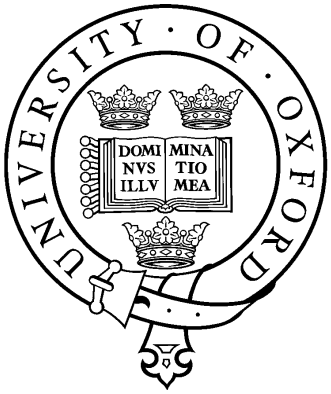
VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE WORKS OF PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA



Phoebe Elisabeth Makiello
The Queen's College
University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Trinity Term 2009

ABSTRACT: VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE WORKS OF PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

Much has been written concerning visions of God in Philo. Little has been said concerning the mechanism by which Philo conceives the eye of the soul perceives in the intelligible realm. It is the contention of this thesis that the means whereby intelligibles are perceived, namely through a mental process which entails a certain degree of understanding, and indeed mastery, of the thing perceived, leads Philo to reject utterly the possibility that a transcendent God might be the object of such noetic perception. This thesis therefore moves beyond the observation, noted by many previous scholars, that Philo considered visions of God problematic to an attempt to explain exactly why this was so. The causes, I argue, are to be found in Philo's marriage of a Platonic anthropology and cosmology with certain Stoic notions concerning apprehension. The thesis therefore progresses from a consideration of the way in which the human mind perceives and understands to an explanation as to why it is not able to function normally in relation to God. It then proceeds to examine appropriate ways in which, according to Philo, God may be perceived and comprehended. I conclude that the most important experiences of the divine, whilst undertaken by the purified mind, are divested by Philo of all visionary symbolism and no longer reflect any great yearning for knowledge.

ABBREVIATIONS OF PHILO'S TREATISES

Abr.	*De Abrahamo*
Aet.	*De Aeternitate mundi*
Agr.	*De Agricultura*
Anim.	*De Animalibus*
Cher.	*De Cherubim*
Conf.	*De Confusione Linguarum*
Congr.	*De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia*
Contempl.	*De Vita Contemplativa*
Decal.	*De Decalogo*
Deo.	*De Deo*
Det.	*Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat*
Deus	*Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis*
Ebr.	*De Ebrietate*
Flacc.	*In Flaccum*
Fug.	*De Fuga et Inventione*
Gig.	*De Gigantibus*
Her.	*Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit*
Hypoth.	*Hypothetica*
Ios.	*De Iosepho*
Leg. i- iii	*Legum Allegoriae* i- iii
Legat.	*Legatio ad Gaium*
Migr.	*De Migratione Abrahami*
Mos. i- ii	*De Vita Mosis* i- ii
Mut.	*De Mutatione Nominum*
Opif.	*De Opificio Mundi*
Plant.	*De Plantatione*
Post.	*De Posteritate Caini*
Praem.	*De Praemiis et Poenis, De Exsecrationibus*
Prob.	*Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit*
Prov. i- ii	*De Providentia* i- ii
QE i- ii	*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum* i- ii

QG i- iv	*Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim* i- iv
Sacr.	*De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*
Sobr.	*De Sobrietate*
Somn. i- ii	*De Somniis* i- ii
Spec. i- iv	*De Specialibus Legibus* i- iv
Virt.	*De Virtutibus*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION OF SECONDARY LITERATURE 1

I. 1. Introduction 1

I. 2. Methodology 4

I. 3. Analysis of previous discussions concerning Visions and knowledge in Philo 5

I. 4. Summary of the secondary literature relating to visions and knowledge 18

4. 1 *Visions of God* 18

4. 2 *The visionary experience: How might one perceive the Logos and the Powers?* 19

4. 3 *Type of Vision* 20

4. 4 *Visions and Knowledge* 21

I. 5. The contribution of this thesis 23

II. VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE NON-BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS OF PHILO 25

II. 1. Chapter 1: What constitutes a visionary experience in Philo's works? What are the epistemological implications? 25

1. 1 αἰσθητός κόσμος and νοητός κόσμος 26

1. 2 The place of heaven in Philo 27

1. 3 Man as a bridge between αἰσθητός κόσμος and νοητός κόσμος 35

1. 3. 1. Body and Soul 35

1. 3. 2. Mind and the senses 36

1. 3. 2. 1 *Terminology* 37

1. 3. 2. 2 *The soul as tripartite* 38

1. 3. 2. 3 *The soul divided between rational and irrational elements* 39

1. 3. 3 Visions and the eye of the soul: The perceptual role of mind 43

1. 3. 3. 1 *Terminology* 44

1. 3. 3. 2 *The perceptual role of mind* 45

1. 3. 3. 2. a The inadequacy of bodily sight: reasons and consequences 45

1. 3. 3. 2. b Why is the soul able to see in the νοητός κόσμος? An account of the nature and characteristics of the mind. 48

1. 3. 3. 2. c The mind as another kind of sense 56

1. 3. 3. 3 *Mechanisms* 58

1. 3. 3. 3. a The eye of the soul is able to see in the intelligible world without the assisstance of anything else 58

1. 3. 3 .3. b κατάληψις as an operation of the mind. 61

II. 2. Chapter 2: Visions of God in Philo 77

2. 1 The Existent and his Powers as invisible and incomprehensible 78

2. 1. 1 Is it possible to experience a vision of God? Can one apprehend God's essence or even behold God? 79

2. 2 Why God's essence cannot be known 85

2. 2. 1 The inadequacy of language and the unknowability of God 85

2. 2. 2 The material sphere cannot bring God down to its level 87

2. 2. 3 Humans lack an adequate organ by which the Existent might be perceived 89

2. 2. 4 God cannot be contained but transcends all 92

2. 2. 5 Why God's essence cannot be known: conclusions 94

2. 3 Seeing God and the quest to discern the nature of the Existent 95

2. 3. 1 Israel as "one who sees God" in Philo and God as intelligible to the mind 95

2. 3. 2 Discovering wisdom: an encounter with the divine logos as a stage in the visionary's progress towards seeing God 97

2. 3. 3 Different levels of divine vision and the possibility of beholding the Existent 98

2. 3. 4 The quest for the vision of God's essence and the contemplation of the Existent with clear vision 99

2. 3. 5 Human visions of the Existent: fleeting and limited 103

2. 3. 6 Conceptions of God 105

2. 3. 7 Faith 110

2. 3. 8 Scepticism concerning the possibility of visions of the Existent and distinctions between different visions of God 111

II. 3 Chapter 3: The epistemological significance of different types of vision in Philo 113

3. 1 Distinctions between dream visions and waking visions with regard to acquiring knowledge 114

3. 2 Philo's distinction between three categories of dream 116

3. 3 Ascent of the soul and visions of the intelligble world 118

3. 4 Ascent visions of God and immortality 129

3. 5 Visions experienced during divine indwelling or inspiration of the soul 132

II. 4 Chapter 4: Philo's understanding of memory 140

4. 1 Memory as a faculty 140

4. 2 An impression on the soul 143

4. 3 The ethical dimension 145

4. 4 Memories of God and of the intelligible world 147

4. 4. 1 References to "θεοῦ μνήμη" in Philo 147

4. 4. 2 Impressions on the mind of the image of God or of the Powers 149

4. 4. 2. 1 All humans possess an imprint of the image of God, though in some it is corrupted 150

4. 4. 2. 2 Conceiving of God and the existence of different degrees of purity of impression 152

4. 4. 2. 3 Initiation in the greater mysteries 153

4. 4. 2. 4 The ascent of purified minds allows initiates to experience greater closeness to God and sometimes a vision of the First Cause 154

4. 4. 2. 5 The mysteries and the purification of the mind 158

III. MOSES' VISIONARY EXPERIENCES IN DE VITA MOSIS 160

III. 1 Chapter 1: Visions and Knowledge in De Vita Mosis Book I 161

1. 1 Moses' first vision 161

1. 2 Moses' second vision 173

1. 2. 1 Moses' titles and his relationship with God 173

1. 2. 2 Entering the darkness 176

1. 2. 2. 1 *The imagery of darkness and light and the limits of Moses' capacity to perceive and apprehend in Mos. i. 158* 177

1. 2. 2. 2 *Why Moses can neither apprehend nor look down upon God's essence* 180

1. 2. 2. 3 *κατανοέω and ἔννοια in the context of religious experience in Philo* 182

1. 2. 2. 4 *Moses' perception of the divine: conceiving but not apprehending* 191

1. 2. 2. 5 *What does Moses really perceive and experience in Mos. i. 158?* 195

III 2: Chapter 2: Visions and knowledge in De Vita Mosis Book II 199

2. 1 Philo's account of Moses' vision at Sinai/ Horeb 199

2. 1. 1 The vision 199

2. 1. 2 Preparing the mind 202

2. 1. 3 Rebirth as pure mind and revelation 204

IV. SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS 209

IV. 1 Summaries and Conclusions 209

1. 1 What constitutes a visionary experience in Philo's works? What are the epistemological implications? 209

1. 2 Visions of God in Philo 210

1. 3 The epistemological significance of different types of vision in Philo 213

1. 4 Philo's understanding of memory 215

1. 5 Visions and Knowledge in De Vita Mosis Book I 217

1. 6 Visions and knowledge in De Vita Mosis Book II 219

IV. 2 Final word 222

BIBLIOGRAPHY 223

I. INTRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION OF SECONDARY LITERATURE

I.1. *INTRODUCTION*

Much has been written concerning visions of God in Philo. Little has been said concerning the mechanism by which according to Philo, the eye of the soul may perceive in the intelligible realm. It is the contention of this thesis that the means whereby intelligibles are perceived, namely that it is through a mental process which entails a certain degree of understanding, and indeed mastery, of the thing perceived, leads Philo to reject utterly the possibility that a transcendent God might be the object of such noetic perception. This thesis therefore moves beyond the observation, noted by many previous scholars, that Philo considered visions of God problematic to an attempt to explain exactly why this was so. The causes, I argue, are to be found in Philo's marriage of a Platonic anthropology and cosmology with certain Stoic notions concerning apprehension. The thesis therefore progresses from a consideration of the way in which the human mind perceives and understands to an explanation as to why it is not able to function normally in relation to God. It then proceeds to examine appropriate ways in which, according to Philo, God may be perceived and comprehended. I conclude that the most important experiences of the divine, whilst undertaken by the purified mind, are divested of all visionary symbolism and no longer reflect any great yearning for knowledge.

This thesis begins by investigating aspects of Philo's cosmology and anthropology which indicate that there is a great gulf between human beings, who are part of the sensory and material world, and those things which are part of the intelligible world and can be apprehended by the mind alone. I then focus upon the reasons why and the means whereby this gulf, which is no longer solely metaphysical but also epistemological, might be bridged. The ordinary senses, even when deployed by exceptional humans, are no longer adequate for the perception of the divine. It is a process of the mind, κατάληψις, which, illuminated by the divine light, enables the seer to acquire some distinct apprehensions of intelligibles.

In the second chapter, it is argued that the very process by which non-sensory objects are perceived entails an understanding of them that cannot apply in the case of God.

In this chapter I investigate the ways in which Philo nonetheless admits that humans may undergo meaningful visionary experiences of the divine and I explore the tension in his works between the impossibility of apprehending God and the human yearning for a vision of the Existent. Dillon has pointed to the concept in Philo's writings of the inadequacy of reason and has rightly argued that only the kind of seeing that is proper to the Israel soul will enable any comprehension of God. In addition, the role of faith, reliance upon God and the guidance of the divine reason can be shown to play a crucial role in illuminating and purifying the mind of the visionary and leading it towards God.

The third chapter investigates whether different sorts of vision, waking or sleeping entail different epistemological outcomes. Whilst this is the case in many ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts, where Philo is concerned, because the human condition is always subject to change, the mind must therefore seek to abandon those bodily and sensory things which hinder it from closeness to God. It is apparent that both the type of soul and determination to abandon material concerns correlate to the level of vision which might be experienced. Study of ideas about memory in Philo demonstrates that he also draws a distinction between souls which preserve a genuine memory or impression of the image of God, and those in which it is base or corrupted. Significantly, the same relationship between the quality of the impression or memory and the ability to ascend towards God can be discovered.

Whilst the first four chapters are largely thematically arranged, the final two chapters attempt to follow Moses' progress as a visionary as described in the biographical treatise *Vita Mosis*. As Philo considered Moses to be have experienced the closest possible relationship which a human being might have with God, this approach enables me to explore whether the cognitive limits to which all human beings are held apply also to Moses.

Several conclusions reached by this study do not differ widely from those reached by previous commentators concerning Philo's understanding of visions and knowledge: visions of God are limited to perceptions that he does exist; it is important to attain a direct intuition of the existence of God as opposed merely to reasoning from the

observation of a created world to the existence of a creator; Moses is, until the very end of his life when he is resolved into pure mind, held to the same limitations as other human beings.

I do however emphasise to a greater degree the importance of ascent visions as a means of transcending human boundaries, since I argue that for Philo, human minds are hampered in their progress towards God by bodies and sensory desires. This leads him to emphasise the role of the divine spirit as a guide and reliance upon faith in God. Furthermore, I introduce the notion that Philo's understanding of memory plays a part in the human approach to the divine, so that the conception of God's existence and the experience of an ascent vision are depicted in several passages as possible because the human mind is imprinted with a memory of the divine image.

I.2 *METHODOLOGY*

Whilst analysing all passages which refer to a vision experience, by which I mean a visual experience of a supernatural nature, whether embedded within a dream or whether the seer is awake, I will bear in mind the work of D. T. Runia on "How to Read Philo"[1]. He notes that one should take into account the exegetical context of each passage, when Biblical verses are being interpreted, as well as noting thematic context. One ought also to establish the exegetical problem that gives rise to Philo's interpretation and to try to understand the ideas that Philo deploys and how he uses them in interpreting a passage.

I will not merely be analysing passages which depict visions, but also attempting to analyse the use of particular terms employed by Philo in association with visions. Here, I shall compare the use of terminology in Philo with usage in the LXX and Greek philosophy and literature, so as to understand both the type of knowledge which Philo believed was available through different sorts of vision experiences and in order better to appreciate which influences his writings were subject to.

Birnbaum sets out two additional criteria with which to read Philo: an awareness of the possibility that Philo may be adapting his presentation to suit a particular audience or genre, and a recognition that some of Philo's interpretations may derive from traditional Jewish exegesis. Although both of her suggestions are possible, they remain conjectural; this applies particularly to the latter point, as she herself somewhat acknowledges[2]. Nonetheless, they are important to bear in mind if one wishes to avoid the trap of unquestioningly systematising Philo's work[3].

---

1 Runia, David T, "How to Read Philo" in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986) 185- 98, reprinted in *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (1990).

2 Birnbaum, E., *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought,* Georgia: Brown Judaic Studies, Studia Philonica Monographs (1996), 23: "Philo's work also relies upon Jewish exegesis that developed well before him. Here the difficulty presented by the paucity of sources can hardly be overstated."

3 Goodenough, E. R, "Problems of Method in Studying Philo Judaeus" in *JBL* 58 (1939) 51- 58.

I.3 *ANALYSIS OF PREVIOUS DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN PHILO*

Because the vision of God holds such a prominent place in Philo's works, much of the secondary literature on the subject of visions in the works of Philo concerns itself exclusively with that particular sort of vision. Furthermore, because Philo sometimes refers to the possibility of union with the divine, much of the secondary material relating to visionary experience in Philo deals with his purported mystical theology.

E. R. Goodenough

In *By Light, Light*, Goodenough argues that Philo's Judaism is essentially a mystery religion which offers a "distinctly non-Jewish type of salvation", whereby "the spirit is released from the flesh in order to return to its spiritual source in God"[4]. He posits two main types of mystery in Philo, in which the embodied human being might partake: a lower, cosmic mystery during which the initiate comes to understand that the cosmos is created by a God who guides it, and a higher mystery, during which the mystic experiences a vision of the Powers. Goodenough also refers, without exploring in depth, to a third stage of the mystery where the soul might approach τὸ ὄν, but which is inaccessible to humanity. I will in the course of this thesis explore this notion which will take on particular significance where discussion of ascent visions and experiences after death are concerned. In this context, abandonment of the body as a requirement for a closer acquaintance with the divine shall be considered.

Goodenough notes that, where the higher stage of the mystery has Logos as its source, during the cosmic form of the mystery men use the lower agents of the Light-stream as revealed in the laws, the advices of Judaism and in the cosmic order[5]. He argues that for Philo, the lower form of the mystery is one that is accessible through what he understands as 'normative' Judaism. Indeed, he posits that Gentiles are not invited to share in the lesser mystery in the way that they are in the higher[6]. For Goodenough, the mystery did not only preoccupy itself with a philosophy of God, however, but was

[4] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 254.
[5] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light,* 209.
[6] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 115.

also a revelation of man's nature and his need for salvation, and of the royal road by which men could rise above matter into the immaterial realm. As my thesis seeks to explore connections between visionary experiences and growth in knowledge, I will not dwell upon Goodenough's idea that, for Philo, 'normative Judaism' enables access to the Lower mystery.

Goodenough concludes that Philo ought to be treated as a source from whom we learn of a Judaism so thoroughly paganised that its postulates and objectives were those of the Hellenistic mysteries rather than those of any Judaism we have hitherto known. It was not a Judaism with a Hellenistic veneer, but a Hellenism presented in Jewish symbols and allegories. Philo, according to Goodenough, presents a Hellenistic dream of the solution of the problem of life by ascent higher and ever higher in the Streaming Light-Life of God. Whilst it is certainly important to acknowledge that Philo's conception of God is heavily influenced by Plato and his interpreters, this thesis shall, concentrating upon the exploration of visions and knowledge in the works of Philo, argue that Philo offered a novel understanding as to what constituted a vision. This new conception of the visionary experience not only diverged from that of the Septuagint, but adapted the Stoic idea of κατάληψις to fit an anthropology and cosmology which owed much to both Judaism and Platonism.

David Winston

Winston emphasises the Greek philosophical aspects of Philo's mystical quest. In his work *Logos and Mystical Theology*, David Winston presents Philo as primarily a Platonist philosopher, rather than as "first and foremost a commentator on Scripture who elected to use Platonic thought as the main vehicle of his exegesis because he considered it to be the philosophy most pliable and adaptable to the biblical worldview"[7]. He views Philo's Logos doctrine as central to his thought, and dealing with that subject exclusively in his first chapter, argues that Philo followed Middle Platonists in employing the concept to designate the world-immanent activity of the divine. The concept of Logos was particularly suitable for Philo as he was able to echo other works of Jewish Hellenistic literature, especially Wisdom of Solomon,

[7] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 13.

which employed the term "Wisdom" synonymously with the "word of God"[8]. Winston emphasises that, "for Philo, it is through the Logos and the Logos alone that man is capable of participating in the Divine". Winston, proceeding to a discussion of the functioning of the Logos, points out that for Philo, the Powers of God are expressions of his one Logos and are the means whereby he acts upon the world[9].

The second chapter, "The Psyche and Its Extra-Terrestrial Life in Philo's Anthropology", is more relevant to the question of visions, although Winston does not generally refer to visions as such, preferring to concentrate upon the possibility for various kinds of soul to ascend towards God. Their ultimate destination depends, in Winston's analysis, on Philo's notion of the human soul's origin, and upon whether a particular soul has attained perfect wisdom, or whether it is still progressing[10].

Ellen Birnbaum

In *The place of Judaism in Philo's thought*[11], Birnbaum shifts the focus away from the question of whether Philo is more fundamentally a Greek or a Jew, to the question of "how he himself assesses the significance of being a Jew"[12]. She explores this question through Philo's discussion of two kinds of relationship to God. The first is the quest to see God, or the goal of seeing him, while the second concerns the covenant between God and biblical Israel, and by extension its Jewish descendants[13]. Whilst I seek to investigate all visions in Philo and the relationship between visions and knowledge, Birnbaum's interest in the matter centres primarily upon Philo's understanding of the term 'Israel' as 'one who sees God' and whether or not it carries any ethnic connotations in his work.

She conceives Philo's depiction of the quest to see God as a mystical one, understanding the term loosely as "the impulse to have a direct, i.e., unmediated,

[8] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 15- 16.
[9] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 19.
[10] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 41- 42.
[11] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 2.
[12] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 3.
[13] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 4- 5.

experience of God, who is transcendent and immaterial"[14]. This definition deliberately sidesteps such issues as whether the experience is intellectual or ecstatic or both, and whether "direct experience" implies mere perception of or actual union with God. Birnbaum promises nevertheless to address these issues throughout the course of her study. In effect she concentrates mainly upon questions, not directly relevant to my thesis, which centre on the issue of particularism versus universalism, such as whether the achievement or ability to see God is to be characterised as innate or acquired. She also explores the individualistic dimension of the experience of seeing God and questions whether one needs to be Jewish in order to do so[15]. In examining where Philo lies between the poles of particularism and universalism, she contrasts the 'mystical', more individualistic approach to God with Philo's understanding of Israel's covenant relationship with God, and its relevance to Philo's Jewish contemporaries. The study therefore largely bypasses the issue, explored throughout my thesis, of whether the experience of seeing God is intellectual, ecstatic or involves a union with God.

In her quest to assess how and why Israel holds an important place in Philo's thought, Birnbaum concentrates upon Philo's high estimation of the faculty of seeing in general and seeing God in particular, and upon the notion of God as the object seen[16]. In this context, she expands upon Philo's relation to his philosophical background. She points out that it was common by his day to esteem sight as the sense that leads to philosophy and to regard the contemplative life described by Aristotle as the best of human pursuits. In describing God as the best object of vision Philo is, Birnbaum points out, in accord with his philosophical background. Nevertheless, she emphasises that he is more than a reflection of his environment, pointing to his distinctive description of God from both a philosophical and a personal, Jewish perspective[17]. Indeed, she quotes passages which demonstrate Philo's desire to elevate God as better than the philosophical constructs of the Monad, the One, the Good[18]. Birnbaum refers to Philo's apparently conflicting ideas regarding the possibility of seeing God, which

[14] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 5.
[15] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 5- 6.
[16] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 80.
[17] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 83.
[18] See also Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 106 where the same point is touched upon.

appears sometimes to be unqualified, whist at other times he claims that God can be seen only through apprehension of his intermediaries. By Birnbaum's own admission, these issues are not explored in depth as they exceed the scope of her own study. In fact, these points will be explored in detail in my own thesis, as they relate both to the manner in which a vision of God might be obtained, and the extent to which God himself might be perceived.

In "Philo's Understanding of the Experience of Seeing God"[19] Birnbaum remarks that a definitive portrayal of what Philo means by seeing God may be impossible because his presentation is filled with inconsistencies. Moreover, she criticises those scholars who have focused exclusively upon Philo's ideas and neglected other factors, such as the relationship between these ideas and the Biblical text he is interpreting, the possible influence of earlier exegetical traditions, the literary genre of the work, his audience, and the very nature of seeing God[20]. She perceptively argues that the different problems presented by scriptural verses behind each passage occasionally lead Philo to contradict himself, although exegetical context cannot alone account for his inconsistencies on the subject of seeing God. She suggests that different exegetical traditions which emphasise different elements may play a role, and although this is not untrue, it is very difficult, in the absence of firm textual evidence[21], to come to any firm conclusions on the subject. More convincingly, she suggests that the very experience of seeing God may defy any single description, so that Philo may experience or conceive of this vision in different ways[22]. Indeed, my thesis will broadly argue that the seeming discrepancies in Philo's treatises between those passages which qualify any apprehension of God as being at most an apprehension of his Powers and those which hint at a more heightened visionary experience result in part from the tension between Philo's great yearning for a close relationship with God and the impossibility for matter, especially impure matter to approach the divine. I will also explore the possibility that Philo regards this tension as, in some cases, resolved following total abandonment of the body.

---

[19] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, chapter 2: 85- 90.
[20] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 86.
[21] Although she mentions several previous studies on the possible existence of earlier traditions in Philo's works (Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 29, n49) she offers no detailed discussion of their findings.
[22] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 90.

On the question of seeing God, and where the identity of Israel is concerned, Birnbaum makes several significant points. The source of Philo's association between seeing God and Israel is its etymology ὁρῶν θεόν which may be derived from traditional Jewish exegesis of Gen 32, and the phrase τὸ ὁρατικὸν γένος, both of which had evolved to encompass the philosophical kind of seeing and to separate from their original identification with the patriarch and nation. She has demonstrated through this thesis that the precise identity of the seers that these expressions denote almost always remains uncertain. Nevertheless, Birnbaum does maintain that, because the distinguishing mark of "Israel" is its ability to see God, it would seem that anyone who qualifies, whether Jew or non-Jew, may be considered part of "Israel". In this context she remarks that Philo often speaks admiringly of non- Jews like the Persian magi and other sages from foreign lands. Although she concedes that he never calls them Israel or speaks of them as seeing God per se, she suggests that his description of them would lead one to think that they met the requirements for belonging, namely, that they had the spiritual ability to apprehend the existing God. She argues moreover that Philo's notions about seeing God are strongly influenced by the Platonic tradition, which emphasises the superiority of the sense of sight and proclaims belief in a transcendent One. Indeed, she understands that for Philo, seeing God represents the height of human happiness, achievement of the philosophical goal, attainable only through the sight of the mind with the help of God. This well made point, with which I largely concur, will be explored in greater depth in the course of this thesis.

C. T. R. Hayward

In *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings*[23] Hayward is interested in similar questions to those already posed by Birnbaum, although he does not restrict the scope of his study to Philo but examines Jewish and early Christian understandings of the title 'Israel' from c. 300 BCE up to the beginning of the sixth century CE.

Hayward insists, "whenever Philo spoke of the 'one who sees God', he always had in mind the Jewish people as a whole", though he concedes that Philo might also have had in mind some non-Jews as well. This rash statement is an example of the pitfalls

[23] Hayward, C. T. R: *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings* (New York: OUP, 2005).

for any student of Philo who attempts a systematization of his thought without taking careful account, as Birnbaum's study does, of the distinctions between different categories of treatise, and most importantly, of the context, exegetical or otherwise, of Philo's pronouncements.

Hayward posits 'Israel' as representing, for Philo, a stage beyond the world of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who are linked to God through a divine title in which they themselves feature. He asserts that Israel is "implicitly associated with a name of God which is beyond the conventional, an idea which brings us back to the Temple, the only place where the Tetragrammaton may be pronounced in full". On this basis, he concludes that Israel, 'the one who sees God', is bound up with the priesthood, with purity, with holiness and with service to God. The problem with this approach is that Hayward employs what he himself terms 'implicit' evidence and associations in order to draw sweeping conclusions, and as such runs the risk of introducing his own assumptions into Philo's remarks concerning Israel.

Hayward refers to *Ebr.* 82 where Israel is the name of perfection because it indicates 'vision of God', and he points out that the way to this vision is through following Moses[24]. Hayward is thus able to draw a bridge between Israel and Moses, who is the leader of those who worship God on their ascent to the ethereal height, and their subsequent vision of the Logos and the cosmos. What I will address in the course of my own study, and what Hayward ignores at this juncture, is the distinction between seeing God, which Israel symbolically represents, and all other visions as well as distinctions between ascent visions and other sorts of experiences. If one takes note of these distinctions, the reference to Moses as the leader of those who ascend to the ether and experience a vision of the Logos and his work, the cosmos, loses some of its relevance to a discussion concerning the identity of Israel, those who have a specific type of vision, namely a vision of God. Nevertheless, Hayward does validly claim that there are strong associations between worship of God and perfection in Philo[25], though whether this permits one to draw a direct line between worship of God and seeing God, which is described as perfection, is a moot point, as Philo applies the

[24] Cf. *Conf*. 95- 97
[25] Hayward, C. T. R: *Interpretations of the Name Israel*, 190.

epithet of perfection to several different activities and states, not all of which are necessarily to be related to each other in such a causal pattern.

Wolfson

Wolfson alludes to what he perceives to be a widespread misconception in the study of the philosophy of Philo, namely the assumption that Philo, because of his conception of the absolute immateriality of God and the unknowability of his essence, was confronted with the problem of how to bring God in relation with the world and had to resort, as did Plotinus, to intermediaries. Wolfson recalls that Philo distinguishes between the Powers which existed as patterns prior to creation and the Powers which, upon the creation of the world entered the created things and have remained immanent in them as the principle of the preservation of the forms of the things in the world[26]. It is in this context that Wolfson reads *Spec.* i. 47 which compares the Powers which have become immanent in the world to seals which come into contact with wax and stamp their impressions on it. The Powers are not those which existed prior to the world and were the patterns of its creation, but are immanent in the world and the principle of its preservation.

Wolfson assumes[27] that in Philo's mind, the types of knowledge in Plato's writings shaped themselves into a threefold classification[28]: 1. sensation and opinion; 2. knowledge of scientific concepts formed by the mind on the basis of data furnished by sensation; 3. knowledge of the ideas attained through recollection, which is called by Plato philosophic frenzy. According to Wolfson, Philo substitutes for Plato's third type, that of recollection or philosophical frenzy, the scriptural term prophecy[29]. The last two types of knowledge in Philo, the knowledge of the mind through the senses and the knowledge of the mind without the agency of the senses represent for Wolfson two different ways of gaining knowledge about God[30]. Wolfson identifies

[26] Wolfson, H. A, *Philo, foundations of religious philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, 2 vols. (Cambridge Mass. 1948), i. 275.
[27] In chapter ix, "Knowledge and Prophecy".
[28] In vol ii page 3 Wolfson does acknowledge that there is in Philo no formal classification of the types of knowledge.
[29] Cf. Wolfson, H. A. , *Philo*, vol ii. 8, 10.
[30] Wolfson, H. A. , *Philo*, vol ii. 5- 6.

the latter kind of knowledge about God as the greater mysteries during which the mind rises above creation and "obtains a clear vision of the uncreated one" and the former as the lesser mysteries when the mind learns about God "through created things".

In his discussion, in chapter x: "Proofs of the Existence of God" of the two different ways of gaining knowledge about God Wolfson argues for a very narrow distinction between direct and indirect apprehension of the existence of God. He relates Philo's belief, from *Leg.* iii. 33, 100 that one may know of God either through observation of the created world, or from "a clear vision of the uncreated one", apprehending God from himself and apprehending also his Logos. For Wolfson, direct knowledge of God is knowledge of nature imparted by divine revelation, as opposed to empirical observation[31]. Thus, for Wolfson, there is no difference in the content or provenance of indirect or direct knowledge of God. Rather, they differ in method alone, the indirect knowledge being obtained by philosophy whereas the direct knowledge of God was obtained by prophecy[32]. Wolfson bases this rather important conclusion upon his reading of one passage: *Opif.* 8. This passage reveals that Moses had reached the summit of philosophy and been instructed by divine oracles of the principles of nature. As a result, for Philo, Moses could not fail to recognise the existence both of an active cause and a passive object. If this is to be the sum total of Moses' achievements, then it is difficult to understand why he was, for Philo, such an outstanding character, exalted in his relationship with God above all the other patriarchs (with the possible exception of Isaac). Wolfson is correct in recognising the passage as a refutation of the Aristotelian position[33]. He rests too much weight upon this passage, however, in understanding it as delineating the scope of any apprehension of the divine and claiming that there is no other source of knowledge concerning God other than the principles of nature, even if they are divinely revealed.
It may be that in his quest to prove that Philo did not contradict himself on the unknowability of God's essence, Wolfson goes too far in attempting to harmonise statements belonging to different treatises and different contexts so that they fit into a fully coherent and logically consistent theory. This has the unfortunate effect of

[31] Wolfson, H. A. , *Philo*, vol ii. 88.
[32] Wolfson, H. A. , *Philo*, vol ii. 89.
[33] Wolfson, H. A. , *Philo*, ii. 74- 75.

ignoring the mystical aspects of Philo's approach to religious experience as he admits in some passages that he himself fails to understand all the divine mysteries whilst in other passages he affirms the inspired dimension of some of his own scriptural interpretations. The repeated references to desire and hope of a full vision of God ought perhaps not to be dismissed so lightly, and though Wolfson is right to point out that the statements mentioned by Zeller[34] "do not necessarily mean that man can have a knowledge of God's essence", it is not true that they "might mean almost anything" and do not deserve to be dismissed in a footnote. Wolfson's insistence that the notion of God being unknowable in his essence is a new principle introduced by Philo into the history of philosophy[35] leads him to sweep aside all the ambiguities and subtleties of Philo's position.

Francesca Calabi

In *God's Acting Man's Acting* Calabi discusses the twofold depiction of God in Philo. She argues that the twofold nature of aspects of the divine in Philo is to be understood in the context of a Middle Platonic tradition which distinguishes between a first immobile God, who is transcendent, incomprehensible and unknowable, and a second God who intervenes in the cosmos. Thus, for Calabi, Philo follows the biblical model whereby God acts providentially in the world and reveals himself, whilst also depicting God as 'He who Is', the one who is unknowable. This is discussed in part one, "The Nature of God", whilst the second part, "The Mediation Activity", deals with Philo's bridging of the gap between the purely contemplative God and the creative and providential activities of that God, namely, his introduction of the Powers as mediating figures. In this context, Calabi convincingly defends the idea of the Powers as ways God has of acting rather than as hypostases of God or autonomous beings.

In "The Nature of God", Calabi considers the place and role of the Logos in Philo, in the context of his understanding of God as one and unmixed. She refers to

[34] Zeller, D. "The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria. The Use and Origin of a Metaphor" in *SphA* VII (1995) 19- 55. Cf. *Somn*. i. 23, 148; *Migr*. 31, 175; *Conf*. 28, 145.
[35] Wolfson, H. A. , *Philo*, ii. 150.

Nikiprowetzky's view that the need to safeguard the oneness of God against the pseudo-multiplicity of first cause, intelligible world and Logos underlies the identification of the Logos with the noetic world. Calabi herself opines that, in accordance with *Opif*. 8, where God's soul is said to be the place of ideas, the intelligible world is the same as the divine Logos, implying that the Logos lies within God. This shifts the Logos into the sphere of transcendency, whilst it is also, in Philo's works, the first of the Powers, an aspect of God directed towards creation and action, which mediates between transcendence and immanence. She argues that this creates a different perspective according to whether Logos and Powers are considered with respect to God's mind or with a view to the way they act, because for Philo the Powers are ways in which God acts in the world.

In her first appendix "The dazzling light", Calabi argues that Philo overturns the sense of Plato's metaphor of the sun, by which analogy he implies that the good makes noetic objects knowable. She points out that the metaphor was introduced in the *Republic* to express something that cannot be easily understood in intuitive terms: the Platonic good, as likened to the sun, was the source of truth, being, and knowability, but also the object of knowledge[36]. In Philo, the analogy with the sun is introduced to support the opposite thesis: the impossibility of knowing God by intellectual means. For this reason, she suggests, the blinding features of the sun are considered, not those that can be perceived by the human eye: although God is the source of a noetic light which apprehends the invisible, it is not possible to see God, and anyone who looked at him would be dazzled[37]. Yet she draws attention to the difference between seeking to know God through a process of reasoning, and those who acquire knowledge of God's existence intuitively, through an immediate process. God is his own light, and those who contemplate God through himself are set apart.

For Calabi, seeing the Powers is not equivalent to seeing God and is clearly connected with the capacities of the seer. In her section on "Visions of the Powers", she contrasts this point of view with those of Wolfson and Bréhier. She notes that for Wolfson, the Powers are properties of God and that the names by which he is called designate those properties. He quotes passages which seem to indicate that whereas

[36] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 62.
[37] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 65.

the essence of God is unknowable, the Powers themselves are knowable. Wolfson sees the Powers as ideas created by God, both as incorporeal beings and as forms which are immanent in the world. He argues that where differences of position appear in Philo's texts, they are to be attributed to the exegetic requirements of passages translated from the Septuagint in different ways. Calabi notes the difficulty of reconciling differences within the Philonic corpus. She refers to Bréhier, who regarded as most fundamental the question of the soul's ascent towards knowledge of God[38]. In order to clarify the relationship between God and his Powers, Bréhier analysed Philo's interpretation of Genesis 18. 2 in *Abr.* 119- 124 and *QG* iv 1- 2. Without making further reference to Bréhier, Calabi comments upon the same texts, drawing her by now familiar conclusion: whether or not one sees one or three beings is closely connected to the level of the person who is seeing: θεός or κύριος according to the moral level of the perceiver. She suggests that *QG* iv 1- 2 provides some interpretative key, namely, that the vision arises out of two actions: God's appearing and Abraham's seeing. This implies a meeting between incorporeal rays and the ways in which pure souls look at the rays[39]. She stresses the impossibility of a clear vision due to the impossibility of resting one's eyes too long on the rays because of limited intellect. Only for those who reach the end of the path will the Being appear at the same time as Lord and God.

In part three, "God as Model", Calabi considers the theme of the contemplative life in Philo. She argues that it is "not so much an ecstatic form of pure vision of a God who, in any case, cannot be seen as to his essence, as much as a reconsideration of God's word and of one's own actions"[40]. She clarifies further that for Philo, contemplation equals study, that is, exegesis. Any exegesis of the biblical text throws a light upon the nature of reality because the Torah expresses the order and the law of God according to which he made the cosmos. The prime example of the contemplative in Philo is given by the Therapeutae. Calabi notes that the contemplative activities of the Therapeutae consist in exegesis, allegorical interpretation of the philosophy of the fathers, analysis of the hidden realities contained in the texts as well as a vision of the

[38] *QG* iv 1- 287- 89.
[39] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 88.
[40] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 155.

Being who leads to perfect happiness[41] Calabi does not, however, expand upon the significance of the vision or explore whether Philo considers it to be the goal or final achievement of a contemplative life. Instead, Calabi understands the prayer of the Therapeutae to lead the soul to follow the truth[42] as a request that they might know how to study. Nevertheless, she does briefly mention that, according to Philo, the Therapeutae are driven by the desire to see the Being, and that it is thus that they attain happiness. This is why they are arduous in their philosophical studies[43] and enraptured by God's spirit like corybants[44].

[41] *Contempl*. 11- 12.
[42] *Contempl*. 27.
[43] *Contempl* 16.
[44] *Contempl*. 12

I.4 *SUMMARY OF THE SECONDARY LITERATURE RELATING TO VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE*

I.4.1 *Visions of God*

Most scholarship concerned with the topic of visions in the works of Philo has concentrated upon his interest in visions of God. This is to some degree understandable, as they constitute in Philo the highest sorts of visionary experiences one might aspire to. There appears to be some degree of consensus amongst students of Philo that he denied the possibility of experiencing a vision of God as to his essence. Indeed, on the question of seeing God, Calabi understands Philo to believe that it is only possible to see his image and insists that seeing the Powers is not equivalent to seeing God in Philo. Nonetheless, she does discuss the possibility that Philo might have referred to instances in which God was seen in *Deus* 3 and *Mos*. II. 289, though she maintains that this refers to his existence and not to his essence, and that, moreover, these texts concern themselves not with a vision of God but with a vision of the Powers and the created world. However, in support of this notion Calabi offers no detailed textual analysis of the passages in question but supports her argument by citing other passages in Philo which support these views[45]. These she clearly believes to be applicable to all references to knowledge of or visions of God. Birnbaum however, highlights the apparently conflicting nature of Philo's ideas regarding the possibility of seeing God. She points out that this possibility appears sometimes to be unqualified, whilst at other times Philo claims that God can be seen only through the apprehension of his intermediaries. She remarks that a definitive portrayal of what Philo means by seeing God may be impossible because his presentation is filled with inconsistencies.

Bearing this in mind, I shall proceed nonetheless to investigate Philo's understanding of visions of God. I will enquire whether he in fact considers the vision impossible only for those souls which are embodied. Indeed, Goodenough also refers, without exploring in depth, to a higher stage of the mystery in which the soul might approach τὸ ὄν, but which he views as inaccessible to humanity. In this respect, I will also

[45] Namely *Deus* 62; *Fug.* 162- 163; *Praem*. 39ff.; *Virt*. 215, cited in Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 102.

consider Philo's ideas on the vision of God in the next life, taking account of the work of F. E. Brenk[46] on this particular question. I further intend to relate this issue to the possibility of acquiring knowledge following a vision. Indeed, having exposed the very particular understanding of the visionary experience in Philo as a grasping of intelligible truths with the eye of the soul, I will enquire whether it would not be inconsistent for Philo to assert that one might have a vision (in the sense of experiencing a supernatural or intelligible entity) without comprehending its object, that is, grasping its essence.

I.4.2 *The visionary experience: How might one perceive the Logos and the Powers*

Goodenough considers the visions in Philo in the wider context of what he understands to be Philo's mystical Judaism. For him there are two parallel ways in which Philo describes the ascent to wisdom: the Logos, Light-Stream cycle and the Sophia cycle. Winston by contrast emphasises that, "for Philo, it is through the Logos and the Logos alone that man is capable of participating in the Divine". Winston also argues that for Philo, the Powers of God are expressions of his one Logos and are the means whereby he acts upon the world[47]. Here he is in broad agreement with many other current scholars, who tend to view the Powers as ways in which God approaches the world. Winston however, also argues that the Philonic Logos, is not an abstraction, but a "vivid and living hypostatization of an essential aspect of Deity, the face of God turned towards creation"[48]. Here, his main concern is to emphasise that for Philo, God has no direct contact with the material realm. Although he does insist that the Logos is not a separate entity at the side of God, it seems that he is going too far in claiming that Philo views it as an hypostasis of an aspect of the Deity. This is in contrast to Calabi according to whom the Powers are not just aspects of God but also ways in which the first principle acts in the world. She rejects therefore any notion of the Powers as autonomous beings or as hypostases of God.

---

[46] Brenk, F. E. "Darkly Beyond the Glass: Middle Platonism and the Vision of the Soul" in S. Gersh and Ch. Kannengiesser (eds.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 8 (Notre Dame: Indiana 1992), 39- 60.
[47] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 19.
[48] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 50.

Calabi's emphasis upon the Powers as ways in which God relates to the world is very important in her support of the notion that the vision obtained, whether of a higher or lower Power, or of one or three, is contingent upon the ability and virtue of the seer, rather than indicative of anything intrinsic concerning the nature of God or the Powers. Calabi's understanding that the distinction between God and his Powers exists largely in the perception of the seer is one with which this thesis is in broad agreement. Furthermore, though Philo does sometimes treat God and the Powers as separate entities, he also, on occasions, distinguishes between τὸ ὄν and ὁ ὤν or θεός, between the Existent and God, though they also coalesce in Philo's nomenclature. It is therefore not a simple matter of two ontic subjects as opposed to two implied correlates of different modes of vision. This ambiguity in Philo's work ought probably to be understood as deriving from interpretations of Plato since it was not clear then and is not clear now whether Plato means to postulate a transcendent world of forms or a transcendent mode of vision. Goodenough concedes that the Powers, which he sees as functional differentiations of the Light-Stream or Logos which issues from God, might seem from a human point of view to be existential differentiations, but insists that they are not. Thus, for Goodenough, the visions are part of the mystery which from the divine point consists in God's relation to the material world and to man. God, whilst completely sufficient and self-contained, shoots forth a great stream of immaterial radiation, the Logos, which is also called Sophia or Virtue and occasionally pneuma. It is quite likely indeed that for Philo the true distinction is that which exists between different modes of vision, but he is unable to eradicate from his language any formulation which might tend to imply that the Powers have a separate existence.

I.4.3 *Type of vision*

There has been little interest in previous scholarship in comparing the various kinds of vision in Philo, whether dream visions, ascent visions, message visions or symbolic visions, with regard to the mechanism of the vision, the possibility of experiencing a vision, and its outcome.

Nonetheless, many commentators have distinguished between direct and indirect approaches to God. Indeed, Calabi cites Runia's work which affirms that Philo alludes

to "a sort of noetic comprehension which can intuitively grasp the existence of God in his oneness at the level of logos"[49]. With regard to *Leg*. All. iii 100- 103, which discusses the possibility of seeing God directly, Calabi remarks upon the different noetic levels which correspond to different types of knowledge which the intellect can have of God, at the same time insisting that God can never be seen, not even by Moses. She mentions in passing that according to Dillon[50], the "almost mystic type of vision" described in *Legat*. 4- 6 is on an entirely different level. She is careful to reassert the impossibility of any vision of God as to his essence, citing on that point the work of Vanderlin who clarified that even the highest level of contemplation, perhaps reached only in a state of ecstasy, does not lead to knowledge of his essence[51]. Calabi concludes that man's approach to God may take on a number of different forms, on different levels of knowledge, and be closer or more distant depending upon the virtues and capacities possessed. She notes that of the different modes of knowledge, ecstasy and theophany constitute the highest levels, and that Moses' prophetic vision was "an intellectual intuition, an immediate feeling of the existence of God which implies a break off from the created world"[52].

I.4.4 *Visions and knowledge*

It is noteworthy that there has been little explicit emphasis in previous scholarship upon the connection in Philo between having a vision and comprehending the object of the vision. Rather, interest has centred upon the object of the vision, whether it be one or all of the Powers, and upon the manner in which the seer achieves a vision.

It is worth noting, however, that Winston implicitly conflates the notions of vision and of knowledge in noting that for Philo, "man's goal and ultimate bliss lie in the knowledge or vision of God"[53]. Winston also touches upon the boundaries to which knowledge of God is subject in Philo, in mentioning the influence of the Platonic

[49] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 103; cf. Runia, D., *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus*.
[50] Dillon, J., "The Transcendence of God in Philo", in *CHSHMC* 16, 1- 6.
[51] Vanderlin, E, "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *MSR* III (1947) 285- 304.
[52] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 104.
[53] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 54.

supranoetic unknowable entity, which is made manifest only through projection: "Philo's Logos yields only an image of the divine essence and itself indicates yet a further projection of that image in a cosmos which stands at a third remove from its source"[54]. He does not however go as far as Calabi who argues not only that God is unknowable, but further insists that the Powers are also unknowable and ineffable.

Goodenough distinguishes between a lower, cosmic mystery during which the initiate comes to understand that the cosmos is created by a god who guides it, and a higher mystery, during which the mystic experiences a vision of the Powers. This distinction has been noted by a number of scholars, notably Calabi, who refers to Philo's differentiation between acquiring knowledge of God through a process of reasoning and grasping his existence intuitively. Winston also draws attention to the difference between conjecturing God's existence "through plausible inference" and those true friends of God who, according to Philo, apprehend him through himself, as light is seen by light. Thus, the manner in which one approaches the intelligible world, whether through deductive reasoning or through visionary inspiration, has been explored by other scholars, but the degree and type of knowledge as the potential outcome of a visionary experience is an area which demands further research.

[54] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 45.

I.5. *THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS*

Whereas many commentators have noted the dichotomy in Philo's works between statements which preclude any apprehension of God's essence and reports of visions of his Powers, the mechanism by which a vision is experienced has not been widely investigated. Certainly, it has been noted that for Philo, intelligibles are perceived with the eye of the soul, but the manner in which this takes place and the consequences which follow have not been noted. In exploring distinctions between the different terms which Philo employs in describing perceptual and cognitive activity, such as for instance καταλαμβάνω, ἐννοέω, and θεωρέω, it is possible to determine why Philo cannot allow that God or even his Powers are ever apprehended, whilst he does suggest that God might be perceived and conceived of in a more limited sense.

This thesis studies in greater detail the mystical experience of τὸ ὄν alluded to by Goodenough and which, according to Dillon, operates beyond reason. In this regard, it will also be fruitful to examine Brenk's idea that one might come face to face with God in the afterlife. It shall be suggested that these sorts of experience do indeed form part of Philo's understanding of the human relationship with God, but that in describing them he usually eschews the vocabulary of vision and epistemological concerns for a more mystical depiction of the abandonment of the earthly and the ascent of pure mind towards the Uncreate. In this sense, my thesis agrees to an extent with Vanderlin who notes that even the highest level of contemplation of God does not lead to knowledge of his essence: the mystical ascents which Philo then describes enable a relationship with God which is no longer based on knowing what he is but on experiencing his presence in a deeper way.

Calabi's work, pointing the significance of human cognitive ability where the content of the vision is concerned is taken into account and need not be reproduced in this thesis. It shall nevertheless be mentioned that Philo's conception of the nature of God as utterly transcendent[55] above even the heavens precludes any vision of the divine essence. This is important in attempting to determine, through an analysis of Moses' visions, the upper limits of human cognitive ability and closeness to God. Thus, I seek

[55] Pointed out by Dillon and accepted by Calabi.

to test the doubt cast, throughout Philo's works, on the impossibility of seeing God and his Powers. Despite agreeing with Calabi's argument that we are always "in the sphere of knowledge of God in terms of his existence and not of his essence" [56], it will be demonstrated that there are many different degrees of perception and comprehension which might be experienced by the seer.

In comparing the different types of vision which Philo relates, it will be demonstrated that abandonment of the sensory and the bodily is considered by him to be of vital importance in allowing the seer to gaze upon spiritual objects, both where dream visions and waking visions are concerned. This is due to the fact that both body and soul are subject to change which prevents, according to Philo, the formation of reliable impressions. Although other commentators have mentioned the importance of the Logos or the divine reason as an object of vision[57], I will emphasise its role as a guide towards more exalted visions and higher forms of knowledge. In fact, having explored Philo's conception of the memory of God, I shall argue that he considers the experience of divine indwelling and inspiration as the guiding action of divine reason towards a vision of God which already exists in human reason. This thesis, exploring in some detail the ascent towards God in Philo, will argue that it is a memory of the divine, clearer in some than others which, purified through the abandonment of bodily concerns, enable the mind to ascend towards God.

[56] Calabi, F. *God's acting, man's acting*, 102.
[57] Cf. for instance Runia, D., Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus, 366.

PART II: VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN THE NON-BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS OF PHILO

In the non-biographical works of Philo visions do not figure as components in any protracted narrative accounts of the lives of great men as they do in *De Vita Mosis*, *De Abrahamo* and *De Iosepho*. Most are treatises concerned with the explanation and allegorical interpretation of biblical passages. Nonetheless Philo does, in the course of these works, provide expositions of concepts fundamental to his understanding of humanity and its encounters with the heavenly sphere and God. A close reading of these texts also enables one to develop a greater affinity with the different sorts of knowledge and perception. Thus, the non-biographical treatises allow an insight into questions raised by the analysis of the visionary experiences embedded in narrative accounts.

II.1 *WHAT CONSTITUTES A VISIONARY EXPERIENCE IN PHILO'S WORKS? WHAT ARE THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS?*

Since Philo retells Biblical accounts of visions in *De Vita Mosis*, *De Abrahamo* and *De Iosepho*, and moreover does not interpret these visions as having only an allegorical meaning, it is evident that he does not exclude the possibility of receiving visions. Nonetheless, Philo's understanding of the world entails a reinterpretation of the visionary experience. Indeed, although sight is the greatest of the senses in Philo's works[58], there is a fundamental division between that which is perceptible by the outward senses and the νοητός κόσμος[59], the world perceptible to the intellect. We shall explain here that for Philo, man can be a bridge between these two worlds because he is both embodied and rational. Indeed, man has a soul in which God placed mind[60], in part so that it can act, as will be explored in more detail, as the eye of the soul.

[58] *Opif.* 120, 147. *Migr.* 47, 164- 165. *Conf.* 140- 1.
[59] References in *Opif.* 15, 24, 35, *Gig.* 61, *Her.* 111, *Praem.* 37, 1 *QG.* iv. 8.
[60] *Opif.* 139.

1.1. *αἰσθητός κόσμος and νοητός κόσμος*

The most extensive exposition of Philo's views concerning the intelligible world and the world perceptible by the senses is to be found, unsurprisingly, in *Opif.*. He explains in *Opif.* that the αἰσθητός κόσμος, is a copy of the νοητός κόσμος, since God assumed that no object of perception would be faultless which was not made in the likeness of an original discerned only by the intellect[61]. This is why God first formed the intelligible world[62]: in order that he might use a pattern wholly Godlike and incorporeal in producing the material and visible world. The world perceptible to the senses is thus the very image of the intelligible world. Philo clarifies the relationship between the two universes through the analogy of an architect who images the plan of a city, and then proceeds to build the city of timber and stones[63]. Although the νοητός κόσμος is the model for the material world that our senses can perceive, there is nonetheless a dimension of the intelligible world that renders it virtually unapproachable: it is ὁ θεοῦ λόγος itself[64]. There might be some degree of doubt concerning this designation however, as Philo refers in several passages to the νοητός κόσμος as being *located* in the Reason of God. Nonetheless, two elements of his account in *Opif.* might allow clarification. Firstly, Philo is at pains to emphasise, that the information which he is about to convey is phrased in a plainer, more undisguised manner: "εἰ ΄ τις ἐθελήσειε γυμνοτέροις χρήσασθαι τοῖς ὀνόμασι"; plainer, presumably, in relation to his preceding assertion concerning the intelligible world in *Opif.* 20, stating that it could have no other *location* than the Reason of God[65]. The most crucial point is that the designation of the intelligible world as the Reason of God applies to it as it is in the process of creation: "τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη κοσμοποιοῦντος"[66]. This is in fact reiterated in his analogy of the city discernible by the intellect alone, which is nothing else than the reasoning faculty of the architect *in the act of planning to found* the

[61] *Opif.* 16.
[62] *Opif.* 16, 19.
[63] *Opif.* 17, 18.
[64] *Opif.* 24, 25.
[65] *Opif.* 20: "τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον οὐδ᾽ ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἰδεῶν κόσμος ἄλλον ἂν ἔχοι τόπον ἢ τὸν θεῖον λόγον". A similar comment is made by Philo in *Opif.* 36
[66] *Opif.* 24.

city[67]. Whether this equation of νοητός κόσμος with θεοῦ λόγος applies once the αἰσθητός κόσμος has been created is not entirely clear. Nonetheless, Philo appears to sustain the identification of the two in a description that exemplifies the close parallelism that exists, for Philo, between man and the world. Indeed, as man was made in the image of God, and since the part is an image of an image, the whole, that is, the αἰσθητός κόσμος, is so too[68]. Therefore, the αἰσθητός κόσμος is a copy of the divine image. This divine image is the Word or Reason of God, and so the identification of the intelligible world with the θεοῦ λόγος is complete.

The relationship between the two worlds can be further clarified upon examining Philo's account of the creation of the world in *Ebr*. 30, where he explains that the world perceptible by the external senses was created through the union of God, described as father with his knowledge, which Philo in the language of myth denotes as mother of the creation: "μητέρα᾽ τὴν τοῦ πεποιηκότος ἐπιστήμην, ᾗ συνὼν ὁ θεὸς οὐχ ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἔσπειρε γένεσιν". One ought to understand "ἐπιστήμη" as being also the mother of the θεοῦ λόγος, rather than as the Word of God itself, despite the role of both in the creation of the world perceptible to the senses. Indeed, in *Deus* 31 both the νοητός κόσμος and the αἰσθητός κόσμος are designated as sons of God, older and younger brothers, whereas knowledge is the mother of the world perceptible to outward senses. Furthermore, in *Ebr.* 30, knowledge is described as bringing forth "τὸν μόνον καὶ ἀγαπητὸν αἰσθητὸν υἱὸν", implying that there is only one universe which may be susceptible to sensory perception, but not excluding the possibility that the knowledge of God also played a role in bringing forth the νοητός κόσμος. It thus appears that, for Philo, God created the intelligible world, and then employed it as a model according to which, through union with his knowledge, he begat the world perceptible to the senses.

1.2. *The place of heaven in Philo*

Whereas in much Jewish literature of the Greco- Roman period heaven is understood as a place not only remote from earth but also in some sense ontologically distinct,

[67] *Opif.* 24: "οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ νοητὴ πόλις ἕτερόν τί ἐστιν ἢ ὁ τοῦ ἀρχιτέκτονος λογισμὸς ἤδη τὴν νοητὴν πόλιν κτίζειν διανοουμένου."
[68] *Opif.* 25.

and so accessible only through superhuman assistance, in Philo, heaven, though above the earth, is also a part of the αἰσθητός κόσμος. It therefore occupies an intermediary position, where perception is concerned, somewhere between the world accessible to the senses and that which is intelligible only to mind.

In *Opif*. 27 Philo places heaven firmly among the elements of the αἰσθητός κόσμος, since he mentions that it is the best of *created* things[69]. Indeed, whilst the formation of the incorporeal heaven took place at the same stage as the formation of the invisible earth[70], both serve as patterns for the world perceptible to sense in *Opif*. 36. In this same passage, Philo underlines the corporeal nature of heaven in his explanation of its designation as 'firmament': "ἐποίει τὸν οὐρανὸν ὁ δημιουργός, ὃν ἐτύμως στερέωμα προσηγόρευσεν ἅτε σωματικὸν ὄντα"[71]. The creator designated the heaven as "στερέωμα" precisely because it is bodily in essence. Indeed, the basic meaning of the term is 'a solid body'[72]. However, because the Septuagint frequently employs "στερέωμα" throughout the *Book of Genesis* to designate 'heaven' or 'the firmament', Philo is able to draw a link between the two senses of the word and so explain the use of στερέωμα on the basis of the bodily nature of the heaven. Moreover, the direction of his argument allows one to note that it is the "σωματικὸν ὄντα" which is taken as axiomatic by Philo and the semantic question is not only secondary to, but also deduced from, the ontological status of heaven. Philo emphasises this in the development of his theory: the body, 'σῶμα', is naturally solid, 'στερεόν', because it has a threefold dimension. Furthermore, it was precisely in order to distinguish the body-like heaven from the purely intelligible one that he called the former 'στερέωμα'[73]. In this context, Philo explicitly indicates that he

[69] *Opif*. 27: "ἄριστόν ὄντα τῶν γεγονότων".
[70] *Opif*. 29: "πρῶτον οὖν ὁ ποιῶν ἐποίησεν οὐρανὸν ἀσώματον καὶ γῆν ἀόρατον."
[71] See especially Septuagint *Gen*. i. 6, i. 14, i. 17, i. 20. The fact that the term is employed in the Septuagint in its alternative and more common sense of 'firm foundation', for instance in Septuagint *Ez*. xiii. 5 and *Ps*. lxxii. 4, reinforces the bodily connotations which allow Philo's interpretation. This despite the fact that it is sometimes applied to God, as in Septuagint *Ps*. xvii. 2 and lxx. 3.
[72] See for instance Hippocrates, *Flat*. 8; Anaxagoras quoted in *Placita Philosophorum* ii. 25. 9.
[73] *Opif*. 37. Philo adds that once the distinction was established, God went on forthwith to speak of it as heaven: "εἶτ᾽ εὐθέως οὐρανὸν προσεῖπεν αὐτὸν εὐθυβόλως καὶ πάνυ κυρίως".

regards heaven as part of the αἰσθητός κόσμος since he asserts not only that it is perceptible by the senses and bodily, but moreover insists that it is to be distinguished from that which is intelligible and incorporeal: "εἰκότως οὖν ἀντιθεὶς τῷ νοητῷ καὶ ἀσωμάτῳ τὸν αἰσθητὸν καὶ σωματοειδῆ τοῦτον στερέωμα ἐκάλεσεν."[74]. The claim that heaven can be perceived by the senses is reiterated in *Congr.* 51, where Philo places the one who aims to see heaven as second to the one who sees the truly Existent, "τὸ ὄντως ὄν"[75]. This is the designation by which Philo refers to God as he really is rather than according to his powers; it is debateable as to whether any human being is ever able to perceive God as 'τὸ ὄν', as opposed to perceiving him as Lord or God[76], but the crucial point here is that Philo understands 'τὸ ὄν' as pertaining to a sphere entirely distinct and remote from "τὸν αἰσθητὸν οὐρανὸν", which includes the well-ordered host of stars, but is not thought adequate as a dwelling place for God.

It is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge that this second place in excellence does not indicate disdain on Philo's part, since in *Ebr.* 70 he claims that the body must be killed in order to allow the soul to look up to heaven. In this work, however, heaven appears not only to be opposed to the bodily and the senses, but also to be associated with the νοητός κόσμος. Indeed, Philo states that the objects of the senses may prevent the soul both from lifting its head heavenwards and from welcoming "τὰς νοητὰς καὶ θεοειδεῖς φύσεις". This passage appears to contradict the impression previously formed that Philo considers the heaven to be part of the bodily world, perceptible according to the outward senses. One other passage, *Leg.* i. 1, appears to confirm the suspicion that Philo sometimes, seemingly inconsistently, associates heaven with the νοητός κόσμος. Indeed, Philo argues here that Moses, speaking symbolically, calls the mind 'heaven'[77], because the natures intelligible to the mind only are in heaven: "αἱ νοηταὶ φύσεις ἐν οὐρανῷ" and this in clear contrast to sensation which Moses calls 'earth' because sensation has a corporeal and earthy constitution. It thus appears that we have two different and opposing views in the works of Philo: the first, that heaven is part of the αἰσθητός κόσμος, and the second

[74] *Opif.* 36.
[75] *Congr.* 51.
[76] This is to be discussed below.
[77] Philo further claims in *Leg.* 1. 21- 22 that heaven is the model for the mind.

that heaven is the seat of the νοηταὶ φύσεις. One might nonetheless avoid the assumption that Philo is inconsistent as to the status and perception of heaven if one considers the case of the human mind in Philo, which is, though distinct from the body, contained within a body and, though an intelligible nature, when embodied dwells in the αἰσθητός κόσμος, though it can seek to escape it[78]. Heaven, though part of the corporeal world, contains αἱ νοηταὶ φύσεις, and is can thus be considered a mirror image of the human mind, an intelligible essence contained in an earthly body.

The νοηταὶ φύσεις which are contained in heaven are not to be identified with the various references to the manifest and visible Gods. Indeed, though in *Opif.* 27 Philo claims of heaven that: "θεῶν ἐμφανῶν τε καὶ αἰσθητῶν ἔμελλεν οἶκος ἔσεσθαι ἱερώτατος." It is very clear that the heaven which Philo refers to in this passage is the heaven perceptible to the outward senses, since in this extract Philo not only mentions that heaven was the first thing created but offers the further detail that it was made of the purest substance. Therefore, his insistence that the gods are perceptible to the senses and visible is less surprising than his reference to gods. It is clear from *Opif.* 55 that, by visible gods, Philo is designating the stars and planets, and not any purely intelligible natures, since he claims there that God created the stars which are perceptible by the external senses, divine and most beautiful images: "ἐδημιούργει τοὺς αἰσθητοὺς ἀστέρας, ἀγάλματα θεῖα καὶ περικαλλέστατα". The insistence in both passages from *Opif.* upon the sensory ('αἰσθητός') nature of the 'visible gods', coupled with a mention in *Opif.* 55 that God placed the stars, divine images "ἐν ἱερῷ καθαρωτάτῳ τῆς σωματικῆς οὐσίας ἵδρυε τῷ οὐρανῷ" reinforces the impression that they are on no account to be confused with the νοηταὶ φύσεις. Furthermore, in *Spec. Leg.* 1. 19 Philo writes that the stars are regarded *by the outward senses* as gods "πάντας τοὺς κατ᾽ οὐρανὸν οὓς αἴσθησις ἐπισκοπεῖ θεοὺς". Given his views concerning the limitations of sense perception, one grasps that the categorising of stars as 'visible gods' in *Opif.* and *Aet.* in no way exalts them to the sphere of the intelligible nor does it allow one to consider them as intelligible themselves despite being amenable to sensory apprehension. Thus, he believes that one must not look upon them as independent rulers since they are by their *intrinsic nature*, "φύσει γεγονότας",

[78] For the relationship between body and mind in Philo see below.

responsible to a higher power. It is therefore only misguided individuals who would worship those beings, although they are superior to humans since "ἕνεκα ἀρετῆς εὐθύνας οὐχ ὑφέξοντας". Indeed, this latter point is pressed more explicitly in *Opif.* 84, where it is claimed that God exempted the heavenly beings from man's dominion since they obtained a more divine portion: "ὅσα θνητὰ ἐν τοῖς τρισὶ στοιχείοις γῇ ὕδατι ἀέρι πάντα ὑπέταττεν αὐτῷ, τὰ κατ᾽ οὐρανὸν ὑπεξελόμενος ἅτε θειοτέρας μοίρας ἐπιλαχόντα". Thus, heaven and the stars or heavenly beings, are more exalted than man whilst yet remaining in the sphere of the αἰσθητός κόσμος.

The creation of the stars and their mode of operation might, however, allow us to shed greater light upon Philo's reference to the intelligible natures. Indeed, in *Cher.* 97 Philo describes as intelligible natures the rays of light projected by God and emphasises that they cannot be comprehended by the outward senses. Having related the creation of incorporeal heaven and invisible earth, the ideal archetypes for heaven and earth perceptible to the outward senses, Philo proposes, in *Opif.* 29, that the Maker created the incorporeal essence of light, which was to provide a pattern, discernible only to the mind, of the sun and the stars which were to come into existence in heaven. In *Opif.* 31 Philo adds that: "τὸ δὲ ἀόρατον καὶ νοητὸν φῶς ἐκεῖνο θείου λόγου γέγονεν εἰκὼν τοῦ διερμηνεύσαντο τὴν γένεσιν αὐτοῦ". If it came into being as an image of the Divine Word, and since it is called not only invisible but also intelligible, it is not inconceivable that this light, which in *Cher.* 97 is referred to in the plural since it pours forth in rays, can in fact be equated with the νοηταὶ φύσεις which in *Leg.* i. 1 are said to be "ἐν οὐρανῷ". Indeed, this light is described as "ὑπερουράνιος ἀστήρ, πηγὴ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀστέρων"[79]: it is from it that the stars and planets draw their light. Significantly, Philo adds that the pure radiance is dimmed since It changes when passing from the intelligible to that which is perceptible by the external senses. Thus, one might tentatively suggest that the νοηταὶ φύσεις are the rays of the light poured forth from the Existent, which not only provided the pattern for the heavenly bodies which are perceptible to the senses, but moreover are the source of their light. Perhaps it is in this limited manner that one might understand them as being in heaven, not in a spatial sense, but both as

[79] *Opif.* 31.

archetypes of the stars and as the source of their light. It is difficult to maintain that by "αἱ νοηταὶ φύσεις ἐν οὐρανῷ"[80] one is to see a reference to the archetypal and purely intelligible heaven referred to in *Opif.* 29, despite subsequent references to heaven being the symbolic name of "τήν […] ἰδέαν τοῦ νοῦ"[81], since not only is heaven employed as a symbol in this allegorical context, but also due to the inadequacy of equating the model of a mind with the archetype for heaven as firmament, a place where the stars and planets evolve. Indeed, in *Ebr.* 70 the allusion to the intelligible natures follows immediately upon a reference to the soul lifting its head up towards heaven. Although not entirely satisfactory, this understanding of the relationship between the stars and the intelligible natures, and the sort of heaven in which they are or are not contained cannot, it appears, be further elucidated. This is in part due to the deliberately ambiguous position of heaven in the works of Philo.

Just as, for Philo, man can sometimes bridge the ontological gulf between αἰσθητός κόσμος and νοητός κόσμος, it appears that Philo does consider heaven to be a boundary between those two spheres. Indeed, although it is a part of the former, the body and the objects perceptible to the senses are considered to be obstacles to the perception of heaven[82], and in certain passages it is described by Philo as containing natures which are intelligible to mind alone. Even the description of the stars as 'visible gods', though qualified by the insistence that they are so regarded by the outward senses, contributes to a certain ambiguity concerning the status of heaven, especially with regard to human perception. Indeed, Philo's most explicit representation of heaven as a boundary is embedded in a discourse which assumes both that heaven is bodily and perceptible to the outward senses *and* that it was created as the first and best part of the visible world. Having characterised heaven as "πρῶτον αὐτοῦ [αἰσθητοῦ κόσμου] τῶν μερῶν, ὃ δὴ καὶ πάντων ἄριστον, ἐποίει τὸν οὐρανὸν ὁ δημιουργός"[83], establishing clearly that while it is of the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, and very much in contradistinction to the purely intelligible

[80] *Leg.* 1. 1
[81] *Leg.* 1. 21- 22.
[82] *Ebr.* 70.
[83] *Opif.* 36.

world[84], it is the first and best of the bodily world, Philo proceeds to describe heaven as a boundary. That it is such is taken as axiomatic, since Philo uses this characteristic to explain why God, having distinguished the corporeal heaven from its purely intelligible archetype by calling it "στερέωμα", 'solid firmament', subsequently dropped the linguistic distinction and referred to it as "οὐρανός". This is not the only passage in Philo's works which describes heaven as the boundary of all: "πάντων ὅρος". Indeed, in *Plant.* 3, Philo presents an account of the ordering of the world, where, comparing the world to a plant, he states that the Framer of the world caused earth and water to occupy the position of roots at the centre and drew up air and fire from the centre to the space on high. He then argues that the encircling region of ether (αἰθέριος) was set to be a boundary (ὅρος) and guard to all that is within. He then adds that the name of the ether, οὐρανός, is derived from ὅρος. In *Plant.* 3, one thus acquires not only a corroboration of Philo's understanding of heaven as a boundary, but, through its identification to the ether, a more vivid picture of its encircling the four elements which make up the Earth. The image of an ether, perceptible to the outward senses, and so part of the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, yet at the same time encircling and guarding our world, confers the impression that heaven occupies the position of an intermediary realm. This is indeed confirmed by Philo's several descriptions of the mind passing through the boundaries of creation in order to reach the uncreated Existent. Thus, in *Det*. 88-89, Philo poses the question whether it is possible for a soul to fly through air, "δι᾽ ἀέρος", from earth to heaven, "εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀπὸ γῆς". Here, it is clear that a spatial distinction is drawn between earth, air and heaven, and in the following passage, Philo differentiates between the boundaries of earth and sea, and those of air and heaven, thus reinforcing the separation of the different places[85]. Furthermore, the mention of the natures which exist in heaven, "αἱ ἐν οὐρανῷ φύσεις", implies perhaps a more radical ontological distinction, and one linked to place, since the soul is required to travel great distances in order to investigate them. However, this latter difference between heaven and earth is dwarfed by the categorising of earth, sea, air and heaven as all part of the world, "ὁ κόσμος", in contradistinction to the nature of God, "θεοῦ φύσις". That heaven is in fact a

[84] *Opif.* 36: "[…] ἀντιθεὶς τῷ νοητῷ καὶ ἀσωμάτῳ τὸν αἰσθητὸν καὶ σωματοειδῆ […]". This is given as the reason for God's referring to the created heaven as the firmament. For further details see discussion above, p. 3.
[85] *Det.* 89.

frontier region of the *αἰσθητὸς κόσμος*, separating it from the Existent, is even more clearly expressed in *Plant*. 22. There, Philo follows his initial description of the perishable eyes of the body raising themselves from earth to the far removed region of heaven, demonstrating thereby that heaven is amenable to sensory perception, with a claim that the eyes of the soul not only reach up to the highest regions of the ether, but pass over the boundaries of the whole world in order to hasten towards the uncreated. As we have established, from the same treatise, that αἰθήρ for Philo is equivalent to "οὐρανός"[86], heaven is not only included within the sphere of the whole world, "πᾶς ὁ κόσμος", but quite likely implied in the expression: the boundaries of the whole earth, "παντὸς τοῦ κόσμου οἱ ὅροι", since this clause immediately follows the mention of the soul reaching the highest regions of the ether. The sense that heaven is, though spatially distinct from the earth, still a part of the αἰσθητός κόσμος, and at the same time functions as a border between the world of sense and the νοητός κόσμος transpires with even greater clarity from Philo's description of the mind moving to things both material and immaterial in *Mut*. 179-180. Having mentioned its reaching the boundaries of land and sea, Philo reiterates his, by now, familiar image of the mind leaping from the earth to pass through the lower air, "δι' ἀέρος"[87], into the upper air or ether, "εἰς αἰθέρα"[88], where it encounters the furthermost sphere of the fixed stars. Although this clearly constitutes a description of the passing from earth to the separate realm of heaven, both are part of the world of sense. Indeed, Philo follows this with a mention of the continuation of the mind's journey, borne onwards from the boundary of all things sensible, "τοῦ παντὸς αἰσθητοῦ τούτου ὅρου ἔξω φέρεται"[89], to the world which is compounded of ideas, "πρὸς τὸν ἐκ τῶν ἰδεῶν παγέντα"[90].

These passages all testify to the belief that heaven, though not part of the intelligible realm, functions as a boundary and an intermediary place, the most exalted part of the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος. It is nonetheless the case that for Philo, God, his Powers, and the angels, no longer inhabit heaven; it is to be expected that this radical shift in the

[86] See remarks above concerning *Plant.* 3.
[87] *Mut.* 179.
[88] *Mut.* 179.
[89] *Mut.* 180.
[90] *Mut.* 180.

understanding of the place of the divine, God and the angels or disembodied souls, in relation to the human world, will have an important impact on the ability of humans to receive visions. Moreover, it will become clear that the increased difficulty in seeing the divine and supernatural leads, in the works of Philo, to a blurring of the distinctions between perception and understanding, thus affecting the epistemological impact of a vision upon a seer.

1.3 *Man as a bridge between αἰσθητός κόσμος and νοητός κόσμος*

Though mankind, being part of the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, seems remote from the intelligible world, Philo intimates that man might in fact bridge the two universes. Indeed, Philo describes man in several different treatises as a creature from the intelligible realm descended into an earthly body, and further claims that some of these embodied souls yearn to transcend the sensory world. Furthermore, the human soul is, according to Philo, divided between rational and irrational components. The rational element of the soul is the mind, which God has placed in man's soul to act as an eye to the soul. Where sensory perception is concerned, it requires input from the organs of the senses, and orders the impressions that they convey, in order to acquire a picture of the sensory world. It plays an even more crucial role, however, in apprehending the intelligible world, where the outward senses are of no use.

1. 3.1 Body and soul

In his description of the creation of man[91] Philo claims that the man who came into existence after the divine image was "ἰδέα τις ἢ γένος ἢ σφραγίς, νοητός, ἀσώματος, οὔτ᾽ ἄρρεν οὔτε θῆλυ, ἄφθαρτος φύσει"[92], that is, a form or type of seal, perceptible only to the mind, incorporeal, neither male nor female, incorruptible. This man however, is, according to Philo, very different from the man whose creation is described in Genesis 2. 7, who was formed by God taking clay from the earth and breathing into his face. The latter man is αἰσθητὸς, an object of sense perception,

[91] *Opif.* 134- 135.
[92] *Opif.* 134.

consisting of the union of body and soul, "ἐκ σώματος καὶ ψυχῆς συνεστώς"[93]. The man who exists on earth is thus of composite nature, and the divine part, the divine breath, renders man immortal, so that it might be said that "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"[94].

Although it is made clear that man is now not as perfect as was the first man, either with respect to his body or to his soul[95], so that as generation follows generation, the powers of body and soul are feebler[96], he nonetheless asserts that the descendants of that first man are, with respect to mind, closely united to the word or reason of God as well as belonging, because of the structure of the body, to the world: "πᾶς ἄνθρωπος κατὰ μὲν τὴν διάνοιαν ᾠκείωται λόγῳ θείῳ, τῆς μακαρίας φύσεως ἐκμαγεῖον ἢ ἀπόσπασμα ἢ ἀπαύγασμα γεγονώς, κατὰ δὲ τὴν τοῦ σώματος κατασκευὴν ἅπαντι τῷ κόσμῳ"[97]. It is, in Philo's view, this duality of nature that, it will be demonstrated, both permits and hinders human beings access to the νοητὸς κόσμος .

1.3.2. Mind and the senses

Philo focuses quite extensively upon the perceptual faculties embedded within the soul, and indeed appears to understand the nature of the soul in relation to perception of the outside world, both the sensory universe and that which is apprehended by the intellect alone. Indeed, this may explain why in certain passages Philo appears to use διάνοια and νοῦς synonymously: he employs these terms to refer to the soul because he considers them to represent the most important and exalted component of the soul: the mind indeed not only plays a vital role in perceiving bodily objects and in controlling the senses, but alone can hope to perceive those things which belong to the νοητός κόσμος.

---

[93] *Opif.* 134.
[94] *Opif.* 135.
[95] Since Philo explains in *Opif.* 140 that: "ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἡμετέρα γένεσις ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, τὸν δὲ θεὸς ἐδημιούργησεν".
[96] *Opif.* 141.
[97] *Opif.* 146.

1.3.2.1 *Terminology*

In *Opif.* 135 it is notable that Philo conflates soul and mind, having explained previously that the soul was originated from nothing created and that the divine breath was breathed in so that man may, with respect to the invisible part, which is the ψυχή, be rendered immortal[98], he then proceeds to confer this immortality upon διάνοια, mind. In *Migr.* 193 it also appears that, whilst not using 'νοῦς' , mind or thought, as a synonym of 'ψυχή', Philo focuses on what he considers the most important aspect of the soul, namely, its faculty of reason. The use of the term 'νοῦς' also happens to suit his interest since, in this passage, the focus happens to be upon the contrast between "ὁ δὲ τῶν ὅλων νοῦς"[99] which created the universe, and the human mind which did not create the body. An apparent confusion of the terms might in fact reveal underlying subtleties, as is the case upon careful examination of *Agr.* 48- 49, where Philo begins with the assertion that the mind, 'νοῦς', ought to rule in us like a shepherd, 'ποιμήν',[100] and follows with a mention of the parts of the soul, "τὰ μέρη τῆς ψυχῆς", which are prevented from drifting by God's care, as he provides a shepherd, 'ποιμήν', for it[101]. The extract ends with an assurance that it is impossible that the union of the mind, 'διάνοια', should be dissolved[102]. Two points of interest emerge from this passage. The first, that Philo appears to use 'νοῦς' and 'διάνοια' interchangeably, but not 'ψυχή', since he insists that the mind ought to rule over the parts of the soul. This latter fact constitutes a second plane of interest, namely, the notion that there are not only divisions within the soul, but that one part, concerned with reasoning, is appointed to rule over the others by God. The explanation in *Opif.* 139, of the relationship between the senses and reason confirms that what appears occasionally to be an indiscriminate use of ψυχη, διάνοια, and νοῦς in fact conceals a distinction between the soul as a whole composed of different parts, and the most exalted of those parts: the mind. Indeed, Philo describes the senses

---

[98] *Opif.* 135: "τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν ἀπ᾽ οὐδενὸς γενητοῦ τὸ παράπαν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ ἡγεμόνος τῶν πάντων· ὃ 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 ἀθανατίζηται".
[99] *Migr.* 193.
[100] *Agr.* 48.
[101] *Agr.* 49.
[102] *Agr.* 49.

as the means by which the creator endowed the body with soul, but insists that they are nonetheless ruled by reason, λογισμός[103]. That νοῦς and λογισμός are used quasi-synonymously by Philo is confirmed by an explanation in *Conf.* 21 of the soul's division into three distinct parts, one of them being the division of mind and reason, "νοῦς καὶ λόγος".

1.3.2.2 *The soul as tripartite*

Philo several times mentions that the soul is in fact tripartite[104]. In *Quid Rerum* 225, Philo writes that: "ψυχὴ τριμερὴς ἐστι" as a passing comment in a wider discussion concerning the seven-branched candlestick, so the tripartite nature of the soul features here as an assumption requiring no further explanation. This is also the case in *Conf.* 21, although in this passage, Philo names the three different divisions of the soul as "νοῦς καὶ λόγος", mind and reason, "θυμός", passion or temper, and "ἐπιθυμία", desire or appetite. It is notable that Philo consistently assumes that the soul's division into three components is to be taken for granted. Indeed, several passages in *Leg.* provide a more detailed exposition of the functions of the three parts of the soul, and are preceded by an affirmation of the principle that the soul is tripartite. Thus, in *Leg.* 3. 115, Philo prefaces his account of a debate which exists between some philosophers who have separated the parts of the soul from one another only in respect of their operations and others who have distinguished them also by their places with an affirmation of the nature of the soul as tripartite. The axiomatic status of this pronouncement is emphasised in his use of 'συμβαίνω'[105]. Indeed, associated expressions are often employed in philosophy with two main senses: Firstly, to refer to a contingent attribute, or 'accident' (in the modern sense) and secondly, as designating an essential attribute or property of something[106]. Whether essential or contingent to the character of our soul[107], Philo's use of the verb reinforces the notion that the three parts are to be taken for granted in the discussion that follows. A similar

[103] *Opif.* 139.
[104] Cf. Plato, *Rep.* iv, esp. 438 ff.
[105] *Leg. All.* 3. 115: "τριμερῆ συμβέβηκε τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν εἶναι καὶ ἔχειν μέρος μὲν ἓν λογιστικόν, δεύτερον δὲ θυμικόν, τρίτον δὲ ἐπιθυμητικόν".
[106] Liddell, H. G and Scott, R, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1968, p. 1674.
[107] This point will be discussed in further detail in '*c. The soul divided between rational and irrational parts'*.

approach is apparent in *Leg.* i. 70 where Philo introduces his statement that our soul is divided into three parts with the verbal adjective νοητέον, 'one must conceive/ understand'. Not only is one to assume that the soul is divided into three parts, but the character of these divisions is also taken as a given. Indeed, Philo consistently refers to the soul as possessing "[…]μέρος τὸ μὲν λογικόν, τὸ δὲ θυμικόν, τὸ δὲ ἐπιθυμητικόν"[108]. He also refers to a tripartite division of the soul into the (undivided) rational part, the senses (which are five) and speech, sometimes adding to that the generative power[109].

1.3.2.3 *The soul divided between rational and irrational elements*[110]

It may appear somewhat puzzling that Philo also frequently refers to the soul as divided between a rational and an irrational faculty, thus conveying the impression that he views the soul as divided into two parts rather than three[111]. The explanation for this apparent discrepancy is to be found in *Leg.* 3. 118 where, according to Philo, reason, 'ὁ λόγος', is appointed as the charioteer of the two passions, θυμός and ἐπιθυμία. Significantly, both temper and appetite are referred to as 'πάθος', so that although they are differentiated, they still pertain to the same sphere, passion, essentially distinct from that of reason which governs them. Indeed, this same hierarchical distinction is present in *Leg.* i. 72, where Philo explains that the harmony of the soul resides in the dominance of the lesser parts by the more excellent, and emphasises that the reasoning faculty is better, the lustful and the high spirited are the inferior: "κρεῖττον μὲν δὴ τὸ λογικόν, χεῖρον δὲ τὸ ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ τὸ θυμικόν". Once more, "τὸ ἐπιθυμητικὸν καὶ τὸ θυμικόν " are treated as similar in status, while the difference which is underlined is that between reason and passion. This is also evident from Philo's taking inspiration, in this same passage, from Plato's image of the passions as horses being guided by reason as their charioteer[112]. Where the rational part, τὸ λογικόν, is the guide, the other two irrational faculties are both

[108] *Leg.* i. 70. See also *Leg. All*. i. 72, 3. 115 and *Conf.* 21.
[109] *Opif.* 117.
[110] For an understanding of the mind as distinct from the soul see Plato, *Tim*. 90 and Aristotle, *De Anima*, esp. 429 ff. Bipartite and tripartite models of the soul co-exist in many Platonists.
[111] See *Her.* 132, 167; *Det.* 3, 5, 82, 83; *Sobr.* 18.
[112] *Phaedrus* 246 A, B and 253 D.

likened to horses. However, where Plato draws a sharp contrast between the two horses, one of whom listens to the voice of reason, and the other prideful steed who does not wish to yield[113], Philo does not. There is no mention in *Leg.* 1. 72 of any difference in the response of the irrational parts towards reason, and both are called inferior, without further precisions as to hierarchy being provided. While for Plato the danger to the soul comes from the disobedient horse who might plunge and run away, giving trouble *both* to reason *and* to the other horse[114], Philo has both 'horses', "ὁ θυμὸς καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία"[115], turn restive and drag the driver, reason, from his seat. He therefore draws a much greater distinction between reason and the two passions, whilst refraining from accentuating the differences between θυμός and ἐπιθυμία .This therefore explains the apparent inconsistency between Philo's designation of the soul as tripartite and his depiction of it as compounded of two parts: rational and irrational.

Where Philo's understanding of the possibility of perception, whether sensory or otherwise is concerned, this division of the soul into rational and irrational components is essential. Indeed, both are concerned with different spheres of discernment, since Philo argues that there was a time when the mind neither had sense-perception nor conversed with it[116], and strikingly, writes that it was then only half the perfect soul, "ἥμισυ ψυχῆς τελείας"[117], because it lacked the power whereby it might discern bodies. This power, without which all bodily objects were wrapped in darkness, and by which they could become the objects of knowledge, is outward sense, 'αἴσθησις'[118]. That 'αἴσθησις' is identical, in Philo, to the irrational part of the soul might be gathered from the depiction of its relationship to mind, the rational part, which closely resembles that portrayed by Philo between the two passions and reason. Indeed, it is affirmed in *Migr.* 3 that both αἴσθησις and διάνοια are related and part of the same soul, and the parallelism between sense and the irrational part, mind and the rational part seems to confirm that the identification is correct: "αἴσθησις δὲ συγγενὲς καὶ ἀδελφόν ἐστι διανοίας, ἄλογον λογικῆς,

[113] *Phaedrus* 253 E.
[114] *Phaedrus* 254 A.
[115] *Leg. All*. 1. 73.
[116] *Cher.* 58.
[117] *Cher.* 59.
[118] *Cher.* 59.

ἐπειδὴ μιᾶς ἄμφω μέρη ψυχῆς ταῦτα ". Furthermore, the association of the irrational part of the soul with the outward senses is clearly confirmed in *Det.* 168 where Philo writes that the irrational part of the soul is itself subdivided into seven portions: the outward senses and the organs of speech and generation: "τὸ ἄλογον τῆς ψυχῆς εἰς ἑπτὰ διανέμεται μοίρας, ὅρασιν ἀκοὴν ὄσφρησιν γεῦσιν ἁφὴν λόγον γόνιμον"[119]. It is thus natural that he should classify the senses as the daughters of the irrational part of the soul: "ἀλόγου δὲ μέρους ψυχῆς αἰσθήσεις θυγατέρες"[120]. Philo depicts the union of 'αἴσθησις' with the mind in *Cher.* 60 in terms of their respective perceptual faculties, the mind being able to apprehend incorporeal things, while the senses can, when attaching a second portion to the soul, enable the perception of solid bodies. It might thus appear that man is the ideal intermediary between the two worlds, and can moreover access both. However, the coupling of sensory perception to the mind does not, in Philo, come without a price to the latter. Indeed, though it seems from *Cher*. 60 that it is more natural for the mind, and thus for the soul, which is ruled by the reasoning faculty, to gravitate towards the perception of incorporeal bodies, it is possible for the mind to be dragged down by the senses, since following its meeting with sense which captures the external objects of sense through the sensory organs, mind becomes vain, the worst evil of the soul[121]. This comes about as a result of the mind believing that these were its own possessions[122]. This explains why, despite the necessity of the outward senses for the perception of bodily objects[123], Philo writes in *Post.* 56 that the mind is destroyed by each one of the outward senses as by a moth[124]. Philo's notion of an opposition between the rational and irrational parts of the soul is even more starkly illuminated by his remarks in *Migr*. 204 where the outer senses are said to feast when the mind is fasting, and vice versa[125]. The implications of this attitude towards a soul formed of two unequal and competing parts will be revealed further upon examination of Philo's attitudes towards the possibility of receiving visions of things intelligible to the mind

[119] See also *Opif.* 117 (Loeb I) and note p. 476.
[120] *Migr.* 206.
[121] *Cher.* 57.
[122] *Cher.* 63.
[123] *Cher.* 61- 62.
[124] *Post*. 56: "καθάπερ γὰρ ὑπὸ σητὸς ὑφ᾽ ἑκάστης τῶν αἰσθήσεων νοῦς ἐκβιβρώσκεται καὶ διεσθίεται, σειόμενος καὶ σπαραττόμενος·"
[125] *Migr*. 204: "ταῖς γὰρ τῶν αἰσθήσεων εὐωχίαις λιμὸν ἄγει διάνοια, ὡς ἔμπαλιν ταῖς νηστείαις εὐφροσύνας."

alone, and the preparation for such visions which most often, it will be shown, necessitate a neglect not only of the body but also of outer sense, which though part of the soul, is understood by Philo to be the "σωματικός οἶκος διανοίας"[126]. Indeed, for Philo, a soul which too greatly embraces the senses becomes effeminate and polluted: "τί οὖν, ὦ ψυχή […] αἴσθησιν ἀσπάζῃ τὴν ἐκθηλύνουσάν σε καὶ μιαίνουσαν;"[127].

Philo's explanation as to why the rational part, the mind, must be pre-eminent in the soul and govern over the senses is very closely related to their different perceptual spheres, as the parallelism between νοῦς and νοητός, αἴσθησις and αἰσθητός demonstrates, in the following extract from *Aet.* 1 which affirms the superiority of mind, and that which is perceptible to the mind over sense and that which is sensible: "αἰεὶ δ᾽ αἰσθήσεως ἡγεμὼν νοῦς καὶ νοητὸν αἰσθητοῦ". Furthermore, despite the mention in *Cher.* 61- 62 of sense, symbolised by Eve, pouring light into the mind when she came into being, enabling the mind to discern the nature of bodies, in *Post.* 57, Philo writes that it is the mind, νοῦς, which sends forth its own light and causes all bodies to be seen visibly[128]. These two passages might initially appear to reveal inconsistency on Philo's part; however, his remarks in *Post.* 126 clarify his understanding of the relationship between the mind and the senses: drawing a distinction between the active, that which irrigates, and the passive, that which is irrigated[129], he proposes that each of the senses is irrigated by the mind as by a fountain. He then argues that: "οὐδεὶς γοῦν εὖ φρονῶν εἴποι ἂν ὀφθαλμοὺς ὁρᾶν, ἀλλὰ νοῦν δι᾽ ὀφθαλμῶν". Thus, the sensory organs, through which sense captures the external objects[130] are the instruments which the mind can employ in order to obtain knowledge of the αἰσθητός κόσμος. In *Congr.* 143 Philo clarifies this point by means of a different image, arguing that the mind uses the external senses as ministers in a court of justice and then decides itself on the nature of the objects thus submitted to it[131]. Despite the many disparaging remarks concerning the senses, Philo

[126] *Migr.* 187.
[127] *Cher.* 52.
[128] *Post.* 57: "ὁ νοῦς τὸ οἰκεῖον φῶς ἀποστέλλων πάντα καὶ τὰ σώματα καὶ τὰ πράγματα τηλαυγῶς παρασκευάζει καταλαμβάνεσθαι".
[129] *Post.* 126: "ποτισμὸς δὲ ὁ μέν ἐστι ποτίζοντος, ὁ δ᾽ αὖ ποτιζομένου".
[130] *Cher.* 57.
[131] *Congr.* 143.

nonetheless maintains that in a wise soul, the seven senses are unpolluted[132]. It is as such that they might properly function as instruments to the mind, permitting it to gain access to the sensible world, and, correspondingly, the whole soul is a legitimate companion of reason[133], presenting a united front to the body, which is the region of pleasures and lusts. Here, "ἡ ὅλη ψυχὴ" might confidently be assumed to stand for both the rational part of the soul, the mind and the irrational part, since Philo clarifies in *Her.* 55 that he uses the term 'ψυχή' in two senses: "ἥ τε ὅλη καὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν αὐτῆς μέρος, ὃ κυρίως εἰπεῖν ψυχὴ ψυχῆς ἐστι".

1.3.3 Visions and the eye of the soul: The perceptual role of the mind

Not only is man compounded of the union between body and soul, but the soul itself is, for Philo, to be understood as divided between rational and irrational elements. The pre-eminence of the rational part of the soul, the mind, has already been shown to reside for Philo, in its vital importance for the ordering and understanding of sensory perceptions. Its significance in his works, where visions are concerned, in apprehending those natures that dwell in the νοητός κόσμος shall now be explored. Here, I shall attempt to understand the nature of the 'eye of the soul'[134], its role in apprehending objects in the intelligible world, and whether it is able to perceive God. It will then be important to establish both its mechanism, the manner in which it sees, and whether seeing with the eye of the soul might be considered equivalent to 'experiencing or having a vision'. Moreover, if perceptions of or in the intelligible world by means of the eye of the soul are to be considered as visions, it will be important to establish whether any knowledge gained as a result is to be considered extraordinary and to an extent superhuman, as is the case with knowledge acquired following visions in biblical texts.

---

[132] *Det.* 169.
[133] *Congr.* 59: "λογισμοῦ […] ἡ […] ὅλη ψυχὴ καθάπερ ἀστὴ σύμβιος".
[134] For references to the eye of the soul or eye of the mind, cf. Plato, *Rep*. 519b, 533d; *Sym*. 219a; *Soph*. 254a; Aristot. *Eth.* 1144 a 30.

1.3.3.1 *Terminology*

It is clear from many passages in Philo's work that by 'τὸ ψυχῆς ὄμμα', the eye of the soul, he means to refer to the mind in its perceptual role. Indeed, in *Mut.* 3 he suggests that the eye that receives the impression of the divine appearance is the eye of the soul[135]. It is clear from this passage that the divine cannot, unlike in other Jewish texts before Philo, be perceived with the bodily eye, even in extraordinary circumstances: Philo has named another organ which might apprehend the superhuman. The identification of this organ as the mind can be deduced from several paragraphs from *Heres*. Indeed, in this treatise, Philo first affirms that the mind is better than the outward sense[136], so that objects of the intellect are vastly superior to those of the senses[137]. He then proceeds to justify this last proposition on the basis of the eyes of the body being inferior to the eyes of the soul[138], thus drawing a parallel between "νοῦς" in the opening statement and "τὰ νοητά " in the closing proof. If this were not clear enough, two further passages, both referring to the mind, point out that one comprehends the world of the intellect through the mind and the external world through the senses[139], and that wisdom, as it is understood by the pure mind, is superior to that which is taught by the outward senses[140]. Since it is the mind which is identified, in these two last passages, as comprehending the intelligible world, its identification with the eye of the soul can without doubt be confirmed by *Sacr.* 69, which affirms that Pharaoh was mutilated as to the eye of the soul, by which alone incorporeal natures can be apprehended[141]. This function of the eye of the soul is quite consistent throughout Philo's works, and might be explained by his belief that the power to understand the objects of the intellect was granted to the eye of the soul by God[142].

---

[135] *Mut.* 3: "τὸ δεχόμενον τὴν θείαν φαντασίαν τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστιν ὄμμα".
[136] *Her.* 89: "νοῦς […] ἄμεινον αἰσθήσεως".
[137] *Her.* 89: "ὥστε μυρίῳ πλήθει τὰ νοητὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ὑπερβάλλειν".
[138] *Her.* 89: "τοῦ γὰρ ψυχῆς ὄμματος βραχυτάτη μοῖρα οἱ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα ὀφθαλμοί".
[139] *Her.* 111.
[140] *Her.* 98.
[141] *Sacr.* 69: "τὰ ψυχῆς ὄμματα πεπηρωμένος, οἷς μόνοις αἱ ἀσώματοι καταλαμβάνοντα φύσεις".
[142] *Migr.* 191: "[…] τὸ ψυχῆς ὄμμα, ᾧ νοητὰ βλέπειν ἔδωκεν ὁ θεός".

1.3.3.2 *The perceptual role of the mind*

1.3.3.2 a The inadequacy of bodily sight: its reasons and consequences

In Jewish conceptions of visions before Philo, where the seer overcomes spatial boundaries in order to interact with angels or even with the Glory of God (in the case of heavenly journeys) or when he is visited by heavenly powers, the seer does not require an organ wholly distinct from those of the human body. This is the case even in vision reports where only the visionary sees the angel, as in *Daniel* 10.7. Philo, however, regards perception of things or minds in the intelligible world as the primary function of the eye of the soul, the mind. In fact, its ability to perceive things in the intelligible world is contingent upon its belonging to that realm itself- it is ontologically alike those things which it must apprehend. Indeed, although sight is unequivocally presented by Philo, throughout all his works, as the greatest of the senses[143], better than hearing[144], which is inadequate both for a clear comprehension of the truth[145] and for divine encounters[146], since the eyes of the body can even behold heaven[147], and it is associated with a desire for knowledge[148] and with memory[149], it has no access to the νοητὸς κόσμος, and cannot apprehend angels, even less God himself. Indeed, apprehension in general is not the role of any of the senses, since they are incapable of apprehending subjects, but can only distinguish between bodies. This is given in *Leg*. *All*. 3. 50 as the reason for which, unlike the mind, none of the senses are susceptible to instruction[150].

---

[143] *Opif.* 120, when remarking upon those things which are judged "διὰ τῆς ἀρίστης τῶν αἰσθήσεων ὄψεως".

[144] *Conf.* 140: "ὅψιν γὰρ ἀπλανῆ πρὸ ἀκοῆς ἀπατεῶνος ἄξιον μάρτυρα τίθεσθαι". See also *Ebr.* 82.

[145] *Conf.* 141 "[…] πρὸς τὴν σαφῆ τῆς ἀληθείας κατάληψιν μακρὸν ὅσον ὄψεως ὑστερίζουσα διελέγχεται γέμουσα ματαιότητος ἀκοή".

[146] *Migr.* 47- 48: This passage does represent Philo's judgement of hearing as inadequate, although the sight which he believes apprehends the voice of God is the sight of the soul, as is made clear in the last phrase of paragraph 48.

[147] *Conf.* 100; *Opif.* 147, 54.

[148] *Fug.* 121, 138.

[149] *Mut.* 98.

[150] *Leg*. iii. 50: "οὔτε γὰρ ἡ ὅρασις οὔθ᾽ ἡ ἀκοὴ οὔτε τις τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων διδακτή, ὥστε οὐ δύναται κατάληψιν πραγμάτων ποιήσασθαι· μόνων γὰρ σωμάτων διακριτικὴν εἰργάσατο αὐτὴν ὁ ἐργασάμενος· ὁ δὲ νοῦς ὁ διδασκόμενός ἐστιν […]".

In the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint, as well as in the New Testament, the crucial distinction is that between heaven and earth, God and humans. Angels play an important part in mediating between God and human beings, travelling between their respective spheres, though they themselves for the most part are described as dwelling in heaven. For Philo, however, the distinction is no longer solely between heaven and earth but between the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, of which heaven is a part[151] and the νοητὸς κόσμος, thus adding an epistemological differentiation to the metaphysical division: The distinction in nature between the two spheres is largely apparent through the different means and levels of difficulty required to perceive objects in these spheres. Thus, one can no longer claim to understand the division in spatial terms since, as shall be further discussed, the human mind which exists in a body is yet part of the νοητὸς κόσμος.

Sight, the sight of the body that is, is no longer sufficient for the perception and even less apprehension of superhuman beings, since their essential difference from humans does not necessarily result in their being removed from them in spatial terms, but in their being ontologically distinct, since humans are compounded of minds *and* bodies, whereas those creatures which Moses calls angels are the purest souls which have disdained to be drawn towards the earth[152]. As the eyes of the body are able to function only where material objects are concerned, this difference in nature entails a perceptual gulf. Indeed, Philo reasons in *Gig*. 9 that, though our sight is incapable of perceiving the forms of souls, this does not entail that there are no souls, but rather that they can only be apprehended by the mind, since like must be contemplated by like[153]. While the eyes of the body behold that which is perceptible to the external senses, they are incapable of seeing in the intelligible world: only the mind beholds those things which are perceptible to the intellect. As such, the mind fulfils in the soul the role of the eyes in the body[154]. As a result, for Philo, the ontological distinction implies also an epistemological distinction: the ordinary, bodily manner of receiving

---

[151] That is, the heaven that we perceive, since Philo also mentions in *Opif.* the existence of an archetypal heaven.

[152] *Gig.* 12; *Plant.* 14.

[153] *Gig*. 9: "καταλαμβάνεσθαι δ᾽ αὐτὰς ἀναγκαῖον ὑπὸ νοῦ, ἵνα πρὸς τῶν ὁμοίων τὸ ὅμοιον θεωρῆται".

[154] *Opif.* 53: "ὅπερ γὰρ νοῦς ἐν ψυχῇ, τοῦτ᾽ ὀφθαλμὸς ἐν σώματι· βλέπει γὰρ ἑκάτερος, ὁ μὲν τὰ νοητά, ὁ δὲ τὰ αἰσθητά".

visions and thus potentially gaining in knowledge has been removed. This entails the need for an organ equivalent to the eyes, which might take over their role in the intelligible world. Consequently, we shall see that where Philo is concerned, the means of bridging the divide has to an extent come within the control of human beings, who are able to improve, through greater learning and exercise of virtue and avoidance of all that pertains to the body, their means of access to the intelligible world, to the world of minds and of angels, and ultimately of God.

Philo constantly marks the mind, which in some contexts he refers to as the eye of the soul, as superior to the eyes of the body: the organ that according to Philo, it shall be demonstrated, allows man to perceive in the νοητὸς κόσμος, is the same mind that he describes as judging and ordering sensory perceptions[156]. Nonetheless, he conveys the impression that it pertains to an utterly different sphere to that of the senses. Indeed, in *Sobr*. 4-5 he encompasses both propositions: "ὅσῳ τοίνυν ψυχὴ σώματος κρείττων, τοσούτῳ καὶ νοῦς ὀφθαλμῶν ἀμείνων". Here one finds both an explicit expression of the superiority of the mind over the eyes, coupled with a parallelism between ψυχή and νοῦς on the one hand, σῶμα and ὀφθαλμός on the other. It is most likely that the soul which Philo refers to here is the entity compounded of both mind and senses, the faculties of perception and judgement, which would of course include the sense of sight. This is in no way problematic, however, since the eyes are described in his works as the orifices through which light might shine into the soul, and subordinated to sense[157], which is a tool of the mind. Thus, the body as an instrument of the soul is quite appropriately compared to the eyes, which are both instruments of and superseded by the mind. The identification of mind as pertaining to the intelligible sphere is more clearly apparent in *Sobr.* 3, where Philo writes that the mind will encounter (indeed one might understand the use of the middle voice as indicating that it will converse or interact with) the images perceptible to the mind: "τοῖς νοητοῖς ἀγάλμασιν ἐντεύξεται". Tellingly, the sight of these intelligible images will attract the soul and simultaneously will preclude attraction towards sensible objects: "ὧν ἡ θέα ψυχαγωγοῦσα πρὸς οὐδὲν ἔτι τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀπονεύειν ἐάσει".

---

156 *Congr.* 143.
157 *Cher.* 61.

1.3.3.2 b Why is the soul able to see in the νοητός κόσμος? An account of the nature and characteristics of the mind.

It thus becomes apparent that for Philo, the mind is not only superior to the eye of the body, both in its ordering of our sensory perceptions[158] and in its ability to see deeper into things[159], but is, as to its very essence, distinct from the bodily eye and because of this is able to see into another realm, unrelated to the sensory world. Indeed, the reason for which the mind is able to perceive in the νοητὸς κόσμος, which also explains its ontological difference from the bodily eye, is that it is of divine essence. It is, according to Philo, the image of the image of God[160], and as such is also indivisible and undivided[161]. These two characteristics constitute the explanation for its ability to perceive the intelligible things. In fact, Winston quite cogently argues that Philo's "overpowering conviction of God's existence and his unshakeable confidence that we can bask in its presence" comes from what Winston characterizes as an "early form of the ontological argument", namely, Philo's understanding that the concept of God was imprinted upon the human mind, held to be an inseparable portion of the divine mind[162]. Winston thus links Philo's conception of God and the universe to his theory of creation[163].

It is therefore necessary to examine in more depth what is meant and entailed by the mind being the image of the image of God, why Philo believes the mind to be indivisible, and further, why indivisibility renders it more likely to see in the intelligible world. Philo argues in *Heres* that whilst the irrational part of the soul is divided into six portions by God[164], he left the rational part, the mind, undivided,

---

[158] See above: "2 *c. The soul divided between rational and irrational elements*".
[159] *Post.* 118: "ταῦτα μὲν γὰρ τὰς ἐκτὸς ἐπιφανείας μόνον ὁρᾷ, ὁ δὲ τῆς διανοίας ὀφθαλμὸς εἴσω προελθὼν καὶ βαθύνας τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς σπλάγχνοις ἐγκεκρυμμένα κατεῖδε". See also *Congr.* 143: "ὥσπερ γὰρ ὀφθαλμοὶ μὲν ὁρῶσιν, ὁ δὲ νοῦς δι᾽ ὀφθαλμῶν τηλαυγέστερον".
[160] *Her.* 230- 231.
[161] *Her.* 232.
[162] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 46.
[163] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 47.
[164] *Her.* 232. These are given as: "ὅρασις, ἀκοή, γεῦσις, ὄσφρησις, ἁφή, φωνή, γόνιμον ". In *Opif.* 117, the irrational part of the soul is split into the same seven

"κατὰ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς ὁμοιότητα οὐρανοῦ"[165]. Philo proceeds to claim that in so doing, God followed the analogy of heaven taken as a whole: while the inner part of heaven is divided into seven circles of wandering stars, just as the irrational part of the soul is divided into seven parts, the outer heaven remains undivided[166]. It is not clear whether the reference to the whole heaven ought to be understood as pertaining to the created heaven, visible to the bodily eyes, or whether Philo refers to the archetypal, intelligible heaven, or whether the whole heaven is an allusion to both, with the outer sphere of fixed stars being that part which is intelligible to the mind alone. It will be important to establish which Philo does intend, especially given his claim in *Gig*. 60 that "τὸ οὐράνιον τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν ὁ νοῦς". It is indeed strange that he describes the mind as heavenly, since unless explicitly mentioned as the archetypal form of the visible heaven, 'οὐρανός' is generally included as part of the world perceptible to the senses[167]. The context of Philo's description of the mind as the heavenly portion in us is a discussion of the three different types of men: those born of earth, those of heaven, and those of God. While those born of God, the priests and prophets, have migrated into the intelligible world and dwell there[168], those who are born of heaven are primarily mentioned as studying the encyclical sciences, although their mind is also said to exercise itself in all those matters of the intellect[169]. The reference to the mind as "τὸ οὐράνιον τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν" follows the introduction of those men born of heaven, and so presumably intends to exclude those born of earth. The justification for the classification of the mind as heavenly follows immediately: "νοῦς δὲ καὶ τῶν κατ᾽ οὐρανὸν ἕκαστον"[170]. One ought to translate this phrase, along with Colson and Whitaker, as "the heavenly beings are each of them a mind", rather than to understand a reference to the mind of every person who is born of heaven, since all other allusions in this passage to the ones born of heaven refer to them not as 'τῶν κατ᾽ οὐρανὸν' but as 'οἱ […] οὐρανοῦ […] γεγόνασιν

---

parts, "εἰς πέντε αἰσθήσεις καὶ τὸ φωνητήριον ὄργανον καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τὸ γόνιμον".

[165] *Her.* 232.

[166] *Her.* 233. Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 247c, *Tim*. 36c.

[167] For the formation of the incorporeal heaven see *Opif.* 29; For the use of 'οὐρανός' to refer to the visible, solid heaven see *Opif.* 37.

[168] *Gig.* 61.

[169] *Gig.* 60: "παραθήγων καὶ ἀκονῶν ἔτι τε γυμνάζων καὶ συγκροτῶν ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς αὐτόν"

[170] *Gig.* 60.

ἄνθρωποι' or in shortened form, 'οὐρανοῦ'. This would appear to indicate that there is some essential quality of the mind which renders it more akin to heavenly beings than to the sensory objects which surround it on earth[171].

One might then ask whether this is related to the claim in *Heres* that the mind was created in analogy with the outer, indivisible sphere of heaven. Is the whole heaven to be understood as the archetypal heaven or the corporeal heaven, or does Philo intend to draw a distinction between the whole heaven which is part of the sensory world, and the outer sphere of heaven which is part of the intelligible world? Whereas in many passages that mention 'πᾶς οὐρανός', Philo often appears to be discussing the visible heaven, for instance in *Leg*. iii. 171, where 'πᾶς οὐρανός' is included at the end of a list of things which might be seen with the pupil of the eye[172], it is unlikely that Philo wishes to draw an analogy between the mind and the outer sphere of fixed stars in a manner which would entail that the former be considered a part of the sensory world. Indeed, in *Plant.* 22 Philo reports that the eyes of the body can attain not only heaven, but also its utmost reaches[173], so that the eyes of the soul should be assumed to possess even greater power[174]. Moreover, in *Gig.* 62 and *Mut.* 179 Philo points out that the mind can reach the upper reaches of the air and beyond, and in *Mut.* 179 this includes the furthest circle of fixed stars, which the mind can surpass. There ought thus to be little doubt that for Philo, the perceptual realm of the eye of the soul does indeed consist of the intelligible world, and certainly extends beyond heaven, which is still within the domain of the senses. Furthermore, *Her.* 236 states that the perceptual ability of the eye of the soul, which alone can apprehend the intelligible[175], derives from its likeness to God[176].

---

[171] On the place of men born of earth with regard to mind, see chapter below on "*Preparation for the vision*". I do not suggest here that Philo regards men born of earth as having no mind since it is the heavenly part of man, rather he believes that they prioritise the desires of the body and ignore the promptings of the mind.

[172] For instance *Leg. All.* 3. 171, where Philo writes that the pupil of the eye, "αὕτη βραχύτατον οὖσα μέρος τὰς τῶν ὄντων ὁρᾷ ζώνας ὅλας καὶ θάλατταν ἄπειρον καὶ ἀέρος μέγεθος καὶ τοῦ παντὸς οὐρανοῦ".

[173] *Plant.* 22: "οἱ ἐκ φθαρτῆς παγέντες ὕλης ὀφθαλμοὶ τοσοῦτον ἐπέβησαν, ὡς ἀπὸ τοῦ τῆς γῆς χωρίου πρὸς τὸν μακρὰν οὕτως ἀφεστῶτα ἀνατρέχειν οὐρανὸν καὶ ψαύειν τῶν περάτων αὐτοῦ".

[174] *Plant.* 22: "[…]πόσον τινὰ χρὴ νομίσαι τὸν πάντῃ δρόμον τῶν ψυχῆς ὀμμάτων".

[175] *Sacr.* 69.

If one is better to understand the mind and its role in perception, one must further elucidate the nature of the outer sphere of fixed stars, beyond which it can reach[177], and to which it is moreover compared, bearing in mind the conclusions just reached concerning the unlikelihood of the mind's being compared to any corporeal substance. Interestingly, in *Somn.* 1. 21 Philo speaks of the outermost sphere of fixed stars in a passage dealing with the incomprehensibility of heaven and its varying constituents. It appears that he is referring to a corporeal heaven in this passage since he asks whether it might be of solid ice or purest fire, and with respect to its outermost sphere that it is not possible to know whether it has upward reaching depth or not. This appears to indicate that the outer sphere is to be conceived as corporeal. Indeed, in *Spec. Leg.* 3. 189 Philo describes the outer sphere of fixed stars as circumscribing the world: it acts therefore as a boundary[178]. It is very likely, moreover that this world is the created, sensory world, since the passage refers several times to God's activity as Father and Creator of the world. There appear therefore to be several indications that Philo often understands the "ἐξωτάτω καὶ ἀπλανής σφαῖρα ἄτμητος" as being part of the αἰσθητός κόσμος, albeit at its very edges. However, this seems to be somewhat at odds with the mention in *Her.* 233 that the soul and heaven are "τὰς νοερὰς καὶ λογικὰς δύο φύσεις, τήν τε ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ παντί". This cannot, however, be automatically regarded as an entirely precise and accurate statement by Philo of his own views concerning either the heaven or the soul, since he generally speaks of the latter as possessing an irrational as well a rational part[179]. It might then be surmised that the qualities referred to are merely relative: that is, that the heaven and the soul are rational and intellectual entities in the context, respectively, of the world and of the human being. Of course, since Philo sometimes uses 'ψυχή' to refer to the mind, he may in the same manner be employing 'οὐρανός' as a metonymy for the "ἐξωτάτω καὶ ἀπλανῆ σφαῖραν". In fact, given that the following sentence adds

---

176 *Her.* 235- 236.

177 For instance in *Mut.* 179.

178 *Spec. Leg.* 3. 189: "οὐκ ἔστιν ἄπειρα, πεπέρασται δὲ ἑνὸς κόσμου περιγραφῇ, πόλεως τρόπον τῇ τῶν ἀπλανῶν ἐξωτάτω σφαίρᾳ περιλαμβανόμενα ". For further mention of all of heaven as a frontier region, of which the sphere of fixed stars constitutes the outer reaches, see above, "*The place of heaven in Philo*", penultimate paragraph.

179 See for instance the previous verse, *Her.* 232, where he speaks both of "τὸ μὲν […] ἄλογον ψυχῆς μέρος" and of "τὸ δὲ λογικόν, ὃ δὴ νοῦς ὠνομάσθη ".

that they are both whole and indivisible, and that he has presented the inner sphere of heaven as divided, in the same fashion as the irrational part of the soul, it emerges that he does indeed intend to refer to the mind and the outer sphere of heaven. The question still remains, however, whether the outer sphere of fixed stars ought to be considered as part of the intelligible world or the sensory world. Perhaps this matter is unclear because it was not the main object of Philo's interest in *Her.* 230f. Indeed, one ought to recall the purpose of this passage which, as Philo reminds the reader with the concluding statement: "διὸ λέγεται· "τὰ δὲ ὄρνεα οὐ διεῖλε.""[180], was to interpret the *Genesis* 15. 10 account of the two sacrificial birds that are not divided. Thus, Philo's foremost concern in this passage was to interpret the allegory of the two birds as two minds, one of which is the human mind and is indivisible. The analogy of the heaven suited him particularly well, especially given the parallels which he saw between the sevenfold inner sphere of planets and the seven divisions of the irrational part of the soul.

One is thus left inconclusive in the face of the apparently differing depictions of the nature of the outer sphere of fixed stars in Philo, and so unable to come to any firm conclusion with regard to the nature of the mind, and how seriously the attribution of 'νοερά' and 'λογικη' is meant: are they merely relative to the whole (body or world) in which the mind or the outer sphere dwell, or are they to be understood as absolutes? In order to make sense of the impression in some of Philo's works that he considers the outer sphere to be part of the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος, whilst apparently designating it as intellectual and rational, a final line of inquiry might attempt to treat separately the notions, often conflated in Philo, of rational and intelligible. Thus, it might be that Philo's comparison of the outer sphere to the mind assumes merely that they are both rational, just as they are both indivisible, without thereby implying any shared nature in belonging to the νοητὸς κόσμος. Indeed, it appears very difficult to understand the outer sphere as belonging to the intelligible world, since it is not only the planetary sphere that can be perceived through the senses but also the fixed stars[181]. This might imply that it is part of the sensory world, whilst still being a

[180] *Her.* 233.
[181] *Opif.* 147 revels that even the fixed stars can be seen by man: "[…]διὰ τῆς ἡγεμονικωτάτης τῶν αἰσθήσεων ὄψεως ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ ἑκάστῳ τῶν ἄλλων ἀστέρων πλανήτων καὶ ἀπλανῶν συνεγγίζων."

rational entity. Given the evidence from other treatises, it is very difficult to believe that in *Heres* Philo really counted the "ἐξωτάτω καὶ ἀπλανῆ σφαῖραν" as part of the intelligible world, although he clearly asserts that heaven (which most likely stands for the outer sphere in *Heres* 233) is rational. Therefore, we are left in uncertainty concerning the kinship of the mind, as well as of the outer sphere of fixed stars, to either the intelligible or the sensory world: all that we can gather from *Heres* 233 is that they are τὰς νοερὰς καὶ λογικὰς δύο φύσεις. Being rational does not appear to exclude the possibility of existing in the αἰσθητὸς κόσμος.

In *Heres* 234, Philo offers a different analogy for the mind, in an explanation of the symbolic meaning of the birds in *Genesis* 15. 10: the pigeon, which is tame and domesticated, represents our human mind, while the turtledove represents its paradigm[182]. It becomes apparent in the following sentence that the paradigm is not to be understood as heaven, or even as the outer sphere of heaven. Rather, it is "ὁ θεοῦ λόγος". One might wonder whether the two are not to be identified. Indeed, having described the mind as by nature indivisible, in analogy with the outermost sphere of heaven, Philo proceeds to depict it as dividing other things, just as "ὁ θεοῦ λόγος" to which it is compared[183]. Furthermore, the Reason of God is also said, in the same paragraph, to be indivisible. Moreover, even if we are to understand Philo's conception of the soul in man as comparable to the heaven in the universe, considering them as "τὰς […] νοερὰς καὶ λογικὰς δύο φύσεις"[184], as merely an expression of their positions relative to the sensory entities in which they are contained, his words in *Heres* 235 appear to be more than coincidental. Indeed, in that passage he identifies the archetypal mind, represented allegorically as a turtledove in *Genesis* 15. 10, with "ὁ θεοῦ λόγος", and proceeds to discourse upon "αἱ δύο φύσεις, ἥ τε ἐν ἡμῖν τοῦ λογισμοῦ καὶ ἡ ὑπὲρ ἡμᾶς τοῦ θείου λόγου". This statement is akin to the aforementioned passage from *Heres* 233, where heaven is described as the intelligible and rational nature in the world. It thus looks as if Philo is identifying the Reason of God with the outermost heaven, which is rather perplexing,

---

[182] In *Her.* 234: "περιστερᾷ μὲν οὖν ὁ ἡμέτερος νοῦς, ἐπειδὴ τιθασὸν καὶ σύντροφον ἡμῖν ἐστι τὸ ζῷον, εἰκάζεται, τῷ δὲ τούτου παραδείγματι ἡ τρυγών".
[183] *Her.* 234.
[184] *Her.* 233- 234.

since where the purely intelligible archetypes of the heaven and the earth are concerned, both are contained within the reason of God, whilst the νοητὸς κόσμος is nothing other than the Reason of God already occupied in the creation of the world[185]. Therefore, even if the outermost sphere is understood to refer to the intelligible heaven[186], it would seem surprising that Philo allowed a distinct part of the νοητὸς κόσμος to be identified with the divine reason. Furthermore, as there are many indications that, for Philo, the reason of God is not so much a part of the intelligible world as the locus of the world of ideas[187], and furthermore is in some cases identified with it[188], the prior comparison of the mind to the "ἐξωτάτω καὶ ἀπλανῆ σφαῖραν" appears to be even more problematic. The only solution appears to be that Philo intended the analogy with the outermost sphere of heaven to be restricted to its indivisibility. This is a reasonable assumption, since the reference to the planetary sphere with its sevenfold division fits the irrational part of the soul, which in Philo is similarly divided. This allowed Philo to compare the human soul as a whole to the entire heaven. Thus, one must conclude that the analogy to the "ἐξωτάτω καὶ ἀπλανῆ σφαῖραν" has no bearing on whether or not Philo considered the mind to be part of the intelligible or the sensory sphere. This presupposes, however, that he probably did not regard indivisibility itself as being a characteristic of the intelligible world alone.

---

[185] *Opif.* 24: "εἰ ΄ τις ἐθελήσειε γυμνοτέροις χρήσασθαι τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, οὐδὲν ἂν ἕτερον εἴποι τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη κοσμοποιοῦντος".

[186] It is possible that the outermost sphere of fixed stars refers to all or part of the archetypal heaven, since in *Decal.* 102 Philo writes that the unit is the idea of the sphere of fixed stars, just as seven is of the planets, since from the unit and the seven springs the incorporeal heaven which is the pattern of the visible heaven. On the other hand, one cannot exclude a mention of the visible heaven in *Her.*, as one would expect it to resemble the archetypal one. Indeed, in *Decal.* 103, Philo proceeds to comment upon the substance of which heaven has been framed, as partly undivided and partly divided, failing, however, to specify whether he writes of the archetypal or of the visible heaven here.

[187] *Opif.* 20: "[…] οὐδ' ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἰδεῶν κόσμος ἄλλον ἂν ἔχοι τόπον ἢ τὸν θεῖον λόγον τὸν ταῦτα διακοσμήσαντα·" See also *Opif.* 36: "ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀσώματος κόσμος ἤδη πέρας εἶχεν ἱδρυθεὶς ἐν τῷ θείῳ λόγῳ".

[188] *Opif.* 25: "[…] δῆλον ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἀρχέτυπος σφραγίς, ὅν φαμεν νοητὸν εἶναι κόσμον, αὐτὸς ἂν εἴη τὸ παράδειγμα, ἀρχέτυπος ἰα τῶν ἰδεῶν ὁ θεοῦ λόγος."

Two factors render it more likely, despite the lack of identification between the outer sphere of the fixed stars and the Reason of God, that the mind, unlike the 'ἀπλανής σφαῖρα', is intended by Philo to feature as part of the intelligible sphere. Firstly, it is designated in *Heres* 230- 231 as being in the image of the image of God[189]. Indeed, according to Philo, the two birds of *Genesis* 15. 10 are allegorical representations of "τοὺς πτηνοὺς καὶ πεφυκότας μετεωροπολεῖν δύο λόγους". One of them is the archetype above us, which Moses calls "εἰκόνα θεοῦ", and the other is the copy which abides among us as "τῆς εἰκόνος ἐκμαγεῖον"[190]. This impression of an image is of course the mind which is in each of us, which according to Philo is "τρίτον εἶναι τύπον ἀπὸ τοῦ πεποιηκότος"[191]. Since Philo understands the Image or Reason of God as being the oldest thing which pertains to the intelligible sphere[192], it follows that the mind, as its image, is also part of the νοητὸς κόσμος. The second main point which makes it very likely that Philo conceived the human mind as being part of the intelligible sphere and which distinguishes it from the "ἐξωτάτω καὶ ἀπλανής σφαῖρα" despite their both being indivisible, is the mind's ability, which it shares with "ὁ θεοῦ λόγος" alone, to deal with and divide all things immaterial as well as material[193]. Indeed, the power of the mind to divide all things, both intelligible and bodily which it comprehends[194], is likened to the action of the Reason of God upon all that is in nature[195]. So the mind shares an attribute, indivisibility, with both the sphere of fixed stars and the divine Reason, but only the latter two possess an active ability to apportion and separate. Significantly, this shared potency is the result of the likeness of the mind to God as Father and Creator. Philo states this unambiguously in *Her.* 236, where he argues that the divine is unmixed and indivisible and without parts (ἀμιγές, ἄκρατον, ἀμερέστατον), whilst being the cause, in the whole world, of mixture, infusion, division, and multiplicity of parts. Philo then reiterates his by now familiar point, that the two minds which are in the

[189] For a similar comparison see also *Opif.* 69 where man is described as being in the likeness of God with regard to mind. For a discussion of 'the image of the image' cf. Plato, *Rep.* 597 ff.
[190] *Her.* 231.
[191] *Her.* 231.
[192] *Fug.* 101.
[193] *Her.* 234.
[194] *Her.* 235: "ὅ […] ἡμέτερος νοῦς, ἅττ᾽ ἂν παραλάβῃ νοητῶς πράγματά τε καὶ σώματα, εἰς ἀπειράκις ἄπειρα διαιρεῖ μέρη καὶ τέμνων οὐδέποτε λήγει".
[195] *Her.* 235: "ὅ […] θεῖος λόγος τὰ ἐν τῇ φύσει διεῖλε καὶ διένειμε πάντα".

likeness of God, the one in us and the one above us, whilst indivisible, are able to divide and distinguish.

1.3.3.2. c The mind as another kind of sense

There are several passages in Philo where the mind is compared to the eye of the body. In fact, in *Opif.* 53 he goes further than mere comparison in asserting that "ὅπερ γὰρ νοῦς ἐν ψυχῇ, τοῦτ᾽ ὀφθαλμὸς ἐν σώματι· βλέπει γὰρ ἑκάτερος, ὁ μὲν τὰ νοητά, ὁ δὲ τὰ αἰσθητά". The mind therefore exactly parallels the eye with regard to its perceptual function, the difference residing solely in their acting upon different realms rather than in the roles which they undertake. Similarly, in *Congr.* 135, the eye of the soul is an organ whose functioning corresponds to the actions of the eye of the body, even where its ability to see is concerned. Indeed, it is also possible for the sight of the mind to be dimmed[196]. It is therefore not the case that Philo has dreamt up an infallible organ with which humans can apprehend the intelligible world. He is thus able to account for the undeniable fact that many fail to see the objects of the intellect, amongst which are the angels, and even more never attain a vision of God.

Accordingly, the mind is not only employed in order to pass judgement on the objects of the senses, but also plays a distinct role in perception. It is this latter function which leads Philo to write, on occasion, as though the mind were a kind of higher sense in its own right, since in *Congr.* 143 he argues that διάνοια is: "ἑκάστης τῶν αἰσθήσεων αἴσθησις εἰλικρινεστέρα" and *Congr.* 144 "καθάπερ γὰρ αἴσθησίς τις αἰσθήσεων, ὡς ἐλέχθη πρότερον, ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχή". These two last passages illustrate the looseness of Philo's terminology[197], as on occasion he fails to mark distinctions between the soul as compounded of both rational and irrational elements, whilst sometimes preferring to refer to the rational part as διάνοια or νοῦς. Where the passages from *Congr.* 143 and 144 are concerned, it is likely that,

[196] *Congr.* 135: "καθάπερ δ᾽ οἱ σώματος ὀφθαλμοὶ πολλάκις μὲν ἀμυδρῶς πολλάκις δὲ τηλαυγῶς ὁρῶσι, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα τοτὲ μὲν ὑποσυγκεχυμένας καὶ ἀδήλους τοτὲ δὲ καθαρὰς καὶ τρανὰς δέχεται τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων ἰδιότητας".

[197] Discussed above: "2 *a. Terminology*" and "2 *c. The soul divided between rational and irrational elements*".

having specified that it is the *mind* which he considers the more pure sense of the senses, he does not feel obliged to be precise when reiterating the same point in the following paragraph. Philo's reference to the mind as a sense, albeit the purest, appears somewhat odd in the context of frequent allusions to the superiority and essential difference of mind from sense. However, it is a significant indicator of his understanding of its role as perceptual. Indeed, Philo goes further in his portrayal of the mind as an instrument of perception than mere figurative description of νοῦς as the eye of the eye[198], which implies that it judges and arranges sensory input. He depicts it in some passages as being the soul of the soul and like the pupil of the eye[199]. That Philo intends to portray the mind as a perceptual organ is rendered even more apparent upon reading *Heres* 55, where he employs the same analogy of the eye and once more clarifies his use of soul as denoting both the union of rational part and sense, and as referring exclusively to the mind. Indeed, he begins by explaining that "ψυχὴ διχῶς λέγεται, ἥ τε ὅλη καὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν αὐτῆς μέρος", and proceeds to name this dominant part of the soul: "ψυχὴ ψυχῆς". Its role in perception is brought to the fore through the use of the now familiar analogy of the eye, which Philo explains refers both to the whole orb and to the most important part, the one which can thus be compared to the mind: the part by which we see: "τὸ κυριώτατον μέρος τὸ ᾧ βλέπομεν". Indeed, *Mut.* 209 confirms the accuracy of this comparison since Philo writes explicitly of the mind as ὁρατικός, endowed with the power of seeing, in the context of bringing the mind out of the region of the body, a test designed to confound sophists who can only speak of holy things[200]. The power of seeing is not the only characteristic of the mind, which is also described as φιλοθεάμων, loving the vision and as φιλόσοφος, loving wisdom. This will be explored in greater detail further, suffice for now that this be recognized as an indication in Philo, of the close link between seeing with the mind and wisdom. Indeed, it appears that according to Philo the eye of the soul transmits knowledge with an immediacy that never applies to bodily sight, which must always refer its perceptions to the rational division of the soul.

---

[198] For instance in *Post.* 143.
[199] *Opif.* 66: νοῦς is characterised here as : "ψυχῆς τινα ψυχὴν καθάπερ κόρην ἐν ὀφθαλμῷ."
[200] *Mut.* 208.

1.3.3.3 *Mechanisms*

1.3.3.3. a The eye of the soul is able to see in the intelligible world without the assistance of anything else.

In *Mut.* 3 Philo represents the eye of the body as inadequate and unable to receive a vision, insisting instead that it was the eye of the soul which received the divine vision[201]. Interestingly, it is the context of Abraham's vision of the Lord of all[202] that Philo asserts the notion that the soul sees without the co-operation of anything else. This he alleges is because the intelligible objects are a light unto themselves[203]. It might appear from this last point that the possibility of attaining a vision of the intelligible objects resides with the objects themselves and not with the seer. This seems somewhat contradictory to the idea that the mind needs no other agency in order to perceive.

This apparent contradiction might be elucidated somewhat by *Deus* 45- 46, where Philo maintains that man is superior to other animals by virtue of mind which apprehends the natures both of material things and things in general. Philo claims in this passage that the mind is able to function in this way, as the sight of the soul, by virtue of its being illuminated by rays conformable to its own nature[204]. The perceptual role of the mind is the result of this branch of the soul being formed from a different substance, that is, the substance out of which divine natures were created. Indeed, in several passages, Philo describes the soul as being formed of the upper air (or ether), from a particle detached from the Deity[205]. Indeed, in *Det.* 90 he explains

---

[201] *Mut.* 3: "ἀλλὰ μὴ νομίσῃς τοῖς σώματος ὀφθαλμοῖς γίνεσθαι τὴν προσβολήν […]ἀλλὰ τὸ δεχόμενον τὴν θείαν φαντασίαν τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστιν ὄμμα".

[202] *Mut.* 2: "[…] ᾧ φησιν ὀφθῆναι τὸν τῶν ὅλων κύριον".

[203] *Mut.* 4: "αὐτὰ γὰρ ἑαυτοῖς ἐστι φέγγος τὰ νοούμενα".

[204] *Deus* 46: "ψυχῆς γὰρ ὄψις οὗτος [ὁ νοῦς] οἰκείαις περιλαμπόμενος αὐγαῖς".

[205] *Leg.* iii. 161: "ἡ᾽ ψυχὴ αἰθέρος ἐστίν, ἀπόσπασμα θεῖον". This is supported by *Gen.* ii. 7: "ἐνεφύσησε γὰρ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα ζωῆς ὁ θεός, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν". The first half of the biblical verse is quoted in a very similar context in *Plant.* 19ff. In *Plant.* 18 however, Philo describes the rational soul in slightly different terms, not as a portion of the divine, but as the genuine coinage of that divine and invisible spirit: "τοῦ θείου καὶ

that the divine cannot become separate, but extends itself[206], and so since the mind is an inseparable portion of the divine soul[207], it is also able to extend itself. This is why, when it conceives of the universe, it reaches out as far as the bounds of the whole[208]. Thus, the very nature of the mind as of divine substance guarantees its ability to apprehend the nature of all things, including the intelligible objects, since in *Det.* 91, following the remark that the mind, the rational part of the soul, is a portion of the divine, Philo writes that only the rational part of our soul has attained to a conception of God[209]. By contrast, with the irrational part we can apprehend neither God nor any other object of the intellect. The mind has access to the intelligible world and eventually even to a conception of God as existing, even if it is not possible to probe the nature of his being, because it is itself of divine substance. The access which the mind has to the intelligible world because of its nature as divine, and its position as intermediate between the intelligible world and the world of the senses, since it is housed in the body, is in evidence in *Somn.* 1. 34 where Philo reiterates the notion that the mind in man occupies an analogous place to that of heaven in the universe, since both are holy, once more stating that the mind is a fragment of the divine[210] and again quoting *Genesis* 2. 7.

The aforementioned passages might convey the impression that, for Philo, as the mind is a portion of the divine soul, it requires no further assistance in order to perceive in the intelligible world. Nonetheless, it appears from his reference in *Mut.* 4 to the

---

ἀοράτου πνεύματος ἐκείνου δόκιμον εἶναι νόμισμα σημειωθὲν". The explanation for the variation in the formulation of this concept might be found in *Mut.* 223, where Philo first of all states that the reasoning faculty is "τελειότατον δὲ καὶ θειότατον ἔργον, τῆς τοῦ παντὸς ψυχῆς ἀπόσπασμα" before proceeding with somewhat greater caution, and reverence to a different expression of what for him constitutes the same notion: "ὅπερ ὁσιώτερον εἰπεῖν τοῖς κατὰ Μωυσῆν φιλοσοφοῦσιν, εἰκόνος θείας ἐκμαγεῖον ἐμφερές".

[206] *Det.* 90: "τέμνεται γὰρ οὐδὲν τοῦ θείου κατ᾽ ἀπάρτησιν, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐκτείνεται.".

[207] *Det.* 90: "τῆς θείας καὶ εὐδαίμονος ψυχῆς ἐκείνης ἀπόσπασμα".

[208] *Det.* 90: "[…] ὅταν ἐννοῇ κόσμον, τοῖς πέρασι τοῦ παντὸς συνευρύνεται ῥῆξιν οὐ λαμβάνων".

[209] In this passage, this cannot include a conception of the nature of God, only that God exists since in *Det.* 89 Philo posits the nature of God as inapprehensible: one may only know that he exists: "[…] τὴν ἀκατάληπτον θεοῦ φύσιν, ὅτι μὴ πρὸς τὸ εἶναι μόνον, καταλαβεῖν, ἣν δύνηται.".

[210] *Somn.* 1. 34: "[…] νοῦς, ἀπόσπασμα θεῖον ὤν".

intelligible things being a light unto themselves that Philo envisages the necessity of the mind being illuminated by the intelligible objects. Thus it is somewhat perplexing that he should maintain, in *Mut.* 4 that the mind needs the assistance of no other agency. In fact, what Philo appears to insist upon in *Mut.* is a strong contrast between the eyes of the body and the eyes of the soul, the latter not requiring any created, sensory light[211], an agency which is unrelated to the substance of which the mind is formed. This does not apply to the rays which illuminate the mind, since they are described as related to or conformable to the nature of the mind[212]. The independence of the mind from any agency which might belong to the αἰσθητός κόσμος does not therefore render it so independent from the light radiated by the objects of the νοητός κόσμος. Philo's assertion that the mind sees with no co-operation from anything else relies on the understanding that "ἄνευ τινὸς ἄλλου συμπράξεως" refers to the senses or the things which are perceptible by the senses, as those which belong to the intelligible world are not considered 'other'.

However, this apparently coherent formulation of the degree to which the mind is independent in its ability to perceive in the intelligible world appears somewhat shaken by Philo's description of its role in *Her.* 263- 264, where it is described, by analogy to the sun, as a light-bringer, since it sheds mental rays upon us just as the sun sends light forth to the whole world. It is difficult to see how, in this context, the mind might not be considered entirely independent even of the intelligible objects since, if the analogy holds, it would be expected that the mind shed the mental rays in the same way as the sun does with light perceptible to the senses. The question of mental rays, and its implication for the perceptual independence of the mind might be examined more fruitfully in the light of the role played by κατάληψις for apprehensions of the intelligible world.

1.3.3.3. b κατάληψις as an operation of the mind.

In *Her.* 263 Philo writes that κατάληψις is the medium through which the mind sheds the mental rays upon us. It appears difficult to establish with confidence

[211] Indeed he writes in *Mut.* 6 that "ὅταν οὖν ἀκούσῃς ὀφθέντα θεὸν ἀνθρώπῳ, τοῦτο γίνεσθαι νόει χωρὶς φωτὸς αἰσθητοῦ·"
[212] *Deus* 46.

whether Philo believes that the mental rays radiate from the objects of the intellect and so illuminate the mind or whether he understands that they may sometimes emanate from the mind itself. In fact, there are only two specific references to mental rays in the works of Philo, and both refer to the mental rays in the context of prophetic inspiration. Thus, *Her.* 262- 263 compares Moses, who saw God in actual appearance and face to face[213]with the prophets who are to follow, to whom this will not apply, though they will know God through a vision[214]. Philo then proceeds to compare the mind of those who are inspired to the sun. Indeed, he claims that Moses describes "τὸν ἐνθουσιῶντα" when he says that "περὶ ἡλίου δυσμὰς ἔκστασις ἐπέπεσεν"[215]. Thus, despite the use of the first person plural pronoun in the following comparison between the sun and the mind, which are both light-bringers, one ought to understand a reference to prophets in this passage and not to all human beings. That is, one might understand the mind's use of mental rays as describing the limits of human ability, and not as a reference to usual or even commonplace functioning of the mind[216]. This impression is confirmed upon reading *Spec. Leg.* 4. 192 where Philo asserts that the real priest is also a prophet, having by reason of his virtue rather than his birth been advanced to the service of the truly Existent. Significantly, Philo explains in language very similar to that of *Her.* 263, that this is because to the prophet nothing is unknown, since he has within him an intelligible sun and rays which are never overshadowed[217]. It is these that allow a full and clear apprehension of things unseen by sense but apprehended by the understanding[218]. From both *Her.* 262- 263 and *Spec. Leg* iv. 192 one might conclude that Philo regards the mind of the prophet as distinct from that of other men, else he would not specify that his remarks apply specifically to prophets. With this reservation in mind, it is

---

[213] Cf. *Numbers* 12. 6, 8 and *Deut.*34. 10.

[214] *Her.* 262 quoting *Numbers* 12. 6: "ἐὰν γένηται ὑμῶν προφήτης κυρίου, ἐν ὁράματι αὐτῷ γνωσθήσομαι".

[215] *Her.* 263.

[216] The description of "ὁ δὲ ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς τὰς νοητὰς διὰ τῶν καταλήψεων αὐγάς" ought not, however, to be taken as a reference to prophetic inspiration or ecstasy itself, since in *Her.* 264 Philo claims that when the radiance of mind is still around us, we are self-contained and not possessed. It is only when the divine light shines that the human light sets and ecstasy and divine possession, which regularly befall prophets (*Her.* 265), occur.

[217] *Spec. Leg.* iv. 192: "[…]ἔχοντι νοητὸν ἥλιον ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀσκίους αὐγάς".

[218] *Spec. Leg.* iv. 192: "[…]εἰς ἐναργεστάτην κατάληψιν τῶν αἰσθήσει μὲν ἀοράτων διανοίᾳ δὲ καταληπτῶν".

possible to surmise that for Philo, the mind of a prophet is able to apprehend the objects of the intellect of its very own agency, requiring no other light than the intelligible rays which illuminate it. This, however, takes place with one notable exception, since God or the Existent shines his own light, which extinguishes the human light[219], since mortal and immortal may not share the same home[220].

In those cases where the virtuous are able to perceive with the unaided eye of the mind the objects of the intellect, Philo remarks that they do so through the medium of κατάληψις[221]. It is worth delving deeper into Philo's use of κατάληψις in order to determine exactly how 'apprehension' or 'cognition', as it might be translated, functions, and what implications this might have for our understanding of what it is to see with the eye of the soul. In other words, it is important to define the role which κατάληψις plays in human perception of the intelligible world, and to determine the implications which this might have for Philo's understanding of a vision and its potential to convey knowledge.

The first point which may be ascertained with regard to Philo's understanding of κατάληψις is that he understands the term to express a function proper to the mind. Indeed, in *Mut.* 56 it is presented as the main faculty of the mind. In this passage, Philo assumes, in an interpretation of *Genesis* xvii. 3[222] that underlines man's dependence on God, that if the mind 'falls', it simultaneously loses its ability to apprehend things[223]. Philo's notion that κατάληψις is a seminal activity of the mind is also apparent in *Plant.* 42. Here, Philo justifies his assertion that training and exercise in the virtues belong to rational creatures only, by appealing to *Genesis* 2. 8[224] that he interprets as a statement that God set the mind, which is the real man in

---

219 *Her.* 264: "ὅταν μὲν γὰρ φῶς τὸ θεῖον ἐπιλάμψῃ, δύεται τὸ ἀνθρώπινον".

220 *Her.* 265: "θέμις γὰρ οὐκ ἔστι θνητὸν ἀθανάτῳ συνοικῆσαι". Cf. Plat. *Symp.* 202.

221 *Her.* 263.

222 *Mut.* 54, quoting *Gen.* 17. 3: "ἔπεσεν Ἀβραὰμ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον."

223 *Mut.* 56: "πέπτωκε δὲ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς νοῦς τὰς καταλήψεις ἀφῃρημένος […]". As both verbs in the clause are in the perfect tense it is assumed that the falling of the mind is simultaneous with the removal of its faculty of comprehension. No clear causal origin can be established from this passage.

224 *Plant.* 41 quoting *Genesis* 2. 8: "ἔθετο […] ἐκεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὃν ἔπλασεν".

us, amid the growths of noble character. Philo then argues, that *Genesis* ii. 8 ought to be received as a clear indication that that beings void of mind are by nature incompetent to cultivate the virtues, since they are not capable of receiving comprehension[225].

κατάληψις appears in lists of the powers belonging to the reasoning part of the soul in *Congr.* 98[226] and *Post.* 36[227]. It is striking that of all the powers of the mind listed in these two passages, only κατάληψις appears in both, though one ought to bear in mind that Philo intimates, in *Congr.* 98, that his list is not exhaustive. Nonetheless, the impression remains that, although κατάληψις does not appear at the head of either list, its presence in both would seem to indicate that Philo regards it as of prime importance to the functioning of the mind. In *Plant.* 31, Philo incorporates κατάληψις in a list of the most perfect faculties, which he therefore chose to plant in the mind rather than in the body[228]. The list appears somewhat more exhaustive that in the two other passages, and just as *Post.* 36, includes a mention of ἐπιστήμη.

A further indicator that κατάληψις refers exclusively to a mental process is Philo's assertion that sense is incapable of κατάληψις, since it consists in receiving the comprehension of things[229]. In this instance, Philo's use approximates that of the Stoic understanding that the mind must assent to cognitive impressions[230]. Cognitions do not simply have a privileged epistemic status due to the way in which they come about, but involve the further step of giving assent to a cognitive impression. That the

---

[225] *Plant.* 42: "ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν διανοίας ἀμετόχων ἱκανὸν οὐδὲν ἀρετὰς γεωργῆσαι, ὧν τὸ παράπαν λαμβάνειν οὐ πέφυκε κατάληψιν".

[226] *Congr.* 98: "[…] ἄριστον ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ὁ λογισμός ἐστι, καὶ ἄξιον τὰς συνέσεως καὶ ἀγχινοίας καταλήψεώς τε καὶ φρονήσεως καὶ τῶν ἄλλων δυνάμεων, ὅσαι περὶ αὐτόν εἰσιν, […]".

[227] In *Post.* 36, Philo argues that if the powers of perception are all gifted to the senses, then so are the faculties of the mind gifted to it: "εἰ δὲ καὶ ταῦτα, καὶ αὐτὸ δήπου τὸ νοεῖν, ἐν ᾧ μυρία ἐννοήματα, διανοήσεις, βουλαί, προμήθειαι, καταλήψεις, ἐπιστῆμαι, τέχναι, διαθέσεις, ἄλλων ἀριθμὸς δυνάμεων ἀδιεξίτητος".

[228] *Plant.* 31: "ταῦτα δέ εἰσι νόησις, κατάληψις, εὐστοχία, μελέται, μνῆμαι, ἕξεις, διαθέσεις, τεχνῶν ἰδέαι πολύτροποι, βεβαιότης ἐπιστημῶν, τῶν ἀρετῆς ἁπάσης θεωρημάτων ἄληστος ἀνάληψις".

[229] *Leg. All.* iii. 50.

[230] Although given the Stoic belief that the mind or soul was also a body, the same distinction between intelligible and sensory processes does not apply.

conception of incorporeal bodies is indeed a faculty of the mind for Philo is evident from *Cher.* 60, where Philo explains the reason for God attaching outward sense perception to the soul: he wished to enable the soul to comprehend not only incorporeal but also solid bodies. The two last passages demonstrate two points concerning Philo's attitude towards κατάληψις. Firstly, that it is a faculty of the mind, and secondly that the apprehension of incorporeal entities is proper to the mind, whilst cognition of solid bodies must proceed first of all through sensory awareness, being then mediated to the mind which alone might comprehend them.

That the intelligible natures are utterly incomprehensible to outward sense is confirmed with certainty by Philo's pronouncement in *Cher.* 97 that "αἰσθήσει δὲ ἀκατάληπτος ἡ νοητὴ φύσις". In this latter passage, however, it is not clear that κατάληψις ought to be considered a function of the mind. Rather, the use of a negative adjective applied to the objects of the intellect themselves would appear to indicate that cognitivity or the lack thereof is a quality pertaining to the objects themselves. However, the passage begins with a statement that "ὁ […] τοῦ ὄντος ὀφθαλμὸς φωτὸς ἑτέρου πρὸς κατάληψιν οὐ δεῖται". Here κατάληψις appears as a faculty of the eye of the Existent, rather than as a quality of objects, whether intelligible or otherwise. It is thus apparent that Philo's use of the term is somewhat ambiguous with respect to the source of apprehension, whether it resides in the mind or the objects which the mind seeks to comprehend. Perhaps it might be useful to surmise that, although apprehension is not a quality which resides in the objects, it is quite possible for them to be described as 'incomprehensible' since, as shall be demonstrated below, κατάληψις is, for Philo, not always clear or complete. Indeed, Philo is very clear that only God possesses perfect knowledge. So it is only for God that all objects must be described as fully 'comprehensible'.

It ought also to be pointed out that κατάληψις entails more than simple perception in Philo. Indeed, in *Cher.* 97, he states that that which has been created is perceptible to the outward senses[231], and as demonstrated above, this must of necessity exclude the possibility of κατάληψις, since the outward senses are incapable of performing such an operation. Moreover, *Her.* 98 renders the connections between the inadequacy

[231] *Cher.* 97: "αἰσθητὸν γὰρ τὸ γενόμενον,".

of sense by focusing on the desired end of κατάληψις: the acquisition of that wisdom which is not taught by the outward senses[232]. Wisdom is then apprehended by the mind[233], and as a result, the soul is able to migrate from insecure conjecture to firm apprehension, and thus from the created to the uncreated, from the world to its Maker and Father[234]. Here, some confusion may arise over the role of κατάληψις since in this passage it appears to represent both the process whereby the mind attains wisdom and the result of that apprehension. It is quite possible that this is part of the process that allows one to improve one's faculties so that one might refine one's apprehensions and come to clear comprehension of things.

Although κατάληψις is sometimes used in descriptions of sensory perception, this can be explained by the mind's role in ordering perceptions. Thus, in *QG* i. 2. 34 it is not necessary to understand that the senses are able to comprehend the sensible objects. Rather, it is through the senses, as through windows, that the apprehension of sensible objects comes upon the mind[235]. Here, one need not assume that the verb ἐπεισέρχομαι is employed according to its later use in the New Testament to indicate that something occurs to someone, with the implication of an event that is undesirable, as for instance in Acts 13. 40. This would entail a certain passivity vis à vis the sensible objects where the mind is concerned. Rather, one ought to read in the *Quaestiones* passage the notion expressed in Thucydides, of things being imported, as well as Lucian's use of the term with the meaning of something coming into one's head or occurring to one. So, though Philo is not entirely clear on this point, it is probable that the faculty of apprehension, proper to the mind, when dealing with the sensible objects needs first of all to obtain impressions of them through the senses. Indeed, this chapter has already explored the interaction between senses and the mind and found that the mind, though independent with regard to perceptions and apprehensions of the intelligible things, requires the senses for the apprehension of material objects. This is also apparent from *Vita Mosis* i. 223 where Moses' spies are

---

[232] *Her.* 98: "τὸ᾽ νέον ἀγαθὸν κληρονομῆσαι σοφίαν τὴν ἄδεκτον μὲν αἰσθήσει".
[233] *Her.* 98: "νῷ δ᾽ εἰλικρινεστάτῳ καταλαμβανομένην".
[234] *Her.* 98: "[…] καὶ ἀπὸ ἀβεβαίου εἰκασίας ἐπὶ πάγιον κατάληψιν […] ἀπὸ τοῦ γεγονότος πρὸς τὸ ἀγένητον, ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου πρὸς τὸν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα αὐτοῦ.".
[235] *QG* i. 2. 34: "αἱ αἰσθήσεις θυρίσιν ἐοίκασιν. διά γὰρ τούτων, ὡσανεὶ θυρίδων, ἐπεισέρχεται τῷ νῷ ἡ κατάληψις τῶν αἰσθητῶν".

supposed to become the eyes and ears of the multitude in order that they might obtain a clear apprehension of the knowledge which they require[236]. The spies are to take the place of eyes and ears, but it would make no sense to assume that this is in order for those organs themselves to apprehend what it is necessary to know. The sensory organs are not designed to acquire or even mediate knowledge. Instead, they are tools of the mind, as the spies in this passage are the servants of the multitude. Thus it appears conclusive that κατάληψις, even when employed in order to gain knowledge of the material world, remains a mental process, though it then requires information provided by the senses.

However, *Spec. Leg.* i. 288 presents a somewhat greater problem for this interpretation. In this passage, Philo compares the relationship between the rational faculty and the knowledge which is necessary to the contemplation of incorporeal and intelligible things to the relationship between the eyes and the light discernible by the senses which is employed for the apprehension of bodies. The term κατάληψις seems at first sight to be used to describe an action performed by the light. However, Philo only indicates with the phrase "αἰσθητὸν φῶς […] πρὸς κατάληψιν σωμάτων" that the light which is perceptible by the senses is in some way useful for the apprehension of bodies. Just as the knowledge does not contemplate, the light itself does not apprehend. One might therefore conclude that where apprehension of sensory objects are concerned, perception undertaken by the senses, in which sensible light is involved, allows the mind to apprehend. However, it is also the case that for Philo, at least where humans are concerned, the bodily eyes are necessary for the apprehension of sensible light[237]. Furthermore, despite the role played by sensory perception, in *Mut.* 111 it is κατάληψις, as a faculty of the reasoning part of the soul, which according to Philo serves to improve the mind. Indeed Philo writes that it is repeated apprehensions which produce advances and growth in the mind, thanks to

[236] *Mos.* i. 223: "γίνεσθε δὴ τῶν τοσούτων μυριάδων ὦτα καὶ ὀφθαλμοὶ πρὸς τὴν ὧν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι σαφῆ κατάληψιν."

[237] *Deus* 58: "ὀφθαλμῶν […], οἷς ἄνευ φωτὸς αἰσθητοῦ κατάληψις οὐ γίνεται·. In this passage, Philo wishes to point out that God as no need of eyes, since the light perceptible to the senses is a created light, and before creation, God saw, using himself as light.

the seven faculties of the unreasoning part of the soul[238]. Thus, though where perception of the intelligible objects there is no such divide, when it comes to the comprehension of material things, κατάληψις plays no role in actual perception of the objects, though it is a necessary mental process if knowledge of the material, sensory world is to be obtained.

Philo comes close, in certain passages, to equating κατάληψις with knowledge or wisdom. Indeed, in *Det.* 131 Philo employs the term κατάληψις in parallel with the verb "οἶδα" perhaps thereby implying that he regards them as synonymous or at least as sufficiently close in meaning to employ them interchangeably. In this passage, Philo wishes to explain the consequences of good or poor understanding for the fluency of our speech and so begins with the statement that our speech is rejoices and exults, "ὅταν μὲν γὰρ ἄκρως εἰδῶμεν ὃ λέγομεν", and follows this with the same construction in order to express the opposite state of affairs "ὅταν δὲ τοῦ νοήματος ἐπαμφοτερίζῃ κατάληψις", which results in deficient and tiresome speech.

Similarly, in both *Plant.* 36 and *Migr.* 42, κατάληψις appears to be closely associated with vocabulary related to knowledge. In *Migr.*, in an interpretation of *Genesis* 1. 31, Philo proposes that "ὅτι εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ὅσα ἐποίησεν" does not refer to God directing his sight at the objects which he created, but rather refers to his understanding and comprehension of them[239]. Strikingly, κατάληψις appears alongside εἴδησις and γνῶσις and, as Philo's purpose is to oppose these processes to that of ordinary sight, which he claims in this passage that God did not employ, it would appear that the term is to be understood as denoting a manner in which God has knowledge of created, material as well as intelligible objects, without any need for initial sensory perception. The question whether or not κατάληψις encompasses not only apprehension but also comprehension of the created objects appears, at least in God's case, to be ascertained, but whether it might be used interchangeably with other terms denoting knowledge or understanding still remains. Indeed, it is unclear why Philo would require three different terms if they all

---

[238] *Mut.* 111: "διὰ γὰρ τῶν ἑπτὰ δυνάμεων τούτων αἱ προβάσεις καὶ παραυξήσεις τοῦ πατρός νοῦ ταῖς ἐγγινομέναις καταλήψεσι συνίστανται".

[239] *Migr.* 42: "[…]εἴδησιν καὶ γνῶσιν καὶ κατάληψιν ὧν ἐποίησεν εἶχεν."

expressed exactly the same idea. In fact, γνῶσις, far from necessarily being employed in the broad sense of 'knowledge' might well in this passage encompass the notion of recognition with which Thucydides occasionally deploys it[240], or, as quoted in Aeschines i. 50, convey acquaintance with a person. This applies all the more as Philo is here attempting to argue that *Genesis* 1. 31 does not entail that God saw, but that he knew the objects that he had created. This knowledge implies recognition, since it is in part because he is creator that he is able to know without first perceiving. Indeed, Philo argues in the preceding verse that proof of God's wisdom comes both from his having created the universe and from his having possessed the knowledge of the things that had been brought into existence. Meanwhile, εἴδησις, translated by Colson and Whitaker as 'insight'[241], is, as they point out, introduced with reference to εἶδεν. It is also used in *Plant.* 36 in connection with the tree of knowledge, which in *Genesis* 2. 9 is the tree τοῦ εἶναι. In *Plant.* 36 Philo refers not only to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil but claims that the sacred oracles refer to several trees, which for Philo are allegorical representations of the growths of a rational soul according to virtue, with life and immortality as their end or to evil ending in death. The first two trees are those of life and immortality, and the last four are connected to notions of knowledge or perception. These are the trees of: "εἰδήσεως, καταλήψεως, συνέσεως, καλοῦ καὶ πονηροῦ φαντασίας." Once more, this does not imply that Philo conflates the meanings of these different terms, but does indicate that he considered κατάληψις to be not only a mental process but also a form of knowledge.

The equation between apprehension and knowledge seems initially even closer in *Congr.* 141 where Philo defines knowledge, ἐπιστήμη[242], as a sure and certain apprehension which cannot be shaken by argument or reason[243]. However, it is not to be assumed that κατάληψις is equated with knowledge by Philo, or that the term is

[240] Thucydides 7. 44.
[241] Colson, F. H. and Whitaker, G. H. in Loeb 4 p. 155. See note in Appendix p. 562.
[242] It is evident from *Congr.* 142 that the type of knowledge referred to here is that which applies to philosophy and all the other virtues, and is contrasted with the lower arts.
[243] *Congr.* 141: "κατάληψις ἀσφαλὴς καὶ βέβαιος, ἀμετάπτωτος ὑπὸ λόγου." For an almost identical definition of ἐπιστήμη see *S. V. F.* i. 68.

used in a different sense in the two definitions in *Congr.* 141[244]. Indeed, it is crucial to recognise that the stability which distinguishes ἐπιστήμη from τέχνη derives from the certainty of the one apprehension[245] which is lacking where art is concerned since it is characterised as a system of several conceptions working with each other[246]. It is not therefore the case that any apprehension is understood to be in all cases the same as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) by Philo. This is understandable, as Philo does not treat κατάληψις as an immovable power of the mind. Rather, as one might surmise from *Plant.* 31, where he terms it a growth, he expects that it is amenable to improvements. Indeed, it is quite clear from the parallel which Philo draws, between the eyes of the body which sometimes see clearly and sometimes dimly and the eye of the soul which are sometimes presented with characteristics in blurred manner and sometimes in clear and distinct form, that he envisages the mind as not always apprehending in a perfect way. Thus, in *Her.* Philo develops the notion that a specific process is necessary if one is to attain to the certain and unshakeable apprehension mentioned in *Congr.* 141 as defining ἐπιστήμη. Indeed, in *Her.* 98 Philo refers to the inheritance of wisdom which cannot be received by sense[247], but is only apprehended by a wholly pure and clear mind. Through this wisdom, the soul is able to progress from insecure conjecture (ἀπὸ ἀβεβαίου εἰκασίας) to firm apprehension (ἐπὶ πάγιον κατάληψιν). This wisdom is the land referred to in *Her.* 314, whose fruit is the sure and steadfast apprehension (κατάληψις ἀσφαλὴς καὶ βεβαία) of the wisdom of God. Here, the language is identical to that used in the definition of ἐπιστήμη in *Congr.* 141, so that the knowledge referred to in that passage might be the knowledge or firm apprehension of the wisdom of God. Philo does not use the terms ἐπιστήμη and κατάληψις interchangeably. Rather, an exceptional form of κατάληψις may be attained, and it is that sure, clear and unshakeable apprehension which is identical with knowledge.

The recognition by Philo of different grades of κατάληψις is accompanied by his attempt to explain how one might improve one's apprehensions. Indeed, it is quite

---

[244] As do Colson F, H and Whitaker, G. H in Loeb iv, p. 530 note *b*.
[245] *Congr.* 141: "κατάληψις ἀσφαλὴς καὶ βέβαιος".
[246] *Congr.* 141: "σύστημα ἐκ καταλήψεων συγγεγυμνασμένων".
[247] *Her.* 98: "τὸ δὲ νέον ἀγαθὸν κληρονομῆσαι σοφίαν τὴν ἄδεκτον μὲν αἰσθήσει".

possible, according to Philo, that one's apprehensions be uncertain. In fact, in *Ios.* 142 he refutes the notion that those who are awake can necessarily discern the differences between things by incontrovertible processes of reason, insisting that those whose apprehensions are uncertain differ in nothing from the sleeping[248]. Moreover, in *Agr.* 162 Philo contrasts those who have fully apprehended a subject and understood it with those who are still in ignorance, the light of knowledge not being strong enough to shine out, and so have not fully apprehended certain matters[249]. Philo also intimates in several passages that κατάληψις can improve from childhood to adulthood, thereby increasing the impression that he understands it to be a power of the mind, rather than merely a particular mental process with a finite duration in time. Indeed, in *Somn.* 1. 11 he laments that one will only attain the greatest strength in apprehension as one's body declines[250]. Indeed, he appears to follow the doctrine, held by amongst others, the Stoics, that in its childhood the soul will be unable to hold impressions and so is only able to apprehend properly in manhood[251]. This attitude emerges in his discussion on the choosing between good and evil, which only begins to present itself when one is on the cusp of manhood and thus able to reach comprehension of virtue and wickedness[252]. Philo does indicate his belief, in several passages, that growing in one's power of apprehension is possible. So, in *Agr.* 161 he even distinguishes between the man who knows that he is wise and the man who, having arrived at wisdom is not yet conscious of it. Here it appears that for Philo, awareness of one's wisdom is necessary in order to claim that one is fully wise, and claims moreover that the arrival at the goal and the apprehension, necessary for perfect wisdom, of that arrival are not simultaneous. Thus, κατάληψις for Philo does

---

[248] *Ios.* 142: "καὶ οἱ ἐγρηγορότες, ὅσα γε πρὸς τὸ ἐν ταῖς καταλήψεσιν ἀβέβαιον οὐδὲν τῶν κοιμωμένων διαφέροντες […]".

[249] *Agr.* 162: "ᾧ δὲ ἔτι τὸ ἀγνοίας ἐπιπροσθεῖ σκότος, μήπω τοῦ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ἀναλάμψαι φέγγους ἰσχυκότος, ἀσφαλὲς οἶκοι καταμεῖναι, τουτέστιν εἰς τὴν περὶ ὧν ἄκρως οὐ κατείληφε […]".

[250] *Somn.* i. 11: "πρὶν οὖν ἡβῆσαι καὶ ἐννεάσαι τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀκριβεστέρᾳ καταλήψει, χαλεπὸν ὑποσκελισθῆναι".

[251] *Conf.* 102: "ἀνδρωθείσης τρόπον τινὰ τῆς τῶν θεωρημάτων καταλήψεως, ἥτις ἐν ἡλικίᾳ διαρρεῖ παιδικῇ διὰ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ὑγρότητα μήπω δυναμένης τοὺς ἐνσφραγιζομένους πήττειν καὶ διαφυλάττειν χαρακτῆρας "καὶ ἡ ἄσφαλτος ἦν αὐτοῖς πηλός." οὐκ ἔμπαλιν ὁ πηλὸς ἄσφαλτος·".

[252] *Congr.* 82: "χρόνου δὲ προϊόντος ὅταν ἐκβαίνοντες τῆς παιδικῆς ἡλικίας μειρακιοῦσθαι μέλλωμεν, τὸ δίδυμον στέλεχος εὐθὺς ἐκ μιᾶς, ἀρετὴ καὶ κακία, φύεται ῥίζης· καὶ ποιούμεθα […] τὴν κατάληψιν ἀμφοῖν […]".

not of necessity imply knowledge or perfect knowledge, since gradual progression is almost inevitable if one is to attain perfect wisdom. This is so much the case in Philo that he is even able to draw a distinction between that ignorance which is far from knowledge and that which is close at hand.

The question then arises as to the means and method by which one might be able to attain apprehensions, especially clearer and firmer apprehensions, and thus progress in understanding, and most especially in knowledge of those things which concern the intelligible world. In two passages it appears that Philo uses the term κατάληψις to refer to the comprehension of phenomena by ordering them into categories[253] and to the understanding of thoughts which is enabled through repetition[254]. In most passages dealing with the potential improvement of κατάληψις, however, Philo explores the relationship between knowledge or wisdom as an instrument of the mind and wisdom as the end goal of heightened apprehension. This is most apparent in *Migr.* 39 where it is the sight of the divine light, identical with knowledge[255], which opens the eye of the soul and leads it to apprehensions distinct and brilliant beyond those gained by the ears[256]. It appears that the Israel-soul, the seer[257], first sees the divine light that is identical with knowledge, which in turn enables it to apprehend in the clear and firm way which will enable it to attain knowledge. Although it may at first appear nonsensical and circular to imagine that greater apprehension and knowledge may be attained only through knowledge, it appears that Philo wishes to draw a distinction between practice, and the science or system behind the practice. Indeed, he explains that the manner in which the divine light or knowledge draws the eye of the soul

---

253 *Conf.* 85.
254 *Contempl.* 76.
255 *Migr.* 39: "τὸ ὁρᾶν […] φῶς τὸ θεῖον, ἀδιαφοροῦν ἐπιστήμης".
256 *Migr.* 39: "[…] ἢ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς διοίγνυσιν ὄμμα καὶ πρὸς τὰς ὥτων τηλαυγεστέρας καὶ ἀριδηλοτέρας ἄγει καταλήψεις." It seems judicious to retain 'ὥτων' rather than emend to νοητῶν or to ὄντων as Mangey did, since *Migr.* 38 relates that the practiser, Jacob, was eager to exchange ears for eyes and to see before he heard. Indeed, *Migr.* 38 explicitly introduces a passage concerned with the inheritance of which sight is the ruling principle and thus surpasses the previous inheritance which has hearing as its source. It would therefore seem fitting that the apprehensions gained following the seeing of divine light are greater than those obtained through hearing. That very notion is indeed expressed in *Sacr.* 78.
257 See *Migr.* 38, where Philo concludes that the one who sees is the wise man, for fools are dim, and that this is why in former times prophets were called seers: "διὰ τοῦτο καὶ τοὺς προφήτας ἐκάλουν πρότερον τοὺς βλέποντας".

towards clear apprehensions functions analogously to the practice of music and of the sciences, which is apprehended through the relevant science[258]. The other important point that Philo wishes to highlight in this passage is the grounding of the practice of a discipline in its theory, and he ensures that the analogy of music and the sciences applies to the pursuit of wisdom in explicitly stating that "[…]οὕτω καὶ διὰ σοφίας τὸ σοφὸν θεωρεῖται". From *Migr.* 39 it emerges that the divine light, identical with knowledge, and, given the closing statement of the paragraph, equated with wisdom is an instrument of the mind which enables it to attain distinct and brilliant apprehensions. The same point is made in *Spec. Leg.* 1. 288 where wisdom is also called "διανοίας φῶς" and compared, in its activity as an instrument of the rational faculty to the light discernible by the outward senses, which acts as a tool of the eyes[259]. It is also apparent from *Opif.* 53 that knowledge functions as an instrument of the soul's eye, the mind being apparently unable to see without its assistance. Indeed, having drawn a parallel between the eye of the body perceiving in the sensory world and the eye of the soul perceiving in the intelligible sphere, Philo proceeds to explain that neither may act independently. Thus, just as the eye of the body requires light in order to perceive bodies, the mind is in need of knowledge in order to distinguish incorporeal things[260]. A significant additional stress in *Migr.* 39-40 is that wisdom is more than an instrument of the mind, since the contemplation of that which is wise is the end towards which wisdom is employed. Knowledge or wisdom, to which distinct apprehensions are sometimes equated, is therefore an end at which the seer aims, but also functions as the instrument to that end. This crucial way in which wisdom, the instrument of the mind differs from light which is the tool of the bodily eye is expressed by Philo in *Migr.* 40: "σοφία δὲ οὐ μόνον φωτὸς τρόπον ὄργανον τοῦ ὁρᾶν ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴν ὁρᾷ". In *Her.* 98 wisdom is the new inheritance, the end which, not approachable to sight, might be apprehended by a pure

---

[258] *Migr.* 39: "διὰ μουσικῆς τὰ κατὰ μουσικὴν καὶ διὰ πάσης τέχνης τὰ ἐν ἑκάστῃ καταλαμβάνεται". Colson and Whitaker point out in Loeb iv, p. 155 note b that the fact that τὰ κατὰ means "the practical application" is brought out more clearly in *Det.* 114.

[259] *Spec. Leg.* 1. 288: "ὅπερ γὰρ αἰσθητὸν φῶς ὀφθαλμοῖς πρὸς κατάληψιν σωμάτων, τοῦτ᾽ ἐπιστήμη λογισμῷ πρὸς θεωρίαν τῶν ἀσωμάτων καὶ νοητῶν".

[260] *Opif.* 53: "χρεῖος δὲ ὁ μὲν νοῦς ἐπιστήμης εἰς τὸ γνωρίσαι τὰ ἀσώματα, ὀφθαλμὸς δὲ φωτὸς εἰς τὴν τῶν σωμάτων ἀντίληψιν […]".

and clear mind[261], as well as the means whereby the soul might migrate from insecure conjecture to firm apprehension[262]. As a result, in this same passage, κατάληψις functions both as the means by which one might attain wisdom and as a result of the actions of wisdom. Although no mention is made of κατάληψις in *Sacr.* 78, the passage also highlights Philo's dual conception of knowledge or wisdom as both instrumental and the desired end of perception with the eye of the soul. Indeed, he contrasts the feeding of the mind upon ancient thoughts, leading not to perfect virtue but to civic virtue with the experience of a sudden beam of self-inspired wisdom shining upon one and opening the closed eye of the soul[263]. Wisdom is not only described as the means whereby the eye of the soul is opened, but according to Philo also makes us spectators rather than hearers of knowledge, substituting the swifter sight for hearing[264]. This very instrumental description of wisdom is, however, counterbalanced by its alleged purpose, which is to enable a better approach to knowledge, the goal towards which both the historians and poets aim at, through hearing, and which the seer is able to contemplate, through the instrument of wisdom which opens the eye of the soul.

More explicitly even than in *Migr.* 38-39, in *Spec. Leg.* 4. 192, Philo makes claims for prophets regarding knowledge and the manner of gaining clear apprehension, with the added precision that the things which are apprehended are those which are unseen to sense and only comprehended by the intellect. Here Philo maintains that nothing is unknown to a prophet because he has within him an intelligible sun and unclouded rays[265], and that it is these which allow him a full and clear apprehension of

---

[261] *Her.* 98: "δὲ νέον ἀγαθὸν κληρονομῆσαι σοφίαν τὴν ἄδεκτον μὲν αἰσθήσει, νῷ δ᾽ εἰλικρινεστάτῳ καταλαμβανομένην".

[262] *Her.* 98: "[…]δι᾽ ἧς ἀποικιῶν ἡ ἀρίστη βεβαιοῦται μετανισταμένης τῆς ψυχῆς […] ἀπὸ ἀβεβαίου εἰκασίας ἐπὶ πάγιον κατάληψιν[…]".

[263] *Sacr.* 78: "ὠφέλιμον μὲν οὖν, εἰ καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἀρετῆς κτῆσιν τελείας, ἀλλά τοι πρὸς πολιτείαν, καὶ τὸ παλαιαῖς καὶ ὠγυγίοις ἐντρέφεσθαι δόξαις καὶ ἀρχαίαν ἀκοὴν ἔργων καλῶν μεταδιώκειν […]. ἀλλ᾽ ὅταν γε μὴ προϊδομένοις μηδὲ ἐλπίσασι φέγγος αἰφνίδιον ἐπιλάμψῃ τὸ αὐτομαθοῦς σοφίας, ἡ δὲ τὸ μεμυκὸς ὄμμα ψυχῆς διοίξασα […]".

[264] *Sacr.* 78: "[σοφία] ἀντὶ ἀκροατῶν θεατὰς ἐπιστήμης ἐργάσηται τὴν ὠκυδρομωτάτην αἰσθήσεων ὄψιν πρὸ τῆς βραδυτέρας ἀκοῆς ἐν διανοίᾳ θεῖσα".

[265] *Spec. Leg.* 4. 192: "προφήτῃ δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἄγνωστον, ἔχοντι νοητὸν ἥλιον ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀσκίους αὐγάς".

intelligible things[266]. Perhaps this intelligible sun is the same as the divine light or wisdom mentioned in *Migr.* 39, especially since Philo states in *Migr.* 40 that God's archetypal luminary, of which the sun is a copy, is wisdom[267].

This of course carries implications for the possibility of growing in knowledge: Although one may wish to distinguish knowledge as a practice and knowledge as a system or science through which one may learn to practice[268], from Philo's premises concerning the nature of wisdom as a necessary instrument of the mind in quest of knowledge, it still unclear how one might, if not already wise, see the divine light or knowledge which opens the eye of the soul, even less how one might have an intelligible sun within one. This, despite Philo's mention in *Spec. Leg.* 4. 107 of the method whereby the pupil, having received from the teacher the principles of wisdom[269], may eventually acquire firm conceptions. In order to do so, he is in need of a long process of learning during which he uses memory to recall what he has heard so as to stamp a firm impression of the conceptions upon his soul[270]. In *Spec. Leg* 4. 108 Philo further maintains the necessity of distinguishing between apprehensions, this being symbolized by the parted hoof[271]. It does seem that, according to Philo, man may at least refine and clarify his conceptions through education by a wise teacher and the use of memory. However, this still begs the question as to how the teacher himself became wise, whilst there is moreover no mention that the knowledge provided by the teacher functions as a divine light which opens the eye of the soul. Indeed, the very mention of the manner in which the student receives wisdom from the teacher, δι᾽ ὥτων, recalls *Migr.* 38- 39 where the knowledge or divine light which leads to clear apprehensions is said to surpass that

---

[266] *Spec. Leg.* 4. 192: "εἰς ἐναργεστάτην κατάληψιν τῶν αἰσθήσει μὲν ἀοράτων διανοίᾳ δὲ καταληπτῶν".

[267] *Migr.* 40: "αὕτη [σοφία] θεοῦ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἡλίου φέγγος, οὗ μίμημα καὶ εἰκὼν ἥλιος.".

[268] Though Philo does not explain in detail how this is supposed to be the case.

[269] *Spec. Leg.* 4. 107: "ὁ παιδευόμενος, δεξάμενος δι᾽ ὥτων τὰ σοφίας δόγματα καὶ θεωρήματα παρὰ τοῦ διδάσκοντος […]"

[270] *Spec. Leg.* 4. 107: "[…] ἄχρις ἂν ἕκαστον ὧν ἤκουσεν ἀναπολῶν μνήμῃ συνεχέσι μελέταις αἱ δ᾽ εἰσὶ κόλλα νοημάτων ἐνσφραγίσηται τῇ ψυχῇ βεβαίως τὸν τύπον."

[271] ἀλλ᾽ οὐδὲν ὡς ἔοικεν ὄφελος ἡ τῶν νοημάτων βεβαία κατάληψις, εἰ μὴ προσγένοιτο διαστολὴ τούτων καὶ διαίρεσις εἵς τε αἵρεσιν ὧν χρὴ καὶ φυγὴν τῶν ἐναντίων, ἧς τὸ διχηλοῦν σύμβολον·

which can be received through hearing. Indeed, the very same point is made in *Sacr.* 78 where the shining of the beam of self-inspired wisdom, opening the eye of the soul, renders the learning from old authorities obsolete, so that it is, in Philo's words, "μάταιον […] διὰ λόγων ὦτα γυμνάζειν". Philo's solution is that the only means by which one can begin to apprehend knowledge, whereby one might progress to clearer apprehensions and greater knowledge, is through the gift of God. Indeed, in *Sacr.* 79 he asserts that it is God who causes self-inspired wisdom to spring up within the soul. He maintains that as a result, the knowledge which comes through teaching must be swept away: God's pupil cannot suffer the guidance of men. This is largely because for Philo, as stated in *Migr.* 40, God is the only being who possesses perfect knowledge. Furthermore, he was not only the creator of the universe, but also made the knowledge of the things which he had made[272]. Philo reasons from this that God, the one who knows (ὁ ἐπιστήμων), is the only one who might offer guidance and teaching to the ignorant. He further points out that God is acknowledged to be the source and fountainhead of knowledge in all its forms[273].

Thus, in Philo κατάληψις denotes a function of the mind, a mental process which is essential in order to obtain knowledge of either the sensible or the intelligible world, but cannot for all that be automatically equated with knowledge. Nonetheless, it does appear that for Philo, clear and brilliant apprehensions constitute knowledge, and in this he approaches the Stoic definition of knowledge. The distinction in Philo is that he considers God to be the source of knowledge which is necessary in order to obtain clear apprehensions and grow in wisdom.

---

[272] *Migr.* 42.
[273] *Migr.* 42: "ἀρχὴ καὶ πηγὴ τεχνῶν καὶ ἐπιστημῶν".

II.2 *CHAPTER 2: VISIONS OF GOD AND OTHER VISIONS IN PHILO*

The stark opposition in Philo between those things which are visible and sensible and those which are incorporeal and divine is obvious in *Heres* 209[274] where they are included in a long list of opposites. This in part explains his treatment of visions (which in the biblical texts might be categorized as the sight of a supernatural being from a different spatial realm) as epistemically as well as ontologically different from the perception of earthly things. This explicit categorization of the world of angels, souls and ideas as radically distinct from the sensory world distinguishes Philo's account of visions from corresponding biblical accounts, which do not openly share this concern. Because even where the world of the intelligible and the incorporeal is concerned, there is a gradient of holiness and inaccessibility, the object of the seer's quest acquires a greater importance both with regard to the difficulty of apprehension and the level and kind of wisdom gained as a result of the vision. Moreover, Philo understands God as to his essence to be above the noetic as well as the sensory universe. The powers of God are sometimes understood to be apprehensible by the eye of the soul, and sometimes not. I shall explore here Wolfson's notion that, insofar as the powers are conceived of as Platonic ideas or forms, they are considered to be amenable to apprehension by the mind, but insofar as they are considered as attributes of God, a vision of the power "as to their essence" is subject to the same limitations as is a vision of the Existent[275]. I shall not dispute Wolfson's distinction between powers as ideas and powers as attributes in Philo but I will argue that, rather than reflecting different planes of reality, Philo instead draws attention to differences in human ability to perceive the divine: Perceptions of the powers as ideas are a "lower" and therefore less infrequent experience than visions of the powers as to their essence which require the visionary to be far more advanced in virtue and understanding, and more remote from bodily existence. Nevertheless, although Philo explains how one might improve one's apprehensions through reliance upon the divine light or

---

[274] *Her.* 209: "καὶ τἄλλα δὲ ἐναντία προῦπτα, σώματα ἀσώματα, ἔμψυχα ἄψυχα, λογικὰ ἄλογα, θνητὰ ἀθάνατα, αἰσθητὰ νοητά, καταληπτὰ ἀκατάληπτα[…]".

[275] Wolfson, ii. 33

[277] *Det.* 89; *Post*. 15; *Post* 169; *Somn*. i. 67.

knowledge, and through practice and memory, he considers apprehensions of God as to his essence to constitute a different category of apprehension altogether- one which he appears to believe is inaccessible to man. It is this tension in Philo's works, between the yearning for a vision of God and its apparent lack of fulfilment which I intend to explore.

2.1. *The Existent and his Powers as invisible and incomprehensible*

It is important when considering what a vision of God might entail in Philo to bear in mind the manner in which intelligibles are perceived. Philo understands katalepsis to be the medium through which the mind sheds mental rays upon prophets and regards katalepsis as the faculty which enables the virtuous to perceive intelligibles. Although it is not the case that katalepsis is always perfect, it nonetheless connotes some degree of comprehension and thus the capture or grasping of the object which one wishes to perceive and apprehend. It is therefore not surprising that Philo insists that God is ἀκατάληπτος[277]. Indeed, for Philo the human inability to apprehend all distinguishes us from God since to God nothing is unclear or incomprehensible[278]. Thus, not only is God considered to transcend the intelligible world, but capturing his essence would entail a mastery of the divine by the human.

The fact that God's essential nature cannot be captured by the human mind should not necessarily prevent one from seeing God. However, a problem arises in that, though God is above all intelligibles, he is like them incorporeal and invisible to the eye of the body. He can therefore only be seen with the eye of the soul, the mind. Philo must then reconcile the possibility of perceiving God with the mind whilst insisting that his nature cannot be fully comprehended by any mortal being. In the following section I will investigate passages in which Philo excludes the possibility of any comprehension of God's nature, that is, any vision of God's essence, as well as those passages in which he appears to deny the ability of humans to even see or behold God.

[278] *QG.* ii. 54: "θεῷ δὲ οὐδὲν ἄδηλον οὐδὲ ἀκατάληπτον·" (Greek fragment only); cf. *Praem.* 40.

2.1.1 Is it possible to experience a vision of God? Can one apprehend God's essence or even behold God?

Whilst Philo does refer to the desire to see and comprehend God's nature, it often appears that he also denies the possibility of experiencing any vision of God as to his essence. Philo describes the essence of God as constituting pure being or existing. Indeed, in *Det.* 160 existence constitutes God's essence and in *Conf.* 137[279] Philo seems to argue that God can only be conceived of as existing. This last passage, though confirming the notion that existence is the characteristic which most suitably applies to God, might also be understood to imply that humans cannot conceive of God in any other, perhaps more profound way. It is important to note that Philo regards all language as inadequate in describing God, who is essentially unnameable because he is without genus or species. The description of God as Existent is therefore not to be understood as an accurate description of his nature, but merely as an imperfect human label with which to refer to the nature of God, who in his utter transcendence is indefinable and indescribable[280]. I shall first of all examine the main passages in which Philo denies the possibility of a vision of God or comprehension of the divine essence. It will be necessary to assess whether Philo believed that God was only manifest through projection or whether he admitted the possibility of a vision of the Existent. I shall then offer explanations as to why, in certain of his writings, Philo considered the essence of God to be both invisible and unknowable. Because any

[279] *Conf.* 137: "τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὑπεράνω τῶν δυνάμεων ὂν ἐπινοεῖται περιττεύειν, οὐ *** κατὰ τὸ εἶναι μόνον". Despite the missing phrase in the mss. one may still translate: "that which transcends his Potencies is conceived of not …, but only as being/ existence".

[280] On this point, Calabi observes, in "Names of God" (*God's acting, man's acting*, 90- 94), that the system for naming and representing in Philo is based upon human capacity for understanding, and thus upon human incapacity to know the essence of God. It is therefore a language which anthropomorphises and hypostatises. It is a language which speaks of the powers as if they were autonomous beings, and the logos in terms of a 'second God'. In actual fact, for Philo, the only thing that can be said about God is that he *is*. Every attempt to describe him assigns to him improper attributes and idolatrises him. She writes that "the essence of God, though utterly concealed in its primary being, is nevertheless made manifest on two secondary levels: the intelligible universe of the logos, which is God's image (*Somn*. i. 239; *Conf*. 147- 148), and the sensible universe, which in turn is an image of that logos (*Opif*. 24)".

vision of God is a mental vision[281], such that God would be seen with the mind, Philo does not always distinguish between seeing and comprehending God.

In *Mut.* 8, Philo deduces from the futility of Moses' entreaties in *Exod.* 33. 13, that despite praying to God, the object of his search ("τὸ ζητούμενον"), no one, not even the best of mortals, may know more than that which lies below the Existent[282], and with this he should be amply satisfied, since this is God's judgement, as we read in *Exod.* xxxiii. 23[283]. The same interpretation is followed in *Post*. 169, where Philo reiterates the point that the good man might behold anything that is below the Existent, whilst he himself is beyond apprehension. Philo explicitly states the reason for this inability to perceive the Existent: though the things which are beneath the Existent may not as yet be apprehended, they can come within the human power of comprehension[284], but where the Existent is concerned this is not possible, as he is by nature incapable of being beheld by mortals[285]. It is noteworthy that the Existent, τὸ ὂν, cannot be comprehended because he is incapable even of being seen by mortals. Although the same connection between perception and comprehension is not referred to, a very similar reasoning is followed in *Post.* 168 where Philo argues that the human faculty of reasoning cannot advance beyond the notion that the cause of the universe is and subsists: to enquire about the essence and quality of God is a folly[286]. Knowledge of God's existence is possible, but to know what he is is not. This passage exceeds many of Philo's other writings in actually condemning the desire for knowledge of God's essence. This may in part be due to the context. Indeed, in *Post*. 165, Philo is intent upon discrediting the images of corruptible matter and the animals which are revered as gods in Egypt, stating that they have no real existence and are not true or visible gods. In *Post* 167 Philo then outlines the manner in which the truly Existent, τὸ δὲ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὂν, may be conceived of and recognized: with the eyes of the mind, through his mighty works in the world and through the rapidity of

---

[281] *Mut*. 6.

[282] *Mut.* 8: "αὐταρκεστάτης δωρεᾶς τῷ θνητῶν ἀρίστῳ γένει νομισθείσης τῆς τῶν μετὰ τὸ ὂν σωμάτων τε ὁμοῦ καὶ πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμης."

[283] *Mut.* 9.

[284] *Mut.* 9: "[…] τῶν ὅσα μετὰ τὸ ὂν σωμάτων τε ὁμοῦ καὶ πραγμάτων εἰς κατάληψιν ἐρχομένων, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάντα ἤδη καταλαμβάνεται […]".

[285] *Mut.* 9: "μόνου δ᾽ ἐκείνου [τὸ ὂν] μὴ πεφυκότος ὁρᾶσθαι".

[286] *Post.* 168: "[…] περαιτέρω᾽ σπουδάζειν τρέπεσθαι, ὡς περὶ οὐσίας ἢ ποιότητος ζητεῖν, ὠγύγιός τις ἠλιθιότης".

his operations. He concludes that the true God can be more easily conceived by the mind than proved by verbal demonstration. Here, it is noteworthy that Philo avoids any mention of apprehending God, employing instead the infinitives "κατανοεῖσθαί" and "γνωρίζεσθαι", terms which connote recognition and a certain degree of understanding rather than full comprehension. Knowledge of God's existence may, according to Philo, best be attained through knowledge of his powers: God's faculties, by the works that they accomplish, declare his existence. Thus, although no one, not even Moses, can comprehend or perceive God in his totality, it is possible to perceive and even know of his faculties or powers.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, in Philo, perceiving intelligible things normally entails comprehending them to some degree, since the organ employed for the perception of αἱ νοηταὶ φύσεις is the mind, and κατάληψις is not only a mental process which enables perception of intelligibles, but also a form of knowledge, albeit not necessarily full or perfect understanding. If perceiving the Existent were to constitute for Philo the same operation as seeing other intelligible natures, there ought to be no distinction between beholding or seeing God, and apprehending him, and so, attaining some degree of understanding concerning his nature. In fact, Philo draws a very clear distinction between the Existent, which is how he usually designates God when he wishes to speak of him in terms of unknowable essential nature, and everything which is below the Existent. That this does include the powers of the Existent and all other intelligibles offers some hope of approaching the divine, whilst excluding any possibility that mortals might come to see or know of the nature of God.

The tension between yearning and impossibility is displayed in Philo's ambivalence towards the proposition that the divine nature, despite initial appearances, might be seen by humans. Indeed, in *Conf.* 138 he writes that the divine nature which presents itself as visible is in reality invisible and incomprehensible. In *Conf.* 139 the gulf between God as an apparent object of perception and the transcendent reality is extended to God as an object of knowledge. Indeed, Philo explains that while God seems to be an object of contemplation, he does in reality precede demonstration to

the mind[287]. Similarly, in the course of his interpretation of *Deut*. xxxii. 39 in *Post.* 167- 168, Philo is careful to insist that when God is referred to as visible, this is a misuse of language. The passage begins, however, with a statement that the biblical verse shows God to be apprehended by clear intuition. In fact, it appears that Philo concentrates initially on rebutting any notion that God may be apprehended through mere dry philosophical discussion. Wishing nonetheless to guard against any suggestion that this bold statement might entail that God should be perceived by created beings, Philo argues that the verse refers to each one of God's powers. Finally, Philo retreats even further to assert that human beings can learn no more than that the cause of the universe is and really exists[288]. We are therefore left with a third interpretation of *Deut*. xxxii. 39 according to which God says: "Behold my existence". These three distinct positions on the visibility and knowability of God are not scattered throughout Philo's works in a manner such as would suggest an inconsistent or changeable mind. Nor do they derive from the exegesis of different texts, though it is not impossible that Philo reflects here three different exegetical traditions of the same verse. I suggest rather that the careful gradation, from apprehension of God through clear intuition to mere knowledge that the universe has an existing cause is a deliberate rhetorical device, intended to allow some lingering hope to one seeking a deeper understanding of God, whilst at once warning him not to be disappointed if no spectacular vision offers itself. That the passage is carefully constructed is apparent also from the relationship between the first and final interpretations. Indeed, the initial statement privileges intuition over demonstration through words, whilst the final one appears to refer to an understanding of God not far removed from Aristotle's notion of the unmoved mover, the ultimate cause. In fact, the point of Philo's argument in *Post*. 167ff. appears to reside in the importance of knowing, not more than Aristotle, but differently: that is, through clear intuition rather than logical deduction. Finally, Philo concludes with the claim that the powers of God

[287] One must of necessity bear in mind that the manuscripts of both *Conf.* 138 and 139 are corrupted and confused, so that this version is a reconstruction.

[288] *Post*. 168: "ἔστι τε καὶ ὑπάρχει". Although Colson and Whitaker translate "exists and subsists", it is notable that Aristotle employs ὑπάρχω in this sense to denote the subsistence of qualities in a subject. As it is unlikely that Philo intends to depict the existent as subsisting in the world in such a way, it is more appropriate to assume that Philo had in mind the notion that God is that which really exists, as opposed to "φαίνομαι" (cf. Aristotle *Cael*. 297b22).

may be apprehended (the second interpretation of *Deut*. xxxii. 39), and that it is these which make evident not his essence but his true existence. Perhaps Philo, through the use of ὑπάρχω, wishes to emphasise that it is possible to obtain sure knowledge, as opposed to mere conjecture, that God really does exist, although his nature can never be apprehended.

Philo's insistence upon the inapproachability and invisibility of God is even more apparent in *QE.* ii. 45, where he interprets the reference in *Exod.* xxiv. 16a to the glory of God coming down upon Mount Sinai as denoting only "a belief and counting on the divine glory". This produces in the minds of those present an "appearance of the coming of God, who was not there". Philo argues that this concurs well with the etymology of the word Sinai which he believes in Greek to mean "inaccessible". Philo concludes the passage with the statement that the divine place is so inaccessible that "not even the holiest mind is able to ascend to such a height to it"[289]. This somewhat contradicts Goodenough's understanding of the glory of God appearing to Moses as a flame as a culmination of the mystic ascent[290]. Goodenough is correct in mentioning that for Philo this was not God himself but his Powers. However, he fails to note that in *QE* ii. 47 Philo is careful to note that "it is the form of the glory and the power of God which appears" and that "the fire is not his power but only his glory". As Marcus points out, "Philo seems to mean that God's power was only *like* his glory (symbolized by the flame) […] and that neither God's essence nor his power actually appeared"[291]. It is therefore imprudent to conclude as Goodenough does that going up to the flame Moses goes beyond the heaven into God and there abides[292]. In *Q.E.* ii. 47 Philo further clarifies that the glory of God is "the power through which [God] appears". Interestingly, Philo writes that the form of the power appears to be like a flame to the spectators "for God showed not that which pertained to his essence but what he wished to see to be". Here, even the form of the divine power only appears to be a flame, it was "not a veritable flame". In this passage, it is quite clear that Philo is interested in dismissing the Stoic idea that the fire is the essence of God, and insists that it is not even his power but only his glory. Thus, Philo argues in *QE* ii. 45, 47 that

[289] *Q.E.* ii. 45.
[290] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 214, discussing *QE* ii. 37- 47.
[291] R. Marcus, *QE.*, (Loeb supplement II), 94 note *b*.
[292] Goodenough here refers to *Q.E.* ii. 40

neither God's essence nor his power actually appeared. They only seemed to manifest themselves to the people.

Finally, Philo's view that the Existent can be apprehended by no one is nowhere clearer than in *Praem.* 40, which follows a description of Jacob receiving a vision of God as his reward for reaching perfection[293]. Having, by means of continuous striving, begun to open the eye of the soul, an incorporeal beam shone upon Jacob and revealed to him the intelligible world ruled by its charioteer. This does not however enable him to see God, but perceiving his longing, God granted him a vision of himself. Here, Philo already adds a cautionary note, specifying that the vision was granted only in so far as it was possible for a mortal and created nature to contain it[294]. He then adds that the vision showed only that God is, not what he is[295]. A full explanation follows in the next verse, where Philo describes God in superlative terms, and concludes that to God alone is it possible to apprehend God: to have a vision of God entails seeing that God exists, but no comprehension of what he is is included in or follows upon this perception[296].

So opposed is Philo to the notion that God, the cause of all and highest of all, might even be seen, let alone comprehended, by a mortal that he is prepared to reinterpret biblical verses which unambiguously report a vision of God. This is the case in *Mut*. 15 where Philo warns that *Gen*. xvii. 1, "ὠφθη κύριος τῷ Ἀβραὰμ", must not be understood in the sense that the cause of all shone upon Abraham and appeared to him. It is instead a manifestation of God's sovereignty which rewards Abraham for his departure from the speculations of the Chaldeans who ascribe powers of action to the world which they regard as causes. Thus, Philo argues that Abraham perceived one of the powers of God, the power of kingship. This explains, for Philo, why

---

293 *Praem.* 36.

294 *Praem.* 39: "[…] καθ᾽ ὅσον οἷόν τε ἦν χωρῆσαι γενητὴν καὶ θνητὴν φύσιν".

295 *Praem.* 39: "[…] οὐχὶ τῆς ὅ ἐστιν ἐμφαινούσης, ἀλλὰ τῆς ὅτι ἔστιν".

296 *Praem.* 40: "ἐκεῖνο μὲν γάρ, ὃ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ κρεῖττον καὶ μονάδος πρεσβύτερον καὶ ἑνὸς εἰλικρινέστερον, ἀμήχανον ὑφ᾽ ἑτέρου θεωρεῖσθαί τινος, διότι μόνῳ θέμις αὐτῷ ὑφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ καταλαμβάνεσθαι".

theSeptuagint refers to the Lord, not the Existent: "διὸ λέγεται "ὠφθη" οὐ τὸ ὄν, ἀλλὰ κύριος"[297].

Philo therefore appears to reduce any vision of God to a perception of his actions in the world, or to an apprehension of his existence. Nevertheless, he holds out hope, in *Conf*. 139 for a knowledge of God's existence which does not permit any doubt or argument: an understanding that God exists obtained not through philosophical justification but through religious experience.

2.2 *Why God's essence cannot be known*

2.2.1. The inadequacy of language and the unknowability of God

Significantly, the description of God as Existent, and incomprehensible is directly linked, in *Mut.* 7-11 and *Post.* 168- 169 with the impossibility of speaking of God's nature. Indeed, that Philo did hold God to be not amenable to human apprehension or perception is evident from *Post.* 168 where, in introduction to his interpretation of *Deut.* xxxii. 39, Philo guards against the notion that the Existent is visible, by arguing that when we say so, we are not using words in their literal sense[298]. Thus, the logical consequence of God's essential un-knowableness is that he may not be spoken of in any meaningful way: This is what is reflected in Philo's conclusion in *Mut.* 11 that no personal name can ever be assigned to the Existent[299]. Indeed, he argues that though God provides mere mortals with a name by which they might refer to him, it is not possible to know the name that truly reflects the essence of God.[300] This statement both echoes and explains the insistence in *Mut*. 7 that the truly existing God is not apprehended by any man: "μὴ μέντοι νομίσῃς τὸ ὄν, ὅ ἐστι πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὄν, ὑπ᾽ ἀνθρώπου τινὸς καταλαμβάνεσθαι". He nevertheless appears to believe that the references to God as existing or being do reflect some truth concerning his nature, however limited the scope of this revelation may be: "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν," ἴσον τῷ εἶναι

---

[297] *Mut*. 17.
[298] τὸ δ᾽ ὁρατὸν εἶναι τὸ ὂν οὐ κυριολογεῖται […]".
[299] *Mut.* 11: "ἦν οὖν ἀκόλουθον τὸ μηδ᾽ ὄνομα κύριον ἐπιφημισθῆναι δύνασθαι τῷ ὄντι πρὸς ἀλήθειαν".
[300] *Mut.* 11- 15.

πέφυκα, οὐ λέγεσθαι"[301]. It is nonetheless quite clear that Existent or Being is not a personal or proper name.

This sentiment is most explicit in Philo's allegedly late treatise *Deo*[302], in which he claims that "the one in their midst is called Being; this name 'Being' is not his own and proper name"[303]. Indeed, as in *Mut*. Philo distinguishes between personal proper names, such as Lord and God, which allow mortals to be brought into relation with the divine[304] and which merely reflect different aspects of the true God, and expressions such as τὸ ὂν, which refer to God in his essence though they cannot convey any definition of the divine essence. Thus, in *Deo* 4 Philo writes that "inasmuch as he is, he is named 'the Being'" and designates God and Lord as symbols, respectively, of the "creative [and] of the royal virtue". In this same treatise, Philo explains that the unnameability of God rests upon his unknowability: "For he himself is unnameable and beyond expression, as being incomprehensible". Similarly, in *Somn*. i. 67 Philo links the inadequacy of any divine name and the impossibility of speaking about God with his incomprehensibility[305]. As Calabi points out, although in some passages, God is not merely unnameable but has no name at all, "it is not a question of the ontological lack of a name but rather the impossibility of man's knowing an adequate name"[306].

In *QG*. ii. 54, Philo argues that "that blessed and most happy one does not admit any likeness or comparison or parable; rather he is beyond blessedness itself and happiness and whatever is more excellent and better then these". Any comparisons or parables in the biblical text are attributed to use in "learning and aid in teaching" and do not reflect "the nature of truth". Thus, Philo insists that "in reality God is not like man nor yet like the sun nor like heaven nor like the sense-perceptible world but only like God, if it right to say even this".

---

[301] *Somn.* i. 230.
[302] Siegert, F, "The Philonian Fragment *De Deo*" in *StPh* x, 1- 33. Presents the scholarly consensus on the authenticity of the treatise and argues for its being "one of the last works of Philo", 2-3.
[303] *Deo* 4.
[304] *Mut*. 13.
[305] *Somn.* i. 67: "τοῦ ἀκατονομάστου καὶ ἀρρήτου καὶ κατὰ πάσας ἰδέας ἀκαταλήπτου θεοῦ".
[306] Calabi, 2008, 47.

For Philo, it is not proper to confer a proper or personal name upon God, and any comparison or parable concerning God does not reflect the true nature of reality but merely serves as an aid to teaching. This applies to any reference to God as visible which cannot be taken literally since the divine cannot be spoken of in any meaningful way. God, for Philo, is unnameable because he is incomprehensible.

2.2.2 The material sphere cannot bring God down to its level

Though the remoteness of the divine nature is not spatial but rather due to the very nature of that being and the limitations of human minds, Philo underlines the perceptual and epistemic distance between God and humans through the vocabulary of sacred space. Indeed, he describes the conceptions of the Existent as "ἄδυτος", that is, 'not to be entered', a term whose substantive, τό ἄδυτον, designates the innermost sanctuary of a temple. This inapproachability is further reinforced by an extension of the unknowability of God to that of heaven, since Philo proposes that, as heaven is bounded by God, not only the Existent but also heaven are excluded from our powers of conception[307].

That the created and material cannot approach or enter the divine sphere is therefore not a limitation upon the power of God to enter matter, but rather a reflection of the frailty of created and corporeal beings who are not able to endure the unmitigated might of God. Indeed, though God is depicted as the source of a noetic light which apprehends the invisible, it is not possible for a human to contemplate the essence of God, as the incorporeal rays would blind whoever approached too close[308]. In similar fashion, when repudiating the notion that Abraham saw the Existent in *Mut*.15, Philo rejects the notion that any human mind could contain a vision of God. Philo repeatedly emphasises that the inability fully to apprehend God is no punishment but divine beneficence towards the human seer whose very nature entails that he cannot cope with the full might of divine perfection. Thus, even Moses cannot receive a vision of God clearly manifested, since this cannot be granted to any that are brought

[307] *Her.* 229: "ὥσπερ οὖν ἀπερίληπτον τὸ ὄν, οὕτως καὶ τὸ ὁριζόμενον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ μέτροις τοῖς εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν ἐπίνοιαν ἥκουσιν οὐ μεμέτρηται".
[308] *Fug*. 164- 165.

into being by creation[309]. The inability to perceive and comprehend God thus resides with human beings rather than with God himself, as Philo maintains in *Spec. Leg.* i. 43 where God declares that he bestows gifts in accordance with the capacity of the recipient, because not all that God can easily give is within human power to take[310].

The gulf which Philo perceives, between God who can freely bestow whatever he will and humans whose capacity to receive is limited, resides largely in the fundamental difference between that which is unoriginate, God, and that which is created and is assigned a genus and species[311]. Indeed, so great is the divide, that when God created out of confused matter he did not touch matter himself but rather made use of the forms so that every genus would receive its proper shape[312]. This is because God is perfect and so needs to partake of nothing outside himself: unlike human beings he is self sufficient, unchanging and certain[313]. Thus, following a reference to the ordering of matter by the forms or powers, Philo has God declare that Moses is not to hope ever to apprehend either him or even his powers in their essence[314]. In this context, it is worth noting Calabi's rejection of any understanding of the powers as possessing qualities and attributes which are describable, in contrast to 'He who is' who is ineffable[315]. Given that even the powers are, according to Philo, unknowable and ineffable she argues that it cannot be a question of two planes of reality which are reached through different paths, but rather of different ways of referring to the same reality seen from different perspectives. She argues this point largely on the basis of *Legat.* 5- 6, where Philo writes that even the heaven, should it become a voice, would lack appropriate terms to approach and expound not only God, but also his attendant powers. Although this largely deals with the possibility of naming God and the powers, nevertheless the previous phrase refers to reason which cannot ascend to God, but ebbs away, *unable to find the proper words*. Calabi is therefore quite justified in drawing a close parallel here between ability to know God and his powers, and ability to name them. In *Leg.* 6 where Philo writes that even reason cannot attain to ascend

[309] *Spec. Leg.* i. 43.
[310] Cf. *Deus* 80; *Post* 143- 5.
[311] *Opif.* 12
[312] *Spec. Leg.* i. 329.
[313] *Deus* 26, *Cher.* 86.
[314] *Spec. Leg.* i. 49.
[315] Calabi, F., "Unknowability of God".

to God who cannot be touched or handled, he refers to an inability to talk not only about God but also about his powers. It may well be that Philo's point here is to repudiate the role of reason in searching for God[316], rather than to reject the possibility that humans might ascend towards God at all, since in *Leg*. 5 he refers to souls whose vision has soared above all created things and schooled themselves to behold the uncreated and divine.

2.2.3 Humans lack an adequate organ by which the Existent might be perceived

Philo quite consistently maintains that the incomprehensibility of God and the invisibility of his essence derive from human limitations. Indeed, he points out that even the mind is inadequate for such purposes[317]. Philo explains that this is because God has driven created being away from his essential nature, so that we cannot touch it, even with the pure, unmixed, incorporeal mind[318]. In this passage Philo seems to draw a distinction between apprehending and seeing the Existent, since in *Post.* 21 he explains that Cain has willingly blinded his soul, the only organ by which he could have seen God. Wolfson maintains that for Philo "God cannot be apprehended by any man, not only as an object of sense but even as an object of intelligence". He supports this statement by quoting a translation of Mut. 7: "for we have in us no organ by which we can envisage it, neither in sense […] nor yet in mind". That even the mind is inadequate for the envisaging of the Existent rests largely upon the corrupt nature of the manuscript, which reads not "νοῦν" (mind) but "ἰσχὺν" (strength or power). Although the emendation is not necessarily unwarranted, the manuscript evidence alone cannot bear the weight of Wolfson's arguments. Nevertheless, *Post*. 19- 20 seems to indicate that Philo believed the human mind to be inadequate as it lacked swiftness even to pursue the planets, and muses that it is strange that God who outstrips them all is motionless[319]. Furthermore, in *QG*. II. 54, Philo argues that

[316] This is largely the point which John Dillon makes in his paper "The transcendence of God in Philo: some possible sources". Philo's conviction, reflected in *Leg*. 6 is that "a kind of mystical vision is the only faculty that will connect us with God, since reason is inadequate" (page 6).
[317] *Post.* 19: "τὸ πάντων ὀξυκινητότατον, ὁ νοῦς, ἀπεριγράφοις ἂν ἀπολειφθείη τῆς καταλήψεως τοῦ αἰτίου διαστήμασιν".
[318] *Post.* 20.
[319] *Post.* 19.

"reflecting is properly used of God since [his] mind and intention are most firm". This is contrasted with the human will which is "unsettled and inconstant and vacillating". Philo pursues this pessimistic view of the human mind, insisting that "it is impossible for the human mind to be extended and disseminated as it is too weak to pass very completely and effortlessly among all things". In fact, it appears from *Leg. All.* ii. 22 that the mind is not in itself inadequate, but is hampered by the body: this is why it is too weak to be extended. It is therefore worth considering that Philo may not have regarded all human minds as utterly inadequate for the perception of God, rather when expressing doubts over the ability of the mind he concentrated upon the vast majority of human minds which are entrapped and enthralled by the body.

It may be the case that Philo, in *Mut.* 10- 11, aims his remarks concerning the limitations of the mind at the majority of human beings who are ensnared by the body and wrapped up in material concerns. Philo explains that it is little wonder that the Existent is inapprehensible to humans since even our own minds are unintelligible to us[320]. He underlines this point in his rhetorical question: "τίς γὰρ ψυχῆς οὐσίαν εἶδεν;" Given Philo's willingness, in many passages, to explain what the soul consists of and to provide details as to the respective functions of the rational and the irrational part of the soul, the propriety of this analogy is somewhat questionable. Although this might, if one considers a rigid definition of 'essence', strictly concern only the function of the soul, without thereby touching upon its nature, Philo does feel able to assert that the soul is part of the intelligible world, surely providing at least some notion as to what sort of substance it is. Nonetheless, two points need to be borne in mind. Firstly, that in *Leg. All.* i. 91 Philo does provide a more detailed account of the manner in which the essence of the soul cannot be known to us humans. In this passage, he presents an analogy with the eye of the body which cannot see itself: "[…]οὕτως καὶ ὁ νοῦς τὰ μὲν ἄλλα νοεῖ, ἑαυτὸν δὲ οὐ καταλαμβάνει". Philo then proceeds to ridicule the notion that the mind might know of its own nature, challenging it to tell us what it is or of what kind: "πνεῦμα ἢ αἷμα ἢ πῦρ ἢ ἀὴρ ἢ ἕτερόν τι σῶμα" Philo goes further and appears to claim that it is impossible for the

[320] *Mut.* 10: "καὶ τί θαυμαστόν, εἰ τὸ ὂν ἀνθρώποις ἀκατάληπτον, ὁπότε καὶ ὁ ἐν ἑκάστῳ νοῦς ἄγνωστος ἡμῖν;"

mind to say of itself whether it is even a body or whether it is incorporeal[321]. He follows this immediately with the rhetorical question, whether men who inquire about God's substance are simpletons[322]. Here it becomes necessary to bear in mind the context of Philo's affirmations that since we cannot apprehend even the soul, we have no hope of apprehending the Existent. Indeed, these simpletons mentioned in *Leg. All.* i. 91, who seek knowledge of the nature of God, might conceivably be the same type of people described in *Mut.* 10 as sophists, who have contended with each other concerning the nature of the soul[323]. This passage immediately follows and seeks to justify Philo's claim that the Existent alone by his nature cannot be seen, since even the mind in each of us is unknown to us[324], reinforcing the impression that Philo's concern with the unknowability of God's essence ought to be read as, in part, a reaction against discussions which assume that God's nature might be apprehended by man. Indeed, Philo in a passage critiquing the Chaldean, or Stoic, approach, counsels those who seek God to come down from heaven and explore their own nature[325]. This entails leaving behind opinion, 'δόξα', the country of the Chaldeans and migrating to the place of sense perception, 'τὸ τῆς αἰσθήσεως χωρίον'[326]. That this is unlikely to lead to an apprehension of the nature of God itself might be detected from Philo's promise in *Migr.* 186 of the potential reward of such a migration: you might know that, just as there is mind in you that controls all that is in you, so there is in the universe, and he guides and rules over the universe[327]. Thus, by examining oneself and one's own nature, one might be led to the conclusion that there is a God who is sovereign over the universe, but there is no indication here that one might ever come to know of his nature. Correspondingly, Philo gives no indication in this passage that the ones whom he is advising might apprehend the nature of the soul, only that they might perceive that there is a mind in each of them which rules the rest of their being. It is also significant that the means by which one might come to such a limited

[321] *Leg. All.* i. 91: "[…] ἢ τοσοῦτόν γε ὅτι σῶμά ἐστιν ἢ πάλιν ἀσώματον".
[322] *Leg. All.* i. 91: "εἶτ᾽ οὐκ εὐήθεις οἱ περὶ θεοῦ σκεπτόμενοι οὐσίας;"
[323] *Mut.* 10: "τίς γὰρ ψυχῆς οὐσίαν εἶδεν; ἧς ἡ ἀδηλότης μυρίας ἔριδας σοφισταῖς ἐγέννησεν ἐναντίας εἰσηγουμένοις γνώμας ἢ καὶ ὅλοις γένεσιν ἀντιστατούσας".
[324] *Mut.* 9- 10.
[325] *Migr.* 185: "μόνους ` ἑαυτοὺς καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῶν φύσιν ἐρευνᾶτε, μὴ ἑτέρωθι μᾶλλον οἰκήσαντες ἢ παρ᾽ ἑαυτοῖς".
[326] *Migr.* 187.
[327] *Migr.* 186: "λογιεῖσθε γὰρ ὅτι, ὡς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστι νοῦς, καὶ τῷ παντί ἐστι […]".

understanding of the universe is through the exercise of one's reason, and not as the result of a vision or any such divine guidance. Indeed, the verb which Philo employs, λογίζομαι, does not only mean 'to conclude by reasoning', but connotes calculation and computation, as the noun which is related to λογίζομαι reveals: λογιστής denotes, in Plato a calculator or teacher of arithmetic, and in Aristotle and Demosthenes a reasoner. One might thus infer that Philo has in mind here a sort of relatively dry reasoning, which might lead Abram or Bezalel to conclude that there is a God ruling over the universe, but falls short of the higher vision of God attained by Israel.

2.2.4 God cannot be contained but transcends all

Another explanation for the inapprehensibility of the Existent is Philo's argument that God can contain but cannot be contained[328]. This understanding of the Existent might provide a reasonable explanation as to why Philo believes its nature to be inapprehensible and conforms to Philo's writings concerning the nature of God as essentially unknowable, though one might apprehend all that is below him[329]. The reference to God containing without being contained occurs in the context of an account of the difference between Chaldean or Stoic notions of the visible universe either being God or containing God as the soul of the whole[330], and Moses' opinion that neither the universe nor its soul is the primal God. Philo proceeds to warn against false interpretation of *Deut.*4. 39: "ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἄνω καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω". No one ought to think that the he who is essentially existing[331] is spoken of here, but rather one of his powers, loving kindness, by which he has established the

---

328 *Migr.* 182.

329 *Mut.* 8- 9: "[…] τῶν ὅσα μετὰ τὸ ὂν σωμάτων τε ὁμοῦ καὶ πραγμάτων εἰς κατάληψιν ἐρχομένων, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάντα ἤδη καταλαμβάνεται μόνου δ᾽ ἐκείνου μὴ πεφυκότος ὁρᾶσθαι".

330 This same concept is exposed in *Leg. All.* i. 9, where Philo implies that the following expression is inadequate: "ἡ γὰρ τῶν ὅλων ψυχὴ ὁ θεός ἐστι κατὰ ἔννοιαν". Indeed, it is preceded by his rhetorical question asking how those who do not know the substance of their own soul can have any accurate notions of the soul of the universe. As Colson, F. H. and Whitaker, G. H (*Loeb Volume I*, *Appendix* p. 478) point out, this expression is Stoic (*S. V. F.* ii. 774), and the equivalent ἡ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχή is attributed to Cleanthes himself (*S. V. F.* i. 532).

331 *Migr.* 182: "[…] τὸν κατὰ τὸ εἶναι […]".

realm of being[332]. The reason for rejecting the notion that the Existent might be spoken of as residing in any place, which includes the notion that he might be a part of the universe, albeit its soul, is precisely that God may not be contained in any thing.

It is therefore not only human limitation which precludes any apprehension of God or even of the Powers. Philo's placing of the supreme principle beyond all qualification, even Being[333] places it, as Dillon points out[334], above all qualification whatsoever and therefore also above all rational knowledge. Significantly, Dillon does note that Philo is quite frequently prepared to designate the supreme principle, which for him is also the personal God of Judaism, as the One, the Monad or the really Existent (τὸ ὄντως ὄν,). At the same time, not only is the Monad presented as "the incorporeal image of God"[335], Dillon also cites *Cont*. 2 where Philo speaks of the Therapeutae as worshipping the Existent, which is better than the Good, purer than the One, more primordial than the Monad". Judiciously, Dillon indicates a passage, *Praem*. 39- 40 in which this very sentiment, that the supreme principle, the God of Judaism, is utterly transcendent and beyond definition, with the impossibility for any mortal and created to apprehend God. Thus, such transcendence appears to preclude any deep relationship with, and knowledge of, God based solely upon a vision of his Powers, since they do not offer a full representation or qualification of the supreme nature. This sentiment is largely in agreement with Winston' s observation that also the influence of the Platonic supranoetic unknowable entity, which is made manifest only through projection, entails that in Philo knowledge of God is subject to certain boundaries. Accordingly, he argues that "Philo thus shares with the Stoics the notion of transcendent immanence, except that […] Philo's Logos yields only an image of the divine essence and itself indicates yet a further projection of that image yet a further projection of that image in a cosmos which stands at a third remove from its source"[336]. It is not necessary to view the Powers or Logos as autonomous beings, rather one ought to understand them as ways in which we view God, the being beyond

[332] *Migr.* 182- 183.
[333] Cf. *Deo* 4 f.
[334] Dillon, J., "The transcendence of God in Philo".
[335] Dillon notes that in several authors before Philo, including Speusippus and Eudorus, the Monad is understood to be inferior to the One.
[336] Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 45.

predication or definition. The Powers and Logos are not on a different ontological level from God[337], rather as Calabi points out[338], the ways in which humans relate to God are limited by human language and cognitive capacity, though it is also important to acknowledge that any rational knowledge of God is precluded by his utter transcendence.

2.2.5 Why God's essence cannot be known: conclusions

At first sight it might appear that Philo is strangely inconsistent concerning the possibility of apprehending the nature of the soul. His intimation that one cannot know the nature of the soul does not sit well with some of his descriptions of the soul, its component parts and functions, though it might be regarded as a hyperbole used to emphasise, given the enormous gulf between human and divine, the corresponding difficulty in apprehending the nature of God. In fact, Philo's insistence upon the limitations of the human mind and the consequences of its restricted perceptual scope, namely that the nature of the soul might not be known, ought to be understood in the context of his warning against Chaldean notions that the essence of the soul as well as the nature of God might be apprehended. It appears that for such characters he advises, perhaps as a first step towards greater perfection in understanding, to retreat to sense-perception which will at least allow knowledge of the mind and its leading role and by rational deduction, that there is such a mind which rules over the universe. Meanwhile, another approach to the unknowability of the Existent is provided, focusing specifically upon characteristics of God that irremediably entail his incomprehensibility. In effect, it is reasonable to surmise that both Philo's claim that as one might not know the essential nature of the human soul, it is foolish to seek to comprehend the essential nature of God, as well as his argument that the Existent cannot be contained in anything, appear to be largely directed at Stoics or 'Chaldeans'.

[337] For instance in the case of Abraham's vision, cf. *Abr*. 120ff; *QG* iv. 1-2.
[338] In *God's acting, man's acting*, 52- 53.

2.3 *Seeing God and the quest to discern the nature of the Existent*

2.3.1 Israel as "one who sees God" in Philo and God as intelligible to the mind

It is quite clear that Philo believes that it is, in some sense at least, possible to see God. Indeed, Birnbaum remarks that the motif of seeing God runs throughout all three exegetical series (Allegorical Commentary, Exposition, and QGE), and adds that Philo frequently extols the sense of sight in general[339]. Furthermore, his widespread use of 'Israel' in the sense of 'one seeing God' testifies to this. There are throughout Philo's works many references to Israel as "the one who sees"[340], and Israel is, for Philo, the emblem of seeing as Jacob is of hearing[341]. Furthermore, Philo appears to be hinting that seeing refers to something more than a mere sensory experience in *Somn.* ii. 271- 272, where Israel is allegorically interpreted as representing the souls of those who wish to see and find deep hidden knowledge[342]. Indeed, there are more specific allusions to Israel not only as the one who sees God[343], but also as the mind seeing (ὁράω) or beholding (θεωρέω) God[344], and the far-sighted eye of the soul which perceives (καθοράω) God[345]. It therefore appears, at first sight at least, that Philo sometimes treats perceptions of God in much the same way as he views perceptions of any of the intelligible objects- as possible, though affected in a non-sensory manner through the mind, which acts as the organ of sight in the intelligible world. This is especially the case in *Cher*. 97 where God is described as intelligible by the mind: "ὁ νοητὸς θεὸς". It is quite likely that Philo refers to God rather than the powers in this passage since Philo first argues that God is himself the archetypal essence of which myriads of rays are the effluence. These rays are none of them

---

[339] Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought*, 77- 90.
[340] *Leg. All.* 2. 34: τοῦ ὁρῶντος ἔγγονον Ἰσραὴλ. *Deus* . 144; *Migr.* 113, 125; *Somn.* 1. 114, 1. 117 (in both passages, sight and light are contrasted with darkness and ignorance).
[341] *Conf.* 72.
[342] *Somn.* 2. 271.
[343] *Leg. All.* 3. 212: "ὁ ὁρῶν τὸν θεὸν"; *Post.* 63, 92 (this is why Israel is the portion of the Lord. It is also referred to as such in *Plant.* 59 without the detailed explanation given here); *Fug.* 208.
[344] *Leg. All.* 3. 186; *Somn.* 2. 173: "ὁ […] Ἰσραήλ ἐστι νοῦς θεωρητικὸς θεοῦ" (also linked to virtue in this passage).
[345] *Conf.* 92.

visible to sense, rather they are all visible to the mind. They are described as the instruments of that same God alone who is "νοητὸς θεὸς". Furthermore, in *Spec. Leg.* i. 17, leaning upon *Deut*. iv. 19 in his attack upon astral gods and defence of God as creator of the universe, Philo argues that just as sense is the servitor of mind, all beings perceived by sense (including the sun and the moon) are ministers of he who is perceived by the mind. That Philo refers here to God is abundantly clear from *Spec. Leg.* i. 20 since he honours the immaterial, invisible, the one apprehended by the understanding alone, who is not only God of Gods but also the maker of all. The reference to "τοῦ ἀειδοῦς καὶ ἀοράτου καὶ μόνῃ διανοίᾳ καταληπτοῦ" appears to confirm that Philo did indeed regard some minds as able to apprehend God. Indeed, Philo urges: "Let us, transcending the boundaries of visible essence by means of our reason, proceed to honour"[346] God. It might nonetheless be cautioned that Philo does not specify that ordinary human minds may apprehend God, nor that they may apprehend his essence. Given the interest of this passage in the heavenly bodies, described both as God's magistrates over sub-lunar beings and ministers of God, it may well be that when Philo describes God as intelligible by the mind or reason he refers only to those minds which are lieutenants of the one Father of All: the stars[347]. Philo's insistence upon the inability of the human mind to apprehend God's essence or even the essence of his powers in a later passage in the same treatise[348] renders this supposition more likely. Nevertheless, the exhortation to honour God in conjunction with the reference to his being intelligible to the mind suggests that Philo leaves open the possibility that some human minds might obtain a more exalted comprehension of God.

As discussed in the previous chapter, it may be that references to the inadequacy of the human mind to perceive God refer in fact to the fallacious understanding of the divine which Philo often calls Chaldean and is in fact Stoic. Thus, in *Her*. 289 he contrasts the creed of the Chaldeans with that of the lovers of God and interprets *Gen*. xv. 15 as a migration from the created and sensible to the intelligible and creative cause: "πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν καὶ πεποιηκὸς αἴτιον". Philo is mainly concerned with

[346] *Spec. Leg.* i. 20: "ὥσθ᾽ ὑπερβάντες τῷ λογισμῷ πᾶσαν τὴν ὁρατὴν οὐσίαν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ ἀειδοῦς καὶ ἀοράτου καὶ μόνῃ διανοίᾳ καταληπτοῦ τιμὴν ἴωμεν".
[347] *Spec. Leg*. i. 13.
[348] *Spec. Leg.* i. 49.

affirming that God is not created and not sensible. If he had wished to exclude the possibility that he might be conceived of by the mind he could have chosen another, negative, epithet. Instead he refers to him as "νοητός", allowing some hope perhaps that the divine might be approached with the mind.

2.3.2 Discovering wisdom: an encounter with the divine logos as a stage in the visionary's progress towards seeing God

The majority of scholars have understood references to seeing God as indicating at best a direct realisation of the fact that there is a God, rather than a reference to any deeper insight into the nature of God. Although in some passages Philo does appear to deny the possibility of any apprehension of God which goes beyond his existence, it is worth also considering in some detail *Somn.* ii. 270- 272 which does not entirely concur with this somewhat oversimplified picture of Philo's thought. The context of this passage is a discussion of occasions which, not according with silence, call for speech in song or praise[349]. The first occasion is the destruction of passion, which is an imperfect good. This is contrasted with an occasion of most transcendent excellence (ὑπερβάλλον καλόν): the discovery of wisdom. That Philo appears to expect its discovery may be deduced from the following sentence, where he writes that when it has been discovered, all the people will sing. He justifies this with a quotation from *Num*. xxi. 17 and, without specifying a meaning for "Israel" interprets the well as a reference to hidden and deep knowledge. He further identifies this knowledge as that which always serves to water the fields of reason in the souls of those who desire to see. Thus Philo apparently links the discovery of deep and hidden knowledge to the divine logos or to God since both are sometimes called the founthead of all wisdom. Indeed, in *Fug*. 82, Philo maintains that the knowledge (γνῶσις) of God is wisdom and true virtue. The reference to those who wish to see is reminiscent of Philo's interpretation of Israel as one who sees God. Thus, Philo seemingly creates a link between seeing God or desiring to see God and obtaining deep hidden knowledge. Although he does not specify whether this knowledge concerns God's nature or even the divine, it is unlikely that he refers merely to knowledge that God exists. Indeed, Philo appears to concentrate upon the content

[349] *Somn*. ii. 268.

(which is hidden) of the knowledge and its deep nature, rather than manner in which the knowledge is obtained. Furthermore, the passage concerns not mere knowledge alone but wisdom, which Philo sometimes identifies with the divine logos. It may therefore be that the passage concerns the discovery of the divine logos by those who desire to see. Interestingly, the discovery of the knowledge does not appear as an end in itself in this passage since it will serve to water the fields of reason in the souls who wish to see. It is therefore likely that the discovery of deep knowledge and most excellent wisdom, perhaps identified with the divine logos, though an event which warrants rejoicing is in fact only a stage in the pursuit of a vision. In this case, knowledge is both a reward and a necessary precursor to visionary activity.

2.3.3 Different levels of divine vision and the possibility of beholding the Existent

Before dismissing entirely the possibility of experiencing any visions of the Existent in Philo it is necessary to explore *Somn.* i. 227- 230. Here, Philo is keen both to refute any hypostatization of God[350] whilst distinguishing between he who is truly God and the divine reason, who is improperly called God. Philo highlights the difference between the one true God, indicated by means of the article, and one of those who are improperly referred to as God, the divine reason, who is called simply θεός with no article. This distinction is quite specifically related to *Genesis* xxxi. 13, since Philo takes the precaution of specifying that it is in the present instance, "ἐν τῷ παρόντι", that scripture has indicated him who truly is by means of the article. One cannot therefore extrapolate from this distinction that all instances in which Philo employs the definite article with reference to God indicate the Existent, the one true God, whilst those passages in which he omits the article necessarily refer to the divine reason. Nonetheless, it impresses upon one that for Philo there may be several different levels of divine vision, whilst he insists that there is only one unchangeable monadic God. This confirms to some degree Calabi's thesis that whether one sees God or one of his powers depends upon the ability of the human perceiver and does not involve a hypostatization of God. However, this does not necessarily entail that no human can see God, rather it leaves open the possibility that some extraordinary human beings might accede to visions of God, perhaps even perceiving his essence.

[350] C.f. *Somn*. i. 228.

Although Philo repeatedly acknowledges that it is impossible to grasp the essence of God, he does nevertheless intimate that existence is essential to God, in the sense that existence is proper to God[351]: he alone actually exists[352], while other beings exist in semblance only and do not have being as being really is: "οὐκ ὄντων κατὰ τὸ εἶναι". It is thus likely that when referring to visions of the Existent rather than visions of God, Philo means to indicate that they are to some degree visions of God as to his essence. One would expect him always to insist that such a vision is impossible, and while he does sometimes suggest that this very vision is unattainable, it is most surprising that he occasionally appears to leave open the possibility of a vision of the Existent[353]. It is interesting that in *Praem.* 27, for instance, Philo appears both to admit the possibility of beholding the Existent and seems to conflate this with experiencing a vision of God. Indeed, both are descriptions of Jacob's reward for unwearied and unswerving labour. In this context it is worth exploring Philo's attitude towards seeking visions and knowledge of the Existent. Moreover, it is important to establish to what extent visions of God on the one hand, and of the Existent on the other, enable greater knowledge both of the existence of God and of his essence.

2.3.4 The quest for visions of God's essence and the contemplation of the Existent with clear vision

In both *Fug.* 165 and in *Opif.* 71 Philo explains that the sight of anyone who seeks to behold the principal essence of God will, in the first passage, be maimed, and in the second dazzled, by the great brilliancy of its rays. The cautionary note in *Opif.* follows upon a description of the mind, bearing a clear impression of the image of God[354], which reaches the intelligible sphere, and in a sober intoxication, is possessed with the longing which enables it to attain to the topmost arch of things perceptible to the mind, and seems to be on its way to the Great King. Amidst the longing of the

---

[351] *Det.* 160: "τῶν γὰρ ἀρετῶν ἡ μὲν θεοῦ πρὸς ἀλήθειάν ἐστι κατὰ τὸ εἶναι συνεστῶσα".
[352] *Det.* 160: "ὁ θεὸς μόνος ἐν τῷ εἶναι ὑφέστηκεν".
[353] *Praem.* 27.
[354] *Opif.* 71: "[…]προσεπεσημήνατο εἰπὼν τῷ κατ᾽ εἰκόνα τὸ καθ᾽ ὁμοίωσιν εἰς ἔμφασιν ἀκριβοῦς ἐκμαγείου τρανὸν τύπον ἔχοντος".

mind, pure rays of light dazzle the eye of the understanding[355]. This recalls the analogy between God and the sun which leads Philo to argue that, just as the rays of the sun are filtered by the atmosphere so as not to burn and blind us, the rays which emanate from the Existent must likewise be tempered[356]. One ought nevertheless to bear in mind that 'σκοτοδινιάω' implies dizziness, not blindness, so that there is no explicit indication from Philo in *Opif.* 71 that the rays emanating from the Existent would blind the eye of the soul, merely that as a result of the glare the mind would become dazzled. From this passage, one cannot conclusively judge whether Philo entirely excludes the possibility of a vision of the essence of God or not.

Philo goes much further than the mere possibility that God might not be entirely inapprehensible when he writes, in *Mut.* 82, that Jacob's reward for wrestling in the struggle for virtue was the power to behold the Existent with clear vision[357]. Here, Philo specifically refers to the reward being a garland woven for the victorious soul[358], so that it is quite explicitly the soul alone which contemplates the Existent, as it does other intelligibles. Significantly, it appears from *Mut.* 81 that this was the prize for seeing God[359], especially since in this passage Philo makes it the duty of the one who sees God to carry away the prizes of victory. Thus, the beholding of the Existent ("τὸν ὄντα […] θεωρεῖν […]") is differentiated from and exalted above the sight of God ("τοῦ […] τὸν θεὸν ὁρῶντος"). Indeed, although seeing God is presented as the result of shaking the support upon which passion rests, the power to contemplate the Existent with clear vision is described as a prize for him who sees God. The impression is therefore that the clear contemplation of the Existent is contingent not only upon a struggle against the passions but also upon the prior vision of God. It seems as though, in this passage at least, Philo distinguishes between mere sight of God and a clear vision of the Existent. In *Praem.* 27, however, Philo appears to equate the two, since he describes the crown of the man of practice as a vision of God ("ὅρασις θεοῦ") and in summing the prizes awarded to the different types of soul, he

[355] *Opif.* 71: "γλιχομένου δ᾽ ἰδεῖν, ἀθρόου φωτὸς ἄκρατοι καὶ ἀμιγεῖς αὐγαὶ χειμάρρου τρόπον ἐκχέονται, ὡς ταῖς μαρμαρυγαῖς τὸ τῆς διανοίας ὄμμα σκοτοδινιᾶν".
[356] See *Deus* 79.
[357] *Mut.* 82: "[…] τὸν ὄντα δυνήσεται θεωρεῖν ὀξυδερκῶς'.
[358] *Mut.* 82: "[…] νικηφόρῳ ψυχῃ […]".
[359] *Mut.* 81: "[…] τοῦ᾽ τὸν θεὸν ὁρῶντος τὸ μὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἀγῶνος ἀστεφάνωτον ἐξελθεῖν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἐπὶ τῇ νίκῃ βραβεῖα ἄρασθαι".

refers to it as a perpetual vision of the Existent ("ὁρᾶν ἀεὶ τὸ ὂν"). There is no mention in this passage of clear vision in conjunction with seeing or beholding the Existent, so that one may not assume that Philo always associated the two elements as he did in *Mut.* 82, although it could be argued that he still distinguished between seeing and contemplating with clear sight. Indeed, Philo describes the beautiful reward of the hard working, practising soul as its being endowed with eyes for the sight ("θέα") in bright light of him who alone is worthy of sight[360]: it thus appears that Philo does to some degree at least believe in the possibility of supplanting the difficulties in gazing at the Existent, most specifically in its being surrounded by blinding rays of light, as mentioned in *Fug.* 165. One ought nonetheless to bear in mind that nowhere in *Mut.* 81- 82 does Philo refer to the soul, victorious though it may be, apprehending ('καταλαμβάνω') the Existent, in the sense that contemplation might immediately entail understanding, although as the soul is only able to see using the mind as its eye, it is difficult to envisage how it might contemplate the Existent without thereby gaining greater comprehension of its object. It still remains that Philo chooses not to employ language which would unambiguously express the belief that the human mind can comprehend the essence of God. This might be an indication that for the apprehension of an intelligible, especially where God himself is concerned, one requires not only mental perception, but also prior knowledge, in order to apprehend the object of the vision.

The same circumspect language is employed in *Congr.* 56, where Philo argues that the mind which loves God might attain a vision of him[361]. One ought to bear in mind, however, that this passage is not concerned with the knowledge or understanding that might be obtained from a vision of the divine. Rather, Philo is interested in contrasting the mind which loves God and receives a divine vision with the soul which is defined by its unreasoning impulse towards passion. The unreasoning soul is the allegorical interpretation bestowed upon Amalek, translated by Philo as 'licking up'[362], whom God banishes from his presence[363]. There is no clear indication in

---

[360] *Mut.* 82: "καλόν γε ἀσκητικῇ ψυχῇ πρόκειται τὸ ἆθλον, ἐνομματωθῆναι πρὸς τὴν τοῦ μόνου θέας ἀξίου τηλαυγῆ κατανόησιν".
[361] *Congr.* 56.
[362] *Congr.* 54- 55.
[363] *Congr.* 57: "τὴν δὲ ἄδικον καὶ ἄθεον ψυχὴν φυγαδεύων ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ […]".

Congr. 56 whether the object of the vision is the nature or essence of God, God as the Existent, since Philo writes only of "τὴν μὲν γὰρ ὁρατικὴν αὐτοῦ (clearly referring back to 'ὁ θεός' mentioned in the preceding clause) φιλόθεον ὄντως διάνοιαν"[364]. However, given that Philo writes in *Congr.* 51 of Israel having been gifted with the sight of the Existent[365], it might possibly be that in *Congr.* 56 Philo displays the belief that the mind which truly loves God might be able to see the Existent. In fact, the description of Israel as seeing the Existent is part of a section which deals with the different types of, to widely varying extents, good or at least not wicked souls: Nahor represents any philosophy which falls short of recognising God, and its legitimate wife, Milcah, is astrology, the queen of sciences, whilst its concubine is Reumah, who "sees something", thus representing sceptics, who do not concern themselves with the best things in nature. These are then contrasted with the wicked who, Philo points out, also take opinions and doctrines as concubines. The souls which have a vision of God are mentioned in the course of both these accounts, thus leaving the impression that they are to be considered somewhat apart from ordinary souls. It appears that in *Congr.* 51, Israel, though designated as a 'γένος', is to be understood not as representing an ethnic group but rather a type of soul, since the second best race or kind is that which sees the heaven of our senses, the well-ordered host of stars. It is significant that Philo creates a parallelism[366] between the object of the sight of the most excellent race, and the meaning of the name 'Israel', that is, between the Existent and God, suggesting that that Philo uses the terms interchangeably in this passage: "τῷ […] ἀρίστῳ γένει *τὸ ἄριστον ὁρᾶν*, *τὸ ὄντως ὄν*" and "Ἰσραὴλ […] *ὁρῶν θεὸν* ἑρμηνεύεται". Indeed, the parallelism appears to strengthen the case for a reference to a vision of the Existent for the god-loving souls in *Congr.* 56.

In fact, in *Praem.* 27, Philo refers quite explicitly to a vision of the Existent attained by the man of practice who achieves fulfilment by virtue gained through instruction[367], when he asks what could be more beneficial or august than a perpetual

---

[364] *Congr.* 56.
[365] *Congr.* 51: "τῷ μὲν οὖν ἀρίστῳ γένει τὸ ἄριστον ὁρᾶν, τὸ ὄντως ὄν, συμβέβηκεν. Ἰσραὴλ γὰρ ὁρῶν θεὸν ἑρμηνεύεται".
[366] In *Congr.* 51.
[367] *Praem.* 27: " […] διδακτικῇ χρησάμενος ἀρετῇ πρὸς τελείωσιν, […]"

vision of the Existent[368]. This vision of the Existent appears, just as the vision in *Congr.*, to be treated as equivalent to a vision of God, mentioned in the preceding clause as the reward of the man of practice[369]. It is once more the case, as in *Mut.*, that the language of sight is employed, but not the language of kataleptic perception which would imply at least some degree of comprehension of the object apprehended.

It appears therefore that Philo sometimes refers interchangeably to a vision of God and a vision of the Existent. The only distinction which he draws is between those occasions when the soul sees God and those when it contemplates or sees God with clear sight. Philo avoids any reference to apprehending or comprehending God or the Existent, perhaps indicating that even if seeing God or the Existent with clear vision is an experience which may allow greater understanding of the divine as the blinding rays which surround God may be in part overcome, it does not imply the same type of permanent apprehension which may be obtained through katalepsis.

2.3.5 Human visions of the Existent: fleeting and limited

That fleeting contemplation and overcoming of the dazzling divine rays rather than permanent and fully comprehending vision is to be expected is apparent from Philo's treatment of Jacob/ Israel, the practising type of soul. Whereas the soul improved by teaching is able, with the co-operation of memory, to get a tight grip on what it has learnt[370], the soul of the practiser is engaged in ceaseless and unremitting labour[371]. Indeed, obtaining a vision of the Existent with clear sight is most associated with the type of soul which, having obtained its prize, must strive to win it over again, in contrast to Abraham, the soul which benefits from instruction. This despite the references to the eternal vision of the Existent as Jacob's reward. The clarity of vision which might be bestowed by God is also presented as temporary where Philo's own experience is concerned, since he writes that he obtained clarity of vision

[368] *Praem.* 27: "τοῦ δὲ πιστεύειν θεῷ καὶ διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου χαίρειν καὶ ὁρᾶν ἀεὶ τὸ ὂν τί ἂν ὠφελιμώτερον ἢ σεμνότερον ἐπινοήσειέ τις;"
[369] *Praem.* 27: "ὁ στέφανός ἐστιν ὅρασις θεοῦ".
[370] *Mut*. 84.
[371] *Mut.* 86.

("ὀξυδερκεστάτην ὄψιν") under divine inspiration[372], yet admits that upon some occasions, when he is not inspired, his mind is barren[373]. This clarity of sight is not related to visions of the Existent, however; rather it refers to his suddenly being showered with thoughts from above.

Interestingly, despite the mention in *Mut*. 82 of the power which enables the soul to behold the Existent with clear vision, Philo appears to deny in *Mut.* 7-8 the possibility of seeing God clearly and distinctly, though he employs a different term from *Mut* 82: "τηλαυγῶς". Having declared that there is in human beings no organ by which God can be apprehended, Philo relates that Moses searched everywhere in his desire to see clearly, "τηλαυγῶς", him who alone is good. This search, he points out, is futile. Whereas ὀξυδερκῶς and cognates denote sharp-sightedness, τηλαυγῶς connotes brilliancy and is the adverb of the term "τηλαυγής" which denotes brightness or whiteness seen far off. It is a somewhat odd term for Philo to employ in this context, since in the Septuagint its main use is to refer to leprosy[374]. Perhaps its appeal lies in the image of a far-off brightness, since it was used in this sense of the sun and the moon[375]. In any case, it conjures up the dazzling brilliance of the divine rays which prevent some from seeing the Existent, and is thus quite antithetical to ὀξυδερκῶς which Philo uses to evoke a power divinely bestowed, which enables the mind to cut through obstacles and obtain a clear vision of God.

In *Mut.* 7, the passage in which Philo denies the possibility of any brilliantly distinct vision of the Existent, he also designates Moses as: "[…] ὁ τῆς ἀειδοῦς φύσεως θεατὴς καὶ θεόπτης". It is perplexing that, despite the limitations which Philo seeks to place upon any vision of God, he describes Moses not only as a spectator of the incorporeal natures, but further coins for him the term θεόπτης, one who sees God. It still remains however, that even "θεόπτης" does not necessarily indicate that Moses apprehended God's essence: in fact it is an indication that where visions of God are concerned, unlike perceptions of other intelligibles, comprehension of the

[372] *Migr.* 35: "ἔστι δὲ ὅτε κενὸς ἐλθὼν πλήρης ἐξαίφνης ἐγενόμην ἐπινιφομένων καὶ σπειρομένων ἄνωθεν ἀφανῶς τῶν ἐνθυμημάτων, ὡς ὑπὸ κατοχῆς ἐνθέου κορυβαντιᾶν […]"
[373] *Migr*. 34.
[374] *Leviticus* xiii. 2, 4, 19, 24.
[375] *H. Hom.* Xxxi. 13 and xxxii. 8.

object of the vision does not necessarily follow upon its being perceived. Philo appears, even where Moses is concerned, to exclude this possibility entirely. Indeed, appeal to God himself still does not allow Moses to apprehend the nature of God, since Philo, having interpreted *Exod.* xxxiii. 13 as a reference to Moses taking refuge with the object of his search, concludes that he fails to gain his object[376], proceeding to quote in support *Exod.* xxxiii. 23[377]. In *Mut* 9 Philo affirms that "μόνου δ' ἐκείνου μὴ πεφυκότος ὁρᾶσθαι". It is likely that the genitive "πεφυκότος" clarifies the scope of the verb and so conveys the notion not that God cannot, by his very nature, be seen (at all)[378], but that God's nature or origin cannot be seen. As well as making grammatical sense, this would accord better with Philo's argument that humans cannot see the causes or origin of things and his insistence that God cannot be apprehended and his essence cannot be perceived. This also renders more comprehensible Philo's depiction of Moses as "θεόπτης", which does not entail understanding of God. Indeed, "θεόπτης" designates one who sees God and cognates of this unusual term refer to visions of God. It is nonetheless difficult to reconcile *Mut* 7- 9 with those texts that appear to endorse the possibility of experiencing a clear vision of God, and possibly even of the Existent, although Philo never allows that God may be comprehended. It is not impossible that Philo reserves such divine visions for those souls which are able to abandon the body entirely and ascend towards God. Indeed, those souls which are not constrained in human bodies, the stars, are said by Philo to behold God.

2.3.6 Conceptions of God

Philo mentions in several passages that the rational part of the soul can attain a conception of God. Indeed, interpreting *Genesis* 4. 10, Philo argues that the irrational part of the soul is dumb, but that the rational part has a voice[379], and that blood is the essence of the vital faculty, or life[380], and through its fountainhead, mind, we might

---

[376] *Mut.* 8: "καὶ ὅμως ἀμοιρεῖ τῆς προθέσεως".
[377] In *Mut.* 9.
[378] As the Loeb translation would have it.
[379] *Det.* 91.
[380] Though not of the soul, since in *Spec.* iv. 123 Philo specifies that blood is not the essence of the mental and rational life but of that which exists according to the outward senses, so that we and irrational animals have a common existence: "τὸ μὲν

utter entreaties to God[381]. In the course of this interpretation, Philo maintains that the rational part has a voice, since only it has attained to a conception of God[382]. ἔννοια means a conception or thought in the mind, and does not necessarily entail that the nature of the thing conceived has been understood. Nonetheless, it appears that Philo does consider it to denote some degree of understanding, since in the following clause, he holds that with no other part is it possible to apprehend (καταλαμβάνω) either God or any other mental object[383]. This would seem to suggest that Philo considers ἔννοια not only as designating some form of picture or image in the mind but further to include a notion of understanding of the mental object. Furthermore, the very mention of intelligibles alongside God as the objects of apprehension of the rational faculty alone would appear to indicate that in this passage at least, Philo does not distinguish, where God and intelligibles are concerned, between the means of perception or the extent to which one might comprehend them. In *Det.* 91, Philo holds that one might have a conception of God in the mind, and that the rational faculty is the means whereby one might apprehend God. The reason for this ability of the mind to form conceptions of God, and possibly even to understand them, lies in God's breathing of his own deity into the soul[384]. Thus, the invisible deity stamped the impression of itself upon the invisible soul, so that the terrestrial region would also have a share in the image of God. Before this, Philo makes very clear, the Creator had made for the body no soul capable by itself of seeing its maker. Philo writes that, as a consequence of the incorporeal nature of the archetype, which entailed the invisibility of the image, the soul entertains immortal conceptions[385]. Thus, the statement in *Det.* 91, that the rational faculty is able to receive a conception of God because it is able to grasp or comprehend God cannot be regarded as an incidental remark, but should rather be considered the culmination of Philo's anthropology, in particular, his

---

αἷμα δι᾽ ἣν εἶπον αἰτίαν ὅτι οὐσία ψυχῆς ἐστίν οὐχὶ τῆς νοερᾶς καὶ λογικῆς ἀλλὰ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς […]".

381 *Det.* 92.

382 *Det.* 91: "[…] ὃ δὴ μόνον ἔννοιαν εἴληφε θεοῦ·".

383 *Det.* 91: "τοῖς γὰρ ἄλλοις μέρεσιν οὔτε θεὸν οὔτε τι νοητὸν καταλαβεῖν δυνάμεθα."

384 *Det.* 86: "[…]ἄνωθεν ἐνέπνει τῆς ἰδίου θειότητος".

385 *Det.* 87: "τὸ δ᾽ ἀρχέτυπον οὕτως ἦν ἄρα ἀειδές, ὥστε καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν οὐχ ὁρατή, τυπωθεῖσα μέντοι κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα οὐκέτι θνητὰς ἀλλ᾽ ἀθανάτους ἐννοίας ἐδέχετο".

understanding of the nature of the human soul as having received an imprint of the image of God.

In *Ebr.* 107, Philo refers to the one who is able to see the Existent. However, it has already been demonstrated above that references to the ability to see God or even to see the Existent cannot be regarded as equivalent, in Philo, to understanding the nature of God. Following his mention of "ὁ […] τοῦ ὄντος ὁρατικὸς", Philo proceeds to claim that such a person knows him who is the cause, but the verb ἐπίσταμαι does not necessarily imply understanding. Rather the use of "ἐπιστάμενος" leads one to conclude that Philo refers in this passage only to knowledge in the sense of acquaintance or knowing that a thing exists. Indeed, it is possibly akin to the use in Herodotus where it means 'to be assured' or 'to believe that a thing is'. However, in *Ebr.* 108, Philo alludes to the mind or understanding as the only organ by which the Existent can be comprehended. Nonetheless, this statement is not as clear an indication that the mind cannot only perceive but also understand the Existent, since the passage continues with the contention that the man whose understanding is blinded can only see the material contents of the world, and does not perceive the Existent. Such a man then believes the material things to be the cause of all that comes into being and so fashions idols of stone and wood. Since the man whose mind is blind lacks even the knowledge that there is a immaterial God, it is somewhat difficult to be sure that Philo, in designating the mind as the organ "ᾗ τὸ ὂν μόνῃ καταληπτόν ἐστιν" entails anything more than that it grasps that there is a God, despite the frequent use of the verb καταλαμβάνω, to denote seizing something with one's mind and comprehending it[386], even if that apprehension is not fully clear and distinct. On the other hand, it is impossible to discount entirely Philo's reference to the Existent as καταληπτός, a term used by Cleanthes to mean 'capable of being apprehended or comprehended'[387]. It is at least clear from both *Det.* 91 and *Ebr.* 108 that if God may be perceived, it is with the mind, though it is not entirely clear whether or not the Existent might be understood.

This impression, that the mind is the organ whereby some degree of perception of the divine may take place, is reinforced by a passage in *Leg. All.* 1. 37, where Philo

[386] Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 897.
[387] Cleanthes, *Stoic.* 1. 137.

contends that God breathed the spirit into the human mind, and it is this divine exhalation which enables human souls to derive some conception or mental image of him[388]. This is, according to Philo, what enables humans to know from God himself, that there is a God, but once more, does not entail any understanding of his essential nature, since, as pointed out above, ἔννοια designates a thought in the mind or mental image, and does not necessarily entail understanding.

Philo does, however, appear to believe that the human mind, even infused with divine spirit, is not sufficient on its own to comprehend the nature of God. Indeed, he renders this point clearly in *Abr.* 80, where he states that it is impossible for any one to comprehend the truly Existent by his own unassisted power, unless he himself displayed and revealed himself[389]. Furthermore, in *Praem.* 43 Philo describes as admirable those who have inferred the existence of God from his works[390], but names as God-worshippers (θεραπευτής) and true friends of God (θεοφιλής) those who have the power to apprehend (καταλαμβάνω) God through God alone, without the cooperation of reason. One who is able to know God through himself is in Greek called a God- seer and in the Chaldean tongue, Israel[391]. In the following paragraph, Philo reaffirms the same notion: that God is his own light and so is discerned through himself alone, without anything else co-operating in giving a perfect apprehension of his existence[392]. This last statement conveys the central point in Philo's notion of the function of a vision of God: in *Praem.* 44 he followed his definition of the one who sees God through himself alone as Israel or the God-seer with the cautionary note that it is impossible to see his real nature. Instead, the visionary sees that God Is. It is difficult to grasp what greater knowledge he may attain than the knowledge available to one who infers that God exists from his works, through the agency of reason. In *Praem.* 45 we finally have the answer: the knowledge that God Is, is obtained in a

---

[388] *Leg. All.* 1. 37: "ἕνωσις γίνεται τῶν τριῶν, τείναντος τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν διὰ τοῦ μέσου πνεύματος ἄχρι τοῦ ὑποκειμένου τίνος ἕνεκα ἢ ὅπως ἔννοιαν αὐτοῦ λάβωμεν;".

[389] *Abr.* 80: "[…] ἦν ἀδύνατον καταλαβεῖν τινα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ τὸ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὄν, μὴ παραφήναντος ἐκείνου ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιδείξαντος".

[390] *Praem.* 43: "ἀλλ᾽ οὗτοί γε οἱ θεσπέσιοι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων διενηνοχότες […] ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων εἰκότι λογισμῷ στοχασάμενοι τὸν δημιουργόν.".

[391] *Praem.* 44.

[392] *Praem.* 45: "ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτοῦ φέγγος ὢν δι᾽ αὐτοῦ μόνου θεωρεῖται, μηδενὸς ἄλλου συνεργοῦντος ἢ δυναμένου συνεργῆσαι πρὸς τὴν εἰλικρινῆ κατάληψιν τῆς ὑπάρξεως αὐτοῦ".

manner which guarantees its truth to a greater degree than the proofs obtained through human reasoning. Moreover, Philo's declaration that the true seer apprehends that God Is entails perhaps some grasp of his essential nature: that it is to exist. Despite any further knowledge concerning the essence of God being excluded from possibility, Philo believes that some may come to understand that God's essence is existence. This to some degree explains his own willingness to write that God is the Existent, and further, that existence belongs to God alone and to no other creature. This, one might surmise, is the prize of those who apprehend God through God alone, with the eye of the soul. Those who discern the uncreated from his creation are merely making a happy guess.

That the Existent can be perceived with the mind applies whether this is attained through reasoning from his works to his existence, or whether one apprehends God through God himself. As demonstrated above, Philo draws a distinction between these two approaches, believing that true friends of God apprehend him through himself, and further hints that only they can understand that God Is. This is confirmed by Philo's statement in *Post.* 167, that the truly Existent is apprehended by clear and distinct perception rather than demonstrated by arguments carried on in words. He also claims that the Existent can be contemplated and become known (γνωρίζω) with the eyes of the mind, from the powers that range the universe[393]. Given Philo's argument that those who infer God's existence from his works are approaching him in an inferior manner and obtain not knowledge or faith but are merely making a reasonable deduction, it is somewhat perplexing that he then adds "καὶ ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς καὶ ἀπαύστου τῶν ἀμυθήτων ἔργων φορᾶς": and from the constant motion of his ineffable works. A partial explanation is given in *Post.* 169, where Philo explains that God as to his essential nature is beyond the line of straight and direct approach. The Powers of God make evident his existence from the things which he accomplishes. The works of God are thereby relegated to a more passive role than that of the Powers, and serve merely as silent witnesses to the presence of a creator. The function of the Powers, meanwhile, is more akin to that of intermediaries

[393] *Post.* 167: "τὸ᾽ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὂν οὐ δι᾽ ὥτων μόνον, ἀλλὰ τοῖς διανοίας ὄμμασιν ἐκ τῶν κατὰ τὸν κόσμον δυνάμεων […] κατανοεῖσθαί τε καὶ γνωρίζεσθαι συμβέβηκε".

between God and man[394]. In *Post.* 167, Philo once more does not necessarily imply greater knowledge concerning God's essence, rather, he appears to suggest that the essence of God can be contemplated through his powers, without necessarily implying that it is further comprehended. Indeed, the attribution of the contemplation and recognition of God not only to the Powers but also to the constant motion of the works of God does to some degree lessen the scope of both κατανοέω and γνωρίζω, as Philo's repeated pronouncements concerning the inferior revelatory power of the created works of God precludes one from seeing in this fragment of *Post.* 167 a reference to any deeper knowledge of God's essential nature.

2.3.7 Faith

In fact, it appears that where visions of God are concerned, Philo abandons the notion that the mind might act as a organ of perception and understanding. Indeed, in *Praem.* 28, following a mention of a vision of the Existent by the virtuous man of practice, Philo points out that the seer has learned to disregard not only the senses but also the reasoning faculty[395]. He elaborates in *Praem.* 29 upon the unreliability of reason, which thinks itself appointed to judge things conceptual or intelligible, but in fact finds itself in trouble[396]: he uses the analogy of an athlete mastered by a superior power to depict the defeat of exhausted reason[397]. In both *Praem.* 28 and 30, Philo comes to the conclusion that faith in God alone might offer support[398]: It is only the one who is able to soar beyond not only material but also immaterial things and take

---

[394] It is important to note here that the Powers are not to be viewed as metaphysical intermediaries, especially given Philo's description in *Deo* 12 where the Powers are neither separate from God, nor differentiated from each other. Calabi points out (in *God's acting, man's acting*, 81) that this last point is stressed by Philo in other texts (*Her.* 166 and *Sacr.* 60, cf. *QE* ii 66). She further notes that in *Cher.* 20 ff., this is expressed visually by the reciprocal contemplation of the two Cher., who by continual watching of the other "may acquire a mutual yearning".

[395] *Praem.* 28: "ὁ μὲν τοίνυν ἀψευδῶς πιστεύσας θεῷ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα γενητὰ καὶ φθαρτὰ κατείληφεν ἀπιστίαν, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ μέγα πνεόντων, **λογισμοῦ τε καὶ αἰσθήσεως**".

[396] *Praem.* 29: "ὅ τε ἡγεμὼν αἰσθήσεως λογισμὸς τὰς κρίσεις οἰόμενος ἀνῆφθαι τῶν νοητῶν καὶ κατὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἐχόντων ἁλίσκεται περὶ πολλὰ κηραίνων".

[397] *Praem.* 29: "καθάπερ ἀθλητὴς ὑπὸ ῥώμης δυνατωτέρας ἐκτραχηλιζόμενος […]".

[398] *Praem.* 28: "ὁ μὲν τοίνυν ἀψευδῶς πιστεύσας θεῷ τὴν ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ὅσα γενητὰ καὶ φθαρτὰ κατείληφεν ἀπιστίαν […]".

God as sole support who might be truly happy[399]. Not only does Philo appear to indicate that a vision of God is possible in this passage, he also explicitly places such a vision in a category far more elevated than perception or comprehension of mere intelligibles, let alone the material world. It nonetheless remains that in such an endeavour, the mind is utterly inadequate, and as one might not comprehend, only faith remains, and reliance on God, with unfaltering deliberation.

2.3.8 Scepticism concerning the possibility of visions of the Existent and distinctions between different visions of God in Philo

Thus, not only does Philo recognise the limitations of the human mind when attempting to apprehend God, he also offers a solution: One might not directly apprehend the Existent, but he can be apprehended though his Powers, with the aid of the λόγος θεοῦ which acts as an intermediary.

Philo nevertheless insists that speech and human concepts are inadequate where attempts to discuss and understand the nature of God are concerned[400]. He elucidates the nature of his own references to the Existent: To say that the Existent is visible is to use words in an irregular sense to refer to each of God's Powers[401]. Indeed, though he writes in *Post.* 167 that the truly Existent can be known with the eyes of the understanding, Philo adds the precision that he is known from the powers that range the universe and from the constant motion of his ineffable works[402]. Furthermore, that Philo does not here imply direct and unmediated understanding or knowledge concerning the nature of God is further indicated by the emphasis of the sentence, which lies with the notion that the Existent cannot only be perceived through the ears but also through the mind. This is in opposition to manufactured gods which are only

399 *Praem.* 30: "ὅτῳ δ᾽ ἐξεγένετο πάντα […] ἀσώματα ὑπεριδεῖν καὶ ὑπερκῦψαι, μόνῳ δ᾽ ἐπερείσασθαι καὶ στηρίσασθαι θεῷ μετ᾽ ἰσχυρογνώμονος λογισμοῦ καὶ ἀκλινοῦς καὶ βεβαιοτάτης πίστεως, εὐδαίμων […] οὗτος ὡς ἀληθῶς".

400 *Conf.* 134.

401 *Post.* 168- 169; *Mut.* 15.

402 *Post.* 167: "τὸ δὲ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὂν […] τοῖς διανοίας ὄμμασιν ἐκ τῶν κατὰ τὸν κόσμον δυνάμεων καὶ ἐκ τῆς συνεχοῦς καὶ ἀπαύστου τῶν ἀμυθήτων ἔργων φορᾶς κατανοεῖσθαί τε καὶ γνωρίζεσθαι συμβέβηκε".

for the ear to hear of[403]. Hearing is throughout Philo's works considered an inferior sense to sight, this, along with the context of *Post.* 167 leads one to believe that Philo cannot here be referring to the Existent being an object of apprehension or knowledge. Rather, Philo is stressing that the true God might be known through his powers.

One might at this juncture pose the question as to whether extreme scepticism with regard to visions of the Existent and their being described as merely visions of his Potencies is a feature of later treatises since most such remarks appear to be confined to *Post.* and *Mut.*. Moreover, there does appear to be a distinction in Philo between descriptions of some of the divine visions of Jacob/ Israel or those of Moses, and other visionary experiences which Philo explicitly designates as visions of the Powers only. It is true that Philo makes a distinction between the two chief Potencies of the Existent, that which is called God or Father, and that which is designated as Lord. However, seeing the Powers of God does not quite seem an adequate summary of the experiences which Philo sometimes describes, where the mind empties itself[404], soars up towards, even comes into, the Existent One[405]. These appear to be the most revered sorts of visionary experiences for Philo. Although Philo does seem to admit that the Existent might be contemplated or seen, and though this must to some degree involve perception through the eye of the soul, one may never comprehend the essence of God. This does not, however, preclude Philo from distinguishing between different visions of God, and regarding some as enabling a closer relationship to God than others. Indeed, he points out in *Praem.* 40 not only that God's subsistence, the fact that he is, is not apprehended by all, but further, that not all can apprehend him in the best way[406].

---

[403] *Post.* 166: "χειρόκμητος οὐδείς ἐστιν ὄψει καὶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν θεός, ἀλλ᾽ ἀκοῇ καὶ τῷ νομίζεσθαι".
[404] *Her.* 69.
[405] *Congr.* 134; *Gig.* 52; *Sacr.* 10; *Post.* 174.
[406] *Praem.* 40: "τὸ δ᾽ ὅτι ἔστιν, ὑπάρξεως ὄνομα καταληπτὸν ὄν, ἢ οὐ πάντες ἢ οὐχ ὁδῷ τῇ βελτίονι καταλαμβάνουσιν".

II.3 *CHAPTER 3: THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF VISION IN PHILO*

The content of a vision is not the only factor, in Philo, which correlates with the type and degree of knowledge acquired. The manner in which that vision is received and what sort of vision it is might also be contributing factors to the epistemic outcome of the vision.

In reading the works of Philo, one needs first of all to account for the distinctions between different types of vision explicitly inherited from the biblical texts which provide much of the material upon which he bases his treatises. Following the work of Oppenheimer and Flannery- Dailey, these might be categorised as distinctions between dreaming and waking visions on the one hand, message and symbolic visions on the other hand. In attempting to draw conclusions concerning Philo's views on the degree and kind of knowledge to be gained following such a vision, one must compare his rendition of the biblical story to that of the Septuagint, noting any potentially significant variations in terminology (especially where the vocabulary of perception and understanding is concerned) and observing whether or not these correlate with potential variations in the outcome of the visionary experience.

The second category which requires attention in the analysis of different types of vision in the works of Philo is one defined by the author himself. Indeed, in *Somn.* i. 1- 2, Philo distinguishes between three types of dream vision: those which are sent by God, those which result from the soul moving in harmony with the soul of the universe, and those which are the result of the soul's own independent activity. In the case of these dream visions, Philo himself characterises them as requiring different degrees of interpretation, so that the God-sent visions are easiest to interpret, whilst those which arise from the soul's independent activity are most obscure and potentially misleading. It shall be important to determine not only how easy the three sorts of dream visions are to understand, but also whether the knowledge which they might impart differs accordingly.

Finally, it is necessary to examine two other types of visionary experience to which Philo accords great importance. These are the ascent vision, and the visionary experience which occurs in the context of divine possession. In the first case, the soul is depicted as flying or ascending, usually with the ultimate goal of union with the Existent, or more generally, with the divine. Here, it will eventually be important to determine whether the knowledge sought by the visionary implies, as in Platonic discourse, access to prior memories rather than straightforward revelation[407]. In the latter instance, the divine spirit or God is depicted as indwelling in a person's soul, though divine possession does not, in Philo, necessarily entail a concurrent visionary experience.

With regard to all of these different categories of visionary experience, it shall be important to determine whether or not Philo restricts certain terms relating to perceptual and cognitive activity to particular types of vision, and whether this correlates with the outcome of the vision. In other words, I shall attempt to determine whether Philo regards the type of the visionary experience as a significant contributory factor both to seer's ability to comprehend the vision and to grow in knowledge, as well as to the sort of knowledge to which a visionary might gain access.

3.1. *Distinctions between dream visions and waking visions with regard to acquiring knowledge.*

Divinely inspired oracular visions might be either waking visions or dream visions since Philo writes in *Migr.* 190 that the mind might stray beyond the confines of the body and the senses and become divinely inspired, both in deep sleep and when it is awake[408]. It is not clear, however, whether receiving oracles (in this case prophetic oracles or "μαντεία") during a god-inspired frenzy, "ἐνθουσιάζω", also entails divine indwelling in the human soul. It appears that the same function is fulfilled in *Migr.* 191 by philosophic principles, though here it appears that the philosophic

[407] This question will be dealt with in the course of my chapter on "Philo's understanding of memory".
[408] *Migr.* 190: "τοτὲ μὲν ἐν τοῖς βαθέσιν ὕπνοις […]τοτὲ δὲ κἀν ταῖς ἐγρηγόρσεσιν·"

principle is both the agent which possesses the mind as well as the object which draws its contemplation. That they probably ought in this passage to be understood as visionary experiences is in part suggested by their contrast with the imaginations or mental pictures of the senses and the reference by Philo to the mind beginning to gaze upon truth as on a mirror. Indeed, this impression seems confirmed upon reading *Migr.* 191, as Philo there concerns himself with the possibility of seeing the spiritual or intelligible object, which may be beheld by the God-given power of the eye of the soul. *Migr.* 190- 191 is an indication that Philo does not always draw distinctions between the mode in which dream vision and waking visions are experienced, at least where the necessity of abandoning sensory perception is concerned.

In *Migr.* 222 and *Ebr.* 159 however, sleeping and wakefulness are opposed, with sleep being associated with blindness and opposed to the keen-sightedness and knowledge which can come with wakefulness. Indeed, in *Migr.* 222 Philo enjoins the reader never to close his eyes either willingly or unwillingly, for sleep is a blind thing, as wakefulness is a thing of keen sight. Meanwhile in *Ebr.* 159, ὁ ἐπιστήμης ἔρως is said by Philo to hate sleep and love wakefulness. In the same manner, in *Gig.* 39 Philo casually uses dreams as a byword for unreliability when he refers to promises "αἳ διαφέρουσιν ὀνειράτων οὐδέν". Moreover, in *Somn.* i. 121, Philo associates dreams with sensory pleasure since he deems the life of those who live in luxury to be, in the eyes of the lawgiver, a life of sleep and dreams. In *Somn.* i. 121- 124, Philo casts further opprobrium on those whose whole life is nothing but a dream, insisting that they are excluded from discipleship with the holy word or reason[409].

Indeed, it appears from *Ebr.* 180 that Philo admits the possibility that dreams are sometimes misleading and incongruous. In this passage, he is largely concerned with the manner in which the motion and change which afflicts our bodies as well as our souls leads to a change in mental pictures. It is these that he compares to conflicting and unreliable dreams. This seems to indicate that for Philo any mental picture, whether during a dreaming state or not, risks being the subject of change, and therefore unreliable. Hence Philo's argument that the variability of mental pictures is proof of the impossibility of apprehension. Indeed, in *Ebr.* 170 Philo mentions the

[409] *Somn.* i. 124: "τοιοῦτος οὐδεὶς γνώριμος τοῦ ἱεροῦ λόγου".

variability of mental pictures and argues that judgements of mental images must therefore also be variable. He follows in 171- 174 with several examples, which are his version of the tropes of Aenesidemus and concludes in 175 that these phenomena are clear proofs of the impossibility of apprehension. In other words, the tropes in this passage are those according to which the difference of impressions arises from something in the subject who forms the impression. There is no indication in this passage that Philo refers specifically to visions (understood as images mental or otherwise which are sent to the seer from a divine being). Instead he takes examples from the natural world, referring to the chameleon which changes its colour and the dove's neck which in the sun's rays changes to a thousand different hues. The impossibility of apprehension, a leading term of the sceptics, applies to the object which cannot be apprehended, although it came to signify their general agnosticism. As Philo appears to be capable of a great degree of scepticism regarding the grasping of material phenomena, and thus the possibility of attaining any real knowledge concerning them, this allows some perspective both on his scepticism with regard to apprehending the true essence of God as well as his reserve where dream visions are concerned. The fluctuating nature of the human condition, always subject to change, both where the body is concerned as well as in the case of the soul, entails unreliability in the forming of impressions[410] and difficulty in acquiring true knowledge. This explains, to some degree, the need for the guidance of divine reason if one is to apprehend intelligible objects, and lies behind Philo's division of dreams and their epistemic reliability according to whether they are of divine origin or not.

3.2 *Philo's distinction between three categories of dream*

In *Somn.* i. 1- 4 Philo provides an account of the distinctions which, according to him, ought to be drawn between different types of dreams. He speaks of a treatise (now lost), in which he discussed heaven-sent dreams[411], by which, he clarifies, are meant those dreams in which the deity of his own motion[412] sends visions or mental images

---

[410] *Ebr.* 179: "[…]καὶ ἐστὼς μέντοι καὶ κινούμενός τις ἑτέρας ἔλαβε φαντασίας, καὶ θαρρῶν καὶ δεδιὼς ἔμπαλιν, ἔτι μέντοι λυπούμενός τε καὶ χαίρων, καὶ φιλῶν καὶ τοὐναντίον μισῶν".

[411] *Somn.* i. 1: "τῶν θεοπέμπτων ὀνείρων".

[412] *Somn.* i. 1: "θεῖον […] ἐλέγομεν κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν ἐπιβολὴν".

which are presented to us in sleep[413]. Interestingly, Philo uses the term "φαντασία" to denote the visions, and there are no connotations here of unreliability attached to the term as there are in *Ebr.* 170f.

Philo refers to a second kind of dream as one in which our own mind moves together with the mind of the universe[414], and seems to be possessed and God-inspired[415] and thus capable of receiving foreknowledge of things to come. It is interesting that this type of dream vision, which involves human interaction with a divine Potency rather than purely God-given revelation, is specifically related to knowledge concerning the future, rather than to a greater understanding of God. It thus appears that there might be, for Philo, some degree of correlation between the type of vision received and its content, so that the nature and depth of knowledge which one receives can to an extent be correlated with the origin of the vision, as fully or only partially divine. In this context, it is profitable to examine the vision of Jacob's ladder which Philo places in this second category. Tellingly, he argues that the meaning of the vision may be understood if one reads carefully the passage which precedes its account. In fact, he writes that this is a necessary step in grasping the meaning of the vision[416]. It therefore appears that Philo sees the need for interpretation where such visions, involving human volition as well as divine inspiration, are concerned, although by the same measure he does not exclude the possibility of understanding them and thus extracting knowledge from the account of such a visionary experience.

Upon reading *Somn.* I. 70 it becomes clear that the distinction between God-sent dream visions and dreams which proceed from the mind of the seer moving in concourse with the mind of the universe also holds for visions in general. Indeed, Philo interprets the words of *Genesis* xviii. 33[417] as a reference to Abraham meeting with sacred words from which God has withdrawn himself. This, Philo explains,

---

413 *Somn.* i. 1: "τὰς ἐν τοῖς ὕπνοις ἐπιπέμπειν φαντασίας".

414 *Somn.* i. 2: "δεύτερον δ᾽ εἶδος, ἐν ᾧ ὁ ἡμέτερος νοῦς τῷ τῶν ὅλων συγκινούμενος ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ".

415 *Somn.* i. 2: "κατέχεσθαί τε καὶ θεοφορεῖσθαι δοκεῖ".

416 *Somn.* i. 4: "προκατασκευὴ δ᾽ ἐστὶ τῆς φαντασίας ἀναγκαία, ἣν ἀκριβώσαντες εὐμαρῶς ἴσως δυνησόμεθα καὶ τὰ δηλούμενα ὑπὸ τῆς φαντασίας καταλαβεῖν".

417 Quoted by Philo in *Somn.* i. 70: "ἀπῆλθε κύριος, ὡς ἐπαύσατο λαλῶν τῷ Ἀβραάμ, καὶ Ἀβραὰμ ἀπέστρεψεν εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτου".

entails that God has ceased to extend visions from Himself, but only extends those which proceed from his Powers[418]. Here, it is noteworthy that, whilst distinguishing between visions which are extended from God and those which proceed from his Potencies, Philo still appears to hold that God is the ultimate cause of both[419].

3.3 . *Ascent of the soul and visions of the intelligible world*

It appears that Philo uses descriptions of the ascent of the soul towards God in order to account for the difficulty of obtaining a vision of God. It may also derive from the problematic use of the language of perception and sight where the Existent is concerned, given both his attachment to Jewish ideas of the impossibility of seeing the divine and Platonic ideas concerning the division between the world of sense and the intelligible sphere. As Philo makes use of the notion of cognitive impressions, largely gleaned from the Stoics, and applies it to a worldview to which the Stoics were largely opposed, it results in the idea that one can grasp and understand things, and sometimes even understand things clearly and fully, which belong to the intelligible world alone. Because Philo's God is the Jewish God, he does not wish to allow for that possibility and so, as well as the distinction between the Existent and the powers, must find a different language in order to describe encounters with the Existent. This revolves mainly around notions of the ascent of the soul.

In *Somn.* i. 137, Philo explains that God made the air the principle of life, and that it is the abode of incorporeal souls. He argues that their number is equal to that of the stars and that they are imperishable and immortal[420]. These souls, according to Philo, are of three different kinds: those of earthly tendencies, those which might be described as wavering, according to times appointed by nature[421], and the last which are of perfect

---

[418] *Somn.* i. 70: "[…]μηκέτι τὰς ἀφ᾽ αὑτοῦ τείνων φαντασίας, ἀλλὰ τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν μεθ᾽ αὑτὸν δυνάμεων".

[419] Indeed, in *Cher.* 71 Philo attributes all the activities of the soul as God's possessions.

[420] *Somn.* i. 137: "οἷα πόλις εὐανδρεῖ πολίτας ἀφθάρτους καὶ ἀθανάτους ψυχὰς ἔχων ἰσαρίθμους ἄστροις".

[421] *Somn.* i. 138: "[…] αἱ δ᾽ ἀνέρχονται, διακριθεῖσαι πάλιν κατὰ τοὺς ὑπὸ φύσεως ὁρισθέντας ἀριθμοὺς καὶ χρόνους". Plato also mentions these souls in *Plant.* 14, where he reaffirms the notion that their ability to leave mortal bodies is determined by fixed periods of time: "τὰς μὲν γὰρ εἰσκρίνεσθαι λόγος ἔχει

purity and are gifted with a diviner temper. These dispositions determine whether they are bound to earthly bodies[422], whether they migrate between bodily life and ascent to the upper air[423], or whether they are viceroys of the Ruler of the universe, able to behold all things. In the case of the souls who once were entombed in mortal bodies but have renounced them, it appears that as a result of ascending into the upper air they achieve immortality since Philo writes that they reside in the upper air for ever, "τὸν αἰῶνα"[424], which is to be contrasted with those souls which either cannot or choose not to escape from bodily life and so choose a mortal existence, "τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου"[425] in a mortal body, "σώμασι θνητοῖς"[426]. It is unclear whether Philo is to be considered as representing those souls who roam the upper air as experiencing visions, although he does relate that their lives will be devoted to roaming the air, using the term "μετεωροπολέω", which in Himerius and Iamblichus denotes, in the former, busying oneself with the higher things of the soul[427] and in the latter, concerning oneself with divine things[428]. Both authors however date to the fourth century AD, so that it not possible to infer any mystical connotations from their use of the term. It is perhaps more cautious simply to assume a meaning close to that of Plato's *Phaedrus* 246 c, where it is used to depict travel through the air.

σώμασι θνητοῖς καὶ κατά τινας ὡρισμένας περιόδους ἀπαλλάττεσθαι πάλιν". See Plato: *Phaedrus* 248 c upon which Philo seems to depend, since Plato argues that there is a law of destiny according to which any soul which attains a vision of the truth in company of a god is preserved from harm until the next period, whereas the soul which cannot follow drops to the ground and passes into a human body. See also *Phaedrus* 248 e- 249 a where Plato discusses the exact periods of time which will elapse before souls can return to whence they came. Plato also makes a distinction between more ordinary souls which must remain in bodies for 10 000 years and the souls of philosophers which may depart after only three periods, 3000 years. There is however, no indication in *Somn.* I. 37f. that the soul's preservation or ability to soar higher is dependent upon a vision of the truth as it is in Plato.

[422] *Somn.* i. 138: "τούτων τῶν ψυχῶν αἱ μὲν κατίασιν ἐνδεθησόμεναι σώμασι θνητοῖς, ὅσαι προσγειότατοι καὶ φιλοσώματοι".

[423] *Somn.* i. 139: "[…]τούτων αἱ μὲν τὰ σύντροφα καὶ συνήθη τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου ποθοῦσαι παλινδρομοῦσιν αὖθις, αἱ δὲ πολλὴν φλυαρίαν αὐτοῦ καταγνοῦσαι […] τὸ σῶμα, φυγοῦσαι […] ἄνω κούφοις πτεροῖς πρὸς αἰθέρα ἐξαρθεῖσαι μετεωροπολοῦσι τὸν αἰῶνα".

[424] *Somn.* i . 139. See Plato *Phaedrus* 256 d where Plato writes that those souls who have begun the heavenwards pilgrimage may not fall again to darkness and the journey beneath the earth but live in light forever.

[425] *Somn.* i. 139.

[426] *Somn.* i. 138.

[427] Himerius, *Orationes* 14. 12.

[428] Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 5. 15.

It is unlikely that Philo conceives of the perfectly pure souls, those whose ascent is described as resulting in the beholding and hearing of all things, as having once resided in human bodies, since he insists that they never felt any craving for the things of the earth. Indeed, it appears that they are the equivalent of the souls of gods in Plato's *Phaedrus* 246 a, since in 247 a and c it is the souls of the gods which are said to see many blessed sights in the inner heaven and to behold the things beyond. Indeed, in *Plant.* 14 Philo also draws a distinction between the souls which enter mortal bodies and quit them again, and souls which are endowed with a diviner constitution and have no regard for earthly matters. It is these which are said to exist on high, and are called by the Greek philosophers, heroes, and by Moses, angels. Thus, it appears that Philo does not envisage humans to be capable of such an ascent, beyond the upper-air or as able to see and hear everything. Indeed, he describes these souls as acting as mediators on our behalf, because of our great awe and dread of God.

However, it appears that in *Somn.* i. 143, Philo does conceive of Moses as such a being since he interprets the Israelites' entreaty to Moses, in *Exod.* xx. 19, to speak to the people instead of God speaking to them, lest they die, as prompted by our realisation that God is to be held in awe and dread. In the course of this account, he refers to Moses as "one of those mediators"[429]. It therefore appears that in some very exceptional cases, it might be possible for a human soul to rise higher than the upper air, although there is no clear indication from Philo that this necessarily also entails the ability to behold and hear all things. Most interestingly, there is no indication, even though Philo's account revolves around an allegorical interpretation of *Exod.*, that Moses' soul had left his body. It might be the case that Moses' ability to act as such a mediator is at least partially predicated upon his visionary experiences, which constitute significant episodes in Philo's description of his relationship with God.

In *Somn.* i. 144, Philo returns to Jacob's dream vision, and reaffirms his own symbolic interpretation of that vision, since he writes that the air was symbolised by a stairway. Meanwhile, in *Somn.* i. 146, he considers that which is called stairway in humans to be the soul, since it encapsulates both sense perception and mind. Thus, Philo is able

[429] *Somn.* i. 143: "[…] τινος τῶν μεσιτῶν".

to interpret the reference to angels in Jacob's dream which ascend and descend the stairway[430] as the words or thoughts of God moving up and down through the entire soul[431]. It is these thoughts of God which exert an external influence upon the human soul and allow it to experience visions, since they draw the soul upwards and disconnect it from what is mortal. It is important, at this juncture, to bear in mind the work of Calabi who argues that there are no metaphysical intermediaries in Philo[432]. Her work is in agreement with my findings since she determines that the image of angels going up and down the ladder in Jacob's dream aims to show a mediating function, and stresses that God has no need of intermediaries, but that they benefit humans instead[433]. This is because humans, who are infinitely distant from perfection, cannot cope with the power of God[434].

Philo writes rather obliquely in *Somn*. i. 146 that the words or thoughts of God exhibit to the sight of the soul the spectacle of the only objects worthy of our gaze[435]. That these objects are likely to be invisible to ordinary eyes and must be revealed by angels or divine powers can be deduced from other references to worthy sights in Philo. Indeed, that those things worthy of being seen are objects visible to the eye of the soul alone is hinted at in *Somn.* ii. 160, where the one who sleeps following folly closes the eye of his soul and is therefore not able to behold anything worthy of sight[436]. Furthermore, in *Migr.* 35, Philo describes his own experience of divine inspiration, during the course of which ideas are showered upon him from on high. Following this passage, and employing the terminology of visionary experience, he claims that he obtained keenest vision and most clear distinctness of objects such as might be received by the eyes as a result of the clearest exhibitions[437]. He then proposes that

---

[430] *Genesis* 28. 12: "οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ἀνέβαινον καὶ κατέβαινον".
[431] *Somn.* i. 147: "ἄνω δὲ καὶ κάτω διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς οἱ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγοι χωροῦσιν ἀδιαστάτως".
[432] Calabi, F., "Roles and Figures of Mediation" in *God's acting, man's acting*.
[433] *Somn*. ii. 142.
[434] Calabi, F, *God's acting, man's acting*, 124.
[435] *Somn.* i. 147: "τὴν θέαν ὧν ἄξιον ὁρᾶν μόνων ἐπιδεικνύμενοι ".
[436] *Somn.* ii. 160: "καὶ καταμέμυκε τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμματα, οὐδὲν οὔθ᾽ ὁρᾶν οὔτ᾽ ἀκούειν τῶν θέας καὶ ἀκοῆς ἀξίων οἷός τε ὤν·".
[437] *Migr.* 35: "[…] ὀξυδερκεστάτην ὄψιν, ἐνάργειαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἀριδηλοτάτην, οἷα γένοιτ᾽ ἂν δι᾽ ὀφθαλμῶν ἐκ σαφεστάτης δείξεως".

that which is thus shown is most worthy of being seen, contemplated, and loved[438]. The context, and especially the reference to clear and distinct objects[439], suggests that the objects most worthy of sight are those which are obtained through some manner of divine revelation. It does indeed transpire that the objects worthy of sight are, in Philo, revealed through the word of God or knowledge, since in *Leg. All.* iii. 171 Philo argues that, by reason of its brilliance, ὁ θεοῦ λόγος is the means by which things worthy of sight may be beheld[440]. Furthermore, in *Ebr.* 158 it is knowledge which beholds the objects worthy of being seen[441]. The reference to the thoughts of God exhibiting visions to the soul follows the account of their dragging the soul upwards whenever they ascend and severing it from the mortal. The vision therefore seems to be contingent upon the ascent, rather than the ascent depending on the vision.

Philo perceives a distinction between those whose life is not fully cleansed and is still defiled by the weight of the body, whose guides and purifiers are the angels, the divine words, and those who have been purified to the utmost, in whose souls walks the Ruler of the universe. The role of the angels is to reveal the doctrines of all that is good and beautiful, and so guide the souls towards greater purification and brightness. Thus, it appears that the visions which Philo alludes to in *Somn.* I. 147 are a means to greater clarity and purity in view of further ascents and greater experiences. In this perspective, it is not unlikely that the doctrines of all that is good and beautiful may well constitute that which is most worthy of our sight, as they enable the purification, and thus presumably the further ascent, of the soul.

The result of an ascent vision, where angels or words of God move up and down the soul, between its foot, the senses, and its head, the mind, is explained in *Somn.* i. 149, after Philo's reference to the purification of the soul by the angels who cleanse by revealing beautiful doctrines: The evil tenants of the soul are ejected so that the good

---

[438] *Migr.* 36: "τὸ ἀξιόρατον καὶ ἀξιοθέατον καὶ ἀξιέραστόν".
[439] See comments on the use ἐνάργεια of in the chapter on '*The Content of the Vision*'.
[440] *Leg.* iii. 171: "[…] ᾧ τὰ θέας ἄξια κατόψονται·".
[441] *Leg.* iii. 171: "ἡ ἐπιστήμη […]πάντα δ᾽ ὅσα ἀκοῆς καὶ θέας ἄξια περισκοπεῖ καὶ περιβλέπεται".

One may enter[442]. Philo therefore exhorts the soul to become a fit house, most holy temple and beautiful habitation for God[443]. Thus, the culmination of the ascent vision in Philo is a purification of the soul with a view to enabling divine indwelling.

That the goal of a visionary ascent is not only to attain knowledge concerning God, but rather to experience directly a vision, might be deduced from Philo's account of the transmigration of the soul and its consequences in *Somn.* 1. 181f. In this passage, Philo comments upon *Genesis* xxviii. 15[444], interpreting it in two distinct manners. First of all, he understands the biblical passage as a reference to reason's departure from itself and its return. Indeed, although he affirms the superiority of the reason which remains with itself, he proposes that the second best thing is for it to return back from outward sense. Thus, his first interpretation does not invoke the descent of the soul for the period of a lifetime into a human body, but the leading astray of human reason which may ally itself to the irrational part of the soul and there abide. However, Philo's second interpretation of the *Genesis* verse explicitly concerns the immortality of the soul and transmigration from the heavenly abode into the human body[445]. Its return necessitates help and guidance from God, who gave birth to it and has compassion for it[446]. Once the soul has been returned to its mother city or 'μητρόπολις', it is able to inquire into the concerns of Him that Is[447]. Here one ought to consider the nature of the soul's mother-city. Indeed, if by 'μητρόπολις' Philo seeks to designate the air, which he has previously described as the abode of all souls, his depiction in paragraph 182 of the soul as "διακινηθεῖσα […] καὶ διαναστᾶσα", cannot be understood as an indication that the soul has already arrived at its natural abode, since it is still in error and because the truths concerning the Existent dawn upon Jacob only progressively. Indeed, the assurance that God will

---

[442] *Somn.* i. 149: "ὅσα δὲ ἐξοικίζεται κακῶν οἰκητόρων στίφη, ἵνα εἷς ὁ ἀγαθὸς εἰσοικίσηται, δῆλόν ἐστι".

[443] *Somn.* i 149: "σπούδαζε οὖν, ὦ ψυχή, θεοῦ οἶκος γενέσθαι, ἱερὸν ἅγιον, ἐνδιαίτημα κάλλιστον".

[444] Quoted in *Somn.* i. 180: "ἀποστρέψω σε εἰς τὴν γῆν ταύτην.".

[445] *Somn.* i. 181: "ἴσως δὲ καὶ τὸ περὶ ἀφθαρσίας ψυχῆς ὑπαινίττεται δόγμα διὰ τούτου".

[446] *Somn.* i. 181: "φησὶ δ᾽ οὐ μέχρι τοῦ παντὸς καθειργμένην αὐτὴν ὁ γεννήσας περιόψεσθαι πατήρ […]καὶ ἐλευθέραν ἄχρι τῆς μητροπόλεως ἀσφαλῶς παραπέμψειν".

[447] *Somn.* i. 182 "διακινηθεῖσα οὖν καὶ διαναστᾶσα πρὸς τὰς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ζητήσεις ἡ ἀσκητικὴ ψυχὴ […]".

not give up[448] might indicate that Philo regards this return of the soul under divine guidance as a very gradual process. This is indeed the clearest explanation for the rather baffling transition in *Somn.* i. 182 where, having affirmed that the soul has been stirred up and is ready for inquiry into the Existent, Philo suddenly introduces the notion of fallibility, false notions and fear as woes allaying the soul which attempts to think upon the divine[449].

It is quite possible that one ought to understand this as a digression from the account of ascent, since he proceeds to discourse upon the formation of ideas concerning intelligibles from the experience of the material world, which thereby acts as a gateway to the world which can be perceived by the intellect alone. Nonetheless, despite Philo's expression of many doubts concerning the possibility of apprehending any thing which concerns the Existent, it is quite clear that contemplating propositions which relate to God, as well as the perception of intelligibles, requires passing beyond the sensory world. Thus, Philo hints at the necessity of more than one migration of the soul, since he continues to employ the terminology of ascent. Indeed, though Philo declaims the necessity of making material objects one's starting point for our ideas concerning intelligible objects, nevertheless, the world which only the intellect can perceive can only be apprehended by effecting a migration or transition on to it from this sensory world[450]. Thus, divine aid still retains a place in Philo's understanding of perception beyond this world, since the material world which acts as a gateway to the immaterial is, Philo clarifies, one of the Potencies of the Existent, namely that one which expresses his goodness[451]. However, *Somn.* i. 187 indicates that in his notion of migration, Philo retains the importance of the place one is departing from. Thus, though it is certainly the case that in order to apprehend the intelligible world one must transit to that world and leave the material universe, material objects still function as important starting points[452].

---

448 *Somn.* i. 181: "καὶ μὴ πρότερον ἀνήσειν ἢ τὰς διὰ λόγων ὑποσχέσεις ἀληθείας ἔργοις βεβαιωθῆναι".
449 *Somn.* i. 182- 184.
450 *Somn.* i. 186: "κόσμον νοητὸν οὐκ ἔνεστιν ἄλλως καταλαβεῖν ὅτι μὴ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ ὁρωμένου τούτου μετάβασιν".
451 *Somn.* i. 185.
452 *Somn.* i. 187: "οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄλλο τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν ἀσώματον ἐννοῆσαι δυνατὸν ὅτι μὴ τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβόντας ἀπὸ σωμάτων".

Furthermore, in *Somn.* i. 186- 188, one might consider that Philo seeks to draw a distinction between those who glean their ideas of the intelligible world from their experience of the material world which is its copy[453], and those who are able to behold it, not from some outside point but, its gates having been removed, as it actually is[454]. Indeed, it is only in *Somn.* i. 188 that Philo appears to return to the notion of a soul which no longer relies upon the material world and can thus behold the vision without shadow. In fact, careful reading of *Somn.* i. 188 leads one to believe that Philo's purpose in referring to the conception of the intelligible world from the one which the senses perceive is to posit this as a mere introduction and somewhat inferior gateway to the notion of an intelligible world. Thus, in *Somn.* i. 188 Philo seems to argue that it is possible to be summoned[455], without shadow and by means only of the idea or form engraved in the mind, to the image which was beheld. The contrast is even more striking if one follows Colson's proposition that 'μακρόθεν' may have fallen out before or after "θεαθὲν", so that the image would have previously been beheld from afar, in contrast to the soul's being now summoned into its presence, with no intervening shadow. Even if one were to discount this latter emendation, the clause which follows this passage invokes the possibility of beholding the intelligible world as it is, and not through any other medium[456], citing the removal of all of its walls and gates as a precondition[457]. Since the sensible world

---

[453] *Somn.* i. 188: "κατὰ τὸ ἀνάλογον οὖν καὶ ὁ νοητὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ κόσμος ἐνοήθη, πύλη τις ὢν ἐκείνου" and "[…]τὸν ἀειδῆ κόσμον καταλαβεῖν ἐθέλουσιν, ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ ὁρατοῦ φαντασίας ξεναγοῦνται" For reference in *Somn.* i. 187 see footnote above.

[454] *Somn.* i. 188: "πάσης πύλης ἀπαρθέντων εἰς τὸ μὴ ἀπό τινος ἀθρῆσαι, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὑτὸ ἀλέκτῳ τινὶ καὶ δυσερμηνεύτῳ θέᾳ διιδεῖν κάλλος ἀναλλοίωτον".

[455] Colson, in the Appendix to the Loeb edition of the text, suggests that we take "μετακληθήσεται" in its usual sense of 'summoned', and bearing in mind the likelihood that its subject shall be a person rather than "ὁ κόσμος", suggests the emendation to "κοσμολόγος" or 'world explorer'. Thus, according to Colson, the passage would read: "The world explorer, whose nature is intelligible reality needs no sight of shapes, but only the archetypal idea engraved in the mind, and by this he will be summoned with no intervening shadow to the Form which he has beheld from afar". Bearing in mind the fact that the term κοσμολόγος has not been recorded in any other work, I would translate, "The world explorer, whose nature is intelligible reality without any form or sight, will be summoned without shadow, but only by means of the archetypal form/ idea engraved in the mind, to the image which was beheld by him [from afar]".

[456] *Somn.* i. 188: "[…] εἰς τὸ μὴ ἀπό τινος ἀθρῆσαι, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸ καθ᾽ αὑτό".

[457] *Somn.* i. 188: "πάντων αὐτῷ τειχῶν καὶ πάσης πύλης ἀπαρθέντων […]".

is described as some sort of gate to the intelligible world[458], it appears that the last clause in paragraph 188 refers to the removal of the sensible world as a precondition to the clear sight of the intelligible world without any external point of view reliant on the senses.

Thus, one might conclude that Philo's purpose in *Somn.* i. 186- 188 was to describe two different ways of approaching the intelligible world, the first being to reach a conception of the intelligible world through the visible impression of the sensory world. This sensory world is, however, a shadow of the intelligible world, and can only offer a limited understanding of the world perceptible to the mind alone. It appears therefore that the thing perceived, in this instance the intelligible world, is of less importance than the manner in which it is perceived, and further that perception can progress, so that a vision of the intelligible world unmediated by the material world coalesces with the completion of the soul's ascent to its mother city. This appears to be confirmed by Philo's structuring of the argumentation and narrative in *Somn.* i. 181- 188. Indeed, paragraph 181 contains a brief account of the soul's gradual journey from the foreign land of the body towards its heavenly abode, its 'μητρόπολις', aided by God. The following paragraphs, 182- 188, recount a part of this gradual journey, with the initial stirring of the soul and its awakening to the existence of God, through some of its errors concerning the divine nature, all the while stressing its initial reliance upon the world of sense that is the divine Potency which expresses the Existent's goodness. The second half of *Somn.* i. 188 introduces the notion that one might perceive the intelligible reality without recourse to the images presented by the world of sense, since it is possible that the soul will be summoned to contemplate the Form with no intervening shadow, but as it actually is. Assuming that Colson's emendation of "κόσμος" to "κοσμολόγος" is correct, Philo appears to argue in this passage that, at least in the case of a particular kind of soul, ascent will entail a vision of the intelligible world, more fruitful than the considerations which can follow from an observation of the sensory world. It might be the case, given Philo's initial presentation of a divine promise that the soul can return to its heavenly abode, and given the subsequent distinction between those who attempt to apprehend God and the intelligible world through, respectively, deductive

[458] *Somn.* i. 188: "ὁ νοητὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ κόσμος ἐνοήθη, πύλη τις ὢν ἐκείνου".

reasoning and observations of the material world, and the soul which is summoned to a vision of the form, that the passage reflects the idea of two different categories of soul, one for whom the ascent towards the mother city will be gradual and fraught with errors and reliance upon the world of the senses, divine goodness though it may be, and the soul which is summoned directly to experience the sight of the intelligible world. Indeed, the soul which is summoned towards God recalls the soul which is of God, that is, the souls of priests and prophets, equivalent to Plato's notion of the philosophical soul, in *Gig.* 61.

This seems to be confirmed upon reading *Leg. All.* iii. 99- 100, where Philo argues that those who discern the Artificer through his works apprehend the existence of God by means of a shadow. These are contrasted with the more perfect mind which has been initiated into the great mysteries[459] and stretches and looks beyond creation[460]. In this manner, the more perfect mind will obtain a clear vision of the Uncreated[461], and from him will apprehend both himself and his shadow. This passage offers the familiar contrast between the created and uncreated as well as the reference to transcending the created, using a verb, 'ὑπερκύπτω', which conveys both the notion of sight and of movement. That *Leg. All.* iii. 100 refers to an ascent vision is even more probable if one considers the echoes of this passage in *Ebr.* 152. There, Philo recounts the soul breaking free from mortal chains[462] and surpassing the boundaries of the universe, before being borne onwards to the sight of the beautiful and uncreated God[463]. The reference to the created, sensory world as a shadow and the assurance that there is a type of soul which might transcend it offer clear points of contact between *Leg. All.* 99- 100 and *Somn.* i. 188.

---

[459] *Leg.* iii. 100: "ἔστι δέ τις τελεώτερος καὶ μᾶλλον κεκαθαρμένος νοῦς τὰ μεγάλα μυστήρια μυηθείς ".

[460] *Leg.*. iii. 100: "[…] ὑπερκύψας τὸ γενητὸν".

[461] *Leg.* iii. 100: "[…] ἔμφασιν ἐναργῆ τοῦ ἀγενήτου λαμβάνει".

[462] *Ebr.* 152: "[…] δεσμὰ μὲν οἷς πρότερον ἐσφίγγετο, ἃ περιῆψαν αἱ τοῦ θνητοῦ βίου κεναὶ σπουδαί, πάντα λύσας". This recalls the sentiment of *Somn.* I. 181, where Philo refers to the setting free of the soul from bodily chains: "φησὶ δ᾽ οὐ μέχρι τοῦ παντὸς καθειργμένην αὐτὴν ὁ γεννήσας περιόψεσθαι πατήρ, ἀλλ᾽ οἶκτον λαβὼν λύσειν τὰ δεσμὰ".

[463] *Ebr.* 152: "[…] πρὸς τὴν τοῦ ἀγενήτου παγκάλην καὶ ἀοίδιμον θέαν ἐπειχθῆναι;".

It therefore appears relatively certain that Colson's suggestion to emend "κόσμος" so that the subject of becomes a person is correct. Philo can be understood as proffering the notion of a type of soul which might be summoned by the Uncreated and, in ascending, experience a vision of God and of his shadow, the world, understood as both the intelligible and sensory worlds. The type of vision is therefore of crucial importance here: the summoning from God and ascent towards the heavenly abode of the soul, abandoning the body as a foreign land[464] are the greatest ways of acceding to a vision of the intelligible world and of the Existent. This view of the necessity for the soul to ascend towards the Existent and abandon the sensory world in order to experience a vision to some degree explains Philo's deprecation of dream-visions as mere shadows and events during which the eye of the soul is shut, as the soul experiences these during sleep, which is a bodily mode. At the same time, it appears that for Philo the ability to experience a vision as the culmination of the soul's ascent is more significant than the knowledge which might thereby be gained, especially where the nature of God is concerned. Indeed, as Philo generally dismisses the possibility of any comprehension of the essence of the Existent, and as he admits that the knowledge of his existence might be acquired from observation of the sensory world and its divinely ordained harmony, he has trouble drawing a quantitative distinction between understanding obtained from the sensory world, and that gained through a visionary ascent. Thus, the vision and the ascent acquire greater intrinsic significance and Philo is led to stress the superior *manner* in which the divine and the intelligible might be experienced.

Ascent visions are, however, not always described by Philo in laudatory terms. Indeed, in *Somn.* i. 57 he mocks those who would mount to heaven and brag of what they see there[465], having not even yet attained self-knowledge. Here, as in *Migr.* 185, he urges first an exploration of self, which might in time include both the soul (by which Philo presumably means the senses, since he makes separate mention of the

[464] See *Somn.* i. 256: "[…] οὕτως γὰρ δυνήσῃ καὶ εἰς τὸν πατρῷον οἶκον ἐπανελθεῖν, τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς ξένης μακρὰν καὶ ἀνήνυτον ζάλην ἐκφυγοῦσα".

[465] *Somn.* i. 57: "ἀνάβαινε νῦν εἰς οὐρανὸν καὶ καταλαζονεύου περὶ τῶν ἐκεῖ, μήπω δεδυνημένος γνῶναι κατὰ τὸ ποιητικὸν γράμμα 'ὅττί τοι ἐν μεγάροισι κακόν τ᾽ ἀγαθόν τε τέτυκται'".

reasoning faculty) and eventually the mind[466], before attempting to move towards higher, spiritual experiences, including visions. As *Somn.* i 56 reveals, Philo is prepared for this quest to be a long one since he does not yet command the reader to see his own soul and mind, requiring only, as a first step, the abandonment of preoccupations with heaven. It is moreover interesting to note that he specifies the inability, at least for the soul who must initially retreat from heavenly concerns, to ever comprehend the soul or the mind[467]. It is not clear from this passage alone whether the impossibility for this sort of person to comprehend its own soul extends to all men or not. In fact, Philo does envisage the possibility, not for those who seek only self-knowledge but for the more perfect athletes of wisdom[468], of moving beyond self-knowledge, since he writes in *Somn.* i. 59 that those who have mastered the study of sense-perceptions may move beyond them and advance to a greater object of contemplation[469], which, as becomes clear from *Somn.* i. 60, is the highest knowledge: knowledge of the Existent. Here, however, Philo retreats from the suggestion that one might know the Existent, offering the paradoxical statement that the greater the self-knowledge, the more Abraham despaired of knowing the Existent, whilst asserting that the man who has despaired of himself is beginning to know the Existent. It is notable, however, that in this passage (*Somn.* i. 56- 60), as he moves from the disapproved-of heavenly ascent to the discussion of progress towards acquiring the highest knowledge, Philo has gradually abandoned the language of ascent visions for the vocabulary of philosophical enquiry. This may perhaps hint at his disapproval of ascent visions as well as reflecting the influence of Socratic methods and discourse concerning knowledge[470].

3.4 *Ascent, visions of God and immortality*

Brenk has proposed that "once a presupposition of negative theology is swept aside, many texts appear more positively to assert seeing God 'face to face' in the next

---

[466] *Somn.* i. 56: "καὶ οὔπω σοι μεῖζον ἐπίταγμα ἐπιτάττω, τὴν σαυτοῦ ψυχὴν ἰδεῖν καὶ τὸν νοῦν, ἐφ᾽ ᾧ μέγα φρονεῖς".
[467] *Somn.* i. 56: "[…]καταλαβεῖν γὰρ αὐτὸν οὔποτε δυνήσῃ"
[468] *Somn.* i. 59: "τοιοῦτοι μὲν ἡμῖν οἱ φρονήσεως κατάσκοποι, τῶν ἀθλητῶν καὶ ἀγωνιστῶν αὐτῆς αἱ φύσεις τελειότεραι".
[469] *Somn.* i. 59: "δικαιοῦσι γὰρ οὗτοι τὸν περὶ τῶν αἰσθήσεων σύμπαντα λόγον ἀκριβῶς καταμαθόντες ἐπί τι μεῖζον ἕτερον χωρεῖν θεώρημα […]".
[470] See *Somn.* i. 58.

life"[471]. In support of this thesis he cites in particular *Deus* 151 and *Legat.* 4- 5. In relation to the first passage, Brenk understands it as stating "that after death the soul ascends to the celestial sphere"[472]. Philo does not specify, however, that the ascent occurs after death. He is rather concerned with the abandonment of earthly, bodily, and sensory treasures[473]. Moreover, the soul is not said to ascend to a celestial sphere, as Brenk suggests, but rather, the soul which is celestial and heavenly is able to leave earth behind[474]. In fact, rather than suggesting the afterlife, the passage seems to hint at the ethical telos of the ascent, since Philo does not explicitly state that, as a result of the ascent, the soul lives or dwells with the divine natures as Brenk asserts. Rather, the verb "διαιτάω", used by Philo in the middle voice, denotes leading a certain course of life, in this case, a life in accordance with divine natures. Indeed, an ethical understanding of the passage takes greater account of Philo's conclusion that the soul, having experienced a vision of incorruptible and genuine good, bids farewell to the good which is transient and spurious.

Brenk appears to associate references to ascent with the afterlife of the soul. Although it is difficult to assert that this must always be the case, it is possible that Philo did indeed envisage the soul as living with unbodied natures after death. Indeed, in *Cher.* 114, Philo argues that, after death, we who are joined to the body, creatures of composition and quality, shall be no more. Concerned with the destiny of the soul, he proceeds to describe it as being reborn to be with those who are unbodied, without composition or quality[475]. Moreover, in *QG* ii. 4 he argues that the soul binds all parts of the body, whilst in *Leg. All.* 22 it is the mind which has the power of ἕξις or holding things together. More precisely, in *Deus* 35 ff. ἕξις is a breath or spirit which extends itself through the body. This is a power which the soul or mind shares with inanimate things like stones and bones. Interestingly, Philo ascribes it to the mind which is as yet unclothed by the body. Philo appears to derive this notion from the Stoics who believed that the soul itself is pneuma which, as well as being intrinsically

[471] Brenk, F. E. "Darkly Beyond the Glass: Middle Platonism and the Vision of the Soul", esp. 46- 51.
[472] Brenk F. E., 48.
[473] *Deus* 148- 150.
[474] *Deus* 151: "Ὀλυμπίου καὶ οὐρανίου ταῦτα ψυχῆς τὰ μεγάλα τολμήματα τὸν μὲν περίγειον χῶρον ἀπολελοιπυίας […]".
[475] "[…]εἰς παλιγγενεσίαν ὁρμήσομεν οἱ μετὰ ἀσωμάτων σύγκριτοι ποιοί".

active and intelligent, also has corporeality, thanks to which it can act upon the body[476]. In fact, like all other powers, Philo ascribes its origin to God, who is the only true possessor. It is thus, as Colson and Whitaker point out[477], conceived of as a power distinct from the objects or persons in which it is found. Thus, Philo describes the body as a dead thing, since even the power to hold it together is a psychic power. It is noteworthy that the mind and the soul are referred to interchangeably, and perhaps one ought to assume that when Philo refers to the soul ascending, he is describing the ascent of its ruling part, the mind. In any case, given the crucial role of the soul or mind in maintaining the body in corporeal unity it is not unreasonable to suppose that when it ascends, the mind so compromises the body that ascent occurs only after death. Indeed, in *Mos*. ii. 288ff. pure mind can apparently persist after death, since Philo writes that Moses became pure mind, was possessed by the divine spirit and, after death, ascended.

Accordingly, both rebirth of the soul after death as well as the translation to pure mind on the brink of death are associated in Philo with ascent, though not directly with vision. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that Philo envisaged all ascents as occurring post mortem. For instance, in *Praem.* 62, having explained that until we reach maturity, we vacillate between good and evil, Philo states that once the mind has begun to flap its wings, it forms an appearance of the good with its whole soul and, unrestrained, it wings its way to reach that vision and leave evil behind. It is apparent from *Praem.* 63- 64 that this does not necessarily refer to the afterlife. Not only is there no mention of death as a precursor to the soul or mind spreading its wings and flying towards the vision of the good, Philo seems to envisage this as an episode in the life of the soul which has received a good nature, good instruction and exercise in the principles of virtue. The ascent which Philo depicts in *Praem* 62 represents the soul inclining decisively towards the good once it has received a bliss and happiness for its lot. Moreover, not only does such a soul win health and power, Philo appears to suggest that a healthy soul which has winged its way towards the vision of the good leads to bodily gifts since to the gifts of the soul are added good complexion from modesty,

[476] Cf. Sedley, D: "Stoic physics and metaphysics" in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, eds. Algra, K; Barnes J; Mansfeld, J; Schofield, M.
[477] Colson F. H and Whitaker G. H, "Appendix to Allegorical Interpretation II", *Loeb vol. I* , 480 (note on § 22).

good bodily health and beauty[478]. Although Philo does envisage some ascents and visions as taking part after death, he does not always associate them since it is possible for the mind to form an appearance of the good which benefits not only the soul but also the body. It is therefore possible to conclude that Philo sometimes employs the language of ascent and vision in order to describe moral progress during life on earth rather than an experience which can only occur after death.

3.5 *Visions experienced during divine indwelling or inspiration of the human soul*

In his allegorical interpretation of the commandment to restore the debtor's garment before the setting of the sun in *Somn.* i. 112 and 113, Philo interprets the restoration of the garment as the restoration of reason to the soul before the setting of God's all-illuminating rays. Here, it appears that Philo might be understood as presenting the counterpart to the soul's ascent towards God, since he writes that God sends the light forth from heaven into the mind of man and states that the God-like and incorporeal light then resides in the soul. The setting of that light is interpreted by Philo as an experience akin to that of "all Egypt"[479] of darkness that may be felt, of a sightlessness and ignorance. In several other passages, Philo has defined incorporeal, God-like light as being the divine reason. Indeed, he explicitly sets out in both in *Somn.* i. 87 and i. 90- 92 that by sun Moses sometimes means the Ruler of the universe himself, the universal Father, and the First Cause. Thus, the indwelling of God-sent divine reason in the soul is understood by Philo to enable a restoration of reason, contrasted with darkness, sightlessness and ignorance. Though Philo does to some degree use the terminology of visual experience when opposing blindness to the mind's experience of divine light, and though it is certainly connected with reason and opposed to lack of knowledge, there is no explicit mention of visionary experience in conjunction with divine indwelling in the soul here. In fact, the outcome of the regaining of man's peculiar prerogative, the divine gift, reason, is to enjoy calm repose through the presence of a counsellor who will never abandon his post. Here, the role of the divine reason is that of guide and defender, the same role which Philo

[478] *Praem.* 64: "[…]εὔχροια μὲν ἐξ αἰδοῦς, εὐεξία δὲ καὶ κάλλος".
[479] Cf. *Exod.* x. 21.

outlined for the reason or word of God in *Somn.* i. 86[480], but once more, no overt reference to visions is present in this passage.

An understanding of Philo's mentions of divine reason, sent by God from heaven into the mind of man, as references to visionary experiences is, to some degree, required upon investigation of *Somn.* i. 115- 119. Indeed, in *Somn.* i. 115, Philo refers to his previous argumentation (in paragraphs 87- 114) stating that its aim was to show that the mind of the Practiser of virtue is forever in motion, ascending and descending[481] between greater and lesser illuminations[482]. In the time of the mind's uplifting, there shine upon it the rays of the fountain of reason, the all-perfecting God[483], that is, the divine reason which radiates from God as rays from the sun, whilst during lesser illuminations, its light is the images of those rays, akin to the secondary light of the moon, the immortal reasons or words which it is customary to call angels[484]. This offers some evidence that Philo considers the experience of being illuminated of secondary importance compared to whether the rays which illuminate are those which shine from God, or whether the light of the mind is the images of those rays, immortal words or angels. It is apparent from *Somn.* i. 117 that illumination by the divine light is understood by Philo as constituting or perhaps more cautiously, as enabling, a visionary experience of God, whilst inspiration from the lesser light is equivalent to a lesser, angelic vision. Indeed, he writes that meeting a word is a sufficient gift for those who cannot see God, since their soul is not entirely bereft of illumination as, though the glorious undiluted light has sunk from their sky, they have obtained that

---

[480] In *Somn.* i. 86 Philo refers to the reason of God as giving help and refuge to those who are akin to virtue: "ὁ γὰρ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος, […], τοῖς […] ἀρετῆς συγγενέσι καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἀποκλίνουσιν ἀρήγει καὶ βοηθεῖ, ὡς καταφυγὴν καὶ σωτηρίαν αὐτοῖς πορίζειν παντελῆ […]."

[481] *Somn.* i. 115: "τοῦτον δὴ τὸν δόλιχον ἀπεμηκύναμεν οὐκ ἄλλου τοῦ χάριν ἢ τοῦ διδάξαι, ὅτι ἡ ἀσκητικὴ διάνοια κινήσεσιν ἀνωμάλοις πρός τε εὐφορίαν καὶ τοὐναντίον χρωμένη καὶ τρόπον τινὰ ἀνιοῦσα καὶ κατιοῦσα συνεχῶς".

[482] Philo describes the mind as being illuminated (περιλάμπεται) by the incorporeal rays of the all-powerful God, or by the images of those beams, the angels.

[483] *Somn.* i. 115: "ταῖς ἀρχετύποις καὶ ἀσωμάτοις ἀκτῖσι τῆς λογικῆς πηγῆς τοῦ τελεσφόρου θεοῦ". I suggest all-powerful as a translation for τελεσφόρος, as in its use in *H. Hom.* 2. 32. 2 to refer to Zeus, whilst noting that, interestingly, in Sophocles' *Electra* 646 it is used in a visionary context: "grant accomplishment to the vision": φάσματα δὸς τελεσφόρος .

[484] *Somn.* i. 115: "[…] ταῖς ἐκείνων εἰκόσιν, ἀθανάτοις λόγοις, οὓς καλεῖν ἔθος ἀγγέλους".

which has been diluted. Significantly, it appears that, in this instance, the type of vision is not implicated in the degree to which a visionary experience is valued and glorified, rather, it is the nature of the illuminating rays, whether they are the divine reason, or whether the lesser reasons or words, the angels, which constitutes the determining factor. This is most likely due to their role as guides to the mind. Indeed, in *Somn.* i. 119, Philo describes the divine reason, referred to here as right reason[485], as coming forward to meet the Practising soul whose mind and senses have acknowledged their weakness. Further, the divine reason is depicted as the champion and succour of the soul, who waits for it to come invisibly from without. The language of this passage is somewhat confusing if one is to argue for the description of a visionary experience in the context of divine indwelling in the soul. However, it is the case that the divine reason is understood, not as the object of the vision, since Philo characterises it as coming to the aid of the soul '**ἀφανῶς**', but rather as the guide, perhaps to a vision of God as is indirectly alluded to in *Somn.* i. 117. Indeed, in *Somn.* i. 116 Philo affirms that apprehensions of things are gained in greatest distinctness by means of the rays of God, and that when this is absent does a secondary and feebler light arise. Thus, the divine reason illuminating the soul acts as a guide and a means of obtaining a clear vision. One might thus contend that the content of the vision in this case, God, is intimately linked to the type of vision, that is, an indwelling of the divine reason in the human mind.

It is significant that the divine reason is, as alluded to above, referred to in *Somn.* i. 119 as "**ὁ […] ὀρθὸς λόγος**". The very same expression is used by Plato in *Phaedo* 73 a, in a context which imbues the expression with connotations of knowledge as memory of the forms. Indeed, Cebes offers as a proof of the immortality of the soul the fact that people can answer questions (concerning things which they do not appear to have learnt) of themselves, because they have within them some knowledge and right reason. As demonstrated by *Somn.* i. 119, Philo understands this right reason to

---

485 *Somn.* i. 119: "**ὁ […] ὀρθὸς λόγος**". The only use of this expression in the Septuagint is in 4 *Macc.* i. 15: "**λογισμὸς μὲν δὴ τοίνυν ἐστὶν νοῦς μετὰ ὀρθοῦ λόγου προτιμῶν τὸν σοφίας βίον**", where it is used in the sense of 'good, sound reason'. That it refers to the divine reason in *Somn.* i. 119 is quite clear from the mention of "**ὁ θεῖος λόγος**" earlier in the same paragraph, which stands aloof from the mind which arrogantly assumes that it attains to a firm comprehension of the intelligibles. Philo draws a contrast with the divine or upright reason only comes to the mind which confesses its weaknesses.

be the divine reason, and whilst it is by no means necessary to infer that he assumed Plato's understanding of right reason, there is much evidence that Philo not only believed that human soul bore an impression of God, the mind, which was in the image of the divine reason[486], but that it is endowed with a portion of the divine mind at birth, that makes man resemble God[487]. Philo even refers to those who believe that the faculty of reasoning comes in from without and is divine and eternal[488]. Indeed, he seems to accept this version of the nature of reason himself since in *Post.* 184 he deems the reasoning faculty to be our most divine faculty[489]. In *Spec.* iv. 123 Philo defines the essence of the soul as being the divine spirit[490], and describes God as breathing it into the face, seat of the senses which act as bodyguards to the mind, so that it appears that Philo considers the reasoning faculty and the mind as the same, divine entity, which, as the account of the inbreathing of the divine spirit suggests, comes from without. The designation in this same passage of the essence of the reasoning soul as a radiance of the blessed and thrice blessed nature[491] points once more to likelihood that the essence of the mind is the divine reason, since Philo describes the breath as something better even than ethereal spirit[492]. Furthermore, the expression "τῆς μακαρίας φύσεως ἀπαύγασμα" is employed in *Opif.* 146 where Philo links it explicitly with both the divine reason and the human mind as well as treating it as equivalent to the notion of a fragment or copy: "πᾶς ἄνθρωπος κατὰ μὲν τὴν διάνοιαν ᾠκείωται λόγῳ θείῳ, τῆς μακαρίας φύσεως ἐκμαγεῖον ἢ ἀπόσπασμα ἢ ἀπαύγασμα γεγονώς […]". It appears that Philo's understanding of the breath of God has been heavily influenced by *Wisdom of Solomon* 7. 24- 27,

---

[486] For instance in *Her.* 234, where Philo describes the human mind as a copy of the reason of God.

[487] *Opif.* 67 and 69: "οὔτε γὰρ ἀνθρωπόμορφος ὁ θεὸς οὔτε θεοειδὲς τὸ ἀνθρώπειον σῶμα. ἡ δὲ εἰκὼν λέλεκται κατὰ τὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμόνα νοῦν ".

[488] *Opif.* 67: "[…] τὴν γὰρ τοῦ λογισμοῦ τανῦν ὑπερθετέον διὰ τοὺς φάσκοντας θύραθεν αὐτὸν ἐπεισιέναι θεῖον καὶ ἀίδιον ὄντα".

[489] *Post.* 184: "τὸ θειότερον τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν λογισμὸν". Mangey (*Loeb* ii p. 439) suggests however that the text cannot be entirely correct here and suggests emendations. They do not however alter the sense that reason is the most or more divine faculty in man.

[490] *Spec. Leg.* iv. 123: "ἐκείνης [ψυχῆς … τῆς νοερᾶς καὶ λογικῆς] γὰρ οὐσία πνεῦμα θεῖον".

[491] *Spec. Leg.* iv. 123: "τὸ δ᾽ ἐμφυσώμενον ἦν […] τῆς μακαρίας καὶ τρισμακαρίας φύσεως ἀπάυγασμα". The only use of the term 'ἀπάυγασμα' in the Septuagint is found in *Wisdom of Solomon* 7. 26.

[492] *Spec. Leg*. iv. 123: "τι αἰθερίου πνεύματος κρεῖσσον".

where it is equated with wisdom and described as a breath of the power of God[493]. In this passage, wisdom is described as pervading and penetrating all things because she is a breath of the power of God and a pure emanation of his glory. The description of wisdom as a radiance of eternal light and an image of the goodness of God in *Wisdom* 7. 26 is reminiscent of Philo's equation, in *Opif.* 146 of the radiance and the fragment of the blessed nature as well as his understanding, in *Mut.* 223, of the copy of the divine image as a more pious designation of the fragment of the universe, both of which refer to divine reason. Most significant is the account in *Wisdom* 7. 27 of wisdom's passing into holy souls in every generation, and making them friends of God and prophets. Here, one finds a precedent to Philo's notion that the divine reason can inspire a man to prophesy and can lead a man towards a vision of God.

The inbreathing of the spirit of God is linked in *Leg.* i. 38 with the ability of the human mind to soar so high as to grasp or understand the nature of God[494]. Indeed, Philo sees in the inbreathing the creation of a relationship, a union, between God, who inbreathes, the mind which receives, and that which is inbreathed which is the spirit or breath. It is due to this divine inbreathing alone that the human soul is able to conceive of God. One ought however to draw attention to the differences in Philo's understanding of 'πνεῦμα' in *Spec.* iv. 123 and in *Leg.* i. 37- 38. Indeed, in the latter passage the term is used to designate the medium through which the power of God reaches the soul. Indeed, the inbreathing is also described as God stamping the soul with the impress of those of his powers that are within human comprehension. This is the meaning of Philo's pronouncement that mind was ensouled by God[495]. In this version, it appears that the spirit or breath is little more than the medium. This understanding is nonetheless not incompatible with the somewhat vaguer account of *Spec.* iv. 123 which describes the substance breathed by God as "πνεῦμα θεῖον" and "αἰθέριον [...] πνεῦμα", but abandons the use of the term 'πνεῦμα' in preference for the expression "τρισμακαρίας φύσεως ἀπάυγασμα". In both cases, it is therefore still possible to conclude that Philo views the essence of the soul as being a

[493] *Wisdom of Solomon* 7. 25: "ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστιν [σοφία cf. *Wisdom* 7. 24] τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως".
[494] *Leg.* I. 38: "ἐπεὶ πῶς ἂν ἐνόησεν ἡ ψυχὴ θεόν, εἰ μὴ ἐνέπνευσε καὶ ἥψατο αὐτῆς κατὰ δύναμιν".
[495] *Leg.* . I. 40: "[…] ὥστε τὸν […] νοῦν ἐψυχῶσθαι ὑπὸ θεοῦ".

divine spirit, which, it seems, can be described by Philo both as an effulgence or radiance of the blessed nature or as a power which proceeds from God.

Moreover, in *Mut.* 223 Philo refers to the reasoning faculty as a most admirable and divine thing, a fragment of the universe, which he regards as equivalent to its more pious designation as a faithful copy of the divine image. It is therefore amply clear that Philo does in fact regard the human reasoning faculty as a fragment of the divine reason, or mind of the universe, and regards this merely as a different expression of the same notion, namely, that the human mind is a copy of the mind of God. In *Det.* 89- 90 this idea is explicitly linked to the possibility of aiming at an apprehension of the nature of God. Indeed, Philo's statement that the human mind deemed the limits of the universe as too narrow for its course and aimed at apprehending the inapprehensible nature of God, functions as a prompt for the question which immediately follows: How could the mind, contained in such small bulks as a brain or heart, have room for all the vastness of the universe had it not been an inseparable portion of the divine and happy soul[496]? It is thus reasonable to surmise that Philo understood the divine reason to act as a guide, in part because it enabled the human mind to access memories of God, which exist in the human soul because the reasoning faculty is a fragment of the divine reason. Further, because, according to Philo, no part of that which is divine can cut itself off, but rather extends[497], there exists an intimate connection between the human mind and the divine reason or the divine soul. It is this, one might suggest, which allows the divine reason to indwell in the human mind and inspire and guide it towards great visions. It is possible to attain a vision of God because the human mind contains an impression of God, which is nothing but a fragment of the divine reason that pervades the entire universe, not cut off from its source, but only extended. Access to such a vision is enabled by inspiration and sometimes indwelling of the reason of God, which acts as a guide, so that revelation from without is required in order to access knowledge of God, which might be understood as already present in the human mind, insofar as it is a fragment and extension of the divine reason, needs only some illumination to have a direct vision of God.

---

[496] *Det.* 90: "[…] εἰ μὴ τῆς θείας καὶ εὐδαίμονος ψυχῆς ἐκείνης ἀπόσπασμα ἦν οὐ διαιρετόν;"

[497] *Det.* 90: "τέμνεται γὰρ οὐδὲν τοῦ θείου κατ᾽ ἀπάρτησιν, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐκτείνεται".

It is necessary to distinguish between the reason of God, of which each (well-disposed) human mind is a portion, and the divine spirit, which in some passages designates pure knowledge in which all wise men share, and which can enter a human mind, but cannot abide there. Confusion may arise on two distinct grounds. Firstly, by divine spirit, Philo does not always designate the pure knowledge which can enter the mind of a prophet, since in *Spec.* iv. 123 it designates the essence of the human soul. Further confusion may arise as Philo describes both the divine spirit, in *Gig.* 27[498], as well as the divine soul, in *Det.* 90, as indivisible and extended throughout the whole world. With these distinctions in mind it is easier to comprehend Philo's remarks concerning prophetic inspiration, during which event, he contends, the divine spirit replaces the human mind[499]. Indeed, in *Heres* 265 he describes this as a frequent occurrence amongst the race of prophets and justifies it on the basis of holy law, according to which it is impossible for what is mortal to dwell with what is immortal. Philo's description of the human mind as mortal remains puzzling in the context of the many other passages which describe it as by nature divine, though *Gig.* 28- 29 indicates that, for Philo, this is largely due to the ties which bind the mind to its fleshly body, rather than to any intrinsic property of the human mind itself. Thus, the experience of divine indwelling and inspiration is possible because the human mind is a fragment of the divine reason. It must, however, be guided by the divine reason or spirit, which can enter the mind and sometimes replace it. The spirit of God is, according to Philo, pure knowledge and he illustrates this description with the account of *Exod.* xxxi. 2f during which God called up Bezalel and filled him with the divine spirit, wisdom and understanding[500]. Philo argues that these words offer a definition of what the spirit of God is. It is this wise and divine spirit which is also the spirit who helps[501]and may stay awhile in the soul but cannot abide there[502]. Philo contrasts the

---

498 *Gig.* 27: "τὸ […] πνεῦμά ἐστι τὸ σοφόν, τὸ θεῖον, τὸ ἄτμητον, τὸ ἀδιαίρετον, τὸ ἀστεῖον, τὸ πάντῃ δι᾽ ὅλων ἐκπεπληρωμένον".

499 Philo's reference to the divine spirit in a prophetic context can in part be understood as following the Septuagint's frequent mention of the spirit of God, "πνεῦμα θεοῦ", in accounts of prophetic inspiration. Cf. *Num*. xxiv. 2; 1 *Sam*. x. 10; 1 *Sam*. xix. 20, 23; 2 *Chron*. xiv. 20; *Ezek*. xi. 24.

500 *Gig.* 23: "ἀνεκάλεσεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν Βεσελεὴλ καὶ ἐνέπλησεν αὐτὸν πνεύματος θείου, σοφίας, συνέσεως, ἐπιστήμης, ἐπὶ παντὶ ἔργῳ διανοεῖσθαι".

501 *Gig.* 27: "[…] τὸ […] πνεῦμά ἐστι τὸ σοφόν, τὸ θεῖον, […]· ὅπερ ὠφελοῦν οὐ βλάπτεται[…]".

502 *Gig.* 28.

lot of the embodied souls, thwarted by their fleshly nature, with that of the incorporeal souls who see and hear things divine[503]. In this manner, Philo underlines the temporary nature of divine inspiration in humans, and so their limited access to knowledge. Given the reference to the incorporeal souls who are able to contemplate divine things, which follows upon concerns with the indwelling of the divine spirit or pure knowledge, it is possible to infer from this passage that one of the functions of the divine spirit is to enable one to experience visions of the divine.

Philo understands the experience of divine indwelling or inspiration as the guiding action of the divine reason, towards a vision of God which already exists in human reason, the most divine of human faculties. Although there is no hint that such a vision would confuse, since the indwelling of the divine spirit is inspiration by pure knowledge, he also indicates that such an experience can only be temporary.

[503] *Gig.* 31: "ψυχαὶ μὲν γὰρ ἄσαρκοι καὶ ἀσώματοι ἐν τῷ τοῦ παντὸς θεάτρῳ διημερεύουσαι θεαμάτων καὶ ἀκουσμάτων θείων".

II.4 *CHAPTER IV: PHILO'S UNDERSTANDING OF MEMORY*

It is necessary to distinguish Philo's use of 'μνήμη' as sometimes designating a mental impression and sometimes designating a faculty. These two conceptions are, however, intimately linked since it appears that, where Philo refers to memory as a faculty, he means to evoke the notion of permanent recall of something learnt, so that it imprints itself in the mind and then becomes a memory or permanent impression.

4.1 . *Memory as a faculty*

In *Plant.* 31 Philo includes 'μνήμη' amongst the other most perfect faculties, the noble growths[504] which God planted in the dominant faculty[505], presumably the soul or the mind. Here, Philo specifies that these faculties, which include broadly intellectual capabilities[506], cannot be grown by any mortal[507], but owe their existence to the Uncreate Artificer, "ὁ ἀγένητος τεχνίτης", who not only created these faculties once, but is ever making them for every man who is begotten[508]. Thus, memory is understood by Philo as a faculty of the mind, entirely 'grown' by God, who makes one anew for each mortal man. In Plato's *Theat.* 191 c we are asked to picture a block of wax in our souls upon which perceptions and thoughts can be imprinted and so remembered. This block of wax is said by Plato to be a gift of Μνημοσύνη, the mother of the Muses. Interestingly in *Plant.* 129, Philo writes that Μνήμη, which some falsely call Μνημοσύνη, is a divine power which gave birth to the Muses. In the passage which follows Philo concludes that the work most appropriate to God is the conferring of gifts whilst thanksgiving is most proper to creation. Philo's propensity to ascribe psychological faculties to the beneficence of the creator explains his keenness to attribute a divine origin to the faculty of memory.

---

[504] Mentioned first in *Plant.* 30: "δυνάμεις ἁπάσας εὐγενῆ μοσχεύματα εἶναι συμβέβηκε".

[505] *Plant.* 31: "τὰ᾽ ἀμείνω καὶ τελειότερα τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ καὶ καρποφορεῖν δυναμένῳ διαφερόντως ἡγεμονικῷ προσερρίζου".

[506] *Plant.* 31: "ταῦτα΄ εἰσι νόησις, κατάληψις, εὐστοχία, μελέται, μνῆμαι, ἕξεις, διαθέσεις, τεχνῶν ἴαι πολύτροποι, βεβαιότης ἐπιστημῶν, τῶν ἀρετῆς ἁπάσης θεωρημάτων ἄληστος ἀνάληψις."

[507] *Plant.* 31: "τούτων οὐδὲν οὐδεὶς θνητὸς ἱκανὸς φυτουργῆσαι".

[508] *Plant.* 31: " […] οὐ πεποιηκὼς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ποιῶν ἀεὶ καθ᾽ ἕκαστον τῶν γεννωμένων τὰ φυτὰ ταῦτα".

Given the reference to Μνημοσύνη, he may also have in mind Plato's account in *Theat*. 191c. Although Philo's own account is couched in the language of myth, his explicit preference for the term Μνήμη is perhaps due to the possible understanding of Μνημοσύνη as a divine figure[509].

The view of memory as divinely created seems to be quite consistent in Philo since in *Leg.* iii. 91-92 he also points to memory as a most necessary nature, created in the soul by God, as was recollection[510], though memory is the better of the two. Indeed, according to Philo, memory is younger than recollection because it comes at the end of a process of recollecting and forgetting and then recollecting again[511]. Thus, whereas 'ἀνάμνησις' is depicted by Philo as mutilated and blind, 'μνήμη' possesses clear and distinct visible apprehensions and so never errs through ignorance. Moreover, it is superior to recollection as it is unbroken and uninterrupted[512]. It important to emphasise that when writing of the implantation of memory in the human soul, which in *Leg.* is said to occur at the same time as the implantation of recollection, we need not assume that Philo refers to particular memories. Rather, the reference to both memory and recollection as natures ("φύσεις") in *Leg.* iii. 91 indicates that Philo does distinguish between the faculty of memory and discrete memories. Philo complicates the matter somewhat by illustrating his point that memory is superior to recollection with an explanation which points to the emergence of a discrete memory[513]. Moreover, whilst Philo is not careful to emphasise this distinction, in *Plant*. 31 μνήμη is included as one of the divinely planted growths of the soul alongside εὐστοχία, sagacity, a skill. Thus, for Philo 'μνήμη' can mean both a divinely gifted faculty and the outcome of successful recollection which confers a certain permanence upon one's apprehensions. Interestingly, 'κατάληψις' generally designates apprehensions of an intelligible kind in Philo, and the attribution of such apprehensions to the faculty of memory is perhaps an indication that it is, at least in part, through this faculty that the mind is able to access and acquire permanent

[509] Cf. Hesiod *Theog.* 50f.
[510] *Leg.* iii. 91: "[…] δύο φύσεις ἐδημιουργήθησαν ἐν ψυχῇ ὑπὸ θεοῦ σφόδρα ἀναγκαῖαι, μνήμη τε καὶ ἀνάμνησις".
[511] *Leg.* iii. 91.
[512] *Leg.*. iii. 92: "πρεσβύτερον· τὸ χεῖρον ἡ ἀνάμνησις εὑρίσκεται μνήμης τοῦ κρείττονος· *** συνεχὲς καὶ ἀδιάστατον".
[513] *Leg.* iii. 92.

comprehension of elements of the intelligible sphere. Moreover, the reference to such apprehensions possessed by memory as 'ἐναργής'[514], with its sight-related connotations, indicates perhaps that the memory accesses such apprehensions as visible images, albeit, one supposes, visible to the eye of the soul alone.

Philo is thus very careful to distinguish between memory and mere recollection. In fact, it appears from *Leg. All.* iii. 93 that Philo regards memory as the confirmation and preservation of the mind's speculations[515]. As Philo writes that Ephraim is the name which symbolises memory because it means 'fertility of the soul of the man who is fond of learning', it appears that memory is to be regarded as a faculty which, though clearly implanted in the human mind by God, comes into operation as a result of studying. Indeed, as mentioned above, it comes, according to Philo, at the end of a repeated process of forgetting and then recollecting[516]. Memory is the faculty which allows the preservation of the fruits of study, confirmed speculations[517]. It is telling that forgetfulness is described, in *Cher.* 69 as a curse of the soul[518] and associated not only with dreaming but with assuming that one is possessor of one's own reasoned thoughts. This underlines the importance of reliance upon God as a guarantee of permanence and source of all knowledge[519]. One might therefore regard Philo's understanding of memory as closely equated with knowledge since, from these last few passages, in particular *Leg. All.* 3. 91, it appears impossible that he might conceive of a false, erroneous memory. That very notion would, on Philo's definition of memory, be oxymoronic.

---

[514] *Leg.* iii. 92.
[515] cf. Plato, *Philb.* 34a.
[516] *Leg.* iii. 92: "λήθῃ οὖν κατ᾽ ἀρχὰς χρώμενοι πάλιν ἀναμιμνῃσκόμεθα, ἕως ἐκ τοῦ πολλάκις μὲν ἐκλαθέσθαι πολλάκις δὲ ἀναμνησθῆναι βέβαιος αὖθις μνήμη κρατήσει ".
[517] *Leg.* iii. 93
[518] ἡ σύντροφος ψυχῆς νόσος λήθη
[519] In *Cher*. 71 Philo is quite clear that all activities of the soul, whether carried on through the senses or without them, including knowledge, reasoning and sense perceptions are God's possessions. Indeed, to act belongs to God alone (*Cher*. 77).

4.2 *An impression on the soul*

In *Philb*. 34a Plato, having clarified that a perception refers to the union of the soul in one common affection and motion, defines memory as the preservation of perception. In *Theat.* 191 c-d the process whereby perceptions are preserved is describedI; it is through the imprinting of things heard, seen and thought upon the faculty of memory as upon a wax tablet[520]. Philo retains this understanding of individual memories as impressions upon the mind. Indeed, in *Deus* 43, Philo explains that the mind like wax receives the imprint of everything which the senses have introduced and retains it. Here, Philo even assumes Plato's understanding of 'μνήμη' as potentially falling victim to forgetfulness, since he writes that the image or impress is retained until forgetfulness, the opponent of memory makes the imprint indistinct or effaces it[521]. In *Her*. 181 Philo openly acknowledges his debt to Plato as he states that the soul is a block of wax "ὡς εἴπέ τις τῶν ἀρχαίων"[522]. In his exegesis of *Gen*. xxx. 42 he proceeds to elaborate upon Plato's distinction[523] between wax which is harder or softer or of proper quality, and the implications for the receiving and preserving of impressions. The very same distinction is mentioned again in *Mut*. 212, where Philo argues that in the souls of those who are naturally good there is a good mixture like smooth wax, which easily receives all that is seen. He adds that such a soul reproduces perfectly the shapes[524] impressed upon it in lifelike copies preserved by memory. It is apparent that 'μνήμη' in this passage refers to the faculty, which acts like a wax tablet in preserving impressions. The memory therefore preserves clear images or copies[525] of that which is perceived. The manner in which memory retrieves images is illustrated in *Op*. 18 where Philo refers to an architect who first sketches in his own mind the layout of the city that is to be built. In so doing, he receives in his mind the figures of the different parts of the city, such as temples, docks, gymnasia

---

[520] Cf. *Tim*. 26.

[521] *Deus* 43: "[…] κηρῷ δὲ ἐοικὼς ὁ νοῦς τὸ ἐκμαγεῖον δεξάμενος ἄκρως παρ᾽ ἑαυτῷ φυλάττει, μέχρις ἂν ἡ ἀντίπαλος μνήμης τὸν τύπον λεάνασα λήθη ἀμυδρὸν ἐργάσηται ἢ παντελῶς ἀφανίσῃ.".

[522] Plato in fact asks his reader to assume that there is *in* the soul a block of wax which receives impressions of perceptions and thoughts. This is Philo's understanding also in *Mut*. 212.

[523] In *Theat.* 191c.

[524] 'εἶδος'.

[525] *Mut.* 212: "[…] μνήμης ἐναργεῖς τινας εἰκόνας᾽".

and so on. This, Philo states explicitly, is the creation of the architect's own mind. According to Philo, before beginning to build the city, the architect recalls the images of the various parts of the city by his innate power of memory. In this manner they are more distinctly imprinted upon his mind. Here memory is a faculty of the mind which enables the recall of images which have already been imprinted, in other words individual memories. This recall allows the memories to be more distinctly engraved upon the mind, in a process which differs from the pattern of recollecting and forgetting which normally precedes the formation of a permanent memory in Philo. As the case of the architect is used as an analogy to explain the creation of the world by God[526] it may be that Philo was reluctant to envisage the possibility of forgetting, which would imply that the image was impressed upon an imperfect mind. The manner in which memory acts is further alluded to in *Leg*. *All*. ii. 43, where Philo contrasts the mind to sensation which is only affected by that which is present. He argues that the mind can be set in motion by that which is past, by way of memory[527]. It is likely that the faculty rather than any individual memory is intended here since Philo employs the singular.

In *Mut.* 270 independent practice allows the pupil to set upon himself the stamp of memory. Unlike Plato, who adds in *Theat*. 191d that memories can be erased and these things we forget and do not know, in this passage Philo treats memories as indelible and permanent. He appears to use the term to refer to that which Plato understands as recollection. Indeed, the passage is reminiscent of Meno 80ff. where Socrates insists that he has not taught the slave anything, but that the boy has retrieved recollections himself. Philo is more explicit in his depiction of the power of memory since as a result the pupil is said to be perfected. It is interesting also that he allows learning to be part of the process whereas Plato appears to understand recollection as retrieval of what has already been learnt (cf. Philb. 34b-c). Given Philo's insistence in *Her.* 181 that the docile soul allows the imprints to seek deep within it so that the shapes are preserved beyond any possibility of effacement, it is likely that he regards memories as indelible when they are imprinted upon virtuous souls. In *Spec. Leg.* iv. 107 Philo also depicts the formation of firm apprehensions through learning and the

[526] Cf. *Opif*. 19.
[527] *Leg.* ii. 43: "ὁ δὲ νοῦς καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ παρόντι κινεῖται, παρεληλυθότι […] κατὰ μνήμην".`

action of memory. He argues that whilst the pupil learns through constant exercises which act as the cement of conceptions it is not possible to grasp things securely until, by using memory to call up each thing which has been learnt, he stamps a firm impression of them in the soul. In this passage learning is essential to the acquisition of knowledge concerning principles of wisdom. Memory is used in order to render permanent the knowledge acquired through learning from a teacher, by recalling apprehensions so that they can be imprinted upon the mind. Whilst learning through a teacher and through practice is necessary, memory is indispensable as it is this faculty which enables apprehensions to be imprinted upon the mind. Such impressions then appear to constitute knowledge as they are securely grasped. The formation of knowledge through the use of memory to imprint upon the mind conceptions which have been learnt is linked to an ability to distinguish between vice and virtue. Indeed, Philo affirms that the firm apprehension of conceptions is only useful if we can distinguish between those which we ought to choose, which lead to virtue, and avoid the contrary, which lead to vice.

4.3 *Ethical dimension*

Whilst *Spec. Leg.* iv. 107 discusses the acquisition of firm apprehensions through memory in the context of ethical considerations, in other passages Philo appears to suggest that memory is intimately linked to truth and is the preserve of the virtuous. Indeed, in *Sobr.* 28- 29, memory is the privilege of the wise and God-loving and is superior to recollection. In this passage, Philo appears to believe that memory, unlike recollection, is not apt to succumb to forgetfulness. Indeed, whilst ἀνάμνησις is represented by Manasseh, whose name is by interpretation "from forgetfulness" ("ἐκ λήθης"), memory is symbolised by Ephraim, whose name is "fruit-bearing". Philo finds this an appropriate title because memory has been unbroken. He concludes that unforgotten memories are food for souls[528]. This same point is made in *Migr.* 205 where Philo gives the same interpretations of the names Manasseh and Ephraim and argues that the most nourishing fruit of the soul is remembering with no

[528] *Sobr.* 28: "[…]καρπὸς ὠφελιμώτατος καὶ τῷ ὄντι ἐδώδιμος ψυχαῖς τὸ ἄληστον ἐν μνήμαις ἀδιαστάτοις.".

forgetfulness[529]. In both cases Philo employs the plural, so that he apparently refers to actual discrete memories rather than any faculty of the mind. In *Congr.* 39, the ethical dimension is even clearer, since it is the soul of one who remembers[530] which does not lose the fruits of what he has learned, unlike the soul of one who must be reminded[531]. Philo presses the point in his exegesis of *Gen*. xlvi.20 as he interprets the passage to mean that the man of memory lives with a citizen wife, memory, whilst the forgetful, man lives with an arrogant Syrian concubine, reminiscence.

Philo also reflects Plato's concern in Theat. 191 that not all wax tablets are equally suited to impression, since in *Cher.* 102 Philo states that memory arises from a good disposition[532]. The context indicates that a reference to memory as a faculty is intended, since ἐπιμονὴ which is also said to arise from a good disposition is best understood as denoting a character trait. Moreover, in *Mut* 84 Philo argues that a good nature co-operates with memory in order to assure the retention of what is learnt. Thus, one whose nature favours the acquisition of virtue through teaching remains constant. Philo thus shares with Plato the notion that some natures are better predisposed to certain impressions than others, though for Philo the ethical dimension attains a greater importance. In *Sobr*. 5, Philo no longer refers to those who have been gifted with a good nature, but focuses on those who have freed themselves from the yoke of the passions. Indeed, he writes that the mind which is free from the oppression of the passions will gaze clear-eyed upon all that is worthy of contemplation and be aroused by the suggestions of memories. It appears here that the sleep which makes us forget is caused by the passions, whilst memories (referred to by Philo in the plural), arouse the mind. There may be a link for Philo between that which is worthy of contemplation and that which is worth remembering, since in *Virt.* 176 the most important blessing of the soul is undying memory of things worthy to be recollected. That some things are worthy of recollection implies, however, that not everything is necessarily worth remembering, and quite consistently in *Agr.* 133 and *Praem.* 18 Philo intimates that not every memory is good. Furthermore, *Spec Leg* iv. 107 in which Philo appears to distinguish between memories which lead to vice and

[529] *Migr.* 205: "[…] καρπὸς δὲ κάλλιστος καὶ τροφιμώτατος ψυχῆς τὸ ἄληστον ἐν μνήμαις".
[530] "ἡ […] τοῦ μεμνημένου ψυχὴ".
[531] "ἡ […] τοῦ ἀναμνήσει [ψυχὴ]".
[532] "ἐκ μὲν γὰρ εὐφύιας εὐθιξία ἐπιμονὴ μνήμη[…]".

those which lead to virtue suggests that his attitude towards memories is indeed ambiguous and that some firm apprehensions ought to be avoided. This appears at first to contradict the sentiment expressed in *Leg. All.* i. 55 that memory is the guarding and preserving of holy opinions. However it may be possible to distinguish between individual recollections which can encompass firm impressions of bad things and the faculty of memory which concerns itself with imprinting upon the soul the images of worthy and holy apprehensions. *Deus.* 138 appears to confirm this since it is possible to have memories of iniquitous behaviour which instead of leading to further vice enjoin one to reject one's previous offensive behaviour and follow the divine admonitions. These memories, Philo specifies, are in fact prompted by a heaven-inflicted frenzy. It is therefore not inconsistent for Philo at once to admit than some memories may be memories of bad things, whilst memory is a faculty gifted to the soul by God.

4.4. *Memories of God and of the intelligible world*

4.4.1 References to "θεοῦ μνήμη" in Philo

In several passages Philo refers to a memory of God, "θεοῦ μνήμη". Indeed, in *Virt.* 165 Philo explains why the memory of God should be kept as an image enshrined[533], never to be forgotten. He depicts God as a spiritual sun who, when rising and shining upon the soul, scatters the night of the passions and vices so that virtue reveals the brightness of her form. Remembering God, for Philo, allows humans to be cured of their pride. Indeed, the memory of God serves a primarily ethical goal, that of combating human arrogance through remembering that vigour is a divine gift and that humans are naturally weak. Thus, the memory of God will lead humans to give thanks to God. Although the notion of a memory or recollection of the divine is present already in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Philo imbues that memory not only with an ethical purpose, but with the power to lead arrogant humans towards a personal relationship with God. The importance of remembering God in the context of thanksgiving is also apparent from *Spec Leg.* ii. 171, where Philo discusses the significance of the sheaf offering[534], which is given in thanks for both the Jewish nation and the whole world.

---

[533] "[...]ἄληστον ἐχρῆν τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μνήμην ἀγαλματοφορεῖν"
[534] Cf. *Lev*. xxiii. 10ff.

He suggests that many benefits have come through the offering of first- fruits, the first of which is the memory of God, and it is not possible to find a more perfect good than this. Furthermore, in *Spec. Leg.* ii. 176, Philo writes that the festival of the sheaf anticipates a greater feast, the festival of first fruits or Pentecost. It is from the first feast that the fiftieth day (and so the date of the second) is reckoned. This is done by counting seven sevens with the additions of the monad, described by Philo as an incorporeal image of God[535]. Thus, Philo, whether intentionally or not, creates a link between the memory of God and the incorporeal image of God.

A slightly different aspect of Philo's understanding of the memory of God can be found in *Cont.* 26, where it is associated with abandonment of the body. In this passage, Philo relates the practice of the Therapeutae, who he terms philosophers[536]and who desire a vision of the Existent[537]. According to Philo, they remain rapt and possessed until they see the object of their yearnings[538], suggesting that they are successful in experiencing a vision of the Existent. It seems that the memory of God is acquired or rediscovered in the course of their heaven-sent passion[539]since Philo's reference to the Therapeutae retaining the memory of God and never forgetting it[540] occurs directly after his description of the place in which they are initiated into the mysteries[541]. Indeed, Philo relates that in each house of the society there is a sacred room, "οἴκημα ἱερόν", which is called a sanctuary or closet, "σεμνεῖον καὶ μοναστήριον[542]". It is in this room that the Therapeutae are initiated into the mysteries, and Philo specifies that they take into it none of the things

---

[535] In *Spec. Leg.* iii. 180, the monad is described as being the image of the first cause: "μονὰς […] ἐστιν εἰκὼν αἰτίου πρώτου". In *Her.* 187, the monad is the image of God who is alone in his unity and yet possesses fullness: "μονὰς δὲ οὔτε προσθήκην οὔτε ἀφαίρεσιν δέχεσθαι πέφυκεν, εἰκὼν οὖσα τοῦ μόνου πλήρους θεοῦ".

[536] . *Cont.* 2.

[537] . *Cont.* 11.

[538] . *Cont.* 12.

[539] . *Cont.* 12.

[540] . *Cont.* 26: "ἀεὶ μὲν οὖν ἄληστον ἔχουσι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ μνήμην […]".

[541] . *Cont.* 25- 26.

[542] On this word, Conybeare states that it does not exist elsewhere in a Greek document until the end of the third century, where it has acquired the sense of a building for a single monk or hermit or for several monks together. Colson judges that in *Cont.* 25 it "indicates simply a room in a house which no one else is allowed to enter". Loeb ix, *Appendix* 519- 520.

necessary to the needs of the body but only the scriptures, which foster and perfect knowledge and piety[543]. Here Philo adds that they retain the memory of God. It is therefore not entirely clear whether this memory is to be understood as identical with perfected knowledge or whether one ought to consider it on a par with the scriptures as instrumental in fostering both knowledge and piety. The content of the memory is somewhat clarified by Philo's conclusion that since the memory of God is not forgotten, even in their dreams, the picture is nothing other than the loveliness of divine virtues and powers. Given Philo's assertion that many, when asleep and dreaming, give utterance to the glorious verities of their holy philosophy[544], one might suggest that the memory of God plays a didactic role since it is unlikely that Philo regards it possible for anyone to express in words the nature of a divine memory or impression of God. Indeed, the use of the adverb of manner "ὡς"[545] implies that the mental image of the divine virtues and powers is enabled by the retention of the memory of God.

4.4.2 Impressions on the mind of the image of God or of the powers

In addition to explicit references to a memory of God, Philo also discusses impressions or engravings in the mind of the image of God or of the powers which, it might be suggested, are memories of God and allow humans to conceive of the divine. Philo distinguishes between those in whom the image is genuine and those in whom the impression is debased or corrupted. Nonetheless, all humans are said to possess the imprint of the image of God, since failure to do so would absolve the wicked of culpability. Philo apparently draws distinctions amongst those who are stamped with a genuine impression, especially in his comparison between Bezalel and Moses. It shall be demonstrated here that this hierarchy rests upon the possibility of purification of the mind through initiation into the higher mysteries which enables the mind to soar above the aether, and towards the Uncreate or God. Thus, the purification of the mind

[543] *Cont.* 25: "[…] μηδὲν εἰσκομίζοντες μὴ ποτόν, μὴ σιτίον, μηδέ τι τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα πρὸς τὰς τοῦ σώματος χρείας ἀναγκαῖα, ἀλλὰ νόμους καὶ λόγια θεσπισθέντα διὰ προφητῶν καὶ ὕμνους καὶ τὰ ἄλλα οἷς ἐπιστήμη καὶ εὐσέβεια συναύξονται καὶ τελειοῦνται".
[544] *Cont.* 26: "πολλοὶ γοῦν καὶ ἐκλαλοῦσιν ἐν ὕπνοις ὀνειροπολούμενοι τὰ τῆς ἱερᾶς φιλοσοφίας ἀοίδιμα δόγματα."
[545] *Cont.* 26.

and the greater quality of the impression of the image of God enables greater closeness to God which Philo sometimes expresses in terms of an ascent vision.

4.4.2.1 *All humans possess an imprint of the image of God, though in some it is corrupted.*

In *Leg.* iii. 75 Philo moves from the notion that pleasure and the body are inherently bad, to the suggestion that some natures are inherently bad and others inherently good. He compares this to the case of plants, some of which can be cultivated and are useful and others which are injurious. Consequently, in *Leg*. iii. 77 Philo states that just as God hates pleasure and the body without giving any reason, he has promoted good natures apart from any manifest reason, pronouncing no action of theirs acceptable before praising them. He argues in the passage which follows that Noah was shown to be of excellent nature from his birth. Similarly, Philo writes of Melchizedek that God produces him to begin with as peaceable and worthy of his own priesthood[546]. Philo also states that Abram was created by God in such a shape as to merit esteem[547]. Where those such as Isaac are concerned, Philo argues that even before birth God moulds them and disposes them excellently[548] and determines that they shall have a most excellent inheritance. The same appears to apply to Jacob, whilst Esau, conversely, was declared to be a slave whilst still in the womb[549]. This, for Philo, is linked with the idea that God has foreknowledge, since he explains that God knows the different pieces of his handiwork even before he has thoroughly chiselled them[550]. Thus, when Philo writes in *Leg.* iii 104 that there are two different natures, both chiselled from God's hands, this should be understood as a reference to the distinction between those formed by God in such a way as to merit esteem and those who were destined to be base. Indeed, Philo contrasts the two natures: one is accursed and stamped with a counterfeit impression, and the other is beneficial and praiseworthy and stamped with a genuine impression.

---

[546] *Leg.* iii. 79.
[547] *Leg.* iii. 84.
[548] *Leg.* iii. 85: "ἐνίους δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πρὸ τῆς γενέσεως καλῶς διαπλάττει καὶ διατίθεται". It is not made explicit here, but may be relevant, that Philo considers the receiving of the divine imprint as the culmination of the perfected moulding of matter.
[549] *Leg.* iii. 88.
[550] *Leg.* iii. 88: "ὁ γὰρ ζῳοπλάστης θεὸς ἐπίσταται τὰ ἑαυτοῦ καλῶς δημιουργήματα καὶ πρὶν αὐτὰ εἰς ἄκρον διατορεῦσαι […]".

That the impression stamped upon the praiseworthy human soul is that of the image of God is to be inferred from *Leg.* iii. 95- 96 where Philo claims that God stamped upon Bezalel's soul the impression of God's shadow, the divine logos, which he used in order to make the world. In that passage Philo declares that in the case of Bezalel, the image of God has been impressed upon the soul as upon a genuine or tested coin. That all souls are, for Philo, impressed with the image of God is evident from *Plant.* 18, where Philo claims that the rational soul or mind is a genuine coinage of the divine and invisible spirit, impressed by the seal of God, the stamp of which is the eternal logos or image of God. Philo then quotes *Gen* ii. 7 as proof that he that receives is made in the likeness of him who sends forth the breath. He supports this with a reference to *Gen*. i. 27, stating that man has been made after the image of God. That this refers to all men and not simply to the first man is likely, since Philo is anxious to refute any suggestion that humans are made after the image of anything created[551]. Indeed, impression with the eternal logos explains our upright stance and ability to lift our eyes to heaven[552] which distinguishes us from other animals. It is clear from this passage that Philo regards the rational soul as bearing the stamp of the eternal logos. Thus, where the nature of the genuine impression referred to in *Leg.* iii. 104 is concerned, *Plant*. 18 confirms that it is to be identified with the impression of the logos or image of God.

The main distinction between the two texts is that the statements concerning the mind in *Plant.* 18 seem to apply to all human beings whereas *Leg.* iii 104 distinguishes between two natures. It is quite possible that *Plant.* refers only to those more virtuous souls, because it is not troubled with differentiating between humans. The passage is instead mainly concerned with explaining what distinguishes humans from animals, namely, an upright stance which allows the eyes to gaze on heaven. On the other hand, *Plant.* 21 does seem to hint that all humans are not necessarily drawn towards the Existent since Philo writes that it is impossible for any to discern how the understanding tends towards the Existent except for those who have been drawn towards him: no one can know what he himself has not experienced. The existence of humans in which the image has been debased might be explained accordingly: although *Plant*. 18 f. is concerned with shared human characteristics (upright stance

[551] *Plant*. 19.
[552] *Plant* 20.

and ability to lift our eyes to heaven) which differentiate us from animals, Philo's quoting from *Gen.* ii.7 and *Gen*. i. 27 indicates that his remarks regarding the mind being a *genuine* coinage apply to the first man. Although all humans share in the imprint of the divine logos or image, it becomes less clear, baser, adulterated. Indeed, as Philo relates in *Opif*. 140 -141, later generations of humans are inferior to the first man as succeeding generations are further away from the original. Nonetheless, amongst contemporaries distinctions still exist. In *Gig*. 65 Philo deploys the metaphor of adulterating or debasing coinage with regard to the man of earth, who is alleged to have turned the mind away from reason and towards the lifeless nature of the flesh. Meanwhile, there is a qualitative distinction drawn between the man of earth and those who are men of heaven and men of God, but Philo does not appear to consider that they might belong to different generations.

4.4.2.2 *Conceiving of God and the existence of different degrees of purity of impression.*

Leg. iii. 96 states that human beings were modelled according to the image of God and so received the power and character of the model, whilst *Leg.* iii. 97 links the character impressed upon the human mind to the obtaining of a conception of God. It seems, therefore, both from Leg. iii. 96 f. and *Plant*. 18 that all human minds initially received an imprint of the divine image. The difference lies in the quality of the impression. Nevertheless, Philo indicates in *Sacr.* 139 that it is possible for the mind to undergo purification, since the ruling principle, subject to many changes, might assume different impressions. Indeed, in *Sacr*. 137 a contrast is drawn between impressions of a coin pure and approved by test and impressions of one that is base and adulterated. It is suggested, in this passage, not only that the mind might be purified but also that it might vacillate between base and pure impressions. In *Congr*. 159 Philo states that the truly Existent is the true coin, which is somewhat perplexing since in most passages the mind receives the impress of the image of God and not the impress of God himself. However, a reference to the Existent better suits Philo's purpose in this passage as his criticism focuses on those who fancy themselves to be true gods, thus forgetting him who is the true coin. It is interesting that Philo associates forgetfulness regarding the true God with the reference to the coin with which the mind is said, in other texts, to be stamped. It is not impossible therefore that

those in whom the impression is said to be debased or adulterated are to be understood as possessing at best a dim memory of the divine image which Philo, in several passages, portrays as a guide to God[553].

Even amongst those who possess a genuine imprint of the divine image there exists a hierarchy where conceptions of God are concerned. Indeed, in *Leg.* iii. 97- 100, Philo contrasts those who derive knowledge of the existence of God from observation of the natural world and its order[554], that is, by means of a shadow, and those who obtain a vision of the uncreated one by lifting their eyes above and beyond creation.

4.4.2.3 *Initiation in the greater mysteries*

Interestingly, the main distinction between Bezalel and Moses, the more perfect and purer mind, is that the latter has undergone initiation in the greater mysteries[555], so that it might be suggested that for Philo purification of the mind and the access to sharper memories of God might be achieved through initiation in the greater mysteries.

It is quite significant that those who base their reasoning on what is before their eyes perceive God, the Creator, from his shadow[556]. Philo contrasts these, in *Leg.* iii. 100, with that kind of mind, which, having been purified through initiation into the great mysteries[557], can now apprehend God from himself and know the (inferior) place of his image or shadow. The mind which obtains a clear vision of God directly from the first cause is also referred to in *Leg.* iii. 102. In *Leg.* iii. 100, it seems as though the more perfect mind has become so as a result of initiation in the mysteries, and is thus able to apprehend the first cause from a clear vision of God. In *Leg.* iii. 104, however, Philo refers to two different natures in terms which suggest that they have been created such, since he describes them as created, moulded and engraved or chiselled by God. Those who apprehend the creator from his works seem to be included as

[553] Cf. for instance *Somn*. i. 119; *Mut* 114.
[554] See also *Praem.* 43.
[555] *Leg.* iii. 100.
[556] *Leg.* iii. 99: "οἱ δὴ οὕτως ἐπιλογιζόμενο διὰ σκιᾶς τὸν θεόν καταλαμβάνουσι διὰ τῶν ἔργων τὸν τεχνίτην κατανοοῦντες " Philo refers to those who observe the well-constructed world around them (cf. *Leg*. iii. 98- 99)
[557] *Leg.* iii. 100.

possessing a genuine imprint of the image of God[558], so that it is likely that, whilst excellent character from birth is important, nonetheless cleansing of the mind and a purer imprint might be acquired in part through initiation into the greater mysteries.

It appears that receiving the impress of the powers or logos is sometimes to be understood as equivalent to the experience of a divine vision. Indeed, whilst in *Leg.* iii. 104 Philo concludes that both Moses and Bezalel represent natures stamped with genuine impressions of the divine image in *Plant.* 26- 27 as in *Leg.* iii. 100- 102, Philo expresses a distinction between Moses and Bezalel in terms of the language of sight and vision: He asserts that the supreme cause exhibits things, to some clearly and very distinctly, as though in unclouded sunshine, to others more dimly, as though in the shade. It is still uncertain, however, whether initiation into the great mysteries enables the mind to be re-imprinted with the impress of the powers or the image of God, in other words, whether the great mysteries open the door to a heightened, visionary experience of the divine which enables a permanent memory of God to become imprinted upon the soul.

4.4.2.4 *The ascent of purified minds allows initiates to experience greater closeness to God and sometimes a vision of the first cause.*

It is not impossible that Philo understands the mind as being remoulded and re-imprinted with the image of God in the course of the ascent which takes place during initiation in the greater mysteries. This would entail that initiation in the mysteries allows one to recover something of the clarity of the first impression of the divine logos. Indeed, as pointed out above, *Sacr.* 139 indicates that according to Philo it is possible for the mind to undergo purification and so to obtain a more genuine imprint. Philo also contemplates the transformation and improvement of the mind in *Gig*. 62- 64, since Abram, the man of heaven, becomes Abraham, the man of God: the God of the Universe becomes in a special sense and by special grace, his own personal God[559]. Abraham's reasoning is not only chosen but also purified and it thus becomes God's companion. Although there is no mention in this passage of a greater closeness

[558] See the reference to Bezalel in *Leg. All.* iii. 95- 96.
[559] *Gig.* 64: "εἰ δ᾽ ὁ τοῦ κόσμου θεὸς καὶ μόνος ὢν θεὸς καὶ αὐτοῦ κατὰ χάριν ἐξαίρετον ἰδίᾳ θεός, ἐξ ἀνάγκης δήπου καὶ αὐτὸς θεοῦ. […]ἐξειλεγμένος […] καὶ κεκαθαρμένος".

to God through a recovered or clarified memory, it nevertheless hints that in the course of purification of the mind, a new, personal relationship with God is initiated. Moreover, this occurs, according to *Leg. All.* iii 84 as part of an ascent, since the Abraham soul mounts yet higher than that of Abram, who turns away from what is mortal, since it explores the deity and his nature. In this passage too, Philo stresses the soul's desire to improve itself. It is not impossible that this new relationship is what Philo envisages as the outcome of initiation into the great mystery. However, it is necessary to point out that this is the very relationship ascribed to the Jews, the suppliant race, in *Legat*. 3, although it might be worth bearing in mind the apologetic nature of that work and Philo's determination to portray the Jews, as an ethnic group, as being virtuous, whereas other works stress the insignificance of birth. Indeed, Birnbaum mentions that in *Legat*. Philo equates the one who sees God with the Jews and suggests that the Jewish way is superior even to that of philosophy. She concludes that this ought once more to be understood in the context of Philo's aim and audience, since in the context of the persecution of Jews, Philo wished to elicit sympathy and admiration on their behalf[560].

Philo believes that it is possible to purify the mind. In *Sacr.* 137- 139 the outcome of this purification is a more genuine imprint whilst in *Gig.* 64 purification leads to a new, personal relationship with the one God of the universe. Significantly, Philo seems implicitly to correlate the imprinting of the image of God upon the mind with the possibility to conceive of God. Indeed, *Leg.* i. 38 might be interpreted as a description of the manner in which a memory of God becomes imprinted upon the mind, while in *Leg.* i. 37 Philo explains that one may obtain a conception of God because God inbreathed the spirit into the mind of every human. Philo also depicts this inbreathing as God drawing the human mind up to himself in order to stamp it ('τυπόω') with the powers. Thus, Philo describes the manner in which the human mind is imprinted by God in terms of an ascent towards God, which results in the obtention of a conception of God[561]. Significantly, Philo specifies that the powers with which the mind is stamped are those which are within the scope of its

[560] Cf. Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism*, chapter 3.
[561] *Leg.* i. 38: "οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἀπετόλμησε τοσοῦτον ἀναδραμεῖν ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς, ὡς ἀντιλαβέσθαι θεοῦ φύσεως, εἰ μὴ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς ἀνέσπασεν αὐτὸν πρὸς ἑαυτόν".

understanding. Since Philo refers to "ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς" , this passage does confirm that all human minds are to some degree restricted in the extent to which they can receive the impress of the powers and so also in the extent to which they can conceive of God.

Though there is no explicit mention of the imprinting of the memory of God itself, the reference to God stamping the mind with the powers is reminiscent of the link between the memory of God and the mental image of the divine powers in *Cont.* 26. In this passage it is because they retain the memory of God that the Therapeutae picture nothing else in their dreams than the beauty of the divine powers. Furthermore, in *Leg*. iii. 97f. Philo concerns himself with the nature of the character impressed upon man. Significantly, Philo is also interested in this passage in discovering how we came to conceive of God, so that there appears to exist a relationship between the impression upon the human mind, the memory of God and the manner in which humans arrived at a conception of the divine.

The question now remains as to how Philo envisaged the imprinting of the mind. There are indications in Philo's works that being stamped with the divine image is the result of a perfected moulding of matter, so that the imprint represents the final stage in a journey towards perfection and closeness to the divine. In some passages, it appears that Philo distinguishes between the heavenly man[562] who is not moulded but stamped with the image of God and the earthly man, our ancestor, who was the moulded work of the artificer but not his offspring until God breathed into the earthlike mind and he became a living soul endowed with mind. It is clear that Philo only understands the earthly man as possessing a living soul once he has received the breath of God and so been stamped with the image of his creator. It seems that Philo envisaged this progression not only for human beings but also for the whole universe, since the universe is only stamped with the image of God and an ideal form, the divine logos, once it is perfected and has been shaped and moulded[563].

Since Philo does not consider most humans to be born perfect, it is likely that he envisages the final stage, during which the mind is re-imprinted with the divine

[562] Not the man of heaven mentioned in *Gig.* 60- 61, but the archetypal human mind.
[563] *Somn.* ii. 45.

image, as the apex of a journey towards perfection, in the course of which the passions are tamed and the senses are recognised as subordinate to the mind[564]. It is at that point that an ascent towards the intelligibles, and perhaps ultimately to God, is possible. Indeed, in one who has ignored passions both major and minor and is endowed with a perfect nature is permitted once a year to behold the sights which are forbidden to others[565]. Memory of instruction and knowledge is engendered in one who is thus struck by the ideal form of virtue, follows it and contemplates admiringly the most God-like beauty[566]. *Ebr.* 135- 137 might also be considered to hint at the notion of ascent since the nature which has ignored all passions and is able to perceive the intelligible form of virtue is described as possessing a winged and heavenly yearning for those forms of good which are incorporeal and imperishable[567]. Moreover, it appears that it is the imprint of the divine logos which enables humans to ascend towards the intelligible world and God. Thus, in *Somn.* i. 188 Philo describes the soul being summoned by means of, or through, the divine reason which is engraved in the mind[568]. This is the fragment of the divine which was breathed into the human soul by God and is, in fact, the human mind. Thus, the soul will ascend towards the intelligible world through the fragment of divine reason, sometimes equated by Philo with the νοητός κόσμος, which is carved into it: the ascent of the soul relies on an imprint of that towards which it ascends. That this is to be understood as a memory is suggested by Philo's depiction of memory as that which is impressed upon the mind or imprinted upon the soul[569].

Philo therefore envisages an ascent towards the intelligible world and God through the fragment or imprint of the divine logos upon the soul, which when purified, first through the mastering of the passions and further in the course of initiation into the greater mysteries, is able to contemplate God-like ideal forms and thus recover permanent memories. Interestingly, it is possible to link Philo's depictions of ascent

---

[564] This is referred to as the outcome of the mysteries of the lord, which enable the mind to apprehend God from his creation. It is not necessarily the case that all must undergo initiation into these 'lower mysteries' however.
[565] *Ebr*. 135- 136.
[566] *Ebr,* 137.
[567] *Ebr.* 136: " […] ἐξ ἁπάντων μόνῳ ὁ τῶν ἀσωμάτων καὶ ἀφθάρτων ἀγαθῶν πτηνὸς καὶ οὐράνιος ἔρως ἐνδιαιτᾶται."
[568] See also *Plant.* 21-22.
[569] Cf. *Deus* . 43.

with his understanding of purified minds as genuine coinage, that is, minds which possess a genuine or clear imprint of the image of God. Indeed, in *QE.* ii. 46 Philo envisages the calling above of Moses as a rebirth so that the prophet is pure mind and without a body, unlike the earth-born first moulded man. Accordingly, *Mut.* 208 designates Moses as "νοῦς ὁ καθαρώτατος"[570], which has been taught to think of holy things in a divine manner, and refers to him as an authentic coin, unlike the Sophists, who are base coinage.

4.4.2.5. *The mysteries and the purification of the mind*

Philo sometimes appears to hint at an ascent as part of initiation into the mysteries. in *Leg.* iii. 71 Philo refers to the mind which is being initiated into "τὰ τοῦ κυρίου μυστήρια", the mysteries of the Lord[571] as soaring aloft. One ought to caution that the term "μετεωροπολέω" can denote either haunting the air or express the slightly vaguer notion of busying oneself with higher things. In fact, from the references in *Leg. All.* iii. 83- 84 it appears that Philo exploited both connotations since the designation of Abram as "μετέωρος", lofty or high, as well as the reference to the mind rising up, "ἐπανιὼν" emphasise the literal sense of "μετεωροπολέω" in that passage and serve to reinforce the image of the soul ascending first of all to contemplate the universe and then further towards the Uncreate[572]. At the same time the notion that the mind busies itself with more lofty concerns is unmistakeable in Philo's depiction of the soul enquiring into the divine and its nature, because of its love for ineffable knowledge[573]. Thus, ascent of the soul is linked in Philo with a search for greater knowledge of the divine and its nature. Before this occurs, Philo clarifies that the mind must both govern the soul and soar away from mortal things[574]. In *Leg.* iii. 71 this is conveyed as the mind judging the body to be hostile. This soaring towards the divine does not necessarily follow an explicit account of the rejection of

[570] For another reference to Moses as pure mind cf. *Congr.*132.
[571] Not the higher mysteries.
[572] Cf. *Plant*. 22.
[573] *Leg.* iii. 84: "[…] ἐρευνᾷ τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὴν τούτου φύσιν δι᾽ ἔρωτα ἐπιστήμης ἄλεκτον".
[574] *Leg.* iii. 84: "ὁ γὰρ νοῦς, ὅταν μὴ δεσπότου τρόπον ἀπειλῇ τῇ ψυχῇ, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς πατὴρ ἄρχῃ, μὴ τὰ ἡδέα χαριζόμενος αὐτῇ, τὰ δὲ συμφέροντα καὶ ἀκούσῃ διδούς, καὶ ἐπίπαν τῶν ταπεινῶν καὶ ἀγόντων ἐπὶ τὰ θνητὰ ἀποστὰς μετεωροπολῇ […]"

matter, mortality or the body. Indeed, Melchizedek is portrayed as sufficiently detached from earthbound ways to conceive of God in a way which transcends not only matter but also all that is free from matter[575]. In this passage too, however, the mind is understood to be free from the lures of the earthly. The importance of abandoning the passions and all that it tied to matter, whether conceived of metaphorically or literally, is closely bound in Philo with the possibility of perceiving and accessing memories, since in *Sobr.* 5 Philo declares that those who are free from passions will be clear-eyed and aroused by memories. That the taming of the passions is associated with the lower mysteries suggests that it is in the higher mysteries that the mind becomes more perceptive and aroused by memories[576].

[575] *Leg.* iii. 82.
[576] *Sacr.* 62. Cf. *Deus* 61.

III: MOSES' VISIONARY EXPERIENCES IN VITA MOSIS

Vita Mosis, unlike many of Philo's other works, does not concern itself primarily with exegesis: rather, it is a retelling of the life of the author of the Pentateuch, addressed largely to a Gentile audience, or at least to one not well-acquainted with the Jewish scriptures: "τὸν βίον ἀναγράψαι διενοήθην, ἀνδρὸς τὰ πάντα μεγίστου καὶ τελειοτάτου, καὶ γνώριμον τοῖς ἀξίοις μὴ ἀγνοεῖν αὐτὸν ἀποφῆναι"[577]. The purpose is thus to make the life and character of Moses known to the outer world, from which his memory has been banished by the Greek authors. Indeed, Philo contrasts the fame of the Mosaic laws to the paucity of knowledge concerning Moses, which he attributes to Moses' rejection by Greek authors who envy him and who live under laws which oppose his[578]. It is remarkable that the rejection of the laws of Moses is not linked to ignorance concerning his ordinances, but rather to a concerted silence where his life is concerned. Here, it is relevant to note that biography, in the Greco-Roman world, often constituted a prelude to the exposition of particular philosophical doctrines. The life of the philosopher as well as his thoughts together formed part of his philosophy, and enabled readers to aspire to his example. In following this scheme, Philo therefore presents Moses as a philosopher on the Greco-Roman model, and so understands his place in Judaism as related to the position occupied by the founder of a philosophical school[579]. Given the great importance that Philo places upon Moses, as well as his presentation of Moses as an extraordinary human being endowed with an exceptionally virtuous and pious nature, an examination of the visionary episodes in the life of Moses will allow one to understand whether the limitations to which other human beings are subject always apply in the case of Moses and whether he therefore offers some hope to those who wish to follow his laws and his exemplary conduct. In basing this investigation primarily upon *Vita Mosis*, it is hoped that any progression which occurs in the nature of Moses' visions will be highlighted by the biographical presentation of the treatise.

---

577 *Mos.* i. 1.
578 *Mos.* i. 2.
579 Goodenough, E. R: *By Light, Light*, 181.

III.1 *CHAPTER 1: VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN DE VITA MOSIS BOOK I*

1.1 *Moses' First Vision*

The first vision is narrated so that the epiphany is revealed only gradually to the reader. Indeed, where the Septuagint follows the mention of Moses bringing the sheep to Mount Horeb with an immediate account of the vision of the angel of the Lord in *Exod*. iii. 2[580], Philo first mentions that Moses saw an extraordinary sight: "θέαμα ἐκπληκτικώτατον"[581] and proceeds with a description of the burning bush which initially mentions no divine figure: "βάτος ἦν, ἀκανθῶδές τι φυτὸν καὶ ἀσθενέστατον· οὗτος, οὐδενὸς πῦρ προσενεγκόντος ἐξαίφνης ἀνακαίεται [...] διέμενε σῷος, οὐ κατακαιόμενος, [...] ἀλλὰ τροφῇ χρώμενος τῷ πυρί"[582]. The marvellous sight here refers quite clearly to the spontaneous bursting into flame of the bush which nevertheless remains intact. It seems that this account is added to the biblical version largely to provide the framework upon which Philo builds his symbolic interpretation of the vision in *Mos*. i. 67. The epiphany described in *Mos*. i. 66 also enlarges upon the Septuagint version, and needs careful attention if one is to understand both the nature of the vision as well as its function in imparting greater knowledge to Moses.

Where the Septuagint announces that an angel of the Lord appeared to Moses out of the fire, Philo's account in *Mos.* i. 66 is not so immediately specific. Instead of the angel of the Lord, which according to the Septuagint Moses sees in the flames of the fire, Philo writes that there was in the midst of the burning bush a most beautiful form, "μορφή τις ἦν περικαλλεστάτη", a most godlike image, "θεοειδέστατον ἄγαλμα". This is a somewhat ambiguous description, as Philo usually employs the term μορφη to denote a physical or outward form, something of a material nature[583].

---

[580] *Exod*. 3. 2: "ὤφθη δὲ αὐτῷ ἄγγελος κυρίου ἐν φλογὶ πυρὸς ἐκ τοῦ βάτου καὶ ὁρᾷ ὅτι ὁ βάτος καίεται πυρί ὁ δὲ βάτος οὐ κατεκαίετο ".
[581] *Mos.* i. 65.
[582] *Mos.* i. 65.
[583] For instance, this is very clear in *Abr.* 147 where Philo contrasts the dispositions of the soul to the forms of bodies as subjects of investigation: "[…] ὅσοι τρόπους ψυχῆς ἐρευνῶσιν ἀλλ᾽ οὐ σωμάτων μορφάς". Moreover, in *Deus* 55, men who are attached to the soul as opposed to those who serve the body are content to

The phrase θεοειδέστατον ἄγαλμα is a more ambiguous and rare expression in Philo. Indeed, it only occurs in one other passage in the superlative, in *Opif.* 137 where it refers to the first man[584]. In this passage, Philo argues that the first man who existed as a compound of mind and body[585] was formed by God out of the purest of all material substances, so that a sacred shrine was being fashioned for the rational soul, which man was about to carry as a sacred image. It is the rational soul which Philo proceeds to characterise as "ἀγαλμάτων τὸ θεοειδέστατον". Because the passage describes the purpose of the pure material body to be that of carrying the rational soul as an image or statue, "ἀγαλματοφορήσειν", it appears irrefutable that the most divine image refers in this case to the rational soul rather than to the whole man. As Philo frequently refers to the soul as an intelligible, and sometimes to its rational part as an image of the image of God, the divine logos, it would appear that in *Mos.* i. 66, the figure in the midst of the flames is most likely to be perceptible to the mind only, belonging to the incorporeal and intelligible realm. If this is indeed the case, and the θεοειδέστατον ἄγαλμα in i. 66 designates an intelligible[586], then unlike even the most beautiful μορφη, it is not visible to the bodily eye. The use of the superlative might imply that there is only one most divine image, which can be identified as the rational soul of the first man in *Opif.* 137. Philo might even intend to set it apart from the minds of all other human beings, since in *Opif.* 140 he insists that the first man surpassed all other human beings in body and soul, since he was created by God, whereas our beginning is from humans. This might perhaps indicate that the image which Moses perceives in the fire is that of the first man. Indeed, even though Philo does refer to other divine images, such as those which exist in heaven, the

---

conceive God as existing and do not picture him with form ("[…] τὴν κατὰ τὸ εἶναι φαντασίαν μόνην ἐνεδέξαντο μὴ μορφώσαντες αὐτό").

[584] I leave aside the reference in *Somn.* ii. 223 to the Covenant as a divine or God-like image, "ἄγαλμα θεοειδὲς", which God will erect upon the soul of the just man.

[585] To be distinguished from the archetypal man. Philo understands Genesis i. 26 to refer to the creation of the ideal of man, that is, man as 'generic' as distinct from the creation of the particular first individual, Adam, whose creation is described, according to Philo, in Genesis ii.7. See Wedderburn, A. J. M: "Philo's 'Heavenly Man'" in *Novum Testamentum* XV*,* fasc. 4, esp. 312- 313.

[586] Philo does of course employ the term "ἄγαλμα" elsewhere to refer to statues or images, usually of gods, and in those cases, it is quite clear that he does not intend them to refer to intelligibles. See for instance *Mos.* i. 298, *Decal.* 7 and *Ebr.* 109. The understanding of the most divine image as an intelligible depends upon its identification with the rational soul of man.

stars[587], the only image which he characterises as the most divine is that of the first embodied man. Nevertheless, its designation as μορφη still remains problematic if one understands Moses' vision to be that of an intelligible.

A solution might present itself if one considers a comparison between the soul of the first man, which is carried in his material body and the heavenly bodies or stars, which Philo understands as spiritual and divine natures that dwell in bodies[588]. Although humans are unable with the bodily senses to perceive the divine nature of the stars, Philo very explicitly states that the stars are perceptible to the bodily eyes[589]. In fact, Philo even states that the divine natures which are not embodied as stars are incorporeal and visible to the mind[590]. Thus, like humans, stars are compound beings, made up of bodies amenable to sensory perception, and spiritual and divine natures that, like souls and other intelligibles, may be seen with the mind. Indeed, though the stars are characterised as having been created with regard to the intelligible light, and are established in heaven, the purest temple of corporeal being, they are nonetheless, like the first man to be created as a compound of body and soul, part of the sensory and material world. It is therefore not possible to exclude the notion that the supremely divine image which appeared to Moses in the fire was also part of the material universe, despite carrying the most divine image, a rational soul intelligible to the mind alone. One might surmise that Moses apprehended the figure of the first man, a body formed of purest matter, which like the heavenly bodies may be seen with the eyes of the body, and simultaneously perceived an intelligible soul. Indeed, Philo refers to the most divine image, which is not amenable to sensory perception, in apposition to his mention of the most beautiful form, implying that both phrases refer to the same object, perceived at once on a sensory and noetic level.

Having examined Philo's initial description of the vision, it is not entirely surprising to discover that he expands his account with the phrase: "τῶν ὁρατῶν ἐμφερὴς οὐδενι". This might simply imply that what is in the midst of the flames does not resemble anything visible, rather than that it was not amenable to sight. Indeed, this is

[587] For instance in *Abr.* 159.
[588] *Opif.* 144.
[589] *Opif.* 55.
[590] *Opif.* 144.

quite plausibly explained by understanding the figure to be that of the first man, whose body was fashioned from the purest substance, and whose soul is characterised as being rational. This first man was nevertheless understood by Philo to belong to the material world[591], so that the vision which Moses experiences here is one which, quite unusually, might involve the eyes of the body rather than the mind alone. This would make far more sense of the description of the object of Moses' vision as a "μορφη".

Indeed, Philo's depiction of the most beautiful form as refulgent with a light brighter than the light of fire[592] would appear to confirm such an interpretation. This seems to imply that the form was illuminated by the light which descends from the heavenly bodies. Indeed, in *Abr.* 157, Philo describes the twofold nature of light, which shines upon sight (understood as the greatest of the bodily senses, since God made light to shine upon sight alone). One of these is the effulgence of the fire of common use, which is perishable, whilst the other light is brought to us from heaven above, where the stars pour forth their rays as from perennial fountains and is imperishable and unquenchable. Crucially, it is through both of these kinds of light, of very different origin, that sight strikes upon visible objects so as to apprehend them. It appears that the distinction drawn by Philo in *Mos.* 66 is that between the light which comes from the merely useful fire, which is destructive[593], and the light of the heavenly stars which is at the origin of philosophical speculation[594]. Therefore, the light with which the divine image is refulgent is probably the light which is emitted by the heavenly bodies, and so cannot be regarded as incorporeal or intelligible, though it undoubtedly enables a heightened use of bodily sight. The verb ἀπαστράπτω, meaning 'to flash forth' is a cognate of ἀστραπή ,'lightning', which might confirm that one is to understand the light which Moses perceived as descending from heaven. It therefore appears that the light of the heavenly bodies, which is at the origin of philosophical speculation, illuminates the material form as well as the most divine image of the first man so that Moses can perceive him. Neither the light which descends from the heavens, nor the first man whose pure material body carries the most divine image are part of the intelligible world. They belong rather to the most pure and holy sphere of

[591] *Opif.* 137.
[592] *Opif.* 66: "φῶς αὐγοειδέστερον τοῦ πυρὸς ἀπαστράπτουσα".
[593] See *Rerum* 136.
[594] This distinction is Stoic in origin, see *SVF* i. 120 and Cicero, *Natura Deorum* ii. 40 for close comparisons with Philo's understanding of the two types of fire.

the sensory world, the heaven in the first case, and in the second, the purest body. At the same time, the rational soul of the first man, the "ἀγαλμάτων τὸ θεοειδέστατον" is part of the intelligible world and, if Moses apprehends it, one must assume that it is with the eyes of the soul.

It appears very likely that the significance of Moses' seeing the most divine image is that it represents the culmination of one of the lesser mysteries, that is, perceiving the human soul with the eye of the mind. This would fit particularly well into the context of Philo's description of Moses' first vision, since Moses comes across the burning bush whilst he is shepherding his flock. Significantly, in *Mos.* i. 62, Philo writes that Moses' life as a shepherd was a prelude to his kingly role, since initiation into the lesser mysteries must precede initiation in the greater. Furthermore, in *Decal.* 60, Philo presents the vision of the human soul, which he characterises as "τὸ ἄγαλμα τὸ πάντων ἱεροπρεπέστατον", as the precursor to a conception of the uncreated and eternal God. The possibility that Moses might at once perceive the existence of the rational soul whilst also seeing the material body is not problematic, since, one might surmise, this parallels the notion that an incorporeal and invisible God rules the material universe[595].

The second half of *Mos.* i. 66 concerns only the incorporeal, intelligible aspect of Moses' vision, since Philo refers to a vision of an angel or image of the Existent, imperceptible to the senses. Philo appears to emphasise the functional aspect of Moses' vision, exhorting the reader to call it an angel- " καλείσθω δὲ ἄγγελος "- whilst not neglecting to mention the nature of the figure in the midst of the bush, stating that it might be supposed that this was the image of the Existent[596]. The only other passage in which Philo mentions an "εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος" is *Spec.* i. 81, where the expression refers to the soul of the priest which is fashioned "κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος". This is immediately followed by a section, which makes very clear that εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος denotes the image of God[597]: "λόγος δ' ἐστὶν εἰκὼν θεοῦ". Philo's understanding of the nature of the figure in the bush relates primarily to its function with regard to the visionary experience: it announced future events: "ὅτι

[595] Cf. *Decal*. 60.
[596] *Mos.* i. 66: "ἦν ἄν τις ὑπετόπησεν εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος εἶναι".

σχεδὸν τὰ μέλλοντα γενήσεσθαι διήγγελλε". At the same time, this appellation coincides with the Septuagint which states that Moses saw an "ἄγγελος κυρίου". *Mos.* i. 67, where Philo interprets the vision symbolically, contains no indication that the identity of the figure might be ambiguous; it is plainly stated that it was an angel. In fact, the reference to the figure as εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος is interchangeable with its designation as ἄγγελος. Indeed, *Conf.* 146 allows us to shed some light upon the identity of the figure which appeared in the midst of the burning bush. Indeed, this passage identifies the Logos as the eldest and chief angel, and further specifies that the Logos is also called the man according to God's image[598], thereby confirming that Moses experiences a vision of the divine Logos. *Leg.* iii. 177 further confirms that the divine Logos may be referred to as an angel. In this passage however, the Logos is sometimes depicted as unique, in comparison with the several angels, although it performs the same functions as them. In *Cher.* 3, the identification of the Logos as an angel is even clearer, so that it is evident that for Philo, the Logos can be designated as an angel[599], though not all angels are to be identified with the divine Logos. This does not preclude his also perceiving the form of the first man which carries the image of the Logos. Like the θεοειδέστατον ἄγαλμα, the phrase "εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος" designates an entity which is imperceptible to the senses, and can be seen by the mind or the soul alone. It is therefore likely that Philo relates a vision which Moses perceives on two different levels. He is able to see the figure, or μορφή of the pure and most beautiful material body of the first man; but the vision is also the manifestation of a most godlike image, the image of God, which Philo believed could be perceived only with the eye of the soul[600]. This understanding of Moses' first vision is quite unlike that of Bockmuehl[601] who assumes that Philo depicts Moses as seeing manifested "a visible form which could easily be taken to be that of God"[602]. This leads him to speculate, quite wrongly given the utter lack of any

[598] In *Opif.* 69 (cf. *Opif.* 25, 65- 88), the human being created according to God's image is the archetype of the human mind, not to be confused with the first man. The man according to God's image is therefore the archetype of the rational soul of the first man.
[599] *Cher.* 3: "ἀγγέλου, ὅς ἐστι θεῖος λόγος".
[600] See discussion below on *Mos.* i. 158 and *Mut.* 7. Whether Philo believed that Moses was able at this stage to perceive the εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος is not entirely clear.
[601] Bockmuehl, M., "'The Form of God' (Phil. ii. 6). Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism." in *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1997), 1- 23.
[602] Bockmuehl, M., "The Form of God", 15.

reference to ascent in this passage, that "talk of God's form could belong to the context of Jewish mystical thought about the ascent to behold the heavenly appearance of God"[603]. The significance of this vision is that one is not able to perceive everything with the bodily eyes, but that there exist certain intelligibles which might only be seen by the eye of the soul. The rational human soul is one such intelligible, which rules over the senses and the body, and by apprehending it, one might grasp that there is a God who presides in analogous fashion over the material and sensory world.

Following the announcement that the angel employed the miracle of sight to herald future events[604] Philo offers his own interpretation of the vision in symbolic terms, leaving us to assume that Moses arrived at the same understanding, though he is not interested in emphasising this point. Philo not only devotes three verses to this interpretation but also emphasises its symbolic aspect: "σύμβολον γὰρ ὁ μὲν καιόμενος βάτος τῶν ἀδικουμένων, τὸ᾽ φλέγον πῦρ τῶν ἀδικούντων"[605]. The angel itself becomes, in the interpretative passage, the providence of God: "ὁ᾽ ἄγγελος προνοίας τῆς ἐκ θεοῦ […]"[606]. So, from "εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος εἶναι", to ἄγγελος, to a mere symbol of divine providence: the vision which Moses beholds in the wilderness, which Philo exhorted his readers to designate in a purely functional manner as 'ἄγγελος', since the divine is inaccessible to the physical eye, is then interpreted by Philo as being a tool of divine revelation, a mere sign from heaven. This is some way from the mystical and ambiguous language by which Philo seeks to describe the indescribable and hints at the identity of the angel in *Mos.* i. 66. One ought therefore to recognise that, for Philo, even Moses must be gradually initiated into the mysteries, since his vision teaches him of the existence of God by analogy with the human soul, which is also invisible to the eye of the body, rather than through a manifestation of the Powers or the divine Logos. It is nonetheless a direct sign of providence from God, and a direct and awesome revelation of the existence of a rational soul in humans: the figure is at once the thing revealed and a symbol of

603 Idem.
604 *Mos.* I. 66.
605 *Mos.* I. 67.
606 *Mos.* I. 67.

God's care for human beings to whom he makes himself known gradually, according to their capacities to receive revelation.

Whilst the angel in biblical texts, certainly by the Greco-Roman period, was understood to be messenger of God[607], Philo subverts the usual trope and turns the angel into a component of the message. Where the Septuagint portrays the episode of the burning bush as a miracle which underlines divine power and functions as a prelude to divine revelation, Philo depicts it as a revelation itself, although it also features as a prelude to greater visions. In addition to Moses' apprehension of the rational soul (which is not explicitly referred to in Philo's account, but may be inferred from the appearance of the most divine image), and its significance as revealing the existence of a God, Philo interprets the vision of the burning bush as mediating truths concerning the future. The manner in which future events are heralded by the angel is significant. Indeed, Philo writes of the angel that, with a silence clearer than speech, it heralded the future through the appearance, vision, or sight (ὄψις) which it exhibited: "ὅτι σχεδὸν τὰ μέλλοντα γενήσεσθαι διήγγελλε τρανοτέρᾳ φωνῆς ἡσυχίᾳ διὰ τῆς μεγαλουργηθείσης ὄψεως[608]". Two notable features of Philo's account merit further exploration.

First of all, the mention of sight as a greater means of transmitting revelation is to be regarded as an example of Philo's high estimation of the sense of sight, which he values above hearing. Indeed, Philo understands the words of God to the Israelites at Sinai as having been seen rather than heard. Nonetheless, this is an unusual demonstration of the superiority of sight over hearing, since where the revelations at Sinai are concerned, Philo understands the words of God to be intelligibles, whereas in this context, there is no explicit indication that the burning bush, interpreted symbolically, is to be understood as part of the intelligible world. Thus, akin to the symbolic visions of the Book of Daniel, where interpretation of the visual revelation is required in order that any knowledge of the future might be yielded, the vision of the burning bush is assumed to be redolent of symbolic meaning, and so also requires interpretation. In the latter case, however, there is no indication that Moses

---

607 Mach, Michael, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit*,Tübingen, 1992.

608 *Mos.* i. 66.

experienced any difficulty in grasping the symbolic meaning of the visible signs, and the immediacy of Philo's interpretative passage appears to vouch for the contrary. In fact, throughout the interpretation, Philo makes no mention of Moses' reaction to the vision; furthermore, in verse 69 the use of the present tense appears to indicate that Philo is referring to the miracle of the burning bush as a sign for his contemporaries, rather than as a revelation to Moses: "τοῦθ᾽ ἅπαν ὑπογραφή τίς ἐστι τῆς ἐθνικῆς ὑποθέσεως". Nonetheless, the opening of verse 71 makes very clear that Moses came to the same conclusions, and that the miracle and its revelatory force were initially directed at the prophet: "τὸ τεράστιον τοῦτο καὶ τεθαυματουργημένον δείξας ὁ θεὸς τῷ Μωυσεῖ, παραίνεσιν ἐναργεστάτην τῶν μελλόντων ἀποτελεῖσθαι". This passage also renders the visual force of Moses' experience, since Philo here emphasises that God had shown ("δείξας") the miraculous portents and wonders to Moses, and that the exhortation concerning future events was rendered most visible ("ἐναργεστάτην").

The second remarkable feature in Philo's account is the notion that the vision revealed truths concerning future events. In *Somn*. i. 181, Philo mentions that it is an attribute of God to foretell what is to happen, though there is no mention as to whether or not he employs an intermediary in so doing. A further interesting question is whether the revelations of future events are to be regarded as a result of Moses' faith in God. Indeed, in *QG.* iii. 58, Philo remarks that the divine oracle announcing Isaac's future birth occurs as a result of Abraham's remarkable faith. There is no explicit mention of Moses' faith in the account of his first vision, nevertheless, in *Mos.* i. 47 Philo mentions that Moses, having fled from Egypt, was beseeching God to save the oppressed Hebrews and that God, approving of his spirit, listened to his prayers. Thus, the astonishing sight which appears at i. 65 and the unfolding revelation might well be the first of many divine interventions on behalf of Moses and his people. Despite the mention of Moses beseeching God in i. 47, it cannot be denied that Philo barely mentions any statements of belief in, or reliance upon God before the first vision. Instead he prefers to emphasise that Moses trained his soul[609] and followed its impulses rather than those of the body. This, I argue, is because the first visionary experience represents the moment at which Moses becomes fully aware not only that

[609] *Mos.* i. 25- 29 and 50

there is a rational soul which must rule over the body but also that there exists a God who rules over the universe. This is what renders him more receptive to accepting revelations concerning future events as emanating, through the medium of the angel, from God. That the revelation is indeed from God is apparent from *Mos.* i. 71, where Philo writes that it was God who had shown marvellous portents and wonders to Moses.

Philo reports that, having given Moses visible warning of future events, God begins to urge him through oracles: "καὶ διὰ χρησμῶν […] προτρέπειν αὐτὸν"[610]. Here Philo embeds a direct message from God within the larger framework of Moses' vision of the burning bush. Thus, Moses first experiences revelations through a vision, which in part employs symbolic elements, considered to be clearer than speech because they appear as visual images[611], before then listening to divine oracles. These oracles are most effective in imparting knowledge to Moses not only of future earthly matters, as in verse 73 where God teaches Moses that the Pharaoh who persecuted him is dead and that the new king no longer remembers him, but also in passing to him truths concerning the divine. Indeed, following the biblical account where Moses asks God to reveal his name to him[612], in verses 75 and 76 Philo reproduces the biblical answers so that, through questioning God and receiving a divine reply, Moses becomes the first to learn God's name. Philo does add to the Septuagint here, since, while he faithfully reproduces the biblical "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν", opening the passage on the name of God with the following: "ὁ δὲ "τὸ μὲν πρῶτον λέγε" φησίν "αὐτοῖς, ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν [...]"", he qualifies this by stressing the didactic element of the passage. Indeed, the meaning of the revelation concerning the divine name is to enable Moses and his people to distinguish between that which is and that which is not[613]. Thus, Moses' newly acquired understanding concerning the divine name is to be passed on- so that, although he is the first to have been told this truth, he is not to keep it secret. A further lesson imparted through this divine revelation is that Moses and the Hebrews to whom he is to transmit the knowledge understand that no name

---

610 *Mos.* i. 71
611 *Mos.* i. 66.
612 *Exod*. iii. 13- 18.
613 *Mos.* i. 75: "ἵνα μαθόντες διαφορὰν ὄντος τε καὶ μὴ ὄντος".

can properly be used of God, to whom alone existence belongs[614]. The meaning of the slightly cryptic first part of the revelation, that the people must learn to distinguish between what is and what is not, is then revealed, as God refers to himself as one to whom existence alone belongs[615]. This is Philo's understanding of the biblical depiction of God as "ὁ ὤν". Here, Moses acquires for the first time valuable knowledge concerning the nature of God as being the only true Existent, though, as Philo clarifies throughout his many writings, this cannot be understood as a revelation of the essence of God, but is rather a heightened apprehension of his existence. There is a distinct hierarchy in the type of revelation which God gives to Moses in the oracles: teaching concerning the name might yield truths concerning both what God is and what he isn't, whilst the revelation that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is for those who in their natural weakness seek some title to use: "ἐὰν δ' ἀσθενέστεροι τὰς φύσεις ὄντες ἐπιζητῶσι πρόσρησιν". This emphasis is absent from *Exod*. iii, where the first words spoken by God to Moses in *Exod*. iii. 6 were: "καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεὸς τοῦ πατρός σου θεὸς Αβρααμ καὶ θεὸς Ισαακ καὶ θεὸς Ιακωβ"; these are repeated in the course of this vision in *Exod*. iii. 15, 16 and iv. 5.

There follows a still lesser teaching during Moses' vision, where God no longer passes on the spoken word through Moses, but teaches him to perform signs which will compel those who persist in unbelief: If they still disbelieve, three signs which no man has ever before seen or heard of will be sufficient to convert them. In *Mos.* i. 77-81 not only does God show the two first signs to Moses, but he teaches them to him directly as part of the visionary experience, which is a motif unparalleled in the known Jewish literature of this period. While Philo is faithful to the text of *Exod*, he does, once more, emphasise the didactic element in Moses' interaction with God: "ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὑπὸ μόνου μόνος ἐπαιδεύετο, ὡς παρὰ διδασκάλῳ γνώριμος"[616].

---

614 *Mos.* i. 75: "προσαναδιδαχθῶσιν ὡς οὐδὲν ὄνομα τὸ παράπαν ἐπ' ἐμοῦ κυριολογεῖται".
615 *Mos.* i. 75: "[…] ᾧ μόνῳ πρόσεστι τὸ εἶναι".
616 *Mos.* i. 80.

Thus, in the course of Moses' vision, Philo moves from a tentative and brief presentation of the vision of an intelligible, more precisely, this vision might be that of the first rational human soul, image of the image of God, embodied in pure matter, to a man who is taught signs in order to perform them in front of sceptics. An intimation that Moses is able immediately to interpret the vision symbolically and gain significant knowledge of earthly realities demonstrates a subversion of the usual notion in biblical visions of a symbolic vision as one which is difficult to interpret, whilst retaining the normative content of such revelations, which tend to deal more with terrestrial happenings than divine truths. Indeed, the revelations concerning the name, and even the nature of God, as both Existent and essentially unknowable are imparted to Moses in an auditory message, in oracles, which God spoke to him. There is no indication in this passage that one is to understand anything other than that Moses heard the voice of God, despite Philo's other writings concerning the words of God being perceived with the eye of the soul, rather than with the ears. The signs meanwhile are included by Philo as part of the teaching which Moses receives through oracles spoken by God, though they are neither symbolic nor revealing in any other way; rather, they are intended to inspire fear and awe in those who are not able to be converted through the previous teachings. Not only does Philo intimate that Moses understands both the symbolic interpretation and the teachings through oracles, he reinterprets the biblical text, so that instead of Moses being reluctant to carry out the task to which the Lord has assigned him[617], Philo emphasises that his rejection of the mission was the result of his humility, magnified since his divine encounter[618]. Thus, according to Philo, Moses considered that human eloquence compared to God's was dumbness[619]. Philo thus balances Moses' assertion that he lacks eloquence with his consideration of his position as a mere man whose speech cannot compare to God's, thus diminishing any biblical notion of Moses' lack of perfection. Furthermore, Philo underlines that, as a result of his first visionary experience Moses has grown in faith, since before beginning a retelling of Moses' attempt to refuse his mission, Philo carefully insists that he does believe: "πιστεύων"[620]. Unlike in the

[617] *Exod*. iv. 10- 14.
[618] *Mos.* i. 83: "ἰσχνόφωνον καὶ βραδύγλωσσον, οὐκ εὔλογον, αὐτὸν εἶναι φάσκων καὶ μάλιστ᾽ ἀφ᾽ οὗ λέγοντος ἤκουε θεοῦ".
[619] *Mos.* i. 83: "νομίσας γὰρ τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην λογιότητα κατὰ σύγκρισιν τῆς θείας ἀφωνίαν εἶναι".
[620] *Mos.* i. 83.

biblical account, there is thus no anger on God's part, on the contrary, God approves of Moses' modesty: "ὁ δ᾽ ἀποδεξάμενος αὐτὸν τῆς αἰδοῦς". Moses has advanced not only in knowledge through this vision, but also in virtue.

1.2. *Moses' second vision*

1.2.1 Moses' titles and relationship to God

The second vision that Philo narrates in *De Vita Mosis* is a retelling of *Exod*. xx. 21. The brief passage in which the visionary experience is recounted begins with the mention of Moses bearing the title of god and king of the whole nation, "ὠνομάσθη γὰρ ὅλου τοῦ ἔθνους θεὸς[621] καὶ βασιλεύς". This is in apposition with the statement that Moses entered the darkness where God was, "εἴς τε τὸν γνόφον, ἔνθα ἦν ὁ θεός, εἰσελθεῖν". Both the bestowing of the titles and the epiphany[622] are related to his partnership with God: "τῆς πρὸς τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων καὶ ποιητὴν κοινωνίας". This is also the case in Philo's reference to *Exod*. xxiv. 2 in *QE*. ii. 29. In this passage, the biblical verse "Moses alone shall come near to God and they shall not come near" is taken by Philo to refer to the divine inspiration of the prophetic mind, filled with God, which alone is "said to come near God in a kind of family relation"[623]. It seems in *QE*. ii. 29 that Philo also has in mind the death of Moses, who he describes in *Mos*. ii. 288 as having been summoned to the Father, who resolved his twofold nature of body and soul into one[624]. In *QE*. ii 29 Philo extrapolates this experience to all exceptional prophetic minds, who, abandoning all mortal kinds, become like the monad[625] and so become kin to God and truly divine. In

[621] Cf. *Exod*. vii. 1. Nowhere in the Septuagint is Moses referred to as "τοῦ ἔθνους θεὸς". Although for use of this expression in other contexts see for instance 2 *Chron*. xxxii. 15.
[622] I use the term in its broad sense of "manifestation of a god".
[623] *QE* ii 29.
[624] *Mos*. ii. 288.
[625] Philo explains in *Gig*. 52 that this comes about because when, without speech, but in the soul alone we contemplate the Existent, there is perfect stability because such contemplation is based upon the Indivisible Unity. Philo seems to consider that if the soul is concerned only with thoughts of the Existent and since, furthermore, the Existent is one and stable, the unity of God will somehow suffuse the mind of the contemplative, rendering him akin to the monad itself. Cf. *Mut*. 31- 34; 38- 39.

Mos. i. 158, Philo does not explicitly refer to any such transformation of Moses, nor does he mention that Moses has abandoned his body. Nevertheless, the account of Moses' friendship with God, followed by the bestowal of a divine title upon Moses and his entering the darkness where God was, suggest that Philo considered Moses to have attained a heightened, to some extent divine, status before even experiencing the second vision at Sinai (*Exod*. xxiv. 18[626]) or the ascent to God at the end of his earthly life[627]. Indeed, according to Goodenough it is as a result of the abandoning of the body that Philo believed Moses able to enter into the invisible region, into the darkness where God was. He cites *QE*. ii. 27f. which highlights that nothing but the pure intellect in man can go on to the vision[628]. Furthermore, in *Gig*. 54, Philo suggests that Moses only began to worship God and enter the darkness after having abandoned all bodily things. This, he argues, is because the divine spirit[629] aids only those who have disrobed themselves of all created things. It is only once divested of bodily concerns and mere opinions that the mind, unhampered and naked, will come to God. This passage, coming after Philo's statement that contemplation is based on the indivisible unity, enables one to grasp the nature of the spiritual ascent towards God, and the nature of Moses' encounter with the divine: kinship and a vision of God are based on the notion that the mind of the seer will be filled with God, this will only occur once the mind of the prophet has abandoned all material concerns and tamed the passions[630].

Thus, in *Mos.* i. 158, Moses' beholding of what is hidden from the sight of mortal nature can be understood to result from his closeness to God[631] through the abjuration of worldly wealth. This is echoed by a progression in the text from a depiction of the relationship between God and Moses in terms of physical or material aspects, where God gives Moses the wealth of the whole earth and sea and rivers (i. 155), to what appears to be a mystical union with God in i. 158. Interestingly, this development in

---

[626] Philo refers to this vision in *Mos.* ii. 70.
[627] *Mos.* ii. 288.
[628] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 213- 214.
[629] In *QG* ii. 59 Philo explains that the divine spirit is the essence of the mind (logikon).
[630] Cf. *Praem.* 54 where Moses eschewing of blind wealth is connected with his embracing of that which has eyes to see and is followed by Philo's statement that all Moses claimed to own was to have the portion of God as his own natural possession.
[631] Cf. *Mos.* i. 155- 156.

the relationship between Moses and God appears to be paralleled by the evolution of the titles ascribed to God. In i. 157 Philo refers to God as "ὁ θεὸς". As Williamson points out, Philo specifies that he uses the article when referring to the Existent, to distinguish the transcendent Existent, the God who is One, from his Logos[632]. In this context, Philo stresses that, although the prophet may be called a friend of God[633], he possesses nothing, whilst God possesses all things. However, in i. 158, before he enters into the darkness Moses is said to be in partnership with "τὸν πατέρα τῶν ὅλων καὶ ποιητὴν"[634]. These titles are generally reserved by Philo for the reaching out of the Deity into the world of material things, since both refer to a relationship, the first with humanity, the second with the world. Indeed, in *Mut.* 27- 28 Philo points to a distinction between how God is and how he may be spoken of in some circumstances. He explains that the words "ἐγώ εἰμι θεὸς σὸς"[635] are used by license of language, because the Existent is not relative. Rather, it is the Potencies which he has projected into creation which are in some sense spoken of as relative. This demonstrates that Philo, when ascribing to God titles which are descriptive of a relationship, refers only to certain aspects of His being. In *Mos.* i. 158 it is however somewhat difficult to determine whether the reference to God as Father and Maker ought to be understood as a reference to the Powers of the Existent, that is, to God in extension, or whether Philo means to associate Moses more directly with God in his essential, transcendent, nature. Indeed, the designation "ποιητής" usually denotes the creative power, which in *Mut*. 29 is understood to be begotten by the Father, who must therefore be identified as the Existent, the source of the Powers and Logos through which he reaches towards human beings. In *Mut* 29f., the Father therefore represents a more transcendent sphere of the divine than does the creative Power. However, in *Mos.* i. 158 both designations appear to be on the same level. It is therefore difficult to determine whether Philo regarded Moses as akin to the Existent, God as to his essence, or to his Powers, God as he might be perceived by mortals. Nonetheless, from the use of the title of "ὁ τῶν ὅλων πατὴρ" in many of Philo's other works it is most plausible to regard this as a reference to the Existent. Indeed, in

---

[632] Williamson, R: *Philo*, 123- 124; cf *Somn*. i. 227- 130.
[633] *Exod*. xxxiii. 11: "καὶ ἐλάλησεν κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν ἐνώπιος ἐνωπίῳ ὡς εἴ τις λαλήσει πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτοῦ φίλον ".
[634] Cf. Plato *Tim*. 30a.
[635] *Gen.* xvii. 1.

QG. ii. 62, Philo contrasts "the most high One and Father of the universe" with the "second god, who is his Logos". The point of the verse is to explain that the rational part of the human soul was formed as an impression by the divine Logos, since the pre-Logos God, "ὁ πρὸ τοῦ λόγου θεὸς", is superior to every rational nature. The Greek fragment concludes (more emphatically than does the Armenian) that nothing which comes into being can rightfully bear the likeness of He who is above the Logos. *Conf*. 63 meanwhile specifies that the Father of the universe is also father of the Logos. Another passage which clearly implies that the designation "Father of the universe" is intended to refer to the transcendent Existent is *Migr*. 195, where following Philo's insistence that God, the mind of the universe, "ὁ τῶν ὅλων νοῦς", abides outside all material things[636], he maintains hope that once the mind has abandoned bodily concerns and come to know itself it might embark upon the quest to discern the Father of the universe. Though Philo clearly intends to refer to God as transcendent here he is nonetheless not unwilling to entertain hope that he might still be approached and known. It is therefore not to be discounted that, by Moses' partnership with the Father of the universe and creator, Philo means to imply that Moses is able to enjoy some direct relationship with the Existent. Indeed, the partnership with God and the affirmation of his own heightened status is perhaps a necessary requirement, since only one who has shed all material wealth, attachment to body and is living according to the mind alone, is sufficiently akin to God to be able to approach him.

1.2.2 Moses' Second Vision: entering the darkness

The report that Moses enters into the darkness, "εἴς τε τὸν γνόφον, ἔνθα ἦν ὁ θεός, εἰσελθεῖν λέγεται", is an almost verbatim quotation from the Septuagint[637]. Upon this does Philo's account of Moses' mystical experience hang, and so it is little surprise that he follows the Septuagint in designating God as "ὁ θεός". Nonetheless, Philo has elsewhere[638] insisted that this formulation designates the true God, so that it is likely that he means to imply that the Existent, rather than the divine Logos or any divine Power, is shrouded in darkness.

---

[636] *Migr*. 193.
[637] *Exod*. xx. 21: "Μωυσῆς δὲ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν γνόφον οὗ ἦν ὁ θεός".
[638] *Somn*. i. 227- 130

This is a strange formulation, given Philo's use of light and sun imagery to describe God. Indeed, he depicts God as the archetypal sun who extends his rays outwards, and is the source of knowledge. Despite the temptation to understand this Platonic imagery according to the meaning which Plato intends in the *Republic*, namely that the Good, as likened to the sun, is not only the source of truth and being, but also the object of knowledge, one ought to consider Philo's emphasis upon the blinding features of the sun. Thus, he overturns the Platonic analogy in order to support the thesis that it is impossible to know God by intellectual means[639]. Indeed, it appears that Philo deliberately subverts the Platonic notion that the Good can be an object of knowledge as part of his claim that the Jewish God is the true God and thus more remote from human apprehension. Thus, in *Praem.* 40 he argues that to God alone it is permitted to apprehend God, having asserted that: "ἐκεῖνο μὲν γάρ, ὃ καὶ ἀγαθοῦ κρεῖττον καὶ μονάδος πρεσβύτερον καὶ ἑνὸς εἰλικρινέστερον, ἀμήχανον ὑφ᾽ ἑτέρου θεωρεῖσθαί τινος". Although God is the source of a noetic light which apprehends the invisible, it is not possible to contemplate the essence of God, as the incorporeal rays would blind whoever approached too close[640].

In this context, it might be fruitful to begin by enquiring as to Philo's understanding of the role which the darkness plays in Moses' experience upon the Mount. Once this has been established I shall explore the meaning and scope of Moses' contemplating or conceiving, and proceed to discuss the possible nature of the unseen, invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence into which Moses entered. Thus, I shall attempt to determine both the boundaries within which Philo believed a human being could attain a vision and knowledge of God as well as the precise nature of Moses' encounter: did Moses experience God himself or merely one of his Powers and was he able to exceed mere perception and comprehend the divine?

1.2.2.1 *The imagery of darkness and light and the limits of Moses' capacity to perceive and apprehend in Mos. i. 158.*

---

[639] Cf. Calabi, F: *God's acting, man's acting*, 65.
[640] *Fug.* 164- 165.

One ought first of all to note that the mention of Moses entering the darkness where God was is largely due to Philo's interest in and reliance upon the text of *Exod.* xx. 21. Indeed, the only passages in which the term γνόφος is employed in Philo are those that refer to or interpret *Exod.* xx. 21 (*Post.* 14; *Gig.* 54; *Mut.* 7; *Mos.* i. 158). It is therefore indubitable that one of the reasons for the mention of Moses entering the darkness is Philo's adherence to the biblical text. Philo's generally negative appraisal of darkness[641], often associated with vice or ignorance, and variously termed "ζόφος" or "σκότος" accounts perhaps for his insistence in *Mos.* i. 158 that it symbolizes "τὴν ἀειδῆ καὶ ἀόρατον καὶ ἀσώματον τῶν ὄντων παραδειγματικὴν οὐσίαν". This hypothesis increases in probability upon consideration of Philo's association of "ζόφος" and "σκότος", which on several occasions he uses interchangeably, with the sensory, as opposed to the noetic, world. Indeed, in *Praem.* 36 he employs both "ζόφος" and "σκότος" and argues that he has found darkness to be associated with the mortal race[642]. Even ether and the whole heaven had the semblance of night because the whole realm of sense is without defining bounds and the indefinite is brother to the darkness[643]. Darkness for Philo therefore tends to connote the sensory, indefinite and mortal world, so that it is not surprising that he specifies in *Mos.* i. 158 that γνόφος refers to the invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence. It is also unlikely, in view of Philo's general attitude towards darkness, gloom or dusk that this interpretation was suggested to him by the term γνόφος and it is probable that his understanding of Moses' experience at Sinai as including contemplation of the invisible natures was not dependent upon any allegorical interpretation of the specific terminology. At the same time, his interpretation of the biblical term in a manner which differentiates it from his general understanding of darkness accounts perhaps for the specific use of γνόφος which he reserves for Moses' encounter at Sinai.

It might be that Philo understands God to have shrouded himself in darkness in order not to dazzle Moses, although it is important to observe that Philo in no way understands God to have been literally present in the darkness, since, referring to the

---

[641] See for instance *Praem.* 36; *Leg. All.* iii. 171; 46; *Virt.* 164.
[642] *Praem.* 36: "παρὰ τῷ θνητῷ γένει πολὺν ζόφον ἀνεύρισκε κατὰ γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ ἀέρα καὶ αἰθέρα·".
[643] *Praem.* 36: "πᾶσα ἡ αἰσθητὴ φύσις ἀόριστος· τὸ δ᾽ ἀόριστον ἀδελφὸν σκότους καὶ συγγενές".

very same *Exod*. xx. 21 text in *Post*. 14, he makes very clear that God is above both place and time[644]. It is nonetheless possible that underlying *Mos*. i. 158 is Philo's notion that God reveals himself to humans according to their own capacities, since were he to reveal himself *entirely* mortals would not be able to receive such a gift[645]. Furthermore, references to the impossibility of apprehending God are often accompanied by descriptions of the blinding rays which issue forth from God. Indeed, in *Spec*. i. 37- 38, Philo depicts the soul's eye as dizzied by the flashing of the rays[646] when it attempts to see all that there is in the heavens. Even less is man able to apprehend God[647], as Philo clarifies in *Spec*. i. 43, which follows an account of Moses' pleading to God for an understanding of what God is in his essence[648]. Philo has God explain that Moses' request cannot be granted to any who are brought into being by creation, and that not all that God can reveal is within a human's power to receive. That Moses himself is excluded from the possibility of knowledge concerning God's essence is all the more apparent from Philo's assertion that to those who are worthy of divine grace, God extends all the boons *which they are capable of receiving*[649], reinforcing the limitation which human nature rather than behaviour places upon the experience of divine revelation. Philo reiterates in *Spec*. i. 44 that the apprehension of God is more than human nature or even the whole heaven and universe could contain. Similarly, in *Fug*. 164- 165 interpreting the same passage, *Exod*. xxxiii. 13f., Philo specifically denies that Moses is able to apprehend God. He argues that while Moses was seeking knowledge regarding the nature of the creator of the whole universe, he prayed that he would learn from God himself what God is and asserts, employing solar imagery, that Moses was unsuccessful in his search: The man who wishes to set his gaze upon the supreme essence will be blinded by the rays that

---

644 "οὐ γὰρ ἐν γνόφῳ τὸ αἴτιον οὐδὲ συνόλως ἐν τόπῳ, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου".

645 *Spec*. i. 43- 44. Cf. Plato *Phaedrus* 247d, although in Plato the soul which is concerned to receive that which is appropriate to it is, like the mind of a god, nourished by insight (νοῦς) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) unmixed, suggesting that it is appropriate for such a soul to enjoy greater visions than Philo would allow.

646 Cf. *Opif.* 71 where the mind which seeks to see God is dazzled by rays of concentrated light.

647 See also *Praem.* 38 which refers to the vision of God afforded to Jacob-Israel (the man of practice).

648 *Spec*. i. 42. This passage constitutes Philo's understanding of *Exod.* xxxiii. 13f.

649 The same reservation is expressed in *Praem.* 39 where God grants the "man of practice" a vision of himself only insofar

beam forth around him, before he sees him. At the same time, it is God, presented as noetic sun, who is can dispel the darkness of ignorance or vice[650].

Philo takes care not to employ the term γνόφος in any context other than discussion of or reference to *Exod*. xx. 21 and carefully insists upon the precise interpretation of the word in terms of invisible and incorporeal essence of existing things, which evokes the notion of Platonic forms or ideas. This does not preclude the possibility that the biblical reference to darkness allowed Philo to hint at the limitations of human knowledge and explore the subtleties of the analogy between God and the sun: The Existent, as noetic sun, at once reveals the intelligible world whilst remaining invisible due to the blinding effect of the bright light whose beams allow one to perceive intelligibles.

1.2.2.2 Why Moses can neither apprehend nor look down upon God's essence

In *Fug*. 165, in a discourse concerning *Exod*. xxxiii. 23, Philo employs the term "καταθεάομαι", to look down upon or watch/ contemplate from above, and argues that this form of perception cannot be exercised by a human being towards the supreme essence. Similarly, Philo also denies the possibility that created beings might apprehend, καταλαμβάνω, the Existent. Thus, in *Mut*. 7, where Philo offers a somewhat more protracted interpretation of *Exod*. xxiv. 18, he rejects any notion that Moses did in fact approach comprehension of the Existent. Wolfson suggests that Philo found corroboration for the incomprehensibility of God in the verse "Moses went into the thick darkness where God was". Having pointed out Philo's understanding of the vision of God as a mental vision in *Mut.* 6, Wolfson draws attention to Philo's alleged insistence that "God cannot be apprehended by any man, not only as an object of sense but even as an object of intelligence"[651]. Wolfson then quotes *Mut*. 7: "for we have in us no organ by which we can envisage it, neither in sense for it is not perceptible by sense, nor yet in mind". However, Wolfson ignores here that the manuscript reads not "νοῦν" but "ἰσχὺν", so that the former term is an emendation. It is pointed out in the Loeb edition that Mangey translates "facultatem".

[650] For instance in *Virt*. 164.
[651] Wolfson, H. A, *Philo*, vol. ii, 119.

Although the emendation is not necessarily unwarranted, the manuscript evidence cannot support the weight of Wolfson's arguments, that Philo regarded God as utterly incomprehensible even to the mind and that this view could not have been derived from existing philosophical texts and principles. Given that throughout his works Philo often has recourse to scriptural verses in order to support his philosophical views, it is also unwarranted to suggest that he was "conscious of the fact that he was going beyond philosophy here" because he quotes *Exod* xx. 21. Wolfson further claims that when Philo argues that God "by his very nature cannot be seen […] he means that God cannot be comprehended by the mind"[652].

In fact, few commentators have paid close enough attention to Philo's emphasis in *Mut*. 7 which rests upon the notion of seeing God *clearly and plainly*, which is somewhat akin to apprehending the essence of the Existent[653]. It is important to note that this passage does not exclude the possibility that God might be *perceived* by Moses. Indeed, quite significantly for our understanding of *Mos*. i. 158, Philo writes in *Mut*. 7 that Moses really saw God because the scriptures tell us that he entered into the darkness. One must therefore conclude that to see God is differentiated from seeing God clearly or apprehending him. One ought to remember that for Philo to perceive that which is incorporeal is to perceive with the eye of the soul, the mind. This usually entails at least some degree of comprehension. This is why, I suggest, Philo feels the need to reject fiercely any notion that the mind was able to capture the essence of God, who cannot be contained but transcends all[654]. Indeed, the verb which he employs in *Mut*. 7, "καταλαμβάνω" carries connotations of "bringing down", and just as one may not gaze upon God from above, there is no way in which humans can bring God down to their level[655]: the Existent, Philo clarifies, is not an object. Furthermore, in *QE* ii. 45, Philo exploits the Septuagint version of Exod. xxiv. 16a: "καὶ κατέβη ἡ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ Σινα" in his argument that there can be no movements of place or of change in the deity: what is said to come down is not the essence of God but his glory. Philo then remarks that the notion of glory denotes

[652] Wolfson, H. A, *Philo* , vol. ii, 119.
[653] Cf. *Deus.* 29.
[654] *Post.* 14.
[655] As Williamson also notes, though he does not draw the same wider conclusions as I do, in *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo*, 88.

both the existence of the Powers[656] and that the belief in the divine glory was designed to produce in the mind an appearance of the coming of God who was not there. It is thus clear that God cannot descend. Indeed, Philo ends *QE* ii. 45 with an assurance that the divine place is truly inaccessible, for not even the holiest mind is able to ascend such a height to it so as to approach and touch it. Here it is once more likely that Philo excludes any possibility that the mind might truly comprehend God as to his essence, either through God's descending to a human level or by the mind's ascent to levels of comprehension reserved to the divine. Fundamentally, Philo does not seek in *Mut*. 7 to exclude perception of God from the realm of possibility, but rather rejects the notion that one might capture or grasp his very essence. This is to be compared with *Mos*. i. 158 where those things which are "ἀθέατα φύσει θνητῇ", invisible to mortal natures, can nonetheless be perceived and to some degree understood: "κατανοῶν". Here it is necessary to ask whether the contrast which Philo seeks to draw is between different modes of perception: (κατα)θεάομαι and κατανοέω, or whether he employs those two terms interchangeably, and seeks rather to draw attention to the fact that Moses is able to do what other mortals are not.

1.2.2.3 *κατανοέω and ἔννοια in the context of religious experience in Philo*

Philo employs forms of κατανοέω and ἔννοια in order to describe Moses' contemplation and consideration of the divine and invisible natures, which according to his interpretation, is what is meant by the biblical reference to the prophet entering the darkness where God was. It is difficult to determine to what extent the term denotes understanding of an object rather than mere observation. To establish whether it connotes certain, firm or clear conception is even more problematic. That the latter sense can attach to κατανοέω is clear from its use in Epicurus' (fragmentary) *De Rerum Natura* 138G where it refers to a doctrine that is to be grasped and hence accepted. In Plato *Tim*. 90d it is used to convey no more than mere perceiving and in *Tim*. 82c, observation or consideration. A slightly more nuanced usage can be detected in passages from some of Plato's other works[657], where it is used in the sense of observing well or understanding. None of these passages are particularly relevant

[656] The Catenae has: "ἡ [δόξα], τὴν παρουσίαν ἐμφαίνουσα τῶν δυνάμεων".
[657] Plato: *Sph*. 233a, 264b; *Grg*. 455b; *Phlb*. 48a.

to the issue which I am exploring in Philo; they illustrate the broad spectrum of meanings which can attach to a term which does not seem to have been employed in a particularly technical or precise manner. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why it appealed to Philo when he needed a word to describe some sort of perceptual and/ or cognitive experience which he did not wish to (or could not) circumscribe excessively. Philo even employs the term to refer to someone involuntarily conceiving of God[658]. Thus, even the most vile men might fleetingly conceive of God and such conceptions do not have to remain with them.

In *Det*. 91 Philo writes that only the rational part of our soul, the mind, can form or receive conceptions of God[659]. Indeed, in *Det*. 68 the mind is described as created by nature to be a vast treasury, easily to contain conceptions of all bodies and all things. It therefore appears likely that the activity of conceiving would be a function of the mind. This capacity to form conceptions is according to Philo directly connected to the creation of the rational part of the soul through the inbreathing of the divine spirit by the creator. Human ability to conceive of God arises, for Philo, from God reasoning that it would be to the advantage of the creature to obtain a conception of its creator and as a result breathing onto him from above of his own deity[660]. This divine inspiration refers to the creation of the rational soul of the embodied man[661], so it might be that, according to Philo, the conception of God is implanted in all human beings. One must recall, however, Philo's belief that the first man surpassed all other men, since he was created by God, whilst our beginning is from men. Further, Philo insists that the forms and faculties of all his descendents are ever feebler[662]. This, one surmises, includes their likeness to and imitation of the divine logos, which they resemble as a result of God's inbreathing of the divine spirit into the first man's face[663] and which enabled the creature to obtain a conception of the creator[664].

---

[658] *Gig.* 20
[659] *Det*. 91: "λογικόν, ὃ δὴ μόνον ἔννοιαν εἴληφε θεοῦ".
[660] *Det*. 86 and *Leg*. *All*. i. 37- 38.
[661] *Opif*. 139. See also *Plant*. 18- 19.
[662] *Opif*. 140. Cf. *Opif*. 136.
[663] *Opif*. 139, Philo describes the embodied man as formed as a likeness and imitation of God's word as a result of the inbreathing of the divine spirit and in *Plant*. 19 Philo writes that he who receives the divine spirit is made in the likeness of him who sends forth the spirit. In *Leg*. i. 37 Philo is very clear that it is the spirit ("τὸ πνεῦμα") which is inbreathed and in *Opif*. 135 Philo writes that the man formed as the result of

One is left to ponder whether, in entering into conceptions, however lofty, Moses experienced any great revelation or formed any conceptions which had not already been implanted into him or perceived visions unavailable to the commonest of mortals and perhaps more vivid to men of previous generations. In fact, Philo does acknowledge that some minds form false conceptions of God, since in *Sacr*. 101 Philo urges the mind to remove from its conceptions of God all notions of creation, mortality, changeability and profanity[665]. Furthermore, κατανοέω is not reserved for descriptions of the highest form of divine perception since in *Spec*. i. 33, 35 Philo writes that, just as one might conceive of the sculptor from his works, it is possible to conceive of God from the world. This is throughout Philo's writings represented as an inferior way of coming to believe in God[666]. The term cannot therefore be equated with καταθεάομαι, often reserved for clear perception and used of God looking down upon his creation.

It appears that some conceptions can be false whilst others are correct, thus allowing for the possibility that Moses might form conceptions exceeding those of other human beings. In fact, some conceptions seem to be elevated almost to the status of apprehensions. Indeed, in *Det*. 91 Philo comes rather close to equating conceiving God to apprehending him. In that passage he refers the receiving of conceptions to the mind and adds by way of explanation that the other parts of the soul do not enable comprehension or apprehension, of God or of any other object of the intellect[667]. It appears that Philo's phrasing, in creating a parallelism between the receiving of conceptions and apprehension might be somewhat lacking in caution. Indeed, in *Det*. 89 he is intent upon denying the possibility that the mind, despite its ardent desire, might apprehend the nature of God, beyond the fact that it is inapprehensible. In fact, it ought to be pointed out that in *Det*. 91 Philo does not refer to God as the Existent,

---

divine inbreathing is a composite of earthly substance and "πνεῦμα θεῖον". Thus, in Spec. iv. 123 the essence of the rational soul is the divine spirit.

664 *Det*. 86.

665 *Sacr*. 101: "ἀφελεῖς οὖν, ὦ ψυχή, πᾶν γενητὸν θνητὸν μεταβλητὸν βέβηλον ἀπὸ ἐννοίας τῆς περὶ θεοῦ […].".

666 See for instance, *Leg*. iii. 99, 102; *Somn*. i. 239.

667 *Det*. 91: "τοῖς γὰρ ἄλλοις μέρεσιν οὔτε θεὸν οὔτε τι νοητὸν καταλαβεῖν δυνάμεθα."

but to "θεός" without the article, which usually denotes for Philo the divine reason, and not the divine essence. Moreover, *Det*. 86 elucidates that κατανοέω is understood by Philo to represent an experience quite different from seeing God, and insists that God wrought for the body no soul capable of itself of seeing its maker, so that we must consider κατανοέω to refer to an activity remote from a clear vision of God as to his essence. It cannot be denied that Philo on occasion uses different terms, including κατανοέω, which refer to seeing, comprehending, apprehending and contemplating in a seemingly interchangeable manner. This is the case in Post. 168, where it is very plausible that this apparent lack of distinction between κατανοέω, γνωρίζω, ὁράω, [ἀντι]καταλαμβάνω[668] and θεάομαι is largely designed to emphasise that the truly Existent, "τὸ […] πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὂν", can in no way be an object of perception or of knowledge, no matter the finer distinctions which might be drawn between the different functions of the mind. Indeed, Philo's aim in this passage is to insist upon the impossibility of one of God's creatures even so much as conceiving (κατανοέω) of God's essence[669], since to say that God is visible is a excess of the language which refers in fact to his powers[670], who make evident God's existence rather than his essence from the things which he accomplishes[671]. The problem for Philo resides in the inadequacy of human language and its difficulty in expressing an experience which for him goes beyond mere philosophical speculation: arguments carried out in words cannot suffice to lead one to the knowledge that there is a God who is truly existent; one rather arrives at such knowledge through clear intuition. Nevertheless, Philo reiterates that one can perceive no more than God's subsistence, since he argues that "ἐγώ εἰμι ἴδετε"[672] means "τὴν ἐμὴν ὕπαρξιν θεάσασθε" and concludes that the human faculty of reason must content itself with learning that the cause of the universe is and subsists[673]. Thus, whilst Philo occasionally appears to use the vocabulary of perception and comprehension without

---

[668] Cf. *Tim. Loc.* 102d: "to take possession in turn". This is the only passage in which the term appears in Philo.
[669] *Post*. 168: "ἀμήχανον γὰρ τὸν κατὰ τὸ εἶναι θεὸν ὑπὸ γενέσεως τὸ παράπαν κατανοηθῆναι".
[670] *Post*. 168: "τὸ δ᾽ ὁρατὸν εἶναι τὸ ὂν οὐ κυριολογεῖται, κατάχρησις δ᾽ ἐστὶν ἐφ᾽ ἑκάστην αὐτοῦ τῶν δυνάμεων ἀναφερομένου".
[671] *Post*. 169.
[672] *Deut* xxxii. 39.
[673] *Post*. 168: "ἀνθρώπου γὰρ ἐξαρκεῖ λογισμῷ μέχρι τοῦ καταμαθεῖν ὅτι ἔστι τε καὶ ὑπάρχει τὸ τῶν ὅλων αἴτιον προελθεῖν".

much distinction, it is largely to emphasise the impossibility of any vision or understanding of God's essential nature[674] or in the context of an inferior perception of God, such as in *Leg*. iii. 99 where he uses καταλαμβάνω and κατανοέω in parallelism in order to refer to those who arrive at an apprehension or conception of God through his works[675]. *Det*. 86 renders very clear that the term κατανοέω does not convey the same extent of perceptual experience as does ὁράω. It is also unlikely that Philo employs it to refer to events whose epistemological depth reaches that of apprehending the divine essence, since to those unattainable visions he prefers to apply the term καταλαμβάνω. Significantly, for Philo, καταλαμβάνω and ὁράω are somewhat related terms[676] and he describes the eye of the soul as apprehending in the intelligible world in the same manner as does the eye of the body in the sensible universe.

It seems significant therefore that that which distinguishes true from false conceptions is that the former seem to arise in the context of divine inspiration. Indeed, Philo mentions in *Virt*. 214 that it was the conception that there was a one, primal, uncreated maker of all, as well as divine inspiration, that induced Abraham to leave his native country and its polytheism[677]. Furthermore, in *Leg*. i. 37f. Philo writes that conceptions of God (as Existent, since Philo refers to ὁ θεός throughout the passage) are arrived at as a result of the union which occurs when God extends the power which proceeds from himself through the medium of the spirit or breath to the subject[678]. This passage refers to the creation of the rational part of the human soul, which, if it was embodied, was contained in a form made of the purest matter[679]. However, it is puzzling that in his description of this process Philo refers to the inbreathing of the spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα) since he distinguishes between the man made

---

[674] See also *Her*. 224 where Philo is concerned with the inability of humans to completely comprehend the arrangement of the planets.

[675] *Leg*. iii. 99: "[…]οἱ δὴ οὕτως ἐπιλογιζόμενο διὰ σκιᾶς τὸν θεόν καταλαμβάνουσι διὰ τῶν ἔργων τὸν τεχνίτην κατανοοῦντες".

[676] Cf. Part 1 of thesis, chapter on the human mind and katalepsis.

[677] *Ebr*. 137.

[678] ἕνωσις γίνεται τῶν τριῶν [ὁ θεός, ὁ νοῦς, τὸ πνεῦμα], τείναντος τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν διὰ τοῦ μέσου πνεύματος ἄχρι τοῦ ὑποκειμένου

[679] Cf. *Leg*. i. 33.

according to the image who partakes of spirit, and the man made of matter who partakes of light and less substantial air, that is, breath (ἡ πνοὴ)[680].

It is difficult to determine whether Philo believed that some few human beings such as Moses were created according to the divine image, and are to be considered as heavenly men[681] or whether he is merely imprecise in his use of terminology in this instance. Goodenough, in asking whether Philo considers Moses to be a God, mentions that Moses, on the Mount, shared in God's nature, that is, in the quality of fixed unchangeableness[682]. Despite his previous account of Moses' visions as part of a mystic ascent, Goodenough notes that for Philo, Moses, like the other sophoi, the patriarchs, was different from the beginning: his soul was sent to dwell in a body which never became naturalised to its new abode. Whilst in the body, the soul was still living in the conceptual virtues which are indistinguishable from the divine logoi. Although for Philo there is only one God, so that Moses is contrasted with God in his pure existence, Goodenough also points to him being contrasted with all men, even the patriarchs, except for Isaac. Thus, for Goodenough, "his humanity was ultimately meaningless in his almost completely divine nature"[683]. Goodenough speculates that what Philo had in mind was the Pythagorean notion of τρίτον γένος, a middle type of existence enjoyed by the perfect man. Although there is little indication that Philo had this precise idea in mind, the question whether Moses was a heavenly man might be somewhat elucidated upon closer examination of what for Philo constitutes a further condition, other than the possession of a mind, in order for the soul to conceive of God: Mastery of the passions and the flesh. Thus, in *Leg*. ii. 81 Philo understands that it is through beholding in the soul the beauty of self-mastery, despite having been bitten by pleasure, that one might behold God himself, and emphasises that the mind ought then to see and contemplate[684]. Moreover, Philo equates this conception or beholding of God with clear vision[685] and declares that he who beholds and considers God in such a way shall live. That Philo hints at the transcendence of bodily existence

[680] Cf. *Leg*. i. 42.
[681] Cf. *Leg*. i. 31- 32.
[682] Cf. *Post*. 28ff.
[683] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism*, 228.
[684] *Leg*. ii. 81: "μόνον ἰδέτω καὶ κατανοησάτω".
[685] *Leg*. ii. 82.

for the seer might be gauged from his remark that escape from death is the lot of those who look with clear vision upon self mastery and God. Philo therefore associates mastery of the passions and escape from fleshly existence with conceiving or having a clear vision of God. That Moses might be considered able to escape the body, and so by extension, able to remain with the divine spirit[686] is hinted at in *Leg*. ii. 80 where Philo, interpreting *Numb*. xxi. 8, distinguishes Moses from others, since he writes that Moses loves excellences without bodily form, whereas our souls, being unable to get out of our bodies, crave for excellence in bodily shape. Further, Philo argues in this passage that God's bidding to Moses is "Make it [the serpent] for thyself", in order to show that self-mastery is not a possession of every man but only of the man beloved of God[687]. Indeed, the serpent was created in order to heal those souls who, pining for corporeal mass, encounter pleasures which bring death. It is in all likelihood these souls which, according to Philo. After being enamoured of self-mastery and divested of passions, turn to the lower way[688]. Thus, Philo intimates that Moses was utterly different from other human beings in his ability to transcend bodily existence, so that, although others may also be able to achieve self-mastery, it is less precious having been arrived at through gradual progress in wisdom. That this is differentiated from the self-mastery found in the man beloved of God[689] seems to imply some degree of determinism on Philo's part.

Philo was quite explicit concerning the death which afflicts those who pine for corporeal mass, which is a death that ruins the soul by vice rather than the death which severs soul from body. This raises the question whether the living, which is bestowed on those who master their passions and behold and form conceptions of God, refers to the freeing of the soul from its corporeal envelope or whether Philo implies a life according to self-mastery and the contemplation of God which nevertheless remains an earthly, embodied existence. In other words, does the activity of beholding and forming conceptions of God necessitate departure from the physical body, and are some or all human beings able to participate in this sort of visionary activity? Philo's pronouncements in *Gig*. offer some insight into this matter. Indeed,

---

[686] See *Gig*. 19ff.
[687] *Leg*. ii. 79.
[688] *Leg*. ii. 83.
[689] *Leg*. ii. 81, 85.

in *Gig*. 19 he states that the divine spirit[690], under whose influence true conceptions are formed[691], enlightens humans but does not remain in them forever due to their fleshly nature. Interestingly, in *Gig*. 20 Philo appears to include himself in the mass of men amongst whom the divine spirit does not abide forever, though it may sometimes stay awhile. In *Gig*. 19-20 it appears that Philo excludes most humans from the possibility of forming true conceptions, at least, true conceptions with some degree of permanence. However, from the departure of the divine spirit, Philo does exempt those souls who give themselves to philosophy, studying to die to the life of the body[692], in order to attain to a higher existence immortal and incorporeal in the presence of the Immortal and Uncreate[693]. Similarly, in *Gig*. 53, Philo argues that the divine spirit can only really aid those who have divested themselves of all created things and the wrappings of mere opinion and in that state reach God[694]. Philo specifically mentions Moses as an example of such a man in *Gig* 54 and, referring to *Exod*. xxxiii. 7, states that Moses pitched his tent outside of the tabernacle and of the whole army of corporeal things, thereby indicating that he established his mind so that it should not move[695]. The mention of the immobility of the mind is an indication that Philo believed Moses to have been in God's presence since in *Gig*. 49 he states that immutability is that which one experiences at the side of God, who is himself always

---

[690] In *Gig*. 22 the divine spirit is identified as both air and pure knowledge. Cf. *Leg*. iii. 161: "ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ αἰθέρος ἐστίν, ἀπόσπασμα θεῖον· "ἐνεφύσησε γὰρ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πνεῦμα ζωῆς ὁ θεός, καὶ ἐγένετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν". εὐλόγως οὖν τὸ μὲν ἐκ γῆς διαπλασθὲν σῶμα συγγενεῖς ἔχει τροφὰς ἃς ἀναδίδωσιν ἡ γῆ, ἡ δὲ αἰθερίου φύσεως μοῖρα οὖσα ψυχὴ πάλιν αἰθερίους καὶ θείας· ἐπιστήμαις γὰρ τρέφεται καὶ οὐ σιτίοις ἢ ποτοῖς, ὧν ἐπιδεές ἐστι τὸ σῶμα." In this latter passage the soul, ethereal by nature, a portion of the deity, receives ethereal and divine food: it is fed on knowledge. The conditions under which the divine spirit might remain with a person are therefore important in determining whether that person will be able to form conceptions and acquire knowledge. Since the spirit is interpreted by Philo as a reference to pure knowledge, it is not impossible that true concepts which can be formed by the human mind in the presence of the divine spirit are to be considered as equivalent to clear perceptions.

[691] Cf. *Leg*. *All*. i. 37 f. and *Virt*. 214.

[692] Cf. Plato *Phaed*. 67E; 64A.

[693] *Gig*. 14.

[694] *Gig*. 53: "[…] ὃ πάντα ἀπαμφιασάμενον τὰ ἐν γενέσει καὶ τὸ ἐσωτάτω καταπέτασμα καὶ προκάλυμμα τῆς δόξης ἀνειμένῃ καὶ γυμνῇ τῇ διανοίᾳ πρὸς θεὸν ἀφίξεται".

[695] *Gig*. 54: "[…] τὴν γνώμην ἱδρυσάμενος ἀκλινῆ".

immutable[696]. Indeed, in *Gig*. 54, Philo continues that, having left behind corporeal things, Moses began to worship and entered the darkness. In this passage, Philo therefore associates the abandonment of bodily things with being in the presence of God, worship of God and entering the darkness, understood here to be the invisible region, "τὸν ἀειδῆ χῶρον". In this context Philo also mentions that Moses has the spirit of God ever at his side[697], intimating thereby that Moses was in such a state as to be able to form true conceptions.

Although there is no direct mention of Moses beholding or conceiving those things which are hidden from mortal nature as in *Mos*. i. 158, the reference to entering the darkness as well as its characterisation as invisible indicates that Philo is interested in the same biblical passage. Furthermore, the reference to Moses learning secrets of the most holy mysteries and becoming a hierophant as a result leads one to conclude that both treatises understand *Exod*. xx. 21 to recount an unprecedented uncovering and contemplation of secret knowledge. While *Mos*. depicts Moses as conceiving or observing ("κατανοέω"), in *Gig*. 54, Philo writes that Moses remained in the darkness and completed his initiation into the most holy mysteries. Since Moses is said, as a result to have become the hierophant and teacher of divine rites, we are to understand that his initiation involved the acquisition of sacred knowledge. It does therefore appear that where Moses' experience of entering the darkness is concerned, the term κατανοέω in *Mos*. i. 158 is intended to convey a growth in understanding as well as contemplation. Indeed, in *Cher*. 41, Philo writes of the lovers of wisdom who reject sense perception as a help to gaining knowledge in favour of virtue and describes Moses' wife Zipporah, representing virtue, as speeding from earth towards heaven and contemplating/ conceiving of the nature of things divine and blessed. In this passage also, there is a close link between abandonment of the body and the

[696] *Gig*. 49: "[…] στάσις τε καὶ ἠρεμία ἀκλινὴς ἡ παρὰ τὸν ἀκλινῶς ἑστῶτα ἀεὶ θεόν".

[697] *Gig*. 55. Although this is followed by the mention that Moses, just as other men, also departs mortal life, it is necessary to add that Philo poses the question as to whether this is fair, and postpones its resolution until his inquiry into the prophet's life as a whole, when the initiates are fit to learn of its mystery. Given the treatment of Moses' death at the end of the second book of *De Vita Mosis*, it is likely that Philo has in mind the prophet's ascent and union to God. Since this episode occurs at the end of the prophet's life, it is likely that Philo allowed for the still embodied Moses to undergo a visionary experience when he entered the darkness (cf. *Exod*. xx. 21).

senses, knowledge, and "κατανοέω" as well as the additional importance of virtue in the path towards wisdom. A similar abandonment of the bodily senses by the companion of knowledge, "ὁ ἐπιστήμης ἑταῖρος"[698], is required in *Migr*. 195 if one is to hope to discern or conceive (κατανοέω) of the universal father who is so hard to trace and to understand[699]. Indeed, once the mind has changed place and is no longer amidst such vessels of the soul as the body and sense perception, the mist will scatter and it will become keen-sighted[700]. These passages demonstrate that the term denotes not only contemplation but also the formation of concepts, which is in some manner linked to a certain growth in knowledge for those who are wise enough to enlist the assistance of the virtues rather than the senses. It is likely therefore that in *Mos*. i. 158 the visionary experience includes both perceptual and cognitive aspects. Despite Philo's failure to mention the presence of the divine spirit in his later treatise, the explicit reference to its being always with Moses in *Gig*. 55 suggests that, in writing *Mos*. 158, Philo also considered it to have been present and played a role in Moses' experience. Thus, we are to understand that when Moses beheld the natures invisible to mortals[701], he formed true, lasting conceptions of them.

Therefore, although conceiving of God cannot be equated with seeing or apprehending his essence, true conceptions of God nevertheless entail the undergoing of an exalted experience as they are produced through a union of God's divine power, his spirit, and the human mind which has abandoned all care of bodily things, although this does not necessarily entail a literal departure from the body.

1.2.2.4 Moses' perception of the divine: conceiving but not apprehending.

In fact Philo seems to prefer an understanding of perception of the divine which includes some notion of forming conceptions, thereby avoiding the implication of a deep, clear or comprehensive understanding of the divine essence, which is more

---

[698] *Migr*. 197.
[699] *Migr*. 195: "ἐλπίσας τὸν δυστόπαστον καὶ δυστέκμαρτον πατέρα τῶν ὅλων κατανοῆσαι".
[700] *Migr*. 197: "[…]ήνίκα τῆς ἀχλύος σκεδασθείσης ὀξυδορκήσειν ἔμελλεν".
[701] τὰ ἀθέατα φύσει θνητῇ κατανοῶν

easily connoted by such expressions as καταθεάομαι[702] or καταλαμβάνω[703]. Thus, in *Post*. 14, Philo writes that Moses penetrating the darkness means that he has entered into those unapproachable and invisible conceptions which are formed of the Existent[704]. This follows upon the statement in *Post.* 13 that Moses is aware that his quest to experience a clear revelation of God is impossible to achieve, and that his object is out of reach. In *Post*. 14, Philo's interpretation of *Exod*. xx. 21 is further complicated since he has Moses enter into conceptions of the Existent, but describes these as belonging not only to an immaterial sphere but also to an unapproachable sphere. "ἄδυτος" designates not only that which is not to be entered but also, by extension, the innermost sanctuary of a temple[705]. It is useful to compare this description to that given by Philo in *QE* ii. 28, where Philo argues that, although those who come too near in desiring a vision of God are consumed, those who stand far off at a distance are merely kindled with vitality. In this passage, which relates to the second ascent of Mount Sinai[706], Philo appears to suggest that Moses might in fact be able to experience the rays of God without being consumed. It is not clear whether one is to understand Moses as transcending the unapproachable or whether he is depicted as approaching to the very limits of human possibility with regard to an experience of God.

Philo writes that this is said in reference to the most perfect and prophetic mind, for which it is fitting and lawful to enter the dark cloud. It therefore seems that the statement regarding those who draw too near to the fire being consumed by its flames must also apply to Moses: perhaps we are to understand that, even in entering the dark cloud, Moses too must remain at a distance. In this context, it is interesting that Philo mentions that the prophetic mind which enters the dark cloud also dwells in the forecourt[707] (αὐλή or atrium) of the palace of the Father. This might initially seem to

---

[702] Indeed, Philo uses this term to refer to God contemplating his creation.
[703] As pointed out above, Philo believes that God alone may fully comprehend his own essence.
[704] *Post.* 14: "[…] εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας".
[705] See for instance Homer, *Iliad* v. 448, 512. C.f. Liddell and Scott, 25.
[706] *Exod*. xxiv. 1b.
[707] The translation is from the Armenian as no Greek fragment is available for this passage. Cf Loeb Supplement to Philo II, 69.
[709] As he also does in *Gig*. 7 where he mentions animals contained in fire, calling them "πυρίγονα", "fire-born". C.f. Aelian *Nat. An*. 2. 2. 231.

be somewhat at odds with the reference in *Post.* to Moses entering into unapproachable (ἄδυτος) conceptions of the Existent. Nevertheless, although the term might connote the inner chamber of a sanctuary, Philo does not explicitly mention an inner shrine. Furthermore, it might be that the reference to entering the forecourt of the Father's palace is a more heightened enough experience for a mortal, even one so pious as Moses. In fact, a not implausible reading of the passage is to see the reference to entering the forecourt as the first stage in Moses' gradual ascent towards the Existent. Indeed, in *QE* ii. 28 Philo compares the most perfect and prophetic mind, for which it is fitting to enter the dark cloud and dwell in the forecourt, to salamanders who can move and dwell in the fire by which others are destroyed. Here, it is noteworthy that salamanders are considered by Philo to be creatures native to fire, indeed, he refers to them in *QE* ii. 28 as "fire born"[709]. Although it is not explicit, this comparison, as well as the understanding that it is fitting and lawful for Moses to enter the cloud, conveys the impression that Moses' mind is returning to an environment, close to the deity, to which he is native. Furthermore, the commentary is upon *Exod.* xxiv. 1, where the Septuagint text draws a clear distinction between the elders, who must stand and worship God from afar, and Moses, who alone may approach the deity. Indeed, *QE* ii. 29 might represent a further stage in the ascent since the uniqueness of Moses in being able to approach God is addressed, and the passage concludes that the prophetic mind, having left behind all mortal kinds, is changed into the divine and so becomes kin to God and truly divine. This does to some extent echo and perhaps surpass the understanding of Moses as enjoying fellowship with God and being called a god of the nation in *Mos.* i. 158. The darkness might therefore protect others from the blinding rays, that is, those who are in second place and may only make a path to heaven and even more so those in third place who can at best be beholders of the blessed path above[710]. Meanwhile, the prophetic mind, inspired and filled with God is able to go up to God, finally transcending darkness, and as salamanders dwell in the fire from which they are born, the prophetic soul may return to its original element and become like the monad[711]. This analysis is to some degree borne out by *Gig.* 54 f, where Philo sets

[710] *QE* ii. 29.
[711] *QE* ii. 29. Cf. *Mos.* ii. 288.

Moses apart from the vast majority of men, since he writes that it is as a result of abandoning the body that Moses can go into the darkness, the invisible region.

One must carefully distinguish, however, between accounts of Moses entering into the dark cloud, which, notwithstanding its identification to the unapproachable and invisible essence of the Existent in *Post*. 14, with the possible oblique reference to an inner sanctuary, and Philo's account of Moses' ultimate ascent to a divine where he is resolved into a monad. Although there may be some premonitions of the latter experience in *Mos*. i. 158, notably in Moses' fellowship with God and in his being called the god of the whole nation, these are not as exalted depictions as are the lofty descriptions of the prophet as akin to God, in a family relation, and as truly divine in *QE* ii. 29. It is therefore likely that the experience described in *Mos*. i. 158 refers to an important progression in Moses' ability to perceive and commune with God, but by no means to the summum of religious experience which Moses was to undergo. That, as shall be further discussed, is to be found in *Mos*. ii. 288.

If this conclusion is correct, there is all the more reason to suppose that κατανοέω does not describe the most advanced form of perception and cannot be taken to refer to full comprehension of the divine essence. Nonetheless, proper conceptions are said by Philo to be formed under divine inspiration[712]. Indeed, it must be noted that the supreme religious experience undergone by Moses is neither perceptual nor epistemological but involves a metamorphosis, as he is resolved into a single, intelligible nature.

One might surmise that these distinctions arise as a result of the necessity for Philo of grappling with the corollaries of his beliefs regarding noetic perception and his distinction between the noetic and sensory universes, whilst taking account of the biblical descriptions of visions of God. There is an indication in *Fug*. 164 that he explicitly excludes God from belonging to the noetic universe, placing him so far above any creation, intelligible or sensory, that even the sight of the mind cannot reach him. Indeed, in that passage he has Moses pose unanswerable questions concerning the divine essence, including the question: "σῶμα ἢ ἀσώματος ἢ

[712] *Virt*. 214.

ὑπεράνω τι τούτων". This would concur with Philo's insistence, throughout his works, that God is above place or time, and that he is contained nowhere. To a certain extent, it is likely that the largely metaphorical use of place and space with regard to the noetic universe and the ideas nevertheless exerted some influence upon Philo's thought, so that he wished to preclude any misunderstanding that God might be in some way spatially contained and therefore limited.

1.2.2.5 *What does Moses really perceive and experience in . Mos. i. 158?*

As Philo refers to the same biblical passage in *Post.* 13f. it is useful to draw on this treatise whilst exploring the more limited account of Moses' entering into the dark cloud in *Mos.* i. 158. In *Post.* 13f. Moses yearns to see God and implores him to reveal clearly his own nature. Although he realises that the object of his quest is unattainable he struggles on with no relaxation of his endeavour. So when he enters into the thick darkness where God was, he entered into conceptions regarding the Existent that belong to the unapproachable region where there are no material forms[713]. Here as in *Mos.* i. 158 Philo offers an understanding of the darkness which appears at first sight to identify it with the essence of the Existent. Both passages indeed designate the darkness as being a region without material forms. However, the choice of ἔννοια suggests that Philo wished to distinguish invisible conceptions of the Existent from apprehension of his essence. Moreover, Philo is careful to reject the possibility that God might be found in any place and insists that he is above both place and time: the cause of all is not in the thick darkness: "οὐ γὰρ ἐν γνόφῳ τὸ αἴτιον οὐδὲ συνόλως ἐν τόπῳ, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου". God therefore transcends all, though he has filled the universe with himself, for he has caused his Powers to extend themselves throughout the universe. Although in this statement Philo may initially seem to offer some possibility of apprehending God, in *Post.* 15 he denies even this to the God-loving soul, judging that to probe the question of the essence of the Existent is to enter upon a quest of that which is beyond matter and beyond sight. Nonetheless, Goodenough understands the descriptions of Moses at

[713] *Post.* 14: "ἤδη γοῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον ὅπου ἦν ὁ θεὸς εἰσελεύσεται. τουτέστιν εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας.".

Sinai in *Post*. 12- 15 to imply the supreme human experience of God[714]. He describes Philo's account of Moses at Sinai as an attempt to get beyond the Powers, which are in the world, to the essence of Being, which transcends it. He rightly notes that for Philo[715] this is an impossible quest for man, and the highest achievement we can hope for is to see that God is invisible. Whilst Philo does not reject the search for the apprehension of the divine essence as futile, he nonetheless embarks upon a flight of negative theology, writing that the God-loving soul apprehends that God is apprehensible by no one and sees that he is invisible[716]. In the opposition which Philo sets up in the phrases "καταλαβεῖν ὅτι ἀκατάληπτος" and "ἰδεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶν ἀόρατος" he encapsulates both the clear-sightedness and the despair of the visionary who grasps more than any other mortal the extreme transcendence of God. It is not impossible that Philo ought to be understood as holding out some hope for a greater apprehension since in *Post*. 21 he rejoices with the lovers of God since the quest of the Good and the Beautiful, even if it misses its goal, is sufficient to give delight in advance ('προευφραίνω')[717].

Goodenough stresses, in commenting upon *Post.* 15- 16, that Moses' approach, like Abraham's, must be through the Powers[718]. In fact, in *Post*. 16 Philo appears to suggest that the content of Moses' perceptions did not constitute his most important experience. Indeed, Philo writes that the great hierophant had attained to the comprehension of the most important point in his investigation before he commenced it, when he entreated God to become the exhibitor and expounder of his own nature to him. Indeed, although following *Post*. 16 Philo gives no clear indication whether God did in fact accede to Moses' request, in *Post*. 20 Philo insists that God has driven created being far away from his essential nature so that we cannot even touch it with

[714] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 212.
[715] In *Post*. 15.
[716] *Post*. 16: "καταλαβεῖν ὅτι ἀκατάληπτος ὁ κατὰ τὸ εἶναι θεὸς παντὶ καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦτο ἰδεῖν ὅτι ἐστὶν ἀόρατος".
[717] *Post.* 21: "τοῖς […] οὖν φιλοθέοις τὸ ὂν ἀναζητοῦσι, κἂν μηδέποτε εὕρωσι, συγχαίρομεν- ἱκανὴ γὰρ ἐξ ἑαυτῆς προευφραίνειν ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ καλοῦ ζήτησις, κἂν ἀτυχῆται τὸ τέλος".
[718] E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 213.

the pure spiritual contact of the understanding[719]. Nevertheless, the reference to the impossibility of apprehending the essence of God[720] is not a denial of the possibility of a vision of God since it refers specifically to a vision of the essence, that is, a clear apprehension and full understanding of the nature of the deity. Indeed, despite Philo's insistence in *Mut.* 7 the Existent cannot be truly apprehended by any human, in *Mut.* 3 Philo declares that the eyes of the soul receive the vision of the Lord of all[721], so that perception of God is to be distinguished from apprehension of his nature. If it is indeed the case that the darkness protects Moses from the blinding light emanating from the deity it is likely that Philo would not allow full apprehension of God to Moses, or even a clear vision of the Existent. Moreover, Philo also argued that even the Powers of God, which seem to be considered principally as ways in which God makes himself known to humankind rather than as separate beings[722], could not be clearly apprehended by any mortal[723].

In .*Mos.* i. 158, Philo refers to Moses entering into the darkness where God was, into the archetypal essence of existing things. This reference to the presence of God can be contrasted with the experience of the people in *QE* ii. 45, where Philo argues that despite appearances, God was not really present. Meanwhile, the exact nature of the archetypal essence of existing things remains unclear. It is possible that the incorporeal and archetypal essence which Moses experiences is that of the Logos. Indeed, Philo understands the Logos to be the image (εἶδος) of God as archetype, whilst it is also the archetype of all other things[724]. Given the reference to existing things and Philo's usual desire to distance God as Existent from material existences, it might be that he understood Moses to enter into the essence of the divine Logos. To what extent this can be distinguished from a direct experience of the existent is

---

[719] *Post.* 20: "[…] πορρωτάτω δὲ τῆς κατὰ τὸ εἶναι φύσεως αὐτοῦ τὸ γενητὸν ἀπεληλακώς, ὡς μηδὲ κατὰ τὰς ἀκραιφνεῖς καὶ ἀσωμάτους τῆς διανοίας ἐπιβολὰς ψαῦσαι δύνασθαι".
[720] C.f. also *Spec. Leg.* i. 45 and i. 47 where Moses not only acknowledges that he never could receive a vision of God clearly manifested, but is moreover denied an apprehension even of God's Powers.
[721] ὁ τῶν ὅλων κύριος. C.f. *Mut.* 2.
[722] Despite Wolfson's claims.
[723] *Spec.* i. 49: the exhortation that one should not hope to apprehend either God or his powers in their essence is addressed to Moses.
[724] Cf. Dillon, J, *The Middle Platonists*, 160.

unclear, all the more so since Philo often treats the divine Logos and the Powers as properties of God as Existent rather than as separate beings. If one, on this occasion, accepts Goodenough's understanding of the relationship between God and his Logos as represented by a light stream, Moses' experience as recounted in *Mos.* i. 158 does not imply that he apprehended the Existent, but is deeply mystical in form since Philo's language implies a closeness to the divine as Moses does not only behold that which is invisible to mortals but is able to enter into the incorporeal and archetypal essence.

Mut. 7ff implies that Moses' experience in *Exod.* xx. 21 involved a vision of the Powers. That Moses can apprehend what is below God[725] ought not to be understood as denoting an ontological difference between the Existent and his Powers, but rather a distinction which lies with the seer: the former cannot ever be apprehended, whereas the latter is, by an act of divine grace, visible to the eye of the soul. Thus, it is not accurate to understand that for Philo "the darkness stood for man's total failure to penetrate the secrets of God"[726] or that "Philo interprets Moses' experience in the darkness where, Exod. xx. 21 says, 'God was' as one of disappointment and frustration"[727].

The importance of Moses' experience on the Mount resides at least in part in the fact that it is God himself who reveals to Moses certain conceptions regarding the divine nature. This is not equivalent to Moses attaining comprehension of the essence of God. Rather, as Philo clarifies in *Mos.* i. 158-159, entering into the invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence of existing things leads to Moses becoming himself a form of virtue. Thus, in *Mos.* i. 158-159 the question of perception is not Philo's primary interest. Indeed, it appears that as a result of his entering into the darkness, Moses became one of the intelligible archetypes himself. Accordingly, Philo first of all presents Moses as a beautiful and godlike work, a model for those who wish to copy him. Philo follows this with a hint that Moses has become a form of virtue, since he argues that it is best for the mind to carry a perfect form of virtue. Moreover, it is following Moses' entering into the darkness that he becomes, for

[725] *Mut.* 8- 9.
[726] Williamson, R, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo*, 89.
[727] Williamson, R, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo*, 89

Philo, a hierophant of the divine mysteries. This is not mentioned in *Mos*. but is explored by Philo in *Gig*. 53- 54. In that passage, Philo first of all specifies that Moses has removed himself from the bodily sphere so that the divine spirit may abide with him. Then only does he begin to worship God, and entering the darkness, learns the secrets of the divine mysteries. It is thus, according to Philo, that he becomes not only an initiate but also a hierophant who may explain divine things to those whose ears are purified.

III.2 *CHAPTER 2: VISIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN DE VITA MOSIS BOOK II*

2.1. *Philo's account of Moses' vision at Sinai/ Horeb*

2.1.1 The Vision

In Book II, Philo presents Moses' life as a king, philosopher, legislator, high priest and prophet[728]. The first account of a vision in Book II follows Philo's description of Moses' life as a lawgiver and king[729], and an affirmation that he is about to describe Moses' office of high priest[730]. Philo introduces the reader progressively to the visionary account, first mentioning that oracles instructed Moses concerning all that related to the priesthood in II. 67: "ἠξιοῦτο χρησμοῖς ἕκαστα τῶν εἰς τὰς λειτουργίας καὶ ἱερὰς ὑπηρεσίας ἀναδιδασκόμενος". 'χρησμός' is a rather vague term for Philo to employ in such a context, as it means nothing more than 'oracle' or 'answer of an oracle', and he frequently uses it to mean 'Scripture'[731]. That it is a divine oracle might nevertheless be deduced from an earlier passage in ii. 67, which states that Moses was "καταπνευσθεὶς ὑπ᾽ ἔρωτος οὐρανίου", as a result both of loving God and being beloved by Him. This in itself cannot definitively be interpreted as constituting a visionary experience. That it does nonetheless allude to inspiration during a vision seems likely, especially as Philo refers to Moses' instruction in the mysteries of the priesthood in ii. 71: "παιδευόμενος τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἱερωσύνην πάντα καὶ πρῶτα". In this verse, the matters relating to the priesthood are imparted to Moses on the mountain, clearly Mount Sinai[732], which he has ascended. At this stage of the narrative, however, Philo has still given no clear indication to the reader unacquainted with the Pentateuch, that Moses acquired such teachings during a vision[733]. Indeed, the entire theophany at Sinai[734] is passed over in

---

728 *Mos.* ii. 2.
729 *Mos.* ii. 66.
730 *Mos.* ii. 66- 67.
731 Quote examples.
732 See *Mos.* ii. 69- 70 and compare to *Exod.* xxiv. 18 and *Exod.* xxxiv. 29- 35. Philo appears to conflate the two biblical episodes somewhat. Possibly because both mention that Moses remained upon the Mount for forty days and forty nights (*Exod.* xxiv 18 and xxxiv 28).
733 As Philo follows the account of Moses' instruction with regards to the priesthood with the story of the building of the tabernacle, it is likely that he is recounting *Exod*. xxxiv. 29 f. rather than *Exod*. xxiv f.

Philo's account[735], so that where the biblical text contains an explicit and lengthy account of Moses' encounter with God, Philo's retelling is exceedingly restrained.

Accordingly, a vision experience is only directly mentioned in ii.74, and Philo's account avoids the vivid anthropomorphic language of *Exod.* xxxiii. 22- 23, and the mention of God's hand with which he is to cover Moses, and of his back, which Moses will behold. Instead, it centres on the constructing of the tabernacle[736], and any mention of a visionary experience is largely secondary: "σκηνὴν οὖν, ἔργον ἱερώτατον, δημιουργεῖν ἔδοξεν, ἧς τὴν κατασκευὴν θεσφάτοις λογίοις ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους Μωυσῆς ἀνεδιδάσκετο, τῶν μελλόντων ἀποτελεῖσθαι σωμάτων ἀσωμάτους ἰδέας τῇ ψυχῇ θεωρῶν ". By "θεσφάτοις λογίοις" we are to understand that Moses received words spoken by God, but the phrase is rather imprecise, and Philo does not elaborate upon it, though he locates the experience on the mount, linking his retelling with the biblical story. The most revealing phrase is the precision given by Philo that Moses saw the immaterial forms of the tabernacle "τῇ ψυχῇ", 'in the soul', or 'with the soul'. The surprising point at this juncture is that he chose not to use the expression "ψυχῆς ὄμμα", with the eye of the soul[737], which he usually reserves for visions of the divine. It is perhaps necessary to stress that θεωρῶν does not simply mean 'seeing', but has strong overtones of 'contemplating'[738]. This further reduces the visual element of the passage, where 'visual' is understood to bear the conventional reference to a sensory experience. In fact, although the description of the tabernacle in *Exod*. xxv f. is preceded by the appearance of God's glory[739], it is through God's speaking to Moses that the revelation concerning the sanctuary is imparted. Where the divine voice is concerned,

---

[734] *Exod*. xxxiv. 5- 7, see also *Exod*. xxxiii. 19- 2. Before God instructs Moses concerning the tabernacle, the Septuagint also mentions that the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai (*Exod.* xxiv. 16- 17). This is omitted in *Mos.* but addressed in *QE* ii. 45- 47. In *Mos.*ii. 70- 71 Philo recounts aspects of both biblical episodes.

[735] One of the reasons for this is the unwillingness on Philo's part to speak of seeing God, and his extreme care in avoiding or qualifying any anthropomorphic language when speaking of God.

[736] Cf. *Exod.* xxv- xxvii.

[737] Which is presumably why Colson translates "He saw with the soul's eye…" in his translation of *Mos.*, Loeb Classical Library, Massachusetts, 1935, 485.

[738] This is indeed the verb employed by Plato when he describes the contemplation of the forms in the Timaeus.

[739] *Exod*. xxiv. 17.

however, Philo believes that it is not heard but seen by the eyes of the soul[740]. Once more, it appears that Philo's determination that the bodily senses should have little or nothing to do with the perceiving of the divine has led him radically to depart from the biblical narrative, to the point of omitting a theophany, as well as creating new mechanisms by which the seer received divine knowledge through what might here only loosely be termed a visionary experience. Nevertheless, Moses does receive important knowledge concerning the building and furnishing of the tabernacle, and Philo devotes a long passage in Book II to describing the subsequent reproduction of the immaterial forms, which Moses contemplated with or in his soul.

In *Mos*. ii. 76, Philo elaborates upon the manner in which Moses contemplates the immaterial forms. Having already stated that the archetypal patterns of the objects were conceived in the mind, he adds that the shape of the model was stamped upon the mind of the prophet. Philo proceeds to describe it as painted in diverse colours and fashioned beforehand, invisibly, without material by invisible forms[741]. For Philo Moses thus carried in his mind a vision of the tabernacle before it was actually built[742]. Similarly, in *QE* ii. 51- 52[743] Philo discusses the same biblical episode and states that the literal interpretation of *Exod.* xxv. 7- xxv. 8 refers to the archetype of a sort of shrine. In *QE* ii. 51, Philo offers a deeper meaning, arguing that the verse "καὶ ποιήσεις μοι ἁγίασμα καὶ ὀφθήσομαι ἐν ὑμῖν" indicates that God always appears in his work, the world[744].

[740] Cf. *Migr*. 47- 49; . *Mos*. ii. 213; *Decal*. 46-47. Philo bases this interpretation upon *Exod.* xx. 18.
[741] "ὁ μὲν οὖν τύπος τοῦ παραδείγματος ἐνεσφραγίζετο τῇ διανοίᾳ τοῦ προφήτου διαζωγραφούμενος καὶ προδιαπλαττόμενος ἀφανῶς ἄνευ ὕλης ἀοράτοις εἴδεσι·"
[742] Cf. *Opif*. 18- 20: Philo's analogy of the architect who carries the image of a city in his mind before it is created. Like Moses, he receives the figures of objects in his soul as in wax. This enables him to recall the images. In similar fashion, God conceived beforehand an intelligible universe which existed only in the divine reason.
[743] This passage survives in the Armenian. The Greek is fragmentary so I have based these comments largely on Ralph Marcus' translation.
[744] Cf. *Plant*. 50

2.1.2 Preparing the mind

Philo proceeds to comment in *QE* ii. 51 that God grants his appearance if there is a suitable place purified with holiness. In the following exhortation, Philo warns the mind that if it does not prepare itself, excising desires and pleasures and does not adapt itself to the vision of holiness, it will end its life in blindness, unable to see the intelligible sun[745]. It is not clear whether this refers only to an apprehension of God through the world since Philo offers hope that one might see God, which is for him the "beginning and end of happiness" if one is "worthily initiated and can be consecrated to God": one who has "made his soul […] a sanctuary and altogether a shrine of God" will see the First Cause[746]. It is not unlikely that the passage points to the possibility of seeing beyond the sacred work of God since Philo insists that once the soul is awakened "the manifest One"[747] will appear, "who causes incorporeal rays to shine" for him. Indeed, Philo appears to treat separately the appearance of the one who causes the rays to shine and the granting of visions of "things of nature" which might be presumed to refer to sensory and material things. It must be borne in mind, however, that the Armenian text that survives cannot be considered to offer the same insight into Philo's ideas on these matters as might the original Greek. In this passage, the vocabulary is quite explicitly that of the visionary, as Philo writes that the initiate's eyes will no longer be closed and that he will be wakeful rather than in deep sleep. None of this can occur, Philo insists, to one who has not purified his soul or prepared his mind and become a shrine of God.

The most crucial insight which the *QE* text has to offer into Philo's report of Moses' experience on the mount in *Mos.* ii. 69f. is the importance of purification in order to be initiated and consecrated as a shrine of God so that one might be able to see God. Though Philo is more discreet in the treatise on the life of Moses[748], concerns relating to perfection and purification underlie his text. Accordingly, in *Mos.* ii. 66, Philo

[745] As Marcus points out, Philo refers here to the divine light. Cf. *Spec.* iv. 231.
[746] Marcus points to a variant which reads "first things", but given Philo's references to seeing God, First Cause is more likely.
[747] "ὁ ἐπιφανής".
[748] This may be because the treatise is intended for Gentiles and Jews who are not so well versed in the Scriptures as is Philo. Indeed, Philo often exhorts his readers in other treatises to remain silent concerning the secrets of the mysteries. Cf. *Cher.* 42; *Cher.* 48; *Sacr.* 60.

writes that Moses' great natural gifts were improved through philosophy, which showed truths to Moses so that he became perfected in virtue. It is clear that Moses was perfected through philosophy before he was inspired and that perfection in virtue enabled Moses to attain to a closer relationship with God, since Philo concludes that Moses loved God and was loved in return. Furthermore, in *Mos.* ii. 67- 68, Philo writes that it was necessary for Moses to be cleansed, both in soul and in body before being initiated into the rites of worship and the tasks of the priesthood. Philo adds, in *Mos.* ii. 69, that Moses abstained from eating and drinking for forty successive days[749]. Interestingly, in *Somn.* i. 36 Philo comments that Moses, when abstaining from food and drink was listening to strains of perfect music, which seems to refer to the full and perfect harmony produced by the heavenly bodies. Philo adds that if such a sound were to reach our ears it would produce passionate desires which would compel us to abstain even from necessary food, since we would take nourishment from the inspired strains of perfect music, like beings awaiting immortality[750]. In less exalted language, this sentiment is somewhat echoed in Philo's reflection that Moses had no thought of food or drink because he had the better food of contemplation[751]. Although there is no immediate mention of *a* vision in this passage, it does depict Moses as so changed that those who saw him afterwards could not believe their eyes. Philo reiterates this in his description of Moses' descent from the mount after forty days: his countenance was far more beautiful and those who saw him were amazed. Moreover, their eyes could not continue to stand the dazzling brightness that flashed from him like the sun[752]. It is clear from this passage that Moses was greatly changed following his experience and the description of the brilliant sun-like light flashing forth from Moses' countenance, "ἡλιοειδοῦς φέγγους ἀπαστράπτοντος", which is not mentioned in the Septuagint version, is reminiscent of Philo's portrayal of God who flashes rays of light which dazzle those who wish to see him.

---

[749] Cf. *Exod.* xxiv. 18 and xxxiv. 28.

[750] Cf. E. R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 213 notes that while on Mount Sinai, Moses became incorporeal as a result of his experiences, since the divine music of the cosmos made him forget to eat for forty days. This showed his complete renunciation of the body. Goodenough argues that it was through these experiences that Moses became a hierophant according to Philo[750].

[751] Cf. *Leg.* iii. 140- 141 where rejection of necessary food and drink is replaced by the contemplation of divine things.

[752] Cf. *Exod.* xxxiv. 29- 30.

2.1.3 Rebirth as pure mind and revelation

Although Philo does not choose to mention it in *Mos.*, a reference to the episode where Moses ascends Mount Sinai in order to receive revelations concerning the tabernacle in *QE* ii. 46 intimates that Moses is reborn as pure mind. Indeed, Philo describes the calling above of the prophet[753] as a second birth better than the first[754]. It is better because whilst the latter is mixed with a body, Marcus argues that the wording of the Greek was probably "the former is an unmixed and sovereign part of the soul", and supports his understanding that this refers to the mind with reference to Moses' symbolizing the pure mind in other passages[755]. This certainly makes more sense than the literal translation from the Armenian which is given as "the former is an unmixed and simple soul of the sovereign". Moreover, Philo further contrasts Moses with the first earth-born man, citing in particular his coming from the ether[756] and without a body, unlike the first moulded man who came into being from the earth and with a body[757]. It is therefore extremely likely that we are to understand Philo to believe that, following his calling up onto the Mount, Moses was reborn as pure mind, all the more so if one considers Philo's understanding of Moses as an 'unmoulded' heavenly man created in God's image on the seventh day[758].

There are indications in some of Philo's other works that a pure mind can apply itself to all objects which are proper to the intellect[759], and moreover, that it is when Moses is a pure mind that he receives legislative and prophetic skills[760]. Like priestly skills and revelations concerning the form of the tabernacle, legislative and prophetic skills might be considered matters which pertain to the mind alone. That Moses is thus exalted beyond any other human is further apparent from Philo's disclosure that such

---

[753] In *Exod.* xxiv. 16b.
[754] The Greek fragment reads: "ἡ δὲ ἀνάκλησις τοῦ προφήτου δευτέρα γένεσίς ἐστι τῆς προτέρας ἀμείνων."
[755] Cf. *Mut*. 208; *Congr.* 132.
[756] Marcus points out that the Greek fragment omits this detail.
[757] The Greek reads: "[…] ὅτι ἐκεῖνος μὲν ἐκ γῆς καὶ μετὰ σώματος συνίστατο, οὗτος δὲ ἄνευ σώματος".
[758] Cf. *Leg.* i. 5, 31, 88.
[759] *Ebr*. 71.
[760] *Congr*. 132.

revelations were imparted to him by means of heavenly wisdom[761]. Moreover, in *Fug.* 109, Philo writes that wisdom and God are Moses' wholly pure parents. This passage clearly refers to his second birth since *QE* ii. 46 also depicts Moses' rebirth as occurring in accordance with the ever-virginal nature of the hebdomad. As Philo writes that the reborn Moses had no mother but only a Father, the Father of all, this may initially appear to contradict the reference to both God and wisdom as Moses' parents in *Fug.* 109. However, since the latter passage describes wisdom as the means by which the universe arrived at creation, it is likely that wisdom here refers to the divine mind or to the content of the divine mind[762]. It is not clear whether or not Moses remains pure mind. Indeed, in *Her.* 84, Philo describes a temporary ascent in the course of which the mind which offers sacrifices to God in all purity is transformed into a divine mind, but when serving humans, falls from heaven and descends back to earth. This passage does not strictly refer to Moses but offers an indication that ascents and states of mystical exaltation can be temporary.

It is likely that the transformation of Moses into pure mind is to be considered the most crucial aspect of his experiences on the mount, as there is some indication that Philo did not believe that God was present upon the mount. Indeed, in *QE* ii. 45 Philo states quite explicitly that God, being beyond place, was not upon Mount Sinai. He reinforces this assertion with the argument that "Sinai" means "inaccessible", demonstrating thereby that the divine place is truly inaccessible and unapproachable to even the holiest mind. There is an echo of this sentiment in the seemingly casual remark in *Mos.* ii. 70, that Moses ascended an inaccessible and pathless mountain, the most holy region. Although the oxymoronic language heightens the extraordinary nature of Moses' experience, there is no mention of a divine vision.

The transformation of Moses into pure mind is both the result of a purification in the course of which Moses voluntarily rejects necessary bodily needs and the means by which he is able to receive divine communications which in *Mos.* ii. 74 are presented in somewhat subdued visionary terms. His ascent to an inaccessible region does not necessarily entail an immediate vision of God. Indeed, *QE* ii. 51 which also relates

[761] *Congr.* 132: "οὗτός ἐστι Μωυσῆς, ὁ καθαρώτατος νοῦς, ὁ ἀστεῖος ὄντως, ὁ νομοθετικὴν ὁμοῦ καὶ προφητείαν ἐνθουσιώσῃ καὶ θεοφορήτῳ σοφίᾳ λαβών".
[762] Cf. *Ebr.* 30- 31.

Moses' encounter with the divine on Mount Sinai quite clearly specifies that the mind must be purified before being initiated. Only when it is consecrated as a shrine of God can it see the First Cause. Even in this passage, Philo dwells somewhat upon the vision of God's beneficent Powers which move around all parts of the world and upon visions of the things of nature. Meanwhile, all references to the vision of God are conditional and future: in this allegorical interpretation of *Exod.* xxv. 7, *Philo* no longer relates the past experiences of Moses but depicts the possibilities which might be open to a mind which prepares itself for initiation and consecration to God[763].

The reference to Moses' rebirth as pure mind and the echoes of such a belief in *Mos.* ii. 74 is all the more extraordinary as Philo in no way implies in these passages that the transformation occurs after Moses' death. Indeed, in *Cher.* 114 Philo holds out the possibility that we will no longer be a mixture of soul and body following death. Moses' own death is thus depicted as a resolving of his dual nature into a single unity. This is why it is not impossible that Philo perceived Moses' rebirth as pure mind upon the mount as temporary, although references to Moses being pure mind and receiving prophetic skills as pure mind might seem to count against this interpretation.

It is noteworthy that, in Philo's presentation, in *Mos* ii. 288 ff, Moses' final experience is not visionary. Indeed, at the end of his life, Moses is summoned by the Father and, previously a double being of soul and body, is resolved into a single nature, transformed into a most sun-like mind. It is at that moment that he is possessed and able to prophesy to each tribe. Philo specifies that he was already being exalted before he undertook his flight to heaven and explicitly states that he was inspired and divinely possessed while still alive. It is important to note that Moses is depicted not only as pure mind, but further, as most sun-like. The term is employed in only three other passages, two of which are also in *De Vita Mos.* The first of these passages, *Mos.* i. 166, employs the term to describe the cloud which preceded the Hebrews in their flight from Egypt, which Philo speculates might have been a minister or angel of God. In *Mos.* ii. 70, Philo describes Moses' appearance as brilliant and sun-like following his dwelling on the top of the mountain with God. The

[763] This is by no means the only passage to reflect such concerns. Cf. for instance *Somn.* i. 82 where Philo insists upon the need to reject the glories of material life in order to be pure enough for initiation into the mysteries.

only passage in which Philo uses the superlative is *Congr*. 47, where it refers to the light of the soul, knowledge. Significantly, Philo claims that it is this wisdom which makes the mind brilliant and enables it to see more acutely. It is therefore not impossible that one ought to perceive a small hint that Moses, as pure mind made sun-like, is akin to pure knowledge and so perhaps able to apprehend more clearly. This would be consistent with Philo's reference to his ability to prophesy to each particular tribe and to prophesy accurately concerning his own death.

The lack of any reference to a vision in *Mos* ii. 288 ff can largely be explained by Philo's reliance upon the biblical text. Nevertheless, the Septuagint does not mention that Moses was resolved into a single noetic sun-like nature. Neither does it make any mention of Moses' journey from mortal life to immortality, which Philo moreover recounts as an ascent. It is not unlikely that, as Philo does deny the possibility that God is apprehensible as to his essence, at least in life, he chose, in the final episode of the life of Moses to dwell upon the transformation of the prophet and his becoming pure mind. Being under divine possession is in other treatises connected with living in kinship and familiarity with God[764] and with a radical change in appearance[765], and since Moses is said to ascend following his summoning by the Father it is possible to conclude that a change of nature, abandonment of the body and closeness to God are of greater import than experiencing a vision of God and obtaining knowledge of his essence. It is also not unlikely that Philo wished to end his treatise on the life of Moses, king, prophet, priest and lawmaker, in accordance with the Septuagint's recounting of his death and with positive references to his exaltation and closeness to God. It is necessary to point out that according to Philo it was most wonderful that Moses was able, not only to prophesy truths to each particular tribe, but further, that he was divinely possessed and thus prophesied how his own death would come to pass. This is not stated in the Septuagint and reinforces Moses' quasi-divine status before his final ascent to heaven. Although Philo is keenest, in his use of language, to underline divine possession and inspiration, it is Moses' knowledge of his own fate which separates him from other humans. Moses is therefore presented as having super-human knowledge without any reference to vision. This immediacy only serves to emphasise that he required no intermediaries and, was able to prophesy in his own

[764] Cf. *Virt*. 217- 218.
[765] Cf. . *Mos*. ii. 272; *Virt*. 217

person because he was already exalted and transformed into pure sun-like mind. Indeed, like the sun, he is his own light and can apprehend his own destiny with no apparent need for revelation.

IV. SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSION

IV. 1 *SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS*

In order to make the thesis more perspicuous, I will summarise the chapters successively.

1.1: *What constitutes a visionary experience in Philo's work? What are the epistemological implications?*

Though the soul of man is undeniably connected to the earth, not only through its being embodied, but also in its possession of an irrational part formed of the five senses, speech and the generative faculty, it is able to transcend the αἰσθητός κόσμος and can hope to perceive those things that are intelligible to the mind alone. This it does through the eye of the mind, employing the faculty of apprehension or κατάληψις, which with the aid of the divine light is able to apprehend those incorporeal things intelligible to the mind alone and thus grow in knowledge. The reason why this is possible according to Philo appears in several of his works. In *Her.* 234f. Philo identifies the human mind as an image of the divine reason. Meanwhile, in *Opif.* 31, he intimates that the invisible divine light, which in *Migr.* 40 is identified with knowledge, has come into existence as an image of divine reason[766]. This is not to argue that the human mind is necessarily to be equated with the divine light or knowledge, but as they are both formed after the same model, it is to be expected that they share some substantial similarities. This, quite possibly, explains why Philo believes that the divine light may come in aid of the eye of the soul and enable it to apprehend in the νοητός κόσμος.

It is the nature of the incorporeal and intelligible objects, which, for Philo, constitutes their inaccessibility to normal sensory perception and requires apprehension through the eye of the soul. In order to see with the eye of the soul, the only way in which one might know of the intelligible things amongst which Philo counts souls, angels, and sometimes the Powers of God, one requires the interaction of κατάληψις, a process of the mind, and knowledge or wisdom, the divine light which can only be provided

[766] *Opif.* 31: "τὸ δὲ ἀόρατον καὶ νοητὸν φῶς ἐκεῖνο θείου λόγου γέγονεν εἰκὼν τοῦ διερμηνεύσαντο τὴν γένεσιν αὐτοῦ".

by God. It is wisdom which then enables one to apprehend in a clearer manner, and some distinct apprehensions are equated by Philo with wisdom. In Philo, the equivalent to the biblical notion of a visionary experience entails apprehending in the intelligible world through the eye of the soul or mind. If this experience occurs, because it requires knowledge and leads to clearer apprehensions, it cannot but entail a progress towards greater knowledge, though this does not necessarily include perfect or complete wisdom.

Therefore, a preoccupation with the apprehension of that which exists in the νοητός κόσμος, unavailable to sensory perception, replaces in Philo the old biblical dichotomy between seeing those beings and things which are native to the earth, and seeing supernatural heavenly beings. Apprehensions which allow one to increase in knowledge, those apprehensions that are clear and brilliant, depend upon the eye of the soul having been opened by divine light or knowledge and led towards wisdom. God is the only being who may act as teacher and guide in this quest, so that all knowledge derives from God and all distinct apprehensions in the νοητός κόσμος depend upon God having granted wisdom to the seer. Since the divine light derives from God, where visions of the Existent are sought, the very content of the desired experience takes on in Philo an enormous importance in three areas especially: the ease with which the seer is able to apprehend God, the sort of apprehension of God which he can obtain, and the degree to which he may progress in knowledge.

1.2: *Visions of God in Philo*

Although Philo does admit that it is possible to see God or to have a vision of God, he cannot admit that one apprehends the nature of God in any way. Here, he departs from his own understanding of perception as it occurs in the intelligible realm, since the organ of sight where intelligibles are concerned is the mind. There is therefore not usually a gulf between 'seeing' something in the incorporeal sphere and comprehending or 'grasping' it. Where the divine is concerned, however, Philo does not believe this to be the case. This is due to the great gulf between the divine and human nature: human beings are not strong enough to perceive the Existent, or essence of God, who exudes brilliant rays, but might only approach the divine through his Powers. In fact, as Philo makes very clear in *Deo* 4, the "name Being (Ὤν) is not

[God's] own and proper name. For he himself is unnameable and beyond expression, as being incomprehensible". Indeed, even in *Conf.* 137, where Philo states that that which transcends the Powers is conceived of as Being or Existing, the term "ἐπινοέω" is employed. So, even in this passage, Philo does not suggest that any firm knowledge of that which transcends the Powers is possible. By its very nature, the most transcendent being is not amenable to characterization, description or apprehension, transcending as it does even the intelligible world: God can contain but may never himself be contained. Nevertheless, it is possible to contemplate the essence of God through his Powers and his works. This does not, however, lead to any greater knowledge as to what God is. There is a further distinction to be made between visions of the Powers and visions of the works of God, sometimes also characterised as Powers. Indeed, those who perceive God only through his works experience him in an inferior manner.

It is important to note that, whilst Calabi is correct in pointing, very lucidly, towards an understanding that visions of the various divine Powers or of the Existent refer to how humans relate to God: these are "different perspectives of a single designation"[767], it is Philo's placing of the supreme principle beyond even Being which precludes any rational knowledge of God[768]. All the ways in which humans approach the divine are therefore limited not only by restricted human cognitive capacity but also because of utter transcendence of the One God.

Although for Philo God is perceived, in the same way as are intelligible things, with the eye of the mind, he nonetheless imposes strict limitations upon the understanding of what it is to see God. Thus, he insists that for a man to see God does not mean that he sees what kind of being God is, for that is impossible, but that he sees that he really does exist, not having learnt this fact from anyone else, nor from anything on earth, nor from anything in heaven, nor from any one of the elements, nor from anything compounded of them, whether mortal or immortal, but being instructed in the fact by God himself, who is willing to reveal his own existence to his suppliant[769]. Philo constantly insists that seeing God does not entail an understanding of what God is, but

[767] Calabi, F., 51.
[768] As John Dillon points out in his paper, "The Transcendence of God in Philo".
[769] *Praem.* 44.

only knowing that there is a God. Even Jacob and Moses were subject to human limitations: a mortal and created nature cannot attain to more than the perception that God exists[770].

Nonetheless, Philo is also at pains to show that it is of great importance to come to belief in God through a vision, rather than through observation of the world and reasonable calculation[771], and maintains that genuine friends of God, the seekers of truth, apprehend God through himself[772]. Here, Philo makes one of his frequent comparisons between God and the sun, both of which are seen by their own brightness, and crucially, claims that a perfect apprehension of God entails that he is discerned by himself alone, without the cooperation of anything else[773]. It is therefore apparent that the means by which one acquires knowledge are, to Philo, of immense importance: God is the best guide and instructor. Reasoned calculation from the works of God can only lead as far as conjecture, as Philo reveals in his use of στοχάζομαι in this context, which contrasts with the ability to apprehend (καταλαμβάνω) God through himself [774]. Philo, accounting for the transcendence of God above both the material and immaterial world, has restricted the scope of a vision of God, without thereby robbing it of all its significance.

It is undeniable that Philo, though repeatedly denying any possibility of apprehending God as to his essence, nevertheless expresses, on occasion, this very yearning. Philo simultaneously warns his readers that they cannot fully apprehend what God is whilst holding out the hope that one might apprehend God through clear intuition[775]. Philo, believing that one might apprehend God's existence in many different ways, allows hope for those who seek more than a philosophical proof of the existence of God: Philo holds out religious experience and faith as offering a deeper experience and understanding of God, who is beyond reason[776]. In fact, I explore the possibility that the human mind is not in itself entirely inadequate, but that it is in fact hampered, in

[770] Cf. *Praem.* 40 and *Spec. Leg.* i. 43.
[771] *Praem.* 42- 43, 44- 45.
[772] *Praem.* 43, 46.
[773] *Praem.* 45.
[774] *Praem.* 43.
[775] *Conf.* 138- 139.
[776] Cf. *Legat.* 5- 6

its attempts to stretch towards the divine, by the body. This leaves open the possibility that some human minds, those that show faith in God and soar beyond even the immaterial, might transcend the body and extend towards the Uncreate God. It is still necessary, however, to bear in mind Philo's objections that those who cannot apprehend God are hampered in their desire not solely because they are mortal but also because they are created.

1.3: *The epistemological value of different types of vision in Philo*

Both where waking visions and dream visions are concerned, the reception of oracles through divine inspiration, and gazing upon spiritual objects is contingent, in Philo, upon the abandonment of sensory perception[777]. Sleep is, however, associated in many passages with blindness and dreams with unreliability and sensory pleasures. In fact, though wakefulness is sometimes linked to keen-sightedness and knowledge, Philo considers both states to be affected by the fluctuating nature of the human condition. Indeed, the fact that both body and soul are subject to change precludes, for Philo, reliability in the forming of impressions. This also explains the need for the guidance of divine reason and the greater reliability of heaven-sent dreams compared to those in which the human mind, moving together with the mind of the universe, becomes possessed and God-inspired. In fact, such dreams reveal knowledge concerning the future, and do not necessarily allow the seer any greater insight into the nature of God.

Philo distinguishes between different types of soul, those with earthly tendencies, bound to earthly life, souls that waver, able to migrate between a mortal life and ascent towards the upper air, and those of perfect purity, viceroys of God, able to behold all things. The latter are equated by Philo with the angels of the Septuagint and the heroes of the Greeks and act as mediators between humans and God. It is unclear whether human souls can ever attain such status and ascend beyond the upper air to behold and hear all things, though Moses is in some passages also described as a mediator. Although some souls might be summoned directly to experience the sight of the intelligible world, for others, the ascent will be more gradual and fraught with error. In this ascent, the thoughts of God not only enable the soul to ascend beyond

[777] Cf. *Migr*. 190- 191.

the mortal, but further guide it towards visions. The revelation of beautiful doctrines by the words of God cleanses the soul which might then experience divine indwelling. It therefore seems that for Philo the goal of a visionary ascent is attain a direct experience of God.

According to Philo, a progressive ascent towards the intelligible world and God constitutes a superior approach to that of souls who reach a conception of the intelligible universe through observation of its shadow, the material world. This latter is depicted by Philo as a divine Power, which expresses God's goodness since it acts as a gateway to the immaterial world. Observation of the material world offers only a limited understanding of the intelligible, whereas the ascent of the soul which necessitates the abandonment of the body and of astrological concerns enables, with the guidance of God, a more fruitful and direct experience of the immaterial. Philo, in deprecating those who wish to experience an ascent to heaven before having attained self-knowledge, demonstrates the value which he places upon preparing the soul through renunciation of the body and of the false concerns of astrology before approaching the immaterial and the divine. It is therefore vital, prior to any attempt at partaking in a religious experience, to be philosophically as well as ritually prepared. Philo indeed places great import upon both encyclical learning and philosophy as precursors to any close relationship with God. Accordingly, the more perfect mind will transcend the created and experience a clear vision of the Uncreated, apprehending from God both his own self and his shadow, the world. Since no one may ever apprehend the essence of the Existent, the manner in which one experiences God is more important for Philo than the knowledge which might thereby be gained.

Whilst Brenk seems to associate reference to ascent with the afterlife of the soul, it is in fact very probable that Philo conceives of some ascents as occurring during the course of moral progress on earth. It is nonetheless telling that the power by which the body is held together is, Philo assumes, a psychic power, so that it is not inconceivable that when the mind ascends, the corporeal unity of the body is compromised. In fact, in *Mos.* ii. 288 ff. it is quite explicit that Moses' ascent as pure mind occurs after death. It might be that the greatest ascents are to be understood as occurring post-mortem, when the mind might be fully purified and separated from the body. However, many of the ascents and visions which Brenk wishes to depict as

taking place after death are experienced by souls which, whilst still embodied are gifted with a good nature and, well instructed, have renounced evil, embracing virtue.

Philo understands the experience of divine indwelling or inspiration as the guiding action of the divine reason, towards a vision of God which already exists in human reason, the most divine of human faculties. The divine reason or spirit can enter the mind and sometimes replace it. It is this wise and divine spirit which is also the spirit who helps[778]and may stay awhile in the soul but cannot abide there[779]. Philo contrasts the lot of the embodied souls, thwarted by their fleshly nature, with that of the incorporeal souls who see and hear things divine[780]. In this manner, Philo underlines the temporary nature of divine inspiration in humans, and so their limited access to knowledge. The divine spirit is, according to Philo, pure knowledge, yet God, the intellect of the universe is superior to knowledge[781], so that indwellling by the divine spirit cannot be conceived as the ultimate goal of the seer, rather, the divine spirit is a guide and protector, superior to mere divine words or angels, which enables one to experience visions of the divine.

1.4: *Philo's understanding of memory*

According to Philo, a faculty of memory, which allows the preservation of the fruits of study, is made by God for each human being. Philo depicts memory in the same manner as Plato, as a block of wax in the soul which may receive impressions of perceptions and thoughts. Philo specifies that there are naturally good souls, in which there is a good mixture like smooth wax. Such a soul reproduces perfectly all shapes impressed upon it in lifelike copies preserved by memory. Individual memories are described as impressions and in docile souls are allowed to sink deep so that shapes are preserved. It is not surprising therefore, that Philo draws a distinction between those souls which preserve a genuine impression of the image of God and those in which it is corrupted and base. At the same time, Philo states that memory is used in

---

[778] *Gig.* 27: "[…] τὸ […] πνεῦμά ἐστι τὸ σοφόν, τὸ θεῖον, […]· ὅπερ ὠφελοῦν οὐ βλάπτεται[…]".
[779] *Gig.* 28.
[780] *Gig.* 31: "ψυχαὶ μὲν γὰρ ἄσαρκοι καὶ ἀσώματοι ἐν τῷ τοῦ παντὸς θεάτρῳ διημερεύουσαι θεαμάτων καὶ ἀκουσμάτων θείων".
[781] *Opif.* 7- 8.

order to render permanent the knowledge acquired through learning from a teacher or through independent practice. Accordingly, Philo believes that the same human mind can be subject to changes for good or bad, and characterises this as the assuming of different impressions, sometimes of a pure coin, sometimes of one that is base and adulterated. The purity of the impression of the divine image or powers upon the soul is thus sometimes a function of divine grace, as God creates some natures worthy and good prior to any good actions, yet it occasionally seems amenable to change. Even amongst those characterised as possessing a genuine impression, a distinction is drawn with regard to the manner in which conceptions of God are attained.

Although Philo makes no explicit references to the memory of God in conjunction with ascent visions, he does nevertheless indicate that ascent beyond the aether improves the mind and moreover refers in the context of an ascent to God stamping the mind with the impress of the powers. Furthermore, it is the divine reason engraved upon the mind which summons the purified soul to an ascent towards the intelligible world and God. Interestingly, Philo also associates ascent with the purified mind described as genuine coinage. Ascent towards God is sometimes part of an initiation into the mysteries following the taming of the passions and the forsaking of the material world. Although there are not many explicit references to a memory of God, nevertheless, the impression of the image of God plays an important role in enabling ascent visions and conceptions of God. As a memory often entails firm apprehension of things perceived and thought this may explain Philo's frequent avoidance of any reference to cognition when the "θεοῦ μνήμη" is mentioned. In fact, when Philo does mention the memory of God in *Spec. Leg.* ii. 176 he associates the memory of God with the incorporeal image of God.

Philo tends to make explicit mention of the memory of God in the context of thanksgiving and allows it to serve a primarily ethical purpose: that of combating human arrogance. When the memory of God is recalled, following abandonment of the body and heaven-sent passion in the context of the mysteries it allows the Therapeutae to picture the divine virtues and powers. A memory of the divine, clearer in some than others and which can, through the abandonment of bodily concerns, be purified, does therefore play a role in the vision and understanding of God.

1.5: *Visions and Knowledge in De Vita Mosis Book I*

Philo, in referring to Moses' vision of the burning bush, writes that in the midst of the flame was a most beautiful form, unlike an visible object, an image supremely divine in appearance. It is possible that the form is that of the first man and very likely that the supremely divine image refers to the rational soul, that is, the image of the divine logos. If this is correct, then this vision might refer to the culmination of one of the lesser mysteries in which Moses perceives the intelligible soul with the eye of the mind. In *Decal*. 60, this is presented as the precursor to a conception of an uncreated and eternal God and as such represents an initial stage in Moses' experience of the divine and relationship with God who makes himself known gradually, in accordance with the capacities of the seer to receive revelation. Thus, where the Septuagint portrays the episode of the burning bush as a miracle which underlines divine power and precedes divine revelation, Philo depicts it as a revelation itself, although it also functions as a prelude to greater visions and renders Moses more receptive to further revelation. Philo also recounts the biblical revelation "ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν", specifying that this constitutes a heightened apprehension of God's existence rather than a revelation of his essence. Nonetheless, Moses learns that God is one to whom alone existence belongs and, himself taught by God, is charged with the transmission of that knowledge. Following the first vision, Philo is careful to emphasise both Moses' modesty and his faith.

Philo depicts Moses as having attained a heightened status before entering into the darkness where God was. Indeed, kinship with the divine and a vision of God are, for Philo, predicated upon abandonment of material concerns and taming of the passions so that the divine spirit may act as a guide. It is not unlikely that, in referring to Moses' partnership with the Father of the universe and Creator, Philo implies that he is able to enjoy some direct relationship with God as Existent rather than approaching him through his Powers. Philo takes care not to employ the term γνόφος in any context other than discussion of or reference to *Exod*. xx. 21 and carefully insists upon the precise interpretation of the word in terms of invisible and incorporeal essence of existing things, which evokes the notion of Platonic forms or ideas. This does not preclude the possibility that the biblical reference to darkness allowed Philo to hint at

the limitations of human knowledge and explore the subtleties of the analogy between God and the sun: The Existent, as noetic sun, at once reveals the intelligible world whilst remaining invisible due to the blinding effect of the bright light whose beams allow one to perceive intelligibles.

Indeed, in other treatises Philo quite clearly insists that even Moses was unable to apprehend the essence of God. This ought to be understood in the context of Philo's need, given the connotations of noetic perception, as guarding against any idea that the mind, which might see God, might thereby also be able to capture the essence of God who, transcendent, cannot be contained. Despite Wolfson's statement that Philo found corroboration for the utter incomprehensibility of God in the verse "Moses went into the thick darkness where God was", it is more likely that Philo rejects the possibility that any human might capture or grasp God's very essence. This does not necessarily entail that God is utterly incomprehensible. Indeed, the statement in . *Mos*. i. 158 that things which are invisible to mortal natures can be to some degree perceived and understood tends to vitiate against Wolfson's more extreme position.

Philo employs forms of κατανοέω and ἔννοια in order to describe Moses' contemplation and consideration of the divine and invisible natures. These terms can however take on a broad spectrum of meanings, from mere perception to consideration and understanding of doctrines. Furthermore, Philo believes that even the vilest people might fleetingly conceive of God, whilst he employs the term "κατανοέω" to refer to the possibility that one might conceive of God through observation of the material world. "κατανοέω" often represents for Philo an experience quite different from seeing God. Furthermore, in *Post*. 168, he insists upon the impossibility of one of God's creatures even conceiving of God's essence.

Although conceiving of God cannot be equated with seeing or apprehending his essence, the formation of true conceptions of God are described by Philo as arising in the context of divine inspiration, when the human mind has mastered the passions and escaped from a fleshly existence. As the divine spirit, who enlightens and under whose influence true conceptions are formed, is identified by Philo as pure

knowledge, it is not unlikely that true concepts formed by the human mind, which feeds on knowledge, are to be regarded as somewhat equivalent to clear perceptions.

It is not entirely clear whether one is to understand Moses, in entering into the darkness and beholding the archetypal essence, as transcending ordinary human boundaries or whether he is thereby depicted as acting within the confines of human possibility where experiences of the divine are concerned. It appears, from *QE*. ii. 28-29 that the darkness protects ordinary mortals from the blinding rays of God, whilst the prophetic mind, inspired and filled with God, is able to ascend towards God, transcending darkness, and, as salamanders dwell in the fire from which they are born, the prophetic soul thus returns to its original, divine element and becomes like the monad. This final stage does not refer to Moses' vision as described in *Mos*. i. 158, which instead describes a stage in Moses' progression towards a more exalted relationship with God. Nevertheless, Moses' experience of such closeness to the divine is undeniably mystical and Philo's reference to the presence of God, though it cannot refer to God being in a particular place, contrasts with that of the people in *QE*. ii. 45 where Philo explicitly demonstrates that despite appearance, God was not really present.

1.6: *Visions and knowledge in De Vita Mosis Book II*

In his account of Moses' instruction into the rites of the priesthood, Philo avoids the vivid anthropomorphic language of the Septuagint's account and minimizes the visionary nature of the encounter. Nevertheless, not only does Philo write that Moses received oracles concerning the priesthood, he also depicts the prophet's contemplation of the immaterial forms of the tabernacle in the soul. Another treatise which refers to the same episode, *QE* ii. 51, interprets *Exod*. xxv. 7 as indicating that God appears in his work and, in increasingly mystical language, intimates that the mind which is sufficiently purified and made a shrine of God will see the First Cause. Philo's account in *Mos.* ii. 69 ff. offers no clear indication that a vision of the Powers or of the First Cause is implied in Moses' contemplation of the forms of the tabernacle, it dwells instead upon the importance of purification.

In *Mos.* ii 69 ff. it appears that the most crucial aspect of Moses' experience is his transformation into pure mind, also mentioned in *QE*. Given indications in other treatises that a pure mind can apply itself to all objects which are proper to the intellect, and further, that it is as pure mind that Moses receives legislative and prophetic skills, it is likely that it is this exalted state which allows Moses to receive revelations concerning the priesthood and to contemplate the immaterial forms of the tabernacle. There is, however, no indication that Moses experienced a divine vision and even in *QE* ii. 51, which refers to revelations concerning the tabernacle, the vision of God is presented as conditional and future.

It is quite likely that we are to understand Moses' state of mystical exaltation in *Mos.* ii 69ff. as merely temporary. Indeed, it is only at the end of his life that Moses, previously a compound being of both soul and body, is resolved, according to Philo, into a single nature, transformed into a most sun-like mind. The only other occasion when Philo employs the superlative 'most sun-like', it refers to knowledge which illuminates the light of the soul and so allows it to see progressively more acutely. Accordingly, Moses, as a most sun-like pure mind, is akin to knowledge and not only able to apprehend more clearly himself, is able to enlighten others. This interpretation is quite consistent with the emphasis on Moses' ability to prophesy accurately concerning not only his own fate but that of each individual tribe. It is important to note the absence of visionary references in this final episode of Moses' life: the prophet attains to superhuman knowledge without the need for any intermediaries. Like the sun, he is his own light and can apprehend his own destiny with no apparent need for revelation. Whilst Philo denies the possibility that any mortal, including Moses' may apprehend the divine essence, he also depicts Moses' transformation into pure mind, his abandonment of matter, and his being summoned to the Father.

No longer hampered by bodily constraints and now immortal, it can no longer be assumed that the reborn Moses is subject to the limitations which apply to mortal beings of body and soul. However, in his account of the end of Moses' life, Philo is more interested in emphasising his transformation and final ascent towards God, and his own role as an inspired prophet rather than his desire to apprehend the Existent. It may be that as an immortal and immaterial mind, Moses will be able to attain to this most exalted vision, or it may be that he is now so perfected as to realise the futility of

such a quest and resist the temptation to seek further in the face of the overwhelming transcendence of God. Philo, in concentrating upon the transformation of Moses leaves open the precise nature of the prophet's ultimate relationship with God.

Whilst Calabi stresses the "impossibility of having any direct knowledge of God", even where Moses is concerned, it is necessary to point out that in his most ecstatic religious experiences, Moses is no longer presented as overtly concerned with obtaining knowledge of or seeing God's essence. Philo concentrates rather upon his transformation into pure mind having abandoned the body, and his subsequent ability to ascend towards God, returning to the μητρόπολις of the soul. Here, it may be speculated, Moses attains a state similar to that of the stars, angels or heroes where he may behold all as a viceroy of God.

IV.2 *FINAL WORD*

This study has demonstrated that one ought to regard statements of God's inapprehensibility as co-existing generally quite consistently, in Philo, with references to visions of God and to Israel as "one who sees God". It is argued that Philo's careful use of terminology, which reflects his ideas concerning the manner in which intelligibles might be perceived with the eye of the soul and the connection between the human soul and the divine reason, allows him to safeguard the transcendence of the One God who cannot be conquered by human reason, whilst allowing that there are more exalted manners of understanding that there is a God than to conceive of him through his works.

It has also been important to note that Philo does not tend to describe the most heightened experiences of God in visionary or even epistemic terms. Rather, they entail a complete transformation of the God- lover and an abandonment of all that is material and sensory. This suggests that Philo's overriding concern is not epistemological but metaphysical: the compound human being is resolved into pure mind and summoned to its metropolis and to the Father. It is hoped that these findings will demonstrate the relevance of Philo's works to the study, not only of visionary episodes but of mystical and religious experiences in the Graeco- Roman period.

Bibliography

Editions, Commentaries and Translations

Colson-Whitaker, *Philo with an English Translation*, by F. H. Colson (and G. H. Whitaker for vols. I- V). Loeb Classical Library I- X, London- Cambridge (Mass. 1929- 1962).

Marcus, R. *Philo Supplement. I- II. Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus*, translated by R. Marcus. Loeb Classical Library I- X, London- Cambridge (Mass. 1953).

Runia, D. T. *On the Creation of the* Cosmos *According to Moses: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series (Leiden: Brill 2001)

Siegert, F. "The Philonian Fragment *De Deo*. First English Translation" in *SphA* X (1998).

Winston D. and Dillon, J. *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria*: *A Commentary on De Gigantibus and Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis*, Brown Judaic Studies 25 (Chico California 1983).

Critical Studies

Algra, K.; Barnes, J.; Mansfeld, J.; Schofield, M. *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press 2005)

Attridge, H. W. "Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos" in *SphA* XVII (2005), 103- 117.

Besnier, B. "Migration et Telos d' après le *De Migratione Abrahami*" in *SphA* XI (1999).

Bos, A. P. "A Platonist in the Likeness of Aristotle" in *SphA* X (1998)

Bouffartigue, J. "La Structure de l'Ame chez Philon: Terminologie Scholastique et Métaphores" in Lévy, C (ed), *Philon d'Alexandrie et le Language de la Philosophie* (Turnhout 1998), 59- 76.

Burkert, W. *Greek Religion* (Blackwell 1985)

Birnbaum, E, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought* (Georgia: Brown Judaic Studies, Studia Philonica Monographs 2, 1996).

Bockmuehl, M, "'The Form of God' (Phil. ii. 6). Variations on a Theme of Jewish Mysticism." in *Journal of Theological Studies* 48 (1997), 1- 23.

Bostock, D. *Plato's Phaedo*, (Oxford 1986)

Brenk, F. E. "Darkly Beyond the Glass: Middle Platonism and the Vision of the Soul" in S. Gersh and Ch. Kannengiesser (eds.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 8 (Notre Dame: Indiana 1992), 39- 60.

Calabi, F. *God's Acting, Man's Acting*, (Leiden: Brill 2008).

Calabi, F. (ed.), *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, (Leiden: Brill 2003).

Calabi, F. *The Language and the Law of God: Interpretation and Politics in Philo of Alexandria* (Georgia 1998)

Collins, J. J and Sterling G. E. *Hellenism in the Land of Israel* (Notre Dame Press: Indiana 2001)

Decharneux, B, *L' Ange, le Devin et le Prophète: Chemins de la Parole dans l'Oeuvre de Philon d'Alexandrie dit "le Juif"*, (Spiritualités et Pensées Libres, Bruxelles 1994).

Dillon, J. "The Pleasures and Perils of Soul- Gardening" in *SphA* IX (1997), 190- 197.

Dillon, J. *The Middle Platonists*. *A Study of Platonism 80 BC to AD 220* (London 1977, 1996).

Dillon, J. "A response to Runia and Sterling" in *SphA* V (1993), 151- 155.

Dillon, J. "The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources" in *The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture* 16 (Berkeley 1975), 1- 6.

Fine, G. ed: *Plato: Metaphysics and Epistemology* (OUP: Oxford 1999)

Flannery-Dailey, F, *Dreamers, Scribes and Priests* (Leiden: Brill, 2004)

Goodenough, E. R. "Problems of Method in Studying Philo Judaeus" in *JBL* 58 (1939) 51- 58.

Goodenough, E. R. *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 254.

Goodman, M. *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (2007)

Hayward, C. T. R. *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings* (New York: OUP, 2005).

Helleman, W. E. "Philo of Alexandria on Deification and Assimilation to God" in *SphA* II (1990), 51- 71.

Kraut, R. *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge University Press 1992)

Lane Fox, R. *Pagans and Christians*, 1986.

LaPorte, J. "The High Priest in Philo of Alexandria" in *SphA* III (1991), 71- 82.

LaPorte, J. "Sacrifice and Forgiveness in Philo of Alexandria" in *SphA* I (1989), 34- 42.

LaPorte, J. *Eucharistia in Philo*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity vol. III (1983)

Levison, J. R. "Inspiration and the Divine Spirit in the Writings of Philo Judaeus" in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* vol. XXVI (Leiden: Brill 1995), 271- 323.

Levison, J. R. "Two Types of Ecstatic Prophecy" in *SphA* VI (1994), 83- 89.

Mach, Michael, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer* Zeit, Tübingen, 1992.

Mack, B. L. "Wisdom and Apocalyptic in Philo" in *SphA* III (1991), 21- 39.

Mack, B. L. "Weisheit und Allegorie bei Philo von Alexandrien: Untersuchungen zum Traktat *De Congressu Eruditionis*" in *Sph* V (1979), 57- 105.

Mack, B. L. "Imitatio Mosis: Patterns of Cosmology and Soteriology in the Hellenistic Synagogue" in *Sph* I (1972), 27- 55.

Mazzanti, A, M. "The 'Mysteries' in Philo of Alexandria" in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, 117- 129.

Nikiprowetzky, V. "Thèmes et Traditions de la Lumière chez Philon d'Alexandrie" in *SphA* I (1989)

Radice, R. "The 'Nameless Principle' from Philo to Plotinus: An Outline of Research" in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, 167- 182.

Royse, J. R. "Philo and the Immortality of the Race" in *Journal for the Study of Judaism* XI, 33- 37.

Runia, D. T. "The Reward for Goodness: Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 90", *SphA* IX (1997), 3- 18

Runia, D. T. "Philo and Middle Platonism Revisited" in *SphA* V (1993), 112- 146.

Runia, D. T. "How to Read Philo" in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986) 185- 98, reprinted in *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (1990).

Runia, D. T. *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus*.

Saudelli, L. "La *hodos anô kai katô* d' Heraclite (Fragment 22B 60 DK/ 33 M) dans le *De Aeternitate Mundi* de Philon d'Alexandrie" in *SphA* XIX (2007), 29- 58.

Scott, I. W. "Is Philo's Moses a Divine Man?" in *SphA* XIV (2002), 87- 111.

Sterling, G. E. " 'The Queen of the Virtues': Piety in Philo of Alexandria" in *SphA* XVIII (2006), 103- 124.

Sterling, G. E. "Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism", in *SphA* V (1993) 96- 111.

Stuckenbruck, L. T. "To What Extent Did Philo's Treatment of Enoch and the Giants Presuppose a Knowledge of the Enochic and Other Sources in the Dead Sea Scrolls?", in *SphA* XIX (2007), 131- 142.

Tarrant, H. *Plato's First Interpreters*, Cornell University Press (New York: 2000)

Ubigli, L, R. "The Image of Israel in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria" in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*

Vanderlin, E, "Les Divers Modes de Connaissance de Dieu Selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *MSR* III (1947) 285- 304.

Wan, SK. "Charismatic Exegesis: Philo and Paul Compared" in *SphA* VI (1994), 54- 82

Watson, G. *Phantasia in Classical Thought* (Galway University Press, 1988)

Wedderburn, A. J. M. "Philo's Heavenly Man" in *Novum Testamentum* vol. XV, fasc. 4, 301- 326.

Whittaker, J. "The Terminology of the Rational Soul in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria", in *SphA* VIII (1996), 1- 20.

Wilson, R. "Philo and Gnosticism" in *SphA* V (1993), 84- 91.

Winston, D. "Philo's Mysticism" in *SphA* VIII (1996), 74- 82.

Winston, D, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 13.

Wolfson, H. A, *Philo, foundations of religious philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, 2 vols. (Cambridge Mass. 1948)

Zeller, D. "The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria. The Use and Origin of a Metaphor" in *SphA* VII (1995) 19- 55.