκείνου φύσιν γεννῶσι τοὺς ἐπὶ μέρους. ἡ δ' ἑτέρα πεντὰς τὰς πάσας ἀπαγορεύσεις περιέχει· μοιχείας, φόνου, κλοπῆς, ψευδομαρτυριῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν.

The superior set of five treats of the following matters: the monarchical principle by which the world is governed: idols of stone and wood and images in general made by human hands; the sin of taking the name of God in vain; the reverent observance of the sacred seventh day as befits its holiness; the duty of honoring parents, each separately and both in common. Thus one set of enactments begins with God the Father and Maker of all, and ends with parents who copy His nature by begetting particular persons. The other set of five contains all the prohibitions, namely adultery, murder, theft, false witness, covetousness or lust.

In this passage, Philo recognises the Decalogue as a whole consisting of two sets of five (πεντάς). The first and superior set of commandments is framed by the twofold notion of divine and human 'begetting' (γεννάω). God is the

Father who begets all good things; parents are those who copy the divine nature by begetting offspring. The second and inferior set reflects ‘all of the prohibitions’ (τὰς πάσας ἀπαγορεύσεις).

One can detect in Philo’s partitioned account of the Decalogue a rough correspondence with his account of the respective natures and functions of the chief powers of God. Here, by highlighting the motif of ‘begetting’ that marks the nature of God and those who copy the divine nature (οἱ μιμούμενοι τὴν ἐκείνου φύσιν γεννῶσι τοὺς ἐπὶ μέρους), Philo seems to hint at the possibility that the first set of five commandments perhaps reflects the creative (θεός) agency of the preexistent God. With the second set of commandments, Philo focuses on their prohibitive character, perhaps as a nod in the direction of the divine power by and through whom the created realm is governed (κύριος).

Philo does not tell us explicitly how the giving of the Decalogue accords with the nature of God, other than to say that the Decalogue, with its absence of penalties, reflects the good nature of the divine giver (*Decal.* 176-78). To draw this discussion to a close by returning to our question posed above, it seems that for Philo the giving of the Decalogue is a phenomenon that

accords with the pluriform nature of God (his creative and governing agencies), not the nature of what Philo calls the singular preexistent God.

3.5.3 *Relationship between the Unwritten Law(s) and the Written Laws*

Having separately considered each body of laws, we are now a step closer to considering the relationship between them. The ensuing consideration of Philo's attitudes to this relationship will sharpen our picture of Philo's multi-dimensional way of writing about the mind's aspiration to know God in the legislative segment of the 'Exposition.' In what follows, we will focus on four key features.

First, in Philo's view, both laws are divine in origin, deriving from the same source. 'God is the archetype on which laws are modeled,' says Philo in *On the Special Laws* §1.279.²⁶⁷ Indeed, on this premise, Philo can say that Greek legislators copied Moses in many, if not all, areas of law.²⁶⁸

Second, one law corresponds perfectly to the other. This is a corollary of the foregoing premise. Philo reckons that Moses, in crafting a particular law,

²⁶⁷ See also *Decal.* 52: 'the transcendent source of all that exists is God, as piety is the source of the virtues.'

²⁶⁸ See e.g. *Spec.* 4.61; *Virt.* 139-40; in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see *Conf.* 141. On Philo's view that the Mosaic legislation is superior to other legislations, see Reinhartz 1986:337-45.

follows the equivalent of that law in the unwritten law of nature. As such, when one conforms to the laws of Moses, he or she confirms the law of nature.²⁶⁹

Third, both laws are saturated with intelligible meanings and divinely revealed wisdom that lie beyond what one can comprehend with his or her senses.²⁷⁰ Through both sets of laws, the aspirant's mind can be converted from a state of ignorance to a state of attaining the wisdom of God.²⁷¹

Indeed, when one studies the laws of Moses, he or she discovers that Moses' treatment of the fundamental relationship between the human mind and the senses is analogical to the relationship between the cosmos and God.²⁷² This naturally raises the question: what kind of study facilitates this discovery?

Fourth and finally, allegory is a primary vehicle for studying the relationship between the two sets of laws. Given the saturated nature of the written laws of Moses, Philo insists that allegory is a suitable way to explore the

²⁶⁹ See e.g. *Spec.* 1.152-155; 1.202; 2.13; 2.109; 2.124; 2.129; 2.239; 3.28; 3.33; 3.48; 3.137; *Virt.* 18-19, 94, 122, 127-33; *Praem.* 155-58.

²⁷⁰ *Virt.* 99.

²⁷¹ E.g. *Spec.* 1.15; 2.39. On Philo's ambivalence to the physical cosmos: Festugière 1949 2:519-85; Anderson 2011:36-154.

²⁷² *Spec.* 1.17-18.

profundity of these laws.²⁷³ ‘Broadly speaking,’ observes Philo in *On Joseph* §28, ‘all or most of the law-book is an allegory.’ In keeping with this view, Philo offers various opinions for the nature and scope of allegory, whether in passing or with more stated purpose. See Appendix C for a brief sampling of Philonic statements on allegory in the ‘Exposition.’

Having considered Philo’s approach to the law of nature and the laws of Moses and the interwoven nature of their relationship, we can turn to what Philo says about the nature, potential and limits of the human mind in its aspiration to know divine realities.

3.5.4 How does Philo conceive of the nature of the human mind in this segment of the ‘Exposition’?

In the ‘Moses’ segment of the ‘Exposition,’ Philo stresses more than elsewhere the contingent nature of the human mind. This of course is not to say that Philo denies the high status of the human mind. Indeed, as he says in a fairly representative passage in the third book of *The Special Laws*, the

²⁷³ Cf. Nikiprowetzky 1977:117-55.

human mind is the greatest of all divine gifts.²⁷⁴ In this sense, Philo's position is consistent with the position he maintains elsewhere in the 'Exposition.'²⁷⁵

The Mosaic legislation, however, seems to provoke Philo to focus on the creaturely nature of the human mind. The mind is inescapably subject to the limitations and vulnerabilities of mortal existence. So, for instance, in his commentary on the Mosaic laws punishing those who poison or infect unsuspecting persons with chronic diseases and mental maladies (*On the Special Laws* §3.99), Philo can speak of this act as a crime against the human mind:

On the Special Laws III §99

χαλεπώτερα μέντοι συμβαίνειν
φιλεῖ τῶν ἐν τοῖς σώμασι καὶ τὰ
περὶ τὰς ψυχὰς πάθη τῶν
ἐπιβουλευομένων ἐκστάσεις γὰρ
καὶ παραφροσύναι καὶ ἀφόρητοι
μανίαι κατασκήπτουσι, δι' ὧν ὁ
νοῦς, ἣν μεγίστην ἀπένειμεν
ἀνθρώπων γένει δωρεὰν ὁ θεός,
κακούμενος πάσας κακώσεις,
ὅταν ἀπογνῶ τὰ σωτήρια,
μετανίσταται καὶ μετοικίζεται
τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς φαυλότερον εἶδος
ὑπολειπόμενος ἐν τῷ σώματι, τὸ

However, the bodily troubles of the sufferers from these machinations are often less grievous than those which affect their souls. Fits of delirium and insanity and intolerable frenzy swoop down upon them, and thereby **the mind, the greatest gift which God has assigned to human kind, is subject to every sort of affliction**, and when it despairs of salvation it takes its departure and makes its home elsewhere, leaving in the body

²⁷⁴ *Spec.* 3.99.

²⁷⁵ Cf. Pearce 2007:291 n.65 citing similar notions in *Abr.* 8, 33; *Mos.* 1.43; *QG* 4.133; one might add *Praem.* 163.

ἄλογον, οὗ καὶ τὰ θηρία
μετέσχηκεν, ἐπειδὴ πᾶς ὁ
ἐρημωθείς λογισμοῦ τοῦ
κρείττονος μέρους ψυχῆς
μεταβέβληκεν εἰς θήρειον
φύσιν, καὶ ἔτι μένωσιν οἱ τοῦ
σώματος χαρακτῆρες
ἀνθρωπόμορφοι

the baser kind of soul, the
irrational, which the beasts also
share. For everyone who is left
forsaken by reason, the better
part of the soul, has been
transformed into the nature of
a beast, even though the
outward characteristics of his
body still retain the human
form.

What the foregoing passage recalls is Philo's treatment elsewhere of divine inspiration and the counterfeit forms of ecstasy that can beset the human mind. Indeed, as we shall see below, just as the mind can be divinely inspired to ascend to a higher knowledge of God, it can also be subject to maladies and other forms of decay which induce ecstasies which lead to descent into madness and illness.

3.5.5 *How does Philo conceive of the potential of the human mind in its ascent to know God?*

Philo's discourses on noetic ascent in the 'Moses' segment are perhaps his richest in the 'Exposition.' The density and variety of the material in this segment demand that we will proceed in three stages. First (§3.5.5.1 below), we will examine Philo's discourses in his treatise, *On the Decalogue*. Next (§3.5.5.2), we will examine pertinent discourses in his four-book treatment of the particular laws of Moses, *On the Special Laws*. Third (§3.5.5.3), we will

consider relevant discourses in his two-volume biography of Moses (*On the Life of Moses*) and the final treatises of the 'Exposition,' (*On Virtues, On Rewards and Punishments*).

3.5.5.1 Philonic views based on his interpretation of the Decalogue

Philo begins his interpretation of Mosaic legislation by investigating the character, content and constraints of the Ten Words as he understood them in the Pentateuch of his day. This treatment is found in his book, *On the Decalogue*.²⁷⁶ Philo starts with an important question that gets to the *scope* and the *source* of the mind's ascent to the divine.

Scope of noetic ascent to divine realities. Why does God address his oracles in the first-person form? This question invites Philo to contemplate the possibility that every human being, regardless of rank, can aspire to know and experience God. It is God's intention, says Philo, to enroll every single mind into 'the school of the divine laws (τὰ τῶν ἱερῶν νόμων διδασκαλεῖα).'²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Critical edition of this Philonic book is Cohn and Wendland 1902:180-209; useful commentaries and studies include Colson 1937:1-35; Nikiprowetzky 1965; Sandmel 1968:54-63; Amir 1983c:131-63; Termini 2004:1-29; Ledegang 2009:245-54.

²⁷⁷ *Decal.* 40.

Philo affirms the widest possible scope for noetic aspiration to God. This lies at the centre of his understanding of the Decalogue. To strengthen this principle, Philo offers the following rationale, one which features an eclectic mix of ideas and imagery:

On the Decalogue §41

εἰ γὰρ ὁ ἀγέννητος καὶ ἄφθαρτος
καὶ αἰδῖος καὶ οὐδενὸς ἐπιδεῆς
καὶ ποιητὴς τῶν ὅλων καὶ
εὐεργέτης καὶ βασιλεὺς
βασιλέων καὶ θεὸς θεῶν οὐδὲ τὸν
ταπεινότατον ὑπεριδεῖν
ὑπέμεινεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτον
εὐωχῆσαι λογίων καὶ θεσμῶν
ιερῶν ἠξίωσεν, ὥς μόνον ἐστιᾶν
μέλλων καὶ μόνῳ τὸ συμπόσιον
εὐτρεπίζεσθαι πρὸς ψυχῆς
ἀνάχυσιν ἱεροφαντουμένης ἢ
θέμις τὰς μεγάλας τελεῖσθαι
τελετάς, ἐμοὶ τῷ θνητῷ τί
προσῆκον ὑψαυχενεῖν καὶ
πεφυσῆσθαι φρυαττομένῳ πρὸς
τοὺς ὁμοίους, οἳ τύχαις μὲν
ἀνίσοις ἴση δὲ καὶ ὁμοία
συγγενεῖα κέχρηται μίαν
ἐπιγραψάμενοι μητέρα τὴν
κοινὴν ἀπάντων ἀνθρώπων
φύσιν;

For if the Uncreated, the
Incorruptible, the Eternal,
Who needs nothing and is
the maker of all, the
Benefactor and King of
kings and God of gods could
not brook to despise even
the humblest, but deigned
to banquet him on holy
oracles and statutes, **as
though he should be the
sole guest, as though for
him alone the feast was
prepared to give good
cheer to a soul instructed
in the holy secrets and
accepted for admission to
the greatest mysteries,**
what right have I, the
mortal, to bear myself
proud-necked, puffed-up
and loud-voiced, towards
my fellows, who, though
their fortunes be unequal,
have equal rights of kinship
because they can claim to
be children of the one
common mother of
mankind, nature?

Having stated this rationale, Philo gives us something of what one learns in the school of divine laws – namely, a theology of humility based on the conviction that God does not show favoritism in conferring his gifts of knowledge (§42), and that a human being should not forget what he or she is, and this is learned when one makes nature his or her home (§43).

Source of noetic aspiration to divine realities. What grounds Philo's belief that every person can aspire to know God? This brings us to Philo's view concerning the source of the mind's ascent to God. The source, says Philo, is the transforming power of God.

In *On the Decalogue* §44, Philo describes the instantiations of divine power around Mount Sinai (Exod 19.14-19), a time before the giving of the Decalogue. Prompted by this scriptural context, Philo establishes a principle which he applies elsewhere to the mind's potential to aspire to God: 'For when the power of God arrives, it holds that no part of the world should remain inactive, but all move together to do Him service' (*Decal.* 44). As applied to the mind, Philo here makes it clear that no improvement or ascent can take place absent the power of God.²⁷⁸

This divine, transforming power works in three ways. First, the power of God works in and through the words and oracles of God (*Decal.* 13, 49). In Philo's

²⁷⁸ See also *Spec.* 2.141; 2.228.

view, the Torah is central to any and all aspirations to know God. But these divine words are unlike any words known to human beings. They are unmediated in nature, not subject to any sort of decay (*Decal.* 33-34).²⁷⁹

This then leads to the second way in which the power of God works on the human mind: in order to apprehend the divine words, the mind must be possessed by God. Indeed, Philo insists that only ‘the hearing of the mind possessed by God (τῆς ἐνθέου διανοίας) makes the first advance and goes out to meet the spoken words with the keenest rapidity’ (*Decal.* 35).

Thirdly, the power of God works in tandem with the human conscience, what Philo calls the ‘inward monitor’ (*Decal.* 87). In Philo’s view, these dimensions of divine power converge in the realities signified by the oracle concerning the seventh day (Fourth Commandment). On the seventh day, aspirants follow the example set by God himself in contemplating the divine oracles with the aid of one’s inner conscience.

²⁷⁹ This theme runs through all three independent series: e.g. *Migr.* 47-52; *QE* 2.68. On this theme in relation to later rabbinic tradition: Kuhn 1989:153-75.

3.5.5.2 Philonic views based on his reading of the special laws of Moses

Running throughout the Philonic exegetical corpus is the idea that Moses attained the summit of philosophy.²⁸⁰ Why is this idea so important for Philo? Many reasons can be posited, but chief among them is the belief, held by Jews and non-Jews in Philo's day, that the quality of a particular set of laws correlates with the philosophical caliber of the lawgiver. This was particularly the case in first-century Alexandria. As we shall soon see, this correlation between the lawgiver and his laws is rooted at least in part in Plato's concept of the ideal lawgiver, the philosopher-king.

Moses the preeminent philosopher. In keeping with this widely held view, Philo is keen to present Moses as a superlative philosopher. On Philo's testimony, Moses is an overlooked and unduly maligned figure.²⁸¹ Louis Feldman writes:

Moses is the one biblical figure who does seem to be well known to Greek and Roman intellectuals. His antiquity and his connection with Egypt gave him a definite prominence, though opinions about him differed. In Philo's effort to point out the virtues of Judaism, the personality of Moses was an

²⁸⁰ *Opif.* 8; *QG* 4.152; in the *Allegorical Commentary*: e.g. *Leg. All.* 2.15; *Det.* 38-39.

²⁸¹ *Mos.* 1.1-2.

important means to attract attention, to correct misapprehensions, and to impress potential proselytes.²⁸²

Central to this agenda was the task of convincing readers of Moses' credentials. To this end, Philo exploits Plato's concept of philosopher-king:

Since, as Philo (*Mos.* 2.2) says, following Plato, the ideal state comes into being only where a king is a philosopher or a philosopher king, Moses is the ideal ruler, inasmuch as he combines both the kingly and the philosophical in his single person. As the ideal philosopher-king (*Opif.* 2) he is the supreme philosopher in exploring his subject thoroughly, in refraining from stating abruptly what should be practiced or avoided, in preparing his subjects, who are to live under the laws of which he is the agent, and in refraining from devising myths invented by himself or in acquiescing in those composed by others.²⁸³

In his *On the Special Laws*, Philo variously portrays Moses as the ideal philosopher. Arguably one of his most extensive accounts is *Special Laws book 1* §§32-50, Philo's reflection on two of Moses' legal sayings, Leviticus 19.4 and Deuteronomy 4.4. Both injunctions, Philo writes, fall under the second commandment on idolatry. This link invites Philo to entertain an even broader field of inquiry, namely what is the pursuit of the genuine philosopher. This compels Philo to explore both the content and constraints of this pursuit.

²⁸² Feldman 2007:1-33 (quote is from page 7).

²⁸³ Feldman 2007:3.

As for the content, the genuine philosopher must pursue knowledge of God.

To unpack his point, Philo identifies two principal questions which must constrain the philosopher's pursuit of theological knowledge (§32):

On the Special Laws I §32

δυστόπαστος μὲν οὖν καὶ
δυσκατάληπτος ὁ πατὴρ καὶ
ἡγεμὼν τῶν συμπάντων ἐστίν,
ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ τοῦτ' ἀποκνητέον
τὴν ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ. δύο δ' ἐν
ταῖς περὶ θεοῦ ζητήσεσι τὰ
ἀνωτάτω ταῦτ' ἐπαπορεῖ ἢ
διάνοια τοῦ φιλοσοφοῦντος
ἀνόθως.

Doubtless hard to unriddle and
hard to apprehend is the Father
and Ruler of all, but that is no
reason why we should shrink
from searching for Him. But in
such searching two principal
questions arise which demand
the consideration of the
genuine philosopher.

ἐν μὲν εἰ ἔστι τὸ θεῖον, ἕνεκα
τῶν ἐπιτηδευσάντων ἀθεότητα,
κακιῶν τὴν μεγίστην. ἕτερον δὲ
τὸ τί ἐστι κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν. τὸ
μὲν οὖν πρότερον οὐ πολὺς
πόνος ἰδεῖν, τὸ δὲ δεύτερον οὐ
χαλεπὸν μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἴσως
ἀδύνατον.

One is whether the Deity exists,
a question necessitated by
those who practice atheism, the
worst form of wickedness. The
other is what the Deity is in
essence. Now to answer the
first question does not need
much labor, but the second is
not only difficult but perhaps
impossible to solve. Still, both
must be examined.

Philo illustrates these two principles with an epiphany taken out of the Bible, thereby grounding his principle of the philosopher's pursuit of divine essence in the exegetical context of Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 33.13-23). Much has been written about Philo's treatment of

this biblical text and I will not try to reprise it here.²⁸⁴ Suffice it to say that Philo exploits this exegetical context to affirm the primacy of reason in the philosopher's pursuit to ascend to God. It is apparent that Philo does this by pressing into service both Platonic and Aristotelian notions of knowledge.²⁸⁵

Human reason, at its best, soars beyond the act of philosophically contemplating the universe.²⁸⁶ Despite this capacity, the mind ultimately falters in the face of the overwhelming beauty and power of God.²⁸⁷ Between these poles of human aspiration and divine incomprehensibility, Philo identifies two kinds of knowledge which the aspirant can attain:

On the Special Laws I §38

ἀλλ' οὐ διὰ τοῦτο προκαμὼν
ἀπαγορεύει, γνώμη δ' ἀηττήτῳ
πρὸς τὴν ἐνδεχομένην θέαν
ἵεται, καθάπερ ἐν ἄθλοις
δευτερείων μεταποιούμενος
ἐπειδὴ τῶν πρώτων ἐσφάλῃ.
φαντασίας δ' ἀληθοῦς δευτερά
ἐστὶν εἰκασία καὶ στοχασμὸς καὶ
ὅσα εἰς τὴν τῶν εὐλόγων καὶ
πιθανῶν ἰδέαν ἀνάγεται.

Yet it does not therefore
faintheartedly give up the task,
but with purpose unsubdued
presses onward to such
contemplation as possible, like
the athlete who strives for the
second prize since he has been
disappointed of the first. Now
second to the true vision stands
conjecture and theorising and all
that can be brought into the
category of reasonable
probability.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Runia 2002a:281-316 for an illuminating discussion of this passage (and others) in light of wider theological movements proximate to Philo's era; also Radice 2006:127-49 on Stoic elements in this passage.

²⁸⁵ Mackie 2012:158-59.

²⁸⁶ *Spec.* 1.37-38.

²⁸⁷ *Spec.* 1.39-40.

Philo's twofold reading of the Sinai theophany engages both Platonic and Aristotelian ways of thinking about knowledge. The first (and higher) knowledge is what Philo calls 'true vision' (φαντασίας δ' ἀληθοῦς). The second (and lower) knowledge is what he calls conjecture (εἰκασία), theorising (στοχασμός), and all that comes under the category of reasonable probability (καὶ ὅσα εἰς τὴν τῶν εὐλόγων καὶ πιθανῶν ιδέαν ἀνάγεται).

The concept of *phantasia*, which features in Philo's higher knowledge, is a key part of Plato's approach to knowledge.²⁸⁸ Notions of conjecture and reasonable probability, which mark Philo's lower knowledge of God, are dominant elements in Aristotle's approach to the same subject.²⁸⁹ To attain either prize, says Philo, the faculty of sight must play a pivotal role in one's aspiration to know God, a point which undoubtedly traded on proximate theories of vision in non-Jewish philosophy.²⁹⁰

Of all the foregoing points of contact with Hellenistic thought, perhaps the most instructive is Plato's construal of philosopher-king. In all likelihood, this is

²⁸⁸ Cf. *Theaet.* 195D.

²⁸⁹ Cf. *De an.* 427b-429a. For Stoics: Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.236; Cicero, *Acad. post.* 1.11, 40-42.

²⁹⁰ On Philo's understanding of sight as central for philosophical contemplation, see e.g. *Spec.* 3.185-194 (commenting on Exod 21.26).

Philo's main point of reference in the foregoing passage, as indicated by Philo's language of Moses as the genuine philosopher.²⁹¹

Indeed, the notion of an ideal philosopher-king animates the entire 'Exposition.'

As will be argued below, Philo's statements of Moses reflect his interest in presenting Moses as one who not only meets this ideal but also exceeds it by embodying the ideals of king (βασιλείας), lawgiver (νομοθεσίας), priest (ἀρχιερωσύνης), and prophet (προφητείας) and expressing this fourfold excellence in his legislation.²⁹² In keeping with this view, Philo writes in a four-dimensional way about the human mind's aspiration to know and experience God.

Throughout his presentation of the laws of Moses, Philo trades on this fourfold schema, using it as a way to elaborate on four ways in which the mind can be transformed:

²⁹¹ Strikingly, Philo applies similar language to himself as he opens Book 3 of *On the Special Laws*. Philo composed this book in the twilight of his literary career during a time when he was heavily involved in the civil affairs of the Jewish community in Alexandria. In the book's prologue, Philo nostalgically recounts his first-hand experiences of pursuing this question of divine essence (*Spec.* 3.1-6). The language he uses there to describe his own experiences is similar to the language he uses to describe Moses' quest for divine knowledge in *Spec.* 1.32-50. On this passage in connection with Philo's understanding of divine inspiration and the divine spirit: Levison 1995:288-294; Deutsch 2008:83-94.

²⁹² Cf. *Praem.* 53.

(1) the way of mind that is divinely appointed and invested with a divine inheritance (divine agency and beneficence as signified by the kingly faculty of Moses),

(2) the way of mind that actively applies its reasoning power to contemplate divine realities and control the bodily passions (human agency and the legislative faculty of Moses),

(3) the way of mind that experiences divine possession and is thereby able to learn those things which is unable to comprehend by its own reasoning power (the prophetic faculty of Moses), and

(4) the way of mind that is vested with perfect knowledge of the proper way to serve and worship God (the priestly faculty of Moses).

When each aspirant lives on (and lives out) these laws, he or she will attain a level of noetic ascent that reflects the harmony of these four Mosaic excellences. To unpack all of this, we must begin with brief remarks on the philosophical commonplace which Philo exploits to bracket the entire 'Exposition,' namely Plato's notion of the ideal philosopher-king in the *Republic*.²⁹³

²⁹³ Philo's presentation of the fourfold excellence of Moses is stated in the beginning (*Mos.* 2.3) and end (*Praem.* 53) of the 'Exposition'; cf. Sterling 2009:67. Termini

3.5.5.3 Philo's Moses as the ideal philosopher-king

In antiquity, the concept of a philosopher-king represented one of the more dominant strands of political imagination. Originating in Pythagorean discourses on kingship,²⁹⁴ the concept soon came to be most closely associated with the writings of Plato. The concept arises in several places in the Platonic corpus,²⁹⁵ reflecting a wide range of philosophical and political contexts.²⁹⁶

Plato's paradox of the philosopher-king

To get an initial grasp on this complex concept, it is useful to start with Book V of the *Republic*. This book, along with Books VI and VII, represents arguably

2006:265-97 (esp. 285-87) suggests that Cicero's *De legibus* offers a comparable point of reference to Philo's 'Exposition.' Her insights are illuminating, not least on Philo's tendency to 'retroject the validity of the *Torah* from Sinai towards the creation' whilst also reformulating the philosophical concept of natural law. Yet Termini's neglect of Philo's explicit references to Plato's philosopher-king concept diminishes the force of her analysis.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Barraclough 1984:487-91.

²⁹⁵ *Resp.* 499B-C; *Pol.* 293C.

²⁹⁶ On Plato's theory: Sprague 1976; Reeve 1988; Schofield 1999; on its wider history: Desmond 2011.

Plato's most sustained treatments of the nature and limits of human knowledge and its connection with the establishment of an ideal state.²⁹⁷

In Book V, Plato's Socrates poses the following question: to what extent, if any, is it possible for the ideal polity to come into existence, and if so, how does this state come to pass (*Republic* V 471C)?²⁹⁸ To sharpen the point, one of Socrates' interlocutors, Glaucon, raises a question about the possibilities and limits of human transformation:

What is the smallest change that would bring a state to this manner of government [i.e. a good state], preferably a change in one thing, if not, then in two, and, failing that, the fewest possible in number and the slightest in potency? (473B).

In response, Socrates identifies one change that would bring about the desired transformation, but he calls it 'the greatest wave of paradox,' one

²⁹⁷ As Gerson 2009:30-31 notes, Plato's discussion of philosopher-kings is carried through to the end of Book 7 of the *Republic*, a segment that contains some of most famous ideas and allegories in the Platonic corpus: the Idea of the Good (*Resp.* 504B-509C); the Divided Line (*Resp.* 509C-511E); and the Cave (*Resp.* 514A-521D). For more on the epistemology of *Republic* VI-VII as presented in these three images well-known in antiquity and modernity, see Fine 2003:85-116 (esp. 95-116).

²⁹⁸ This question continues to vex students of Plato. Bickford 2009:126-55 (esp. p. 140) suggests that the main lesson of the *Republic* is 'the impossibility of attaining true justice' (p. 140, citing Bloom 1968 and Nichols 1984:252-74). Alternatively, Zuckert 2009:178-208 proposes that Socrates' paradoxical concept of philosopher-king is meant to 'serve as a paradigm for individuals attempting to order their own souls' and so 'it does not matter, therefore, whether this city ever actually exists' (pp. 178-79).

which would easily provoke laughter and scorn from many (473C). Set on this stage, Plato's Socrates brings the concept front and centre:

[473D] Unless either philosophers become kings in our states or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophic intelligence, while the motley horde of the natures who are present pursue either apart from the other are compulsorily excluded, there can be no cessation of troubles, dear Glaucon, for our states, nor, I fancy, for the human race either. Nor, until this happens, will this constitution which we have been expounding in theory ever be put into practice within the limits of possibility and see the light of the sun.

[473E] But this is the thing that has made me so long shrink from speaking out, because I saw that it would be a very paradoxical saying. For it is not easy to see that there is no other way of happiness either for private or public life' (*Republic* V, 473D-E)

This is a paradox, says Plato's Socrates. In the face of it, Socrates takes a pedagogical, pragmatic turn: granted, the philosopher-king is a paradox that will confound and anger the masses,²⁹⁹ but if those who espouse the concept clearly explain this paradox, then kings and philosophers will be convinced that they themselves are part of this paradox. Additionally, the masses will be convinced that they should follow such philosopher-kings.³⁰⁰ The bulk of the *Republic* is then devoted to an account of an educational system which will

²⁹⁹ *Resp.* 473E-474A.

³⁰⁰ *Resp.* 474B-C.

lead the masses to knowledge of the Good.³⁰¹ One of the main convictions undergirding Plato's discussion seems to be that the philosopher-king is Socrates' key to attaining the perfection of his ideal city.³⁰²

Responses to Plato's paradox of the philosopher-king

According to Paul Shorey, Plato's statement of the philosopher-king is 'perhaps the most famous sentence in Plato.'³⁰³ It generated a wide array of reactions. Aristotle, for instance, simply ignores the concept,³⁰⁴ and if one accepts a fragment widely attributed to Aristotle, the Platonic concept is dismissed on grounds that it is virtually impossible to attain.³⁰⁵

Cicero hardly refers to Plato's concept of philosopher-king.³⁰⁶ Having said this, it is worth considering Cicero's imitation of Plato on the broader subject

³⁰¹ Cf. Taylor 2005:697-98.

³⁰² *Resp.* 502D-503B; 506A-B.

³⁰³ Shorey 1930:508 note a.

³⁰⁴ *Pol.* 1264a24-25, 1264b39-40; in light of these (and other) references, Dobbs 1985:45 notes: 'Paradoxically, this omission is the most telling indication of Aristotle's critical view of the *Republic*.'

³⁰⁵ Cf. Chroust 1968:16-22, citing a passage from Themistius (*Oratio* VIII.107D) which is commonly regarded as a fragment of Aristotle's lost work, *On Kingship*: 'Plato, even if in all other respects he was divine and deserving our unlimited admiration, was utterly reckless when he made the statement that evils would never cease for men until either philosophers became kings, or kings became philosophers.' See also Kirchner 1986:41-54 (esp. 52).

³⁰⁶ But see *Quint. fratr.* 1.1.29.

of the relationship between human laws and the ideal human state. As scholars have noted, Cicero imitates Plato's writing of the *Laws* and the *Republic*, respectively, first describing the best human laws (*De legibus*) before proceeding to write a dialogue about the ideal human state (*De re publica*).³⁰⁷

For Cicero, then, both laws and the ideal state derive from what he calls the 'deepest mysteries of philosophy,' and in keeping with this claim, Cicero can say that the foundation of the ideal state is not the traditional foundation of Roman laws – i.e. the Twelve Tables of Roman history.³⁰⁸ Although Cicero follows Plato's way of formulating laws starting from an ideal model of constitution, he moves in his own direction of thought, as Christina Termini observes:

Making his own this [Plato's] iconic scheme, Cicero applied it with originality to the relationship between the written laws and the natural law. However, unlike Plato, he did not elaborate an abstract model to be transferred to the reality, but he used the general and indefinite concept of *lex naturae* to give ideal value to Roman traditions. The natural law became the criterion of every promulgated norm, and the Roman juridical tradition grew up to be the copy of the supreme law.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ Cicero, *Leg.* 1.15; 2.14; cf. Brown 2009:331-32. On Cicero's indebtedness to (and imitation of) Plato's way of writing the *Republic* and then the *Laws*: Keyes1928:6-7.

³⁰⁸ Cicero, *Leg.* 1.17; cf. Brown 2009:331.

³⁰⁹ Termini 2006:283 [explanatory bracket added].

A similar impulse is seen in some Second Temple Jewish writings. Josephus, for example, presents Abraham and Moses as embodiments of this Greek ideal.³¹⁰ The writer of *Aristeas* adopts categories of Greek thought to transform Moses into Hellenistic ideals, as Luke Timothy Johnson observes:

In this writing, there is the use of a thoroughly Hellenistic literary genre and philosophical topic (*topos*), and both are put to the service of Jewish ethical teaching. **It is within this context that the thought of Moses as the perfect philosopher-king begins to make sense**, for he surely was a leader of the people and revealed his wisdom in Torah. Moses was the model of the wise ruler before Plato ever thought of it.³¹¹

Like some of his contemporaries, Philo trades on similar notions of a philosopher-king throughout his 'Exposition' treatises. What one sees in Philo is perhaps 'a part of the general atmosphere,' as G. Chestnut suggests, with Philo's language of human rulers as embodied Law seen as a rather pedestrian play on a widespread Hellenistic commonplace.³¹² Ray Barraclough however suggests that Philo goes even further in his regard for

³¹⁰ Josephus, *Vita* 11.8-291; cf. Feldman 1968:143-56; Johnson 1986:75-77; but see Sandmel 1979:75 for counterview.

³¹¹ Johnson 1986:77 (emphasis added); Feldman 1993:236 suggests that the favorable portrayal of Moses by Hecataeus in Diodorus 40.3.6-7 recalls Plato's philosopher-king concept in the *Republic*. Even after Philo's time, Plato's philosopher-king concept had a strong afterlife in Alexandria, e.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.158(1). On aspects of political propaganda in *Aristeas*: Carbonaro 2009:449-66.

³¹² Chestnut 1978:1329.

Moses by presenting him as one greater than Plato's idealised legislator, an indication of 'how Philo can grasp the highest pagan thoughts and attribute them to Moses.'³¹³ The truth probably lies somewhere between Chestnut's and Barraclough's respective views, but what is clear is that the Philonic idealisation of Moses in the ideological language of Hellenistic kingship would exert considerable influence on thinkers for many centuries.³¹⁴

Given Philo's engagement with this Platonic ideal both at the beginning and at the end of the 'Exposition' (a point which we will get to in just a moment), Barraclough's view is closer to the target. Indeed, as noted above, Philo opens his 'Exposition' with a two-volume biography of Moses; he concludes with his treatise entitled *On Rewards and Punishments*.³¹⁵ Philo's portrayal of Moses as the superlative philosopher-king appears at both ends of the 'Exposition.'

³¹³ Barraclough 1984:489; cf. Dvornik 1966:559-69 on Philo's apologetic use of Hellenistic concepts of kinship and how Philo's approach might have influenced early Christian writers.

³¹⁴ Cf. Chestnut 1977:154-55 on the influence of Philo on Eusebius' portrayal of Constantine; see further Pearce 2004b:37-74 on aspects of Philonic influence on subsequent notions of ideal political activity.

³¹⁵ Nikiprowetzky 1973:329 (finding earlier concurrence in Adrien Turnèbe [1556]); cf. idem. 1977:181-202 (esp. 199-202); Cohen 1987:168 n.11.

The Beginning of the 'Exposition': Philo's On the Life of Moses

Philo's biography of Moses, consisting of two books,³¹⁶ is organised in light of his understanding of a fourfold excellence of Moses. At the outset of Book Two, Philo unequivocally identifies his point of philosophical reference:

On the Life of Moses II §2

φασὶ γάρ τινες οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ,
μόνως ἂν οὕτω τὰς πόλεις
ἐπιδοῦναι πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον, ἐὰν ἢ
οἱ βασιλεῖς φιλοσοφήσωσιν ἢ οἱ
φιλόσοφοι βασιλεύσωσιν.

For it has been said, not
without good reason, that
states can only make progress
in well-being if either kings are
philosophers or philosophers
are kings.

As scholars have noted, this is a clear reference to Plato's concept of the philosopher-king in Book V of the *Republic*. This concept comes in for explicit mention at the beginning of Book Two, but it has been there from the start of the biography. Indeed, Philo devotes Book One to the task of portraying Moses as the ideal king (§1.148-334).³¹⁷ In Book Two, Philo sequentially presents Moses as the ideal lawgiver (§§2.12-65), the ideal priest (§§2.66-186), and finally, the ideal prophet (§§2.187-287). Using Plato's yardstick,

³¹⁶ *Virt.* 52; *Mos.* 2.1; but note 'three books' in the translation of Yonge 1993:645.

³¹⁷ In Philo's constellated way of writing about God and humanity in the 'Exposition,' the portrait of Moses as the ideal king is invariably connected with Philo's portrayal of God as the king of the cosmos, e.g. *Opif.* 15-24; see further Runia 2003:89-106.

Philo presents the superlative character of Moses in ways that many of his readers, perhaps more philosophically-minded, would have grasped:

On the Life of Moses II §2

ὁ δ' ἐκ περιττοῦ φανεῖται μὴ
μόνον ταύτας ἐπιδεδειγμένος τὰς
δυνάμεις ἐν ταύτῳ, τὴν τε
βασιλικὴν καὶ φιλόσοφον, ἀλλὰ
καὶ τρεῖς ἑτέρας, ὧν ἡ μὲν
πραγματεύεται περὶ νομοθεσίαν,
ἡ δὲ περὶ ἀρχιερωσύνην, ἡ δὲ
τελευταία περὶ προφητείαν.

But Moses will be found to have
displayed, and more than
displayed, combined in his
single person, not only these
two faculties – the kingly and
the philosophical – but also
three others, one of which is
concerned with law-giving, the
second with the high-priest's
office, and the last with
prophecy.

The foregoing statement is an indication of Philo's interest in appealing to both Jewish and non-Jewish readers. To his Jewish readers, Philo presents Moses as *prima facie* evidence that biblical ideas can co-exist with Greek ones. To his non-Jewish readers, Philo portrays Moses as the reality of what Plato (and later students such as Aristotle) considered a virtual impossibility.

More specifically, Philo uses this fourfold schema to depict Moses as follows:

The kingly excellence of Moses points to the realities of divine agency and beneficence. The purview of kingship is things human and divine (*Mos.* 2.5).

The legislative excellence of Moses points to the reality of human agency. In particular, it stresses the aspirant's use of active reason to control the bodily passions (*Mos.* 2.4).

The prophetic excellence of Moses points to two interrelated realities. In his biography, Philo limits this attribute to the notion that human beings, as mortal creatures, are limited in their ability to apprehend things. They can only grasp what is present before them (*Mos.* 2.6). Philo will return to expand his thoughts on Moses' prophetic excellence in the penultimate book of the 'Exposition.'

Finally, the priestly excellence of Moses features Moses' role as a hierophantic teacher and instructor of the divine mysteries (*Mos.* 2.5).³¹⁸

Having considered Philo's fourfold way of understanding Moses as the ideal philosophical ruler of Hellenistic kingship theory, we might ask: does Philo resort to this Platonic theory in places other than his *On the Life of Moses*?

The answer is a definitive yes, a point which suggests that Philo may have

³¹⁸ See also *Mos.* 1.27, 62; 2.71, 153, 201; the translators of Septuagint are likened to priests of the mysteries in *Mos.* 2.40. On notions of Moses as a prophet in *On the Life of Moses*: Canevet 1986:189-206.

been influenced by the concept of philosopher-king in the writing of his 'Exposition' considerably more than scholars have hitherto recognised.

The end of the 'Exposition'

Toward the end of the 'Exposition,' Philo brings a similar set of ideas under this fourfold understanding of Moses. In *On the Virtues*, the penultimate treatise of the 'Exposition,' Philo refers readers specifically to his two-part biography of Moses.³¹⁹ Revisiting the idea of Moses' life as the 'archetypal pattern' and 'beautiful model' for aspirants to follow,³²⁰ Philo turns to this fourfold schema to stress the paradigmatic importance of Moses' life and legacy.

What this effectively does is bracket, at least thematically, the entire 'Exposition' with the idea of Moses as the ideal philosopher-king which Plato could only envisage. As further indication of this, Philo in the final treatise in the 'Exposition' returns to the same portfolio of excellences which features prominently in book two of his biography of Moses:

³¹⁹ *Virt.* 52.

³²⁰ Compare *Mos.* 1.158-59 with *Virt.* 51 and 70.

παῖσαι μὲν οὖν αἱ ἀρεταὶ
παρθένοι, καλλιστεύει δὲ ὡς ἐν
χορῷ παραλαβοῦσα τὴν
ἡγεμονίαν ἢ εὐσέβεια, ἣν
ἐκκληρώσατο διαφερόντως ὁ
θεολόγος Μωυσῆς, δι' ἣν μετὰ
μυρίων ἄλλων, ἅπερ ἐν τοῖς
γραφείοις περὶ τοῦ κατ' αὐτὸν
βίου μεμύηται, τεττάρων
ἄθλων ἐξαιρέτων τυγχάνει,
τυχὼν βασιλείας, νομοθεσίας,
προφητείας, ἀρχιερωσύνης.

Now all the virtues are virgins,
but the fairest among them all,
the acknowledged queen of the
dance, is piety, which Moses,
the teacher of divine lore, in a
special degree had for his own,
and through it gained among a
multitude of gifts, *which have
been described in the treatises
dealing with his life [Mos. 2.3],
four special rewards, the offices
of king, legislator, prophet, and
high priest* (italics and verse
bracket added).

A measure of symmetry in Philo's thought can be detected. First, as the ideal king, Moses signifies the primacy of divine agency and beneficence, a point which simultaneously refutes any claim to self-assertion (*Praem.* 54). Second, as the ideal lawgiver, Moses represents the primacy of human agency, the active application of one's reason to figure out what should be done and what should not be done when it comes to the world in which one lives (*Praem.* 55).³²¹

Third, concerning Moses as the ideal prophet, Philo picks up the line of thought he started in the biography (cf. *Mos.* 2.6). There, it is worth recalling, Philo insists that human beings, as mortal creatures, can only grasp what is

³²¹ Cf. Herzer 2004:223-40 on this text's relation to wider Philonic and early Christian perspectives on scriptural inspiration.

present before them. Here, Philo acknowledges such limits, but he adds more value to the prospect of divine possession.

When divinely possessed, the aspirant becomes a prophet, an interpreter of God. In Philo's reckoning, this is what happened to Moses upon receiving the oracles of God (*Praem.* 51). In keeping with his view that prophecy is social and public in character, Philo insists that the divine realities promised and presented through the mouth of a prophet are designed to bring about concord in humanity (*On Virtues* §§119-120).

Finally, as the ideal priest, Moses represents a role which moves beyond the aspirant's interior realm and into the public realms of worship, thanksgiving and intercession (*Praem.* 56). In light of this, Philo in his final treatise exhorts his readers to seek each of the Mosaic rewards for themselves:

On Rewards and Punishments §56

ταῦτα μιᾶς ὄντα ἰδέας
ἀλληλουχεῖν ὀφείλει τοῖς
ἀρμονίας δεσμοῖς ἐνωθέντα καὶ
περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐξετάζεσθαι, ὡς ὁ
γέ τινος τῶν τεττάρων
ὑστερίζων ἀτελὴς εἰς ἡγεμονίαν,
χωλὴν ἀνημμένος κοινῶν
πραγμάτων ἐπιμέλειαν.

All these are one in kind; they should co-exist united with bonds of harmony and be found embodied in the same person, since he who falls short in any of the four is imperfectly equipped for government and the administration of public affairs which he has undertaken will limp and halt.

Based on his own cues, then, Philo gives central significance to his fourfold understanding of Moses as philosopher-king, lawgiver, prophet, and priest. Each facet points to a particular aspect of human aspiration to theological knowledge. All four aspects, says Philo, should become a unity in each follower of Moses.³²² The following diagram represents the combination of Philo's statements from the beginning and end of this exegetical series:

Diagram 3.5
Philo's portrayal of the fourfold excellence of Moses

Excellence of Moses	Noetic Aspect Signified and Key focal point(s) (<i>italics</i>)	Key texts from the 'Exposition'
Ideal Philosopher-King (<i>βασιλείας</i>)	This type of mind is divinely appointed to be a king and is further vested with a divine inheritance, 'wealth which sees' <i>Divine agency and beneficence</i>	<i>Mos. 2.5</i> <i>Virt. 57</i> ³²³ <i>Praem. 51, 54</i>
Ideal Lawgiver (<i>νομοθεσίας</i>)	This type of mind actively applies its power of reason to contemplate divine realities and control the bodily passions. This leads to priesthood. ³²⁴ <i>Human agency and rationality</i>	<i>Mos. 2.4, 187</i> <i>Praem. 55a</i>

³²² *Praem. 57*; also *Mos. 2.3, 7*. Abraham (*Praem. 58*) is the archetype of this way of following Moses; cf. Pearce 2007:297-98.

³²³ Cf. Num 27.16 as a significant influence on Philo.

³²⁴ Cf. *Spec. 2.164*; *Mos. 1.334* (Moses' legislative and priestly powers closely connected with his kingly authority).

Ideal Prophet (προφητείας)	This type of mind experiences divine possession and is thus invested with the ability to learn all those things which it is unable to comprehend by its own reason. <i>Human non-rationality</i>	<i>Mos. 2.6, 187³²⁵</i> <i>Praem. 55b</i>
Ideal Priest (ἀρχιερωσύνης)	The one endowed with this type of mind is invested with perfect knowledge of the proper way to serve and worship God. On this basis, this person is able to arrange human and divine matters and further propitiate to God on behalf of himself/herself and for those governed. <i>Knowledge of God as sociable and humane</i>	<i>Mos. 2.5, 187</i> <i>Praem. 56</i>

The foregoing diagram invites us to consider two further questions before we draw this chapter to a close.

First, to what extent, if any, does Philo rely on the concept of philosopher-king in his varied readings of the Decalogue and the special laws of Moses? As a general rule, Philo does not seem to dwell at any length on this concept in the middle books of the ‘Exposition,’ though there are some mentions or allusions to it, in whole or in part, in this series and also in the *Allegorical Commentary*.³²⁶

³²⁵ Cf. *Mos.* 1.175; 2.68; 2.188; 2.250; 2.264; 2.291.

³²⁶ On aspects of the kingly (βασιλείας) faculty of mind, see e.g. *Decal.* 175; in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Mut.* 153 (only a sage-philosopher is a king, based on Gen 23.6). On aspects of the legislative (νομοθεσίας) faculty of mind, see e.g. *Decal.* 81, 175; *Spec.* 1.319; 2.104, 164; 4.72. On aspects of the prophetic (προφητείας) faculty of

From a different vantage point, it is useful to recognise a broader tendency in the 'Exposition,' namely Philo's practice of reminding his readers of the interconnected character of Moses' writings (and thus, his series on Moses). In his set of homilies on the primary human virtues (*On the Virtues*), for instance, Philo reminds his readers that the interpretive points offered in the homilies are meant to be understood in light of those offered earlier in his four-book anthology, *On the Special Laws*.³²⁷ Lessons presented in the *Special Laws*, in turn, point back to Philonic ideas offered in (i) the creation account of Moses and (ii) the two-part biography that introduces the entire 'Exposition.'³²⁸

mind, see e.g. *Spec.* 4.52; also *Abr.* 98; in the *AC*, e.g. *Congr.* 132 (only by divinely mediated wisdom did Moses receive the arts of legislation and prophecy); *Migr.* 84 (divine inspiration as requisite for prophecy); *Mut.* 120-26 (Moses as archetypal prophet); *Her.* 258, 260, 265 (divine inspiration ensures prophecy); *Somn.* 1.254 (Samuel as paragon of divinely inspired prophecy). On aspects of the priestly (ἀρχιερωσύνης) faculty of mind, there are few instances in the 'Exposition (but see *Praem.* 53); in the *AC*, e.g. *Fug.* 90 (Moses as priestly hierophant akin to Levitical model); also *Deus* 138-39 (elenchus and repentance in Mosaic priesthood).

³²⁷ E.g. *Virt.* 16.

³²⁸ E.g. Philo's reference (*Spec.* 2.38-22.2) to his discussion of the special significance of the number seven in *Opif.* 9-127; also *Abr.* 258 (reference to *Opif.* 135). On Philo's way of referencing between treatises of two different series, see e.g. *Decal.* 96-101, the opening segment of Philo's exposition of the Fourth Commandment (Exod 20.8). At the outset, he refers the readers back to *Opif.* on the story of the Creation which contains the reason for the Seventh Day commandment (*Decal.* 96-97). To support his reading of the Mosaic account of the divine creation of the world in six days, Philo subsequently refers the readers to what he's written in his allegorical commentary (i.e. *Leg. All.* 1.2-4; *Decal.* 101).

A rather lengthy list of examples could be given, but suffice it to say, Philo's practice of cross-referencing his works, coupled with his passing allusions, allow us to entertain the notion that the fourfold construal of Moses courses through the veins of the entire 'Exposition.' This, then, leads into a second area of exploration.

Why does Philo frame his 'Exposition' with this Greek (Platonic) ideal of the philosopher-king? Unfortunately, Philo leaves us no explicit answer. One key hint, however, is Philo's view of Moses as a key paradigm (παράδειγμα).

Philo asserts that the laws of Moses are incorporeal and cosmic in source and substance, a twofold conviction which in turn leads to an important corollary: the laws are thus binding on those who would wish to copy or imitate (μιμεῖσθαι) Moses' life and his laws:³²⁹

On The Life of Moses I §§158-59

[158] τί δὲ; οὐχὶ καὶ μείζονος
τῆς πρὸς τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων
καὶ ποιητὴν κοινωνίας ἀπέλαυσε
προσρῆσεως τῆς αὐτῆς ἀξιοθεΐς;
ὠνομάσθη γὰρ ὅλου τοῦ ἔθνους
θεὸς καὶ βασιλεύς· εἷς τε τὸν

Again, was not the joy of his
partnership with the Father
and Maker of all magnified
also by the honour of being
deemed worthy to bear the
same title? For he [Moses]
was named god and king of

³²⁹ Cf. *Mos.* 1.158-59; Mack 1972:38-41; on how this passage relates to Philo's broader (often spiritualised) approach to political ideas, see Kügler 2000:231-49.

γνόφον, ἔνθα ἦν ὁ θεός,
εἰσελθεῖν λέγεται, τουτέστιν εἰς
τὴν ἀειδῆ καὶ ἀόρατον καὶ
ἀσώματον τῶν ὄντων
παραδειγματικὴν οὐσίαν, τὰ
ἀθέατα φύσει θνητῇ κατανοῶν.
καθάπερ τε γραφὴν εὖ
δεδημιουργημένην ἑαυτὸν καὶ
τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον εἰς μέσον
προαγαγὼν πάγκαλον καὶ
θεοειδὲς ἔργον ἔστησε
παράδειγμα τοῖς ἐθέλουσι
μιμεῖσθαι.

the whole nation, and
entered, we are told, into the
darkness where God was
[Exod 20.21], that is into the
unseen, invisible, incorporeal
and archetypal essence of
existing things. Thus he
beheld what is hidden from
the sight of mortal nature,
and, in himself and his life
displayed for all to see, he
has set before us, like some
well-wrought picture, a piece
of work beautiful and
godlike, a model for those
who are willing to copy it.

[159] εὐδαίμονες δ' ὅσοι τὸν
τύπον ταῖς ἑαυτῶν ψυχαῖς
ἐναπεμάξαντο ἢ ἐσπούδασαν
ἐναπομάξασθαι· φερέτω γὰρ ἡ
διάνοια μάλιστα μὲν τὸ εἶδος
τέλειον ἀρετῆς, εἰ δὲ μή, τὸν
γοῦν ὑπὲρ τοῦ κτήσασθαι τὸ
εἶδος ἀνενδοίαστον πόθον.

Happy are they who imprint,
or strive to imprint, that
image in their souls. For it
were best that the mind
should carry the form of
virtue in perfection, but,
failing this, let it at least have
the unflinching desire to
possess that form.

What might Philo be doing here? At least two key moves, indicating a figural approach,³³⁰ merit attention.

In his first allegorical move, Philo draws on Hellenistic conventions to present Judaism in favourable light, a consistent feature in the 'Exposition.'³³¹

Philo exploits what Plato formulated by way of paradox (and Aristotle

³³⁰ Philo's use of τουτέστιν points to an allegorical interpretation, as elsewhere; cf. Pearce 2007:88 n.36.

³³¹ Cf. Pearce 2007:180.

refused on grounds of impossibility), namely that the laws of an ideal philosopher-king are a measure of the person himself.³³² In this regard, all of the laws of Moses are superlative because they are borne out of who Moses is.³³³

In his second move, Philo braids two important ideas. The first idea is theological in character and centres on one of his favourite ways for expressing the kingship of God, the twofold title 'Father and Maker.'³³⁴ Philo seems to be anticipating any charge that Moses is advocating human self-deification³³⁵ (something Philo rails against in two historical works³³⁶). Philo instead confirms the identity of the ultimate and unrivalled king, the God who is revealed in the creation account of Moses.³³⁷

³³² Cf. Pearce 2007:158 on Stoic influences.

³³³ Cf. Amir 1973:4; Borgen 1996:145-59. Menken 1988:39-57 observes a tendency to resist such a view of Moses in some early Jewish-Christian communities (e.g. John 6.31).

³³⁴ Cf. Centrone 2000:563; Philo also likes the term *basilikē* to signify the kingly and just rule of God, e.g. *Abr.* 41; *Somn.* 2.99.

³³⁵ A concern in other Philonic exegesis of Exod 7.1: e.g. *Mut.* 11-26, *Det.* 161-62; see further Runia 1988a:48-75.

³³⁶ *Legat.* passim; on the political tensions in Philo's Alexandria, see Barraclough 1984:421-36.

³³⁷ E.g. *Opif.* 15-24; cf. Runia 2003:89-106; note Philo's reference to Plato's concept of philosopher-king in *Mos.* 2.2 implicates the idea of cosmic city which features significantly in *On the Creation of the Cosmos*.

The second idea is more philosophical in character and distinctively Platonic in orientation. Philo seems to be working out the details of the fundamental distinction of reality which he painstakingly examined in his reading of Moses' creation account.³³⁸ Not unlike the impulse one finds in Plato, Philo reckons in *On the Creation of the Cosmos* that only God is king of the incorporeal domain of being. But then this: who shall rule over the corporeal domain of becoming, that world of constant flux with which God by his very nature cannot interact?

This tension seems to move Philo to portray Moses as one who encounters the divine king in the domain of being and then, on that basis, is enlisted as king and 'god' over the domain of becoming in general and the nation of Israel in particular.³³⁹ In the *Allegorical Commentary*, we encounter a rough approximation of this line of thought based on Philo's reading of Exodus 7.1. Prompted by that key exegetical context, Philo reckons Moses as one appointed as god over Pharaoh, the figural equivalent of the physical body (the domain of becoming in a more restricted sense).³⁴⁰ This portrait of Moses is exceptional, however: elsewhere, Philo denounces as blasphemous the act of comparing oneself to God.³⁴¹ Moreover, in the *Allegorical*

³³⁸ As we considered earlier in this chapter (§3.4).

³³⁹ This is a blending of Exod 7.1 and 24.16; cf. *QE* 2.46.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *Migr.* 84; see Chapter 5 (§ 5.4.2) for further discussion.

³⁴¹ Cf. *Somn.* 2.130-31; *Decal.* 62-64.

Commentary, Philo's understanding of Moses in light of Exodus 7.1 seems more centred on the axis between the rational mind and the non-rational body.

Returning to our passage here, Philo, in a single sweep, offers a striking blend of ideas (which I summarise below):

Just as the divine incorporeal king (God) summoned Moses to a realm of intelligibility akin to the Platonic world of unchangeable Forms in order to behold what is hidden from the sight of mortal nature, so those who inhabit what Plato calls the world of becoming – those who Philo calls 'Israel' – are summoned to behold in the kingly Moses a 'well-wrought picture, a piece of work beautiful and godlike, a model for those who are willing to copy it' (*Mos.* 1.158).

Platonic material features significantly in this mixture of ideas. In line with Plato's *Timaeus*, Philo preserves the incorporeality and authority of God, along with the twofold order of reality envisaged in Plato. In keeping with Plato's *Republic*, Philo applies the ideal of a philosopher-king to the figure of Moses. Finally, in light of Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Phaedrus*, Philo applies the ideal of human assimilation to God to the nation of Israel, a possibility which comes by means of the kingly life and laws of Moses.

The mixture of ideas described above seems eclectic at best, but it is not entirely unlike what we find elsewhere. For example, Josephus also regards Plato as one who imitated Moses³⁴² and similarly insists that the sole rulership of God is embodied in and expressed through the life and laws of Moses.³⁴³ There is reason to suspect that a similar commingling of ideas could have been familiar to some of Philo's non-Jewish readers, as Bruno Centrone suggests:

In the historical documents of the time, above all in the Roman imperial ideology and also in non-Platonic thinkers such as Seneca, we find widely attested the idea of the king as representative of God on earth and as incarnation of the divine *logos*. This notion had already been developed in Hellenistic theory; and in Philo and Plutarch, too, there are many allusions to the theory of kingship. The king is charged with the mission of realizing divine order in the world: he is like God on earth, introducing order and concord through the medium of law, of which he is a living incarnation. The ideal of assimilation to God, going back to Plato and widely diffused in Platonism, was here applied to the realm of politics, and imitation of divine virtue was not confined to the private sphere of the sage. This development constituted the reception of the key idea of philosophers in power. It is the main way in which the Platonic conception of kingship and the ideal of a philosopher ruler...were to exercise their influence.³⁴⁴

³⁴² *C. Ap.* 2.257.

³⁴³ Cf. Rajak 2000:587-88 for cognate view of Judaism as *politeia*, or *politeuma*, in Josephus (*C. Ap.* 2.167, 184, 193, 250).

³⁴⁴ See Centrone 2000:560; also Kügler 2000:231-49. On a related note, Conway 2003:471-91 places Philo's portrayal of Moses in conversation with Roman ideologies of masculinity.

3.6 Conclusion

What is the upshot of our study of Philo's epistemological discourses in the 'Exposition'? For one thing, we have a better sense of how Philo's way of dividing the Pentateuch shapes his discourses on human knowledge of the divine. Indeed, by Philo's own measure, one can understand the Mosaic writings (and Philo's 'Exposition' of it) only when one sees the order of – and relationship between – the three distinct parts which form the Pentateuch, namely (1) the creation material, (2) the patriarchal material, and (3) the 'Moses' material (*On Rewards and Punishments* §§1-3).

In keeping with this way of reading Moses' Pentateuch, Philo undertakes a kind of exegetical progression by which he highlights creation, the patriarchs, and Moses as his core philosophical and interpretive anchor points within the Pentateuch. As one follows this progression, one can detect a measure of coherence and structure to Philo's approach to noetic ascent and transformation, perhaps more than scholars have hitherto acknowledged.

In the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition,' Philo offers two distinct models of noetic ascent to knowledge of God. In his first model, Philo invests his reading of Genesis 1.26-27 with concepts envisioned in Plato's *Timaeus*. The mind is

portrayed as an imprint or copy of the mind of God. Noetic ascent is depicted in the imagery and language of Plato's *Phaedrus*.

On this view, then, God is presented as an overwhelming and incomprehensible being. Yet like Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 33.13-23) the mind yearns for knowledge of the divine. The mind is rendered totally passive. It is divinely seized and summoned to a condition of the mind marked by ecstasy and spiritual vertigo. As this ascent reaches its apex, there is a hindering of human understanding.

In his second model, based on Genesis 2.7, Philo enlists the Platonic concept of human assimilation to God (*Theaetetus*). The mind of the human being depicted in Genesis 2.7 is seen as the ruling part of the mixture of immortal and mortal natures that forms the composite human being. Enjoined to non-rational and corporeal faculties, the mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος inhabits the Platonic domain of becoming.

Noetic ascent is entirely possible, but in a different way. Ascent is depicted in the language of Plato's *Theaetetus* and augmented by the ideal of the mind's retrieval of its 'self-taught and self-instructed wisdom.' For Philo, this level of noetic advancement, associated exegetically with Isaac, is akin to the fulfillment of one's natural capacities, a way of rational life that the Greeks (and Philo) saw as

human εὐδαιμονία. As this ascent reaches its apex, there is an enhancement (not prevention) of human understanding.

In the 'patriarchs' segment of the 'Exposition,' Philo exploits the genealogical and narrative material presented in Genesis 4-50 in order to portray the conflictual realities and contingencies that the mind of the Genesis 2.7 ἄνθρωπος must face in the world of constant flux.

Keeping to the biblical material, Philo's ascent discourses feature the patriarchal triad of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Philo transposes each and all of them to a distinctively philosophical register. He uses the patriarchal figures, respectively and relatedly, to signify the possibilities of noetic transformation by the threefold way of instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac), and practice (Jacob). Aristotle's insistence on law over this educational trinity was a notable development in Greek philosophy, but we can only ponder whether this might have influenced Philo as he moved from this segment to the final segment on Mosaic legislation.

In the 'Moses' segment of the 'Exposition,' Philo formulates his discourses on noetic ascent with reference to Plato's concept of the philosopher-king. Presented as a paradox in the *Republic*, this portrait of the ideal human being would become a commonplace in Philo's day. Setting out to prove that Moses

surpasses the Platonic ideal, Philo portrays Moses as the ideal king, lawgiver, priest, and prophet, a fourfold schema which appears at both the beginning and the end of the 'Exposition,' and so thematically brackets the entire series.

With Moses as his focal point, Philo can speak in four distinct yet related ways about the mind's ascent to know the divine. As he reads the Mosaic laws, Philo can talk about the importance of divine agency (kingly function of the mind) without excluding the place of human agency and mastery of the passions (the legislative faculty of the mind). Furthermore, Philo can speak of knowledge that is derived beyond the bounds of normal human reason (the prophetic faculty of the mind) without rejecting the more mystical elements of one's ascent to knowledge of God (the priestly faculty of the mind).

This fourfold way of speaking about noetic ascent to God is consistent with Philo's purpose for writing the 'Exposition.' It enables Philo to write about noetic ascent in ways that converse with both Greek and Jewish frames of philosophical and political reference.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁵ Cohen 1987:168-69 who suggests that Philo's aim for the 'Exposition' was 'directed towards drawing back to a commitment to Jewish practice, or merely keeping within the fold, those with Jewish knowledge and traditional upbringing who had adopted the 'philosophic' viewpoint as their norm.'

Evident in all three 'Exposition' segments is Philo's frequent recourse to the notion of a universal law embedded in nature. The correlation goes something like this: just as the mind apprehends the sensible universe and sees in its varied movements and harmonies the outworking of the law of nature (which in turn leads the mind to see the divine maker and father of the cosmos), so also the aspiring mind also sees in the 'living' laws of the biblical patriarchs and the 'written' laws of Moses a perfect counterpart to the unwritten law of nature.

As part of this correlation, Philo can speak positively about the universalistic dimensions of Mosaic thought whilst also affirming the particular characteristics of Mosaic legislation which Philo sees as intended for a more restricted group of adherents, variously portrayed in the 'Exposition' as 'Jews' and the commonwealth of Moses. So then, *is that which is universal seen in that which is specific, or is it the other way around?* For Philo, the interwoven relationship between these two sets of laws allows him to answer in the affirmative to both.

Indeed, at virtually every turn in the 'Exposition,' Philo seems to work through the realities of divine mediation and the challenges of coming to grips with the coexistence of both divine perfection and human imperfection. For Philo, Moses is key, his excellence seen not only in how Moses raises these weighty questions, but also in how Moses reconciles them in ways that affirm the perfect incomprehensibility of God, on the one hand, and the human yearning for

knowledge and experience of the divine, on the other hand. Because in Philo's reckoning the laws of Moses form the perfect counterpart of the law of nature, they address the tensions of divine mediation in ways that speak to both Jewish and non-Jewish sensibilities.

A BRIEF PREVIEW OF UPCOMING CHAPTERS

Having explored the two theological epistemologies in Philo's main exegetical series (Chapters 2 and 3), we will now offer, under the rationale given in Chapter 1, two chapter-length case studies which variously illustrate the distinctive character of the epistemological commitments and concerns Philo presents in his *Allegorical Commentary*. Because each case study takes us into a particular field of ideas, it is worthwhile, before we proceed any further, to consider the central thread that connects the two case studies.

This thread is Philo's insistence that the way of knowing and experiencing the divine, as envisioned in the Pentateuch, necessarily involves *both* the enhancement of human rationality *and* the abandonment of such rationality. What Philo is doing for readers of this series, in other words, is bringing together two contexts that were widely held apart, seen as contradictory or even conflicting realities in some circles of Graeco-Roman philosophy.

On the necessity of human rationality, Philo can insist, as we shall discover in Chapter 4, that it is vitally important to get right the questions most central to any rational quest to know the divine. One key question that Philo concentrates on is, what – or who – is the locus of epistemic authority and attainment, a

human agent (as espoused by the fifth-century BCE sophist Protagoras of Abdera), or a divine being (as claimed by Plato, and most definitively Moses)?

How does Philo answer this question? As a teacher of the Pentateuch, what resources does Philo marshal from the scriptures of his day to help those among his readers who perhaps might have been occupied with the challenges posed by the Protagorean claim that the human being is the measure of all things? These matters, among others, will be taken up in Chapter 4, our case study of Philo's exegetical use of the language of mystery initiation.

It also comes as no surprise to find Philo exploring a major point of friction relating to the ancillary question of whether one can ascend to divine realities via non-rational means like ecstasy, frenzy, mania or other phenomena? This friction in Philo's time often found expression in discourses concerning wider notions of divine inspiration and madness.

In Chapter 5, then, we will explore how and why Philo invests epistemological value in both ways of knowing the divine. As a general rule Plato and Aristotle both considered rationality and non-rationality as separate ways of knowing. Does Philo follow this way of partition? Or does Philo's commitment to Moses move him in a different way of thought, and if so, on what grounds and for what purpose?

These questions, among others, will be taken up in Chapter 5, our case study on Philo's exegetical use of the language of divine inspiration. As we shall see, Philo's approach to this metaphorical *topos* features two key areas of exegetical concentration. Many texts from the book of Exodus invite Philo to emphasise the divinely-inspired enhancement of human reason in one's quest to the divine. Texts from the book of Genesis which focus on Abraham and Isaac however provoke Philo to insist on the divinely-inspired eviction of human reason. Such exegetical strategies suggest an attempt on Philo's part to bring together in Moses what other thinkers typically held apart.

Following this central thread will sharpen the picture of Philo's varied epistemological discourses which we have developed based on our findings from Chapters 2 and 3. In addition, the wider issues at stake in Philo's intellectual milieu will be delineated and subject to further comment as potential avenues for further research in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4
Scriptural Exegesis and the Language of Initiation
into Divine Mysteries in the *Allegorical Commentary*

4.1

Introduction

What, if anything, does Philo's language of initiation into divine mysteries have to do with his theological epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*? This question about one of the more remarkable features of Philo's allegorical exegesis of Moses is the driving force behind this chapter.

In Chapters 2 and 3 of the thesis, we used the same set of three questions to get a better sense of the distinctive features specific to the theological epistemology Philo presents, respectively speaking, in the *Allegorical Commentary* (Chapter 2) and in the 'Exposition' (Chapter 3).

In this chapter, however, we move away from that interrogative method and in the process we seek to sharpen our inquiry by focusing on two more specific questions:

- (1) What biblical texts provoke Philo's use of the metaphorical language of initiation into divine mysteries?
- (2) What, if anything, might this tell us about his broader exegetical agendas and apologetic aims?

These questions also have the effect of restricting my parameters of inquiry in this chapter. First, in keeping with prevailing consensus, I view Philo's references to initiation as metaphorical in character.¹ Although it has been suggested that metaphors in the classical tradition pointed to realities on the ground,² when it comes to Philo, the case for actual initiation rites behind his language remains difficult to substantiate.

¹ Goodenough 1935 is an example of one who holds to the view that Philo's work is an expression of a Jewish mystery and as such standing behind many of the initiation passages were actual communal events. See Nock 1937, Wolfson 1948a:46, and Lease 1987:858-80 for critical appraisals of Goodenough's thesis. More recent scholarship has sided with the view that the initiation passages are metaphorical not historical. Nikiprowetzky (1977:17), for example, argues that Philo's language of initiation is metaphorical. 'La première constatation qui s'impose est que Philon emploie souvent le mot «initié» (μύστης) et son contraire (ἀμύητος) en des sens incontestablement métaphoriques.' Riedweg 1987 finds on the basis of Philo's varied uses of mystery terminology (μυστήριον, τελετή) that it is virtually impossible to demonstrate the genuine existence of Hellenistic mysteries and that Philo likely employed such terminology for broader rhetorical purposes (cf. Birnbaum 1996:23). No doubt that in some instances (e.g. *Leg. All.* 3.95-103; *Plant.* 27; *Mos.* 2.74-75) Philo's initiation language is indebted to metaphysical doctrines associated with the name of Plato, i.e. the Theory of Ideas, as considered in Williamson 1970:560-61.

² For a recent collection of essays: Boys-Stone 2003.

Second, by focusing on Philo's exegetical strategies, I am following prevailing methods. More to the point, I am building on an observation raised – but not fully substantiated – by Jean Pépin in a 1967 essay wherein he noted the significance of initiation language in Philo's allegorical exegesis.³ A decade later, John Dillon observed the same feature.⁴ Subsequent studies have helpfully illuminated other aspects of this Philonic subject, yet they have not offered the type of exegetical evidence we will consider in this chapter.

Third, in keeping with prevailing consensus on the character of Jewish Alexandrian exegesis in the Hellenistic and early Imperial periods, I am attempting to clarify and contextualise an important claim – recently made by James Carleton Paget and Tessa Rajak – that Philo represents the brand of Alexandrian exegesis and poetry that attempted to 'de-particularise the Hebrew Bible through the lens of Middle Platonism.'⁵ I will attempt to demonstrate more precisely what aspects of Middle Platonism were at stake, and how Philo held his philosophical interests in tension with his more particular interests in the Mosaic concept of theological knowledge.

³ Pépin 1967:131-67 (esp. p. 136); also Mazzanti 2003:117-29 (esp. p. 121).

⁴ On this feature in Philo, Dillon 1977:300 observes a similar tendency in Middle Platonism as seen in writings from 'Heraclitus' (*The Allegories of Homer*, late first- or early second-century AD), Theon of Smyrna (fl. c. 115-40 CE), and Albinus, the second-century CE Platonist philosopher and pupil of Gaius (129-216 CE).

⁵ Cf. Carleton Paget 2004:151. For discussion of Philo's relationship to earlier Jewish commentators in Alexandria see Janowitz 1991:130-33; Collins 2000:186-90; Rowland 2002:83; Rajak 2009:241-42.

4.1.1 *Chapter preview*

In light of the foregoing points, this chapter argues that Philo's uses of the metaphorical language of initiation reflect a measure of intentionality on his part to bring about two distinct yet related exegetical agendas.

In one agenda, Philo uses this language to de-particularise the symbolic meaning and significance of a key figure in Genesis (Cain). He does this in order to address and refute a philosophical question that became pressing in Philo's cultural moment (more on this later). With this agenda, Philo's exegetical use of initiation language is directed primarily by his varied commitments as a student of Plato's ideas as they were understood in first-century Alexandria.

In another agenda, Philo uses the language of initiation to stress the particularity of the Greek Jewish Bible of his day. Drawing on numerous key knowledge-related texts in the book of Exodus, Philo uses this language to emphasise the particular character and constraints of theological knowledge as conceived in the thought world of Moses. In this regard, Philo's exegetical agenda is animated by his commitments as a Jewish reader and disciple of Moses.

The language of initiation, then, facilitates Philo's interest in holding both agendas in a sort of dynamic tension that lends a measure of coherence to his overall thought on human knowledge of God. This viewpoint differs from many scholars⁶ who see Philonic references to mysteries and initiation as an area of incoherence in Philo's hermeneutics and theology. In this chapter, I suggest otherwise.

4.2

Features of mystery initiation in Graeco-Roman antiquity

To get our bearings when we turn to the Philonic evidence, it will be useful to first provide a brief orientation to the primary features and forms of mystery initiation in Graeco-Roman antiquity.

According to A.D. Nock, the metaphorical language of initiation evoked the idea of what he calls a 'philosophic discipleship,' namely, one's attainment of esoteric knowledge based on one's active intellectual contemplation of the perceptible universe.⁷ The writings of Plato (fourth century BCE) certainly reflect this view. Knowledge of the highest sort, for Plato, is accessible by a select few, those who have proved themselves worthy of apprehending this knowledge.⁸ In keeping

⁶ E.g. Mazzanti 2003 as a recent example.

⁷ Nock 1952:189.

⁸ *Phaed.* 69C-D *Theaet.* 155E; *Resp.* 494A; *Tim.* 28C; cf. Riedweg 1987:1-69.

with this, Plato is drawn often to this metaphorical language which pointed to a nearly universal commonplace in the ancient world.

Following Plato's cue, later Greek thinkers traded on the performative characteristics of this commonplace. Initiation, for Aristotle (384-322 BCE), is a thing experienced, not a thing learnt.⁹ Plutarch (c. 50-120 CE) uses the language of initiation to describe one's attainment of esoteric knowledge.¹⁰

In addition to Greek philosophy, the metaphorical language of initiation also featured prominently in the arenas of Greek religious and mythological imagination.¹¹ This language related closely with expressions of Dionysiac maenadism and accompanying forms of ecstatic and prophetic phenomena.¹² Central to the portrayal of aspects of Eleusinian,¹³ Mithraic,¹⁴ and Orphic¹⁵ mysteries was the language of initiation.

⁹ Parker 2005:352 citing Burkert (1987: 69) and Riedweg (1987:127-29).

¹⁰ *Is. Os.* 382D; cf. *Quaest. conv.* VIII 2, 718C-F, containing allusions to Plato, *Phaed.* 83D; *Resp.* 527E; *Phaedr.* 249C; *Def. orac.* 422C.

¹¹ See Prümmer 1960 and Burkert 1987 as leading authorities. Salient surveys include Wiens 1980; Bianchi 1965, 1976; Cosmopolous 2003; Graf 2006; Gasparro 2011. Meyer 1999 offers an anthology of related texts. For epigraphic evidence of mystery language in royal correspondence of the Hellenistic period: e.g. the Letter of Attalus III to Cyzicus (8 October 135 BC), lines 13-14, and the Letter of Attalus III to Pergamum (5 October 135 BC), lines 10-11, as documented in Welles 1934:266-67.

¹² Cf. Seaford 1981; Parker 1996.

¹³ Cf. Clinton 2003; for discussion of the importance of Eleusinian festivals in wider Athenian society, see Parker 2005:327-68.

¹⁴ Cf. Beck 1996; Clauss 2000.

The language of initiation also features significantly in the writings of leading Roman intellectuals. Highlighting the esoteric characteristics of certain kinds of higher knowledge, Seneca associates the idea with the figure of wisdom, a custodian of secret knowledge who is domiciled in a sacred precinct:

Wisdom's course is toward the state of happiness...she delivers to us the knowledge of the whole of nature and of her own nature. She discloses to us what the gods are and of what sort they are; what are the nether gods, the household deities, and the protecting spirits; what are the souls which have been endowed with lasting life and have been admitted to the second class of divinities, where is their abode and what their activities, powers, and will. Such are wisdom's rites of initiation [*Haec eius initiamenta sunt*], by means of which is unlocked, not a village shrine, but the vast temple of all the gods – the universe itself, whose true appartitions and true aspects she [wisdom] offers to the gaze of our minds. For the vision of our eyes is too dull for sights so great [*Nam ad spectacula tam magna hebes visus est*].¹⁶

Finally, the Alexandrian culture of Philo's time was marked by initiation ideas and language. This, as some have suggested, was an outgrowth of the resurgence

¹⁵ Cf. Obbink 1997.

¹⁶ *Ep.* 90.28, trans. Gummere 1920:417. Runia 2001:204 (commenting on Philo's *Opif.* 55) also cites Plutarch, *Tranq. an.* 477C and Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 12.33-34. Winston 1981:386 n. 640 lists Seneca *Ep.* 90.28 among the earliest instances in Graeco-Roman literature on the notion of the cosmos as a temple; see also Cicero *Nat. d.* 3.26 (concurring with Chrysippus); Heb 8.2; 9.11.

of Platonic transcendental ideas in Alexandria at the turn of the era.¹⁷ In Hellenistic Alexandria, the cult of the Egyptian goddess Isis dominated the religious landscape. The cult's appeal remained strong and varied even as its initiation rites commingled with features of Dionysiac initiation which came to Alexandria from classical Greek culture.¹⁸

Although early Jewish writers did not draw on the metaphor of the mystery religions, they frequently used the term *μυστήριον*.¹⁹ Recent literature suggests that Jews used the terminology of mystery – in the singular when used in Greek – largely without reference to mystery cult imagery but rather in a quasi-Septuagintal sense to render the equivalent Hebrew terms. Only in rabbinic literature is there a seemingly deliberate word play on the *ᾰ* root as also similar to *μυστήριον*.²⁰

¹⁷ Cf. Runia 2001:151-52; Bonazzi 2008:233-51. Prümm 1937 and 1960 has demonstrated the post-Philo persistence of initiation ideas and language in the writings of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, among others. In this vein, see also Marsh 1936; Lilla 1971. On mystery and initiation terminology in Valentinian Gnosticism, see Thomassen 2006.

¹⁸ On the blending of Graeco-Roman notions and Isis imaginations in Hellenistic Egypt: Tobin 1991:187-200; more generally: Witt 1997; Donaldson 2003; Bricault/Versluys 2010.

¹⁹ On early Jewish use of the term, see Bockmuehl 1990, repr. 2009; Gladd 2008; Thomas 2009. For discussion of mystery concepts in early Christianity and its environments, see Brown 1968 *passim* and Wiens 1980; both studies build on the earlier studies of Deden 1936; Bornkamm 1942; and Prümm 1960.

²⁰ Cf. Bockmuehl 1990:104-23 (esp. 114-18).

In this respect, Philo is certainly different, as A. D. Nock suggests. Philo's writings reflect little, if any, resistance to the metaphor, unlike many Jews of his time. It is difficult to determine if this attitude toward mystery cult imagery extends beyond Philo and the brand of Alexandrian Judaism which he represents. Nock writes:

The metaphor was, for a Greek philosopher and for Philo alike, no mere ornamental trick of style. It had great inherent appropriateness. The initiate, the philosopher, the Jew, each had something which he believed to be of incomparable, irreplaceable value, making him who received and possessed it different from other men. The rest of the world was excluded from this privilege as being impure, or by reason of inability to come to Eleusis, or through lack of the divine command of Isis, or through incapacity to meet the cost of the initiation; it was excluded again through lack of the necessary preliminary disciplines or the ability to apprehend the ultimate ideal; it was excluded by the results of birth and by invincible ignorance. Each of these minorities encountered at times misunderstanding, hostility and contempt.²¹

Some Jewish thinkers like Philo, says Nock, found the metaphor of initiation 'particularly appropriate, inasmuch as it expressed the passive and receptive attitude of mind which Philo held to be necessary.'²² In light of Nock's statement, we turn now to Philo's use of the metaphorical language of initiation.

²¹ Nock 1937:163-64.

²² Nock 1937:165.

4.3

Philonic exegesis and his language of initiation into divine mysteries

In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo frequently enlists allegory as part of a broader portfolio of interpretive resources, one which includes etymology, comparative philosophy, historical analysis, and analogies to naturalistic phenomena.²³ According to David Runia, when one understands Philo's primary and secondary modes of exegesis and the relationship between these two modes, one can then begin to understand the structure and contents of Philo's allegorical writings.²⁴

4.3.1 Philo's primary mode of exegesis

In Philo's exegesis of Moses, at least two modes of interpretation can be detected in the *Allegorical Commentary*. In what David Runia calls Philo's 'primary' mode of exegesis, Philo can be seen as one who stands within the parameters of commentary writing at least as far as such conventions were developed by Alexandrian predecessors like Aristobulus and the *Anonymous Commentator of*

²³ See e.g. *Post.* 50; *Det.* 47; *Agr.* 3; *Conf.* 143. No doubt Philo's insistence on the pluriformity and profundity of Israel's scriptures is related to his broader view of the corpus as a 'living organism composed of body and soul' (*Contempl.* 78)(cf. Runia 1987). On Philo's openness to multiple, valid interpretations of any given Mosaic text, see Tobin 1983:166.

²⁴ Runia 1984:238.

*the Theaetetus*²⁵ and practiced by Philo's contemporaries elsewhere in and around Palestine.²⁶

In his secondary mode, Philo deepens his exegesis, intensifying his language, all in an effort to explore the depths of what he sees as hidden layers of meaning in a particular Mosaic text. When we appreciate this phenomenon of multi-level exegesis, Philo's use of initiation language can be seen with sharper focus: in most cases, as we shall soon see, Philo uses this language as part of his secondary mode of exegesis.

In keeping with these varied conventions, the *Allegorical Commentary* introduces segments of the first eighteen chapters of the book of Genesis in more or less sequential manner ('main biblical lemmata,' or 'MBLs'). In this sequential framework, Philo comments on salient philological issues and competing interpretations raised by the book of Genesis.

4.3.2 *Philo's secondary mode of exegesis*

In what Runia calls Philo's 'secondary' mode of exegesis, Philo draws on numerous texts from (and beyond) the Pentateuch ('secondary biblical lemmata')

²⁵ Cf. Bonazzi 2008:233-51.

²⁶ Cf. Bockmuehl 2009:3-29.

or 'SBLs'). What results is a way of biblical commentary that features the commingling of formal conventions and interpretive freedom. This exegetical mode is animated by the central tenet that every part of the biblical material coheres and discloses the Mosaic reckoning of God as both One in essence and Many in his mediated ways of interacting with the created universe.

How are these two modes related? The following diagram offers one way of appreciating this relationship by focusing on the number of biblical texts that fall under each mode.

Diagram 4.1
Primary and secondary levels or modes of exegesis
and corresponding text patterns in the *Allegorical Commentary*

	Treatise in the <i>Allegorical Commentary</i>	Number of MBLs considered (Philo's primary mode of exegesis)	Number of SBLs considered (Philo's secondary mode of exegesis)
1	<i>Allegorical Laws I</i>	16	14
2	<i>Allegorical Laws II</i>	9	28
3	<i>Allegorical Laws III</i>	15	84
4	<i>On the Cherubim</i>	2	28
5	<i>On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel</i>	3	47
6	<i>The Worse Attacks the Better</i>	10	35
7	<i>On the Posterity and Exile of Cain</i>	8	59
8	<i>On the Giants</i>	4	14
9	<i>On the Unchangeableness of God</i>	7	31
	Subtotal	74	340
10	<i>On Husbandry</i>	1	22
11	<i>On Noah's Work as a Planter</i>	2	25
12	<i>On Drunkenness</i>	0	42
13	<i>On Sobriety</i>	4	14
14	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>	8	54
	Subtotal	15	157

15	<i>On the Migration of Abraham</i>	5	110
16	<i>Who is the Heir of Divine Things?</i>	17	88
17	<i>On the Preliminary Studies</i>	6	51
18	<i>On Flight and Finding</i>	7	59
19	<i>On the Change of Names</i>	13	77
	Subtotal	48	385
	Total	137	882

As indicated by Diagram 4.1 above, Philo on average turns to six SBLs for every MBL from Genesis. When Philo connects these SBLs into chains of interpretation, Philo frequently deepens his exegesis, intensifying his language with elements of mystical thought, all in an effort to explore the hidden layers of meaning he sees in a particular Mosaic text. When we appreciate these two modes of exegesis at work in the *Allegorical Commentary*, the nature and functions of Philo's use of initiation language come into sharper focus: *in most cases, as we shall soon see, Philo uses this language as part of his secondary mode of exegesis.*

But that is not always the case. This alerts us to our first important point of consideration.

4.4

Philo's language of mystery initiation in his primary mode of scriptural exegesis

We now move to the third and main part of this chapter, in which we consider the key instances of initiation language in the *Allegorical Commentary*. I have identified these passages on the basis of Philo's core vocabulary for initiation.²⁷ Philo's vocabulary is notable in three ways.

First, Philo is more conventional than innovative from a first-century Alexandrian Jewish perspective. Philo draws primarily from the common stock of antecedent Platonic and Septuagintal usages. Second, Philo distributes this language across the *Allegorical Commentary*. Sixteen of the twenty-two treatises feature this language, albeit with some variance. The distribution rate is a bit lower in the 'Exposition': 6 of 10 treatises feature this language.²⁸

²⁷ Primary terms are: *μυστήριον*; *μυέω*; *μύστης*; *ἀμύητος*; *ὄργια*; *τελετή*; *ἱεροφάντης*. Terms of lesser frequency or less direct semantic bearing on our subject include *μύησις*; *μυσταγωγέω*; *μυσταγωγός*; *μύστις*; *μυστικός*; *τελέω*; *ἀτέλεστος*. My list of passages corroborates the findings from the most recent lexical studies on this subject: Pépin 1968; Riedweg 1987; Bockmuehl 1990; Mazzanti 2003; Cohen 2004; Gladd 2008.

²⁸ *Spec.* 1.319, 323; *Spec.* 3.40; *Decal.* 41; *Abr.* 122; *Virt.* 178; *Praem.* 121; cf. Riedweg 1987:108-14.

Finally, Philo uses this language in a metaphorical way. Scholarly interest in the nature and function of Philo's language goes back more than a century,²⁹ but the notion of historicity came to the fore with the publication of Erwin Goodenough's *By Light, Light* (1935). Goodenough's study presented Philo's references to a so-called Mystery of Moses as evidence of an actual Jewish mystery religion shaped by antecedent strands of Jewish esotericism and seen later in Jewish prayers in Greek.³⁰

This theory, however, has not escaped criticism. A. D. Nock, for example, concurs with Goodenough's claim that such language is very emphatic in Philo, but on the question of historicity, he flatly objects on the grounds that mystery initiation was a metaphorical commonplace long before Philo came onto the historical scene.³¹

Due to present limitations, we cannot rehearse the details, but on this longstanding debate we concur with Markus Bockmuehl's position:

²⁹ Cf. Ziegert 1894.

³⁰ Cf. *Apos. Con.* 7.

³¹ Nock 1937:161-63. It is hard to deny Nock's point here, but as pointed out above, it is also hard to deny that initiation also linked closely with performative dimensions, such as ritual dancing and singing. In one instance in the 'Exposition,' Philo shows his awareness of initiation practices current in his day, prohibiting fellows Jews from joining the practice of concealing initiations at nighttime (*Spec.* 1.319-20). Cf. Kippenberg 1995:209-10.

Because of certain parallels with Palestinian exegesis, a straight adoption of Philo's notion of 'mystery' from the Hellenistic mystery cults (not to mention a *Sitz im Leben* in a literal Jewish Hellenistic mystery cult) is less clear than was once supposed. Philo consciously employs the terminology of the pagan rites (as indeed other Jewish diaspora writers did before and after him: e.g. Aristobulus, Artapanus, *Orphica*, Pseudo-Phocylides). But because he combines this with an intense dislike of the very essence of these cults, his use of the terminology can hardly be due to a fascinated desire to emulate them.³²

Having noted three features of Philo's vocabulary, we turn to Philo's use of the language of initiation to interpret a main text from Genesis without resort to secondary proof-texts from Scripture. In other words, we are going to examine initiation language that arises as part of Philo's primary mode of exegesis on Genesis. Strikingly, each passage touches on the same biblical account: the birth and actions of Cain in Genesis 4.

4.4.1 *Why does Genesis 4 provoke Philo's use of initiation language?*

Why Cain? What, if anything, prompts Philo to use initiation language in his treatment of Genesis 4?

³² Bockmuehl 1990:78-79.

Philo's interest in Cain is considerable. Like other Jewish interpreters, Philo encounters in Genesis 4 numerous interpretive knots.³³ These difficulties, for Philo, prompt him to conclude that Moses intends the language of Genesis 4 to be taken figuratively, an account pregnant with deeper philosophical and theological meanings.³⁴

A key starting point is Philo's approach to Cain in a treatise entitled *On the Posterity of Cain*, Philo's exegesis of Genesis 4. In §§ 33-38, Philo casts his gaze on the demerits of sophistry and bad philosophy. To this end, one ancient philosopher comes in for scathing criticism: Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490-420 BCE). Describing the kinship between Protagoras and Cain, Philo writes:

On the Posterity of Abel and Cain §35

τίς οὖν ἐστὶν ἀσεβοῦς δόξα;
μέτρον εἶναι πάντων χρημάτων
τὸν ἀνθρώπινον νοῦν· ἥ καὶ τῶν
παλαιῶν τινα σοφιστῶν ὄνομα
Πρωταγόραν φασὶ χρήσασθαι,
τῆς Κάιν ἀπονοίας ἔκγονον.

Of what sort then is an impious man's opinion? That the human mind is the measure of all things, an opinion held they tell us by an ancient sophist named Protagoras, an offspring of Cain's madness.

Opponents are frequently evoked in the course of Philo's allegorical interpretations of Moses. Regularly featured are the Chaldeans and the

³³ On the variety of interpretive approaches generated by Cain motifs in Gen 4: Salvesen 1991:18-29.

³⁴ Cf. *Det.* 167.

champions of the mind and senses.³⁵ Philo also denounces Jewish interpreters who, in his view, read Moses through the lens of extreme literalism³⁶ or extreme allegory.³⁷ These opponents, however, almost always remain anonymous in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*, thus rendering them difficult to identify.

There are two notable exceptions. Philo unequivocally disdains and denies the Epicureans and Protagoras.³⁸ Philo repudiates both of them in *On the Posterity of Cain*.³⁹ Why these two? By Philo's day, says Jaap Mansfeld, the measure doctrine of Protagoras may have been associated with Epicurean philosophers whose way of life relied completely on sense-experience.⁴⁰

In light of the passage just read, with its description of Cain as the father of Protagoras of Abdera, we move a step closer to why Philo may be using initiation language on Genesis 4. But, in keeping with Philo's method, we might usefully dig deeper here. At this juncture, then, two questions might be fruitfully

³⁵ E.g. *Migr.* 178-84; *Fug.* 8-9; *Somn.* 2.277-89; also *Spec.* 1.327-29.

³⁶ E.g. Shroyer 1936:261-84.

³⁷ E.g. *Migr.* 89-93.

³⁸ Runia 1986:517-18.

³⁹ I.e. Epicureans (*Post.* 2), Protagoras (*Post.* 35). Winston/Dillon 1983:308 sees another reference to Protagoras at *Deus* 61 (cf. DK 80 B 3). Mansfeld 1988:91 finds additional references to Protagoras at *Conf.* 122-27 and *Her.* 246-47.

⁴⁰ Cf. Mansfeld 1988:91. More broadly, Winter 2002:73 observes that Philo's remark that the history of philosophy is one full of discordance (*Her.* 248) can be seen in light of his treatment of Plato's *Theaetetus* (151C), a dialogue that centres on the character and ramifications of Protagorean epistemology.

considered to situate these initiation passages in their Middle-Platonic context:

who was Protagoras? And why does Philo single him out?

4.4.2 *The challenge of Protagorean epistemology in Philo's world of thought*

Literary remains from first-century Alexandrian thinkers⁴¹ reflect a shared and sustained interest in the question of epistemic authority. Who or what is in the position of authority when it comes to acquiring and actualising knowledge? A human agent? Or human faculty, like the mind? Or a non-human agent? Much of the debate concentrated on figuring out what the earliest Greek philosophers said and did not say in connection with this question.⁴²

Enter Protagoras of Abdera, the fourth-century BCE philosopher.⁴³ As we noted earlier in Chapter 2,⁴⁴ Philo uses Protagoras as a paradigm of a type of thinking about divine and human knowledge that goes against Mosaic epistemology. Here, we will expand on what we considered in Chapter 2 by focusing more specifically on how and why Philo uses the language of mystery initiation to bring together Protagoras and the biblical figure of Cain. For ease of reference,

⁴¹ Such as the anonymous commentator of the *Theaetetus*, Antiochus of Ascalon, Eudorus of Alexandria, and Philo.

⁴² Cf. Bonazzi 2008:233-51; Niehoff 2010:35-62.

⁴³ For summary of Protagoras' life: Morrison 1941:1-16, variously critiqued by Davidson 1953:33-45.

⁴⁴ Cf. Chapter 2 (§ 2.3) above.

we will restate the measure doctrine, with which Protagoras opened his book entitled *Truth (Alētheia)*:⁴⁵

The 'Measure' Doctrine of Protagoras of Abdera

Πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἐστὶν
ἄνθρωπος, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὥς
ἐστίν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὥς οὐκ
ἐστὶν

Man (or the human being) is
the measure of all things; of
the things that are, that they
are, and of the things that are
not, that they are not.

In antiquity, the measure doctrine was notorious for its perceived espousal of a radical form of epistemological relativism.⁴⁶ The doctrine marked a pivotal point in the development of ancient Greek thought.⁴⁷ Adding to Protagoras' notoriety, one line of tradition held that Protagoras was exiled and executed on charges of

⁴⁵ As it turns out, no actual writing of Protagoras has survived; we know of his measure doctrine only by way of doxographical attestations in Plato (*Euthyd.* 283E-287A; *Crat.* 385B-386E; *Protag.* 316B-327B, 334A-C, 356C-E; *Theaet.* 151E-179C, esp. 152A2-4), Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1005b35-1011b22; 1021a 29-b2; 1047a 4-7; 1051b 6-9; 1053a 31-b 3; 1057 a 7-12; 1062 b 12ff; 998 a 2-4); Sextus Empiricus (*Pyr. Hyp.* I 215-19; *Adv. Math.* 7.60-69 [Diels-Kranz 80b1; *Adv. Math.* 9.56-57]); Plutarch (*Adversus Colotem* iv 1109a ff); and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 9.50-56. For further discussion of these attestations, see Glidden 1975:209-27. On the strength of these witnesses, most scholars agree that Protagoras did indeed formulate the measure doctrine: see Morrison 1941:8: 'In the *Theaetetus*, which is more seriously philosophical, Plato seems to take special trouble to distinguish between the doctrines which are purely Protagorean and those which are his own development of them. This preoccupation is so marked that we can be confident of the authenticity of the former.'

⁴⁶ Cf. Glidden 1975:216; Lee 2005:30-45.

⁴⁷ Cf. Fowler 2011:56-57.

atheism and corruption of youth. This finds a measure of corroboration in a first-century account from Josephus.⁴⁸

4.4.2.1 Plato's perspectives on Protagorean epistemology

Plato's interest in the ideas and issues raised by the *homo mensura* doctrine can be seen most clearly in the *Theaetetus*, his principal dialogue on the nature of human knowledge. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato brings the doctrine in for close inspection, making it the central part of the dialogue.

According to Plato's Socrates, the measure doctrine is a 'difficult [or dark] saying' for most people (152C). In the person of Protagoras, Plato's Socrates says in the *Theaetetus* 167B 3-4: 'I say that some beliefs are better than others but none are truer.'⁴⁹ Noting the practice of 'examination in and through praxis'⁵⁰ which lies at the heart of Protagoras's approach to knowledge, Klaus Oehler characterises the stark difference between Protagoras and Plato as follows:

Historically speaking, the figure of Protagoras confronted Plato with the at the time most developed theory of relativity and subjectivity in the process of knowledge. Protagoras's epistemological position was totally at odds with Plato's own....Given what we know about Protagoras's teaching, in particular

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ag. Ap.* 2.266.

⁴⁹ Cf. Glidden 1975:216 n.32.

⁵⁰ Oehler 2002:210.

from the speech in the *Theaetetus*, there is reason to believe that, unlike Plato, the philosopher of the *homo mensura* principle takes his systematic point of departure in human knowledge precisely insofar as it is human – and not in the ideal of a perfect knowledge unattainable by man.⁵¹

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato seems to acknowledge the radically relativistic character of Protagoras' view on knowledge. But more is going on. According to Lloyd Gerson, Plato's *Theaetetus* represents the attempt to take direct aim at Protagoras on the grounds that the position arising from the 'measure' doctrine would lead to 'the abandonment of the entire philosophical project.'⁵²

But this points to one of the central paradoxes in the *Theaetetus*: though much attention is devoted to the 'measure' doctrine, it is in fact never refuted or rejected.⁵³ This perhaps explains why the 'measure' doctrine enjoyed a rich afterlife in Greek literature. The writings of Aristotle (384-322 BCE) mark an important chapter in this reception history and bring us closer to addressing the question, *why Protagoras is significant for Philo?* With this question in mind, Aristotle's response to Protagorean epistemology in the *Metaphysics* will be briefly considered.

⁵¹ Oehler 2002:211, 213.

⁵² Cf. Gerson 2009:20-21.

⁵³ Cf. Lee 2005:252; also Oehler 2002:211; for a minority view that Plato did in fact refute the Protagorean challenge: Haden 1984:225-40.

4.4.2.2 Aristotelian perspectives on Protagorean epistemology

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle takes aim at Protagoras and all his predecessors. According to Mikyung Lee, Aristotle achieves this by criticising both the ‘real’ Protagoras and the theoretical position Plato makes for Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*.⁵⁴

The climax of Aristotle’s case against Protagoras comes in book 4 (Gamma) of his *Metaphysics*. Aristotle focuses on the implications of Protagoras’ measure doctrine, claiming that they will lead people to conclude that, as Lee puts it, ‘the search for truth is futile and knowledge is impossible.’⁵⁵ The pragmatic nature of Aristotle’s concerns about Protagoras’ measure doctrine can be seen in the following remark:

It is along this path that the consequences are most difficult; for if those⁵⁶ who have the clearest vision of such as is possible (and these are they who seek and love it most hold) hold such opinions and make these pronouncements about

⁵⁴ Cf. Lee 2005:252.

⁵⁵ Lee 2005:122. ‘Aristotle brings out something that was only implicit in Plato’s discussion of Protagoras: he suggests that Protagoras’ thesis, along with the ideas in the Secret Doctrine, will ultimately lead one to conclude that truth cannot be found and to give up the search for truth’ (Lee 2005:253).

⁵⁶ Aristotle’s discussion of thinkers whose epistemological views proceed from the measure doctrine of Protagoras (*Metaph.* 4.1009a6-8; also 1007b18-23) such as Anaxagoras, Democritus, Protagoras, Empedocles, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, and Homer (4.1009a24-b38)- forms the broader context of this quoted passage.

the truth, surely those who are trying to be philosophers may well despair; for the pursuit of truth will be 'chasing birds in the air.'⁵⁷

By Aristotle's reckoning, the measure doctrine of Protagoras leads to the abandonment of the philosophical project on 'the sceptical conclusion that it is impossible to determine the truth about anything.'⁵⁸

4.4.3 *Philo's perspectives on Protagorean epistemology*

Aristotle's influence on Philo's works was considerable and varied.⁵⁹ This is not entirely surprising in light of Philo's regard for Plato, Aristotle and other Greek philosophers as 'fellow-exegetes' of Moses.⁶⁰ Given this influence, it is somewhat surprising to find that Philo goes in a distinctive direction. Unlike Aristotle, Philo does not try to rehabilitate Plato's response to Protagoras. Rather than rehabilitation, Philo's aim is subjugation: he is keen to show the superiority of the Mosaic response to the Protagorean thesis.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Metaph.* Book 4 1009b33-39; for a related critique of Protagoras, see also 1012a29-33; 1012b5-9. Translation is taken from Tredennick 1933.

⁵⁸ Cf. Lee 2005:128; this reading has long been held, as reflected in the commentary on this passage by Thomas Aquinas (c. 1266-1272 AD); cf. Rowan 1961:272.

⁵⁹ See the collection of essays in Alesse 2008, especially Sharples 2008:66-73.

⁶⁰ Cf. Mansfeld 1988:85.

⁶¹ A point reinforced by *Deus* 61 wherein Philo discusses one's attainment of perfect virtue as a precondition to one's initiation into the mysteries. At the heart of this discussion is Philo's acceptance of the way Aristotle mediates Protagoras's view of perfect virtue; on this point, see Winston/Dillon 1983:308.

This brings us back to our earlier question, namely, *why does Philo use the language of initiation to present (and reject) Cain as the symbolic father of Protagoras?* As our first point of engagement with this question, it is useful to note that Philo uses initiation language on a main biblical text (Genesis 4) in at least three key instances:

Diagram 4.2

Main biblical texts that provoke Philo's language of mystery initiation

Initiation Passage	Main Biblical Text
<i>On the Cherubim</i> §§42-52	Genesis 4.1-2
<i>On the Posterity of Abel and Cain</i> §§173	Genesis 4.25
<i>On Husbandry</i> §25	Genesis 4.2, 12

In language fairly typical of this group of passages, Philo in *On the Cherubim* §§42-52 displays the subtlety of his anti-Protagorean representation. Philo uses the idea of divine impregnation of knowledge and virtues into the human soul to intensify his critique of any notion that the human being is the measure of anything.

That all knowledge is the product of divine impregnation, not human cognition or creation, is 'a divine mystery and its lesson is for the initiated who are worthy

to realise the holiest secret.’⁶² After citing biblical examples of divinely impregnation of knowledge and virtues (Sarah, Leah, Rebecca, Zipporah),⁶³ Philo discloses his own initiation into this divine mystery:

On the Cherubim §49

καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ παρὰ Μωυσεῖ τῷ
θεοφιλεῖ μυθεῖς τὰ μέγαρα
μυστήρια ὅμως αὖθις Ἰερεμίαν τὸν
προφήτην ἰδὼν καὶ γινούς, ὅτι οὐ
μόνον μύστης ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ καὶ
ἱεροφάντης ἱκανός, οὐκ ὥκνησα
φοιτῆσαι πρὸς αὐτόν· ὁ δ’ ἅτε τὰ
πολλὰ ἐνθουσιῶν χρησμόν τινα
ἐξεῖπεν ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ
λέγοντα πρὸς τὴν εἰρηνικωτάτην
ἀρετὴν ταῦτα· ‘οὐχ ὡς οἶκόν με
ἐκάλεσας καὶ πατέρα καὶ ἄνδρα
τῆς παρθενίας σου;’
ἐμφαντικώτατα παριστὰς ὅτι ὁ
θεὸς καὶ οἶκός ἐστιν, ἀσωμάτων
ἰδεῶν ἀσώματος χώρα, καὶ τῶν
συνπάντων πατήρ, ἅτε
γεγεννηκὼς αὐτά, καὶ σοφίας
ἀνὴρ σπέρμα τῷ θνητῷ γένει
καταβαλλόμενος εὐδαιμονίας εἰς
ἀγαθὴν καὶ παρθένον γῆν.

I myself was initiated under
Moses the God-beloved into his
greater mysteries, yet when I saw
the prophet Jeremiah and knew
him to be not only himself
enlightened, but a worthy
minister of the holy secrets, I was
not slow to become his disciple.
He out of his manifold inspiration
gave forth an oracle spoken in the
person of God to Virtue the all-
peaceful. ‘Didst thou not call upon
Me as thy house, thy father and
the husband of thy virginity’ (Jer
3.4). Thus he implies clearly that
God is a house, the incorporeal
dwelling-place of incorporeal
ideas, that He is the father of all
things, for He begat them, and the
husband of Wisdom, dropping the
seed of happiness for the race of
mortals into good and virgin soil.

⁶² *Cher.* 42 (interpreting Gen 4.1-2). It has been suggested (Evans 1994:822-46) that this Philonic notion recalls, at least in part, Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*. For related notions in early Christian literature, see e.g. Gal 4.21-31.

⁶³ Apparently a live option in Philo’s view: e.g. *Contempl.* 68 (older female members of this community depicted as ‘virgins in respect of their purity...and love of wisdom’). On Philo’s presentation of this ‘Mareotic community’: Taylor 2003.

Closing this initiation passage with a crescendo, Philo punctuates his point with a kind of self-soul talk⁶⁴ that has led some to see this passage as exercise of personal devotion rather than public teaching.⁶⁵

On the Cherubim § 52

τί οὖν, ὦ ψυχή, δέον ἐν οἴκῳ
θεοῦ παρθενεύεσθαι καὶ
ἐπιστήμης περιέχεσθαι, τούτων
μὲν ἀποστατεῖς, αἴσθησιν δὲ
ἀσπάζῃ τὴν ἐκθηλύνουσάν σε
καὶ μιαίνουσαν; τοιγάρτοι
γέννημα πάμφυρτον καὶ
πανώλεθρον ἀποτέξῃ τὸν
ἀδελφοκτόνον καὶ ἐπάρατον
Κάιν, κτῆσιν οὐ κτητὴν· λέγεται
γὰρ ὁ Κάιν κτῆσις.

Why then, O soul, when you
should live the virgin life in
the house of God and cling to
knowledge, do you stand
aloof from them and
embrace outward sense,
which unmans and defiles
you? For this you shall bring
forth that thing of ruin and
confusion, Cain, the
fratricide, the accursed, the
possession which is no
possession. For the meaning
of Cain is 'possession.'

With such evocative language,⁶⁶ Philo de-particularises the biblical account of the first act of human murder. He transposes the significance of Genesis 4 to a distinctively philosophical register, with Cain representing the sophistic, self-

⁶⁴ On the inspired character of these unique Philonic exclamations: Terian 1995:56-84.

⁶⁵ Cf. Synder 2000:136-37. That Philo sees himself as learning secrets from both Moses and someone called 'Jeremiah' leads Cohen 2006a:191-209 to suggest that a commentary by 'Jeremiah' mediated a possible connection between Philo and the *Zohar*.

⁶⁶ Kügler 1997 posits a pagan cultic context for this passage (pp. 185-252), and in particular, Egyptian ideas of sonship and related notions of initiation associated with the royal role of Horus (pp. 239-42). To the extent that this suggestion is confined to literary evidence, it faces the same challenges as the earlier views of Goodenough 1935.

loving mind which claims that it – not God – has ‘possession’ of all things.⁶⁷

Philo’s attempt to subsume Protagoras under the line of Cain is not entirely inconsistent with Philo’s broader insistence on the superiority of Moses’ system of thought, one which subsumes all other philosophical systems, favorable ones like Plato and Aristotle and unfavorable ones like Protagoras.⁶⁸ *Philo’s moves are distinctive in this respect, but how distinctive compared to the Jews of his proximate era?*

4.4.4 Proximate Jewish perspectives on Cain

Philo’s opposition to any champion of the mind and senses is unflinching. Philo’s hard-line position differs somewhat from later rabbis who seem willing to cut Cain some slack. The rabbis, for the most part, find that Cain ultimately repents for his sins, thus meriting forgiveness for seven generations.⁶⁹ Philo, by contrast, portrays Cain as the arch-sophist, the antithesis of Moses the perfect sage, undeserving of anything good.

⁶⁷ Philo interprets Cain’s name as ‘possession’ (κτησις), which is his shorthand twofold way of referring (like Abel) to God’s possession over all things and refuting the Protagorean claim to possession; cf. *Cher.* 109; *Sacr.* 2; *Det.* 32; *Post.* 172-73; *Fug.* 97; in *Agr.* 25, an interpretation of Genesis 4.2, 12, Philo asserts that those who grasp truth by means of human senses – as Protagoras espoused – have been ‘uninitiated in soul-husbandry’ (οἱ γεωργίας μὲν ἀμύητοι ψυχικῆς). On self-love (φιλαυτία) as a key theme in Philo: Pearce 2007:149-51.

⁶⁸ Cf. Dawson 1992:73-126.

⁶⁹ E.g. *Gen Rab.* 23:4; *Tan. Gen.* 11.

Perhaps one proximate Jewish source comes close to Philo's way of transposing Cain into a more philosophical register. In *Targum Neophyti*, a lacuna in the traditional Hebrew text (Genesis 4.8) prompts the writer to attribute a lengthy conversation to Abel and Cain concerning the character of divine justice. Presented as one who denies divine justice, Cain appears as 'a forerunner of philosophical deniers of a later day.'⁷⁰

Still, it seems that no other writer – Jewish or non-Jewish – used Cain in the way that Philo did, namely, to tackle Protagoras' measure doctrine. Moreover, no contemporary Jewish writer used Cain to de-particularise the biblical account to engage in broader philosophical discourses on the nature and limitations of human knowledge.

4.5

Philo's language of mystery initiation in his secondary mode of scriptural exegesis

As we have just considered, on at least three occasions in his primary mode of exegesis, Genesis 4 provokes Philo to produce a set of arguments for and against the philosophical thesis of Protagoras. This reflects the set of Middle Platonist commitments through which he reads Moses.

⁷⁰ Kugel 1998:161.

Philo was also a Jew, a very committed one at that. In light of this, it is hard to imagine Philo considering the question of epistemic authority solely from the perspective of Middle Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics. It is here that a tension arises, between Philo's interest in stressing the more universal message of the Greek Jewish Bible for a wider, philosophically-minded audience, on the one hand, and his firm commitment to maintaining the particular character of that same message. It is with this thought in mind that we turn briefly to the other instances of initiation language.

In all these cases (18 to be exact), Philo uses the language of initiation as part of his secondary mode of exegesis, or as part of his enchainment of secondary proof-texts.⁷¹ Due to present constraints, our discussion will be restricted to the following features.

First, in these eighteen passages, Philo interacts with at least thirty-one passages from the Greek Jewish scriptures, mainly from the Pentateuch.

⁷¹ On Philo's levels or modes of exegesis in the *Allegorical Commentary*, see 4.3 above.

Diagram 4.3
Citation preferences in Philonic initiation passages

Order	Biblical book	# of texts (31 total)	References
1	Exodus	13	1.21 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.3) 24.10 (<i>Conf.</i> 95-100) 3.14-15 (<i>Mut.</i> 10-11) 28.31 (<i>Migr.</i> 104) 8.1 (<i>Conf.</i> 95-100) 31.2 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.100) 15.17 (<i>Plant.</i> 52) 33.7 (<i>Gig.</i> 50-55) 18.14 (<i>Gig.</i> 50-55) 33.13 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.100) 18.16 (<i>Ebr.</i> 37)) 33.23 (<i>Mut.</i> 10-11) 21.15 (<i>Fug.</i> 85)
2	Genesis	7	17.15 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.219) 21.6 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.219) 18.6 (<i>Sacr.</i> 59-71) 31.20 (<i>Fug.</i> 13) 18.11 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.219) 38.7 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.71) 18.17 (<i>Leg.</i> 3.23-27)
3	Numbers	5	11.16 (<i>Sobr.</i> 20) 23.8 (<i>Det.</i> 77) 23.19 (2x)(<i>Deus</i> 51-69; <i>Conf.</i> 95-100) 25.3 (<i>Mut.</i> 107)
4	Leviticus	2	16.2 (<i>Gig.</i> 50-55) 16.34 (<i>Gig.</i> 50-55)
5	Book of Kings	2	1 Kgs 15.11 (<i>Conf.</i> 149) 2 Kgs 18.3 (<i>Conf.</i> 149)
T6	Deuteronomy	1	8.5 (<i>Deus</i> 51-69)
T6	Jeremiah	1	3.4 (<i>Cher.</i> 49)

As seen in the diagram above, of the thirty-one proof-text passages, thirteen come from the book of Exodus. Many of these passages represent pivotal accounts of how God redeems his people back to knowledge of himself through the leadership of Moses. Indeed, Philo often links initiation with key events in

the life of Moses, a pattern which leads David Runia to remark that Philo, when using initiation language, is 'no doubt thinking of [Moses'] experiences on the mountain as recorded in Exodus 3, 20, 33.'⁷²

The reception by Moses of the law and his transformation at Sinai feature significantly in numerous Jewish writings contemporary to Philo.⁷³ John Gager suggests that Moses drew the attention of the pagan world to the virtual exclusion of other Jewish figures.⁷⁴ Philo's language of initiation appears to tap into this Mosaic feature and invites further comparison with his contemporaries.

4.5.1 *Excursus: Philo and Enoch traditions*

Philo's insistence on Moses can be appreciated more fully when one considers proximate Jewish writings that featured much speculation concerning the special status of Enoch. Many of these speculations derived from Genesis 5.22-24. Indeed, writings such as *Jubilees* and *1 Enoch* portray Enoch as one who is initiated into the mysteries of intercalation and astronomy among other things.⁷⁵ Pseudo-Jonathan also has bits of this tradition in its treatment of Genesis 5.24.⁷⁶ Some have pointed to possible polemical dimensions between the traditions

⁷² Runia 2001:114.

⁷³ E.g. Sir 45.1-5; *Liv. Proph.* 2.14-15; *Ezek. Trag.* 96-100.

⁷⁴ Gager 1972; also Meeks 1967: 107-11; Coats 1988; Assman 1997.

⁷⁵ *1 En.* 12.2; *Jub.* 4.17-21.

⁷⁶ Cf. Salvesen 1991:29-30.

associated with Moses and Enoch, respectively, with the promotion of Enoch sparking some counter-resistance.⁷⁷

For our purposes, it is important to acknowledge rather than arbitrate this issue. Robert Kraft argues strongly that Philo consciously reflects on ‘the socio-political models associated with Enoch’ and intentionally places Enoch as secondary to Moses,⁷⁸ but it is virtually impossible to say whether Philo should be considered part of this broad counter-movement.

It is helpful to note that Philo’s position is not inconsistent with Josephus’ tendency to limit the significance of Enoch.⁷⁹ It is further noted that as one moves closer to the orbit of ideas associated with key strands of Alexandrian Judaism, one notices – following Tessa Rajak’s recent findings⁸⁰ – that there is an emphasis on the continued study of Torah of Moses⁸¹ and an accompanying insistence on the character and significance of Moses, as seen in Alexandrian Jewish works like *Ezekiel the Tragedian*.

⁷⁷ Cf. Orlov 2005:260-76.

⁷⁸ Kraft 2009:215-16, citing *Post.* 33-74; *Mut.* 27-42; *Abr.* 7-59; *Praem.* 10-27; *QG* 1.79-87.

⁷⁹ Josephus, *A.J.* 1.85; 9.28; but compare *A.J.* 4.325.

⁸⁰ Rajak 2008:245.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* (citing 1QS 6:6-8).

Returning to Philo's insistence on Moses, to take one fairly representative example⁸² we might consider *On the Giants* 50-55. Here, Philo is talking about two types of human minds. As expected, the bad example of Cain (and by implication, Protagoras) is raised.

4.5.2 *On the Giants* §§50-55

The first type of mind focuses solely on materiality and mere opinion, the very features of the mind which Philo elsewhere associates with the mind of Cain and the prime offspring of his madness, Protagoras.⁸³ For this type of mind, says Philo in *On the Giants* §53, there is no prospect of receiving the abiding presence of the divine spirit, no chance to be initiated into the higher mysteries of God.

Then, in a typical move, Philo draws attention to a second type of mind, the superlative mind of Moses. And again, as elsewhere,⁸⁴ Philo draws on a key Sinai image, the ascent of Moses into the darkness of God (citing Exodus 33.7):

⁸² Other examples include *Leg. All.* 3.3 (Exod 1.21); *Leg. All.* 3.100 (Exod 31.2; 33.13); *Plant.* 52 (Exod 15.17); *Ebr.* 37 (Exod 18.16); *Fug.* 85 (Exod 21.15); *Conf.* 95-100 (Exod. 8.1; 24.10); *Mut.* 10-11 (Exod 3.14-15; 33.23).

⁸³ *Post.* 35; also *Her.* 246-47.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Leg. All.* 2.54-58 (Exod 33.7 read with Lev 10.1); *Leg. All.* 3.46-48; *Ebr.* 100, 124. Similarly but on different texts from Exod (19.20, 31.2): *Plant.* 18-26.

οὕτως καὶ Μωυσῆς ἔξω τῆς
παρεμβολῆς καὶ τοῦ σωματικοῦ
παντός στρατοπέδου πῆξας τὴν
ἑαυτοῦ σκηνήν, τουτέστι τὴν
γνώμην ἰδρυσάμενος ἀκλινῇ,
προσκυνεῖν τὸν θεὸν ἄρχεται καὶ
εἰς τὸν γνόφον, τὸν ἀειδῆ χῶρον,
εἰσελθὼν αὐτοῦ καταμένει
τελούμενος τὰς ἱερωτάτας
τελετάς. γίνεται δὲ οὐ μόνον
μύστης, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἱεροφάντης
ὁργίων καὶ διδάσκαλος θείων, ἃ
τοῖς ὦτα κεκαθαρμένοις
ὕφηγῆσεται.

So too Moses pitched his own tent
outside the camp and the whole
array of bodily things, that is, he
set up his judgment where it
should not be removed. Then only
does he begin to worship God and
entering the darkness, the
invisible region, abides there
while he learns the secrets of the
most holy mysteries. There he
becomes not only one of the
congregation of the initiated, but
also the hierophant and teacher of
divine rites, which he will impart
to those whose ears are purified.

Philo's insistence on Moses' active attitude of the reasoning mind over the bodily passions brings to mind A. D. Nock's assertion that Philo found the metaphor of initiation 'particularly appropriate, inasmuch as it expressed the passive and receptive attitude of mind which Philo held to be necessary.'⁸⁵ This raises an important question, namely, *to what extent, if any, does Philo's initiation language relate only to the passive attitude of mind?*

⁸⁵ Nock 1937:165.

4.5.3 Philo's insistence on a mixed economy of active and passive attitudes of mind

In several key instances in the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo turns to texts from the book of Exodus to convey the importance of the mind's active study of the divine *Logos*/Word, with Moses as one's hierophantic guide.⁸⁶ Derived from Exodus, the list of characteristics of active mind continues: one must exert his or her ability to recognise theoretical distinctions of various kinds,⁸⁷ and one must exercise his or her reasoning faculty to adjudicate the beneficial and harmful things of the body and truth from mere opinion.⁸⁸ Indeed, on one occasion,⁸⁹ Philo uses the phrase 'lesser mystery' to describe the mind's active task of mastering the passions.⁹⁰

This is not to diminish the initiation passages in the *Allegorical Commentary* derived from Exodus which stress the idea of noetic passivity. To the contrary, in two key places,⁹¹ Philo uses Exodus to drive home the point that any and all human attainment of knowledge of God is the product of divine impregnation

⁸⁶ *Conf.* 95-100 (interpreting Exod 8.1; 24.10).

⁸⁷ *Fug.* 85 (interpreting Exod 21.15).

⁸⁸ *Gig.* 50-55 (interpreting Exod 18.14; 33.7); *Migr.* 104 (interpreting Exod 28.31); and *Plant.* 52 (interpreting Exod 15.17).

⁸⁹ *Sacr.* 59-71.

⁹⁰ A subject taken up in Chapter 5 (§ 5.4).

⁹¹ *Leg. All.* 3.3, 100.

and midwifery. The role of the human mind, at least in these instances, is virtually dissolved.

On balance, however, it would seem to strain the evidence to say, as Nock does, that Philo's initiation language signifies only the passive or receptive attitude of mind. A majority of initiation passages – at least 14 of 21 – points to a mixed economy of active and passive attitudes, with divine impregnation as the primary conceptual heading under which these passages fall.

This mixed economy is apparent in three particular passages wherein Philo variously addresses his readers as 'initiates.'⁹² Given our constraints, we will consider one instance of how Philo uses texts from Exodus to stress a mixed economy of active and passive attitudes of mind.

4.5.3.1 *On Flight and Finding* §§ 80-85

Although several themes are variously treated in Philo's commentary on Genesis 16.6-12, primary focus is on the subject of human knowledge of God. What is at stake in Philo's view becomes clear at *On Flight and Finding* §8, namely, the question of how one comes to know God as the Moving Cause (τὸ κινεῖν αἴτιον):

⁹² *Leg. All.* 3.200-19; *Cher.* 42-52; *Fug.* 80-85.

εἰσὶ τινες οἱ τὴν ἄποιον καὶ
ἀνείδεον καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον
οὐσίαν θεοπλαστοῦντες τὸ
κινοῦν αἴτιον οὔτε εἰδότες οὔτε
παρὰ τῶν εἰδόντων μαθεῖν
σπουδάσαντες, ἀγνοίᾳ δὲ καὶ
ἀμαθίᾳ κεχρημένοι τοῦ
καλλίστου μαθήματος, οὗ
πρώτου καὶ μόνου τὴν
ἐπιστήμην ἐκπονεῖν ἦν
ἀναγκαῖον.

There are people who fashion
their God out of substance
devoid of quality or form or
shape; but the moving Cause
they neither know, nor have
taken any trouble to learn from
those who do know Him. They
have neither mastered nor do
they study the fairest subject of
all, the first, indeed the only
one, whose knowledge it was a
vital matter for them to acquire.

The subject of divine and human causation prompts Philo to draw on the ideas and language of Greek philosophy. This is a striking feature of Philo's discussion of Exodus 21.12-14 in *On Flight and Finding* §§ 53-86, wherein Philo explores this subject with one principal question in view: the origins of evil.

To this end, Philo reads the Exodus passage in conjunction with a passage from Homer⁹³ and two from Plato.⁹⁴ Perhaps Philo is following the view of Posidonius, who was the first to combine the notion of knowledge and assimilation to God.⁹⁵ Whether he is influenced or not, Philo bases his reading of these texts on this rhetorical question which points to a theological impossibility: if God is the

⁹³ Homer, *Od.* 12.118.

⁹⁴ Plato, *Phaedr.* 247A on 'divine company'; *Theaet.* 176A-C on the aspiration to 'fly away and become like God.'

⁹⁵ Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.153. Reference to Posidonius in Osborn 1957:88 n.1. On the significance of the notion of human assimilation to God in Philo's Middle Platonic environment, see Dillon 1977:300 (who cites Plato, *Theaet.* 176B).

moving cause of all things, as he asserts in *On Flight and Finding* §8, then is God the cause of human evil?

This suggestion Philo rejects outright.⁹⁶ On what exegetical basis does he base his rejection? Philo reads Exodus 21.14 allegorically⁹⁷ and then enlists a rather straightforward reading of a key ascent passage in Greek philosophy, Plato's *Theaetetus* 176C.⁹⁸ On this conflated reading, Philo intensifies his rhetoric: if Moses strictly prohibits one from committing violence against his or her parents (Exod 21.15), how much more apprehensible it is for one to attribute the origins of evil to God?

As elsewhere,⁹⁹ Philo uses the term 'mystery' to characterise this view of God's non-participation with evil. This in turn provokes Philo to exhort those whom he calls 'initiates and hierophants of holy mysteries' (ὧ μύσται καὶ ἱεροφάνται θείων ὁργῶν) to supplement the learning of this mystery with the following *active* measures:

⁹⁶ *Fug.* 80.

⁹⁷ *Fug.* 81.

⁹⁸ *Fug.* 82.

⁹⁹ *Cher.* 48-52.

- (1) guard one's mysteries by 'driving off' the uninitiated;
- (2) maintain the practice of discriminating between divine allowances of evil and human responsibility for evil; and
- (3) keep a code of silence and ethics of speech.

For Philo, then, initiates and hierophants of Moses must actively apply their minds to the question of evil. They must approach it as either (a) the means by which God through intermediaries disciplines his people, or (b) the result of intentional human sin and wrongdoing. In all this, there is no suggestion of noetic passivity. To the contrary, there is a mixed economy of active and passive attitudes of mind, and to the extent that one grasps the varied nature of divine mediation, one also becomes (and remains) initiated in the holy mysteries of Moses.

4.5.4 Proximate Jewish perspectives

This particular insistence on Moses invites comparison with proximate Alexandrian literature. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, likely a first-century BCE/CE work composed in Alexandria, extols wisdom but not at the exclusion of God's particular ways of working on behalf of the Jewish people, endowing them with

knowledge of him in particular ways.¹⁰⁰ Whoever wrote the *Letter of Aristeas* stresses the points of contact between Jewish and non-Jewish cultures; but the composer nonetheless maintains a measure of particularity concerning Jewish faith and laws.¹⁰¹

Something like this may be part of the mood music in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*. Ellen Birnbaum demonstrates that Philo – all throughout his writings but especially his *Allegorical Commentary* – firmly insists on the privilege of Israel as the 'ones who see God' and the particular contours of the divine knowledge conferred on her.¹⁰² Philo's recourse to these texts from Exodus seems to substantiate Birnbaum's broad findings.

Indeed, without discounting Philo's habit for allegorising away the historical aspects of the Greek Jewish Bible of his day,¹⁰³ it is hard to deny that Philo – in

¹⁰⁰ For introductions and commentaries: Clark 1973; Winston 1979; Hübner 1999.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Let Aris.* 139, 144; also Barclay 1996:147; Gruen 1998:216-18; Carleton-Paget 2004:153-54. Related writings which may reflect similar attitudes include *3 Macc.* (cf. Gruen 1998:222-36) and the third *Sibylline Oracle* (cf. Barclay 1996:201; Paget 2004:155). It has been recently suggested (Allen 2007:3-19) that the *Exagoge* (Ezek. Trag.) can be construed as an answer to contemporary anti-Jewish charges drawing on 'fair wage' motifs from Exodus (e.g. *Jub.* 48.18; *Wis* 10.16) and broader ideas of divine providence.

¹⁰² Birnbaum 1996:61-127, 220-30.

¹⁰³ For example, Philo presses into service the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as models of knowledge and virtue, typically severed from the historical notions raised in the biblical material.

using many key texts from Exodus¹⁰⁴ – seems quite keen to validate the historicity of the writings of Moses (at least this book anyway), thereby tethering the notion of human knowledge of God in large part to the saga of a particular people that had lived in a particular place and time.¹⁰⁵

In other words, Philo's interest in universalising the message of the Greek Jewish Bible of his day rarely, if ever, comes at the expense of the particularity of that same message. Moses, his mediation and transformation at Sinai, are absolutely essential for Philo. As such, the metaphorical language of initiation into divine mysteries serves as a vehicle for Philo to convince aspiring readers to take part in that process of transformation.

4.6

Conclusion

One principal question has driven this chapter: what, if anything, does Philo's language of initiation into divine mysteries have to do with his theological epistemology? In light of the foregoing, we can offer the following series of concluding remarks.

¹⁰⁴ Exod 1.21; 3.14; 15.17; 24.10; 33.13-23.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Fug.* 208: 'Hearing takes the second place, yielding the first to sight, and sight is the portion of Israel, the son free-born and first-born; for "seeing God" is the translation of "Israel"' (also *Somn.* 1.172); see further Kugel 1998:387-88 for discussion of the importance of Jacob's new name for early Christians.

First, Philo uses the language of initiation in his exegetical treatment of Genesis 4 in order to engage the wider philosophical issues of his day, and more to the point, the challenges that the measure doctrine of Protagoras posed to prevailing Middle-Platonic notions of epistemic authority. In this regard, Philo perhaps represents a key marker in the history of ideas on this subject: the first serious attempt by a Jewish thinker to scrutinise and synthesise these challenges in relation to a philosophically informed reading of Moses.

Indeed, while others may have regarded Genesis 4 as a problematic text (at least at the literal level), Philo instead sees it as a rich deposit of exegetical and philosophical ideas which can be used to further his 'ground-clearing' agenda. In Philo's reckoning, Moses' account of Cain more than holds its own against the challenges of epistemological relativism presented by the measure doctrine.

Indeed, Philo's insistence on the importance of coming to grips with this Protagorean challenge is in keeping with his broader pedagogical objectives of clearing the ground, as it were, on a number of important philosophical issues and questions for his readers. This agenda is part of Philo's attempt to address a foundational part of the symbolic universe of his readers.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Congr.* 79.

Second, along with attempts to de-particularise aspects of the Greek Jewish Bible, another exegetical agenda can be detected, one which features Philo's use of initiation language to particularise the Greek Jewish Bible in ways congruent with contemporary Jewish notions of theological knowledge. This suggestion finds some support in Philo's frequent recourse to key knowledge texts in the Book of Exodus (13 of 31 texts), as we have considered in this chapter.¹⁰⁷

Taken together, these strands enable Philo to do two things as once, as Henry Chadwick has observed: to present his views regarding Moses in a way congenial to the Middle Platonic schools, whilst teaching his more advanced readers of the greater mysteries of Moses.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Further work could be usefully done on Philo's use of mystery language in his readings of the non-Exodus texts listed in Diagram 4.3 above.

¹⁰⁸ Chadwick 1988:164.

CHAPTER 5

Scriptural Exegesis and the Language of Divine Inspiration in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*

5.1

Introduction

In Chapter 4, we considered the question *what, if anything, does Philo's language of initiation into divine mysteries have to do with his theological epistemology?* In attempting to answer this question, we examined the twofold significance of this language in connection with Philo's primary epistemological concerns as presented in the *Allegorical Commentary*.

First, Philo's use of this language corresponds with his wider interest in de-particularising the Greek Jewish Bible through the prism of Middle Platonism. Like other Jewish writers associated with Alexandria (*Letter of Aristeas*, *Ezekiel the Tragedian*) and elsewhere (*4 Maccabees*, *Josephus*, *Against Apion*), Philo's interest in de-particularising the scriptures fits into his wider apologetic agenda, namely to make a case for the ancient credentials and contemporary intellectual merits of Jewish beliefs and practices.

To be more specific, Philo applies the language of initiation to Genesis 4 – the biblical account of the birth and actions of Cain – in order to engage the varied challenges associated with the so-called ‘measure’ doctrine of Protagoras of Abdera. This doctrine, as it was construed by some thinkers in first-century Alexandria, challenged prevailing notions of epistemic authority.

Second, Philo uses this language in a way that corresponds with his interest in particularising aspects of the Greek Jewish Bible for more advanced readers of Moses. Here, Philo speaks as a pious and influential Alexandrian Jew. His language particularises Israel’s sacred texts in ways congruent with contemporary Jewish notions of noetic ascent to God. This is seen in varied ways. But one striking way is this: Philo’s frequent recourse to the book of Exodus. Using it as a key exegetical platform, Philo uses the language of mystery initiation to re-present key events and experiences of Moses and Israel. From this comes a sense of actualisation: what Moses experienced in the past as the hierophantic leader of Israel can be experienced again to some degree in the lives of keen-sighted disciples who constitute the way of Israel in Philo’s own day.

Taken together, these strands of de-particularising and particularising the Greek Jewish Bible of his day enable Philo to achieve two things as once: to present his

views regarding Moses in a way congenial to the Middle Platonic schools whilst teaching his more advanced readers of the greater mysteries of Moses.

But, as we shall see in this chapter, Philo's language of initiation into divine mysteries is frequently (and instructively) allied with his language of divine inspiration. This linkage represents another key element of Philo's theological epistemology which distinguishes it from the epistemology presented in the 'Exposition.'

In turning to the subject of divine inspiration in Philo, it is helpful to consider why Philo is interested in it in the first place. Was the topic impressed upon Philo by contemporary Jewish notions? Was Philo compelled to take it seriously because of prevailing Graeco-Roman perspectives on the Muses? Was it perhaps part of Philo's firsthand experiences of divine inspiration, or his reading of the Greek Jewish Bible of his day, or his awareness of the presumptions specific to first-century Alexandria? As we shall suggest below, all of these lines can be seen in Philo's eclectic approach to divine inspiration.

What can be safely said here is that Philo considers divine inspiration as an immensely important context for noetic ascent and transformation, not least because the metaphorical image allows him to trade on two strands of thought that for many in Philo's day seemed inconsistent, even contradictory: on the one

hand, Philo can affirm the idea – following Plato – that divine inspiration requires the obviation of human reason whilst on the other hand Philo can endorse the view – following Aristotle – that divine inspiration requires the intensification of human reason to master the bodily passions. For Philo, then, human rationality and non-rationality are equally valid ways to know and experience the divine.

5.1.1 Chapter preview

In what follows, we will consider the set of principal questions that frames this chapter:

- (A) What, if any, is the relationship between mystery initiation and divine inspiration in the broader context of Philo's theological epistemology?
- (B) How does Philo define one in terms of the other, and vice versa?
- (C) And by so doing, what is Philo trying to get across?

Given our limitations, we cannot survey this subject in an exhaustive way, a task that has been taken up in many excellent works.¹ Philonic evidence justifies the questions posed above. In several key allegorical passages, as we will see, Philo considers divine inspiration in terms of mystery initiation, and vice versa.²

The study of each, I submit, contributes to our understanding of the other. These two topics, taken together, help us to grasp the relative weights which Philo gives to human rationality (*initiation*) and non-rationality (*inspiration*) as part of his way of talking about noetic ascent to knowledge of God.

To sharpen this proposed view, this chapter further narrows our focus on the specific *exegetical contexts* and *strategies* that variously shape Philo's language of divine inspiration. This dimension of Philonic inspiration, I think, has been overlooked in previous studies.³ But closer inspection of these exegetical contexts reveals at least two distinct yet related areas of exegetical concentration that animate Philo's approach to divine inspiration.

¹ Belletti 1983:72-89; Burkhardt 1988; Winston 1989:49-67; Bockmuehl 1990:69-81 (esp. 71-73); Levison 1997; Whitlock 2002.

² Cf. *Sacr.* 59-71; *Migr.* 13.

³ Belletti 1983 and Burkhardt 1988 present evidence on Platonic influences on Philo's approach to divine inspiration, but for the most part they do not explore the exegetical contexts that shape Philo's approach.

By remaining focused in the first instance on the specific exegetical contexts and questions which provoke Philo's use of inspiration ideas and language, we will discover Philo's insistence that the human mind is capable of being divinely possessed in at least two primary ways, with each way corresponding to an area of exegetical concentration.

First, one area concentrates on passages in the Pentateuch that feature oracular, priestly figures (Levites, Phinehas, Balaam, and Moses). In this vein, Philo stresses the mind's inescapable (and adversarial) relationship with the physical body. The mind, Philo says, is appointed as god over the body. This appointment, coupled with biblical portraits of priestly zeal, underscores the importance of the aspirant's desire and efforts to extinguish the bodily passions. On this exegetical base, Philo insists on the following way of divine inspiration: *the divine spirit can possess the human mind even when the latter is attached to the physical body.*

The second area of exegetical concentration features the figures of Abraham and Isaac in the book of Genesis (chapters 12 and 15 in particular). Here, Philo is no longer preoccupied with the mind's relationship with the corporeal body. Rather, he stresses its kinship with the incorporeal God. Having escaped the land of the body, so to speak, the divinely inspired mind can perceive the truth that sensible

objects are inferior, imperfect copies of intelligible realities that point to a single, perfect reality, the existent God.⁴

But there is more, says Philo. When the mind reaches the limits of its native rationality, it can be further inspired to know and experience God in *supra-rational* ways. Here, the divine spirit again is the primary agent. The arrival of the divine spirit marks the *obviation* of the aspirant's faculty of reason. To use Philo's own words, the aspirant's mind moves out of itself, leaving him or her in a state of total cognitive passivity. Ecstatic phenomena (e.g. frenzy, dancing, unconsciousness) and predictive prophecy are primary instantiations of this state of divine possession.

To strengthen this viewpoint, Philo trades on the profile of Abraham, a representative mystical figure in first-century Jewish thought, and in particular, the epiphanic darkness that falls upon him in Genesis 15.12. Notably, Philo shows his familiarity with some of the complexities of Platonic and Aristotelian notions on divinely inspired madness. The principle arising out of this area of exegetical concentration is this: *the divine spirit can possess the human mind when the mind is no longer attached to the body.*

⁴ *Leg. All.* 2.1-3; 3.48; *Deus* 11; *Her.* 187-89; *Spec.* 2.176; cf. Bonazzi 2008:237.

In short, Philo's discourses on divine inspiration features at least two exegetical foci which animate his views on human and divine agency:

Diagram 5.1

Two exegetical foci that feature in Philo's approach to divine inspiration

Exegetical Basis	Divine Agency	Human Agency	Character of Bodily Activity
Book of Exodus	The divine spirit can possess the human mind even when the latter is attached to the physical body.	Human reasoning <i>enhanced</i>	The aspirant has full control of his or her body
Book of Genesis	The divine spirit can possess the human mind when the mind is no longer attached to the body.	Human reasoning <i>evicted</i>	The aspirant loses full control of his or her body

In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate how one area of exegetical concentration relates to the other, and how together, they shape Philo's theological epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*. Before we go any further, it is helpful to take stock of how the topic was conceptualised in Graeco-

Roman antiquity and proximate Jewish and early Christian settings. This will clarify Philo's varied positions on divine inspiration, the subject of §§5.3-5 of this chapter. The breadth and complexity of this subject demand our close attention to one specific aspect, namely, the relationship between divine inspiration and initiation into divine mysteries.

5.2

Approaches to divine inspiration in antiquity

It was a portrait of ecstasy as provocative as it was pervasive. All throughout the Greek and non-Greek speaking Roman worlds, from Athens to Alexandria, people from varied walks of life had grown accustomed to the sight of ecstatic figures, real and depicted, possessed in a kind of mad frenzy, a frenzy accompanied by the loss of bodily and often mental controls.

Such figures, typically women but not exclusively so, provoked a wide range of opinions and reactions, from the somewhat disinterested accounts of the historian Herodotus to more charged views that stirred the academies of Plato and Aristotle.

Though observers debated the place of such ecstatically induced figures – known widely and variously in antiquity as Bacchantes, Corybants, and Maenads – they

could hardly deny the longstanding recognition that ecstasy and frenzy of this sort both derived from the gods and elevated the one possessed to the utmost limits of human cognition.

For Hesiod and Homer, writing in the seventh century BC, divine inspiration represented a prime context for human attainment of superhuman knowledge.⁵ In the fifth century BC, varied notions of divine inspiration were increasingly animated by the language of another ancient commonplace, the prospect of human initiation into divine mysteries. This linkage between inspiration and initiation is seen in some of the remains from Euripides, Aristophanes, and Herodotus.⁶

This commingling of ideas, this linkage between divine inspiration and mystery initiation, found a home in the writings of Plato, the fourth-century philosopher. But it also carried a measure of ambivalence.

⁵ Hesiod, *Theog.* 21-34; Homer, *Od.* 8.64; 8.485ff; 22.342-47; cf. *Il.* 2.484ff. Versnel 2012:1197 writes: "That a human being might become possessed by a supernatural power was a fairly common ancient belief."

⁶ Aristophanes, *Frogs* 323-416 (Henderson 2002:71-81); Euripides, *Bacch.* 32-38, 64-167; *Ion* 550-54, 714-17; Herodotus, *Hist.* 4.79. On Maenadism in the Greek-speaking world, see Plutarch, *Mulier. virt.* 249E; *Is. Os.* 364f-365e; Pausanias 10.4.3; Diodorus Siculus 4.3.1-3; cf. Seaford 1981; Versnel 1990; Parker 1996, esp. chapter 9; Segal 1997.

5.2.1 *Some perspectives on divine inspiration in Plato*

In one sense, Plato gives high standing to divine inspiration as a context for noetic transformation. In the *Ion*, Plato's Socrates illustrates the notion of poetic inspiration with specific reference to Corybantic or Dionysiac dancing and other ecstatic instantiations. Such inspiration, says Socrates, occurs when the human mind is moved out of its normal mode of operation.

For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing and is unable ever to compose until he has been inspired and put out of his senses, and his mind is no longer in him: every man, whilst he retains possession of that, is powerless to compose a verse or chant an oracle.⁷

In these passages, notes Eva Keuls, Plato presses home the point that 'the poet 'raves' with a wisdom not his own, of which he has no rational grasp.'⁸

This impression of the non-rational poet is layered in a later dialogue with the notion that poetic inspiration and madness are caused by the activities of gods. In the *Phaedrus*, inspiration is accorded high standing in Plato's metaphysical

⁷ *Ion* 534B; also *Apol.* 22B-C; *Phaedr.* 245A; *Meno* 99D; *Laws* 719C.

⁸ Keuls 1978:136.

system. 'In reality,' says Plato, 'the greatest of blessings come to us through madness (διὰ μανίας) when it is sent as a gift of the gods.'⁹

In keeping with this view, Plato's Socrates identifies at least four ways in which human beings can become possessed by a god (*Phaedrus* 265B):

- (i) a *prophetic* kind of possession (inspired by Apollo)
- (ii) a *mystic* or *telestic* kind of possession (inspired by Dionysius)
- (iii) a *poetic* kind of possession (inspired by the Muses), and
- (iv) an *erotic* kind of possession (inspired by Aphrodite and Eros).

We will return shortly to Plato's theory of divine madness when we consider Philo's reception of it. For now, we note that the first two categories – mantic (or prophetic) ecstasy and telestic (initiatory) ecstasy – became central to Greek ideas and practices of divinely inspired phenomena.¹⁰ Prophetic ecstasy came to be associated with oracular contexts, Delphi and Sibyl among others. Telestic – or initiatory – ecstasy came to be located in varied cultic contexts which, as Fitz Graf suggests, developed into mysteries in late archaic times, with Dionysius

⁹ *Phaedr.* 244A.

¹⁰ Cf. Dodds 1951:64-101.

seen as the central ecstatic figure who in turn inspired adherents into similar states of non-rationality.¹¹

In contrast to his rather high appraisal of divine inspiration in his earlier writings, Plato offers a rather negative picture in a writing associated with the later stages of his literary career. In the *Republic*, Plato not only criticises poets who do not adhere to what is true¹² but Plato further excludes most inspired artists from his ideal polis.¹³

Prompted by this apparent ambivalence, later readers of Plato formulated their own ideas about the character and function of divine inspiration. Chief among them was Aristotle.

5.2.2 *Some perspectives on divine inspiration in Aristotle*

For Aristotle, inspiration is part of the highest human good.¹⁴ Key to Aristotle's view is his insistence on the rational character of divine inspiration. Poetry, says Aristotle in the *Poetica*, is a valid form of study not only for the masses but also

¹¹ Cf. Graf 2004:800 citing Virgil, *Aen.* 6.77-80.

¹² *Resp.* 376A-383C (with Hesiod coming in for scrutiny as Plato's prime example of poetic falsehood, *Resp.* 377E).

¹³ *Resp.* 607A-C.

¹⁴ Along with nature, learning, training, and chance; cf. Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1099b9; *Eth. Eud.* 1214a14-27.

for those capable of 'philosophical enlightenment.'¹⁵ Aristotle goes so far as to say that of the two forms of human potentiality – the life of contemplation and the life of action – poetry suits the former (and higher) form. In this sense, says David Russell, Aristotle can be seen as 'a direct response to Plato's *Republic*, and a defence (far more subtle than Plutarch's) of the study of poetry by the people who matter most.'¹⁶

Eva Schaper offers a sharpened view of the difference between Plato and Aristotle:

This is one of the many sane insights of Aristotle by which he avoided the road Plato forced his followers to travel. When Plato insisted on irrational inspiration, he connected this with the stimulation of irrational forces in the poet's audiences, and poems then became mere mediating links between creation and emotional experience....Aristotle proceeds on the eminently sensible assumption that whatever may be the peculiarity of the art work's origin, it is its structure and formal configuration that is available for analysis.¹⁷

Such debates within the Platonic schools concerning the non-rational character of divine inspiration form only one part of the first-century picture. Indeed, wide consensus was reached in Philo's day on the benefits of divine inspiration, particularly ecstatic forms of it.

¹⁵Aristotle, *Poet.* ch 15 1451b5-10; cf. Russell 1995:93.

¹⁶ Russell 1995:93.

¹⁷ Schaper 1968:59-60.

5.2.3 *Other first-century non-Jewish perspectives on divine inspiration*

'In the Imperial period and under Platonic influence,' says Fitz Graf, 'ecstasy increasingly becomes a means to escape corporeality through ascent to the divine.'¹⁸ This prospect, though variously expressed, permeated the Hellenistic world in which Philo lived, particularly amongst women and other marginalised sectors of society.¹⁹ Most scholars agree that this nexus between ecstatic inspiration and noetic ascent likely derived from some of the more mystical parts of Plato's corpus.²⁰

To make matters more complicated, Mauro Bonazzi has shown that the Platonism of Philo's day was marked by ideas of more theological and transcendental orientations. This rebirth of Platonism, as Bonazzi puts it, featured a commingling of Pythagorean testimonies and Platonic ideas from which emerged a unifying view of God as the divine first principle.²¹

In this complex orbit of ideas, inspiration and initiation were increasingly perceived and portrayed as related phenomena, as attested by Plutarch (c. 50-

¹⁸ Graf 2004:801.

¹⁹ Cf. Kraemer 1979:55-80.

²⁰ On Platonism as a common denominator of the mysticism of the first centuries of the common era: e.g. Festugière 1960:51; Inge 1960:77-164; Hengel 1969:330-81; for more on the varied ways that Jewish motifs shaped the mystical mood of this period, see Gruenwald 1982:41-55.

²¹ Bonazzi 2008:236-51 (esp. 233-39).

120 CE),²² not a total surprise since his teacher (Ammonius) was heavily influenced by the type of theological Platonism characteristic of first-century Alexandria.²³ Moreover, one's act of writing (and listening to) inspired literature was seen as a key instantiation of one's ascent to the divine.²⁴ Still others, like Horace (65-8 BCE), disdained or only marginally tolerated notions of divine inspiration.²⁵

5.2.4 *Some ancient Jewish and early Christian perspectives on divine inspiration*

Not surprisingly, phenomena associated with divine inspiration are portrayed in a variety of ways in the Hebrew Bible. Biblical portraits of divinely inspired figures vary. Positive portraits include Abraham (Gen 15), Hannah (1 Sam 1), Levites (Exod 32-33), and Phinehas (Num 25). Negative figures include Saul (1 Sam 18, 19, 28) and Balaam (Num 22-24). Although the Bible points to the

²² Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 354F-365F, esp. 364E-365F. Plutarch also attests to the long shelf life of the initiation motif in Greek literature. He describes Maenadism at Delphi and Attica in *Mulier. virt.* 249E (cf. *Bacch.* 683-86). So does Pausanias (fl. c. 150 CE) (*Description of Greece* 10.4.3; cf. *Bacch.* 130-35). Diodorus Siculus, the first-century BCE historian, describes the practice of Maenadism elsewhere in ancient Greece (4.3.1-3; cf. *Bacch.* 20-22).

²³ So Bonazzi 2008:236-37 citing Plut. *E Delph.* 391E-394C.

²⁴ Cicero, *De or.* 2.194; *Div.* 1.80 (referencing Democritus and Plato, Cicero writes "no poet can be great *sine furore*"); *Nat. d.* 2.167 ('no one has ever been a great man without some divine inspiration'); for the role of inspiration on poetry and eloquence, see Cic. *Arch.* 18; *Tusc.* 1.64. Guillaumont 1984:14 finds that similar language is used to describe the inspiration of diviners and poets from the Greek archaic period.

²⁵ E.g. Horace, *Odes* 1.1; 2.20; 3.4; cf. Quinn 1980:117-21, 238-40, 249-53; Russell 1995:72.

reality of divinely inspired dreams and prophecy (Gen 37.5-11; 1 Sam 10.6-13), it also points to the decline of such phenomena (1 Sam 28.6, 15, Ezek 7.26; Amos 8.11; Micah 3.6-7). Perhaps with the gradual rise of so-called 'classical prophecy' (Isa 23; Jer 46-49; Ezek 1), ecstatic forms of inspired activity and prophecy eventually moved to the margins of the Israelite way of life, with the Temple and the Torah as the primary loci of authority and activity.²⁶ On the basis of the biblical record, divine inspiration is variously portrayed in the Dead Sea Scrolls,²⁷ Josephus,²⁸ early Christian compositions,²⁹ and rabbinic literature.³⁰

This general point leads us to a more specific inquiry: do these texts consider divine inspiration in connection with mystery initiation (and vice versa)? And if so, how do they go about formulating these connections? In these Jewish sources,

²⁶ See further Aune 1983; Barton 1986 (now 2007); Blenkinsopp 1996; Rowland (1982; 2010:137-40).

²⁷ E.g. Cave 11 *Psalms Scroll* is one of many useful examples; cf. Schiffman 1994:330: 'The concept of inspired biblical interpretation that underlay Qumran law assumed that sect members would be acting under divine inspiration at assembly sessions.'

²⁸ E.g. *B.J.* 3.351-55; also *Vita* 208-15. Josephus correlates the decline of prophetic activity to the reign of Artaxerxes (*C. Ap.* 1.34-41).

²⁹ E.g. Mark 5.42; 16.8; Luke 5.26; Acts 3.10; 10.10; 11.5; 22.17. In narrative accounts, ecstasies are regarded as possessed by demons and healed, cf. Graf 2004:801. The writings of the canonical 'Paul' offer a catalogue of ecstatic phenomena (2 Cor 12.1-11; Gal 1.12, 2.2), inspired prayer (Rom 8.26; 1 Cor 14.14-15a), *glossolalia* (1 Cor 14.18), and 'signs and wonders' (Rom 8.26; 2 Cor 12.12). On related phenomena in Paul: Theissen 1983; Segal 1990:34-71; Bockmuehl 1997; more recently Shantz 2009. On such phenomena in early Christianity: Aune 1983; Johnson 1998; Rowland/Murray-Jones 2009:3-11, 135-67.

³⁰ Rabbinic evidence varies, but some claim inspired activity, both oracular and prophetic forms, ceased from the time of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Ezra: on this point, see e.g. *Sotah* 13.2; *B. Sanhedrin* 11a; cf. MacDermot 1971:14, 238 n. 14.

such formulations are relatively scant, a point which further underscores the distinctive way that Philo approaches this topic.

5.3

Divine inspiration in Philo's writings

As discussed above, notions of divine inspiration were commonplace in antiquity. In Philo's proximate period, these notions – especially when associated with ecstatic phenomena – were increasingly linked with the human mind's ascent to divine realities.

Given the overall character of Philo's engagement with extra-biblical structures of thought, and in particular contemporary philosophical notions of noetic ascent, it comes as no surprise that Philo's allegorical writings feature the language of divine inspiration. Yet, Philo does not seem to have thought very systematically about the nature and function of divine inspiration. Rather, as we shall see, exegetical contexts seem to drive his discourses on the subject.

But a more specific research question might be usefully considered: in his use of the metaphorical language of divine inspiration, does Philo draw any sort of relationship between divine inspiration and the notion of mystery initiation?

The answer, as we shall see, is yes. In what follows, we will attempt to gain more

clarity as to how divine inspiration functions in Philo's theological epistemology and how Philo uses the language of mystery initiation to clarify the nature and function(s) of divine inspiration.

Given the demands of Philo's writings, we will proceed in two stages of inquiry. First (§5.3.1 below), Philo's treatment of divine inspiration in his *non-allegorical* writings will be briefly considered with a twofold purpose in view: (i) to get a sense of how Philo presents this subject for a mainly non-Jewish audience; and (ii) to allow us to see how differently Philo engages the subject in his *allegorical* writings. Second (§5.3.2), we will examine Philo's use of the language of divine inspiration as part of his allegorical exegesis of the Pentateuch. This will enable us to consider what broader agendas might account for Philo's exegetical moves.

As we shall see, our study of these questions will alert us to the possibility of two areas of exegetical concentration that animate Philo's language of divine inspiration. But before we get to these questions, I want to start by briefly noting Philo's non-allegorical engagement with the subject of divine inspiration.

5.3.1 The language of divine inspiration in Philo's non-allegorical writings

Philo's interest in the subject of divine inspiration is apparent in his non-allegorical writings. Although he explores and exploits it from a variety of angles,

Philo's tendency is to recognise divine inspiration as a legitimate noetic context within the frame of Greek theatre, an element of his Alexandrian setting which he seemed to enjoy and consume. Describing a performance of a play by Euripides, one which featured a eulogy of freedom, Philo discloses how the performance stirred him – and the rest of the audience – into a heightened state of enthusiasm (*Prob.* 141).

Philo also offers a rather uncritical portrayal of a group of Jewish aspirants who formed a community near Lake Mareotis, known in first-century circles as the 'Therapeutae.' In his presentation, Philo draws on a catalogue of ideas and terms from Greek literature (again mainly from the stock of Euripidian theatrics) to depict the group's aspirations for unseen metaphysical realities. In Philo's view, these communal aspirations were rooted in the contemplative reading and ritual reenactment of the writings of Moses.³¹

Philo is critical of the kinds of divinatory possession and practices associated with Egyptian cults, which he calls counterfeit forms of divine inspiration, marks

³¹ For instance, in his treatise on a community of ascetic followers of Moses located near Lake Mareotis (*On the Contemplative Life*), Philo describes this group as οἱ βαχχεύμενοι. (*Contempl.* 12), a clear signal to the imaginative world of Euripides' *Bacchae*. Philo's other uses of the βαχχεύω family of words vary, but in at least two key instances, the emphasis seems to be on the passive stance of the mind which Philo considers essential for one's attainment of higher knowledge of God (*Ebr.* 146; *Her.* 69). See further Taylor 2003:312-17 and numerous references therein.

of impiety of the worst kind.³² In this vein, Balaam³³ and Flaccus³⁴ come in for scathing review.

But it is in the more allegorical writings wherein we see Philo's most sustained engagement with the idea of divine inspiration as a context for noetic ascent and transformation in the knowledge of God.

5.3.2 The language of divine inspiration in Philo's allegorical writings

In his allegorical writings, Philo approaches the subject of divine inspiration in a variety of ways. To put some parameters around our discussion of the character and specific aspects of Philo's theory of divine inspiration, it is useful to highlight the following broad principles.

5.3.2.1 The divine spirit as the agent of divine inspiration

Who or what is the divinely designated agent of inspiration? More often than not, Philo insists upon the agency, power and primacy of the divine spirit.³⁵ Less

³² Cf. *Spec.* 4.48; seminal here is Pearce 2007:81-177.

³³ Cf. *Mos.* 1.281; also *Mut.* 203.

³⁴ Cf. *Flacc.* 169.

³⁵ *Sacr.* 10; *Gig.* 50-55; *Plant.* 23; *Deus* 138-39.

frequently Philo identifies the agency of the laws of Moses.³⁶ On one rather notable occasion, Philo describes divinely inspired phenomena as resulting from the mind's co-ordination with the mind of the universe.³⁷ Indeed, absent the inspirational agency of the divine spirit, the powers of God are unable to function properly and yearn for the Existent.³⁸ Inspired phenomena and the knowledge attained in this heightened state of mind cannot arise out of human agency.³⁹

Furthermore, the divine spirit legitimises the activities and aspirations that arise from ecstatic or inspired phenomena.⁴⁰ More specifically, the divine spirit is a key basis for all forms of prophetic activity.⁴¹ This point moves in at least two distinct directions.

In one direction, Philo says that divine inspiration yields genuine prophetic activities⁴² and psalmody.⁴³ In this line of thought, Philo sometimes portrays the human mind as a totally passive instrument of God.⁴⁴ Philo also frequently links

³⁶Cf. *Migr.* 29; *Somn.* 1.68.

³⁷ *Somn.* 1.2.

³⁸ *Cher.* 20.

³⁹ *Fug.* 166-70; *Mut.* 255.

⁴⁰ *Sobr.* 27; *Conf.* 59; *Fug.* 90; see also *Mos.* 1.210; 2.37.

⁴¹ *Her.* 260.

⁴² *Conf.* 44; *Congr.* 132; *Her.* 258, 265; *Somn.* 2.1-2; in 'Exposition': *Virt.* 55.

⁴³ Cf. *Leg.* 1.84; outside the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Contempl.* 84-87.

⁴⁴ *Post.* 78; *Her.* 265-66; *Somn.* 2.232; outside the *Allegorical Commentary*, see e.g. *Mos.* 1.286; *Spec.* 1.65; 4.49.

this feature with Moses.⁴⁵ In this regard, prophecy is the means of revealing aspects of God's nature and divine realities, not idols.⁴⁶

In another direction, divine inspiration eliminates all false forms of divination and prophecy.⁴⁷ For Philo, this is a non-negotiable corollary: when the divine spirit is not involved, all inspired phenomena constitute impiety.⁴⁸

5.3.2.2 Divine inspiration as a context for the mind's ascent to the divine

On what grounds does Philo accept divine inspiration as a valid means to human knowledge of God? For someone who insists so much on human rationality and reasoning, Philo's receptivity to something that in his day was widely associated with ecstatic and non-rational phenomena might seem inconsistent and paradoxical. We will return to this question after our review of the exegetical data below.

By way of preliminary observation, we note that Philo resolves this paradox by *using exegesis to blend two Platonic and Aristotelian positions on the question of*

⁴⁵ *Mos.* 1.175; 2.280, 291; also *Decal.* 175.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Mut.* 125-26 wherein Philo finds that the 'great' gift (μεγάλην δωρεάν) given to Moses, as reflected in his name, is the power of language to express prophet-like the holy laws [ἐρμηνείαν καὶ προφητείαν νόμων ἱερῶν]); cf. *Spec.* 1.315.

⁴⁷ Balaam in *Mut.* 203; cf. *Mos.* 1.277.

⁴⁸ *Conf.* 159.

whether divine inspiration takes place in the domain of human rationality, non-rationality, or both.

For Philo, the answer is both. To make his case, Philo treads on exegetical material from Exodus to insist on the *divinely inspired intensification of human reason* (as part of the mind's fight against the bodily passions). In the same breath, Philo exploits exegetical contexts from Genesis to emphasise the *divinely inspired obviation of human reason* (as part of the mind's further flight to assimilation to divine realities).

With this preliminary observation in mind, I want to recall briefly our discussion in Chapter 3 concerning Philo's reading of Moses' double accounts of the creation of human species in Genesis (1.26-27 and 2.7, respectively).⁴⁹ For Philo, what stands behind Moses' account in Genesis 1.26-27 is the reality of the archetypal human being, the 'heavenly man.' Genesis 2.7 features an inferior type of human being, the 'earthly man.' Each type corresponds to a particular category or class of human mind, with the heavenly man signifying a pure and disembodied mind, the earthly man an impure, embodied mind (*Allegorical Laws* §1.31).

⁴⁹ See Chapter 3 (§ 3.3).

In Philo's reading of Moses, what is the main difference between these two types of men? Crucial is one's relationship to the physical body, as seen in the areas of ontology, ethics, and epistemology:

Diagram 5.2
Philo's theory of two archetypal human beings/minds⁵⁰

Differences	Heavenly Man	Earthly Man (also Adam)
Ontological <i>Allegorical Laws</i> 1.31—32	Incorporeal and disembodied Created after the Image and Idea of God Endowments from God: 1. Facility in apprehending 2. Persistence in doing 3. Tenacity in keeping	Corporeal and embodied Symbolised as clay Endowments from God: 1. Facility in apprehending
Ethical <i>Allegorical Laws</i> 1.92-96	Possesses virtue instinctively	Possesses virtue derivatively by means of ethical teaching, notions of divine potencies, and other forms of human instruction
Epistemological <i>Allegorical Laws</i> 3.97-104	Direct apprehension of the essence of God by means of a perfected mind	Indirect apprehension of the existence of God by means of the imperfect senses

Why is Philo's theory of two human species relevant for our present discussion of divine inspiration? Pertinent for the present discussion is *the place of divine agency*. In keeping with Philo's view of the nature and character of God, Philo

⁵⁰ Adapted from Norgaard 2011:354-55.

unequivocally pronounces that God cannot come into contact with either type of human mind, heavenly or earthly. Yet to each type of mind God mediates his knowledge and presence.

This, for Philo, brings into close view the agency of the divine spirit.⁵¹ But one cannot help but be struck by the fact that Philo designates the inferior earthly mind – not the heavenly incorporeal mind – as the primary locus for the work of the divine spirit. As such, and in keeping with this view, Philo says that the divine spirit relates to the earthly mind in a twofold manner.

First, the divine spirit gives life to the human mind. On this basis, Philo speaks of the divine spirit as forming the earthly mind into an active and intelligible thing.⁵² Indeed, absent the agency of the divine spirit, the mind is utterly incapable of apprehending and ascending to God.⁵³

So, for example, as Philo says in *Who is the Heir of all Things?*, the essence of mind is breathed by God,⁵⁴ a reality which demands the following corollary: only

⁵¹ Divine breath, divine inspiration, and divine spirit are interchangeable in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*: see e.g. *Leg. All.* 1.36-38; *Det.* 85-90; *Her.* 184. On Philo's views of the agency of the divine spirit in the context of the creation account(s) of Moses: Chapter 3 (§ 3.3.5.4).

⁵² *Leg. All.* 1.32.

⁵³ *Plant.* 18-27.

⁵⁴ *Her.* 56.

the recipient of divine inspiration is heir of divine knowledge.⁵⁵ What is more, the self-inspired nature that arises out of ecstatic phenomena (more on this later) forms the basis on which a human aspirant can understand one of the greatest of Moses' mysteries, namely, the mystery of divine impregnation.⁵⁶

Second, the divine spirit empowers the human mind to ascend to a heightened awareness and knowledge of God.⁵⁷ 'For how could the soul have conceived of God,' says Philo in *Allegorical Laws* §1.38, 'had he [God] not breathed into it and mightily laid hold of it (εἰ μὴ ἐνέπνευσε καὶ ἥψατο αὐτῆς κατὰ δύναμιν)? For the mind of man would never have ventured to soar (ἀνατρέχω) so high as to grasp (ἀντιλαμβάνω) the nature of God (θεοῦ φύσεως), had not God himself drawn it up to himself....'

Indeed, pertinent evidence from the allegorical writings suggests that Philo holds the mind's subjugation of the physical body as one of the primary instantiations of divine inspiration.⁵⁸ Here, it is important to note that Philo consistently stresses this principle by drawing explicitly from texts and themes

⁵⁵ *Her.* 64; cf. *Her.* 184; *Somn.* 2.74; also *Spec.* 3.5.

⁵⁶ *Ebr.* 60; *Conf.* 74; *Mut.* 136-37.

⁵⁷ *Sacr.* 78; cf. *Decal.* 35.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Sacr.* 62; *Ebr.* 99, 147; *Migr.* 84; in the 'Exposition,' see *Virt.* 214-17. On at least one occasion, however, Philo is ambivalent about whether the mind can master the body only when inspired (*Mut.* 113), or whether the mind's mastery over the senses triggers inspirational phenomena and prophecy (*Mut.* 120).

from the book of Exodus. This is an exegetical feature to which we will return shortly.

5.3.2.3 Rewards of divine inspiration

In a fundamental sense, Philo sees divine inspiration as a beneficial phenomenon, listing it as one of the eight goods for the aspirant's soul.⁵⁹ In keeping with this view, Philo frequently associates divine inspiration with a range of positive experiences, such as the mind's experience of joy,⁶⁰ love for God,⁶¹ and zeal for God's stable ordering of things.⁶²

For Philo, divine inspiration bears three primary rewards: heavenly or supernatural wisdom,⁶³ peace,⁶⁴ and perpetual priesthood.⁶⁵ Each reward is rooted in the thought world of the Greek Jewish Bible of Philo's day. Moreover, each reward is meant to be shared communally. The recipient bears good things

⁵⁹ In *Congr.* 112, Philo lists inspiration (ἐνθουσιασμούς) along with teaching (διδασκαλίαν), progress (προκοπήν), earnestness (σπουδήν), longing (πόθον), ardor (ζήλον), prophecy (προφητείας), and the love of high achievement (τοῦ κατορθοῦν ἔρωτα).

⁶⁰ *Plant.* 39.

⁶¹ *Fug.* 58, 195; *Somn.* 2.232; cf. *Mos.* 2.67.

⁶² *Mut.* 108, 199; *Somn.* 2.232.

⁶³ *Leg. All.* 1.38; *Congr.* 131-32; *Sacr.* 78.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ebr.* 65-77, 99 (based on Exod 32.17-19, 29); possibly *Post.* 183-84 based on Phinehas (Numbers 25.6-13).

⁶⁵ *Congr.* 99; *Fug.* 90; *Her.* 184; *Somn.* 2.74; possibly *Post.* 183-84. Additionally, the divine breath of inspiration guards the mind from all malady and injury (*Her.* 182-84).

to wider circles of humanity.⁶⁶ This communal dimension, says Philo, is seen most fully in the life and legacy of Moses.⁶⁷ Seen in these ways, divine inspiration is not an abstract matter; rather, it is something to be experienced powerfully in the present time. In a few vivid passages, Philo describes these experiences of divine inspiration.

5.3.2.4 Divine inspiration as first-hand experience

Throughout the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo portrays divine inspiration as a noetic, supernatural context that the aspirant can experience firsthand.⁶⁸ To make this point, he provides two autobiographical case studies. With each offering, Philo vividly recounts how he experienced the agency and power of the divine spirit and the dividends this experience yielded.

The first case study is *On the Migration of Abraham* §§34-36, an autobiographical passage wherein Philo expresses his attitude toward the biblical concept of ‘release’ (ἀφῆσις). Prompted by this notion of ‘release,’ Philo then reflects, as he does elsewhere,⁶⁹ on the numerous occasions in the past whereby he has been

⁶⁶ *Migr.* 123-24, 140.

⁶⁷ *Congr.* 132; *Mos.* 1.175; 2.188; 2.280; *Decal.* 175.

⁶⁸ *Cher.* 27 *Migr.* 35; *Her.* 69; *Spec.* 3.1-6. Recent studies of this aspect include Winston 1982; Hay 1991; Levison 1995, 2006.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Cher.* 27-28; *Somn.* 2.250-54; in the ‘Exposition,’ *Spec.* 3.1-6; on these disclosures in light of the exegetical tendencies in early Christianity: Wan 1994:54-82.

inspired by the divine spirit. In these instances, Philo recounts how he approached his work

empty and suddenly become full, the ideas falling in a shower from above and being sown invisibly, so that under the influence of the Divine possession I have been filled with corybantic frenzy (ὡς ὑπὸ κατοχῆς ἐνθέου κορυβαντιᾶν) and been unconscious of anything, place, persons present, myself, words spoken, lines written. For I obtained language, ideas, an enjoyment of light (φωτὸς ἀπόλαυσιν), keenest vision (ὀξυδερκεστάτην ὄψιν), pellucid distinctness of objects, such as might be received through the eyes as the result of clearest showing.⁷⁰

As the passage above suggests, Philo discloses his interest in the philosopher's tasks of forming ideas and writing them down. Philo's language indicates his familiarity with Plato's construal of poetic inspiration.⁷¹ It is worth noting here that early Jewish and Christian texts offer minimal, if any, points of similarity, though perhaps the 'out of body' experience recounted by St Paul invites limited comparison.⁷² Frenzy and fits of unconsciousness of the sorts described above, Philo says elsewhere, are hallmarks of the kind of mystical experience that Philo associates with figures past⁷³ and present.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Migr.* 35.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ion* 533D-536D; *Phaedrus* 245A; cf. Linforth 1946a, 1946b.

⁷² E.g. 2 Cor 12.2-4.

⁷³ E.g. Abraham as portrayed in *Her.* 249-65.

⁷⁴ E.g. the Therapeutae depicted in *Contempl.* 12.

Central to Philo's autobiographical account of inspiration is his insistence on divine impregnation.⁷⁵ For Philo, this idea moves in two distinct ways. In one sense, Philo regards the mind as full of ideas, but it often fails to give birth to a single idea. When this happens, the mind tends to give up the philosophical task, but this drives the mind to turn to God for knowledge. The mind, says Philo at *On the Migration of Abraham*, 'is filled with amazement at the might of Him that is, to whom is due the opening and closing of soul wombs' (*Migr.* 35).

In another sense, Philo sees the mind as completely barren and empty, with nothing to bring to the philosopher's task. With a sense of rapidity (elsewhere described as a key characteristic of the self-taught nature), the mind is impregnated invisibly. This renders the mind simultaneously frenzied, unconscious, and receptive to a bounty of ideas and words.⁷⁶

5.3.2.5 Divine inspiration and the Pentateuch of Moses

For Philo, the laws of the fathers (τοῖς πατρίοις νόμοις) were indispensable 'laws that no human mind could have conceived without divine inspiration (οὐς ἀμήχανον ἀνθρωπίνην ἐπινοῆσαι ψυχὴν ἄνευ κατοκωχῆς ἐνθέου)' (*Omn. Prob. Lib.* 80).

The God of Moses inspired every aspect of these writings, rendering them

⁷⁵ *Migr.* 33; cf. Levison 2006:197.

⁷⁶ Similarly *Her.* 69-70.

oracles of unrivalled merit and meaning in both the original Hebrew compositions and Greek translations.⁷⁷

Out of this conviction, Philo can speak of the Greek translators of the Hebrew scripture 'as if they were divinely inspired' (καθάπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες), their activities on the island of Pharos as borne out of the prophetic task.⁷⁸ Here, Philo goes further than the composer of the *Letter of Aristeas* and certainly further than Josephus.⁷⁹

Indeed, Philo uses the language of divine inspiration to authenticate sacred Israelite texts not directly ascribed to Moses. For instance, Philo uses inspiration language to describe the authentic quality of the oracles of Jeremiah,⁸⁰ a particular utterance from the Psalmist,⁸¹ and the oracles of the prophet Isaiah.⁸² In these instances, Philo resists any sort of sharp distinction that anticipates later debates over which writings are canonical and which are non-canonical.⁸³

⁷⁷ Cf. Burkhardt 1988:112-22.

⁷⁸ *Mos.* 2.37: καθάπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες προεφήτευσον οὐκ ἄλλα ἄλλοι, τὰ δ' αὐτὰ πάντες ὀνόματα καὶ ῥήματα, ὥσπερ ὑποβολέως ἐκάστοις ἀοράτως ἐνηχοῦντος (emphasis added).

⁷⁹ Cf. *A.J.* 12.103-18; so Feldman 2006:220-21.

⁸⁰ *Cher.* 49 on Jer 3.4; *Conf.* 44 on Jer 15.10.

⁸¹ *Plant.* 39 on Ps 36.4.

⁸² *Somn.* 2.172 on Isa 5.7.

⁸³ Following Bockmuehl 1990:73 who observes Philo's more general and philosophical understanding of prophecy in relation to rabbinic references to contemporary experiences of the revelatory; also Perrot 1995:169-83 for the suggestion that the

It is helpful to pause for a moment and entertain the following question: why does Philo use the language of inspiration to authenticate these writings? In the absence of any clear explanation from Philo, perhaps it is not unreasonable to consider Philo's concerns as part of a broader strategy which he uses to augment his own standing as an interpreter and disciple of Moses, one who might even (as some scholars have suggested) stand on par with Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the biblical psalmists, among others.⁸⁴

With these broad principles in view, we turn to a question that gets us to the core of Philo's approach to the subject of divine inspiration in the *Allegorical Commentary* and the place of this subject in his theological epistemology.

Namely, *what exegetical contexts prompt Philo to use this language, and why?*

special, inspired status of the Greek Jewish scriptures in Philo's system of thought is shaped by his preference for the Greek theory of prophecy.

⁸⁴ On Philo's self-understanding as a prophet *par excellence* on a par with Moses: Sowers 1965:40-43; Aune 1983:147-48, 152; Levison 2006:202-07; but see Hay 1991:47-50 for an important counterpoint. After surveying the pertinent evidence, he writes: 'It appears that Philo perceived himself as having experienced inspiration chiefly in relation to his work as an interpreter of Moses (*Cher.* 49). Did he place himself on a level with Jeremiah or the psalmists, whom he could also represent as disciples of Moses? The reverence with which he cites their statements suggests a sense of their canonical rank which implies they have an authority which Philo does not claim for himself' (quote is from page 50).

This line of inquiry is in keeping with the settled view in Philonic scholarship that Philo was first and foremost an exegete of scripture.⁸⁵ It also builds on the suggestion by Markus Bockmuehl⁸⁶ and Jon Levison⁸⁷ among others who have observed that David Winston's studies on Philonic prophecy and inspiration, while helpful, leave room for further evidence, specifically on the question of how Philo's approach to divine inspiration relates to his wider exegetical strategies. On this note, we turn now to the two areas of exegetical concentration which feature prominently in Philo's use of the language of divine inspiration.

5.4

Exegetical concentrations in Philo's approach to divine inspiration

Although Philo's core vocabulary for divine inspiration derives mostly from outside the Greek Jewish Bible of his day (for more details, see Appendix D), he nonetheless underwrites his language of divine inspiration on the strength of the biblical material. In this respect, two books in particular drive his approach to the topic.

⁸⁵ The primacy of Philo's role as biblical exegete is no longer questioned on the strength of studies by Christiansen 1969, Nikiprowetzky 1977; Conway 1987; Borgen 1997 among others.

⁸⁶ Bockmuehl 1990:72 n. 26.

⁸⁷ Levison 1994:83-84.

As Diagram 5.3 shows, Philo turns most often to the book of Genesis, with the book of Exodus coming second on the list. Taken together, these two books account for the bulk of the exegetical freight behind Philo's inspiration language:

Diagram 5.3

Pentateuchal book	Number of texts that prompt Philo's use of the language of divine inspiration
Genesis	41
Exodus	19
Deuteronomy	11
Leviticus	6
Numbers	6

In what follows, we will consider more fully how texts from Genesis and Exodus animate Philo's discourses on divine inspiration. As we do, we will also bear in mind one specific point of reference: how does Philo construe divine inspiration in terms of mystery initiation, and vice versa?

Guided by these points, we will take three steps. First, under section 5.4.1 below, we will focus initially on a key passage from the *Allegorical Commentary*. This passage, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* §§59-62, shows in a representative manner Philo's way of bringing these two concepts together as part of his

discourses on theological epistemology. More specifically, this passage offers an instructive look at how texts from Exodus exegetically shape Philo's language of divine inspiration.

Second, section 5.4.2 below broadens our parameters and considers Philo's wider uses of Exodus material in describing the character of divine inspiration. What we find is this: in a rather consistent way, Philo uses texts from Exodus to portray the intensification of the reasoning power of the mind. Only in this heightened condition can the mind master the bodily passions, an attainment that Philo describes in the striking language of mystery initiation. Such mastery, then, is equated with one's initiation into the lesser mysteries of Moses.

But is Philo prompted by other exegetical contexts? And if so, what do these texts tell us about Philo's understanding of divine inspiration as a means to theological knowledge? Our third and final stage (section 5.4.3 below) attempts to answer these questions. In doing so, the exegetical functions of the book of Genesis in Philo's approach to divine inspiration will come into sharper view. In contrast to his use of Exodus texts, Philo insists on the divine spirit's way of *obviating* human reason when he draws on texts from Genesis, particularly those which feature Abraham and Isaac.

5.4.1 The 'lesser' and 'greater' mysteries of Moses

On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain §§59-62

This passage offers an instructive look at how Philo invites his readers to think about divine inspiration in terms of mystery initiation. Philo's exegetical task is interpreting Genesis 4.3.⁸⁸ Philo finds this text difficult. Because of this, Philo introduces a chain of secondary proof-texts, beginning with three texts from Deuteronomy to convey the point that Cain is an epitome of self-love (φιλαυτία) who impiously delays his offering to God.⁸⁹ As such, Cain is rightfully indicted on the grounds of forgetfulness and pride.⁹⁰ As a counter-example of this type of self-lover, Philo turns to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18.6.

Rendered allegorically, Genesis 18.6 points to the rapidity and zeal with which every disciple of Moses – symbolised here by Abraham and Sarah – must respond to the nature and powers of God (*Sacr.* 59). A highly associative thinker, Philo takes their acts of kneading and burying cakes to mean that when the aspirant is able to bring together knowledge and virtue, her soul will open and grasp the true nature of God, namely, that God is visible apart from his powers of sovereignty and goodness and yet is revealed in these same powers (*Sacr.* 60).

⁸⁸ *Sacr.* 52: "καὶ ἐγένετο μεθ' ἡμέρας, ἤνεγκε Κάιν ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς θυσίαν τῷ κυρίῳ".

⁸⁹ As Philo insists elsewhere with respect to Cain (*Cher.* 74; *Det.* 32, 78. 103; *Conf.* 128) and Pharaoh (*Leg. All.* 3.12); cf. Deutsch 1998:87-98.

⁹⁰ *Sacr.* 53-58.

For Philo, one's grasping of this reality of God is akin to one's initiation into the inmost mysteries (*ibid*).

Philo immediately connects the kneading imagery in Genesis 18.6 with the kneading image in Exodus 12 (verses 11 and 39). Given what Philo says elsewhere about the allegorical significance of the book of Exodus, this move is anything but happenstance. To the contrary, Philo seems to trade on this kneading image to press home the idea that Moses is espousing two types of mysteries in Genesis 4.3.

The key question for Philo is this: how does one get initiated into the greater mysteries? To get there, one must get initiated into the lesser mysteries (τὰ μικρὰ μυστήρια μνηθέντες). This preliminary stage features the agency and inspiration of the divine spirit, as Philo states:

On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain §62

παρό μοι δοκοῦσιν ὀρθῶς
βεβουλεῦσθαι οἱ πρὸ τῶν
μεγάλων τούτων τὰ μικρὰ
μυστήρια μνηθέντες· ἔπεισαν
γὰρ τὸ σταῖς αὐτῶν ὃ ἐξήνεγκαν
ἐξ Αἰγύπτου, ἐγκρυφίας
ἄζύμους, τουτέστι τὸ ἀτίθασον
καὶ ὠμὸν πάθος κατειργάσαντο
ὥσπερ τροφὴν λόγῳ πεπαίνοντι,

And therefore they, who
became partakers [or initiated]
in the lesser before the greater
mysteries, judged wisely, as I
think, for they 'baked their
dough which they brought out
of Egypt into buried unleavened
cakes' (Exod 12.39), that is,
they kneaded the savage
untamed passion with aid of
reason that softened it as

καὶ τὸν τρόπον τῆς πεπάνσεως
καὶ βελτιώσεως ἔκ τινος θείας
κατοκωχῆς γεγενημένον οὐκ
ἐξελάλησαν, ἀλλὰ ἐν
ἀποκρύφοις αὐτὸν
ἐθησαυρίσαντο οὐκ ἐπαρθέντες
τῇ τελετῇ, ὑπενδόντες δὲ καὶ
ταπεινωθέντες τὸ αὔχημα.

though it were food. And the
method by which they softened
it and wrought it to something
better was revealed to them by
divine inspiration (θείας
κατοκωχῆς), and they did not
utter it aloud, but treasured it
in silence. Their hearts were
not lifted up by the revelation;
rather they were bowed in
submission, and all proud
thoughts were humbled.

In Philo's orbit of ideas, what are the lesser mysteries? As far as this passage is concerned, Philo says that one's initiation into lesser mysteries entails one's kneading (πεπαίνοντι) or application of his or her reason to the uncontrollable passions of the body (τὸ ἀτίθασον καὶ ὤμὸν πάθος). What enables the aspirant to apply his or her reason in this way?

In answering this question, Philo uses the language of divine inspiration (θείας κατοκωχῆς). This yields a sharper revelation of this kneading method to the aspirant. When this happens, the aspirant is initiated into the greater mysteries of Moses.⁹¹ This language of greater mysteries, Andrew Louth suggests, recalls both the language of the mystery cults *and* Plato's idea of the place beyond the realm of forms, i.e. Plato's 'place above the heavens,' but perhaps for Philo in

⁹¹ In antiquity, this notion was grounded in Eleusinian mythical ideas. This has been noted in Plato's use of initiation language. Many have seen hints of Eleusinian mysteries in Plato's discussion of initiatory rites (*Resp.* 560E; cf. Bloom 1987:469; Meyer 1999:31). Rinella 1997:69-77 considers the dialectic between the *Republic* and the *Bacchae* when it comes to Greek notions of ecstasy and inspiration.

reality points to the mind entering a realm of knowledge of God in and of Himself.⁹² In some sense, the greater mystery is on par with the goal of the quest of Moses, namely, to know that God cannot be known.⁹³

To strengthen his emphasis on the primacy of active reason, Philo immediately turns to the Passover account of Exodus 12.11.⁹⁴ As with other texts from Exodus, this text animates Philo's thinking about the importance of the mind's active mastery over the body.⁹⁵

5.4.1.1 Platonic perspectives on the 'lesser' and 'greater' mysteries

Philo's distinction between lesser and greater mysteries is consistent with (and perhaps indebted to) Plato's division between the sensible realm and the intelligible realm. In the *Phaedo*, Plato insists on the necessity of the soul's disengagement from the sensible realm. In this realm, which is marked by constant variegation and flux, the mind is limited to the attainment of opinion (δόξα), not knowledge (ἐπιστήμη):

⁹² Louth 2007:30, citing *Post.* 13-15, Philo's interpretation of the biblical account of Moses' search for God and his entrance into the thick darkness where God was.

⁹³ *Post.* 21; cf. Louth 2007:30-31.

⁹⁴ *Sacr.* 63.

⁹⁵ *Leg. All.* 3.154; *Migr.* 25, 151; *Her.* 254-55.

...If we are ever to know anything absolutely, we must be free from the body and must behold the actual realities with the eye of the soul alone....And while we live, we shall, I think, be nearest to knowledge when we avoid, so far as possible, intercourse and communion with the body, except what is absolutely necessary, and are not filled with its nature, but keep ourselves pure from it until God himself sets us free.⁹⁶

Why does Plato insist on this rejection of the physical body? It is closely related to his view of the character of knowledge. For Plato, knowledge is that which the mind perceives in the intelligible realm of the forms (εἰδός). Knowledge is not that which the senses perceive in the material realm.⁹⁷

It is entirely plausible to see this Platonic insistence as a central piece of this Philonic passage and one that continues in Alexandria to at least the compositional environment of Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-c. 215). Using language consonant with that used by Philo, Clement describes the order of the stages as follows:

Not unreasonably do the Mysteries of the Greeks begin with purification, just as those of the barbarians also begin with bathing. After this there are the Lesser Mysteries, which have a function of teaching and preparation for the Mysteries to come, but the Greater (Mysteries) concern everything, where it is no longer a

⁹⁶ *Phaed.* 66D-67A.

⁹⁷ Cf. Kalin 2010:69 n.24, citing *Tim.* 37C.

matter of learning but contemplating and pondering nature and concrete realities.⁹⁸

As evident in *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* §62, Philo blends the ideas of inspiration and initiation to highlight the significance of the mind's mastery of the bodily passions. This mastery is located in the aspirant's faculty of reason. But this is only possible when the aspirant is divinely inspired. Using the Eleusinian⁹⁹ language of 'lesser' and 'greater' mysteries, Philo conveys the notion that the mind – once severed from the corporeal body (and so initiated into the lesser mysteries) – can aspire and ascend to even greater mysteries and realms of theological knowledge.

5.4.2 How Philo draws more widely on Exodus material to describe the character of divine inspiration

Our discussion above has alerted us to an important point of tension that animates Philo's use of Exodus texts and themes: the mind is encased in the physical body, and as such, the mind is inescapably affected by (and enslaved to)

⁹⁸ *Strom.* 5.70.7-71.1; cf. Clinton 2003:58. Critical edition of book 5 based on *GCS* text can be found at Voulet 2006. Note the similar tripartite schema of purification in Theon of Smyrna (14.20-22); cf. Riedweg 1987:5-8.

⁹⁹ Cf. Clinton 2003:50-60 for Eleusinian terminology in extant literary and inscriptional evidence.

the bodily passions. This idea is a vital part of Philo's approach to divine inspiration in the *Allegorical Commentary*.

An ardent Platonist, Philo can be seen as adopting a stance that Plato and later Platonists would have taken concerning the physical body: one must flee the body and fly to the immaterial knowledge and experience of God, what Plato variously conceives of as human assimilation to God.¹⁰⁰

But escape how? And assimilate to God by what means? It is here, in the gap left open by Plato himself (for later students of Plato wondered whether their master had in fact refuted the measure doctrine of Protagoras¹⁰¹), that Philo finds in the writings of Moses a portfolio of mediatorial figures that fulfills what Plato could only anticipate.

5.4.2.1 Moses as divinely appointed god over the physical body

Not surprisingly, Philo stresses the primacy of Moses. In Philo's reckoning, the divine appointment of Moses as god over Pharaoh in Exodus 7.1 becomes significant on a paradigmatic scale, capturing something of the essence of Moses'

¹⁰⁰ *Theaet.* 176A-B; also *Phaed.* 66D-67A; *Resp.* 500C; *Tim.* 90B-D.

¹⁰¹ On the question of Protagorean epistemology in Philo's Middle Platonic milieu, see Chapter 4 (§ 4.4.2).

theological epistemology. Philo's discussion in *On the Migration of Abraham* §84 provides an instructive look at Philo's train of thought.

Genesis 12.2 is the main biblical text, but Philo turns to Exodus 7.1 for interpretive aid. Key for Philo is the text's portrayal of Moses as the divinely appointed god over Pharaoh: καὶ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν λέγων ἰδοὺ δέδωκά σε θεὸν Φαραω καὶ Ααρων ὁ ἀδελφός σου ἔσται σου προφήτης. Noting the perfect harmony of the meaning of this text, Philo takes this passage as capturing something of the essence of Moses' epistemology – as Moses is appointed god over Pharaoh, so one's mind (Moses) is appointed god over the body (Pharaoh).¹⁰² In keeping with this point, a tension arises: the mind, like all created things, is malleable, subject to constant friction with the passions¹⁰³ and prone to forgetfulness.¹⁰⁴

Without question, Philo takes seriously the contingent nature of the human mind. The mind, however advanced, is always subject to the passions. To deal adequately with this reality, and the necessity of the mind's mastery over the passions, Philo turns frequently to the mediating role of the divine spirit.

¹⁰² Philo's interpretive strategy is not unlike those which feature in later Christian exegesis. Jewish interpreters made idiomatic adjustments to the text or simply avoided translating problematic words; cf. Salvesen 1991:78-79 and references therein.

¹⁰³ *Cher.* 37; *Agr.* 89.

¹⁰⁴ *Congr.* 41.

In this regard, Philo draws on other Exodus texts, as we shall soon see, using these texts to highlight the divine spirit as the agent by which an aspirant can apply his or her mind – with all its native restrictions – to the bodily passions. The divine spirit brings the aspirant’s mind into a state of possession, an enhanced noetic condition which Philo associates with the biblical examples of Levites and in particular Phinehas.

5.4.2.2 Zeal of Priestly Figures in the Bible

Though he is a superlative figure, Moses is not Philo’s sole point of reference in his approach to divine inspiration. Indeed, Moses is part of a company of figures who in the Bible function as mediators between God and human beings. This company includes Melchizedek,¹⁰⁵ Enoch,¹⁰⁶ Nadab and Abihu,¹⁰⁷ the Levites in general,¹⁰⁸ Phinehas,¹⁰⁹ and Samuel.¹¹⁰

Though variously expressed, Philo uses these mediatorial figures to portray an intensified mode of human rationality that is borne out of divine inspiration and

¹⁰⁵ *Leg. All.* 3.79-82; *Congr.* 99; *Abr.* 235.

¹⁰⁶ *Mut.* 39.

¹⁰⁷ *Fug.* 59; *Somn.* 2.67; in the ‘Exposition’: *Spec.* 1.52-57.

¹⁰⁸ *Fug.* 88-93; cf. Amir 1983a:3-51.

¹⁰⁹ *Conf.* 57-59; *Mut.* 106-108.

¹¹⁰ *Somn.* 1.254.

brought to bear on the bodily passions (e.g. *Gig.* 52; *Deus* 135-39). A fairly representative passage is *On Flight and Finding* §§90-91.

In *On Flight and Finding*, Philo considers Genesis 16.6-12 as framed by the following question: what does Moses mean by the term fugitive (φυγάς)? Philo draws on numerous biblical texts when considering three prime motivations: hatred (§§ 7-22), fear (§§ 23-52), and shame (§§53-86). This line of thought leads Philo to reflect on the tribe of Levi as a model for one's flight from the bodily passions (§§88-93).

In this context, Philo considers another question: why are the cities of refuge taken from cities assigned to the Tribe of Levi (§88)? This prompts Philo to turn to Deuteronomy 33.9 to underwrite a basic point: 'a flight that is real exile,' says Philo, 'is loss of our nearest and dearest' (§89) Drawing on one of his favourite biblical episodes,¹¹¹ the Levites again enter his orbit of reflection as a model of flight (§§90-91):

¹¹¹ Cf. Philo's recourse to the so-called 'golden calf episode' of Exod 32.26-29 at *Sacr.* 128-30; *Ebr.* 66-71, 95-105; *Post.* 162-69; *Mos.* 2.159-73; in the 'Exposition': *Spec.* 1.79; on Philo's perspectives vis-à-vis Josephus and Ps.Philo: Lindquist 2006:225-46.

[90] ἄρ' οὖν διὰ τοῦτο μόνον ἢ καὶ δι' ἐκεῖνο, ὅτι ἡ τῶν νεωκόρων Λευιτικὴ φυλὴ τοὺς θεοπλαστήσαντας τὸν χρυσοῦν μόσχον, τὸν Αἰγυπτιακὸν τῦφον, ἡβηδὸν ἐξ ἐπιδρομῆς κατέκτειναν, ὀργῇ δικαίᾳ σὺν ἐνθουσιασμῷ καὶ τινι κατοκωχῇ θεοφορήτῳ χρησάμενοι; 'καὶ κτείνει ἕκαστος ἀδελφὸν καὶ πλησίον καὶ τὸν ἑγγιστα', ἀδελφὸν μὲν ψυχῆς τὸ σῶμα, τὸ δὲ λογικοῦ πλησίον τὸ ἄλογον, τὸν δὲ ἑγγιστα νοῦ τὸν προφορικὸν λόγον.

Was this, then, the only reason, or was it also because the Tribe of Levi, consisting of those who had the care of the Tabernacle, rushed upon and slew from the young upwards [i.e. those of military age] those who fashioned into a god the golden calf, the Egyptian folly? **They did this under the impulse of righteous anger (ὀργῇ δικαίᾳ) accompanied by an inspiration from above (ἐνθουσιασμός) and a God-sent possession (κατοκωχῇ θεοφορήτῳ):** 'And each man slays brother and neighbour and his nearest' (Ex 32.27), for the body is 'brother' of the soul, the irrational part of us neighbour of the rational, and the word of utterance 'next of kin' to mind.

[91] οὕτως γὰρ ἂν μόνως θεραπευτικὸν γένοιτο τοῦ τῶν ὄντων ἀρίστου τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ἄριστον, πρῶτον μὲν εἰ ἀναλυθεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν, διαζευχθέντος καὶ διακοπέντος αὐτῷ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σώματος καὶ τῶν ἀνηνύτων ἐπιθυμιῶν· εἴτα τῆς ψυχῆς ἀποβαλούσης, ὡς ἔφην, τὸ πλησίον τοῦ λογικοῦ, τὸ ἄλογον καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ χειμάρρου τρόπον πενταχῇ σχιζόμενον διὰ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων οἷα δεξαμενῶν τὴν τῶν παθῶν ἀνεγείρει φορὰν·

[91] For in this way only could that which is best in ourselves become capable of ministering before him who is best of all existences, if in the first place the man were resolved into soul, his brother body and its interminable cravings being broken off and cut in two; if in the next place the soul rid itself, as I have said, of that neighbour of our rational element, the irrational, which like a torrent in five divisions pours through the channels of all the senses and rouses the violence of the passions.

Through allegory,¹¹² Philo draws out at least two key Mosaic principles based on the Levitical model presented in Exodus 32.27. The first principle relates to one's ascent to God, which Philo formulates in the language of 'ministering before Him Who is the Best of all Existences.' This principle insists that the disciple of Moses must master the cravings of the physical body. This is allied with a second principle – one is able to master his or her bodily passions only by the agency of the divine spirit.

Indeed, as we shall see below, due to the contingent nature of the mind, such spirit-inspired zeal toward the passions is invariably linked with the mind's ascent to God. What is rather apparent is Philo's belief in the destructive nature and force of the bodily passions.

5.4.2.3 Phinehas as a paragon of divine inspiration

Though Genesis 17 is the main biblical text of this treatise (*On the Change of Names*), Philo exercises a great deal of hermeneutic freedom in drawing from a wide range of secondary biblical texts. In §105, Philo is arrested by the meanings of Reuel (Ραγουήλ), the name of Moses' father-in-law in Exodus 2.18. This, in turn, prompts him to reflect on the meaning of Midian in Exodus 2.16 (*Mut.* 106). An associative thinker, Philo then moves from Exodus to another part of the

¹¹² On Philo's allegorical method in *Fug.* 53-118: Amir 1987:217-36.

Pentateuch, the account of the Midianites in Numbers 25.3, 12-13 in order to interpret the meaning of the name 'Midian.'

In Philo's orbit of allegorical ideas, the Midianites represent the physical human body. Using the language of initiation, Philo associates the nature and character of the Midianites with those 'initiated in the unholy rites of Baal Peor (οὗτοι τε τελεταῖς ἀνιέροις ταῖς Βεελφεγῶρ τελεσθέντες),' and as such, their minds are completely subsumed by the passions of the body (*Mut.* 107). This insistence on the passions is key to understanding what follows. As a counterexample to the passion-laden mind, Philo introduces Phinehas as a symbol of the divinely inspired mind:

On the Change of Names § 108

καὶ τοῦτο ἔπαθεν, ἕως ὃ εἰρηνικὸς
καὶ ἱερεὺς τοῦ θεοῦ τρανός,
Φινεές, ὑπέρμαχος αὐτοκέλευστος
ἦλθε, φύσει μισοπόνηρος ὢν καὶ
ζήλῳ τῶν καλῶν κατεσχημένος· ὃ
σειρομάστην λαβόντι, τὸ δ' ἐστὶν
ἡκονημένον καὶ ὀξὺν λόγον,
μαστεύειν καὶ ἀναζητεῖν ἕκαστα
ἱκανόν, ἐξεγένετο μὴ
φενάκισθῆναι, ῥώμῃ δὲ καρτερᾷ
χρησαμένῳ κατακεντῆσαι διὰ τῆς
μήτρας τὸ πάθος, ἵνα μηδὲν ἔτι
κακὸν θεήλατον τίκῃ.

And this was its condition until
the Man of Peace, an evident
priest of God, Phinehas (Num
25.12,13), came a self-bidden
champion. He is a hater of evil by
nature and possessed by zeal for
the good. And when he took the
lance, that is the sharp-edged
word, able to probe and explore
each thing, power was granted
him, that duped by none and
armed with mighty strength he
should pierce passion through the
womb, that it should henceforth
bring to birth no plague of God's
sending (Num 25.7,8).

Philo is drawn to the image of the 'lance' (σειρομάστην) of Phinehas, which he uses to test whether pits exist in the ground, a biblical picture which prompts Philo to envisage the mind doing something similar, namely, activating his reasoning faculty – the 'sharp-edged word,' ἡκονημένον καὶ ὀξύν λόγον¹¹³ – to 'probe and explore each thing.' In so doing, the active, reasoning mind overcomes the bodily passions.¹¹⁴ This overcoming is the basis for Phinehas' rewards of peace and priesthood.¹¹⁵

Philo's way of appraising and appropriating texts that involve Phinehas invites further comparison with other Jewish writers. These writers share a common scriptural ground: the Hebrew Bible's account of the tribe of Levi and all of its descendants as divinely appointed as interpreters of the law.¹¹⁶ Later Jewish writers generally uphold this view of Levi.¹¹⁷ Based on his biblical pedigree,

¹¹³ A Philonic shorthand, it seems, for the active reasoning mind: e.g. *Agr.* 81, 135; *Her.* 130; *Fug.* 121; *Somn.* 2.33. Philo's interest in exploring notions of reason (λόγος) vis-à-vis the book of Numbers is seen elsewhere: e.g. *Leg. All.* 3.101-02, 148-50, 242; *Cher.* 14-17; *Sacr.* 66-67; *Post.* 182-84; *Ebr.* 72-75; *Conf.* 56; *Mut.* 107-09; *Somn.* 2.170-71; in the 'Exposition': e.g. *Spec.* 1.9-31.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Feldman 2004:196-97.

¹¹⁵ *Post.* 183; cf. Feldman 2004:197. For discussion of Phinehas texts in relation to a cognate New Testament passage (1 Cor 10.8), see also Lincicum 2011.

¹¹⁶ Deut. 17:8-13; 33:10; Hag 2.11; Mal. 2.6-7; cf. Kugel 1998:9.

¹¹⁷ *Jub.* 30.17-18; Sir 45.6-13; *T. Levi* 2.3-4; 4.2; 5.2; cf. Kugel 1998:431-32, 715-16.

Phinehas came to be regarded and celebrated as the final member of the chain of Levite priests.¹¹⁸

In Philo's day, Phinehas was seen as one who did not die,¹¹⁹ as one who ascended to God.¹²⁰ The recipient of God's greatest prize, namely, perpetual priesthood,¹²¹ Phinehas was venerated as the forerunner of the Messiah.¹²² As an indication of Phinehas' status, the author of Ben Sira compares the divine covenant with David with the covenant granted to Phinehas. According to C. T. R. Hayward, the author of Ben Sira makes this comparison to encourage his readers to see in Phinehas 'a very model of what a high priest should be.'¹²³ Given all of the above, perhaps it is not surprising to find the Hasmoneans trying to identify themselves as direct descendants of Phinehas.¹²⁴

Like other Jews of his time, Philo is keenly interested in Phinehas. The main biblical account of Phinehas features prominently in Philo's allegorical

¹¹⁸ Sir [Hebrew, ms. B] 45:24; also Sir [Greek] 45:23-24; *Hel. Syn. Pr.*; *Apos. Con.* 8.5.4; cf. Kugel 1998:136, 811 .

¹¹⁹ Judg 20:28; Ps 106:28-31; *Sifrei Numbers* 131; *Tg. Ps.-J.* Num 25:12-13; cf. Kugel 1998:812-13.

¹²⁰ Cf. Pseudo-Philo *LAB* 48:1-2. In line with this view, some sources identified Phinehas with Elijah: cf. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exod. 6:18; *Pirqei de R. Eliezer* 29; Kugel 1998:814.

¹²¹ Num 25:13.

¹²² Ginzberg 1909-38 (vol III):389 n. 804.

¹²³ Hayward 1996:70; cf. Ben Sira 45:23-25; 50:22-25.

¹²⁴ *1 Macc.* 2.54; cf. Kugel 1998:824 who further cites Hayward 1978.

writings.¹²⁵ Whilst contemporary and later writers were interested in Phinehas as a symbol of priestly loyalty to God,¹²⁶ in Phinehas' actions as a warning against the dangers of intermarriage,¹²⁷ or in Phinehas' association with Elijah,¹²⁸ Philo's interest seems to be part of his broader interest in the mind's ascent to knowledge of God.

As we noted above (*Mut.* 108), what Moses describes in Phinehas' act of thrusting of a spear through the wombs of two idolaters is taken by Philo to be a model of the active human mind that applies its power of reason to all objects of sense.¹²⁹ In this vein, Phinehas' knowledge is described as coming directly from God, not human conventions or sources.¹³⁰ For his zeal and warlike reason, Phinehas is rewarded with the divine blessings of peace and priesthood.¹³¹

¹²⁵ *Leg.* 3.242; *Post.* 182-85; *Ebr.* 73-76; *Conf.* 57; *Mut.* 108; for references to Phinehas in non-allegorical writings, see *Mos.* 1.301-4; *Spec.* 1.56-57; *Virt.* 41. For full discussion, see Feldman 2004:193-216.

¹²⁶ Cf. Pseudo-Philo *LAB* 24.4; 28.1-3; 46.1-47; 48.1-2; 52.2; 53.6, as noted by Feldman 2004:193, 200-03. The motifs of zeal and loyalty for/to God that are associated with Phinehas feature in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (45.23-24) and the second-century BCE 1 Maccabees (2.26, 50, 54). See also 4 Macc 18.12.

¹²⁷ Josephus, *A.J.* 4.141-55; for more, see Feldman 2004:193-195, 203-13.

¹²⁸ *L.A.B.* 48.1 and the rabbinic tradition; cf. Feldman 2004:212-15.

¹²⁹ *Post.* 182-85; *Mut.* 106-109.

¹³⁰ *Ebr.* 73-76.

¹³¹ *Conf.* 55-57; cf. *Mos.* 1.302.

This theme is further intensified in Philo's non-allegorical works.¹³² In his biographical account of Moses, Philo unequivocally portrays Phinehas as a model of piety and religious zeal. There is no question in Philo's view that Phinehas' actions are divinely inspired,¹³³ even though they may be open to the charge of undue violence.¹³⁴ Such violence, however, is condoned if the target of the zealous activity is idolatry, as was the case with the Levites who slaughtered fellow Israelite worshipers of a golden calf.¹³⁵

But Philo's use of zealous, priestly figures to illustrate the character and contexts of divine inspiration is not limited to Phinehas, as we considered above. Philo enlists the Levites in particular to animate his discourses. From a broader standpoint, Philo can be seen as part of a set of Jewish writers who tend to trade on various traditions associated with priestly, mediatorial figures in order to further particular aims and agendas, and here, the author of Ben Sira comes back to mind (cf. p. 405).

Philo's use of such traditions is somewhat distinctive. For instance, he seems to resist some traditions that variously elevate Melchizedek¹³⁶ and Enoch.¹³⁷

¹³² *Mos.* 1.302-04; *Spec.* 3.126; *Virt.* 34-41.

¹³³ *Spec.* 1.56.

¹³⁴ *Spec.* 3.91.

¹³⁵ *Spec.* 3.126.

¹³⁶ Cf. Davila 2003:252-53.

¹³⁷ Cf. Kraft 1978:253-57.

Furthermore, Philo presses Platonic ideas into service in order to modify traditions invoking the angel Michael to suit his own interpretive project.¹³⁸ And more relevant for our purposes, when it comes to his allegorical use of Exodus texts and themes to take into account – and indeed appreciate – the Aristotelian notion that divine inspiration is a context that intensifies – rather than obviates – the reasoning power of the human mind.

5.4.2.4 Brief summary and preview

Though his usages vary, many texts from Exodus compel Philo to insist on an intensification of human rationality that is borne out of divine inspiration. In this regard, biblical portraits of priestly zeal feature prominently, a point which suggests Philo's familiarity with contemporary receptions of Jewish priestly texts and traditions.

But that is not all. As Diagram 5.3 above shows, texts from Genesis also shape Philo's approach to divine inspiration. Indeed, more than any other Pentateuch book, Genesis serves as the primary exegetical platform on which Philo articulates an intensified form of divine inspiration which features *the loss of human rationality and consciousness*. In this regard, Philo shows interest in both Middle Platonic and ancient Jewish ways of construing inspiration.

¹³⁸ Cf. Hannah 1999:85-90.

5.5

Texts and themes from Genesis in Philo's language of divine inspiration

The preceding section (§5.4) considered the range of texts from Exodus which prompt Philo's language of divine inspiration. We discovered that Philo uses these texts in a variety of ways, but the data points to at least one primary agenda, namely, Philo wants to illustrate the divine spirit's way of intensifying the mind's faculty of reason to know and master the passions of the physical body.

Such divinely-heightened rationality, in Philo's reckoning, is a necessary part of the aspirant's quest to experience and know God. Indeed, absent the agency of the divine spirit, the aspirant's mind simply cannot overcome the passions of the human body. To drive this point home, Philo trades on images of priestly zeal from Exodus and also from Numbers. What is more, Plato's language of divine inspiration is noticeably absent.

The foregoing discussion, however, renders only part of Philo's broader understanding of divine inspiration. In fact, when writing about the subject in the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo turns most frequently to texts from Genesis, particularly those which feature portraits of Abraham and Isaac in the book of Genesis, with each portrait influencing Philo in different ways.

Indeed, whilst many of the Exodus texts move Philo to stress the *intensification* of human reason, many of the Genesis texts prompt Philo to emphasise the *obviation* of human reason. In stressing this aspect of divine inspiration, Philo seems to adopt an approach more congruent with contemporary Greek notions of divine inspiration. This is true at least with respect to the following two features.

5.5.1 *Platonic perspectives on the non-rational character of divine inspiration*

On balance, Philo exhibits a positive attitude to Plato's theory of divine inspiration. The *locus classicus* of Philo's attitude is *Who is the Heir of Divine Things* §§249-65. In this passage, Philo considers the meaning and implications of Genesis 15.12, which reads as follows:

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.¹³⁹

Abraham, the central figure in this passage, was an archetypal mystic and virtuous convert in first-century Judaism.¹⁴⁰ Unlike other Jewish interpreters

¹³⁹ περι δὲ ἡλίου δυσμὰς ἔκστασις ἐπέπεσεν τῷ Ἀβραμ καὶ ἰδοὺ φόβος σκοτεινὸς μέγας ἐπιπίπτει αὐτῷ (LXX).

who took Genesis 15.11-12 as foretelling Israel's enslavement at the hands of four kingdoms,¹⁴¹ Philo instead finds Moses' account of Abraham's experience of paranormal phenomena (e.g. sleep, darkness) pregnant with Platonic meaning, especially when it comes to what Plato says about the character of prophetic inspiration.¹⁴² Arranging philosophical theories in opposition,¹⁴³ Philo writes:

Who is the Heir of Things Divine §249

ἔκστασις ἢ μὲν ἐστὶ λύττα
μανιώδης παράνοϊαν ἐμποιούσα
κατὰ γῆρας ἢ μελαγχολίαν ἢ
τινα ὁμοιότροπον ἄλλην αἰτίαν,
ἢ δὲ σφοδρὰ κατάπληξις ἐπὶ
τοῖς ἐξαπιναίως καὶ
ἀπροσδοκῆτως συμβαίνειν
εἰωθόσιν, ἢ δὲ ἡρεμία διανοίας,
εἰ δὴ πέφυκὲ ποτε ἡσυχάζειν, ἢ
δὲ πασῶν ἀρίστη ἔνθεος
κατοκωχή τε καὶ μανία, ἣ τὸ
προφητικὸν γένος χρῆται.

Now 'ecstasy' or 'standing out'
takes different forms.
Sometimes it is a mad fury
producing mental delusion due
to old age or melancholy or
other similar cause. Sometimes
it is extreme amazement at the
events which so often happen
suddenly and unexpectedly.
Sometimes it is passivity of
mind, if indeed the mind can
ever be at rest; and **the best
form of all is the divine
possession or frenzy, to
which the prophets as a class
are subject.**

¹⁴⁰ E.g. Josephus, *AJ.* 1.256; *Sib. Or.* 3.234; cf. Knox 1935:55-60; Sandmel 1951:137-39; 1971:30-95; Berger 1977:1.372-82; Wan 2004:212-24.

¹⁴¹ Viz. Babylon, Media, Greece, and Edom (Rome); cf. Levine 1970:552.

¹⁴² It has been observed that Jewish interpretive interest in this verse centred on the various Greek renderings of *הַרְרָה*, with the creation of Eve in Gen 2.21 as a sort of window text for the ecstatic experience of Abraham in Gen 15.12; for discussion of the wide range of interests: Salvesen 1991:11-12.

¹⁴³ On Philo's exploitation of this well-known practice (*διαφωνία*), cf. Mansfeld 1988:70-102 (esp. 89-94).

Philo here, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in the *Allegorical Commentary*, identifies this kind of ecstasy as one of the hallmarks of genuine prophecy. Indeed, what is hinted at in *Who is the Heir* §249 Philo renders explicitly a few lines later (§§258-62): the genuine prophet is identified by two marks, namely: (1) one experiences divinely-inspired ecstasy, and (2) one prophesies about matters that are corroborated in the written Word of God. Both marks characterise Noah, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

5.5.2 *Ecstasy and prophecy as allied phenomena*

Ecstasy and prophecy, for Philo, are allied phenomena that take place in the domain of human non-rationality, an insistence that seems to be at some odds with proximate notions of the rational character of prophetic utterances.¹⁴⁴ Given Philo's position, we might press a bit more by asking: *why does Philo locate ecstasy and prophecy in the realm of human non-rationality?*

Part of the answer can be found when we broaden our inquiry and listen to what Philo says elsewhere in the *Allegorical Commentary*. In many passages, Philo grounds his attitude to the ecstatic loss of human rationality in his belief in the

¹⁴⁴ Cf. Berchman 1988: 385-423 (esp. p. 391) observes Platonic and Stoic insistence that the prophet, in formulating and transmitting divine utterances, apply rational techniques.

impassible, all-powerful God. This belief, says Philo, lies at the heart of the writings of Moses.

Indeed, as Andrew Louth has observed, the sort of phenomenon that Philo sees in Genesis 15.12 (*Who is the Heir* §§ 249-65) may be genuine *ek-stasis* primarily from a Greek (not Hebrew) perspective¹⁴⁵ – i.e. the mind’s expulsion and the divine spirit’s arrival – but ‘it has nothing to do with mystical union.’¹⁴⁶ In keeping with this belief in the aseity of God, Philo takes Moses’ description of a ‘sunset’ in Genesis 15.12 to mean that the arrival of the divine spirit necessitates the complete disablement of the aspirant’s active, reasoning mind.¹⁴⁷

Yet, somewhat perplexingly, this obviation of the active reasoning mind – more than anything else – characterises ‘the fellowship of the prophets’¹⁴⁸:

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Robinson 1946:180-81.

¹⁴⁶ Louth 2007:32.

¹⁴⁷ Jonas 1954:100-04 claims that ecstatic displacement of one’s human reason is the soteriological goal in Philo; for counterview: Noack 2000 *passim*. On the basis of three key texts (*QE* 2.29; *Her.* 63-74; *Virt.* 211-19), Noack argues (pp. 40-215) that the highest level of ‘God-consciousness’ is marked by the activation of the reasoning or ‘intuitive’ mind, *pace* Jonas (pp. 217-18).

¹⁴⁸ On how this passage relates to wider features in Philo’s discussion about *visio Dei*: Birnbaum 1996:79-85. Some early Christian writings that feature notions of ecstatic inspiration centre on questions of group identity. On the question of whether Philo’s discourse in *Her.* 263-65 can be seen in this context: Nasrallah 2003:36-46.

[263] παγκάλως οὖν τὸν ἐνθουσιῶντα μηνύει φάσκων ‘περὶ ἡλίου δυσμὰς ἔκστασις ἐπέπεσεν,’ ἡλίον διὰ συμβόλου τὸν ἡμέτερον καλῶν νοῦν· ὅπερ γὰρ ἐν ἡμῖν λογισμός, τοῦτο ἐν κόσμῳ ἥλιος, ἐπειδὴ φωσφορεῖ ἑκάτερος, ὁ μὲν τῷ παντὶ φέγγος αἰσθητὸν ἐκπέμπων, ὁ δὲ ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τὰς νοητὰς διὰ τῶν καταλήψεων αὐγὰς.

[264] ἕως μὲν οὖν ἔτι περιλάμπει καὶ περιπολεῖ ἡμῶν ὁ νοῦς μεσημβρινὸν οἷα φέγγος εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ψυχὴν ἀναχέων, ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ὄντες οὐ κατεχόμεθα· ἐπειδὴ δὲ πρὸς δυσμὰς γένηται, κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἔκστασις καὶ ἡ ἔνθεος ἐπιπίπτει κατοκωχὴ τε καὶ μανία. ὅταν μὲν γὰρ φῶς τὸ θεῖον ἐπιλάμψη, δύεται τὸ ἀνθρώπινον, ὅταν δ’ ἐκεῖνο δύηται, τοῦτ’ ἀνίσχει καὶ ἀνατέλλει.

[265] τῷ δὲ προφητικῷ γένει φιλεῖ τοῦτο συμβαίνειν· ἐξοικίζεται μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁ νοῦς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πνεύματος ἄφιξιν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν μετανάστασιν αὐτοῦ πάλιν εἰσοικίζεται· θέμις γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι θνητὸν ἀθανάτῳ συνοικῆσαι. διὰ τοῦτο ἡ δύσις τοῦ λογισμοῦ καὶ τὸ περὶ αὐτὸν σκότος ἔκστασιν καὶ θεοφόρητον μανίαν ἐγέννησε.

[263] Admirably then does he describe the inspired when he says ‘about sunset there fell on him an ecstasy.’ ‘Sun’ is his name under a figure of our mind. For what the reasoning faculty is in us, the sun is in the world, since both of them are light-bringers, one sending forth to the whole world the light which our senses perceive, the other shedding mental rays upon ourselves through the medium of apprehension.

[264] So while the radiance of the mind is still all around us, when it pours as it were a noonday beam into the whole soul, we are self-contained, not possessed. But when it comes to its setting, naturally ecstasy and divine possession and madness fall upon us. For when the light of God shines, the human light sets; when the divine light sets, the human dawns and rises.

[265] This is what regularly befalls the fellowship of the prophets. The mind is evicted at the arrival of the divine spirit, but when that departs the mind returns to its tenancy. Mortal and immortal may not share the same home. And therefore the setting of reason and the darkness which surrounds it produce ecstasy and inspired frenzy.

Literary context helps to unpack the significance of the foregoing passage. This passage comes at the end of a rather lengthy discussion of the nature and character of Moses' programme of noetic transformation.¹⁴⁹ As represented in the experiences of Abraham, this programme involves three stages.

First, the aspirant starts at the lowest domain of knowledge (scientific-astrological knowledge). Second, when one quits this investigation of the stars, one converts to pure religion.¹⁵⁰ The aspirant is summoned to a higher domain (knowledge of oneself), a stage which is marked by the acquisition of moral purity and self-mastery over the body and recalls Plato's language of purification.¹⁵¹ Finally, the aspirant is carried to the highest domain (knowledge of God).¹⁵²

This still leaves Philo with a bit of a problem. He has to affirm, following Plato, that the apex of divine inspiration is a state of non-rationality. The aspirant's mind is rendered totally passive, unconscious and ecstatic. Does Philo settle on this point? If so, he might have realised a fallacy in his position: by using Plato's categories from an earlier dialogue (*Phaedrus*), Philo would be endorsing a way of experience and knowing divine realities (non-rational divine inspiration) that

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Noack 2000:158-215 (esp. 179 n. 542) for discussion of this passage in light of *Her.* 63-74.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Louth 2007:23.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Louth 2007:24.

¹⁵² Cf. *Migr.* 195ff.

compelled Plato, in a later dialogue (*Republic*), to exclude divinely inspired figures from the ideal city-state.

One cannot be sure whether Philo can or does resolve this problem. He does not explicitly say. What is noteworthy is how Philo builds on this Platonic notion of divine madness. If Abraham is the paradigm of Platonic madness (which Philo accepts), then the figure of Isaac, the offspring of Abraham, offers a way (which Philo takes) to relocate the Platonic notion within a Pentateuchal framework. This interest in usurping Greek philosophical truths features routinely in Philo and other Alexandrian writings.¹⁵³

Unlike the approach he takes in the 'Exposition,'¹⁵⁴ Philo in the *Allegorical Commentary* exploits the figure of Isaac as the symbol of ecstatically inspired phenomena. In the process Philo seems to see Moses as the source of the Platonic theory of divine inspiration. As we shall see shortly, what Plato describes as the best gift from the gods – divine madness – is merely a springboard into an even greater experience of divine inspiration, one which

¹⁵³ Cf. Dawson 1992:73-126: in Alexandrian writings, says Dawson, 'classical wisdom is best understood as derivative Mosaic insight' (p. 81).

¹⁵⁴ In the 'Exposition,' Philo focuses on Abraham's obedience as primary proof of his virtue, with the corollary theme of Isaac as one whose willing complicity with his father reflects the connection between sacrifice and noble warfare, a theme that emerged as a key theme in Maccabean literature. On the Aqedah in Philo in light of early Jewish and rabbinic literature, see Chilton 2012:495-518 (esp. pp. 500-10). On the idea in the 'Exposition' of Abraham as a paradigmatic example of noetic ascent to God, see Chapter 3 (§ 3.4.2).

results in the keenest type of human rationality and leads to human attainment of the highest mysteries of God.

It is helpful to remind ourselves that the greater mysteries of God in Philo's system of ideas in the *Allegorical Commentary* (and to a lesser extent the 'Exposition') are frequently associated with allegorical readings of the Pentateuch of Moses. What this suggests, then, is that Philo is taking this well-known Platonic commonplace and leveraging it to strengthen what Philo sees as a prime value in Moses' theological epistemology, namely inspired and prophetic exegesis of the Pentateuch.¹⁵⁵

In light of the close relationship that Philo draws between prophetic inspiration and scriptural interpretation, we turn our attention to this nexus between divine inspiration and what Philo calls the 'greater' mysteries of Moses.

5.5.3 *Divine inspiration and the 'greater mysteries' of Moses*

Part of Philo's interpretive tendency is to put a biblical face on a particular dimension of theological epistemology. In the preceding section, we considered how Philo uses Abraham, as he is portrayed in Genesis 15, to put a rather distinctive frame on the kind of ecstatic phenomena that Plato refers to as

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Levison 2006:209.

prophetic inspiration. Philo re-presents Genesis 15.12 as one which is especially saturated with Mosaic truths concerning the primary context in which prophetic inspiration occurs. This context features a sense of displacement, with the onset of the divine spirit demanding the obviation of the mind's reasoning power and properties.

What are we to make of Philo's insistence on this incompatibility between divine and human agencies? To be sure, this insistence can be seen in a number of ways. Perhaps it might be useful to see this insistence as Philo's attempt to strike some sort of balance between two central Mosaic tenets: on the one hand, that God is utterly and ultimately independent from the created realm, and on the other hand, that God wishes to engage and endow this realm with supernatural knowledge. Philo affirms both tenets in the same breath by insisting on a variety of agents who mediate divine revelation, the divine spirit in the case of the prophetically inspired Abraham of Genesis 15.12.

As hinted at already, this line of thought brings into sharper view Philo's treatment of Isaac in the language of divine inspiration. Whereas Philo uses the first patriarch to put a face on the *primary context* of ecstatic, prophetic inspiration, he frequently draws on the second patriarch to further illuminate the *primary character* of this ecstatic way of a perfected mind. In Philo's reckoning, this move from Abraham to his offspring comports not only with the

Mosaic way of noetic aspiration but also coheres with the narrative flow of Genesis.

5.5.4 *The self-taught nature and ecstatic inspiration*

Isaac shines brightly in Philo's constellation of ideas. Following the narrative movement of Genesis, Philo features Isaac as one who is superior to Abraham, a paragon of a special nature described by synonymous short-hands, 'self-taught' and 'self-inspired.'¹⁵⁶

For Philo, what does this notion of self-taught nature actually signify? At a minimum, this notion stands in opposition to the notion of creaturely self-determination. Indeed, the self-taught nature of Isaac conveys the idea that all knowledge and wisdom is given by God as a gift of inspired phenomena,¹⁵⁷ a view bearing some similarities with Platonic thought in Philo's day.¹⁵⁸ In the

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *Sacr.* 6; *Det.* 30; *Plant.* 168; *Conf.* 74; *Migr.* 140; *Mut.* 88; *Somn.* 1.168; at times, Philo draws on (neo)Pythagorean numerology to underscore Isaac's perfection and purification; see *Congr.* 111 (Isaac represents the number 10, which in turn represents the state of noetic purification); *Mut.* 1 (the perfect number 100 represents the self-taught nature of Isaac).

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Schäfer 2009:169 n.71: "Self-taught" therefore does not mean, in the literal sense of the word, that one can teach this kind of higher Wisdom oneself but rather it comes 'automatically' from 'above,' without any previous education.'

¹⁵⁸ So Dilman 1981:1-12 who shows that the *Phaedo* can be taken as representing Plato's belief that people are not born virtuous; to be lovers of the Good, aspirants must be inspired by contact with something external, i.e. the Forms.

biblical figure of Isaac, then, Philo sees a particular way of endowed knowing that ranks second only to Moses on the scale of created dispositions.¹⁵⁹

Pertinent for our present inquiry is Philo's claim that the self-taught nature of Isaac is borne out of ecstatic inspiration, not human agency, as Philo explicitly states in two key passages.¹⁶⁰ To take a fairly representative instance, Genesis texts on the birth of Isaac (Gen 18.11; 21.2) prompt Philo to reflect on the link between divine inspiration, on the one hand, and the self-taught nature, on the other:

On Flight and Finding §§ 167-68a

[167] οὗτός ἐστιν ὃν Ἰσαὰκ
ὠνόμασαν οἱ χρησμοί, ὃν οὐχ
ἐτέρῳ μὲν χρόνῳ συνέλαβεν,
ἐτέρῳ δὲ ἔτεκεν ἡ ψυχὴ·
‘συλλαβοῦσα’ γάρ φησιν ‘ἔτεκεν’
ὡς ἂν ἀχρόνως. οὐ γὰρ ἄνθρωπος
ἦν ὁ γεννώμενος, ἀλλὰ νόημα
καθαρώτατον, φύσει μᾶλλον ἢ
ἐπιτηδεύσει καλόν· οὗ χάριν καὶ ἡ
τίκτουσα αὐτὸ λέγεται ‘τὰ
γυναικεῖα ἐκλιπεῖν’, τὰ συνήθη
καὶ εὐλογα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα.

[167] This is he whom Holy Writ
calls ‘Isaac,’ whom the soul did
not conceive at one time and give
birth to at another, for it says ‘she
conceived and gave birth’ (Gen
21.2) as though timelessly. For he
that was thus born was not a
man, but a more pure thought,
beautiful not by practice but by
nature. And for this reason she
that gave birth to it is said ‘to
have forsaken the ways of
women’ (Gen 18.11), those
human ways of custom and mere
reasoning.

¹⁵⁹ *Ebr.* 94.

¹⁶⁰ *Fug.* 167-68; *Mut.* 255-56.

[168a] καινὸν γὰρ καὶ κρεῖττον
λόγου καὶ θεῖον ὄντως τὸ
αὐτομαθὲς γένος, οὐκ ἀνθρωπίναις
ἐπινοίαις, ἀλλ' ἐνθέῳ μανίᾳ
συνιστάμενον.

[168a] For the nature of the
self-taught is new and higher
than our reasoning, and in very
deed Divine, arising by no
human will or purpose but by a
God-inspired ecstasy.

As the foregoing passage suggests, the self-taught nature in Philo's system of ideas arises out of a God-inspired ecstasy (ἐνθέῳ μανίᾳ). Widening our scope for a moment, we notice that elsewhere in his allegorical writings Philo can portray this ecstasy in both positive and negative light. For instance, drunkenness¹⁶¹ induces harmful loss of one's rationality, which Philo associates with the so-called 'Maenads,' a group in Greek lore that in Philo's day often conjured up negative views of ecstatic phenomena.¹⁶²

But here (*Fug.* 167-68) this type of ecstasy is positively portrayed along the lines of what Philo says about ecstasy as a hallmark of the 'fellowship of prophets,'¹⁶³ a group which includes Enoch,¹⁶⁴ Samuel,¹⁶⁵ and recipients of heaven-sent dreams.¹⁶⁶ This nexus between the self-taught nature and divinely inspired ecstasy, I submit, is *an important key* to understanding Philo's approach to

¹⁶¹ *Plant.* 147; cf. *Agr.* 37 (gluttony induces ecstasy).

¹⁶² *Plant.* 148.

¹⁶³ *Her.* 264-65; cf. *Migr.* 84.

¹⁶⁴ *Mut.* 39.

¹⁶⁵ *Somn.* 1.254.

¹⁶⁶ *Somn.* 2.2.

theological knowledge, one that has been largely overlooked in prior research as far as I can tell.¹⁶⁷

Earlier research has not addressed an important question: *if one accepts Philo's claim that the Isaac type of nature arises out of both divine impregnation and divinely inspired ecstasy, what does it suggest about Philo's views on the kind of knowledge attained in this heightened state of mind?* In a nutshell, Philo seems to equate the Isaac-state of divine inspiration with the highest sort of enhanced rationality which allows the aspirant to attain the same kind of knowledge (i.e. the Ideas) privy to advanced students of Plato.

To unpack this point, it is worth taking a step back and recalling what Philo says about divine inspiration based on his readings of Abraham: when one quits the study of things of a lower order (astrology) and takes up the study of things of a higher order (oneself), this results in the onset of divinely inspired ecstasy and the concomitant loss of human rationality. This serves as a contrast to what Philo says about divine inspiration in the case of Isaac. No loss of rationality takes place. Rather, human reason is enhanced and optimised: those who

¹⁶⁷ The closest to what we are suggesting is the study of Kundert (1998:107-63) wherein the author draws parallels to wisdom traditions in early Judaism and suggests that Philo understands Abraham and Isaac as symbols of wisdom and otherworldly life, respectively.

possess the self-inspired nature of Isaac are able to study things of the highest order.

Consider *On the Confusion of Tongues* §§73-74. This passage comes as part of Philo's allegorical interpretation of the meaning of 'Shinar' in Genesis 11.2.¹⁶⁸ Provoked by this name, Philo reflects on the idea of 'shaking out' (ἐκτιναγμός, *Conf.* 68) and enlists texts from Exodus featuring Egyptian hostility toward Israel (1.8; 16.27). A bifurcation appears which is seen elsewhere in Philo's exegetical writings: Egyptians represents those who love the body, shaken and destroyed by the passions¹⁶⁹ whilst Israel represents those who see God.¹⁷⁰ In this train of thought, Philo writes about the self-taught mind of Isaac:

On the Confusion of Tongues §§73-74

[73] ὁ μὲν δὴ τῶν τοιούτων νοῦς
ἀπορρίπτει πᾶσαν τὴν ἀγαθοῦ
φύσιν τρόπον τινὰ τιναττόμενος,
ἔμπαλιν δ' ὁ τῶν ἀστέων,
ἀμιγοῦς καὶ ἀκράτου
μεταποιούμενος τῆς τῶν ἀγαθῶν
ιδέας, ἀποτινάττει καὶ
ἀποβάλλει τὰ φαῦλα.

The mind of such as these is
in a sense shaken and casts
forth the whole nature of
good, while the mind of the
virtuous in contrast claims
as its own the Idea of the
good, an Idea pure and
unalloyed, and shakes and
casts off what is worthless.

¹⁶⁸ Beginning in *Conf.* 68.

¹⁶⁹ *Conf.* 71; other examples of the theme of 'scattering': *Det.* 95; *Her.* 59-60; cf. Pearce 2007:142-48.

¹⁷⁰ *Conf.* 72.

[74] θέασαι γοῦν τὸν ἀσκητὴν
οἷά φησιν· ἄρατε τοὺς θεοὺς
τοὺς ἀλλοτρίους τοὺς μεθ' ὑμῶν
ἐκ μέσου ὑμῶν, καὶ καθαρίσασθε
καὶ ἀλλάξατε τὰς στολὰς ὑμῶν,
καὶ ἀναστάντες ἀναβῶμεν εἰς
Βαιθήλ.' ἵνα, καὶ ἄν Λάβαν
ἔρευναν αἰτῇται, ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ
μὴ εὑρεθῇ τὰ εἰδωλα. ἀλλὰ
πράγματα ὑφ' ἐσθηκότα καὶ
ὄντως ὑπαρκτά, ἐσθηλιτευμένα
ἐν τῇ τοῦ σοφοῦ διανοίᾳ, ὧν καὶ
τὸ αὐτομαθὲς γένος Ἰσαὰκ
κληρονομεῖ· τὰ γὰρ ὑπαρκτά
μόνος οὗτος παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς
λαμβάνει.

Thus mark how the Man of Practice speaks: 'Take away the alien gods who are with you from the midst of you, and purify yourselves and change your raiment and let us rise up and go up to Bethel' (Gen 35.2,3), so that, even though Laban demand a search, no idols may be found in all the house (Gen 31.35) but veritable substantial realities graven, as though on stone, on the heart of the wise, realities which are the heritage of the self-taught nature, Isaac. For Isaac alone receives from his father the 'real substance' (Gen 25.5).

For Philo, the themes in this exegetical context allow for a blending of Mosaic and Platonic ideas. The self-taught nature of Isaac is identified as the primary basis for one's comprehension of the veritable realities of God. Reflecting on this point, Philo turns to the language of Plato, equating the divine realities that are grasped by the Isaac-like mind with the idea of the Good that is disclosed to advanced students of Plato.¹⁷¹

More broadly speaking, the foregoing point seems to comport with what Philo insists elsewhere, namely, that the Isaac-nature is marked by the enhanced

¹⁷¹ *Conf.* 73.

exertion (not abandonment) of human reason.¹⁷² Yet, for all of his attention to divine ecstasy as a context for one's transformation into the self-taught nature, Philo can still speak of one's study of the divine word as a locus for such change.¹⁷³

5.5.5 *Homeric portrayals of self-taught inspiration*

Before we conclude this part of our discussion, we will briefly consider another field of ideas which may have motivated Philo's use of Isaac in the ways above. As noted earlier in §5.2 of this chapter, the concept of a pseudo-divine, self-taught nature has been around for a very long time, tracing at least as far back as Homer's portrayal of Phemius. The bard in Odysseus' house, Phemius is an oral poet with a self-taught nature (*autodidaktos*). On this basis, Phemius is portrayed as capable of spontaneously summoning the power to sing and improvise lyrics that describe events of a more international character.¹⁷⁴

This claim to a self-taught nature,¹⁷⁵ in Homer's reckoning, rests neither on human agency nor capacity, but rather on the belief that a god implants all sorts

¹⁷² For a similar point expressed in the 'Exposition,' see Chapter 3 (§§ 3.3.5 and 3.3.6).

¹⁷³ *Migr.* 29; *Somn.* 1.68; cf. Louth 2007:28.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Webster 1958:130-32.

¹⁷⁵ Homer, *Od.* 23.347.

of songs and stories to grow in such a mind.¹⁷⁶ This claim, says Douglas Cairns, 'sets him [Phemius] apart not from divine inspiration but from merely reproductive performance of epic song.'¹⁷⁷

This distinction does not go unnoticed in Plato.¹⁷⁸ In the *Ion*, Plato regards Phemius as an archetype of a certain metaphysical reality, which Plato conveys with the metaphor *rhapsōidós*. According to Gregory Nagy, in antiquity this metaphor was based on the commingling of two fields of ideas (human sowing and poetic singing) which in turn corresponded to an idea rooted in ancient Greek mythology, namely, 'that many and various fabrics of song, each one already made (that is, each one already woven), become remade into a unity, a single new continuous fabric, by being sewn together.'¹⁷⁹

Concerning the paradox of the metaphor, Nagy writes:

The paradox of the metaphor is that the many and the various become the single and the uniform – and yet there is supposedly no loss in the multiplicity and variety of the constituent parts. In effect, this metaphor conveyed by the concept of *rhapsōidós* amounts to an overarching aesthetic principle....¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Webster 1958:132.

¹⁷⁷ Cairns 2001:101.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Ion* 533C.

¹⁷⁹ Nagy 1996:86.

¹⁸⁰ Nagy 1996:86.

The foregoing thoughts shed some light on Philo's use of Isaac texts. For one thing, Philo's portrayals of Isaac recall, at least partly, Homer's notions of the divinely gifted, self-taught nature. That Plato subsequently associates this mind with the capacity to bring pluriform structures into a single unity is interesting for this reason: Philo too uses exegetical material concerning Isaac to describe the mind, divinely impregnated, that can grasp God in both His single essence and His many existences (powers).¹⁸¹

Such influences on Philo would not be entirely outside the realm of plausibility, especially given what we know about Philo's wider reliance on Plato and Homer: in terms of counted citations and quotations, their corpora rank second and third respectively, trailing only Moses.¹⁸²

The plausibility of the foregoing suggestion increases when one considers Philo's intellectual and social location in first-century Alexandria, the centre of scholarly engagement with Homer and Plato, among others, in the Graeco-Roman world.¹⁸³ We also cannot overlook Philo's considerable efforts in defending – or at least positively representing – the beliefs and practices of the Alexandrian

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Conf.* 73-74 discussed above.

¹⁸² Cf. Kamesar 1997:189.

¹⁸³ Niehoff 2011a passim; the first sentence of the book's 'Epilogue' is instructive: 'Stressing the importance of Alexandria as *the* centre of literal Homeric scholarship in the Hellenistic world, I have analysed for the first time Jewish exegetical works in light of the Alexandrian scholar to Homer' (p. 186, italics in original).

Jewish community in connection with her relations with Rome and other ethnic and political communities.¹⁸⁴

In all of this, what seems to be driving Philo's reading of Moses? At the minimum, there seems to be an interest on Philo's part to cast the best possible light on the Jewish way of life as he construed it. In so doing, Philo attempts to dispel a false notion that Jewish engagement with the very best of Greek and Roman ideas forces one of two choices, either apostasy (a posture taken by Philo's own nephew, Tiberius Alexander) or full ignorance of such thought (a posture which Philo equally disdains but for different reasons).

5.6

Conclusion

Close inspection of Philo's metaphorical language of divine inspiration in the *Allegorical Commentary* has revealed at least two areas of exegetical concentration that feature prominently in Philo's approach to this subject.

First, when Philo draws on exegetical contexts from the book of Genesis, he seems to engage the subject in ways congruent with contemporary notions of inspiration, and in particular, Plato's theory of divine madness. To this end, Philo

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Philo's more politically oriented works, e.g. *Legatio ad Gaium*; *In Flaccum*.

stresses the *eviction* of the aspirant's power of reason when the divine spirit comes upon his or her mind. The resulting loss of rationality and control over one's bodily functions and senses are hallmarks of a genuine prophet of God.

But something else happens in this state of unconsciousness and ecstatic non-rationality. Texts from Genesis also provoke Philo to describe a further ascent of the aspirant's mind to the loftiest of heights. In this inspired state, which Philo associates with the 'self-taught' nature of Isaac (a concept with some possible affinities with the Homeric notion of the 'self-taught' divinely-inspired poet), the mind comes out of ecstasy and is brought to a place of *supra-rationality*.

In this place, the aspirant's mind is able to supernaturally grasp the unseen realities of God, namely that he is both one and the many who impregnates the aspirant's mind and soul with knowledge of these realities. Elsewhere Philo correlates these realities with what he calls – using the language of initiation – the 'greater mystery' or 'greater mysteries' of Moses (*On the Cherubim* §42). These mysteries are closely related to the Platonic ideal of apprehending the idea of the Good.

Second, when Philo draws on exegetical contexts from the book of Exodus, he less frequently uses language that resonates with contemporary philosophy. Instead, Philo enlists Mosaic portraits of priestly figures who – in Philo's

symbolic universe – exemplify ways of overcoming the passions and preoccupations of the corporeal world. This, Philo insists, necessitates the *enhancement* of the aspirant’s power of reason, a heightening of the human mind that results from the onset and agency of the divine spirit.

Much of this seems to be animated by Philo’s serious engagement with the idea that the mind is domiciled in the body. An inescapable reality for all students of Moses, the mind’s entombment in the physical body represented for Philo a severe constraint on the mind’s potential to know and experience the divine. But this constraint can be overcome by the type of divine inspiration that entails the enhancement of human reason, as modeled supremely by Moses.

Our study shed light on another important question: *what, if any, is the relationship between mystery initiation and divine inspiration in the broader context of Philo’s theological epistemology?*

A survey of the relevant literature suggests that scholars have tended to ignore this important nexus which features in Philo’s theological epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*. As we have attempted to show, Philo explicitly equates one form of divine inspiration (that which enhances the aspirant’s power of reason) with the lesser mysteries of Moses. He identifies another form of inspiration (that which obviates that power) with the greater mysteries of Moses.

What this suggests, at a minimum, is Philo's regard for initiation and inspiration as two halves of the same *telos*: the mind's ascent to know and experience God. Philo produces one of the more distinctive and eclectic portraits of the divinely inspired mind compared to other writers from the late Second Temple period.

But for all the ways Philo varies his language and blends the language of inspiration with the language of mystery initiation, the Pentateuch of Moses remains the focal point of Philo's exegetical and philosophical activity. Indeed, for Philo, nothing could be better than the prospect of the divine spirit inspiring an aspirant to deeper knowledge of the Pentateuch, whether that comes through the vehicle of human rationality or the vehicle of non-rationality.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Having considered the varieties of epistemological discourses specific to Philo's main series of exegetical works, the *Allegorical Commentary* (Chapter 2) and the 'Exposition of the Law' (Chapter 3), it is time to draw to a close with the aid of the following question: *what difference, if any, does this make for our reading of Philo in general and his approach to human knowledge of God in particular?*

Our explorations of the Philonic material have shed much light on this question. Many conclusions have already been offered, but for ease of reference it will be useful to summarise briefly some of the main findings here (§§6.1-2 below) in order to delineate the limits of our study and avenues for further research (§6.3).

6.1

A central clue to Philo's theological epistemologies

Our study has shown that a central clue to Philo's views of human knowledge of God must be sought with his exegetical encounter with the Pentateuch. Indeed, throughout this study, we have seen that Philo grounds his discourses on the nature, potential and limits of human knowledge of the divine in the Greek

Jewish scriptures of his day at both the literal and non-literal levels of meaning. For Philo, the Mosaic world of ideas offers significant solutions to the key epistemological problems of his day.

This finding, at least initially, might seem rather obvious to state, but it is nonetheless important to bear in mind as we proceed with summarising each chapter of the thesis below. To say that Philo's strategies of reading scripture moves us to the very core of Philo's varied approach to human knowledge of God is a viewpoint which comports with the scholarly consensus concerning the primacy of exegesis in Philo's approach to topics of central concern to him, such as the one studied here.

6.1.1 Specific contribution to present knowledge

The bulk of the interpretive work in the thesis took place in Chapters 2 and 3. On the basis of our findings from these chapters, it is now possible to offer a more coherent and context-sensitive accounting of the two distinct yet related theological epistemologies which feature in Philo's main exegetical series. One epistemology is specific to the *Allegorical Commentary*. A second epistemology is specific to the 'Exposition.'

6.1.1.1 The theological epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary*

In Chapter 2, we discovered that this epistemology is animated by a threefold conviction: the sovereignty of God, the creaturely contingency of the human mind and its inescapable limitations. From each one follows the next. The first understands God as the uncreated cause and possessor of all things, including the human mind. As such, Philo rejects outright the epistemological agenda espoused by Protagoras of Abdera, a self-centric way of knowing associated with the doctrine that *anthropos* is the measure of all things. Philo also urges restraint when it comes to the role of the *Logos*, conceived as all-pervasive in the Stoic imaginations of his day. In Philo's reckoning, the *Logos* is indeed the chief intermediary between God and humanity, but nonetheless created, and on this basis, unequivocally inferior to the uncreated God of Moses.

A necessary corollary of the first point is that the human mind is a created entity, domiciled in the non-rational soul and subject to the full array of contingencies that attend human existence. Philo trades on the philosophical parlance of spiritual impregnation and human assimilation to the divine, enlisting these commonplaces to conceive of the human mind as endowed with the potential to ascend to its divine creator.

Equally clear is Philo's interest in blending this line of thought with Mosaic descriptions of the varied gifts of knowledge which God, out of his beneficence, confers on the aspiring mind. Such conferrals are part of the aspirant's journey to the divine. Through his various agencies, God wants the aspiring mind to gain purification and perfection and thereby to experience therapy and transformation of knowledge.

A third necessary aspect that follows from the ones above relates to the creaturely limitations of the human mind. Even in the superlative paradigm case of Moses, the unmediated knowledge and experience of the divine which he most longs for is the very thing he cannot attain to full measure. A limited strand of contemporary scepticism can be detected, confined to specific exegetical contexts which Philo sees as supporting the Mosaic doctrine of divine incomprehensibility.

Guided by this threefold conviction, and in keeping with his commitment to read Moses in non-literal ways, Philo enlists the ideas and language from two key metaphorical fields of his day – initiation into divine mysteries (the subject of Chapter 4), and divine inspiration of the human mind (Chapter 5) – in order to capture something of the essence of Moses' twofold way of knowing the divine, an approach which requires at times the *enhancement* of human reason and at other times the *eviction* of human reason.

In Philo's view, Moses brings together human rationality *and* human non-rationality as compatible ways of knowing and experiencing the divine, a co-existence which did not commingle as easily in the writings of non-Jewish thinkers like Plato and Aristotle. What is perceived as a harmony in Moses, Philo insists, is not for everyone, however: it is to be understood according to the aptitudes of Philo's more advanced readers of the *Allegorical Commentary*. This seems to add a certain sense of esotericism to some of Philo's epistemological discourses in this series.

6.1.1.2 The theological epistemology of the 'Exposition'

Turning to Chapter 3, we encountered in the 'Exposition' a distinctive set of Philonic commitments and concerns regarding theological knowledge. As in the *Allegorical Commentary*, it is apparent that Philo grounds his epistemology in the writings of Moses. What is equally apparent is this: Philo underwrites his commitment to the Judaism of his day with a wider batch of Mosaic material, presenting the particular character and content of these Jewish ideas vis-à-vis the wider Graeco-Roman imaginations of his day.

Writing to a mixed audience of Jews and non-Jews with little if any knowledge of Moses, Philo presents the Pentateuch as a perfect whole partitioned into three distinct yet inseverable parts. In Philo's reckoning, Moses' excellence is seen in

how the first part of the 'Exposition' (the double creation account of Genesis 1-3) moves into a second part (the patriarchal accounts of Genesis), which then feeds into the third and lengthiest part (the legislative material in the Pentateuch). In recognition of these lines of partition, Philo writes about theological knowledge in three distinctive ways. These have been summarised already, but for ease of reference, we describe them briefly as follows.

Because Philo, like other Jewish interpreters, identified in the Mosaic testimony two separate accounts of the creation of humanity, his knowledge discourses in the first part of the 'Exposition' moves in two primary directions. The first direction, we learned, is heavily invested with a Platonic reading of Genesis 1.27 while the second invests Genesis 2.7 with a mixture of Platonic and Stoic notions of human transformation and well-being.

The first Mosaic account of the creation of humanity (Genesis 1.27) prompts Philo to envisage Plato's intelligible world of being and leads him to employ the language from Plato's *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus*. Here, in his portrayal of noetic ascent, Philo insists that the knowledge gained is apophatic in character. In this ecstatic state of mind, the aspirant experiences vertigo, her intellect evicted in the face of overwhelming divine realities.

Philo sees the second Mosaic account of the creation of humanity (Genesis 2.7) through the window of Genesis 1.27 and this provokes him to consider the possibilities of noetic ascent in the world of becoming and constant flux. In this context, Philo enlists the language of human assimilation to God from Plato's *Theaetetus*, a text he also exploited in the *Allegorical Commentary*. Here, the knowledge gained is not apophatic in character. Rather, the aspirant's state of mind is marked by the full enhancement of human reason predicated on the recovery of her self-taught nature. Compared to the mind's ascent to the divine which Philo derives from his reading of Genesis 1.27, this portrait of noetic ascent is more fully conversant with mainstream Stoic and eudaemonistic approaches to human transformation in Philo's day.

Turning to the segment of the 'Exposition' concerned with the three great patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), we discovered that Philo draws on a longstanding model of Greek education that featured the interlocking virtues of instruction, nature, and practice. Philo presents the patriarchal exemplars, respectively and relatedly, as unwritten laws who embody the best of Greek speculations on these three virtues.

In addition, Philo shows his interest in more mystical imaginations of human knowledge of God. In one striking instance which recalls the sort of language seen more regularly in the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo probes the non-literal

dimensions of Genesis 18, the account of Abraham's encounter with the divine, in order to convey the possibility that God, as a plenipotentiary being, can reveal himself to human minds in two ways: as a single entity to purified (initiated) minds and as a pair of divine powers to less purified (uninitiated) minds.

Such mystical speculations, on balance, are few and far between in this segment of the 'Exposition.' Philo instead tends to tread on the notion that the patriarchs anticipate a fuller reality signified by the life and laws of Moses, the recipient of the divine Ten Words and the revealer of the particular human laws that fall under each of the Words. In Philo's attention to the primacy of laws, one can detect, at least in the distance, the suggestion raised by Aristotle (*Nichomachean Ethics* Book 10) that the triadic approach to human transformation – signified by the interrelated virtues of instruction, nature, and practice – is secondary to the promulgation and practice of divinely conferred human laws.

Having moved from the 'creation' segment to the 'patriarchs' segment, we turn now to the 'Mosaic' segment of the 'Exposition.' Philo's epistemological discourses are not easy to ascertain, not least because of the scale and scope of the material which falls under his purview. Yet, one can detect a connective thread, namely, the idea that the written laws of Moses collectively represent the perfect counterpart to the unwritten law of nature. On Philo's testimony in this segment, these two sets of laws are presented as divine in origin yet disclosed

for the well-being of humanity. Philo's approach to laws as both universal and particular in scope and substance leads him to enlist one of Plato's most famous epistemological constructs, his ideal of the philosopher-king in Book 5 of the *Republic*.

The exact relationship between this Platonic ideal and Philo's conception of Moses is far from clear. What is offered more explicitly, however, is Philo's keen interest in presenting Moses as the ideal king, lawgiver, prophet and priest, one whose fourfold excellence signifies the paradigmatic philosopher whose quest to know and experience God (*On the Special Laws* 1.32-50) illuminates Philo's account of his first-hand experiences of noetic ascent (*On the Special Laws* 3.1-6). In this vein, Philo exhorts some of his readers to cultivate similar kinds of aspirational notions and practices. The basic idea here is not far removed from what one finds in portrayals of Moses in related Hellenistic Jewish literature, notably Josephus.

6.1.2 Areas of overlap between the two epistemologies

Having considered some major areas of difference between the respective epistemologies, we turn now to significant areas of overlap. Three main areas merit summative attention.

6.1.2.1 Divine incorporeality and incomprehensibility

God is not *anthropos*. Nor can human hands contain or fashion the uncreated God. This insistence on divine incorporeality lies at the core of Philo's epistemological programme. In keeping with this conviction, Philo consistently maintains that the God of Moses, as both Father and Maker of the cosmos, is the one who endows human beings with the cognitive ability (reason) and linguistic means (speech) to *both* conceive *and* speak of immaterial realities in ways suitable to the capacities of each aspirant.

A necessary consequence, in Philo's view, is the belief that the essence of the incorporeal God cannot be grasped by corporeal beings, including the best of created things, the human mind. For Philo, this train of thought carries moral freight: to accept anything other than this anti-anthropomorphic principle is to commit impiety of the worst sort.

6.1.2.2 Divine mediation

In light of the foregoing point, a theology of humility can be detected that runs through both exegetical series. Yet such humility becomes the vehicle for genuine hope in the human quest to know and experience the divine. The exemplary lives and laws offered in the Pentateuch of Moses are invested with

this double dose of humility and hope, with Moses' quest for divine knowledge on Mount Sinai (Exodus 33.13-23) providing Philo with the case study *par excellence*.

All of this yields pragmatic benefits. On Philo's testimony in both series, theological knowledge is therapeutic in character, resulting in happiness (εὐδαιμονία), peace and prosperity at both individual and societal levels. Not unlike some Jewish authors of his day, Philo sees in the writings of Moses a commingling of universal and particular ideals that tick all the boxes of what non-Jews of his day would have seen as the good life.

A key corollary to the above is the idea that knowledge is divinely mediated to aspiring minds. In Philo's reading of Moses' Pentateuch, God can be known, but only to a point. In both series, Philo directs readers to envision a world governed by a preexistent and providential divine being who distributes knowledge of intelligible realities in at least two domains.

One major domain is the physical universe. Though it is a copy of the incorporeal universe, the sensible universe nonetheless relates to the uncreated God by means of incorporeal agents and creative powers. Chief among these agents are the divine spirit and the *Logos*, which is variously conceived as the unwritten law of nature.

Another major domain is the Pentateuch. In Philo's view, the Pentateuch is the divinely inspired perfect counterpart of the law of nature. It is the repository of the unseen mysteries revealed to Moses. In both exegetical series, Philo is prepared to accept the role of human mediators. In the same breath, Philo privileges Moses as the mediator *par excellence* through whom both sets of laws are received and revealed. Moreover, Philo maintains that knowledge of God is pursued both individually and in communal circles, and in keeping with this view, both series take into account humanity's need for knowledge of the divine realities as mediated through what Moses calls 'Israel' (*Allegorical Commentary*) or the 'Jews' ('Exposition').

6.1.2.3 Human rationality

Both series point to Philo's belief that human rationality is an absolutely essential part of one's quest to know and experience the divine.

In the *Allegorical Commentary*, Philo can speak at times of the human mind as having two types of rationality, a divine aspect called 'the reasoning faculty above us' and a human aspect called 'the reasoning faculty within us.' By no means does Philo adhere systematically to this view, but there are enough

instances to suggest that Philo regards the co-operation and harmony of these two parts of the compound mind as representing a state of noetic purity and perfection which in turn leads the mind to further ascent to the divine.

In the 'Exposition,' Philo also approaches the subject of human rationality from a double perspective. This is seen in bits and pieces throughout the series, but perhaps this emerges most clearly in the 'creation' segment of the series. As summarised already, key texts like Genesis 1.27 and 2.7 move Philo to formulate two distinct yet related ways of understanding human rationality. Though he formulates his discourses in each series to suit the distinctive needs of his varied audiences, Philo in both series follows a general bipartite approach to human rationality that appears to be in tune with key philosophical notions of his day.

6.1.3 The epistemological significance of Philo's use of the metaphorical language of mystery initiation

A few paragraphs above (§6.1.1.2), we noted the movements between particularity and universality that feature prominently throughout the 'Exposition.' This tension, however, is not limited to that series of books. In fact, this tension touches on one of the more striking features of the epistemology of

the *Allegorical Commentary*, i.e., Philo's use of the metaphorical language of initiation into divine mysteries.

Chapter 4 considered the question: what, if anything, does Philo's language of initiation into divine mysteries have to do with his theological epistemology? Exploring this broader question led us to detect a more particular question that was significant for Philo and other Middle Platonists of his day: what is the measure of all things? In at least two ways, the exegetical and philosophical reasons for Philo's varied use of this language came into sharper focus when we considered Philo's ways of bringing ideas of Protagoras into conversation with those of Moses.

First, Philo's use of this language corresponds with his wider interest in *de-particularising* the Greek Jewish Bible by investing it with contemporary Middle Platonic commitments. Like other Jewish writers in Alexandria and elsewhere, Philo's interest in departicularising the scriptures fits into a wider apologetic agenda, namely to make a case for the ancient credentials and contemporary intellectual merits of Jewish beliefs and practices.

In line with this agenda, Philo applies the language of mystery initiation to the book of Genesis – the biblical account of the birth and actions of Cain (Gen 4) – in order to engage the challenges associated with the so-called 'measure' doctrine

of Protagoras of Abdera. This doctrine, as it was construed in antiquity, challenged prevailing notions of epistemic authority by eliminating the criterion of absolute truth, endorsing instead a notion of truth that is relative to the one to whom something appears. In the symbolic world of Moses, Protagoras is an offspring of Cain, born out of madness. Those influenced by this way of thinking, Philo insists, must be initiated into the Mosaic way of thinking.

Second, Philo uses this language in ways that correspond with his interest in taking seriously the particularity of noetic ascent as portrayed in the Greek Jewish Bible. This is seen in varied ways, but one striking way is in Philo's frequent recourse to the book of Exodus. Drawing on key knowledge texts from Exodus, Philo uses the language of mystery initiation to re-present key events and experiences of Moses and Israel. From this comes a sense of actualisation: what Moses experienced in the past as the hierophantic leader of Israel can be experienced again to some degree in the lives of keen-sighted disciples who constitute the way of 'Israel' in Philo's own day.

Taken together, these strands of de-particularising and particularising the Greek Jewish Bible of his day enable Philo to achieve two things at once: to present his views regarding Moses in a way congenial to the Middle Platonic schools of his day whilst teaching his more advanced readers of the greater mysteries of Moses.

6.1.4 *The epistemological significance of Philo's use of the metaphorical language of divine inspiration*

The tension considered in Chapter 4 is not the only point of tension animating the epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary*. Another flash point centres on the role of human rationality in the quest to know the divine. As such, Chapter 5 explored the questions: does Moses prescribe only a rational way to knowledge about and from God? If not, to what extent, if any, does Mosaic epistemology allow for non-rational ways of attaining such knowledge? These questions alerted us to a wider debate, longstanding in the history of Greek thought, that centred on the role (and limits) of human reason in relation to the varied phenomena of divine inspiration.

In Chapter 5, we discovered the interwoven relationship between Philo's language of mystery initiation, on the one hand, and his language of divine inspiration, on the other. We learned that Philo conceives of one way of the divinely inspired mind which features the mind's capacity to exert active reason over the bodily passions. In this line of thought, Philo can speak of the mind's capacity to be inspired to a higher order of reasoning whereby it can recognise the passions for what they truly are. This, says Philo, is tantamount to the metaphorical notion of initiation into the lower mysteries of Moses.

Strikingly Philo envisages a second, equally valid, way that the mind can be divinely inspired. It is here that Philo focuses on the eviction of human reason. Although the aspirant in this non-rational state is rendered ecstatic and even unconscious, the upshot is a human experience of divine realities which Philo equates with the highest sort of experience of God.

Chapters 4 and 5, when taken together, show us two of the more remarkable features of the epistemology of the *Allegorical Commentary*, i.e. Philo's metaphorical language of mystery initiation and his language of divine inspiration. Apart from exceptional cases (e.g. *Abr.* 119-22), Philo in the 'Exposition' does not deploy these two metaphors as literary devices nearly as much as he does in the *Allegorical Commentary*. These two case studies, then, further substantiate the main thrust of this thesis, namely, that there are two distinct yet related theological epistemologies in Philo's main exegetical series.

6.2

Evaluation of results

In light of the discoveries summarised above, it is helpful to return to a point raised at the outset of this study. In Chapter 1, we observed Ellen Birnbaum's call to investigate further the different ways Philo writes about key features of his preoccupation with theological knowledge. In what follows we identify four

areas in which our study, a response to Birnbaum's call, sharpens our view of Philonic epistemology.

First, our study confirms and expands M. Niehoff's finding that the *Allegorical Commentary* distinctively trades on Platonic notions of human assimilation and divine impregnation. Our study moves beyond Niehoff's findings by showing that Philo's interest in the assimilation language of Plato's *Theaetetus* is not confined to the *Allegorical Commentary*. In fact, Philo trades on this concept in key discourses on noetic ascent and transformation in the 'creation' segment of the 'Exposition.'

Furthermore, our study confirms the epistemological significance of Philo's twofold use of initiation language and inspiration language, a feature which occurs far more prominently in the *Allegorical Commentary* than in the 'Exposition.' Philo uses these metaphors as epistemological vehicles to explore the notion that Mosaic epistemology involves both the enhancement of human reason (rationality) and the eviction of human reason (non-rationality). Here, our investigation into the nexus between mystery initiation and divine inspiration in Philo builds significantly on the basic contention of C. Noack (2000) that Philo's approach to ecstatic inspiration is far more nuanced than previous studies held, i.e. Jonas (1954). By considering more fully the set of Jewish and non-Jewish ideas that relate to Philo's way of bringing together

human rationality and ecstatic non-rationality as equally valid ways to knowing the divine, our study considerably sharpens the picture of divine inspiration offered in Noack's study.

Next, our study breaks fresh ground in Philonic scholarship by offering, perhaps for the first time, a comprehensive account of the place of Protagoras in Philo's epistemology in the *Allegorical Commentary*. Indeed, our study throws new light on Philo's place as a crucial figure in the reception history of Protagorean epistemological ideas in and beyond Middle Platonic and Jewish fields of thought. No study prior to the present one, as far as I am aware, has identified and examined the exegetical link between Philo's concerns about the measure doctrine of Protagoras, on the one hand, and his exegetical application of mystery language to primary texts from the book of Genesis i.e., the account of Cain in Genesis 4. Our study has shown that Philo, at one level of exegetical encounter with the Mosaic text, is keen to deploy scriptural resources to do what Plato and later tradents could not do (in Philo's view), namely, refute the Protagorean challenge to divine epistemic authority.

Turning to the 'Exposition,' our study in Chapter 3 builds significantly on key findings by A. Kamesar and C. Termini, among others, concerning the significance of Philo's own way of organising and interpreting the Pentateuch as one whole consisting of three distinct segments (creation, patriarchs, Mosaic

laws). In keeping with how Philo offers to read the 'Exposition' and write about theological knowledge within each segment, our study challenges current scholarship to reconsider the sense of coherence and progression of ideas that mark Philo's epistemological discourses in the 'Exposition.' The movement of Mosaic ideas in this series is not unlike what we detect in the writings of other thinkers influential in Philo's day like Plato, Aristotle and Cicero.

Our study also breaks new ground when it comes to appraising the influence that Plato's philosopher-king concept exerts in the 'Exposition.' Our efforts to take seriously Philo's way of cross-referencing his two-book biography of Moses with other books of the 'Exposition' allowed us to trace the contours of the philosopher-king motif in the 'Exposition' more fully than previous studies. This incidentally strengthens a longstanding view that Philo's biography of Moses stands in closer proximity to his 'Exposition' than presently recognised, at least from a thematic (though not necessarily chronological) point of view.

For such reasons, our study of the theological epistemology specific to the 'Exposition' enables us to answer more fully Ellen Birnbaum's question as to why notions of *visio Dei* occur with considerably less frequency in the third segment ('Moses') of the 'Exposition' compared to the 'creation' and 'patriarchs'

segments.¹ As our findings show, this change can be seen as part of Philo's deliberate shift in exegetical and philosophical concentration from prospects of personal *visio Dei* experiences to the primacy of communal laws promulgated in and through an ideal human philosopher-king (Moses). Philo's movement of ideas in the 'Exposition' recalls related movements in the writings of earlier Greek thinkers like Plato and Aristotle and contemporary Roman ones like Cicero.

6.3

Avenues for further research

In light of the findings above, the following avenues of further possible research can be suggested.

6.3.1 The wider Graeco-Roman contexts of Philo's discourses on theological knowledge in the 'Exposition'

Recent years have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the Roman context of some of Philo's later writings, including many of the writings that form the 'Exposition.'² Building on these gains, our findings from Chapter 3 contribute to a

¹ Birnbaum 1996:89 n.83.

² Cf. Berthelot 2011:166-87; Niehoff 2011b:1-21; but see Birnbaum 2002:186-93; Barclay 2003:154-56.

sharper view of the 'Exposition' in the context of Graeco-Roman Judaism. This in turn sheds further light on the distinctive aims and audiences of Philo's 'Exposition' relative to those of his earlier works. In addition, one could further explore similar fields of ideas between key knowledge discourses in the 'Exposition' and pertinent texts in Philo's so-called 'apologetic' works, such as the *Hypothetica*.³

On a more philosophical front, additional work could be done on Philo's way of interpreting the laws of Moses in light of the philosopher-king concept in Plato's *Republic*. A quick glance at relevant bibliographic resources suggests that the reception of this notable Platonic concept in Philo's corpus has not been studied as comprehensively as the subject perhaps merits. This gap is not an insignificant one, given the place of Plato's writings in the 'Exposition' and the ways in which Philo mediated non-Jewish notions of kingship and political rule to later writers in and beyond Alexandria.

³ On this see Sterling 1990:412-30; Cover 2010:183-207. Salient features of Jewish, pagan, and early Christian apologetics in the Roman imperial period are usefully discussed in the collection of essays in Edwards et al. 1999.

6.3.2 *The epistemological significance of prayer in the Allegorical Commentary*

What is noticeably absent in one series ('Exposition') is striking present in the other (*Allegorical Commentary*), namely, Philo's tendency to use *the language of prayer* as part of his discourses on theological knowledge. In light of our findings, one could further explore the question of why many of Philo's discourses end in prayer or prayer-like expressions. Further study of this long neglected aspect⁴ of Philo's thought might shed light on Philo's understanding of the interplay between human reason and prayer in one's quest to know and experience the divine.

Moreover, given the expanding reflection on the role of prayer – both public and private – during the Graeco-Roman period,⁵ a sharper picture of the correlation between theological knowledge and prayer in Philo might further contribute to similar lines of inquiry into expressions of Jewish⁶ and non-Jewish⁷ prayer as found in literature associated with the Second Temple period and beyond.⁸

⁴ Indications of renewed interest in Philonic prayer in Delling 1974:145; Borgen 1999:292.

⁵ Cf. Klinghardt 1999:1-52; Rajak 2009:235-36.

⁶ For an overview and anthology of prayer formulations in Graeco-Roman and Jewish sources: Charlesworth 1994; Egger-Wenzel 2004; Hammerling 2008. On the scripturalization of prayer in Second Temple Judaism: Newman 1999:11-17, 117-200, 210-14. On prayer in Josephus: Jonquière 2007. For prayer in Qumran: Nitzan 1994; Chazon (1994:265-844; 1998:244-70; 2003:35-48); Falk (1998 passim; 1999:852-76); Werline 1998 passim; Schuller 2000:29-45; Sarason 2004:151-72; and most recently

Further study on the relationship between prayer and allegory in antiquity could also prove useful. Allegory, for Philo, allows one to comprehend the divine realities embedded in the Mosaic corpus. With this in mind, it is notable that many of Philo's prayer expressions appear as part of lengthy chains of allegorical thought which feature prominently in the *Allegorical Commentary*. It might be that Philo views prayer as *a corollary of allegory* which allows him to both capture something of the essence of the Mosaic writings and actualise them for his present situation. One might usefully test this hypothesis in conversation with the wider range of data now available as a result of the rising tide of interest among classicists and historians in allegory as both a literary and philosophical topic.⁹

the useful collection of essays in Penner 2012. On Jewish liturgical prayer: Reif 1993 and the collection of early Greek Jewish prayers in Van der Horst/Newman 2008.

⁷ Useful points of entry into this vast area of research include Pulleyn 1996 and Naiden 2006. On prayer in Socrates and Plato: Jackson 1971:14-37; McPherran 2000:89-114.

⁸ Porphyry, for instance, in his fragments of his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*, twice comments at length on references to prayer in Plato's text; cf. Niehoff 2008:169-91 (esp. 189-90).

⁹ Cf. Ramelli 2011:569-78 for an overview of recent works on ancient allegory and its reception through the ages.

6.3.3 *The reception of Protagoras in the allegorical writings of Philo*

Recent decades have witnessed a groundswell of scholarly interest in Protagoras of Abdera as an active part of the long history and development of Platonist thought and traditions.¹⁰ It is worth remembering that in antiquity Protagoras was regarded as a key exponent of a radical form of epistemological relativism which he purportedly formulated in the so-called ‘measure doctrine.’

Scholarly attention is not confined to Protagoras’ influence in antiquity.

Researchers are now reexamining arcs of continuity and discontinuity between early Protagorean relativism and later forms of epistemological relativism in contemporary Anglo-American and continental European thought.¹¹

In Chapter 4, we considered how Protagorean ideas exerted considerable influence on Plato and his later students, not least Aristotle and Philo. We saw that Philo trades on ways of expressing human transformation which were associated in his day with the lore (and allure) of mystery cults and telestic

¹⁰ Cf. Schiappa 1991, who observes: ‘I believe that Protagoras’ role in the development of Plato’s and Aristotle’s metaphysics has been underestimated....Protagoras’ theorizing did more than provide a target for Plato and Aristotle; it provided conceptual tools...that became part of their philosophies. Certain aspects of Protagoras’ relativism were not so much rejected by Plato and Aristotle as they were assimilated’ (p. 194). Works that are representative of this renewed interest include but are not limited to Oehler 2002:207-14; Lee 2005; Zilioli 2007; Castagnoli 2010; Moysan-Lapointe 2010:529-45.

¹¹ Cf. Margolis 1991.

initiation. The language of mystery initiation offered Philo various ways to exploit the biblical figure of Cain (Genesis 4) in a further effort to refute the Protagorean notion that the human agent – her mind or her senses – represents the locus of epistemic authority.

Having said this, there has been minimal, if any, interest in this dimension of Philonic epistemology.¹² Our study has shown, however, that Philo can be regarded as a crucial – and perhaps the sole – witness to the reception of Protagorean ideas in first-century Alexandrian Jewish thought.

Among Second Temple Jewish writers, no one before Philo, it seems, had attempted to bring Mosaic exegetical resources to bear on antecedent responses to Protagoras. Given the place of this topic in Philo's allegorical material and the considerable influence such material exerted on later writers in Alexandria and beyond,¹³ further work could be done on tracing the effective history of some of Philo's exegetical and philosophical approaches to the Protagorean way of human knowing.

¹² For a rough sense of this neglect in the Philonic guild, it might be worth noting that not a single entry on Protagoras appears in any of the subject indices of the three major bibliographies on Philo. These bibliographies cover a period of almost seventy years (1937-2006).

¹³ Cf. Siegfried 1875, esp. 303-99; Solignac 1984:1366-74; more recently: Runia 1993a (esp. pp. 348-56 for a useful listing of references to Philo in subsequent literature).

6.3.4 *The varieties of epistemological approaches and discourses in cognate Jewish and early Christian literature*

Having shown the existence of two distinct theological epistemologies in Philo's exegetical series, the findings of this study can be brought into deeper conversation with cognate Jewish and early Christian texts which, despite many generic and contextual differences, nonetheless cast light on first-century approaches to theological knowledge.¹⁴ This could prove useful in light of recent advances in our understanding of the varied interests presented in key knowledge texts from Qumran,¹⁵ Pauline Christianity,¹⁶ Gnosticism,¹⁷ and early Jewish mystical literature.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cf. Siegert 2009:175-209 recently identifies the importance of 'knowledge of God, natural and revealed' as a key topic in his comparison of Philo and various New Testament writings (see especially pp. 185-86, 192, 198, 206-07); a more specific comparison of respective exegetical tendencies in Philo and Paul can be found in Wan 1994:54-82.

¹⁵ Cf. Berg 2008 on the presence of distinct epistemologies in the *Hodayot* and two related Dead Sea Scroll texts (i.e. 4QInstruction, the Discourse on the Two Spirits of the Community Rule). On the epistemological and identity-forming functions of prayer in the *Hodayot*, Newsom 2004:191-286.

¹⁶ Cf. Bockmuehl 1990 for discussion of key epistemological discourses and developments in ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity; also Gladd 2008.

¹⁷ Cf. Dunderberg 2008.

¹⁸ Cf. Rowland/Murray-Jones 2009.

Toward the end of her acclaimed study of ‘what various groups [in Qumran] did socially with their knowledge of torah,’¹⁹ Carol Newsom casts her gaze further afield and suggestively remarks:

The significance of different ways of knowing, of the different objects of knowledge, and of different transactions in knowledge among the various groups and authors of Second Temple Judaism should be evident even from this brief study, though it warrants a more detailed investigation than I have been able to provide here.²⁰

Our findings on different ways of theological knowing in Philo’s exegetical corpus could contribute to the kinds of comparative and contextual work Newsom envisages. In a related vein, one could also look at the footprints of Philo’s key discourses on theological knowledge in later Alexandrian writings (e.g. Clement and Origen), to see whether and how later discourses relate, if at all, to what this thesis has mapped in more detail, namely the co-existence of two distinct theological epistemologies in Philo’s main exegetical series.

* * *

¹⁹ Newsom 2004:347 (reference in brackets added).

²⁰ Newsom 2004:347.

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References to the works of Plato. In order to facilitate comparison between references to Plato in this thesis and other editions, Greek or in translation, I have used the 'Stephanus numbers' that are commonly used in scholarly references to the works of Plato. These numbers and letters indicate the corresponding page and section on that page of the relevant volume of the Greek text of Plato as edited (Paris, 1578) by Henri Estienne (*in Latin*, Stephanus). In general I have relied on the Loeb Classical Library volumes of Plato.

References to the works of Aristotle. For ease of reference, the 'Bekker' numbering system has been used throughout this thesis. 'Bekker' references are found in most editions of Aristotle's works. They are based on the Berlin Academy edition of the Greek text (1831-70) edited by Immanuel Bekker. For English translations of Aristotle, in general I have used the Loeb Classical Library edition (Harvard),

though at times I have used the Revised Oxford Translation of Aristotle edited by J. Barnes (Princeton, 1984). In latter instances, the Barnes text has been referenced in the footnotes.

References to later Greek and Latin texts associated with so-called ‘Hellenistic philosophy’ (272 – 31 BCE) are taken in the first instance from *Long/Sedley’s* two-volume *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (1987). See below for full bibliographic information. Also see pages 1-9 of Volume 1 for discussion of definition and scope of the term ‘Hellenistic philosophy.’

For ancient authors and works, abbreviations and chronological data (date of birth; date of death) supplied in the thesis follow the conventions set out in the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2012). Abbreviations for biblical authors and works follow the conventions set out in the *SBL Handbook of Style* (Hendrickson 1999).

Following the conventions of *The Studia Philonica Annual*, each Philonic work is abbreviated in the thesis according to the following list (organised alphabetically). Our way of numbering each Philonic reference generally follows the edition of Cohn and Wendland, i.e. Arabic numbers only and full stops rather than colons (e.g. *Spec.* 4.123). The conventional abbreviations are as follows:

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>De aeternitate mundi</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De agricultura</i>
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>De animalibus</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De Cherubim</i>
<i>Contempl.</i>	<i>De vita contemplative</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De confusione linguarum</i>

<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De Decalogo</i>
<i>Deo</i>	<i>De Deo</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>In Flaccum</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De gigantibus</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>
<i>Hypoth.</i>	<i>Hypothetica</i>
<i>Jos.</i>	<i>De Josepho</i>
<i>Leg. All. 1-3</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae I, II, III</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Mos. 1-2</i>	<i>De vita Moysis I, II</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De mutatione nominum</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis, De execrationibus</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>
<i>Prov. 1-2</i>	<i>De Providentia I, II</i>
<i>QE 1-2</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum I, II</i>
<i>QG 1-4</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim I, II, III, IV</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Sobr.</i>	<i>De sobrietate</i>
<i>Somn. 1-2</i>	<i>De somniis I, II</i>
<i>Spec. 1-4</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus I, II, III, IV</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus</i>

In addition the standard works listed below are abbreviated as follows:

ANRW	Haase, W. and H. Temporini, eds. <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> . Berlin; New York: W. de Gruyter.
BDAG	Danker, F., ed. 2000 <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature</i> . Third edition. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
CAG	Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca
CC	Corpus Christianorum
CJ	<i>Classical Journal</i>
CQ	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
DK	Diels, Hermann, and Walther Kranz, eds. 1951. <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> . 6th ed. 3 vols. Berlin: Weidmann.
DL	Diogenes Laertius. 1925. <i>Lives of Eminent Philosophers</i> . Trans. by R. D. Hicks. 2 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Dox. Gr.	Diels, H., ed. 1929. <i>Doxographi Graeci</i> . Berlin; Leipzig.
G & R	<i>Greece and Rome</i>
GCS	Harnack, A. von. and T. Mommsen et al., eds. 1891-1995. <i>Die Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte</i> . Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.
GELS	Muraoka, T. 2009. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Louvain: Peeters.
ISF	<i>Incertae sedis fragmenta</i> (unidentified fragments)
LEH	Lust, J. and E. Eynikel and K. Hauspie. 2003. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
LS	Long, A., and D. Sedley, eds. 1987. <i>The Hellenistic Philosophers</i> . 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
LSJ	Lidell, H.G., R. Scott, and H.S. Jones, eds. 1996. <i>A</i>

	<i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9th ed. with revised supplements. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
OCD	Hornblower, S. and A. Spawforth, eds. 2012. <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> . Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
PCW	<i>Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt</i> . 1896—1915. Ed. by L. Cohn, P. Wendland, and S. Reiter. 6 vols. Berlin: George Reimer.
PG	Migne, J. ed. 1857-1886. <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i> . 162 vols. Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner.
PLCL	Philo. 1929-1953. <i>Works</i> . Trans. by F. Colson, G. Whitaker, and R. Marcus. 12 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
SPhA	<i>The Studia Philonica Annual</i>
SVF	Arnim, H. von., ed. 2004. <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> . Volumes 1-4. Leipzig: K.G. Saur München.

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APPENDIX A

‘How to Read Philo’

In his 1986 essay, ‘How to Read Philo’ (see bibliography for full details), David Runia, a leading Philonic expert, offered readers a useful set of four main procedures on ‘how to go about reading Philo.’ Taken together, they represent a widely accepted approach to Philo’s voluminous writings and the complex ideas and themes reflected in them. For ease of reference, each procedure has been summarised with page references to Runia’s more detailed explanation.

1. When a particular subject is dealt with, all the relevant passages must be taken into account (p. 193).
2. Special attention should be paid to the exegetical context (p. 193).
3. The exegetical problem underlying the discussion must be determined (p. 193).
4. The philosophical ideas enlisted by Philo should be identified and then related to the exegetical *locus* under discussion (p. 193-94)

APPENDIX B

Philo's approach to human knowledge about and from God in the *Questions and Answers in Genesis and Exodus*

This section offers a brief survey of salient knowledge texts in Philo's *Questions and Answers on Genesis* ('QG') and *Questions and Answers on Exodus* ('QE')(collectively referred to as 'QGE'). Using the genre of questions and answers that commonly featured in philosophical compositions of Philo's day, the QGE is intended for readers associated variously with school or synagogue environments.¹ Though formulated in numerous ways, the primary thrust of the QGE is the principle that 'the beginning and end of happiness is to be able to see God' (QE 2.51).

In formulating this principle, Philo focuses on two figures, Enoch and Moses, both of whom represent distinct paradigms for human aspiration to knowledge of God. On the one hand, the ascent of Enoch prompts Philo's usage of the language of Plato (c. 429-347 BCE) to portray the aspiring mind as one moving 'from a sensible and visible place to an incorporeal and intelligible form' (QG 1.86).² On the other hand, the ascent of Moses invites Philo's reflection on the

¹ Cf. Royse 2009:33-35.

² Cf. Borgen 1998:250-51 for discussion of this text in connection with wider Enoch traditions in proximate Jewish sources. VanderKam 1995:148-52 surveys Philonic passages, including QG 1.82-86, as part of his study of ancient Jewish and Christian references to Enochic themes of transformation. Among the many references to Enochic

prophetic mind of Moses as a paragon for noetic aspiration (*QE* 2.28, 40).³

Underlying both paradigms is the view that human knowledge and vision of God is attainable (*QE* 2.40), but only when the mind is endowed by God with a measure of spiritual sight and constancy which derives from wisdom and virtue (*QE* 2.51).

Such prospects, however, are limited in the corporeal realm of existence. Even in optimal circumstances, the mind cannot access or ascend to the apex of theological knowledge, God Himself (*QE* 2.45). Philo takes this as axiomatic, but in the *QGE* he nonetheless offers numerous instances of – and indeed an insistence upon – the mitigating role of the divine *Logos* and the revelatory functions of an accompanying class of intermediaries (*QE* 2.68).

The diagram below summarises Philo's scheme of divine mediation in the *QGE*:

ascension in biblical and inter-testamental literature, key passages include Gen 5.24; Wis 4.10-11; 1 En. 39.3ff, 70-71; Heb 11.5; *1 Clem.* 9.3.

³ Cf. Segal 1980:1358 for discussion of this passage as evidence for the claim that 'the chief model for heavenly ascent is Moses for Philo'; similar discussion of this and other Philonic evidence is found in Menken 1988:49-57 and Mack 1995:16-28. Relevant biblical and inter-testamental references include Exod 33.11; Num 12.7-8; Deut 34.10-12.

Diagram B.1

Levels of mediation in the Mosaic universe of ideas (*QG* §2.68)

Levels	Aspect of Divine Mediation	
A (highest)	Speaker (= God Existent)	
B	<i>Logos</i> of God	
C	Creative Power of God	Ruling Power of God
D	Beneficent Power of God	Punitive Power of God
E (lowest)	World of Ideas (or the intelligible cosmos)	

This scheme allows Philo to place considerable weight on Level B as the conceptual domain in which the *Logos* structure of Stoic thought is closely related with the *Nous* structure of Platonic thought.⁴ This commingling of ideas, in Philo's reckoning, mitigates the impassable gulf between the Mosaic God who is unknowable in his essence, on the one hand, and human aspirants who with their minds yearn to know God (Exod 33.13-23), on the other hand. What results is the idea – appearing in seed form in the *QGE* but blooming in varied ways in later exegetical series⁵ – that the human mind comes to know God as monad who appears as a triad (cf. *QG* 4.2).

⁴ Cf. Segal 1980:1355.

⁵ Especially in *Cher.* 9, 27f; *Fug.* 18. 95, 100. The relationship between *QGE* and the two other commentary series is a matter of considerable debate and uncertainty. Scholarly consensus has been reached on several issues, such as genre and implied/real audiences. For overview on these issues, see Thorne 1989. To get a sense of the ongoing discussion, compare Méasson and Cazeaux 1991:125-225 (arguing that *QGE* is

APPENDIX C

Sampling of Philonic remarks on allegory in the 'Exposition'

C.1 On the figural or symbolic nature of allegory:

The literal interpretation of any Mosaic text 'applies to the man' whilst the allegorical 'applies to the soul' (*On Abraham* §88, concerning Genesis 12.9).

'For knowledge loves to learn and advance to full understanding and its way is to seek the hidden meaning rather than the obvious' (*On the Decalogue* §1, concerning Exodus 20.3-17).

'Words in their plain sense are symbols of things latent and obscure' (*On the Special Laws* §1.200, concerning Leviticus 1.3f).

C.2 On the suitability of allegory for some but not all readers of Moses:

Allegorical elements in any Mosaic text are 'obscure to the many but recognised by those who prefer the mental to the sensible and have the power to see it' (*On Abraham* §200, concerning Genesis 22.1-19).

catechetical material which is further developed as theological discourse in the *Allegorical Commentary*) with Wan 1992 *passim* (contending that *Questions in Genesis and Exodus* were not written as preparatory notes for the *Allegorical Commentary* but rather each are independent commentaries with varying degrees of tolerance to mythical material and sophistication in theological formulations).

An allegorical reading of a Mosaic text is less suitable to 'younger ears' and more suitable for 'elders and those whose character is fully developed' (*On the Special Laws* §§3.134-136, concerning the manslaughter rule and death of high priest).

Allegory is for 'those who can contemplate facts stripped of the body and in naked reality, those who live with the soul rather than with the body' (*On Abraham* §236, concerning Genesis 14).

C.3 On the practice and constraints of allegory:

'Examine the more allegorical meaning after the literal' (*On Joseph* §125, concerning Genesis 41.1-46).

A Mosaic text can generate multiple allegorical interpretations (e.g. *On Joseph* §§151-156); at times, rival interpretations occur (e.g. *On Abraham* §178; §253; *On Joseph* §125).

The meanings of some Mosaic laws cannot be fully retrieved, even with the best use of allegory (see e.g. *On the Creation of the Cosmos* §145; *On the Decalogue* §18).

APPENDIX D

Aspects of Philo's core vocabulary for divine inspiration in the *Allegorical Commentary*

Two interconnected questions are considered here. First, what are the specific words Philo employs in his engagement with notions of divine inspiration?

Second, in what mode of exegesis (primary exegesis; secondary exegesis) does each of the words occur?

The first question is addressed in Diagram D.1. Key terms in Philo's language of divine inspiration are identified and ranked by frequency.

Diagram D.1

Philo's core vocabulary for divine inspiration in the *Allegorical Commentary*

No.	Greek term for inspiration	Total occurrences in Allegorical Commentary
1	αὐτομαθής *	30
2	κατέχω	23
3	μανία ¹	15
4	καταπνέω *	12
5	θεοφόρητος*	10
6	ἐνθουσιάζω *	9

¹ *Mig.* 84; *Her.* 249, 264-65; *Fug.* 168; *Mut.* 39; *Somn.* 1.56, 1.254; *Somn.* 2.2. The standard term in the classical period for madness or insanity: occurs 30x in Plato (cf. Moss 1967:714 n.30). For a representative passage for Plato's construal of *paranoia*, see e.g. *Laws* 929d-e.

7	ἐνθους *	8
8	ἔκστασις	7
9	ἐπιθειάζω *	5
10	κατοκωχή *	5
11	θεοφορέω *	5
12	ἐνθουσιασμός *	3
13	κορυβαντιάω *	3
14	κατοχή *	2
15	ἐπιθειασμός *	2
16	θεοληπτέομαι *	1

Most of Philo's vocabulary – 13 of 16 terms as noted above with an asterisk (*) – are not to be found in the Greek Jewish Bible. This suggests, at a minimum, the fundamentally extra-biblical character of Philo's inspiration vocabulary. This is not inconsistent with the findings of Belletti who has shown that Philo's vocabulary of divine inspiration derives principally from Plato's *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, and *Symposium*.² Philo's integration of terms from the Greek Jewish Bible – especially ἔκστασις and μανία – reflects an interest in validating phenomena associated with human non-rationality.

On the basis of Diagram D.1 above, what more can we say about how he uses these words as part of his exegetical strategies? Diagram D.2 below expands the

² Cf. Belletti 1983:77-78. Burkhardt 1988:152-71 asserts that Philo's theory of inspiration, divided into three stages, may have been influenced by the conflation of two sources: (i) Plato's notion of frenzy as presented in *Ion* 533 D-534 D, and (ii) the threefold theory of dreams propounded by the Stoic philosopher Posidonius (cf. Cicero, *De divination* 1.64). More generally see Whitlock 2002. For more on Philo's theory of three types of prophecy in relation to similar themes in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, see Winston 2002.

data presented in Diagram D.1 and shows that Philo uses the language of inspiration as part of his proof-texting method. In most cases, Philo uses the language of divine inspiration as part of his secondary mode of exegesis on the book of Genesis.

It is useful to recall one of the main findings in Chapter 4. We observed that Philo's use of the language of mystery initiation occurs as part of his secondary mode of exegesis of Genesis.

Diagram D.2
Philo's core vocabulary for divine inspiration
in the *Allegorical Commentary*
(classified according to primary/secondary model of exegesis)

No.	Greek term that Philo uses in his accounts of divine inspiration	Total number of occurrences in <i>Allegorical Commentary</i>	# of times Philo uses the term in his exegesis of a main biblical text	# of times Philo uses the term as part of his chain of secondary proof material	# of times Philo uses the term in the preface of a treatise
1	αὐτομαθής *	30	10	20	-
2	κατέχω	23	7	16	-
3	μανία ³	12	3	8	1
4	καταπνέω *	12	2	10	-
5	θεοφόρητος*	10	0	9	1
6	ἐνθουσιάζω *	9	2	6	1
7	ἐνθους *	8	1	7	-
8	ἔκστασις	7	3	4	-

³ Mig. 84; Her. 249, 264-65; Fug.168; Mut. 39; Somn. 1.56, 1.254; Somn. 2.2. The standard term in the classical period for madness or insanity: occurs 30x in Plato (cf. Moss 1967:714 n.30). For a representative passage for Plato's construal of *paranoia*, see e.g. *Laws* 929d-e.

9	ἐπιθειάζω *	5	0	5	-
10	κατοκωχή *	5	1	4	-
11	θεοφορέω *	5	0	4	1
12	ἐνθουσιασμός *	3	0	3	-
13	κορυβαντιάω *	3	0	2	1
14	κατοχή *	2	0	2	-
15	ἐπιθειασμός *	2	0	2	-
16	θεοληπτέομαι *	1	0	1	-
TOTAL		137	29 21.2%	103 75.2%	5 3.6%

Diagram D.2 illustrates at least *two key features* of Philo's language of divine inspiration. First, in describing the agency and inspiration of the divine spirit, Philo prefers to use terms that derive from antecedent notions of the gods and their power to inspire the human mind (i.e. ἐνθουσιάζω, ἐνθουσιασμός, ἔνθους, and related terms) more often than terms that derive from the field of medicine, i.e. ἔκστασις.⁴

Second, in the vast majority of cases (75%), Philo uses these words as part of his secondary proof-texting of the book of Genesis. In other words, Philo's language of inspiration more often than not arises when Philo is exploring the meaning of a Genesis text with recourse to other texts from the Greek Jewish Bible.

⁴ A term that did not gain widespread currency until long after Plato's day, so Angus 1966:101. This point is further confirmed by the fact that the term *ekstasis* does not appear in Leonard Brandwood's *Word Index to Plato* (1976). Aristotle uses the language of ecstasy to describe persons whose minds are not normally 'given to thinking' and 'liable to derangement', hence vulnerable to outside influence during sleep (*On Divination in Sleep* 464a); also *Problems* 30.1 wherein 'Aristotle' describes Heracles' melancholy as a state marked by 'frenzy (*ekstasis*) towards his children.'

Far less frequently does the primary text of Genesis provoke Philo to use this metaphorical language. When Philo is provoked in this way, the account of Abraham's experience in Genesis 15.12 – more than any other text from that book – serves as his scriptural basis. Indeed, except for Genesis 12.4, Philo hardly, if ever, clusters two or more inspiration terms, as Diagram D.3 illustrates:

Diagram D.3

Texts from the Book of Genesis that prompt Philo's use of inspiration terms

Inspiration terminology	αὐτομαθής	κατέχω	ἐκστασις	μανία	ἐνθουσιάζω	καταπνέω	ἐνθους	κατοκωχή
Passages from the book of Genesis that prompt Philo to use the following inspiration words	2.16	2.8	2.19 2.21			3.24		
	4.19	4.1, 2 4.16						
	9.21	12.4			12.4	15.4		
		15.12	15.12	15.12	15.12		15.12	15.12
	15.16							
	17.1	17.16						
	17.20							
	28.11 28.13							
	37.7— 10							
		40.9— 11						