Studies in Philo of Alexandria

God's Acting, Man's Acting

Tradition and Philosophy in Philo of Alexandria

Francesca Calabi

Brill

God's Acting, Man's Acting

Studies in Philo of Alexandria

Edited by

Francesca Calabi
and
Robert Berchman

VOLUME 4

God's Acting, Man's Acting

Tradition and Philosophy in Philo of Alexandria

By

Francesca Calabi

BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON
2008

Translated by Helen C. Tooke

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

ISSN 1543-995x
ISBN 978 90 04 16270 9

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

CONTENTS

PART TWO

THE MEDIATION ACTIVITY

PART THREE

GOD AS A MODEL

ABBREVIATIONS

Journal and Series

ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
HTR	The Harvard Theological Review
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods
JThS	Journal of Theological Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SPhA	Studia Philonica Annual
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

Philo

Abr.	*De Abrahamo*
Aet.	*De aeternitate mundi*
Agr.	*De agricultura*
Anim.	*Dc 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, II, III
Legat.	*Legatio ad Gaium*

Migr.	*De migratione Abrahami*
Mos. I–II	*De vita Moysis* 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 ct solutiones in Genesim* I, II, III, IV
Sacr.	*De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini*
Sobr.	*De sobrietate*
Somn. I–II	*De somniis* I, II
Spec I–IV	*De specialibus legibus* I, II, III, IV
Virt.	*De virtutibus*

Ancient Authors and Texts

Arch.	Archytas
Hippodamos	
De Rep.	*De republica*
Hippolytus	
Ref.	*Refutatio omnium heresium*
Iamblichus	
V. P.	*De vita Pythagorica*
Sext. Emp.	Sextus Empiricus
Pyrr. Hyp	*Pyrrhonae Hypotyposes*
Simpl.	Simplicius
In Phys.	*In Aristotelis physicam*
Stob.	Stobaeus
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*

INTRODUCTION

The topic tackled in this book is that of God's acting in the world. Philo's reference model is the biblical God who acts providentially. He does not confine Himself to forming the cosmos, but follows its developments, rewarding and punishing as He sees fit. He speaks to Moses, and reveals Himself to the people. However, in parallel with this, God is 'He who is', the One whose name cannot even be spoken, whose face cannot be seen, who is unknowable.

The two-fold nature of aspects of the Divine was also to play a role in part of the Middle Platonic tradition, where we find a distinction between a first, immobile God, who is totally transcendent, incomprehensible and unknowable, and a second God who intervenes in the cosmos.

In his formulations of the nature of God and His acting, Philo is basing himself on the biblical image on the one hand, the Platonic and Aristotelian depiction on the other. To bridge the gap between the purely contemplative activities of a God who is perfectly simple and unchanging and the creative and providential action of that God who moulds the world and guides the people, Philo introduces the powers, which are mediating figures. However, by introducing these, he introduces other problems, as one then glimpses the possibility of lower-level divinities, intermediate beings who, to a certain extent, invalidate Philo's rigorously monotheistic principles. Philo is well aware of this; consequently, he constructs formulations that bring out the role of the powers as ways God has of acting, forms in which He is known. This does not, however, prevent him from producing passages in which the powers seem to be presented as autonomous beings, figures separate from God. The same sort of problem recurs, although in rather a different perspective, with regard to the angels and the daemons of which Philo speaks in connection with the children of God, the daughters of men and the giants that resulted from their union (*Gen.* 6).

The first two parts of the book deal with these themes: chapters 1–3 are about the nature of God, His simplicity, unknowability, unnameability. In chapters 4 and 5, I go into the subject of mediating figures and roles: powers, souls and daemons. Chapter 6 considers the snake as a means of mediation: a source of knowledge and a cause of transgression at the same time; the bringer of health and death, justice and wickedness. It is a go-between linking a perfect, but indeterminate world and the sphere of humans, who are split between their goal of virtue and the calls of pleasure and desire. There are basically two paths open to humankind: they can follow the divine law, which constitutes the quest for virtue, or they can follow the path of transgression, rejecting virtue and knowledge. These options are reflected in the types of life people lead. Two positive paths depicted are the contemplative life and the practical one. The model for both is God who, in six days, created the world while, on the seventh, He rested. In other words, establishing the seven days for creation actually bridges the gap we were speaking of: the distinction between an immobile God, who merely contemplates, and a creating God.

The last part of the book brings out the fact that God is a model for mankind and advocates that speculative and practical activities should both be present in people's lives if the people aspire to *homoiosis theo*. One thing Philo has in common with other ancient texts is the theme of assimilation to God, the imitation of a paragon, who teaches both with words and via His exemplary role. In particular, I have proposed an interpretation of the texts of Ecphantus, employing a parallel reading of passages from Philo.

The *leitmotiv* that runs throughout the book is the *double face* nature of acting: the two-sided coin of God as transcendent and immanent, unknowable and revealed, immobile and, at the same time, a maker; the two sides of the notion of acting in humans who, attempting to imitate God, contemplate and produce. In both contexts, divine and human, it would not be proper to give precedence either to one or to the other: the result would be barren.

My hypothesis is that a two-sided condition is seen by Philo as positive; it is a source of fertility and complexity. In my interpretation, far from being an irresolvable contradiction, the penalty for safeguarding divine transcendency and immanence, the incongruence deriving from the two traditions—Greek and Hebrew—that he uses as a reference, two-fold, vision is the key to understanding Philo's works. It constitutes a richness which rejects any reduction of complexity, the elimination of any one of the apparently incompatible forms and aspects. Hence we have a God who is immobile but creates; the mediating figures are ways in which God acts and also forms of knowledge. Hence the theorizing activity, which is good if it is alternated with practical life.

God's acting and man's acting are, at the same time, speculative and practical, and it is precisely out of their copresence that the order of the world unfolds.

Note:
Some chapters of the book have already been published in magazines and/or collective books. I would like to thank the respective editors and publishing houses for having allowed me to republish the articles here.

Previous Publications:

Chapter One
"Tra Platone e la Bibbia. Ontologia e teologia in Filone di Alessandria" Oltrecorrente *ottobre (2004) 47–59.*

Chapter Three
"Conoscibilità e inconoscibilità di Dio in Filone di Alessandria" in F. Calabi (a c. di), *Arrhetos Theos. L'inconoscibilità del principio nel medio platonismo* (Pisa, ETS 2002) 35–54.

Appendix One
"La luce che abbaglia: una metafora sulla inconoscibilità di Dio in Filone di Alessandria", in L. Perrone in collaboration with P. Bernardini and D. Marchini (ed.) *Origeniana Octava. Origen and the Alexandrian Tradition. Origene e la tradizione alessandrina* Papers of the 8th International Origen Congress Pisa, 27–31 August 2001 (Leuven, Peeters-Leuven University Press 2003) 223–232.

Chapter Four
"Serafini, Cherubini, Potenze in Filone Alessandrino. A proposito di *Isaia* 6", *Annali di Scienze Religiose* 4 (1999) 221–249.

Chapter Five
"Ruoli e figure di mediazione in Filone di Alessandria", *Adamantius* X (2004) 89–99.

Chapter Six
"Il serpente e il cavaliere: piacere e 'sophrosyne' in Filone di Alessandria", *Annali di Scienze Religiose* 8 (2003) 199–215.

Appendix Two

"Filone di Alessandria e Ecfanto: un confronto possibile?" in M. Bonazzi—C. Lévy—C. Steel (eds.), *A Platonic Pythagoras. Studies on Platonism and Pythagoreanism in the Imperial Age*, Turnhout, Brepols. In press.

Appendix Three

Galeno e Mosè, *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 4 (2000) 535–546.

The translations of Philo are those of LCL edition. For *De Opificio* I have preferred the translation by D. T. Runia, for *De Deo* the text by J. Laporte.

For the *Bible* I used the Revised Standard Version.

PART ONE

THE NATURE OF GOD

CHAPTER ONE

PLATO AND THE BIBLE. ONTOLOGY AND THEOLOGY IN PHILO

Theoretical Context

What I propose to do here is interpret some of Philo of Alexandria's theories in terms of their importance as a turning point for classical ontology in its transition towards theology. We owe this development to Philo's having grafted the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition onto the biblical one.

Starting out from the first hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides*, questions arise as to the relationships between one and many, being and non being, identity, negation and difference, which are reinterpreted in a Middle Platonic sphere in the theological key of the one. Questions regarding the thinkability of the one and the possibility of knowing it and talking about it are advanced here, together with others regarding the union of oneness and being, and the self reference of thought. Philo's fusion with biblical references is set within these themes and their interpretation, considering them in the light of the Aristotelian theory of the "immovable first mover", thought of thought. The author mediates between the notion of unreachable, unknowable, separate and transcendent principle, flanked by a demiurgic principle belonging to part of the Middle Platonic tradition, and the biblical monotheism which interrelates transcendency and immanence.

By means of this operation the Alexandrian stepped a rung up the ladder which led classical ontology to turn into theology, a progression continued, according to W. Beierwaltes,[1] with further decisive steps in Neoplatonism. Pure being and absolute oneness start to be identified with God. This identification has theological consequences as regards its relationship with the cosmos and the determinations of the intellect. Hence a new conception of God is constituted, a divine one which

[1] W. Beierwaltes, *Denken des Einen. Studien zum Neoplatonismus und dessen Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 1985).

thinks only of itself, an atemporal intellect, the model of identity of the one with being and intellect: God as wisdom and *logos*.

Philo's context is made up of the discussion on principles carried out by the so-called Middle Platonic authors,[2] who were interested in a return to the 'truth of the ancients'. Behind this lay a reinterpretation of Plato, in particular of *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* and the doctrine of principles—the One/Monad and the undefined Dyad—but also the eyeglasses of Aristotelian theory, Stoicism and the pseudo-Pythagorean works.

The questions at point consist in the relationships between one and many, intelligible and sensible, form and matter, God the creator, the demiurge, and noetic reality: between that which lies beyond all qualification and the qualified being.

The area of reference is represented by authors like Eudorus, who introduces a distinction between the One/God, the beginning of everything in the true sense of the word, and the One/Monad and the undefined Dyad, supreme elements from which all things derive.[3] There are two ontological levels here, one transcendent, with the definition of the First Principle as 'god above', the other immanent to reality.[4]

2 On the category of Middle Platonism and the discussions about the Platonism of the Imperial age see J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London 1977, 1996[2ed]); P. L. Donini, *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino* (Torino 1982), 9–24; J. Whittaker, "Platonic Philosophy in the Early Centuries of the Empire" in *ANRW* II. 36.1 (1987) 81–123; L. Dietz, "Bibliographie du Platonisme impériale antérieur à Plotin" in *ANRW* cit. 124–182; Ch. Froidefond, "Plutarque et le Platonisme" in *ANRW* cit. 184–233; F. E. Brenk, "An Imperial Heritage: The Religious Spirit of Plutarch of Chaironeia" in *ANRW* cit. 248–349; C. Moreschini, "Attico: una figura singolare del medioplatonismo" in *ANRW* cit. 477–491; M. Frede, "Numenius" in *ANRW* II. 36. 2 (1987), 1040–1050; J. Mansfeld, "Compatible alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception" in R. van der Broek, T. Baarda and J. Mansfeld (edd.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden 1988), 92–117; P. Donini, "Medioplatonismo e filosofi medioplatonici" *Elenchos* XI (1990), 79–93; F. Romano, *Il neoplatonismo* (Roma 1998), 13–28; J. Dillon, "'Orthodoxy' and 'Eclecticism': Middle Platonists and Neo-Pythagoreans", in J. Dillon and A. A. Long (edd.), *The Question of 'Eclecticism'* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1998), 103–125.

3 See Simpl. *In Phys*., p. 181, 7–30 Diels (= frr. 3–5 M).

4 Cf. M. Bonazzi, "Eudoro di Alessandria e il *Timeo* di Platone (A proposito di Simpl. *In Phys*., p. 181. 7–30 Diels)", in F. Calabi (a c. di), *Arrhetos Theos. L'ineffabilità del primo principio nel medioplatonismo* (Pisa 2002), 11–34 (29). A recent interpretation of Eudorus' thought and his philosophical references can be found in M. Bonazzi, *Eudoro di Alessandria alle origini del platonismo imperiale*, in M. Bonazzi e V. Celluprica, *L'eredità platonica. Studi sul Platonismo da Arcesialo a Proclo* (Napoli 2005), 115–160.

A hierarchy of the real world with a separation between the First Principle, which is immovable, eternal and absolutely simple, undefinable, transcendent, the very first cause, the First God/Intellect which produces the intelligible reality and makes up its thoughts on the one hand, and the demiurgic intellect, an intellect in act that thinks all things on the other, is proposed in *Didaskalikos.* The transcendency of the First Principle/Intellect, connected with the originality of the First God who, necessarily, transcends all real things deriving from it does not, however, imply that it is beyond being, nor, on the other hand, does its unnameableness imply that it is beyond thought as, indeed, it is actually the First Intellect.[5]

According to Numenius, instead, a distinction should be made among three ontological levels: the First God, who is identical to the supreme intellect; the second God, the demiurge; and the third God, who is the cosmos. The interpretation of the passage from *Timaeus* (28c) which speaks of father and maker of the universe opens the question of whether one should postulate the existence of a single divinity that fulfils various different functions or whether one should be thinking of different entities. For Numenius, the First God is the father; the second, the maker; while the third is the cosmos produced. In Plutarch, too, the question is raised as to whether the first principle is the same thing as the demiurgic intellect. It is not always easy to identify Plutarch's position within the vast body of writings he produced, in which the complexity of the positions presented—whether his own or those of his interlocutors—proves to be hard to grasp at times. It is however affirmed that there is a transcendent plan, with a separate nature, which constitutes the ontological and axiological foundation of the cosmos. In this sphere the question of the *status* of ideas poses itself and, more specifically, whether they are to be considered as thoughts of God.[6] An interpretation of the First God as identical to/separate from the intellect is introduced here. In Plutarch, there appears to be no doctrine regarding the hierarchy of the divine figures.

---

[5] Cf. J. Whittaker, *Alcinoos, Enseignements de doctrines de Platon* (Paris 1990), 103 n. 188; M. Abbate, "Non-dicibilità del 'Primo Dio' e 'via remotionis' nel cap. X del *Didaskalikos*", in F. Calabi (a c. di), *Arrhetos Theos* cit. 55–75 (74); F. Ferrari, La trascendenza razionale: il principio secondo Plutarco", in F. Calabi (a c. di), *Arrhetos Theos* cit. 77–91 (78).

[6] For a presentation of the discussion on the theme which divides the scholars see F. Ferrari, *Dio, idee e materia. La struttura del cosmo in Plutarco di Cheronea* (Napoli 1995), 242ff. According to Ferrari Plutarch rejected the thesis of ideas as thoughts of the divine intelligence.

The Principle

Philo of Alexandria can be set in this context. This author seeks to mediate between Platonic thought and Biblical tradition. He develops the theme of causality of the First Principle, and ideas as thoughts of God.[7] The distinction between a principle that is pure being, totally unreachable and unknowable, separate, transcendent, perfectly simple, and a demiurgic principle which relates and is involved with multiplicity is incompatible with the monotheistic conception which Philo has drawn from the *Bible*, just as incompatible as the notion of the noetic world being eternal. Hence the hypothesis whereby ideas originate in God's mind as His thoughts i.e. they depend on the First Principle.

God, who created via the *logos*, looks upon the noetic world—which is what he thinks about—as a model for the creation of the sensible world. He acts through the powers, which mediate between divine transcendency and immanence. However, further difficulties arise when one seeks to make a connected whole of aspects which cannot easily be combined. In particular, if God is pure transcendence, being utterly separate, uninvolved with the multiple, and unchangeable, He cannot have any relationship with the created world, because He would then be marred by what is changeable; but the God of the Bible is a creator and intervenes in the real world. Moreover, His oneness excludes the hypothesis of demiurgic divinities coexisting with the transcendent first God. The question then arises as to whether God-*logos*-powers make up the steps of a hierarchy of reality or whether what we actually have is a multiplicity of functions. And at what level should we position the ideas/thoughts of God? Can we actually say there is a single principle—the cause of everything? And can we speak of the nature of this principle, of its acting, if any, of the relationship between one and multiplicity? Philo always keeps the *Bible* as his indispensable reference point. This is a sacred text, written by God, which mirrors reality. The

[7] Scholars discuss whether Philo derived his formulation of ideas as God's thoughts from Antiochus of Ascalon, as suggested by W. Theiler and also by J. Dillon who, using different arguments, speaks of a conception already formulated at the time of the Ancient Academy which might have been widespread in Antiochus' times. For some scholars the referent could be Xenocrates. Others opine that Posidonius was his immediate referent. Instead, according to R. Radice, *Platonismo e creazionismo in Filone di Alessandria* (Milano 1989), 278 «la teoria delle idee come pensieri di Dio in modo tematico, preciso ed esplicito compare per la prima volta in Filone, in connessione con la dottrina del Logos».

Bible, repeatedly and insistently speaks of one single God who is utterly transcendent—not even His name can be known—and who, at the same time, acts in the real world. God is the cause of everything, not only because, as the origin of all things, his thoughts are the paradigms of the world, but he is also the actor in a providential plan that is made manifest in the creating and governing of what has been created.

So, the issues tackled are: oneness and plurality of the principle; transcendency and immanence; modes of action, knowability, describability and nameability of God.[8] It is a question of reconciling the notion of a principle that is totally transcendent, unknowable and unnameable, without any ascribable qualities, with its interventions in nature and history. As a background we have the text of the *Bible* which, on the one hand, clarifies the gap between God and mankind, the impossibility for the latter of ever knowing the essence of the former, describing Him or giving Him a name while, on the other hand, it speaks of God's creative and providential action. On one hand we have God's declaration to Moses: you can see my glory, but my face you cannot see; no one can see God and survive, which Philo translates in terms of the possibility of perceiving the existence of God, nor His essence (see *Praem*. 39; *Spec.* I 43–44). On the other hand, we have God's action in the world, which Philo translates in terms of the action of the powers: first and foremost, the creative and royal powers, but also the merciful, the legislative and punitive ones. The first of the powers is the *logos*, by means of which God created the world, the all-cutting *logos* and the mediating *logos*.

Here a number of questions are raised: can we maintain, as J. Whittaker[9] does, that God is *epekeina nou* i.e. beyond the intellect,[10] in other words that there is an universal *nous* other than God which might perhaps be the same thing as the *logos*? This would imply that the *logos* is a figure that is autonomous from the principle. And if God uses His thoughts for creating, should we postulate that there is a divine mind, a *nous* that is separate from God to which God is *epekeina*?

---

[8] These themes have been studied by D. Winston. See, in particular, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati 1985); G. E. Sterling (ed.), *The Ancestral Philosophy. Hellenistic Philosophy in Second Temple Judaism. Essays of David Winston*, Brown Judaic Studies Studia Philonia Monographs, 4 (Providence 2001).

[9] "'Επέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας", *Vigiliae Christianae* XXIII (1969), 91–104 (102).

[10] With respect to *Leg*. II 46.

Is there a hierarchy in the reality, or is it just a question of different levels of knowledge and clarity? In view of the monotheistic premisses it seems natural to think, not so much of various kinds of reality, but rather of a single principle which acts in various different roles. But would this not mar His simplicity and perfection?

My hypothesis is that Philo seeks to overcome the difficulties by introducing a distinction between different points of view. If the perspective is strictly ontological, if one attempts to give a definition to the being, to its essence i.e. to take a stance as regards the nature of God, divine transcendency and simplicity lead to an insuperable *impasse*. The result is a sort of negative theology, an aphasia with regard to a God that cannot be named, which contrasts with the knowability of the reality, as this is set entirely within what is changeable and multiple, without it being possible to clearly state the terms of the relationship between the two levels. If, on the other hand, one takes the point of view of people desirous of knowing the first principle, of perceiving its activities, of giving a name—improper though this may be—to the pure being, the introduction of the powers through which He acts, together with the *logos*, a mediating tool, provides an initial solution to the problem.

This solution is actually only partial, because it reintroduces all the difficulties connected with the relationship between transcendency and immanence, between oneness and plurality, but at another level. The attempt to resolve the aporiae does not lead to a definitive solution: hence the continual oscillation in Philo's text between the presentation of the powers and the *logos* as ways in which God carries out His actions, as autonomous entities, and their depiction as human forms of knowledge, as a way of approaching the first principle. Hence the idea of *logos* as the place of God's thoughts, as the divine word, as a means of action, as the image of God and, at the same time, as the shadow Betzaleel looks at when he attempts to know the first principle. In this sense, any vision of the powers and the *logos* is connected with the level of the person seeing.[11] God is unchangeable, devoid of qualities and attributes; man changes, and his perception of the way God acts also changes: any vision of God is conditioned by man and his changes.

[11] Cf. *Deus* 109; *QE* IV 1–2; *Abr.* 119–121. In *Sacr.* 59 we find the notion of powers as 'measures', 'rules' 'parameters'. We are dealing with measures to which things are related, with rules which have drawn their rational form from God.

Nous-noesis-noeton

The notion of ideas as thoughts of God takes us back to the *nous-noesis-noeton* relationship: intellect, the act of thinking and the object thought of. For Philo, the *topos* of the world of ideas, which is the object of thought, lies within the divine *logos* (*Opif.* 20). It is reminiscent of Aristotle's *De anima* (429a 28), where the *topos* of ideas is the noetic soul. The intellectual soul as the place of forms; however not of ideas in act, but of those in potency. In Philo the principle that thinks is called *logos* instead of *nous,* which introduces a significant change in terminology. In Aristotle, *nous* already approaches *logos* and the Stoics see *logos* as the rational principle which animate the cosmos. So it is not a case of a linguistic shift extraneous to the Greek philosophical tradition, but the whole point of using the term is—I believe—the assumption that God acts creatively via the word. By speaking, God created the world.[12]

The Aristotelian distinction between ideas in act which are external to the noetic soul and ideas in potency, which are in the *noetike psyche,* is reflected in Philo's distinction between the world of ideas seen as the object of thought, which is external to God's mind, starting out from the act of creation, and *logos* as God's mind, which is the place of ideas. In other words, there is a sort of division between ideas within God's mind and external ideas, which have an autonomous existence. If thinkers such as Numenius and the author of *Didaskalikos* could make a distinction among First God, demiurgic principle and cosmos produced, in Philo the concept of God's oneness and His simplicity lead the author to view God, His mind and the objects of His thought as one and the same thing and—at the same time—introduce the necessity of projecting ideas outwards, into a noetic world with an autonomous existence. Wolfson explains the nature of this duality very effectively:

> Inasmuch as God is absolute simplicity, His mind and His thinking and the objects of His thought are all one and identical with His essence [...] the ideas, however, do not remain in the mind or the logos of God. By an act of creation they acquire an existence as created beings outside the mind of God.[13]

---

[12] The form used in the account of creation is "He said". In the Septuagint we find the expression 'logos' in other Biblical books (for example in *Ps*. 33. 6), but not in *Genes*is. See *La Bible d'Alexandrie. La Genèse*, Introduction et notes par M. Harl, Paris (1986), p. 87 note to *Gen.* 1.3.

[13] H. A. Wolfson, *Philo. Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, Mass. 1962), I. 231.

There are not two or more Gods, as we find in other Middle Platonic authors, but two conditions and two settings for the noetic world. To return to Aristotle—although the logic is different and therefore the shift is a little forced—ideas in potency are in God's mind and ideas in act in the noetic, created world. The *logos* as a divine intellect which is the same thing as God and—considered from another point of view—as an intellect created by God, with its own autonomous existence. Can we speak here of a hierarchy of being or is it a question of a change in perspective? Are we witnessing an ontological doubling, a different level of existence[14] or rather different ways of seeing the same being? The *logos* is presented as the sum of all ideas (*Somn.* II 45), as a set of an infinite number of ideas (*Sacr*. 83), as the archetypal idea (*Spec*. III 207), the idea of ideas (*Migr.* 103), and the archetypal seal we say is the intelligible world (*Opif.* 25). In other passages, the *logos* is seen as a unifying element of God's powers (*Cher.* 27–28), an aspect of mediation (*Fug.* 101), the source of the creating and the royal powers whereas, on the other hand, it is used to indicate God's word (*Sacr*. 65; *Decal.* 47; *Deus* 83; *Mos.* I 283).

God, intellect, *logos* and powers converge: God, by contemplating His own thoughts i.e. the action of the intellect, creates the world through his own *logos* and governs it by means of the powers. We have a sort of doubling, of subdivision, of the one being. We cannot really say that there are different functions, because the intellect, the place of divine thoughts, is not a function, and neither is the *logos*. The powers can be seen as ways in which God acts and ways in which God manifests Himself and makes Himself known to man. However, man can only perceive His existence, not His essence. The powers and the *logos* can therefore be considered with respect to different degrees of comprehension: a hierarchy which is not ontological, but regards the way in which He manifests Himself.

In a passage from *De Opificio* 8 the theme of the origin of reality is introduced:

> Among existing things there is an activating cause[15] on the one hand and a passive object on the other, and that the activating cause is the

[14] As Wolfson (op. cit. 226–240) mantains. Wolfson also speaks of a third level of existence of the *logos*, which is immanent in the world.

[15] On the activity of the First Principle see also *Spec.* III 178–180; *Cher*. 87; *Det*. 161; *Fug.* 11–13. A discussion of possible sources of the passage can be found in Philo of

> absolutely pure and unadulterated intellect of the universe,[16] superior to excellence and superior to knowledge and even superior to the good and the beautiful itself.

It is in no way mixed; it is wholly one, a statement we also find in *Mut.* 184, where God's simplicity goes against any kind of plurality. He is better than the good, purer than the unit, and more venerable than the monad.[17]

Opif. 7ff. opposes the idea of an inactive God, symmetrical with the concept of a non-generated and eternal world. The powers of God the creator and father are instead postulated and an active principle is presented. This is the intellect of the universe, superior to every other reality, and it is perfectly simple and unmixed. The declaration that God is superior, that He is beyond virtue, beyond knowledge, beyond ideas, is set alongside the concept of providence, that the father and creator of the world looks after what He has produced. We see here an *oikeiosis*, a kinship between the creator and what has been generated.

> It is a worthless and unhelpful doctrine, bringing about a power-vacuum in this cosmos, just like (what happens) in a city, because it does not then have a ruler or magistrate or judge, by whom everything is lawfully administered and regulated.[18]

Although the principle is perfectly simple and unmixed, this does not mean it has no relationships; it takes the role of a father and producer, closely connected with the work it produces. It acts as an active principle and exercises its powers to govern and direct. In His work of creation, as a first step, God constructs the noetic patterns in His mind. These are paradigms of sensible reality, which is fashioned in the image of the objects of thought.[19] Thus, the intelligible world does not have its own *topos*, a separate and autonomous existence, outside God's mind.

> Just as the city that was marked out beforehand in the architect had no location outside, but had been engraved in the soul of the craftsman, in the same way the cosmos composed of the ideas would have no other place than the divine Logos who gives these (ideas) their ordered disposition. After all, what other place would there be for his powers, sufficient

---

Alexandria, *On the Creation of the Cosmos*, Introduction, translation and commentary by D. T. Runia (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2001), 115.

16 See also *Migr.* 192–193.

17 *Praem.* 40; cf. *Contempl.* 2; *Legat.* 5.

18 *Opif.* 11.

19 See *Opif.* 16–19.

> to receive and contain, I do not speak about all of them, but just any single one in its unmixed state?[20]

The pattern, the archetype of ideas, the noetic paradigm lies within God Himself, who contains all His own powers, since they are *akratoi*, unmixed, in other words, not immersed within the multiple.[21] The plan is enclosed within the soul of the creator, the divine *logos*, the place of the intelligibles[22] which gives ideas their order.[23] Here, the intelligible world and the *logos* become one and the same, since it is said that

> the intelligible cosmos is nothing else than the Logos of God as he is actually engaged in making the cosmos [...] the archetypal seal, which we affirm to be the intelligible cosmos, would itself be the model and archetypal idea of ideas, the Logos of God.[24]

For V. Nikiprowetzky,[25] the need to safeguard the oneness of God against the pseudo-multiplicity of first cause, intelligible world and *logos* underlies the identification of *logos* with the noetic world. However, not all the critics agree with this identification and there is an open debate on the matter, partly deriving from difficulties in interpreting the text.[26] In my opinion, the identification of *logos* with noetic world should be interpreted in accordance with *Opif.* 8, where God's soul was said to be the place of ideas. If the intelligible world is the same thing as the divine *logos*, this implies that the *logos* lies within God. This is a remarkable shift given that, in Philo's works, the *logos*, the first of the powers, an aspect of God directed towards creation and action, is mainly an element mediating between transcendency and immanence. If, as here, ideas are set within the *logos*, and indeed, it is even possible that intelligible world and *logos* are the same thing, we shift the latter into a sphere of pure transcendency, where the powers are *akratoi*, unmixed. However, given that the powers are ways in which God acts in the world, there is a difference in perspective according to whether

---

[20] *Opif.* 20–21.

[21] Runia in his commentary to *On the Creation of the Cosmos* cit. 143 interprets unmixedness with respect to the condition of the receiver.

[22] Cf. *Somn.* I 62.

[23] Cf. *Her.* 133–236.

[24] *Opif.* 24.

[25] *Le commentaire de l'Écriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (Leiden 1977) 250 n. 4.

[26] See R. Radice's commentary to the passage in Filone di Alessandria, *La filosofia mosaica. La creazione del mondo secondo Mosè, Le allegorie delle leggi* (Milano 1987) 242–243. According to Radice, God's intellect, intelligible world and logos are identical as to their essence, not as to their scope. See also D. T. Runia, commentary cit. 134.

logos and powers are considered with respect to God's mind or with a view to the way they act. So some critics postulate a sort of split within the *logos* and within the powers, which would seem to divide into transcendent and immanent.[27] The full extent of the problem becomes clear if we compare this passage with *Conf.* 172, which stresses that the noetic world is constructed through the powers and *Spec.* I 48 in which the powers accompany God, are unknowable as to their essence and, at the same time, give form to what exists, ordering and structuring the unlimited and undefined.

The theme of the oneness of God, in His simplicity, totally unmixed,[28] is referred to in *Abr.* 119–122, where the vision of Abraham at Mamre described in *Genesis* (18. 1–15) is presented: it is midday, and three men appear to the patriarch, to whom he generously offers hospitality. One of them leads the exchange and promises that Isaac will be born. According to Philo's allegorical interpretation,

> When, then, as at noon-tide God shines around the soul, and the light of the mind fills it through and through and the shadows are driven from it by the rays which pour all around it, the single object presents to it a triple vision, one representing the reality, the other two the shadows reflected from it.[29]

This was a vision of God, the Father of the universe, and of the two powers that are closest to Him: the creative and the royal powers.[30]

> So the central Being with each of His potencies as His squire presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three: of one, when that mind is highly purified and, passing beyond not merely the multiplicity of other numbers, but even the dyad which is next to the unit, presses on to the ideal form which is free from mixture and complexity, and being self-contained needs nothing more; of three, when, as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries, it is still a votary only of the minor rites and unable to apprehend the Existent alone by Itself and apart from all else, but only through Its actions, as either creative or ruling.[31]

---

[27] Cf. Wolfson, op. cit. I. 226–239.

[28] Cf. *Virt.* 9. For the relationship between God and matter see Wolfson, op. cit. I. 279 ff.

[29] *Abr.* 119.

[30] The action of powers can be seen in many Philonic passages. See for example *Heres* 166; *Sacr.* 60; *Deo* 5; *Cher.* 20 ff.; *QE* II 66. In many of these passages it seems that powers are autonomous entities, separate from God; elsewhere it seems that they are ways of God's acting or else, ways in which man can know God. See here: chap. five.

[31] *Abr.* 122.

In other words, the two-fold vision, alternating between one figure and three, is related to the level of the intellect contemplating. What is seen is one and the same thing: "He who is", being one, simple, immune to mixing, totally self sufficient. His oneness of being, separate from all other things is not, however, necessarily grasped by the intellect preparing itself to receive the vision. If this intellect is unable to grasp the idea in all its purity, untainted by mixing, the viewer ends up seeing a multiple vision, a vision not of "He who is", but of His acts. Here the vision is closely connected with the cognitive capacities of the receiver: the powers are not autonomous forms, but figures perceived by those who apprehend only partial and fragmentary views of the one principle.

Although in these passages, the powers are aspects of God perceived by man, in other passages, they are, instead, presented as ways in which the first principle acts. Thus, in *Cher.* 27. At *Conf.* 170–172 it is clarified that the powers of God are infinite[32] in number. Even if He who commands and rules the world is one, the number of *dynameis* who make up the intelligible and incorporeal world, the model of the phenomenic world, is infinite. There are five of the powers which have a dominant role and, out of these "the chiefest and surest and best" is the *logos,*[33] the shadow of God, the tool used in the creation of the world.[34]

> This shadow, and what we may describe as the representation, is the archetype for further creations. For just as God is the Pattern of the Image, to which the title of Shadow has just been given, even so the Image becomes the pattern of other beings.[35]

> He is Himself the Image of God, chiefest of all Beings intellectually perceived, placed nearest, with no intervening distance, to the Alone truly existent One.[36]

It is moreover the foremost of all the powers.[37]

In contrast with this depiction of the *logos* as situated above the powers in a dominant role amongst intelligible beings, the *logos* in *Heres* 205 is much closer to immanence: being placed close to God, it automatically becomes an intermediary. The *logos* separates the created world from its

---

[32] Cf. *Deus* 79.
[33] Cf. *Fug.* 94–95.
[34] For the *logos* as the instrument of creation see *Cher*. 127; *Migr*. 6; *Spec.* I 81.
[35] *Leg.* III 96.
[36] *Fug.* 101.
[37] See *Cher.* 27.

creator; it intercedes to the benefit of mortals, it acts as their ambassador, a go-between linking God and what has been generated. The fact that God is separate, His detachment from all that is changeable and material, makes it necessary to introduce intermediate forms—*logos* and powers—which can bridge the gap between God and the created world and act on what has been generated. In actual fact God—when He desires to do so—can act directly on the world, and examples of His actions can be found in the *Bible*—ranging from the wonders in Egypt to the apparition Moses experienced. However, one problem remains: how can God remain pure and unmixed after having come into contact with what is material.

We again encounter the issue of God's simplicity, His lack of qualities, His immobility, unchangeability, self sufficiency, lack of desires and needs.[38] The idea that God can act on the created world sets up a mediatory relationship with the intelligible world, and that He performs His deeds via the *Logos* and the powers would seem to contrast strongly with the idea of a God who is immovable and unchanging, immutable in His simplicity. The problem is tackled in various passages, for example at *Mut.* 54 where

> [Abraham] knew that God stands with place unchanged yet moves the universal frame of creation, His own motion being [...] a motion whereby He shows His unalterable, unchanging nature. He knew that he himself is never firmly set in a stable position, that he is ever subject to various changes.

The solution, which seems reminiscent of the immovable Aristotelian motor, is actually set on another plane, at the time when God, the unmoved creator, creates moving beings, witnesses to His immobility[39] i.e. at that time when God acts on the plane of the manifold and changeable. In *Sacr.* 101 God, increate, immutable, sacred and immortal, is set against all that makes up the created world, which is mutable, profane and, mortal. God's separateness, the fact that He is set on a plane which is completely different from that of other things, is emphasized in *Spec.* I 329 where God, being perfectly happy,[40] cannot enter into contact with matter which is unlimited and devoid of order,

---

[38] Cf. *Virt.* 9.
[39] Cf. R. Arnaldez, *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): *De mutatione nominum* (Paris 1964), 57 n. 3.
[40] Cf. *Deus* 26; *Cher.* 86.

and resorts to "the incorporeal powers well denoted by their name of forms". Moreover, God is one and one alone;[41] He is immutable[42] and has no qualities.[43] He is totally unsusceptible to determination.[44] He has no name and cannot be named,[45] nor can one speak about Him.[46] He is not knowable,[47] and is not in any place because He is not contained by anything.[48] His nature is hidden,[49] simple,[50] not mixed and not compound. As He is ingenerate, He has no need of any of the properties of human creatures.[51]

> The Existent considered as existent is not relative. He is full of Himself and is sufficient for Himself. It was so before the creation of the world, and is equally so after the creation of all that is. He cannot change nor alter and needs nothing else at all, so that all things are His but He Himself in the proper sense belongs to none.[52]

At the same time, God is the cause of all things[53] and acts upon them, either directly, for example at the time when He appears to Moses or when He decides to change the course of nature to impede the Pharaoh in his wickedness, or indirectly, via the mediation of the *logos* and the powers. Even if these are not autonomous beings but God's modes of action, their action contrasts with His simplicity, immutability, lack of determination and qualities. The contradiction remains open and Philo is aware of this: hence the various different ways in which he depicts the *logos* and the powers—which are seen at times as manifestations of God, at others as ways in which human beings can know Him.

[41] Cf. *Somn.* I 229.
[42] Cf. *Somn.* I 232.
[43] Cf. *Leg.* I 36; III 36; *Deus* 55; *Cher*. 67.
[44] Cf. *Deus* 55; 109.
[45] Cf. *Somn.* I 230; *Mos*. I 75; *Deo* 4. On the distinction between not having a name and not revealing one's own name see here: chap. three.
[46] Cf. *Mut*. 11; *Somn.* I 67.
[47] Cf. *Somn.* I. 231; *Post.* 168–169; *Mut.* 15.
[48] Cf. *Leg* III. 51; *Post.* 14.
[49] Cf. *Leg.* III. 206.
[50] Cf. *Praem*. 40; *Contempl.* 2.
[51] Cf. *Deus* 55–56.
[52] *Mut.* 27–28.
[53] Cf. *Deus* 56; *Post*. 14.

CHAPTER TWO

SIMPLICITY AND ABSENCE OF QUALITIES IN GOD*

God's Unchangeability

Philo specifically tackles the theme of God's simplicity in the work *Quod deus sit immutabilis*. Philo's argument develops starting out from the interpretation of some biblical passages[1] that are interpreted in the light of God's unchangeability,[2] immobility,[3] non-determination and the absence of any attributes or qualities in Him.[4]

* A first version of this paper was delivered at the "Seminario degli antichisti" Perugia 19–21 May 2005 and at the "Seminario annuale di terminologia filosofica" organized by the "Istituto per il Lessico Intellettuale Europeo and Storia delle Ideas-CNR" 11 January 2006. I thank all those who took part at the discussion. Their suggestions were very useful.

[1] *Gen.* 6. 5–8 "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord". As regards the rather different senses expressed by the verbs used in the *Massorah* and the *Septuagint* in connection with God's feelings, see M. Harl, *La Bible d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): 1. *La Genèse* (Paris 1986), 127.

[2] See *Post.* 28: "The Existent Being who moves and turns all else is Himself exempt from movement and turning."

QG. I 42: "The highest and eldest cause is stable and immobile (suprema vero causa stabilis est et immobilis)". *Somn.* I 249: "the Unoriginate is free from alteration and from movement". See also *Conf.* 134.

[3] Cf. *Post* 29: "quiescence and abiding are characteristics of God, but change of place and all movement that makes for such change is characteristic of creation".

[4] "The comrades of the soul, who can hold converse with intelligible incorporeal natures, do not compare the Existent to any form of created things. They have dissociated Him from every category or quality, for it is one of the facts which go to make His blessedness and supreme felicity that His being is apprehended as simple being, without other definite characteristic; and thus they do not picture it with form, but admit to their minds the conception of existence only" (*Deus* 55). God transcends the peculiarities that mark all created things, "He contains all and is not Himself contained by anything" (*Post.* 7).

More specifically, as concerns us here, the text considers the unchangeable nature of God (§§22–32),[5] a God who is not susceptible to any passion at all (52),[6] who has no form[7] or qualities and cannot be defined. His essence, too, is indefinable, and only His existence can be apprehended (55).[8] He is self sufficient in His pure simplicity and free from all admixture and composition (56).[9]

> He receives nothing from anyone, for, besides that He has no needs, all things are His possessions, and when He gives, He employs as minister of His gifts the Reason wherewith also He made the world (57).
>
> He is not apprehensible even by the mind, save in the fact that He is. For it is His existence which we apprehend, and of what lies outside that existence nothing (62).[10]

At the same time, God is goodness; He takes mankind under His protection (73), is merciful in His judgements (74–75), and mitigates and tempers His Powers and His light according to His interlocutor's receptive capacity (77–81).[11] So we have a double image of God. On

---

[5] God is ὁ ἄτρεπτος (22), ὁ ἄφθαρτος καὶ μακάρος (26). Cf. *Post.* 23 and 28: God is unwaveringly stable, is exempt from movement and turning. At *Post.* 30, "in God's case standing is not a future but an ever present act". On the sense of *aion* as used in Philo with regard to biblical literature and other fields, see H. M. Keizer, *Life, Time Entirety. A Study of ΑΙΩΝ in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*, Academisch Proefschrift (Amsterdam, 7 September 1999).

[6] In §§85–86 of *De Cherubim* God is ἄφθαρτος, ἀγένητος and is also happy, in a state of *eirene*. He does not experience passions: God has a perfect *chara*. Cf. *Abr.* 202–204.

[7] *Deus* 55. F. Alesse has called my attention to the 101 Edelstein-Kidd fragment according to which Posidonius asserted that god has no form (οὐκ ἔχον μορφήν) although he can turn himself into anything he wants to. The text is very interesting in terms of the various analogies arising and, above all, considering its partial use of a Stoic terminology. However, it seems to me that here we simply have an assonance rather than a similarity. In Philo God has no form, not because He cannot take on any form He wants to, but because He transcends form and no human representation can express His being.

[8] The theme of knowability with regard to existence and not essence pervades most of Philo's writings. See e.g. *Deus* 62; *Conf.* 137.

[9] In *Opif.* 8 "the activating cause is the absolutely pure and unadulterated intellect of the universe". Cf. *Post.*: 3–4 God is in need of nothing and has no parts at all. In *Mut.* 184 God is not compounded but a single nature.

[10] Cf. *Somn.* I 67; *Post.* 168. *Post.* 13: Moses wishes to see God, but God is incapable of being seen (*Post.* 15): we cannot touch His nature "even with the pure spiritual contact of the understanding" (*Post.* 20). He "cannot be discerned by anyone else; to God alone is it permitted to apprehend God" (*Praem.* 39–40). Cf. *Contempl.* 2.

[11] At *Deus* 79–81 the powers' existence is independent of that of mortals; they are not ways in which men can know and, to a certain extent not even ways in which God is; they would seem to be autonomous entities. As regards the theme of distribution of divine gifts in accordance with man's capacity to accept them cf. *Post.* 145.

the one hand, He is unknowable, in all senses ungraspable, without any determination or form (55), *haplos*, *apoios* (*Leg.* III 36) or rather, neither with nor without qualities, whether bodily or incorporeal (*Leg.* III 206), He is not in any place (*Leg.* III 51). On the other, He is an *euergetes*[12] and providential demiurge. The heart of the issue is the contemporary presence in one being of two completely different characterisations, which continually crop up in the passages that I wish to analyze, giving rise to certain difficulties and to formulations which are so contrasting that the critics vary as to their interpretations and translations of them. I would like to dwell on *Deus* 107–110, in particular.

Deus 107–110

The passage which forms our starting point is *Gen.* 6.8: "Noah found favour[13] in the eyes of the Lord". It is discussed at *Deus* 104.[14] Following his typical approach, Philo proposes different possible keys to understanding the passage, but, unlike in many other exegeses,[15] here the various interpretations proposed do not all appear to be plausible or

[12] Cf. *Post* 26: God is bountiful; *Mut.* 15: God the Lord; *Mut.* 18: both at once God and Lord; *Mut.* 23–24; 27–32: God is "the framer of the noble and the good alone".

[13] The multiple senses contained in the word *charis* results in a choice of terminology that I feel is not particularly felicitous, but which is adopted both by Mosès and by Mazzarelli, who respectively translate it 'grâce' and 'grazia'. It seems to me that this choice implies precisely what Philo denies in his first explanation of the passage i.e. the idea of a free and special gift which would set Noah on a different plane from the rest of the cosmos. Colson and Whitaker translate it as 'grace', which perhaps corresponds more closely to *charis*, as it comprises the idea of favour, benevolence rather more than it does in Italian. S. Maso once suggested that 'disponibilità' might be a suitable term. In any case, in these passages, the term is undoubtedly a complex and polyvalent one. As I see it, it is precisely this multivalency which is indicative of the different levels at which Philo's argument is set. Regarding the notion of being well pleasing to God cf. *Mut.* 39.

[14] The theme is also dealt with in *QG* I 96, where a rather different explanation is given: Noah was the only one of the men to show he was grateful, and in *Leg.* III 78, where the explanation is the same as in *Deus*: "the righteous man exploring the nature of existences makes a surprising *find*, in this one discovery, that all things are a *grace* (*charis*) of God, and that creation has no gift of grace (*charisma*) to bestow, for neither has it any possession, since all things are God's possession, and for this reason grace (*charis*) too belongs to Him alone as a thing that is His very own. Thus to those who ask what the origin of creation is, the right answer would be that it is the goodness and the grace (*agathotes kai charis*) of God, which He bestowed on the race that stands next after Him. For all things in the world and the world itself is a free gift and act of kindness and grace on God's part".

[15] See e.g. *Cher.* 21–30.

even complementary. One of the interpretations is chosen as being more convincing or, at least, preferable. The first explanation hypothesizes that the expression "Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord" could mean that Noah obtained grace. But, objects Philo,

> what more was given to Noah than practically all creatures, not only those who are compounded of body and soul, but also simple elementary natures, all accepted as recipients of divine grace?

Let us then consider the second explanation: Noah was judged worthy of grace:

> the Cause judges those worthy of His gifts, who do not deface with base practices the coin within them which bears the stamp of God, even the sacred mind.[16]

The image of the stamp had already appeared in Plato (*Phaed.* 69a). Although this explanation is not inappropriate, Philo is not satisfied with it. Indeed, it presupposes the existence of a being worthy of God's gifts. Now, even the cosmos in its entirety—the first, the greatest, the most perfect of God's works[17] would be hard pushed to achieve the required level. The third explanation affirms that

> the man of worth, being zealous in inquiring and eager to learn, in all his enquiries found this to be the highest truth, that all things are the grace or gift of God—earth, water, air, fire, sun, stars, heaven, all plants and animals.[18] But God has bestowed no gift of grace on Himself, for He does not need it,[19] but He has given the world to the world, and its parts to themselves and to each other, aye and to the All. But He has given His good things in abundance to the All and its parts, not because He judged anything worthy of grace, but looking to His eternal goodness, and thinking that to be beneficent was incumbent on His blessed and happy nature (*Deus* 107–108).

We have here an obvious reference to the demiurge who looks to the model of *Timaeus* 28a.

> So that if anyone should ask me what was the motive for the creation of the world, I will answer what Moses has taught, that it was the goodness

[16] Cf. *Plant.* 18, *Det.* 86.
[17] Cf. *Timaeus* 37c.
[18] Cf. *Deus* 5.
[19] Cf. Plotinus VI 9. 6.40; VI 9. 6.34.

> of the Existent,[20] that goodness which is the oldest of His bounties[21] and itself the source of others.

In other words, the cause behind the genesis of the cosmos is *agathotes*, the oldest of the powers. Bounties come from the powers who can act in the world.[22] Here, *charis* has a different meaning from the *charis* found by the *asteios* man mentioned in the foregoing text i.e. the gift of comprehension that he has received.[23] In §109 we return to the first meaning: Moses found *charin* in He whom the powers escort.

---

[20] "That potency of His by which He established and ordered and marshalled the whole realm of being. This potency is nothing else than loving-kindness; it has driven away from itself envy with its hatred of virtue and of moral beauty; it is the mother of gracious deeds by which, bringing into created existence things that were not, it displayed them to view" (*Migr.* 183). Mosès quotes *Cher.* 127 and *Opif.* 21. See also *Leg.* III 78. Behind this idea we have *Timaeus* 29e.

[21] Mosès quotes *QE* II 62 which speaks of the creative (goodness) and the royal power. "The creative (power), however, is the elder according to (our) thinking".

[22] Herein lies a textual problem that I would like merely to point out, seeing that it lies outside the main scope of my argument. It concerns the proposal that the text quoted should be integrated as follows: εἰ τίς μ΄ ἔροιτο, τίς αἰτία γενέσεως κόσμου [...] ἀποκρινοῦμαι, ὅτι ἥ τοῦ ὄντος ἀγαθότης, ἥτις ἐστὶ πρεσβυτάτη τῶν *** χαρίτων οὖσα ἑαυτῇ. Wendland—whose view Mosès adopts—suggests that the text should be corrected to: πρεσβυτάτη τῶν <θεοῦ δυναμέων, τῶν> χαρίτων οὖσα πηγή. The idea of powers as a source of bounties which appears, for example, in *Migr.* 180 would thus be respected. Mosès renders it as: "la bonté de l'Être, la plus ancienne des puissances, puisqu'elle est la source des grâces." Cohn-Heinemann's German version, which opts for a similar interpretation, reads: "Die Gute des Seienden, welche die älteste der Kräfte Gottes und die Gnadenquelle ist." Colson and Whitaker propose: πρεσβυτάτη τῶν <χαρίτων, πηγή> χαρίτων οὖσα αὐτή and translate: "that goodness which is the oldest of His bounties and itself the source of others." Here the ἀγαθότης is itself a gift and is the source of other gifts. For Colson this solution recalls *Leg.* III 78: ἀγαθότης καὶ χάρις is said to be the ἀρχὴ γενέσεως (Colson 488). Winston and Dillon [D. Winston and J. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria. A Commentary on De Gigantibus and Quod Deus sit immutabilis*, Brown Judaic Studies, 25 (Chico, California 1983) 331] propose αἰτιῶν.

Mazzarelli translates: "la Bontà dell'Essere che è la più antica e più nobile delle grazie, perché è grazia a se stessa".

[23] A semantic shift occurs, so that *charis* indicates, initially, the favour of God (M. Harl, *La Genèse* cit., n. p. 127 explains that finding grace before God in the religious sense is only found in *Genesis* at this point. Elsewhere *charis* indicates the favour one asks of a master and for which one thanks him), a favour which marks an acquisition in terms of knowledge, the awareness that all things derive from God. Later *charis* indicates a gift from God a gift given to the whole cosmos, the object of the *euerghesia* of the Cause. The text then returns to the idea of favour, although now it is considered not so much from the point of view of God who bestows it, but rather from the point of view of Moses' pleasing God in a parallel way, even if on a much higher level than Noah did. It is as if *charis* had a double meaning: gift and ability to

> But we must observe that it is said that Noah was most pleasing (εὐαρεστῆσαι)[24] to the powers of 'He who is', to the Lord and God,[25] while Moses pleased He who is attended[26] by the powers. Unlike the powers He is only conceived as being.[27] For it is said by God Himself:[28] 'you have found favour in my sight' (*Ex.* 33.17),[29] showing Himself as He who is without any other thing. (Other possible translation: He who has nothing with him) (δεικνὺς ἑαυτὸν τὸν ἄνευ παντὸς ἑτέρου).[30]

---

comprehend, or rather: *charis* remains gift, but its meaning changes according to the receiver: Noah or the world.

[24] *Gen.* 6.9: εὐαρεστῆσαι while at 6.8 the expression was εὗρε χάριν. Philo uses both the passages but he introduces the powers, thus modifying somehow the text, in particular in relation to 6.9. He is, however paraphrasing the text, he is not quoting it. According to V. Nikiprowetzky [in D. Winston and J. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria. A Commentary on De Gigantibus and Quod Deus sit Immutabilis*, Brown Judaic Studies 25, (Chico California 1983), 115] *Genesis*' passage does not allow Philonic interpretation.

Cf. *Deus* 116 where we find both χάριν and εὐαρεστῆσαι and Noah and the powers.

[25] *Gen.* 6.8 נֹחַ מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה, at God's eyes. The Septuagint says: Νωε δὲ εὗρεν χάριν ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ while in Philo at §104 we read Νῶε εὗρε χάριν παρὰ κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ. At §109 the text says: Νῶέ φησιν εὐαρεστῆσαι ταῖς τοῦ ὄντος δυνάμεσι, κυρίῳ <u>τε καὶ</u> θεῷ, while at §104 we read κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ and in the Septuagint ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ. Here, then we have a splitting of the powers, which are quoted separately. We witness a slow process of textual modification, which is carried out by Philo in order to provide a foundation for his theory of the powers and the separation of "He who is".

[26] On the powers as God's δορύφοροι see *Abr.* 122; *Legat.* 6.

[27] Mosès translates: "dont, abstraction faite de celles-ci [the powers], on ne conçoit que l'existence." He seems to say that, besides His relationship with the powers, "He who is" can be thought of only as being; He cannot be thought of in connection with powers, but only with regard to existence. Thus we should translate: "differently from the powers which can also be thought of with regard to qualifications other than existence." Mazzarelli translates: "a prescindere da quelle" (leaving them aside). He, then, takes the same stance as Mosès. Nikiprowetzky (in D. Winston and J. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria* cit.) translates: qui se désigne à l'éxclusion de tout autre attribut.

[28] Ἐκ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ. The text is tracing a distinction between 'He who is' and God. Unlike Noah, Moses is well pleasing not only to God, but also to 'He who is'. How is it then that God ἐκ προσώπου speaks and says: thou hast found grace with Me? Here we probably have an example of exegetical costraint. Philo is following neither the Hebrew text as we have it in the *Masorah*, nor the *Septuagint.* Does he quote another text or is he compelled to modify his text in order to maintain his thesis? In the background we have the theme of the impossibility for Moses to grasp God directly, but only to see His powers (cf. *Post.* 169).

[29] He who is speaking here is God in the tetragrammaton form. He says מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינַי. In Hebrew there is no difference in the two formulations. In the *Septuagint* the speaker is κύριος: He says εὕρηκας γὰρ χάριν ἐνώπιόν μου. In Philo we find εὕρηκας χάριν παρ' ἐμοί. Immediately after we have Moses' request to God to show him His *cavod* כָּבֹד, His *doxa*: "show me thy glory" and the answer: "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live. [...] you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen".

[30] (Translation mine). Colson and Whitaker translate this passage: "But we must observe that he says that Noah was well pleasing to the Potencies of the Existent, to

The powers are introduced at this point, together with the distinction between the Being to whom no predicate can be attributed and of whom nothing can be said and the powers by means of which He acts. I hold that the expression δεικνὺς ἑαυτὸν τὸν ἄνευ παντὸς ἑτέρου, 'Him who is without any other thing', or: 'Him who has nothing with Him', should be interpreted as 'without any determination'.[31] The interpretation chosen by Colson reads "He shews Himself as Him who has none other with Him". So the sense is therefore that God is alone in creation, He has no helpers. However, this interpretation seems less plausible than the previous one, seeing that 'He who is' can only be thought of in terms of His existence, as is stated a few lines above.

> Thus, then 'He who is' considers the supreme wisdom of Moses worthy of grace owing to Himself only, while He considers the reproduction of it, which is second and more specific, worthy of the grace of His subject powers according to which He is *kurios* and *theós*, *archon* and *euerghetes*. (καὶ κύριος καὶ θεός, ἄρχων τε καὶ εὐεργέτης ἐστίν) (§110, Translation mine).

The distinction between 'He who is' and His powers is again explicitly stated.

In many passages of Philo, God is spoken of together with His powers, the first of which are the creative power, called θεός, and the ruling power, termed κύριος. The terms are used in a double sense, so both θεός and κύριος can indicate 'He who is' or else one of the powers.[32]

The presentation of 'He who is' as κύριος and θεός, ἄρχων and εὐεργέτης, at the end of §110, Lord and God, the head and benefactor of the powers or, at most indistinguishable from His powers, presents some problems: it contradicts the non-relating nature and the separateness of a God who can only be spoken of in terms of existence. It is not 'He who is' who should be Lord and master, but the powers, otherwise 'He who is' would lose His simplicity and lack of determination. Being a totality, He certainly comprehends the powers too and is thus master and Lord, but whenever we consider these functions the mere thought clashes with the oneness, the simplicity, the self sufficiency, the *apoiotes*

---

the Lord and to God, but Moses to Him who is attended by the Potencies, and without them is only conceived of as pure being. For it is said with God as speaker, "thou hast (found grace with Me *Ex.* 33.17), in which words He shews Himself as Him who has none other with Him (δεικνὺς ἑαυτὸν τὸν ἄνευ παντὸς ἑτέρου)".

[31] Mosès has it thus: il se désigne indépendamment de tout attribut.

[32] Cf. *Plant.* 86–87; *Opif.* 16; *QG* II 16.

of 'He who is'. Colson and Whittaker have perceived this problem and added some text that does not appear in the Greek version: this introduces the powers' relationship vis-à-vis humans. In the English translation, we have the powers presenting 'He who is' to mortals as Lord and master etc.[33] And, conceptually speaking, this would fit perfectly: God manifests Himself in the form of powers to mortals unable to grasp the nature of his essence. Unfortunately, however, the text under consideration does not contain this passage. Colson's solution is indicative of the inherent difficulties involved.

So, the general meaning of the passage is: God, about whom nothing can be said save the fact that He exists, contemplated eternal goodness and thus gave birth to the cosmos by means of the powers. It is a gift that God gave the cosmos since He Himself does not need anything. Humans can reach different levels of knowledge and thus obtain *charin* i.e. a comprehension of this reality. Noah and Moses are distinguished one from the other by their greater or lesser ability to understand, but the nature of the powers as related to God is independent of the patriarchs; it is not a construction of the knowing subject.

In passage 108, when considering the contemplation of eternal goodness and *euergetein*, the text says that God looks to eternal goodness. There seem to be two possible interpretations here: God looks at His own goodness and holds that to be beneficent (*euergetein*) is proper to Him, or the supreme Being looks to goodness, as something external, which in the text immediately following is said to be the most ancient of powers, and holds that *euergetein* is proper to Him. In the first case, the supreme Being watches Himself as He carries out an action and holds that this is worthy of determination; in the second case, what He is looking to is a power that seems to have some sort of role as an autonomous being. Both hypotheses pose a problem.

In the first case it seems as if the superior Being doubles to a certain extent, implying a loss of the features of simplicity, lack of attributes and qualities; instead, if God is contemplating the power it seems that the latter is being hypostatized, turning into a being that is autonomous from the supreme Being. Mosès[34] seems to favour the first hypothesis,

---

[33] "He judges as worthy through His subject Potencies, which present Him to us as Lord and God, Ruler and Benefactor".

[34] Il a eu les yeux fixés sur sa bonté eternelle. Here the possessive is explicitly rendered. Nikiprowetzky's commentary ad loc. in Winston-Dillon, *Two Treatises* cit. says: "La Bonté est la vertu divine suprême et la source de toutes ses grâces". The English translation by Colson and Whittaker is "Looking to His eternal goodness".

while Mazzarelli[35] opts for the second. In both cases the hypotheses clash to a certain extent with Philonic theory, which postulates one single God who is *haplos, apoios, arrhetos, agnostos* and powers which constitute His ways of acting or forms by which God is known, but which cannot be considered independent.

As regards the first hypothesis, the scholars have debated the contradictions inherent in assigning attributes and qualities to God. Even if goodness and *euergesia* are considered to be not qualities but proprieties of God, and this is a solution that—as we shall see—some critics have considered, the fact that a split of some sort seems to occur within the one and simple Being is unavoidable. This is a point which Philo would have seen as insurmountable.

> While a being which is formed through the union of several faculties needs several parts to minister to the needs of each, God being uncreated and the Author of the creation of the others needs none of the properties which belong to the creatures which He has brought into being.[36]

In the passage under consideration, when contemplating goodness, 'He who is' sees that this is proper to Him: it would seem that, upon contemplating Himself, the one Being becomes two and causes *genesis* to take place by the very act of contemplating. We find the image of the architect looking at the project he himself has designed and then carrying it out (*Opif.* 17).[37] In theory, there are two possible models, one in which God is the *nous* thinking of Himself and one in which He is the *nous* contemplating the ideas outside Himself. In Philo, the ideas are not external to the mind of God, who thought of them: the divine *logos* is the place of ideas.[38]

---

[35] "Guarda alla eterna Bontà". "Bontà", goodness, has a capital letter and we are induced to think of a hypostasis. Moreover the expression guarda alla Bontà alludes to an idea of looking towards, looking at something external and distant.

[36] *Deus* 56.

[37] As regards the image of the architect see D. T. Runia, "The King, the Architect, and the Craftsman: A Philosophical Image in Philo of Alexandria" in R. W. Sharples and A. Sheppard (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato's 'Timaeus'*, Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies Supplement, 78 (London 2003) 89–106 (partic. 97–98: "the relation between the architect and the craftsman is made clear enough. Philo combines them in one person, but makes clear that the two activities are quite distinct, that the task of planning precedes that of the execution").

[38] The relationship between God and *logos* at the time of creation has been examined by G. E. Sterling, "'Day One': Platonizing Exegetical Traditions of Genesis 1:1–5 in John and Jewish Authors", *SPhA* XVII (2005), 118–140 (partic. 132–137).

Didaskalikos XII

In view of these problems, I feel it might be useful to consider Donini's reading of the XII chapter of *Didaskalikos*. In *Didaskalikos* the first god is an intellect and the Forms are His thoughts. He is ἀκίνητος and perpetually acts upon the second god or second intellect which, in turn, thinks all things. The forms he thinks up are the models for the things in the cosmos (IX 163. 30).[39]

For Donini[40] "la causalité du premier dieu ne s'exercerait directement que sur le second dieu, qui, à son tour, serait celui qui entre vraiment en rapport avec le cosmos" (123). Hence, continues Donini, some critics (Isnardi Parente, Donini himself, Mansfeld) consider the second god and the demiurge one and the same, whereas Loenen saw the demiurge and the first god as being identical.

It is interesting to note that many of the terms used are very close in meaning to the Philonic ones. Naturally *Timaeus* constitutes a common root. To take a specific example, the text in *Didaskalikos* XII 167. 7 says that the cosmos was constructed by God looking at the idea of cosmos "τὸ κάλλιστον κατασκεύασμα τὸν κόσμον ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ δεδημιουργῆσαι πρὸς τίνα ἰδέαν κόσμου ἀποβλέποντος".[41]

---

[39] According to J. Mansfeld, "Compatible Alternatives" cit. 107–108, "the activity of the First Intellect toward the Second Intellect is described by means of two similes, the first of which (10, p. 164.22–3) is based upon Aristotle's description (*Met.* XII 7.1072b3) of the First Unmoved Mover as a cause of motion". "Structurally, this distinction between a First and a Second God recalls that made by Eudoros between the First *Hen*, or most high God, and the Second *Hen*, or Monad, although the essential difference of course is that Alkinoos does not speak of Ones, but of Intellects".

[40] "La connaissance de Dieu et la hiérarchie divine chez Albinos" in *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* cit. 118–131. Donini considers that the first God is the father, as He is the cause of all things and orders the heavenly intellect and the soul of the world, turning them towards Him and towards His thoughts i.e. towards ideas, and He is the cause of the intellect of the soul of the world, the intellect which puts order into the nature of the sensible world.

[41] Donini points out that the first paragraph of chap. XII is practically identical to a fragment of the doxography of Arius Didimus (Fr. 1 Diels). "À la p. 447 des *Doxographi graeci* tout le matériel est largement présenté." However, points out Donini (124) "à la page 167,7 le *Didaskalikos* ajoute en effet une brève incise au texte d'Arius: le cosmos dit Albinos, fut construit «par le dieu… en regardant (*apoblepontos*) une idée du monde»." In this context, I do not wish to dwell upon the extent to which one text influenced the other, as I prefer to focus on Donini's analysis regarding the verb employed.

According to Donini, in this context, *apoblepein* +*pros*+acc.[42] means "'regarder quelque chose de l'extérieur', car le dieu inférieur n'a pas dans son esprit les *noeta*, qui sont les pensées du premier dieu: le verbe *blepein*, d'autant plus qu'il est uni au préverbe *apo-* souligne bien cette extériorité de l'observateur par rapport au *paradeigma* inclus dans l'esprit du dieu transcendant et suprême. Par contre, on ne pourrait pas dire, à propos du premier dieu, qu'il *(apo)blepei* les idées, parce qu'il les possède dans son esprit et les *pense*: il *noei* et non *apoblepei*, comme en fait Albinus écrit à la p. 164, 27. Le fait d'*apoblepein* les idées est donc du domaine de dieu inférieur" (124).

Let us now return to Philo, and the passage in *Deus* 108: ἀπιδὼν εἰς τὴν ἀΐδιον ἀγαθότητα. Can we find the same distinction between viewing ideas from the outside and thought as Donini found in *Didaskalikos*?

Generally speaking, in Philonic terminology ἀφοράω, looking from afar, fixing one's gaze on, contemplating + ἐις means observation and consideration:[43] it is often used in the aorist: it comprises that consideration which derives from observation, a sort of fusion of vision and thought, a mental act of observing which evaluates, the thinking resulting from having considered.[44]

[42] Donini (124) points out that *apoblepein*+*pros*+acc. is also used on p. 169,13 in connection with the intuition of ideas, "qui sont incluses dans l'esprit du premier dieu de la part de l'intelligence de l'âme du monde".

[43] Ἀφοράω, to look away from, to look at; of a distant object; to look towards. + πρός or + εἰς. Although in *Opif.* 114 ἀφοράω + εἰς seems to be a verb indicative of vision, in many other passages it means to meditate, consider, as in *Her.* 79; *Legat.* 213; *Ios.* 259; *Virt.* 63; 122; 197; *Prob.* 23. In some cases the verb indicates having as a reference (*Plant.* 69; *Sobr.* 7; 16). When it takes πρός, ἀφοράω often includes the idea of having an aim. Cf. *Agr.* 5; *Ebr.* 37; *Sobr.* 43; *Migr.* 153; *Fug.* 129. In some cases, to keep an eye on means "pay attention to": cf. *Post.* 141; *Agr.* 49; *Migr.* 190; *Spec.* III 8; *Contempl.* 64.

In the accusative without any preposition, it means watch (*QG* I 21).

[44] Ἀπεῖδον + εἰς: *Deus* 108 ἀπιδών + εἰς…καὶ νιμίσας keeping one's eyes fixed on goodness and considering that *euerghetein*…. Here observation and consideration are rendered using two different verbs whereas, at times, ἀπιδών + εἰς already implies consideration deriving from observation; it is a sort of blend of vision and thought, a mental observation which evaluates. This goes for *Mos.* I. 212; *Somn.* I. 203; *Spec.* I. 41: *Prob.* 28; *Aet.* 4; *Virt.* 32; *Spec.* II. 56; *Decal.* 9; *Spec.* III.102; *Mut.* 164; *Sobr.* 11; *QG* II. 26b ἀπίδετε εἰς (= consider) Abraham your father and Sarah who gave birth to you. Mercier's translation from the Armenian reads: respicite in Abraham patrem vestrum. But it is quoted from *Is.* 51.2 which in the *Septuagint* reads ἐμβλέψατε instead of ἀπίδετε.

Ἀποβλέπω + ἐις also means observing, keeping one's eyes trained on an object, concentrating on something; it is an activity that sometimes comes prior to thought and is sometimes concomitant with it.[45] In *Opif.* 18 the expression ἀποβλέπειν εἰς τὸ παράδειγμα is used in association with the great architect of the world looking at His project. There is probably a reference to Platonic terminology here.[46] The activity is carried out by the architect, not by god, even if we are inside an analogy, whereas *noein* is used in connection with God's activity: when God wanted to form βουληθείς δημιουργῆσαι the sensible world, he first made the intelligible world (*Opif.* 16); when God thought of founding the big city, He first thought up the models (τὴν μεγαλόπολιν κτίζειν διανοηθεὶς ἐνενόησε πρότερον τοὺς τύπους αὐτῆς, ἐξ ὧν κόσμον νοητὸν συστησάμενος ἀπετέλει) (*Opif.* 19). We thus find both ἀποβλέπειν and νοεῖν.

In *Didaskalikos* there are two separate divinities and, in Donini's interpretation, the second god looks to the ideas in the mind of the first. In Philo God is one alone; He has formed the ideas that are in His

In some cases ἀπεῖδον + εἰς may mean to direct one's gaze towards, look at (*Ios.* 117; *Abr.* 173).Together with πρός, ἀπιδών generally means look at, contemplate. Cf. *Opif.* 55; *Ebr.* 150; *Deus* 146; *Plant.* 65. It may, however also render the idea of a mental contemplation, the act of considering. Cf. *Mos.* II 51: "Surveying the greatness and beauty of the whole code with the accurate discernment of his mind's eye, and thinking it too good and godlike to be confined within any earthly walls, he inserted the story of the genesis of the 'Great City' ". See also *Spec.* II 104; IV 95; *Abr.* 71; *Spec.* I 139; I 294; II 32; II 244; III 164.

[45] Ἀποβλέπω + εἰς occurs on a number of occasions. It means keeping one's eyes fixed on something, observing, watching. Cf. *Opif.* 18: "as a good builder, to construct the city out of stones and timber, looking at the model and ensuring that the corporeal object corresponds to each of the incorporeal ideas". See also *Ios*. 234; *Spec.* I 219; *Ios.* 166; *Legat.* 191; *Virt.* 133.

More rarely, it contains the idea of consideration: thus, in *Spec.* I 293, considering the greatness of God, everyone should become aware of their own weakness. Cf. also *Spec.* II 237.

In *Abr.* 61 ἀποβλέπω + εις indicates a purpose: establishing as one's end the conformation to the model.

We also find examples of ἀποβλέπω + πρός. The semantic values of this combination are very similar to ἀποβλέπω + εἰς. Cfr. *Legat.* 359; *Ios.* 182; *Virt.* 69–70.

Finally, we find instances of ἀποβλέπω + complement that indicate see, glance at: cf. *Det.*153; *Mut.* 160:

To conclude, I think that the verb—whether it takes a direct object or is followed by a preposition—indicates an activity of careful observation and consideration which involves looking and thinking.

[46] See *Euthyphro* 6e; *Meno* 72c in which ἀποβλέπω + εἰς is used particularly in connection with ideas. In *Timaeus* 28a the term used for the demiurge who "keeps his gaze fixed on that which is uniform" is βλέπω.

mind, the intelligible world is identified with the divine *logos*, which is also the place of the divine powers. There is no second god who looks, as distinct from a first God who thinks. We find the first and only God who looks to his own thoughts and His own actions, the intelligible world and the powers. The hypothesis of a power as autonomous and considered as external appears implausible. It is God who looks upon Himself while He is carrying out His *energheia*, which is expressed in terms of power (in this case creative).

For the Being, it is not a question of looking to one of his own powers as if it were a part or determination of Himself nor, even less, looking to a hypostatized power, which acts autonomously. 'He who is' contemplates Himself in one of His actions, that of goodness, which belongs to Him, seeing that the creative power has good as its source. I would like again to refer to Donini's analysis of *Didaskalikos*, where the author says: "Le démiurge dont parle Albinos n'est pas le premier dieu. Le premier dieu est (le) «bien» (164, 30), mais n'est pas «bon» (165, 7) parce qu'il est inconcevable qu'il participe à la bonté qui serait par là-même supérieure à lui, (*ibid.*), de sorte qu'il n'a pas même part à l'*arete* et ainsi est meilleur que l'*arete*." (125).[47]

In Philo's *Opif.* 21 the creative power, the δύναμις κοσμοποιητική has as its source τὸ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀγαθόν and immediately afterwards we find an explicit reference to *Timaeus* 29e: αἰτία of the formation of the cosmos is the excellence of the nature of the Father and Maker, who is good (ἀγαθόν εἶναι τὸν πατέρα καὶ ποιητήν). The old problem of the sense in which God looks to goodness crops up again, together with the use of any qualifications for God.

[47] Philo speaks of the goodness of the father, the creator, "He who is" who, at the time of creation, contemplated His own *logos,* the place of the powers, since "the intelligible cosmos is nothing else than the Logos of God as he is actually engaged in making the cosmos" (*Opif.* 24). "Just as the city that was marked out beforehand in the architect had no location outside, but had been engraved in the soul of the craftsman, in the same way the cosmos composed of the ideas would have no other place than the divine Logos who gives these [ideas] their ordered disposition" (*Opif.* 20).

The text then goes on to say that God, with no one to assist him, decided to "confer the unstinting riches of his beneficence on the nature which of itself without divine grace could not sustain any good whatsoever" (*Opif.* 23) and adjust them to suit the receptive capacities of those for whom they were intended. This clarifies to a certain extent the difference between Noah and Moses, who perceive God's gifts in different ways.

Predicates and Properties

According to some exegetes, the predicates referring to God are actually properties. In various passages it is said that 'He who is' is "better than the good, more excellent than the excellent, more blessed than blessedness, more happy than happiness itself" (*Legat.* 5). He is "more venerable than the monad and purer than the unit" (cf. *Praem.* 40; *Contempl.* 2). He is filled with perfect forms of good, or rather, He is Himself the good. (See *Spec.* II 53)

In Winston's reading:[48] "God's superiority to such attributes undoubtedly signifies for Philo that they are applied to Him only equivocally". It is a question not of qualities but of properties, precisely because God possesses them to the highest possible degree; He is the source of them, as He is the cause of ideas. 'He who is' is *apoios* and has no qualities.[49]

"All God predicates"—maintains Winston—[50]

> are, strictly speaking, properties (*idiotetes*). [...] Since the essence of God is one and single, whatever belongs to it as a property must be one and single. Thus Philo reduces all divine properties to a single one, that of acting (*Cher.* 77).

So there would seem to be no contrast with God's being *apoios*. In my opinion, this reading of Winston's raises some problems: if the qualities are *idioteta* how can it be said that there is one single property belonging to God, i.e. acting?[51] It seems to me that Winston has created a vicious circle: given that God is one, monadic and simple, He can only have

---

[48] D. Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature" in L. E. Goodman, *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern, 7 (Albany 1992) 21–41 (23).

[49] Cf. *Leg.* III 36; 51; 206; *Deus* 55–56; *Cher*. 67. "Drummond and Wolfson have shown that this means that God is without accidental quality, but also implies that in God there is no distinction of genus and species. [...] and since He belongs to no class, we do not know what it is" (21).

[50] *Divine Nature* cit. 22.

[51] Winston develops his arguments taking Wolfson as a starting point and, more specifically, the latter's conception (set forth in II 137) whereby all the terms predicated of God should be identified as properties, properties which express the one and all-comprehensive property of God, that of acting, and this would avoid there being any multiplicity in God. However, it is not clear to me what grounds Wolfson has for maintaining that God has only one property, which is that of action since, although Philo does indeed say that action is proper to God, he does not say that this is His only property.

one single property and thus those that might be called qualities cannot be so; they all have to apply to God's action. However, it remains to be demonstrated that God has just one property. In the passage from *Cher.* 77 quoted above, the *poiein* is ἴδιον to God, but it is not said that it is His only ἴδιον feature. Then again, it proves rather difficult to interpret some affirmations regarding the beauty, the happiness, the perfection of God. Does the ulteriority of the qualities owing to which the Being is purer than the One, better than the Good, more beautiful than the beautiful, more blessed than blessedness, happier than happiness itself, more perfect than any possible perfection[52] provide an indication that God is the source of qualities and, as such, do they become His essence as Winston maintains, or does this instead indicate that it is impossible to qualify God using such terms, even if we interpret them as properties? If God is unnameable, unknowable, incomprehensible, one cannot even attribute properties to Him. We are within the sphere of negative theology.[53]

In other words, even if we accept Winston's proposal, the problem of God's simplicity[54] and monadic nature, of whom it is repeatedly

[52] Cf. *Contempl.* 2 and *Legat.* 5–7.

[53] See *Leg.* III 206.

[54] J. Dillon ("The nature of God in the 'Quod deus'", in D. Winston and J. Dillon, *Two Treatises* cit. 217–218) maintains that Aristotle provides the seeds of negative theology by affirming that God is "simple and indivisible" (*Physica* VIII 10.267b25–6; *Metaphysica* XII 7.1072a32–3), "which makes God by Aristotle's own rules of logic indefinable and unknowable, since knowledge is dependent upon definition, and definition involves the distinction of genus, species and differentiae, which is not possible in the case of God. However, as Wolfson says, Aristotle does not explicitly draw this conclusion in the case of God".

On p. 219 Dillon considers chapter 10 of Albinus, which says that God is "ineffable and comprehensible only by the intellect, since there is neither genus nor species nor *differentia* predicable of him". He is neither *poios* nor *apoios* since He is above and beyond any qualification. Dillon ("The nature of God" cit. 221–222) goes on to stress that, in some passages Philo actually describes God and the *logos* as "the most generic (*genikotaton*) of entities, the 'something' (*ti*) (*L.A.* II 86; III 175; *Det.* 118) but it is plain from the consensus of these pages that it is really the *logos* that it is the primary genus. When God himself is described as *genikotaton*, this must be taken to mean that there is no genus which comprehends Him. The most general Stoic category, *ti* is in any case designed to cover both bodies and incorporeal entities (*asomata*) such as Space, Time, and *Lekta* (*SVF* II 329–332), so that it asserts bare existence, and does not categorise or describe an entity. [...] Philo's solution to the problem is the following. Although God cannot be known or described as to His essence, He can be characterised variously in His relation to man and the world. First of all he is 'good', he possesses 'perfect goodness in all respects' (*Deus* 73 but cf. *Praem.* 40). But this need mean no more than that, like the Demiurge of the *Timaeus*, He works to bring all things to their best form."

stated that He is one[55] and monad,[56] would not be solved. Consequently, the problems we have seen in connection with *Deus* 108 also remain without any solution.

Instead, Wolfson sees another difficulty:

> Every action of an agent upon a patient establishes a relation between them, a relation which in Aristotle is designated as the relation between active and passive or of active to passive. Every such relation, however, according to Aristotle, establishes also a reciprocal dependence between the correlatives, for relative terms of this kind are, according to him, called relatives 'because each derives that which it is from reference to another', so that 'the servant is said to be servant of the master, and the master, master of the servant.' [. . .] But this is contradictory to the principle of self-sufficiency of God.[57]

Here the problem arises with respect to κύριος and θεός, ἀρχων and εὐεργήτης of §110.

As Wolfson (139) sees it, at the time of creation God created the intelligible world, i.e. ideas, and endowed them

> with some part of that power to act which had existed in Him as a property from eternity. The ideas are therefore called also powers; they are, however, only created powers and, unlike the powers in the sense of eternal properties, they are distinct from God. Of these created powers there are, according to Philo, two kinds: first, incorporeal powers or ideas, and, second, powers immanent in the physical world.[58]

Wolfson (I 240) proposes three stages: 1) thoughts of God, properties of God for eternity 2) powers or ideas created by God as incorporeal beings (see 239 and 290) in order to enable Him to create the world, 3) ideas and powers immanent in the world, after creation. Thus, to solve the problems relating to simplicity, self-sufficiency and transcendency, Wolfson multiplies the planes on which powers and *logos* move, proposing different stages, which might have a different temporal origin and which would then continue to exist. The scholar thus hypostatizes the powers; he makes them into autonomous beings, speaking of ideas and powers

[55] *Opif.* 171; *Leg.* II 1–3.

[56] *Leg.* II 3; *Her.* 183; *Deus* 11.

[57] Wolfson, *Philo* cit. II 137–138. For the principle of self-sufficiency of God see *Mut.* 27–28. Cf. *Deus* 53–54; *Sacr.* 101.

[58] II 139. See also Wolfson, cit. I 226.

in the mind of and outside God. Here Wolfson doubles, indeed, triples the powers, but in Philo's text there are no such distinctions.[59]

Bos's Interpretation

We also have to consider another interpretation, that of Bos,[60] which quotes the *De mundo* attributed to Aristotle (6, 397b16–20).[61] Bos makes reference to the Aristotelian *nous*,[62] which is unchangeable and the cause of all things, explicitly quoting *Metaphysics* Lambda. I do not intend to enter into the merits of the discussions on the Lambda book of *Metaphysics* and the problems relating to final cause-efficient cause but, in my opinion, some mediation is necessary. As I see it, there is no doubt that God is an efficient cause in Philo. The problem consists in determining by which means this cause acts and how its action should be interpreted as compared with that of the powers. I do not feel it is perspicuous to maintain that, for Philo

[59] As regards the *logos* too, Wolfson postulates a sort of doubling between *logos* as the mind of God and *logos* as the noetic world endowed with its own autonomous existence outside God's mind. I 232: "The Logos, therefore, which started its career as the mind of God or as the thinking power of God, and hence as identical wih the essence of God, now enters upon a second stage of its existence, as an incorporeal mind created by God, having existence outside of God's essence, and containing within itself the intelligible world". Here the doubling regards not the powers, but the *logos*.

[60] A. P. Bos, "Philo of Alexandria: A Platonist in the Image and Likeness of Aristotle" *SphA* X (1998), 66–86 (69).

[61] However, as I see it, this work deals with the fact that the whole cosmos is full of gods. (Translatio Nicholai: omnia plena sunt diis; Bartholomaei: omnia sunt deis plena; Paraphrasis Apulei: deum esse originis †haberi auctorem, deumque ipsum salutem esse et perseverantiam earum quas effecerit rerum.)

Bos quotes J. Dillon (*The Middle Platonists*, 161 n. 2), and R. Radice [*La filosofia di Aristobulo e i suoi nessi con il' De mundo' attribuito ad Aristotele* (Milano 1994) 160], which both connect the passage with *Migr.* 182. In Philo God's presence in every part of the cosmos is linked to the powers, "the complete whole around us is held together by invisible powers, which the Creator has made to reach from the ends of the earth to heaven's furthest bounds, taking forethought that what was well bound should not be loosened: for the powers of the Universe are chains that cannot be broken" (*Migr.* 181). In *Conf.* 136 God "has made His powers extend through earth and water, air and heaven, and left no part of the universe without His presence, and uniting all with all has bound them fast with invisible bonds, that they should never be loosed" (cf. *Post.* 14 which is reminiscent of *Timaeus* 36d9 sgg.).

[62] "If it is fully actualized, is alone in transcending corporeal reality. It does not move either, but it is the (unmoved) principle of movement" (73).

Bos quotes *Metaphysics* XII 7.1072b3–30 with regard to the prime mover "God is a living being, eternal, most good; and therefore life and a continuous eternal existence belong to God".

> the metaphysical Origin can bring about a physical effect by means of his Power(s), like the power of attraction (of a desirable object or a magnet) or like the way that the heat of the Sun has effects on physical reality (81–82).[63]

This does not clarify how 'He who is' is related to the powers.

On p. 78 Bos quotes *De mundo* 6, 398a18, where divine transcendence is compared with the aloofness of the Persian king enthroned in his fortress surrounded by seven concentric walls. He is accompanied by guards and servants, hierarchically ordered right down to the ordinary dependents. In connection with this image, Bos calls our attention to *Sacr*. 59, in which God is accompanied by the powers as body-guards. The image is the same as that in *Deus* 109, but the fact remains that it is precisely the idea of hierarchy that is lacking in Philo. The pre-eminence that the *logos* has over the powers, of the first creative power over the others, is a precedence created by the organization of expressions. Otherwise, we would frankly need to hypothesize that the powers possess a separate existence, but this causes problems.[64] The separation Bos postulates between God and His powers does not seem plausible.

[63] Bos (74) again quotes *De mundo* 6, 397b13–23 which deals with terms suitable to God's *dynamis*, but not His *ousia*. God is the preserver and *genetor* of all things, but uses only His *dynamis*. However, I feel that it is one thing to speak of He who is and His powers and another to consider being in potentiality or in act.

[64] We find the same perspective in Bos' readings of *Deus* 77–81 where Philo speaks of the divine powers, pure and unmixed: "the powers which God employs are unmixed in respect of Himself, but mixed to created beings. For it cannot be that mortal nature should have room for the unmixed". The passage continues: "We cannot look even upon the sun's flame untempered, or unmixed, for our sight will be quenched and blasted by the bright flashing of its rays, ere it reach and apprehend them, though the sun is but one of God's works in the past, a portion of heaven, a consensed mass of ether. And can you think it possible that your understanding should be able to grasp in their unmixed purity those uncreated potencies which stand around Him and flash forth light of surpassing splendour? When God extended the sun's rays from heaven to the boundaries of earth, He mitigated and abated with cool air the fierceness of their heat. [...] Just in the same way if God's knowledge and wisdom and prudence and justice and each of His other excellencies were not tempered, no mortal could receive them, nay not even the whole heaven and universe. The Creator, then, knowing His own surpassing excellence in all that is best and the natural weakness of His creatures, however loud they boast, wills not to dispense benefit or punishment according to His power, but according to the measure of capacity which He sees in those who are to participate in either of those dispensations. If indeed we could drink and enjoy this diluted draught, wherein is a moderate measure of His powers, we should reap sufficient gladness, and let not the human race seek a more perfect joy. For we have shewn that these powers at their full height unmixed and untempered subsist only in the Existent" (*Deus* 77–81).

However, seemingly, Bos tends to see *dynamis* as a multi-purpose term, used by Philo without distinction to indicate the soul, the *nous*, the powers of God and so on, but J. Dillon[65] has clarified: "However, this *dynamis* of the *De Mundo* is a single entity, closely analogous to the *Logos.* In Philo we find a more elaborate system".

In "God as 'Father' and 'Maker' in Philo of Alexandria and its Background in Aristotelian Thought"[66] Bos quotes *Leg.* I 32; 41[67] and *Opif.* 75[68] in connection with beings caused by God himself in a direct way, and speaks of them in terms of generated and not "made" powers, in contrast with 'He who is', who is transcendent, unchangeable and self-sufficient (314–5). Bos speaks of God as He who gives the initial impetus, as the seed gives rise to generation. Bos makes reference to *De mundo* 398b12–22, which describes how the power of God moves the sun, the moon and all the heavens.

> And just as puppet-showmen by pulling one single string make neck and hand and shoulder and eye and sometimes all the parts of the figure move with a certain harmony, so too, the divine nature, by a single movement of that which comes after it, imparts its power to that which next succeeds, and thence further and further until it extends over all things.[69]

God is 'the Begetter' of all that is brought to perfection in the universe, He is the one who caused the generation of the world by means of an initial creative act, but after this act, the one who gave rise to generation (γενέτωρ *De mundo* 6,397b21, 399a31) is no longer involved in the process, and this becomes a matter of the *dynamis* of the winding mechanism.

In my opinion, the ability to relate of the powers, which change according to the seer, leads one not to consider them as autonomous beings or hypostases of God. Rather than a gradation in the activity of God's powers (as Bos maintains—p. 78), I would term it different degrees of capacity in terms of human perception. *Post.* 168–169 explicitly states that the powers cannot be considered as existing separately.

[65] *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, London, 1977, 161.

[66] *Elenchos* 2 (2003) 311–332. Bos returns to his 'Aristotlizing' interpretation of Philo and there are certainly many points of interest in his presentation. In particular his identification of the Chaldean philosophy as the object against which *Opif.* 7–9 polemicizes is particularly convincing.

[67] Which, however, refer to the human *nous*, the rational element of the soul, not to the powers.

[68] However, the passage focuses on the expression 'let us make man' and explains that only man was made with the help of assistants; so the powers cannot be the agents involved, as they were employed in the construction of the whole cosmos, not only the creation of man.

[69] Transl. E. S. Forster with changes introduced by A. Bos.

There is no mention of this sort of causal chain in Philo, and God is always present in the cosmos in a providential role. It thus seems to me that Bos's reading gives rise to some problems.

On the other hand, the notions of δύναμις ποιητική and δύναμις κινητική also recall the Stoic environment.[70] Δύναμις ποιητική is mentioned in fr. 18 Edelstein-Kidd, an extract from Simplicius that seems to be quoting a passage by Posidonius passed on by Alexander of Aphrodysias who, in turn, had taken it from Geminus. According to the text in question, Posidonius holds that the natural philosophy, upon examining the ποιητικὴ δύναμις, grasps the causes of natural events. Besides, in the Ancient Stoics we already find mention of the δύναμις as the active force in the universe.[71]

SVF II 1044 describes δύναμις μορφοῦσα καὶ γεννῶσα, the force which endows natural beings with form and generative possibilities, and *SVF* I 176 affirms that Zeno of Cytium speaks of εἱμαρμένη as the δύνανις κινητική of matter. These are readings in which δύναμις is the principle of movement and order. However, I am not sure that the use of the same terminology actually reflects real references or conceptual similarities. In Philo the powers are presented from various different perspectives, such as projections of God's acting,[72] determinations of God,[73] His names,[74] His ways of acting,[75] measures, rules, parameters,[76] forms in which God carries out His action,[77] causes—which determination has been studied by J. Dillon.[78] In many texts the powers are

---

[70] I would like to thank F. Alesse for calling my attention to the passage in question.
[71] See *SVF* II 311.
[72] Cf. *Deus* 81; *Mut.* 27–29.
[73] Cf. *Cher.* 27–28; *Legat.* 5–7.
[74] Cf. *Plant.* 86–87; *Opif.* 16; *QG* II 16.
[75] Cf. *Migr.* 180.
[76] Cf. *Sacr.* 59
[77] In *Cher.* 27, for example, God created things by means of His Goodness, whilst He governs them by means of His Sovereign power. See *Opif.* 7.
[78] See J. Dillon *The Middle Platonists* 169. Dillon deals with the theme of the powers as causes and sets forth a theory of the powers as relating to a division of the cosmos, which has God, the eldest of causes, as the cause of the intelligible world, the creative power of the heavenly world and the regal power of the sublunary world. Leaving aside the strangeness in his presentation of God as the eldest of causes, which places Him almost at the same causal level as the powers (usually creative power is the eldest of the powers), this division of the cosmos and of God and the powers is somewhat unusual. Dillon makes reference to a passage of *QG* IV 8 which is, effectively, hard to understand. *QG* is a text that is extant only in translated form. The passage quoted then goes on to explain that, in actual fact, the only true cause (here also called *mensura* precisely because the powers are measures, rules), is God and the others are ways

aspects of the Being perceived by the seer and depend on the level of the person concerned.[79] The sort of vision one can have of God is thus proportional to the level of the seer, and this is what we have observed as regards Noah and Moses.

Sections 109 and 110 of *Deus* contain at least two of these terms, which do not always seem to be compatible. So God does not look to His goodness as if it were a part of Him,[80] a determination of His, nor does He see goodness as a power, but He looks to the eternal goodness that is within God's mind and is ἀΐδιον, not because it is other and separate from immanent ideas or ideas created at a later stage, as Wolfson postulates, but because God's work is unceasing and unchanging: God does not live in time, but in eternity; in eternity there is neither past nor future, but only a stable present (*Deus* 32). He looks upon the noetic world He Himself has conceived, but He also intervenes in the cosmos.

Conclusion

To conclude, the passage *Deus* 107–110 is extremely difficult to interpret, as it sets the absolute oneness and simplicity of God against the multiplicity of His powers, His self-sufficiency against relatedness, and the absolute transcendency against His action in the cosmos. In my opinion, most of the problems derive from the fact that biblical language has been translated into Platonic language. The God that in the *Bible* is unnameable, invisible and one, becomes unknowable, *apoios* and *haplos* in Philo. The God who acts in history becomes a God the work of

mortals have of seeing, but it is definitely an unusual passage. In the light of this text, Dillon sees Philo as comparable with theories according to which our world is directly governed by a reality other than God. Dillon hypothesizes that Philo identifies it with an aspect of God to preserve monotheism, but that he reflects contemporary doctrines regarding the existence of divinities or daemons that rule over the sublunar world. By taking this stance, Dillon tends to personify the powers, to see them as forms of God, not as ways of acting and—above all—not to consider them as they relate to the human level. The assertion that the powers are causes is certainly present in Philo, for example in *Deus* 108, where ἡ τοῦ ὄντος ἀγαθότης [...] πρεσβυτάτη of the powers is αἰτία γενέσεως κόσμου. However, I do not hold that passages such as this authorize us to consider the powers as separate forms and, even less, to hypostatize them, as Wolfson, for instance, tends to do (op. cit. I 220).

[79] Cf. *Opif.* 23; *Spec.* I 294; *Abr.* 119–124; *Deus* 109.

[80] "God is a whole not a part. [...] The Existent Being is in need of nothing, and so, not needing the benefit that parts bestow, can have no parts at all" (*Post.* 3–4).

whose powers can be seen, but who is unknowable as to His essence. In order to guarantee His oneness when faced with notions like that of the second god and the ontological hierarchies proper to Middle Platonism, Philo gives Him the characteristics of the first god in the Middle Platonic tradition, without including the ontological hierarchy of the Middle Platonists: this would be inadmissible because it would contrast monotheism.

The critics seek to reconcile these contradictions and produce some sort of unity, but in order to do so they are constrained to produce interpretations which are either forced or partial.

CHAPTER THREE

UNKNOWABILITY OF GOD

Unknowability and Ineffability of God

Amongst the difficulties I have mentioned in the previous chapter emerges God's unknowability, viewed in connection with human attempts to know Him. According to Philo, there are various ways of seeking to gain some knowledge of God:[1] contemplation of the world,[2] approaching the *logos* and the powers,[3] revelation,[4] practising virtue,[5] a sober intoxication in which it is as if the intellect were possessed by God,[6] a noetic vision,[7] direct evidence,[8] a direct and unexpected relationship,[9] an initiation described in the language of the mysteries,[10] the recognition of one's own limits—a step towards gaining access to

---

[1] Cf. E. Birnbaum, "What does Philo mean by "seeing God"? Some Methodological Considerations", *SBL Seminar Papers* 34 (1995) 535–552 (540–541); E. Vanderlin, "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *MSR*, III (1947) 285–304, D. Winston, "Was Philo a Mystic?", in G. E. Sterling (ed.), *The Ancestral Philosophy. Hellenistic Philosophy in Second Temple Judaism. Essays of David Winston,* Brown Judaic Studies Studia Philonia Monographs, 4 (Providence 2001) 151–170 deals with the possibilities and the possible ways of knowing God. The paper analyzes the distinction between a way of knowing based upon the vision of the created world and an immediate vision of God if He can be grasped directly. The problem is to establish the meaning of such a vision given God's absolute transcendence and the impossibility of comprehending His essence. It is a special kind of vision, which can be reached by means of a path based on intellectual faculties. It could be a rational process similar to the one which leads to the vision of the good by means of dialectics in Plato's *Republic*.

[2] *Abr.* 69–71; *Praem.* 41–43.

[3] *Post.* 169; *Somn.* I 239.

[4] *Opif.* 171; *Leg.* III 82; *Somn.* I 230; *Deter.* 160; *Mos.* I 75–76.

[5] *Ebr.* 82–83; *Mut.* 81–82.

[6] *Opif.* 70–71; *Her.* 69–70; 263–265; *Ebr.* 146; *Fug.* 32; 166; *Leg.* I 84; III 83; *Prob.* 13; *Mos.* I 187; *Contempl.* 12; 89; *Spec.* I 41.

[7] *Mut.* 3–6; *Abr.* 57–58; *Spec.* I 49.

[8] *Post.* 167.

[9] *Somn.* I 70.

[10] *Leg.* III 100; *Abr.* 122.

an awareness of the different and divine level,[11] education,[12] *dianoia*,[13] God who is light to Himself.[14]

Here, to exemplify the argument, I have differentiated various methods of approach, which are not always so clearly distinguished in the text: indeed, often the ways converge. *De Posteritate* 167, for example, mentions the possibility of knowing 'He who really is' with the ears and the eyes of the mind, starting out from the created world and the powers, by means of direct revelation, immediate evidence, or by means of reasoning and argument. From this passage, therefore, it seems that knowledge is possible[15] and it is God himself who declares "See that I Am".

However, in the following passage, this impression is contradicted:

> When we say that the Existent One is visible, we are not using words in their literal sense, but it is an irregular use of the word by which it is referred to each one of His powers. In the passage just quoted He does not say 'See Me' for it is impossible that the God who is should be perceived at all by created beings. What he says is 'See that I AM', that is 'Behold My subsistence'. [...] To be anxious to continue his course yet further, and inquire about essence or quality in God, is a folly fit for the world's childhood.[16]

From God, as from the sun, radiate luminous and dazzling rays which prevent mortals from seeing Him. In addition to being *akataleptos* and *aperinoetos*, He is thus also *aoratos*. In other words, when we speak of 'Being', the terminology applying to bodily sight cannot properly be used: 'He who is' cannot be seen, God cannot be perceived by those who are immersed in becoming. The only possibility for man is to understand the existence of God, not His essence. Even the vision mentioned in *Post.* 168–169 is a vision of what 'lies behind God'.[17] Knowledge,

---

[11] *Leg.* III 39–48; *Her.* 24–29; 68–74.
[12] *Legat.* 5.
[13] *Spec.* I 20.
[14] *Spec.* I 42; *Leg.* III 100–103; *Praem.* 43.
[15] Cf. *Spec.* I 36–49; *Praem.* 38–39; *Deus* 55.
[16] *Post.* 168–169. On the nature of God see J. Dillon, "The Nature of God in 'Quod Deus'", in D. Winston & J. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria* cit. 217 ff. who sets a comparison with *Didaskalikos*. See also J. Dillon, "The Transcendence of God in Philo: some possible sources" in Id., *The Golden Chain. Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot 1990) 5–6.
[17] "You shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen". The passage (*Ex.* 33.23) is often quoted by Philo, for example in *Mut.* 9. Cf. *Post.* 13–16; 169; *Fug.* 164–165; *Spec.* I 32; 50.

regardless of the type of approach, turns out to be knowledge of God's powers,[18] of his *logos*,[19] not of God Himself.

Powers can be defined in a number of different ways: ways in which God acts, manifestations of God, intermediaries, measures, ideas, names of God, ways in which man sees. When considering visions of the powers in connection with the different levels reached by man, Philo however stresses that one cannot think of the powers as hypostases of the divine nor, properly speaking, can we speak of divine attributes or qualities.[20]

Thus we have different levels of knowledge: 'He who is' is unknowable, whereas a vision of the powers and the *logos* can be given, even if this is incomplete. The rays that emanate from the purest of radiations cast the intellect desiring to see into darkness and, being blinded, it is struck with an attack of dizziness:[21] it may be able to see a shadow, but not the source of light itself. It is truly impossible to have a clear vision of God, and this is explained in *Spec*. I 37–50, where the situation is likened to the case of a person with sensible eyes, who is unable to see the sun, but can only see its rays.[22] Indeed,

> This which is better than the good, more venerable than the monad, purer than the unit, cannot be discerned by anyone else; to God alone is it permitted to apprehend God.[23]

Ὁ ὢν is the one whose name cannot be said: "My nature is to be not to be spoken".[24] Already a number of authors, including Dillon[25] and Runia,[26] have pointed out that, in the light of the first hypotheses in Plato's *Parmenides*, we can consider the Philonic God's being and the

[18] Cf. *Somn*. I 70.

[19] Cf. *Leg.* III 103. For a commentary on the passage see R. Radice, *Allegoria e paradigmi etici in Filone di Alessandria. Commentario al 'Legum Allegoriae'*, prefazione di C. Kraus Reggiani (Milano 2000) 327.

[20] Cf. here: chap. five; C. Termini, *Le Potenze di Dio. Studio su* δύναμις *in Filone di Alessandria*, Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum 71 (Roma 2000) 53.

[21] Cf. *Opif.* 71; *Spec.* I 37–38; 44; *Fug*. 165; *QG.* IV 1.

[22] See also *Praem.* 37. Cf. P. Borgen, *Philo. An Exegete for his Time*, Novum Testamentum Supplement, 86 (Leiden 1997) 238–239.

[23] *Praem.* 40.

[24] *Mut.* 11.

[25] "The Transcendence of God" cit. 4 ff.

[26] D. T. Runia, "Naming and Knowing: Themes in Philonic Theology with special Reference to the *De Mutatione nominum*" in R. Van Den Broek, T. Baarda, L. Mansfeld (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World*, Leiden-New York (1988) 69–91 (77).

impossibility of His having a name as being closely related, seeing that every name adds something to being. According to *Parmenides*, if the one is one, no name can be given to it; it cannot be said, called or known.[27]

Unnameability of God

The aforementioned authors specifically highlight the difficulties inherent in using the name of God and in his knowability, bringing out any references made to *Parmenides*: however, in my opinion, there are still some problems that have not been considered and which I shall now seek to address.

a) in some passages Philo speaks of God's unnameability, in others of the impossibility of humans' knowing His name. The question I am asking is: does God not have a name at all or does He just not reveal it? Does He not have a name which is suitable for humans who cannot know Him and use an improper name in order to have someone or something to address their prayers to, or is it precisely in the nature of God not to have a name? According to some arguments, it seems we should opt for the first hypothesis, according to others, His unnameability is absolute. I would like to look at these different formulations and seek to find possible origins for them. In the first case, we often find passages in which God presents Himself. These may, perhaps, derive from the Jewish prohibition on pronouncing the name of God, the concept of the efficacy of the spoken word and the function of the name. In the second case, Philo is probably following concepts of a Platonic stamp and, in particular, the problems highlighted in the *Parmenides*.[28]

---

[27] See *Parm*. 142 A.

[28] In an interesting paper ("Early Alexandrian Theology and Plato's *Parmenides*") delivered at the SBL Conference in Philadelphia in November 2005 (in the session "Rethinking Plato's Parmenides and Its Platonic, Gnostic and Patristic Reception") Runia maintains that "Philo never makes any reference" [to Plato's *Parmenides*] but—continues the author—"it is unlikely that Philo was unaware of the *Parmenides* even if he has not referred to it explicitly, or made allusions to it". Runia's thesis is that "the fundamental Platonic dialogue for Philo had to be the *Timaeus*" (p. 7) but there are parallels between the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*. "This convergence can explain why some of Philo's theological arguments may remind us of the Parmenidean dialectic" (8). We shouldn't thus speak of more or less direct references to the *Parmenides*, but of references to the *Timaeus* where we might find some thesis similar to some of

If my interpretation is correct, it would lead one to think that there is a substantial difference between the passages in which Philo quotes the *Bible* verbatim or comments upon it, verse by verse, and those passages where he reasons autonomously, without any immediate textual reference.

b) A further problem regards the relationship between *via negationis*, *via eminentiae*, and *via analogiae*. Let us consider some passages from Philo that it seems could refer to one or other of the three *viae*

> God "for Whom no name nor utterance nor conception of any sort is adequate" (*Somn.* I 67)
>
> "God the Being that is without kind" (*Leg.* III 36)
>
> God Himself indicates Himself as Him who is without any other thing (*Deus* 109).
>
> God is "better than the good, more venerable than the monad, purer than the unit" (*Praem.* 40; cf. *Contempl.* 2)
>
> God is happy (*Deus* 26), He is incorruptible (*Deus* 26), His nature is perfect, He is happy or, rather, He is "Himself the summit, end and limit of happiness" (*Cher.* 86).
>
> As the sun illuminates the sensible world and renders it visible, so God, by creating things, has rendered them visible (*Somn.* I 76); as it is by means of light that light can be seen, thus it is that via God, God can be seen (*Praem.* 46).

These are only some of the formulations found in Philo's text. They are of very different kinds and they pose the problem of compatibility one with the others: is there a contradiction between the assertion that God is ineffable and nothing can be said about Him and the affirmation that He is good or perfect? This is a common theme in Middle Platonic tradition, for example in *Didaskalikos.*

"My nature is to be, not to be spoken"

I shall start with the first question, that of His nameability:

De Mutatione, where the text begins with Abraham's vision, gives us a good example of the interweave between knowledge and name:

Parmenides' arguments. I thank D. Runia for allowing me to consult the unpublished manuscript of his paper.

> Abraham became ninety-nine years old and the Lord was seen by Abraham and said to him, 'I am Thy Lord'". [...] Do not, however suppose that the Existent which truly exists is apprehended by any man.[29]

Not even Moses, who has contemplated immaterial nature, who has seen God, who "entered into the darkness"[30] i.e. "existence invisible and incoporeal", managed to see clearly "Him who alone is good". Moreover, when Moses asks God to reveal Himself to him, he receives a negative answer: God "by His very nature cannot be seen".[31] Running parallel to the impossibility of seeing is that of knowing the name of 'He who is':

> Note that when the prophet desires to know what he must answer to those who ask about His name He says 'I am He that is' (*Ex.* 3.14), which is equivalent to 'My nature is to be, not to be spoken'.[32]

The text continues with the assertion that no name can even be assigned to He who really is: the reference to the need for a name—albeit inadequate—brings out the concept that it is impossible for humans to know a name that is not improper. Moreover, no words are sufficient to describe the Being, nor can adequate names be found for the powers:

> for reason cannot attain to ascend to God, who nowhere can be touched or handled,[33] but subsides and ebbs away unable to find the proper words by which it may approach to expound, I do not say the God who IS, for if the whole Heaven should become an articulate voice, it would lack the apt and appropriate terms needed for this, but even for God's attendant powers.[34]

The names humans normally use to designate God: θεός e κύριος, God and Lord, are improper names used to compensate for human weakness: they designate God's powers i.e. aspects of God that relate

---

[29] *Mut.* 1–7. See also *Post.* 166–169; *Deus* 62; *Spec.* I 49; *Praem.* 36–46; *QG* IV 1–2.

[30] *Ex.* 20. 21.

[31] *Mut.* 9.

[32] *Mut.* 11.

[33] Cf. *Somn.* I 67; *Mut.* 7–8. Given the human impossibility of knowing God, is there any possibility of a direct encounter? Some passages seem to move in this direction. Thus in *Somn.* I 70–71 an encounter (a συνάντησις of God) is introduced while in *Fug.* 140 God's meeting Moses is called σύνοδος, with reference to *Ex.* 3. 11–12. It seems possible to speak of an internal experience which is not necessarily intellectual, of a direct meeting with God. Cf. E. Vanderlin, "Les divers modes de connaissance" cit. 297–299.

[34] *Legat.* 6.

with humans, not 'He who is' in His absoluteness. They are improper names which humans are permitted to use so that it does not prove totally impossible to give a name to the supreme Good. This is a name set within time i.e. a name connected with those who are immersed in temporal space: it is not a name extraneous to generation. But the real name has not been revealed to anyone: "'I was seen', He says, 'of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being their God, and My name of 'Lord' I did not reveal to them'."[35]

Some critics, including Wolfson and Nikiprowetzky, have brought out problems connected with the terminological interweave, which results in θεός being one of the powers, whereas elsewhere the same term indicates God. Still more significant is the fact that κύριος, Lord, one of the powers, is used in the *Septuagint* to indicate the tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable name of God. Moreover, κύριος also means *proper*, both in the sense of one's own name and in that of suitable name. So when God addresses Moses declaring that he has not said the proper name κύριος, does He mean that he has not revealed Himself with an adequate name or that He has not revealed His own real name, seeing that humans cannot know Him? Here we find an example of *katachresis*: the improper use of a language item to indicate a name that cannot be said.[36] Moreover, we humans cannot even call the *logos* by its proper name.[37]

In *Mut.* 13 a very different formulation appears: we no longer find the impossibility of the name existing, but a decision not to reveal it: "for when the transposition is reset in the proper order it will run thus: 'My proper name I did not reveal to thee', but, He implies only the substitute". The Being is ineffable and even its *logos* is unutterable using a name suited to ourselves. "And indeed if He is unnamable He

---

[35] *Mut.* 13.

[36] The theme of the *catachresis* present in these passages has been studied by D. Runia, "Naming and Knowing" cit. 75–91 who speaks of a "deliberate misuse of a word," theorized for example by Quintilian for whom "the term *catachresis* should only be used to describe the deliberate misuse of a word in order to represent a meaning for which no correct word is available" (84). The examples quoted by Runia have been studied by J. Whittaker, "Catachresis and Negative Theology: Philo of Alexandria and Basilides", in S. Gersh, Ch. Kannengiesser (eds.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 8 (Notre Dame (1992) 61–82. Whittaker objects to Runia's "strong" use of *catachresis* in connection with how Philo speaks of God. The passages analysed by both scholars are *Sacr.* 101; *Post.* 167–168; *Mut.* 11–14; 27–28; *Somn.* I 229; *Abr.* 120; *De Deo* 4.

[37] *Mut.* 15.

is also inconceivable and incomprehensible".[38] The text would seem to refer to the impossibility of man's giving names to God, not the general impossibility of the Being having a name.

It is interesting to note that the different formulations appear within the same text. Again, at *Somn*. I 230, God Himself denies being nameable:

> When he had inquired whether He that IS has no proper name, and whatever name anyone may use of Him he will use by licence of language; for it is not the nature of Him that IS to be spoken of, but simply to be.

Here, it is not a question of human incapacity, of an adequate name for those who are at a lower level, but a question of God's nature: His nature is simply to be. We have a reply with a purpose: "It was given in order that, since there are not in God things which man can comprehend, man may recognize His subsistence". There are certain things, including the name presumably, which may be known by the powers or the angels: "to the souls, indeed which are incorporeal and are occupied in His worship it is likely that He should reveal Himself as He is, conversing with them as friends with friends"[39] but, to souls which are still in a body, God only reveals His existence. The formulation in *Mos.* I 75 is very similar.

> Tell them that I am He Who is, that they may learn the difference between what is and what is not, and also the further lesson that no name at all can properly be used of Me, to Whom alone existence belongs.

If the lack of a name is an attribution of the Being in terms of His ineffability and unknowability, we might wonder why in *Mut.* 11–15 'He who is' is not also called *akatonomastos*: it is only stated that God is not known by a name κύριος. *Akatonomostos* is a term used by Philo: we find it, for example in *Somn.* I 67 and *De Deo* 4.[40] In *Mut.* 14 the Being

---

[38] *Mut.* 15. In his "Naming and Knowing" cit. 78 Runia maintains that while for Philo the angel "at a lower level of being, does have a proper name but refuses to reveal it, God does not have one and cannot reveal it properly. [...] He describes the *logos* as having a name that is '*personal* as well as proper' (*idion kai kyrion*). Secondly he distinguishes between God who is undescribable' (*arrhetos*) and the *logos* who is 'not described' (*ou rhetós*); Philo knows very well the difference between negative and privative attributes. For Philo God's unknowability is linked to His unnameability "consequent upon Being's unknowability is the fact that He has no 'proper name'" (76).

[39] *Somn.* I 231–232.

[40] At least this is how Siegert translates the term in his Greek re-translation of *De Deo*.

is said to be ineffable to such a point that not even the powers tell us His proper name. The Being is here *arrheton*, not *akatonomastos* and, in the following passage, God refuses to reveal the name that is His τὸ ἴδιον καὶ κύριον. In this context 'He who is' has a name, even if He decides to conceal it from us. In *Somn.* I 67 and De *Deo* 4, instead, God has no name at all.

> The One in their midst is called Being 'Ων; this name 'Being' is not his own and proper name. For he himself is unnameable and beyond expression, as being incomprehensible. But, inasmuch as he is, he is named 'the Being'.[41]

The lack of any name is stressed. Naturally, the fact that *De Deo* has come down to us only in Armenian, in a translation which is undoubtedly much later than the original—leaving aside the fact that it may be apocryphal—may explain this emphasis. There may, however, be other explanations for what seems to be a marked interpretation, but one which is not without precedent in Philonian works (consider *Somn.* I 67 or *Mut.* 11).

I have thus exemplified the divarication I mentioned earlier: although in some passages God has no names, in others, rather than being totally without any name, God seems to be unnameable by man. It is not a question of the ontological lack of a name, but rather the impossibility of man's knowing an adequate name. If we cannot know the essence of God, we cannot know His name either. Underlying this idea is the Jewish tradition of the value of a word in terms of its efficacy, the power of a name, its controlling function and the knowledge it provides about whatever is named.[42] According to this tradition God has a name, a hidden name which cannot be pronounced or used, except by particular people in particular circumstances.[43] Given the relationship pertaining between name and reality,[44] the proper name would indicate the essence of God—which humans cannot know. It is

[41] *De Deo* 4, transl. J. Laporte.

[42] Cf. J. Dillon, "The magical Power of Names in Origen and Later Platonism" in Id., *The Golden Chain. Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* Collected Studies Series, 333 (Aldershot 1990) XXIII 203–216.

[43] F. Shaw gives an interesting interpretation of the use of the name of God in the Roman world, in "The Emperor Gaius' Employment of the Divine Name", *SphA* XVIII (2005) 33–48, which discusses the use of the Tetragrammaton.

[44] Cf. F. Calabi, *The Language and the Law of God. Interpretation and Politics in Philo of Alexandria* South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 188: Studies in Philo of Alexandria and Mediterranean Antiquity (Atlanta, Georgia 1998) 111–115.

for this reason that God did not reveal it. In this perspective, it seems that unnameability is related not to God's lack of a name, but to His silence in this respect.

In the other interpretation, which derived from theorizations based on Plato's *Parmenides*, 'He who is' cannot have a name as it is His nature solely to be: any name given would add something to being, multiply it, destroy its oneness. A name involves predication, which implies plurality and relatedness.[45]

The differences in formulation probably derive from the range of contexts and functions involved: in *Mut.* 13, Philo quotes the *Bible* almost verbatim and comments upon it passage by passage. In *Mut.* 11, *Somn.* I 230, *Mos.* I 75, and *De Deo* 4, his discussion seems to be more autonomous: the text he is commenting on is reinterpreted, not merely quoted. More space is left for references, implicit or otherwise, to the themes in the *Parmenides*.

What is striking is that—if my interpretation is correct—the texts that can in some way be considered as influenced by "Platonic" thought are far more numerous than those closely connected with the *Bible*.

Via Negationis, Via Eminentiae, Via Analogiae

Let us now examine the second question I posed: the possible incongruities between ineffability and attributing qualities and features to God. What we have to look at is if and how absolute ineffability can coexist with a lack of determination of 'He who is' and 'definitions' such as: better than the good, more venerable than the monad, purer than the unit. Moreover, His relationships with what is determined must be ascertained. There are no lower-ranking divinities who are entrusted with His activities, and the powers are not autonomous beings. This raises questions as to plurality and possible relatedness.[46]

[45] Cf. Runia, "Naming and Knowing" cit. 77.

[46] J. Mansfeld, ("Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception", in R. Van Den Broek, T. Baarda, L. Mansfeld (eds.), *Knowledge of God* cit. 92–117 (97) says: "both Eudorus' Pythagoreans and Simplicius' Xenophanes place One supreme God beyond the opposites which come forth from him because he is their principle, or cause". In Philo, however, even if we find God as *aition* (*Post.* 14), we cannot say that 'He who is' is the principle and cause of the opposites. Moreover—notwithstanding what Mansfeld maintains in p. 98—we cannot speak of polarity as such. There are the two main powers but also many others. It is only possible to think of polarity in terms of duality and of duality as multiplicity. Furthermore, powers

> The Existent considered as existent is not relative. He is full of Himself and is sufficient for Himself. It was so before the creation of the world, and is equally so after the creation of all that is. He cannot change nor alter and needs nothing else at all, so that all things are His but He Himself in the proper sense belongs to none.[47]

If we consider the various ways in which Philo formulates the concept of God, we can divide them into a number of different approaches: sometimes Philo speaks of God as one, totally unmixed,[48] incorruptible (*Deus* 26). Joy and gladness and rejoicing are His alone; He is without grief or fear or share of ill.[49] He is good and benevolent (*Det.* 146). He is without kind (*ho apoios*) and incorruptible (*ho afhthartos*) (*Leg*. III 36), "God is not somewhere (for He is not contained but contains the universe" (*Leg.* III 51). Moreover, whereas in various passages it is stated that God is *asomatos, afhthartos* and *apoios*, in *Leg.* III 206 it is maintained that not even negative sentences can be said of God.

Elsewhere, the uncreated and divine, is

> the primal good, the excellent, the happy, the blessed, which may truly be called better than the good, more excellent than the excellent, more blessed than blessedness, more happy than happiness itself (*Legat.* 5).

He is perfect, the best of all beings, "incomparable cause of all things" (*Fug.* 141), better than the good, purer than the One and more venerable than the Monad (*Praem.* 40; *Contempl.* 2).

We then find relational and relative terms, such as those based on the creation or providence: father, saviour, intellect of everything, the cause of all things. We thus find negative features, such as: devoid of qualities or unmixed, statements which declare He is unnameable, unknowable, incomprehensible, and also declarations of excellence. On the surface, this would seem to be a set of contradictions. On one hand, the affirmation that God is unknowable and ineffable and does not

are not autonomous beings, albeit generated by God. Rather they seem to be ways in which God shows Himself.

[47] *Mut*. 27–28. Cf. *Post.* 14: "The Cause of all is not in the thick darkness, nor locally in any place at all, but high above both place and time. For He has placed all creation under His control, and is contained by nothing, but transcends all. But though transcending and being beyond what He has made, none the less has He filled the universe with Himself, for He has caused His powers to extend themselves throughout the universe to its utmost bounds, and in accordance with the laws of harmony has knit each part to each".

[48] Cf. *Leg.* II 2; *Her.* 183.

[49] *Cher.* 86; *Somn.* II 247–249.

relate with anything, on the other, the expressing of descriptive terms and features. Characterizations of God as immutable or unchanging, for example, seem to clash with His being ineffable, unknowable and without kind. Moreover, the epithets purer than the One and more venerable than the Monad indicate ulteriority, the Being over and beyond predication. Yet, it is a question of epithets that are to some extent in harmony with the negative characterizations relating to ineffability and unknowability. As E. Vanderlin[50] notes, since the *via eminentiae* gives an indirect view of God's nature, it draws closer to the *via negationis*, in a certain sense rendering the *via eminentiae* null and void or removing its positive features. The expression 'better than the Good' is rather special. As Dillon[51] observes, it is reminiscent of the *epekeina tes ousias* in the *Republic*. Other features attributed to God, who is described as perfect, pure, the summit, end and limit of happiness (*Cher*. 86), however, move fully in the direction of predication and attribution of qualities or, at least, assign properties. Whether it is a case of attributes, qualities or properties (*idiotetes*), in any case we are dealing with determinations, which do not seem to combine well with God's ineffability.

As concerns the *viae* now under consideration, the analogy present, for example, in a passage of *Somn.* I 73–75, which refers to the comparison made between God and the sun, constitutes another approach:

> Marvel not if the sun, in accordance with the rules of allegory, is likened to the Father and Ruler of the universe: for although in reality nothing is like God, there have been accounted so in human opinion two things only, one invisible, one visible, the soul invisible, the sun visible. [...] God is light [...]. And He is not only light, but the archetype of every other light, nay, prior to and high above every archetype, holding the position of the model of a model.

In other passages, too we find this analogy with the sun: *Praem*. 45, for example, affirms that, as the sun is visible only by means of the sun and, likewise, light by means of light, so God, who is His own brightness,[52] His own light, is discerned through Himself alone without anything

[50] "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *Mélanges de Sciences Religieuses* III (1947) 285–304 (300). See also R. Berchman, "The Categories of Being in Middle Platonism: Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria" in J. P. Kenny (ed.), *The School of Moses. Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion*. In Memory of Horst R. Moehring, Brown Judaic Series, 304: Studia Philonica Monograph Series 1 (Atlanta 1995) 98–140 (118).

[51] J. Dillon, "The Transcendence of God" cit. 5–6.

[52] Cf. *Spec.* I 42.

being involved—or being able to be involved—in the perception of His existence. What is perceived is, once again, God's existence, not His essence;[53] but it is still a path leading towards truth, a way of envisaging "God through God" (*Praem.* 46).

Yet again, as the sun renders bodies immersed in darkness visible, so God, when He created things, made them visible (cfr. *Somn.* I 75–76). While in the *De Praemiis* passage, the object of comparison was God himself in His existence, here the object of the analogy is God as a power, the God who intervenes in the world. Definitions *eminentiae* (prior to and high above every archetype) appear and definitions by analogy which do not apply to 'He who is', He who is ineffable and unknowable, but to the divine powers, and the *logos*.

Compatible Ways

As we have seen, there are various different approaches to the designation of God, some of which may converge or proceed on parallel ways. However, others seem to conflict. In particular, it is difficult to conciliate the impossibility of expressing the qualities and the lack of qualities of 'He who is' with declarations that He is pure and perfect, ineffable and unknowable or that He is unchangeable.

It seems to me that, in order to try to clarify the issues emerging, two questions should first be answered.

1) Is it thinkable that *via negationis, via eminentiae* and *via analogiae* are applied to different figures, or perhaps to the same figure, but considered in terms of different functions: 'He who is' in His absolute form, the powers in their relationships with the world?
2) Given that 'He who is' is devoid of qualities, can we consider the powers to be attributes or qualities and thus separate approaches that seem to involve predicates from affirmations—or rather negations—applicable to substantiality?[54]

Rather than opt for this kind of solution, I prefer the hypothesis that the three ways towards the designation of the one divine figure—'He who is'—are neither mutually exclusive, nor incompatible. These are

[53] Cf. *Virt.* 215–216.
[54] On these themes see here: chap. two.

apparently different ways, which do not refer to how God relates to the world, but to how humans relate to God: different perspectives of a single designation.

As to the first of the two questions listed, whether we can affirm that God is ineffable and unknowable in His essence, as He is not related to anything other than Himself, and that He does, instead, have attributes or can be characterized when He relates to the world, Vanderlin has already provided an answer.[55] The scholar clarifies that many of the descriptive phrases which describe creative or providential aspects relate to God's action, not His being. One way in which we might be able to trace out a solution to the problem could be by hypothesizing that the ends of the different approaches have different functions. Ineffability and epithets referring to ulteriority would thus be proper to 'He who is'; terms describing His perfection, happiness, goodness and compassion would refer to God in His relationships with the cosmos.[56] This is a solution which seems to be suggested in other authors contemporary to Philo.[57] It has been examined by Wolfson and Invernizzi in connection with *Didaskalikos* and is criticised by Donini.[58]

However, the problem is whether we can find evidence for this in Philo's text: it is true that 'He who is' is ineffable, whereas compassion and punishment are proper to God as κύριος or θεός, but can it also be said that God as a power is the primal good, the excellent, the happy, the blessed (*Legat.* 5) or do these epithets seem to refer to 'He who is'? Moreover, should we interpret κύριος as mercy or is it merciful? Is it

---

[55] E. Vanderlin, "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu" cit. 298.

[56] This thesis has recently been maintained by P. Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria* Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 77 (Tübingen 1999) 40–42.

[57] P. L. Donini maintains in his paper "La connaissance de Dieu et la hiérarchie divine chez Albinos" in R. Van Der Broeck, T. Baarda, L. Mansfeld (eds.), *Knowledge of God* cit., 118–131 (120–121) that a distinction between God's ineffable essence and His attributes considered to describe God's influence upon the world is normal in texts of the Middle Platonism period. He denies however that we can find this distinction in Albinus. Actually, I do not think that this interpretation can be maintained for Philo, at least in such definite terms.

[58] See G. Invernizzi, *Il Didaskalikos di Albino e il medioplatonismo* (Roma 1976) 165 ff. and Donini's critique: "le texte même empêche de penser que pour Albinos le voies analogiae et eminentiae ont une destination différente de la première, la via negationis, clairement présentée afin de rendre en quelque sorte concevable un dieu qui a été defini ineffable. [...] si les trois voies sont toutes en relation avec le caractère ineffable du Dieu, il est impossible que deux d'entres elles visent à établir des prédicats du dieu qui est indefinissable." ("La connaissance de Dieu" cit. 120.

an attribute or a property?[59] In other words, this type of explanation presupposes that perfect and merciful are attributes of a being to whom predication can be applied, they presuppose that the powers have a kind of autonomy: I would almost say they are hypostatised. But if the powers are ways in which we view God, it follows that *via negationis, eminentiae* and *analogiae* are only different ways we have of indicating our approach to God and they designate epithets which vary according to the perspective with which we start out. In this case, the three ways would be compatible, as they would not designate different realities, but just one reality seen through different lenses.

Just as there is no clear distinction between God and powers, but they continuously flow into and out of one another—to the extent that Abraham's vision alternates between the image of one figure and that of three (*Abr.* 120 ff.; *QG* IV 1–2)—likewise, the ways in which God is designated would not, in this case, be clearly distinguished from those used to designate the powers. There would be an intermingling of the three ways, as they are ways of designating adopted by humans.

As regards the second problem I have mentioned—whether we should consider the powers as attributes and qualities and whether we can, therefore, separate approaches which seem to involve predicates from affirmations applicable to substantiality—different types of definitions appear in a passage of *Legatio ad Caium*. In my opinion, the sequence of terms used makes it clear that Philo does not see the different ways as contradictory, but actually consequential.

He is speaking of the people "that sees God" of Israel,

> souls whose vision has soared above all created things and schooled itself to behold the uncreated and divine, the primal good, the excellent, the happy, the blessed, which may truly be called better than the good, more excellent than the excellent, more blessed than blessedness, more happy than happiness itself, and any perfection there may be greater than these. For reason cannot attain to ascend to God, who nowhere can be touched or handled, but subsides and ebbs away unable to find the proper words

[59] D. Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature" in L. E. Goodman (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern, 7 (Albany 1992), 21–42 (21) quotes the passages which clarify that God is *apoios: Leg.* III 36; 206; *Deus* 55–56; *Cher.* 67. "All God's properties are, strictly speaking properties (*idiotetes*). They are derivative of his Essence, but, unlike definitions, do not indicate that essence itself and, unlike qualities, are not shared with others. Further, since the essence of God is one and single, whatever belongs to it as a property must be one and single. Thus Philo reduces all divine properties to a single one, that of acting (*Cher.* 77)" (22).

> by which it may approach to expound, I do not say the God who IS, for if the whole Heaven should become an articulate voice, it would lack the apt and appropriate terms needed for this, but even for God's attendant powers.[60]

'He who is' is ineffable and inaccessible. We cannot know His essence or talk about Him. It is no coincidence that reference is made to the powers, the aspects of the divine that have some connection with humans, the ways in which God manifests Himself and acts. Phrases such as "This which is better than the good, more venerable than the monad, purer than the unit" express the ineffability and the unknowability of God; they owe their origin—once again—to the shortcomings of human language, which resorts to improper descriptive terms to designate God.

Attributes and qualities are not suited to God, whether they consist in pretensions to knowing the essence of ὁ ὢν i.e. from the point of view of His being, or from the human viewpoint of knowableness. In *Leg*. III 36 God is said to be *apoios*, but in *Leg.* III 206 the argument goes further: one cannot speak of qualities, or absence of qualities, or of corporeality or absence of corporeality.[61] To no one has God revealed His nature; it is known only to Himself. And we cannot even know the essence of the powers. We can only give them names for our own use, which do not reflect either God's essence or His qualities. The powers are ineffable and unknowable too, even if they have a name owing to *katachresis*. So the hypothesis that a distinction can be made between the various ways of defining—'He who is' is ineffable, while the powers have qualities and attributes, which are describable and definable—seems simplistic. It is not a question of two planes of reality which are reached by taking different paths, but different ways of referring to the same reality seen from different perspectives.

---

[60] *Legat.* 5–6. In a recent paper D. Runia has introduced an interesting interpretation of the passage. He maintains that "Philo is alluding to a literary topos that he often uses at the beginning of a treatise or a discussion, namely that the powers of language are insufficient to do justice to the subject matter of the work". A few lines above Runia had written: "A contextual reading of the first seven sections [*Legat.* 1–7] shows, in my view, that they should not be just read as a rambling piece of theology, but were inspired by the subject matter of the treatise" (D. T. Runia, "Philo of Alexandria, 'Legatio ad Gaium' 1–7", in D. A. Aune, T. Seland, J. H. Ulrichsen (eds.), *Neotestamentica et Philonica.* Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen (Leiden 2003) 349–370 (367).

[61] Cf. *Leg*. III 51.

Mansfeld's[62] brilliant interpretation of Simplicius' comment on Aristotelian *Physics*, which was then taken up to explain other works which seem to present similar contradictions, may also provide a key for interpreting Philo. Mansfeld likens Philo to Eudorus' description of Pythagoreans and Simplicius' presentation of Xenophanes. "Both Eudorus' Pythagoreans and Simplicius' Xenophanes place One *supreme* God beyond the opposites which come forth from him because he is their principle, or cause". The analogy made with *Post.* 14 and *Congr.* 106 does not seem to me to be particularly significant. However, setting aside the individual similarities between the texts, what I do feel to be significant is the interpretative key used whereby, starting out from the first two hypotheses in the *Parmenides*, Mansfeld speaks of "alternative modes of cognition, compatible, albeit of unequal value "which" suffices to explain the combination of attributes and qualifications which to us [...] appear mutually exclusive" of "alternative ways of contemplating the same realities".[63]

In the light of this hypothesis, we can take a new look at the arguments in Philo: that the majority of the descriptions quoted concern God in His relationships with the world seems to me beyond any shadow of doubt. However, I do not feel that this is in contradiction with the unknowability and ineffability of God. We are dealing here with different aspects of the divine being, different perspectives. The powers have their own features and description, just as they have names because—as Philo says in *De mutatione*—men need a name by which to address God and pray to Him. However, just as the powers do not contradict the concept of God and His oneness, attributed qualities and descriptive terms do not contrast with God's ineffability. This is not because the powers are inferior divinities, second-class, autonomous beings who are assigned attributes separately from God, but due to the nature of the powers. If, apart from being ways in which God acts, they are ways in which man relates to God and learns to know His works, the *via eminentiae, via negationis*, and *via analogiae* are not contrasting ways, or ways referring to different beings. They are different perspectives from which

[62] "Compatible Alternatives" cit. 93 ff.. At p. 94 Mansfeld maintains: "The formula that he [sc. God] is 'neither at rest nor in motion' he [Simplicius] argues does not conflict with...according to which God is at rest and does not move: 'he [Xenophanes] does not mean that he sc. God is at rest according to the rest that is opposed to motion, but (that he is so) according to the abiding that is beyond motion and rest'".

[63] "Compatible Alternatives" cit. 110; 100.

the single God who is 'He who is' can be viewed. In other words, it can be hypothesized that the different ways to definition are connected not so much with different ontological or relational levels that God has, as much as with human language and cognitive capacity.

As men need to give things a name, to the extent that they will use improper ones by *katachresis*, they attribute to God features that do not belong to Him:

> The comrades of the soul, who can hold converse with intelligible incorporeal natures, do not compare the Existent to any form of created things. They have dissociated Him from every category or quality, for it is one of the facts which go to make His blessedness and supreme felicity that His being is apprehended as simple being, without other definite characteristic; and thus they do not picture it with form, but admit to their minds the conception of existence only. But those who have made a compact and a truce with the body are unable to cast off from them the garment of flesh, and to descry existence needing nothing in its unique solitariness, and free from all admixture and composition in its absolute simplicity. And therefore they think of the cause of all in the same terms as of themselves, and do not reflect that while a being which is formed through the union of several faculties needs several parts to minister to the needs of each, God being uncreated and the Author of the creation of the others needs none of the properties which belong to the creatures which He has brought into being.[64]

In *Sacr.* 101 there is an illuminating passage: "Separate, therefore, my soul, all that is created, mortal, mutable, profane, from thy conception of God the uncreated, the unchangeable, the immortal, the holy and solely blessed". There is a need to describe what is ineffable, to use terms or phrases which are not used of God in their literal sense, but are "used in figure, a word of help to our feeble apprehension".[65] This is why *via eminentiae* and *via analogiae* are used, and they do not contrast with *via negationis*: at most, they are less well-suited to the purpose.

[64] *Deus* 55–56.
[65] *Sacr.* 101.

APPENDIX ONE

THE DAZZLING LIGHT: A METAPHOR ON THE UNKNOWABILITY OF GOD

Dillon on Origen

The unknowability of God and the hypothesis that there are various ways of approaching He who cannot be seen was taken up by much of the later tradition. In particular, I would like to dwell here on some passages of Origen in the light of an article by Dillon.[1] The author discusses the age old question of whether Origen can be considered a systematic author. For Dillon, the Alexandrian is a philosopher in every sense of the word, who has formulated an original thought: he started out from the Christian scriptures and based himself on Platonism as regards concepts and formulations that proved to be useful to him, without thereby "surrendering to the Greeks any principle whatever" (216). To support his thesis, Dillon analyzes the use Origen makes of some Platonic images in *Peri Archon*, amongst which, his use of the sun simile and the role of light in the *Republic*. Using quotes from *John's First Epistle* (1.5) and the book of *Psalms*, the image of divine light is introduced. In Origen's opinion, the concept of God as light is to be understood in a metaphorical sense; it is the *dynamis* which allows men to see the truth or to know God himself.[2] According to Dillon, Origen

[1] J. Dillon, "Looking on the Light: Some Remarks on the Imagery of Light in the First Chapter of the 'Peri Archon'" in Id., *The Golden Chain. Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot 1990) 215–230.

[2] Cf. J. Dillon, "Knowledge of God in Origen" in Van der Broek, Baarda, Mansfeld (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman world* (Leiden 1988) 219–228. G. Filoramo, *Luce e Gnosi. Saggi sull'illuminazione nello Gnosticismo* (Roma 1980) 15–18 points out that starting out from Imperial syncretism light is "identificata con la sostanza stessa del mondo divino." Light "è una forza, una potenza, è vita, vita però pensata come incorruttibilità, immortalità: ciò che conta, ora, non è più il fatto di *essere nella luce*, bensì di *essere luce*, di avere la luce, come segno e garanzia di un processo di mutamento spirituale, di conversione, rinnovamento, rigenerazione" (18).

A possible comparison between John 1.9 and the cave simile is studied by C. H. Kooten, "The 'True Light which enlightens everyone' (*John* 1:9): John, *Genesis*, the Platonic Notion of the 'True Noetic Light', and the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*", in Id. (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Hearth: Re-interpretations of Genesis 1 in the* passes from an initial defensive stand against the accusations levelled at Christianity, which assert that, in this faith, God is considered as possessing a corporeal nature—and from the introduction of the example of light in order to oppose the references to God as fire and *pneuma*—on to a thesis on the metaphorical nature of all three epithets applied to God at various times: light, fire and *pneuma*. According to Dillon, this shift occurs for two reasons: 1) whereas Origen is undoubtedly cognizant with the Platonic doctrine on the incorporeality of light, he does not necessarily share it; 2) certainly Origen is thinking of the sun simile in *Republic* VI (507a–509c) which, starting out from Alexander of Aphrodysias, has been interpreted as related to the doctrine of the active intellect (*De Anima* III 5) and Aristotle's unmoved motor (*Metaphysica* XII). Hence comes the doctrine of God as pure activity and as the noetic analogue of the sun, the cause of things "bestowing both intelligibility and existence on all things, as well as knowledge on rational souls" (Dillon, 220).

I would like to dwell on this second point and, in particular, on the theory that it is impossible for man to see God, at least during this life. Whereas in Plato, despite various difficulties, it seems that the sun can be seen and the good can be achieved, in *Peri Archon* (I 1. 5) God cannot be contemplated (Dillon, 223; 229).[3] Moreover, in I 1. 6, Origen seems to make use of the image of the cave to affirm that the essence of God is not knowable: it is only possible to infer his nature from His manifestations and His effects. Backing Origen's interpretation are the developments in the theories on nature and the knowability of the first and the second principle of Middle Platonism. One strong reference has been drawn from Middle Platonic interpretations of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. Origen also has in mind the works of Philo who was, in his turn, influenced by contemporary Platonism (Dillon, 227).

Starting out from these considerations, I would like to take a look at the Philonian interpretation of the simile of the sun and the image of the cave, which may provide a key for the interpretation of the *Peri Archon*. Indeed, in Philo too, God is not knowable, and the Platonic images of light and the sun are interpreted on the negative side: the

Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity and Modern Physics, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions, 8 (Leiden-Boston 2005) 149–194.

[3] Dillon, "Looking on the Light" cit. 224 recalls Numenius' position.

sun blinds human sight and cannot be perceived by the human eye. The path to knowledge presented in the *Republic* in which, once out of the cave, the prisoner can—gradually—manage to see the sun, is interpreted in Philo, by a shift: he who is directed towards the desire to know may seek to perceive the rays of the divine light, not the light itself. Blinded by the dazzling rays, man will, in any case, seek to contemplate as much as he is permitted to; urged on by the desire and the passion to know, the contemplator will not give up his quest,[4] but this will be only partly satisfied.[5] Unlike the sensible, which is immersed in thick shadow, giving an impression of night, the intelligible world is illuminated by an incorporeal light deriving from God which shines in all its purity, unmixed.[6] However, just as the eyes of the body, which are unable to look at the sun, confine themselves to perceiving its rays, as they are projected,[7] in the same way, the eyes of the soul are unable to contemplate the sun of suns (*Spec.* I 279) and perceive its essence. It is uncertain to what extent the soul can see the latter's rays.

> This which is better than the good,[8] more venerable than the monad, purer than the unit, cannot be discerned by anyone else; to God alone is it permitted to apprehend God (*Praem.* 40).

God is unknowable.[9] He is a source of dazzling light and, as such, apart from being *arretos, akataleptos* and *aperinoetos*, He is also *aoratos.*[10]

---

[4] Cfr. *Spec.* I 36–40.

[5] At the suppliant's request "The Father and Saviour perceiving the sincerity of his yearning in pity gave power to the penetration of his eyesight and did not grudge to grant him the vision of Himself in so far as it was possible for mortal and created nature to contain it" (*Praem.* 39).

[6] Cf. *Spec.* I 37–38.

[7] Cf. *Spec.* I 40; *Virt.* 164.

[8] Cf. *Contempl.* 2; *QE* II 68. On the names of God whom Philo calls One, Monad, really Existent cf. J. Dillon, "The Transcendence of God in Philo" cit. IX 5–6; on the Philonic use of qualifications, such as *arrhetos, akatonomastos, akataleptos*, cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 155. According to Dillon, Philo is the first author who uses this kind of designation. See also J. Dillon, "The Nature of God in the 'Quod Deus'" cit. 217 ff. Dillon compares Philo's thesis with *Didaskalikos'* ideas. On the unknowability of God see here: chap. three.

[9] Cf. *Somn.* I 67; *Mut.* 7–8.

[10] E. Birnbaum, "What does Philo mean by 'seeing God'?" cit. (541) notes that many biblical passages concern the difficulties and the danger involved in seeing God. However, according to E. Birnbaum, nowhere is the impossibility of seeing God affirmed. Philo's thesis goes further than the biblical text and one may wonder if this impossibility should not be viewed as an echo of the *Parmenides*.

So, the hiatus identified by Dillon between the light in Plato and its use in Origen is already present in Philo, where many elements harmonize with the latter.

The Sun Simile

In the Platonic analogy in *Republic* VI 506e–509d the sun has a function of knowledge, which is combined with functions of growth: the sun makes sensible objects visible and provides for their generation, growth and nurture. Analogously with the sun, the good makes noetic objects knowable, and is the cause of truth and being. What makes sight more precious than the other senses is the need for a 'third kind'—light—which allows the eyes to see and colours to be seen. The sun is not sight, but it is the cause of sight and can be looked at. Analogously with the sun, the good too, although it is not the same thing as intellectual knowledge is, however, the cause of it, and should be intellectually known.

This is a very much debated aspect in the criticism of Platonic thought, which I do not wish to dwell upon at this point.[11] However, whatever interpretation we choose to give it, the theme of the knowability of the good and its efficacy emerges.[12] The sight of the sun is taken up by Plato in the image of the cave (*Republic* VII 514b ff.). After being initially blinded owing to the strong contrast between the darkness in the cave and the brightness of the light which illuminates the outside world, the freed prisoner can gradually manage to look at objects reflected in the water, then the objects themselves and, in the end, the sun itself. Once he goes back into the cave, the transition from the sun's direct light to darkness again blinds the person and prevents him from seeing. We thus find a process of transition from darkness to

[11] For an analysis of the different interpretations see F. Ferrari, "La causalità del Bene nella 'Repubblica' di Platone", *Elenchos* 1 (2001) 5–37. Cf. also Id., "L'idea del bene: collocazione ontologica e funzione causale" in M. Vegetti (a c. di), *Traduzione e Commento alla 'Repubblica' di Platone*, vol. V, libri VI e VII (Napoli 2003) 287–325. See also T. A. Szlezák, "Das Hölengleichnis" in O. Höffe (hrsg.), *Platon: Politeia* (Berlin 1996) 205–28 (in partic. 215–220); M. Baltes, "Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's 'Republic' beyond Being?" in M. Joyal (ed.), *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition.* Essays presented to John Whittaker (Aldershot 1997) 5–7. On the sun simile see F. Calabi, "Il sole e la sua luce" in M. Vegetti (a c. di), *Traduzione e Commento* cit. 327–354.

[12] Cf. M. Vegetti, "*Megiston Mathema*" in Id. (a c. di), *Traduzione e Commento* cit. shows that the use of the term *agathon* hints at desiderability and usefulness.

light and, vice versa, a transition between a state—albeit limited and deceptive—of sight to one of blindness and vice versa.[13] The sun can, in any case, be seen, and its light is the source of visibility. Likewise, the good can be known, and its light is the source of truth and being. From an intuitive possibility of seeing the sun—albeit attendant with difficulties—we obtain an analogous possibility of seeing the good.[14]

Philo returns to the analogy of the sun, comparing the rays of noetic light to God. The issue of knowability of the good thus shifts to the knowability of God. The latter is repeatedly termed *agnostos, aperinoetos*, in addition to *aoratos* and *arretos*. In His essence God can neither be seen nor known. The same does not apply to His existence. Likewise, the powers can be known as far as their existence is concerned, not in terms of their essence.[15] The Platonic good too was described in terms of its efficacy, not its essence and, besides the good, *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond being and existing, was the source of existence and essence for ideas. Obviously though, the theoretical sphere of Philo's argument is neither directly linked to these themes, nor can it be reduced to these alone. As regards his accentuation of the unknowability of God, the thesis in the *Parmenides* on the ineffability and unknowability of the One and the interpretation of *Exodus* as to the impossibility of seeing the face of God intersect.

The analogy with the sun already entails some difficulties in Plato.[16] In Philo, the difficulties present in Plato knit up with theses relating to

---

[13] On the blindness-lightning relationship see L. Napolitano Valditara, *Lo sguardo nel buio. Metafore visive e forme grecoantiche della razionalità* (Roma-Bari 1994) 13–26.

[14] On the problem of knowing the good and the problems in interpreting this theme see M. Vegetti, "*Megiston Mathema*" cit.

[15] Cf. D. Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature" cit. 21–22. See also here: chap. five.

[16] If the sun is the son of the good, there should be a derivation, on the ontological level, of an empirical object—the sun—from the good belonging to the noetic sphere. Moreover, just as the sun produces *genesis*, but is different from *genesis*, the good produces *ousia*, but is different from *ousia*. The analogical relationship would seem to be perfectly balanced. However, in actual fact, it is stated that the good is beyond essence, as it transcends it in dignity and power, whereas it is said of the sun that it is not *genesis* without, for this reason, asserting that it is beyond *genesis* and transcends it, an affirmation that would patently be absurd. Moreover, the analogy with the light of the sun leads us to postulate the existence of a *tertium* between the subjective and the objective poles. If in the empirical world, the *triton genos* is represented by light, the intermediary between the eyes and visible objects, in the noetic world, the *triton genos* lying between the good and intelligible objects seems to be truth and being and caused by the good. However, if we consider passage 515b, we can see that, if the prisoners could talk to each other, they would consider the shadows to be real objects (*ta onta* and

the absolute unknowability of the divine. The divine light illuminates and is the cause of truth, but the source of it is unknowable. The sun is blinding, its light is dazzling, and the human eye cannot perceive its radiance. The sun-good, which Plato held to be visible, is invisible for Philo and, of the two aspects present in the *Republic*—visibility and bedazzlement, the latter is stressed in Philo. God cannot be seen, only His rays can be perceived. There is a change as compared to Platonic metaphor, where the distinction is more blurred. The sun and its light can be seen. In a sense, Philo overturns the very sense of the metaphor in the *Republic*, which was introduced precisely to speak of the good: to express something that cannot easily be understood in intuitive terms. The Platonic good, as likened to the sun, is the source of truth and being, of knowability, but also the object of knowledge. 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, the blinding features of the sun are considered, not those that can be perceived by the human eye.

Philo's Reading of the Sun Simile

The image of the sun returns repeatedly in Philo: on the one hand—as we have seen—it is a metaphor for God, who illuminates the intelligible world with His light, on the other, it blinds and makes it impossible to see.[17] The sun illuminates the sensible world and permits it to be seen;

alethes). In this context, being and truth do not correspond to light any more, they are no longer the means via which the visible can be seen. They are, instead, the objects to be known as contrasting with the shadows. The problems relating to the *triton genos* lying between subjective and objective poles have led some critics to attribute the third kind function to the good. Thus R. Ferber [*Platos Idee der Guten* (Sankt Augustin 1989[2]) 57 ff.] maintains that the good is the third kind between the subject knowing and the object known. Other scholars have developed the notion of *lux intelligibilis* which seems to find its natural development in the Neoplatonic tradition. See W. Beierwaltes, *Lux Intelligibilis. Untersuchung zur Lichtmetaphysik der Griechen*, Dissert. (München 1957). R. Bultmann, "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum", *Philologus* 97 (1948) 1–36, in partic. 23 points out that, in Plato, man does not see in the light, but by means of light: "man sieht nicht—wie in der Mystik—in das Licht, sondern man sieht mittels des Lichtes, und zwar lernt man dank des Lichtes die Welt, in der man steht, und damit das eigene Dasein in der Welt verstehen."

[17] Regarding the opposition between light and darkness and the determination of light, which may be the right ray, the light which helps someone to find their path in the darkness, but may also be a blinding overabundance cf. H. Blumenberg, "Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung", *Studium Generale* 10 (1957) 432–447 in partic. 433.

yet, although it is the source of sight, it cannot be seen. In the same way God, *aoratos, akataleptos, agnostos, akatonomastos*, cannot be perceived in terms of His essence, but only seen from afar.[18] Let us now consider the two aspects of the metaphor: in *Somn*. I 72–76, the sun is likened to the father and sovereign of all things: God, light, the archetype of all light who, like the sun, allows light and shadow to be distinguished, leads things to the light and renders visible that which was not visible before.[19] According to *Ebr*. 44–45, a pure, bright noetic brilliance radiates from God the bringer of light, so illuminating the eyes of the soul that they can see nothing else.

> The sun when it rises hides from our sight the light of the other stars by pouring upon them the flood of its own beams; even so, when the rays of the Divine Day-star, rays visible to the mind only, pure from all defiling mixture and piercing to the furthest distance, flash upon the eye of the soul, it can descry nothing else.

In *Opif.* 29–31, after the sky, the earth and water, God created the essence of light (*ousia photos*), incorporeal and intelligible, the model of the sun and the stars. "That invisible and intelligible light has come into being as image of the divine *logos* which communicated its *genesis*".[20] The sun, the moon and the stars draw their power to illuminate from it.[21] Here we have the image of intelligible light deriving from God, which is, in its turn, the model for solar light. Again we hear the echo of Plato's argument, although it is changed to conform with the biblical text. It is not the sun which is made in the image of the good, but intelligible light is made in the image of the *logos* and this light forms a model for the sun. Intelligible light is thus a *medium* between *logos* and

[18] Cf. *Somn*. I 67.

[19] In the passages which follow, Philo variously likens the sun to: the human mind, which governs the body in its entirety: sense perception which indicates the sensible to thought; God's word, which brings help to some and ruination to others; and the governor of the universe, whom nothing escapes and who sees everything. Cf. *Leg.* III 170–171: as the pupil of the eye which "sees the zones of the universe in their completeness, and the boundless ocean, and the vast expanse of air and the infinite heaven, all that is bounded by the rising and the setting sun, so the word of God also has keenest sight, and is able to survey all things". Then again, in some passages from the *Bible*, the sun is—according to Philo—a symbol of the First cause, God, the intelligible sun, illuminates the soul, dissipating the gloomy night of passions and vices (*Virt*. 164; cfr. *Spec.* I 279; Cfr. H. Blumenberg, "Licht als Metapher" cit. 440).

[20] Cfr. V. Nikiprowetzky, "Thèmes et traditions de la lumière chez Philon dAlexandrie", *SPhA* 1 (1989) 6–33, in partic. 10–13.

[21] Regarding the foundation of sensible light upon the intelligible one see W. Beierwaltes, *Lux Intelligibilis* cit. 52 n. 2.

sensible sources of light. In *De Mutatione* (4–6), while the eyes of the body see by the means of the light which is different both from the object seen and from the person who is seeing, the soul can see without having the need of a *tertium*, as noetic objects are their own light. The echo of the *Republic* is extremely strong: the problems which arise in Plato from the identification of the analogue to the sun's light are set aside by means of the double function assigned to noetic objects. These are objects of knowledge and, at the same time, illuminating light. *Noeta* can only be perceived through *noesis*: the source of the purest illumination is God.[22] However, God, the source of vision, cannot be seen: there is no way at all of grasping God's essence, either through sensation or intellectual knowledge. Even Moses, when he asked to see His face, was told: "you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen".[23] In *De Abrahamo*, God's invisibility is related to the limitations of human capacities: God

> though invisible, yet brings all things to light, revealing the natures of great and small. For He did not deem it right to be apprehended by the eyes of the body, perhaps because it was contrary to holiness that the mortal should touch the eternal, perhaps too because of the weakness of our sight. For our sight could not have borne the rays that pour from Him that IS, since it is not even able to look upon the beams of the sun.[24]

The author returns to the reference to Plato evoked in the comparison between divine rays and the sun's rays with the image of the thick blanket of mist in which those are incapable of throwing off false beliefs and illusory conceptions are immersed.[25] Thus Abraham, who has turned to the conceptions of the Chaldeans, the study of the stars and false beliefs regarding sensible reality, is enveloped in shadows, and only with mighty efforts would he succeed in emerging from it to "receive the vision of Him Who so long lay hidden and invisible" (*Abr.* 79): God, who showed him His own nature, at least insofar as this was possible. Indeed, it is said not that the wise man sees God, but that God shows Himself to the wise man: "For it were impossible that anyone

[22] Cf. *Opif.* 71; the passage recalls *Phadrus* 249c.
[23] Many other passages go in the same direction, for example *Mut.* 9.
[24] *Abr.* 75–76.
[25] Cf. *Abr.* 79–80. On illusory light and the use of the term *typhos* see P. Graffigna, "Il molteplice e l'eccedente: τῦφος in Filone d'Alessandria", *Quaderni di semantica* 2 (1988) 347–356; cf. also V. Nikiprowetzky, Thèmes et tradition cit. 13–14.

should by himself apprehend the truly Existent, did not He reveal and manifest Himself" (*Abr.* 80).

The Intelligible Light

Let us summarize what has been said so far: God is the source of a noetic light which apprehends the invisible. God Himself is His own light, He is the "archetypal essence of which myriads of rays are the effluence, none visible to sense, all to the mind".[26] It is not possible to see God.[27] Anyone who looked at Him would be dazzled and even His rays dim all that surrounds them. Yet, the eyes of the soul can turn their gaze on noetic rays or at least, attempt to see them. So the prophet desirous of knowledge raises himself above the empirical world and daily life, directs his search towards the Creator (*Fug.* 163–164) and asks to know Him. However, he will not be able to know God's essence: he can only arrive at the knowledge that God exists (*Praem.* 39 ff.). He will be able to come to a knowledge "of all that follows on after God and in His wake", but not contemplate His essence, as he "will be blinded by the rays that beam forth all around Him" (*Fug.* 165). Everything around God is cast into obscurity by His radiance and anyone trying to see His essence will be blinded by His rays.[28] Not only does God remain invisible, but not even the essence of the powers can be seen. God does appear and speak mouth to mouth with Moses, the man who sets out to know the cause not starting from created things, but directly from God, who is His own mirror. Moses sets himself on a completely different level from Bezaleel, who approaches the cause by virtue of a process of reasoning, as if starting out from a shadow of something people crave knowledge of.[29] Mediated knowledge of God is contrasted with immediate, intuitive knowledge. There are people

[26] *Cher.* 97.
[27] Cf. *Fug.* 165.
[28] Just as the sun cannot be gazed at directly, so divine essence blinds and cannot be grasped by man. Cf. A. J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 voll. (Paris 1949–1953) vol. 4: *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose* (1954) 13–14. See also P. Borgen, *Philo. An Exegete* cit. 238–239.
[29] Cf. *Leg.* III 100–103; *Praem.* 41–46.

> who have had the power to apprehend Him through Himself without the co-operation of any reasoning process to lead them to the sight.[30]

Just as the sun lies at the origin of sight and light is perceived by means of light (cfr. *Spec.* I 42), so God, who is His own *pheggos*, can be contemplated through God Himself, without the mediation of other means. Those who seek God starting out from the created world will thus remain at a different level from "those who envisage God through God, light through light".[31]

I would now like to try to pinpoint the Philonic themes that most closely concern our argument.

1) As the sun illuminates the sensible world, God illuminates the intelligible world.
2) God emits a very bright light, which shines everywhere and makes the noetic world visible
3) Intelligible light coming from God blinds anyone trying to look directly at it and seeking to approach God, the source of that light
4) God is *aoratos, agnostos* and *aperinoetos*
5) The analogy with the sun is introduced precisely because of the impossibility of apprehending God by intellectual means, and this analogy allows what is not knowable to be intuitively sensed. The *via analogiae* is added to the *via negationis* and *via eminentiae*. Philo repeatedly exemplifies this first *via* using Plato's sun metaphor[32] as in *Somn.* I 73–76.[33]

---

[30] *Praem.* 43. Cf. *Fug.* 164 and E. Starobinski-Safran, *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): *De Fuga* (Paris 1970) 225 n. 9.

[31] *Praem.* 46. On wisdom grasped intuitively through wisdom itself shining all at once as a light, see *Sacr.* 78–79; *Somn.* I 72.

On the different ways to approach the knowledge of God cf. E. Birnbaum, "What does Philo mean by seeing God?" cit. 540–541; E. Vanderlin, "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu" cit. 300; F. E. Brenk, "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, in particular 47–50.

[32] On the use of the sun simile in Middle Platonism and in Philo in relation with the *via analogiae* cf. L. Napolitano Valditara, *Lo sguardo nel buio* cit. 5–6.

[33] "Marvel not if the sun, in accordance with the rules of allegory, is likened to the Father and Ruler of the universe: for although in reality nothing is like God, there have been accounted so in human opinion two things only, one invisible, one visible, the soul invisible, the sun visible. [...] God is light [...]. And He is not only light, but the archetype of every other light, nay, prior to and high above every archetype, holding

6) Philo takes up the theme of the unknowability of God, declared on a number of occasions in the *Bible*. He denies the possibility of perceiving God's essence and turns Plato's sun analogy in this direction, when it was actually attesting to a greater possibility of knowledge
7) The tertiary role lying between subjective pole and objective pole—identified in Plato as truth and being—is here explicitly filled by the intelligible light that radiates from God.

The Impossibility of Seeing God

In the light of the above, I would like now to refer to a few passages from *Peri Archon*. In I 1.1 the author quotes *John's Epistle* (1.5), according to which God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. The passage is explained by affirming that the light of God in which light is seen is the power of God which allows man to see the truth of all things and God himself (I 1.1).[34] The comparison with the sun is then introduced. In I 1. 5–6 the impossibility of bearing the full splendour of the sun is likened to the impossibility of understanding God and of thinking of Him. The nature of God

> cannot be grasped or seen by the power of any human understanding, even the purest and brightest (humanae mentis intendi atque intueri [...] non potest).[35]

As our eyes cannot look "upon the nature of the light itself—that is, upon the substance of the sun", but, observing the brilliance of it and its rays,

---

the position of the model of a model. For the model or pattern was the word which contained all His fullness—light, in fact; for, as the lawgiver tells us, "God said, 'let light come into being'" (*Gen* 1. 3), whereas He Himself resembles none of the things which have come into being. [...] as the sun when it rises makes visible objects which had been hidden, so God when He gave birth to all things, not only brought them into sight, but also made things which before were not, not just handling material as an artificer, but being Himself its creator".

The analogy can also be found in other passages, for example in *Praem.* 45. Once more the existence of God can be perceived, not His essence (cf. *Virt.* 215–216).

[34] According to Philo (*Cher.* 97; *Spec.* I 42; *Leg.* III 100–103; *Praem.* 46) God Himself is His own light. The brightness of His rays prevents the seer, who is blinded, from seeing Him. Only His shadow can be seen.

[35] Transl. by Roberts-Donaldson.

> can reflect (considerare ex his) how great is the supply and source of the light of the body. [...] As, therefore, our understanding is unable of itself to behold God Himself as He is, it knows the Father of the world from the beauty of His works and the comeliness of His creatures.

God's invisibility is bound up with the very nature of God who, not being body, cannot be seen.[36] The distinction between the visibility of what is corporeal and the knowability of intelligible reality (I 1. 8) introduces a distinction between seeing and knowing with respect to God. God cannot be seen; He can, however, be known, even if "nemo nouit filium nisi pater, neque patrem quis nouit nisi filius". Father and son are thus said to be reciprocally knowable, but this seems to exclude the possibility of anyone else knowing them.[37]

Returning to our starting point—Dillon's article[38]—in Plato one can see the sun; in Origen God cannot be seen. Origen "denied that the human soul, while still in the body, could achieve the equivalent, in Platonic terms, of looking directly at the sun".[39] In *Peri Archon* I 2. 7 it is forcefully asserted that God-light and His rays are one. The Son—splendor ex luce procedens—illuminates all that has been created and is inseparable from the Father-light. In Philo, the light cannot be seen: its rays are blinding. This does not imply that light and rays are separable. The powers cannot be detached from God and, in any case, not even

---

[36] Cf. *Contra Celsum* VI 64: with reference to Paul's *Letter to the Colossians* (I 15), Origen explains the expression 'He is the image of the invisible God' by saying that here the word 'invisible' means incorporeal.

[37] At I 1. 9. the passage "beati mundo corde, quoniam ipsi Deum videbunt" is introduced. Seeing God in one's heart is explained as understanding and knowing: "mente intellegere atque cognoscere." The question arises as to the nature of the reciprocal knowledge of the Father and the Son and the knowledge of those who are worthy of seeing God due to their pure hearts.

Cf. *Contra Celsum* VI 65: "when Celsus adds, that 'He is not to be reached by word', I make a distinction, and say that if he means the word that is in us—whether the word conceived in the mind, or the word that is uttered—I, too, admit that God is not to be reached by word. If, however, we attend to the passage, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God', we are of the opinion that God is to be reached by this Word, and is comprehended not by Him only, but by anyone whatever to whom He may reveal the Father; and thus we shall prove the falsity of the assertion of Celsus, when he says, 'Neither is God to be reached by word'."

God's unknowability and the impossibility of seeing Him seem here to be less strong than in Philo for whom unknowability is a character of God's nature in addition to being tied to human weakness.

[38] "Looking on the Light" 228–229.

[39] Notwithstanding his prudential assertions, here Dillon contrasts Crouzel's thesis as expressed in *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'* (Paris-Bruges, 1963) 496–508. In Dillon Origen seems to deny the possibility of a mystical experience.

the essence of the powers can be seen: only an indirect knowledge of them may be reached. In *Peri Archon* (I 2. 7) the Son—splendor—offers Himself to the weak and delicate eyes of mortals in a form which is milder than the blaze of the light that is unbearably strong. He acts as an intermediary between God and men and enables them to see the glory of the light. Here, explicit reference is made to the theme of the light of the sun (I 2. 7); the impossibility of mortals' bearing the blaze of the light in all its strength is affirmed, while the possibility of perceiving its splendour, the rays spreading out, is stressed. The Son divests Himself of his equality with the Father in order to indicate the path of knowledge to mortals: those who were unable to contemplate the glory of divine light, which is pure, are provided with the means to see it via its rays (I 2. 8). Here the argument seems similar to some Philonic affirmations about the impossibility of seeing light and indirect vision. In actual fact, although there are a lot of similarities between a whole series of interpretations and readings found in the two authors and, most certainly, some of the solutions proposed with regard to the sun analogy and the theme of the unknowability of God are perfectly parallel, the distinction between light and its rays, which is totally absent in Plato, and veiled in Philo, is interpreted by Origen in a far more clear-cut fashion and obviously, the meaning to be attributed to the rays is different in the two authors.

PART TWO

THE MEDIATION ACTIVITY

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POWERS OF GOD SERAPHIM, CHERUBIM AND POWERS IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

De Deo

The question of God's unknowability leads to a consideration of the powers of God and the improper names used to designate Him. I would now like to introduce the theme of the powers. It is tackled in many philonic works. A particularly interesting approach can be read in *De Deo* where powers are considered in connection with the cherubim and seraphim.

De Deo has come down to us in Armenian. Although strong doubts[1] have been voiced as to the authenticity of this fragment, for the last few years, the critics have tended to view it as Philonic. One of them is F. Siegert who, in a work published in 1988,[2] revises his own previous positions; M. Harl,[3] D. T. Runia[4] and P. W. Van der Horst, in his

[1] See F. Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten. Ps. Philo, "Über Jona", "Über Simson" und "Über die Gottesbezeichnung, wohltätig verzehrendes Feuer"* I: *Übersetzung aus dem Armenischen und sprachliche Erläuterungen* [Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1980] 1–8.

[2] *Philon von Alexandrien Über die Gottesbezeichnung, wohltätig verzehrendes Feuer" (De Deo). Rückübersetzung des Fragment aus dem Armenischen, deutsche Übersetzung und Kommentar* [Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1988]. Siegert himself edited a French shorter version of his text which was published in collaboration with J. De Roulet. The title of this version is "Le Fragment philonien *De Deo*. Première traduction française avec commentaire et remarques sur le langage métaphorique de Philon" in C. Lévy avec la collaboration de B. Besnier (ed.), *Philon d'Alexandrie et le langage de la philosophie*. Actes du colloque international organisé par le Centre d'études sur la philosophie hellénistique et romaine de l'Université de Paris XII-Val de Marne (Turnhout 1988) 183–227. An English translation "The Philonian Fragment *De Deo.* First English Translation" was published in *SPhA* 10 (1998) 1–34.

[3] Siegert ("Le fragment philonien *De Deo*" cit. 184 n. 3) discusses the thesis of M. Harl ("Cosmologie grecque et représentations juives dans l'oeuvre de Philon d'Alexandrie" in R. Arnaldez, C. Mondésert et J. Pouilloux (éd.), *Philon d'Alexandrie,* Lyon 11–15 sept. 1966 (Paris 1976) 192) and Terian [*Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus. The Armenian Text with an introduction, translation and commentary* (Chico, California, 1981) 4].

[4] Review to F. Siegert, *Philon von Alexandrien Über die Gottesbezeichnung, wohltätig verzehrendes Feuer" (De Deo). Rückübersetzung des Fragment aus del Armenischen, deutsche Übersetzung und Kommentar, Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1988) republished in D.T. Runia, *Exegesis and Philosophy. Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Aldershot 1990) 399.

review of F. Siegert,[5] also take this stand. In this article, I shall accept the authenticity of the work as a provisional theory, and confine myself to analyzing the fragment as compared with Philonic passages. Although specific terms[6] and conceptions do appear, many themes and concepts in the fragment are also present in Philo's works. Comparing the theses in the Philonic texts that have reached us in Greek with *De Deo* or *Quaestiones* in detail might, however, appear to be a senseless operation: nothing more than an exercise in verbalization. Collating original texts with texts that have reached us only in translation and, furthermore, in a translation which is much later than the primary text, might seem sterile, as many conceptual nuances could derive from the interpretation of the translator. The textual story is, in other words, a determinant factor. Nevertheless, I believe that, if one constantly bears in mind the difficulties connected with this type of work, a comparison can help to clarify certain aspects or, at least, to formulate some questions, even if the answers to them are not unambiguous.[7]

Another reason I decided to tackle this theme, despite the difficulties, was the consideration that the text in question was taken by many authors in the early centuries to be Philonic and, as such, it does play its part in the history of the interpretation of his works.[8]

What I mean to do here is

1) Compare the way some themes in the fragment are handled with theories set out in Philo's texts and try to determine whether the parallel passages present theories that are basically similar, and if they are different, determine what kinds of differences there are.

---

[5] F. Siegert, *Drei hellenististisch-jüdische Predigten. Ps. Philon, "Über Jona" (Fragment) und "Über Simson"*, II: *Kommentar nebst Beobachtungen zur hellenistischen Vorgeschichte der Bibelhermeneutik, SPhA* 5 (1993) 219.

[6] Cf. D. T. Runia, Review cit. 400–401.

[7] I was only able to carry out this work with the aid of a scholar specializing in Armenian translations of Greek texts. Hence my collaboration with Rosa Bianca Finazzi, who not only translated the text into Italian, but also resolved some of my doubts regarding terms and expressions. I thank her for her help.

[8] Recently, some critics have again been comparing the Philonic theory of the cherubim and the flaming sword with texts such as *Habakuk* 3 in which the theme of light appears. Hence possible comparisons with the seraphim in *Isaiah* 6. Cf. F. Strickert, "Philo on the Cherubim", *SPhA* 8 (1996) 40–57 in particular 57, who quotes J. Day, "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in Psalm XXIX and Habakkuk III.9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in *Isaiah* VI", *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979) 143–151.

2) See whether a specific reason can be found for the author's choosing to interpret *Isaiah*, instead of confining himself to the parallel passages found in *Genesis* and *Exodus*, when Philo's exegesis rarely strays from the *Pentateuch*. Can we, regardless of who the author of the fragment is, formulate any hypotheses as to why reference to the biblical passage in question was necessary?

Comparing *Isaiah* 6 with *Gen.* 18. 1–2 and *Ex.* 25. 22, the fragment tackles a series of themes that Philo dwells on in nearly all his works. In particular, I am referring to the theme of the seraphim—which are here put on the same level as the cherubim, God's powers, the theme of noetic vision as compared with sensible vision, the theme of the unknowability of God and the ways and the forms in which He can be seen by people. The names of God are also discussed, along with seeds and creative fire, the elements, the image of God and the powers.

Siegert has already clearly explained the strong Stoic influences[9] present in the fragment which he translated and commented on, identifying relationships with Stoic, Pseudo-Pythagorean and Middle Platonic texts, in addition to references to Judaic literature. Here, I would like solely to analyze the theme of seraphim. I shall then touch on the theme of mortals' visions of God and His powers and the impossibility of fully knowing God, of naming Him and of talking about Him. Here we find a negative theology which allows comparisons to be introduced with the impossibility of naming God and the impossibility of knowing Him in the Judaic tradition (the tetragrammaton, the refusal to assign attributions to God, to delimit Him, to claim to know Him, Moses' unfulfilled requests, the impossibility of seeing God and remaining alive) and, furthermore, with expressions used in Pseudo-Pythagorean and Middle Platonic negative theology, which have been intensively studied in the last few years by various scholars, including J. Dillon and D. Winston.[10]

---

[9] See also Runia, Review, 399; 404.

[10] See, for example, D. Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature" cit.; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 162; D. Winston, J. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria* cit. 217–227. Similar theses occurring in Philo and in Middle Platonic authors such as Albinus, do not however seem to indicate that the former had any direct influence on the latter. At least, this is J. Dillon's opinion in "The Transcendence of God in Philo" cit. 5. In this essay, Dillon affirms that there is no definite indication that the Platonic authors had read Philo. The most likely explanation for the analogies in the thinking is that the first hypothesis in the *Parmenides*, a starting point in Albinus' negative

Isaiah's Vision

I shall start my analysis with paragraph 6 of *De Deo*, which describes Isaiah's vision, presenting it as a state of ecstasy. The divine spirit spreads throughout the chosen one, who is enraptured by the spirit of prophesy, rendered ecstatic and, in prey to a sort of inebriation, sees God: "He said: I saw the Lord sitting upon a high throne [. . .] and the seraphim stood around him [. . .]".

The first question arises due to problems of interpretation. Does the text speak of cherubim, as J. B. Aucher[11] and R. B. Finazzi would have it, or seraphim, as in Siegert's interpretation?[12] In any case, we have an identification between the personages which is implicitly introduced by means of the different name used: cherubim are interpreted as *patterns* or also "burning". These names indicate the powers because they are the εἴδη and the patterns "with which the Creator impressed his seal on the world", but they are called burning "because they consume disorder and the confusion in matter changing it into the beauty of order".[13] We have here the nucleus of Philonic thought: first and foremost cherubim are identified with seraphim, an identification which justifies the comparison of *Is.* 6 with *Ex.* 25. 22 where the cherubim appear. Instead, the passage in *Gen.* 18. 2 is comparable with *Isaiah* because three figures appear in it (the three men) plus the vision of God. In all these passages, Philo identifies a reference to the powers. Appearing in the guise of three men, God manifests Himself with the function of sowing the universe and generating what is mortal through

theology, was in circulation in Alexandria during Philo's times. For an argument against this thesis see, now, D. T. Runia, "Early Alexandrian Theology and Plato's 'Parmenides'" cit. Cf. also J. Whittaker, "ΑΡΡΗΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΚΑΤΟΝΟΜΑΣΤΟΣ" in Id., *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London 1984) XII 303–306. As regards possible relationships between Philo's negative theology and Neopythagorism see J. Whittaker, *Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology* and *Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute* in *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* cit., IX 109–125; XI 77–86. See also F. Calabi (ed.), *Arrhetos theos* cit.

[11] "Philonis Iudaei Paralipomena Armena" (Venezia 1826) in *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wiss. d. Judentums* 80 (1936) 163–170.

[12] *Drei Hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* cit. 89 n. 947.

[13] On the etymology of the term 'seraphim' as connected with the root 'srp' (שָׂרָף seraphin/ שָׂרַף burn) and its association with ἔμπρησις cf. Siegert, *Philon von Alexandrien Über die Gottesbezeichnung* cit. 95–96; 98; M. Harl, *Cosmologie* cit. 197; H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* cit. I, 340–342 sees a reference to *logos* in the seraphim, both as the incorporeal *logos* in the world of ideas, and as the immanent *logos* of the physical world. Here Wolfson brings out the similarities with the Stoic notion of *logos* and the relationship it has with fire, but fails to mention the powers.

mercy.[14] At paragraph 3, the Creator appears with His powers: an appearance of God in His active principles, which set their stamp on the world i.e. by means of His actions.

In his interpretation of *Gen.* 18. 2 (*De Deo* 4), the author gives a symbolic interpretation of the three men. The first, the one in the middle, is "He is", so called not by his own specific name ἴδιον καὶ κύριον[15]—since he is ἀκατανόμαστος,[16] ἄρρητος and ἀκατάληπτος—[17] but as connected with existence.[18] On either side there are His two assistants, one called God and the other Lord, θεός and κύριος, who are the symbols of creative power and royal power.[19] As Siegert notes,[20] unlike in *Quaestiones in Genesim* and *De Abrahamo*, *De Deo* takes the abstraction so far as to refuse to call the supreme being ὁ ὤν. Moreover, by refusing to give God any name, the author also avoids calling Him θεός or κύριος, as happens elsewhere. There is a "He is" to which one cannot even give the name Being, and there are manifestations of this "He is", which are the only aspects that can be given a name. The traditional Judaic

[14] These functions are represented by the male element, since they are active principles which act on passive matter. Siegert ("Le Fragment Philonien" cit. 195 explains that creation is an act of mercy, since being is better than not being. He mentions *Job* in this connection, but the reference might also be Platonic. In *Timaeus* too, the transformation from disorder to order is part of the search for the best. In any case, the mercy that the generation of mortals is founded on blends with the characterization of the powers in §6 where the seraphim consume the disorder, transforming it into the beauty of order.

[15] Cf. *Somn*. I 230. See A. F. Segal, *Two powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden 1977) 163; D. T. Runia, "Naming and Knowing" cit.; F. Calabi, *The Language and the Law of God* cit. 108 ff.

[16] On the text as it recalls *Timaeus* 28c and *Parmenides* 142a, cf. F. Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* cit., p. 68 who quotes J. Whittaker, "*ΑΡΡΗΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΚΑΤΑΝΟΜΑΣΤΟΣ*" cit.

[17] Cf. *Somn*. I 67.

[18] Cf. D. T. Runia, Review cit. 403 n., 404 n.

[19] It is interesting to note that here the appearance of three men is mentioned. In her note on *Gen*. 18. 1–2 in (Ead.), *La Bible d'Alexandrie* cit. 173, Harl observes "les trois hommes sont une simple apparence, puisque Dieu est «sans changement», àtreptos; le mot «homme» indique sa nature mâle; lui-même est sans nom, ses deux Puissances sont *Theòs* et *Kúrios*; il se manifeste entre elles de même que, selon *Ex*. 25. 22 il doit parler "au milieu les deux Chérubins".

Cf. E. Bréhier *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1925) 136. F. Siegert, *Philon von Alexandrien* cit. 76–78 asks the interesting question of whether the interpretation of *Gen.* 18. 1–2 offered by Philo can be found in other authors and notes that, for the most part, the exegetes have followed different interpretations. In particular, he analyses rabbinic interpretations, the frescoes at Dura Europos, Justin and Procopius, and gives an exegesis of the Christian readings which see the three men in *Gen.* 18. 1–2 as Christ and two angels or the Trinity.

[20] Siegert, *Le Fragment* cit. 186.

tendency not to seek definitions or explanations of God in His abstract being, but rather in His works, is taken to extremes here and, certainly, this marks a difference with respect to other Philonic works. Whether this is due to the fact that *De Deo* was a later work or whether we are dealing here with an apocryphal work, or whether there are any other reasons for this peculiarity, obviously remains an open question.

The next point to be interpreted is *Ex.* 25. 22 (*De Deo* 5), in which God communicates from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim. The powers, the cherubim, are winged and "throne on a winged chariot over the whole cosmos".[21] The Father is not detached, above the powers, but everything depends on Him, since He forms the basis for existence and is the "support and column of the universe".[22] The transition from *Genesis* to *Exodus* is related to the three figures. In *Genesis* we do not find a speaking figure between two others, but rather three men appearing to Abraham. However the singular in which the patriarch addresses them, a singular which we find also in God's reply, somehow divides the unity from the plurality and evokes a being accompanied by two men. The central figure has shifted upwards, as it were, so that the one in the middle is also above the cherubim. This vertical arrangement is justified by the verse in the *Bible* which contains the two ideas, centrality and verticality but, in the fragment, the author is concerned with emphasizing the hierarchical aspect, in stressing that God, upon whom all else depends, depends on no one and nothing else.[23] We find ourselves within the sphere of an exegesis that attempts to comprehend elements appearing to be incongruent in a text which, by definition, is devoid of mistakes or approximations. The phrase "the Being in the middle spoke from on high" means that, by means of the word, the Being gave order to the universe, and the universe acquired speech and reason by means of the providence of "He is".[24] We thus gain the impression of an order, a rational arrange-

[21] Here Siegert uses the term 'Heerscharen' which is the same term used at §3 where the maker of the world appears with His 'Heerscharen', the leaders of the hosts and of the archangels. In the English version the term used is 'powers'. The Greek retranslation written by Siegert uses 'δυνάμεις', whereas Aucher translates it with 'virtutes'. While at §4 Aucher also uses the term 'virtutes', Siegert translates with 'Macht', 'body-guards' and 'ἀρετή'. Finazzi chooses 'Potenze, capi delle schiere e arcangeli'.

[22] Cf. E. Starobinski-Safran, *De Fuga* cit. 172 n. 1.

[23] This idea is widespread in many Philonic texts. See, for esample, *Cher.* 119; *QE* II 64; *Leg.* III 37.

[24] However, see Siegert, *Le fragment* cit. 215.

ment, a word imprinted by "He is", the manifestations of which are to be found in the powers.[25] The fact that "He is" is in the midst of the powers is clarified by the text which calls them cherubim: one is attributed with creative power and is called God; the other has ruling power and royal power and this one is called Lord. Likewise—as we have seen—the passage from *Isaiah* 6 (*De Deo* 6): Isaiah sees God as set above His powers, which express the patterns God used to shape the world and which are also called *incendia* because they cause disorder and confusion of matter to disappear. Here too the creative aspect of one power is stressed, while the other is seen as having an ordering function. The idea of fire is connected with the root 'srp' of seraphim, which is linked with the beneficial function of fire,[26] not as something which devours, but as a salutary fire which consumes disorder, turning what is shapeless into shape, disharmony into harmony (*De Deo* 6).[27] Those philosophers who maintain that a creative fire acts in the production of seeds are quoted precisely in connection with the beneficial function of fire. The quotation from *Dt.* 4. 24 (*De Deo* 7): "The Lord your God is a consuming fire" refers to the idea of fire with a salvational purpose, serving not to destroy, but to bring things into existence out of nothing, a fire that creates rational images. By the double name "patterns" and "burning" an allusion is made to the double action of the powers: the creative action of God, who put His stamp on the world, and the ordering action of the Lord, who consumed disorder.[28]

---

[25] Interpreting the passages on the powers Siegert highlights Stoic influences. In an excursus on powers as mediators between transcendence and immanence (62–64), he analyzes the idea of δύναμις and δυνάμεις in many theories: in *De mundo*, in Pytagorism, Neoplatonism, Gnosis.

[26] Siegert (*Le Fragment* cit. 207) connects the benefic fire that does not consume with the Stoic pneuma. More specifically, he quotes a text from Cleantes (*SVF* I 504, passed down by Cicero) in which ignis salutaris is mentioned. As regards Philo's clear awareness of the two types of fire cf. J. Dillon, "Asomatos: Nuances of Incorporeality in Philo" in C. Lévy (ed.), *Philon d'Alexandrie* cit. 106–109

[27] Cf. C. Dogniez et M. Harl (eds.), *La Bible d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): 5. *Le Deutéronome* (Paris 1992) 140n.

[28] The function of fire not as something which devours but, instead, gives order, the creative fire that creates divine images which are not inanimate but animate and rational, recalls Platonic language at some points, Stoic language at others. Thus, in the following lines, there is mention of those philosophers who see a creative fire in the production of seeds. Here there might be a reference to the πῦρ τεχνικόν of the Stoics, as Siegert notes. In *Drei hellenistisch-jüdische Predigten* cit. 89, n. 961 this author observes, in his Greek retranslation on p. 28, n. 73, the term used in the text is different from that found in Philo's writings. Cf. also his comment on the passage on pp. 100–102. Moreover, in his comment to the lines relating to divine images (106–108),

Whereas in the interpretation of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, the two powers are the creative power and the royal one, in the interpretation of *Isaiah* 6, one of the powers is creative and the other beneficent. There is no essential difference in interpretation. As we shall see in other passages from Philo, rule over the universe and sovereignty are achieved via the beneficent power, since ruling over the world is the task of divine goodness.[29] Thus the beneficial work of fire, which does not destroy the world, but consumes disorder, is an act of divine providence, in other words, of His royal power.

The Wings of the Seraphim

The theme of the conservation of matter introduces the distinction between water, air, earth and fire, elements the philosophers of nature had discussed. The references to Epicurus and Empedocles, who is mentioned again further on,[30] are clear. The text (§9) makes reference to the elements in connection with the six wings with which the seraphim respectively cover their feet and their faces and use to fly. Two wings cover their feet: earth and water; two wings cover their faces: air and heaven; with two wings they fly towards God, and some philosophers of nature called these wings love and strife. God is the mediator of war and peace. In other words, even the wings of the seraphim are interpreted in connection with creative and royal aspects. The quotation of biblical passages in which God

> Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,/that flutters over its young,/spreading out its wings, catching them,/bearing them on its pinions[31]

Siegert identifies a point at which Philo distances himself from the Stoic theses, plus a notion of these images which is other than cosmic. Siegert recalls the reading of the Church Fathers, who saw εἰκών as Christ. In the last lines of *De Deo* an image is again mentioned, the image God sent to mortals, and Siegert sees in this a connection with *logos*. Cf. D. T. Runia, art. cit. However, in §12, the term used is different from that found in §6. In the latter, the word 'image' is used as stamp, seal, likeness, in §12 the sense is external appearance, face, semblance.

[29] Cf. *Leg*. I 96. On the relationship between benefic and punitive functions cf. G. Reale, R. Radice, "Monografia introduttiva" in Filone di Alessandria, *La filosofia Mosaica* (Milano 1987) CXV n. 91. In *Fug.* 100 the merciful power is represented by the lid of the ark, the mercy seat, the creative and kingly powers by the cherubim which tower over it. See also *QE* II 66.

[30] Siegert, *Philon von Alexandrien* cit. 113 quotes Galen, *De usu partium* XI 14.

[31] *Dt*. 32. 10–12.

connects the wings of the seraphim to the royal power of the Creator

> on whom depend earth, water, air and heaven [and who] stretched them out through his providence, and kept the world aloft as carried by his guards (§12).

So the wings of the seraphim represent the creative action and the royal action of the powers, which aim to preserve and save the most perfect creatures. In other words, the powers are not separate from God (cfr. §5) and they are not independent one from the other, as providence acts on the elements and the things created in order to preserve the world. While the first power, called θεός, can be derived from the root τίθημι, which in this context alludes to creation,[32] and to τύποι, the patterns the creator used to put his stamp on the world, the aim of the power κύριος, a beneficent power, is to preserve what has been created through the action of fire.

That the two powers act in conjunction with one another is stressed by Philo a number of times in various texts, for example in *Heres* 166, which maintains there is a balance between the powers or in *Sacr*. 60, where the action of the powers is described using the analogy of three measures all kneaded together.[33] In the work *De Cherubim* (§§20 ff.), the close connection between the two powers, the interweave of their actions, is even expressed visually, by the reciprocal contemplation of the two cherubim who, by this continual watching of the other "may acquire a mutual yearning". The context clarifies that there are various levels of interpretation at which the text can be read. Here, the specific passage used as a reference is the verse of *Gen.* 3. 24, which presents the cherubim and the flaming sword.

> I suggest that they are an allegorical figure of the revolution of the whole heaven. For the movements assigned to the heavenly spheres are of two opposite kinds [. . .]. One of the Cherubim then symbolizes the outermost sphere of the fixed stars. It is the final heaven of all [. . .]. The other of the Cherubim is the inner contained sphere.[34]

[32] The assonance between θεός and θεῖναι also appears in *Conf.* 137; *Mut.* 29; *Plant.* 86; *Abr.* 122; *Mos*. II 99; *QE.* II 62 and 68, but it was already present in Herodotus (II 52). Cf. E. Starobinski-Safran, op. cit. 174–175 n. 4.

[33] See, however, the section entitled *Kneaded Measures* as regards the interpretation of the passage and the complex relationship between God and the powers.

[34] *Cher.* 21–23. Here there is a clear reference to *Timaeus* (36cd–40ab). Strong Stoic and Middle Platonic influences may also be detected in Philo's text. D. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Kampen 1983) I, 174–176, highlights points of contact with Albinus' *Didaskalikos*.

According to another interpretation, "the two Cherubim represent the two hemispheres".[35] However, a deeper interpretation says that

> While God is indeed one, His highest and chiefest powers are two, even goodness and sovereignty.[36] Through His goodness He begat all that is, through His sovereignty He rules what He has begotten. And in the midst between the two there is a third which unites them, Reason, for it is through reason that God is both ruler and good. Of these two potencies sovereignty and goodness the Cherubim are symbols, as the fiery sword is the symbol of reason.[37]

The following passage stresses that the two powers are united and are as one, an argument that we have already seen maintained in *Sacr*. 60 and which is repeated and stressed in *QE* II 66, where the distinction between the two powers and, at the same time, their complementary and simultaneous action is explained.

The Image of God

De Deo ends with a reference to the image of Himself that God gave us: the creator in His magnanimity,

> sent to us his image and that of his Powers as a help in the sufferings and evils which are the lot of anyone who is of mortal nature.

God cannot be known directly. He can only be perceived through His powers,[38] and not even these can be comprehended, as far as their essence is concerned, we can only understand their action[39] which, in this context, brings succour to those afflicted by evil. When speaking of the image of God and the powers, the text alludes to the impossibility of seeing God directly. Now a question arises as to what exactly

---

[35] *Cher*. 25; Cf. *Mos.* II 97.

[36] Cf. *QG* I 57.

[37] *Cher.* 27–28.

[38] Cf. B. Decharneux, "De l'evidence de l'existence de Dieux et de l'efficacité des ses puissances dans la théologie philonienne" in C. Lévy and L. Pernot (ed.), *Dire l'evidence: Philosophie et rhétorique antiques*, Cahiers de philosophie de l'Univ. de Paris XII, Val de Marne, 2 (1997) 312–334.

[39] Cf. *Spec.* I 46; *Deus* 79; *Legat.* 6. On the impossibility of knowing or even designating in appropriate terms not only God, but also His powers. Philo repeatedly stresses that it is impossible to see the divine powers. In *Deus* 78–79, for example, after having clarified that the divine powers, which are mixed to created beings, are unmixed in respect of Him, the author passes on to consider their purity, which radiates an exceedingly bright light.

should be understood by the term 'image' in this context.[40] Is reference being made to an indirect vision, a shadow—which is all we can perceive of Him—represented by the vision of seraphim and cherubim, the men at Mamre, the image of the powers, the visible part of God and His intermediaries with the world,[41] or is this a reference to the *logos*?[42] I cannot here venture into an analysis of the *logos* in Philo. I shall confine myself to reminding readers that, at various points, it is via the *logos* that God chooses to reveal himself.[43] The idea of *logos* as the image of God[44] is present, for example, in *De Fuga* 101.[45] On the other hand, in *Sacr*. 59, God and the powers are described as images produced in the souls of those who can see, precisely with respect to the vision of the three men seen by Abraham. So, there is God above the universe, elevated above and separate from everything. Human vision can attempt to see the image of God, not God himself. Divine transcendency is thus preserved, and is stressed by means of negative theological terms which clarify that God is so elevated and superior to man that He cannot even be called by a proper name, nor can he be known or described by mortals.[46] The companions of the soul i.e. those who seek to overcome their own corporeal limits, understand perfectly that the Being cannot be compared to any form of things created, and avoid any determination, any attribution of qualities, which would be

[40] Siegert throws light on the difficulties of translating the passage: he makes reference to *QG* II 62, which deals with a transmission of God's image to the logos and to human reason.

[41] D. T. Runia, Review cit. 401, brings out the problems inherent in understanding this passage. He criticises the translation 'εἰκόνα' given by Siegert, which tends to personalize and Christianize the Philonic *logos*. R. Finazzi also translates this term as 'immagine'. For Wolfson, op. cit. I, 238 ff. the term image in Philo may refer both to the *logos* and to ideas. God can be described as a model and an archetype, never as an image.

[42] As concerns the role of *logos* as God's assistant, intermediary, cutter cf. J. Daniélou, *Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1958) 154–157. H. W. Attridge has made an analysis of the various senses in which Philo interprets the *logos:* "Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos", *SphA* XVII (2005) 103–117.

[43] Cf. A. Segal, *Two powers* cit. 163–171.

[44] At various points Philo speaks of *logos* as the image of God. See, for example, *Conf.* 97; 146–147; *Leg.* III 96; *Somn.* II 45. Cf. J. Daniélou, *Philon Alexandrie* cit. 154–163; B. Decharneux, "Quelques chemins détournés de la parole dans l'oeuvre de Philon" in C. Lévy (ed.), *Philon d'Alexandrie* cit., 313–326. See also Th. H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation* (Washington D.C. 1983) 56 ff.

[45] "The Divine Word, Who is high above all these, has not been visibly portrayed, being like to no one of the objects of sense. Nay, He is Himself the Image of God, chiefest of all Beings intellectually perceived."

[46] Cf. *Post.* 18–21; *Deus* 62.

totally inadequate.[47] It is humans, who cannot raise themselves to the incorporeal forms, who are persuaded that they can assign qualities and properties to God. However, divine transcendency does not imply that God does not act in the world, as a creator and ruler through his powers.[48] There are an infinite number of powers by means of which God acts: the two powers named here—the creative and the royal ones—are the highest of them, called θεός and κύριος.

The Powers

As the names θεός and κύριος are attributed to the powers, it becomes clear that these are not autonomous entities, self-sufficient with respect to God. They are necessarily ways in which He acts, His manifestations, names, forms in which man can know Him.[49] The oneness of God is averred as follows:

> no existing thing is of equal honour to God [. . .] there is only one sovereign and ruler and king, who alone may direct and dispose of all things. [. . .] God is one, but He has around Him numberless Potencies, which all assist and protect created being.[50]

So, God's powers are infinite in number,[51] but five of them have a dominant role. When speaking of the city refuges,[52] after the *logos*—which is "the most ancient, the safest, the most beautiful"—Philo introduces the powers that are entitled to a special role, the creative, the royal, the beneficent and the legislative powers, plus the one by means of which what should not be done is forbidden.[53]

---

[47] Cf. *Deus* 55.

[48] Cf. N. Unemoto, *Die Königherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult im Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt*, Tübingen (1991) 226 ff.

[49] C. Termini has recently made an analysis of δύναμις in Philo: *Le potenze di Dio—studio su* δύναμις *in Filone di Alessandria*, Roma 2000. This is an extremely well-thought-out work, which analytically examines the different senses in which Philo uses the term.

[50] *Conf.* 170–171.

[51] Cf. *Deus* 79.

[52] *Fug.* 94–95.

[53] In this passage, the role attributed to *logos* the divine word is highly significant. Not only does the *logos* take priority over the powers, but the five city-refuges are termed δυνάμεις τοῦ λέγοντος, powers of He who speaks. The creative power is said to be the one "in the exercise of which the Creator produced the universe by a word". Starobinski-Safran in Philon d'Alexandrie, *De Fuga* cit. 172 n. 1 dwells on the interpretation of λέγοντος which is, in her opinion a term that echoes many texts in

A similar schema can be found in *QE* II 68,[54] in a passage that is of particular significance in this connection, seeing that it makes reference to *Ex*. 25. 22–23, which are also interpreted in *De Deo*. Here, as I was saying, the number of powers considered is greater than in our fragment: we have not only the creative and royal powers, but also the merciful power, the legislative power—in its two-fold conception as legislative and punitive—the ark, the symbol of the intelligible world. These powers are ranked after He who is and after the *logos* but, if we consider them starting from the top, we can see a sort of hierarchy; considering the derivation of the powers one from another, an interweave can be observed which sets merciful power next to creative power and legislative power next to royal power. In another passage, *QE* II 62, the powers which are symbolized by the cherubim are the creative and the royal powers.

As Segal clarifies,[55] the *logos* is God's partner in creation.[56]

> Philo calls the *logos*, 'the Beginning', 'the Ruler on the Angels', and significantly 'the Name of God'. But because the *logos* is an emanation of God, Philo can also speak about him as God's offspring, or the first-born son of God.[57]

The relationship between *logos* and powers is a complex one. In the sense that he is the sum of all the powers, the *logos* is above them all.[58] Sometimes he is hierarchically ranked as between God and the powers. Elsewhere we find mention of God and the two greatest powers, the creative power and the royal one, with no mention of the *logos*.[59] I do not wish to analyze these themes here. I would just like to point out that the hierarchical structure which sets God above the powers is flanked in other passages by another, which places God above the *logos*, which is, in turn, above the powers. The mediating *logos* is introduced,

---

the Judaic tradition. For this reason she holds the changes proposed by other authors to be unjustified.

[54] Cf. Reale-Radice, "Monografia introduttiva" cit. CXVI; Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 165–166.

[55] Segal, *Two powers* cit. 173.

[56] Cf. *Leg.* III 96; *Cher.* 125; *Migr.* 6; *Spec*. I 81.

[57] B. Lévy also seems to be referring to a sort of emanatism from God to the powers, *Le logos et la lettre. Philon d'Alexandrie en regard des Pharisiens*, Lagrasse (1988) 78. In actual fact, I do not think we can speak of emanation in Philo in the relationship between God and powers.

[58] Cf. *Cher.* 27.

[59] Cf. M. Harl, "Introduction" à *Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): *Quis reum divinarum heres sit* (Paris 1966) 101, nn. 1 and 2.

for example, in *Heres* 205, where the *logos*, the head of the angels, separates what is created from the creator. It intercedes in the name of what is mortal before what is incorruptible and, at the same time, it is the ruler's ambassador for his subjects.[60] It is thus clarified that the powers are not the only ones entitled to act as intermediaries;[61] this is also a role which the uniting and cutter *logos* can fill.[62] The angels too have a role as intermediaries. The complexity of the status of powers—ways of acting and, at the same time, ways in which man may know God—crops up again in the context of angels.[63] These, too, are treated sometimes as intermediate figures, sometimes as forms through which God shows himself to man.

> To the souls indeed which are incorporeal and are occupied in His worship it is likely that He should reveal Himself as He is, conversing with them as friend with friends; but to souls which are still in a body, giving Himself the likeness of angels, not altering His own nature, for He is unchangeable, but conveying to those which receive the impression of His presence a semblance in a different form, such that they take the image to be not a copy, but that original form itself.[64]

It is clearly stated here that the shapes in which God shows himself depend upon the level of the perceiver,[65] and it is also noted that some people might erroneously consider the form sent by God to be an autonomous form.

---

[60] The analogy of the idea of *logos* as an intermediary with Middle Platonic ideas is brought out by M. Harl, op. cit. 99.

[61] As regards the mediating role of the powers cfr. N. A. Evans, "Diotima, Eros, Cherubim and the Source of Divine Knowledge", *SBL Seminar Papers* 33 (1994) 840–841.

[62] There are many passages relating to the *logos* and, in particular, to the *logos cutter*, for example: *Heres* 235; *Cher.* 30. As regards the *logos* and the relationships between Philonic and Stoic thought cfr. R. Radice, *Platonismo e creazionismo* cit. 67–100. See also J. Daniélou, op. cit. 158–160; D. M. Hay, "Philo's Treatise on the Logos-Cutter", *SPhA* 2 (1973) 9–22. On *logos* as an active element of God's creative thought, see J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 159–160.

[63] Cfr. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 171–174, for whom Philonic angelology is essentially Middle Platonic. See also M. Harl, op. cit. 100.

[64] *Somn.* I 232.

[65] Cf. D. T. Runia, "The King, the Architect, and the Craftsman" cit. 89–106 (101–102).

Visions of the Powers

The nature of the role and the status of the powers is an all-pervading question. For Wolfson,[66] the powers are properties of God, and the names by which He is called designate these properties.[67] Further on, Wolfson quotes passages from which it would seem that the essence of God is unknowable, but that the powers themselves *are* knowable. From Philo's text, differences of position appear which, for Wolfson, are to be attributed to the exegetic requirements of passages translated from the *Septuagint* in different ways. According to this scholar, the consideration that the powers are properties of God's action is repeated on a number of occasions, that they are identical to His essence.[68] However, the author also presents the powers as ideas created by God, both as incorporeal beings and as forms which are immanent within the world. The problem thus remains as to whether these powers, God's creations, which are distinct from his essence, are knowable or unknowable.

From the passages quoted, various possible interpretations of the powers emerge: properties of God's actions, ideas created, attributes of God, His names and ways in which He acts. Here it is a case of attempts to explain which all seem plausible, and yet are all still partial. Already in 1925 E. Bréhier[69] had criticised some theories advanced by other scholars. In particular, he had analyzed the opinion of those, like Heinze,[70] who saw the powers as a form of reconcilement between Stoic-style pantheism and divine transcendency and those who, like Drummond,[71] considered the powers as attributes of God, from whom they can be distinguished not in their essence, but as regards the imperfection of our understanding. For Bréhier, these positions, which are partially correct, do not focus one fundamental aspect: the question of the soul's ascent towards knowledge of God. Given the imperfection

---

[66] Wolfson, *Philo* cit., II 135.

[67] "The powers of God in the sense of the property of God to act, are not distinct from the essence of God, and if the essence of God, as it is assumed by Philo, is unknowable, then the powers of God are also unknowable in their essence" (op. cit. II 138).

[68] Cf. here: chap. two.

[69] Op. cit. 136.

[70] M. Heinze, *Die Lehre vom Logos in der Griech. Philosophie* (Oldenburg 1872, reprint. Aalen 1961) 245.

[71] J. Drummond, *Philo J. or the Jewish-alexandrian Philosophy in its Development and Completion* (London 1888, reprint. Amsterdam 1969) II 89.

of their nature, humans, for whom it is impossible to know God in His essence, can only grasp the fact that He exists and can only know Him indirectly, by means of His creations and through the powers. In order to clarify the relationship between God and His powers, in particular the creative power and the beneficent power, Bréhier takes Philo's interpretation of the passage in *Gen.* 18. 2, relating to the three men who appear to Abraham. These are God himself, and the two powers. Bréhier's analysis hinges on passages from *De Abrahamo* (119–124) and *Quaestiones in Genesim* (IV 1–2) which are parallel to the passage from *De Deo* that we are considering. In these passages, Abraham perceives a triple representation of just one object: the object itself and the two shadows coming out of it. The One, who is in the middle, surrounded by the two powers, offers to the thought of the person having the vision alternately the appearance of a single being and that of three: one when the thought of the person seeing is in contact with the idea, unmixed; three when it is still imperfect, and the thought cannot manage to perceive the Being in its essence, but only in its actions.[72] Whether one sees one or three is thus closely connected to the level of the person who is seeing: θεός or κύριος, according to the moral level of the perceiver.

QG. IV 1–2 thus provides a few keys for interpreting and understanding the passage in question better. First and foremost, the process whereby the vision of God appeared to Abraham was clearly a process involving both figures: on the one hand, the one appearing—God, and on the other the one seeing. Between the two there is one connecting element: the oak. The vision arises out of the coming together of two actions: God's appearing and Abraham's seeing. This does not imply a change, as God is not susceptible to change;[73] it does however imply a meeting between the incorporeal and luminous rays which strike pure souls and the way in which they look at the rays. Here the stress lies on the impossibility of resting one's eyes on the rays for any length of time, due to the limited intellect, hence the impossibility of a clear vision. The human intellect perceives God together with the powers in such a way that " the single appearance appears as a triad, and the triad as

[72] Cf. Unemoto, *Die Königherrschaft* cit. 237–241.

[73] On God's unchangeability cf. *Gig.* 52. Cf. also *Post.* 22. *Somn.* II 222–223. See M. Harl, "Introduction" a *Quis rerum* cit. 101, n. 4. God's unchangeability is also discussed in *Somn.* I 233 although here, as D. T. Runia clarifies, Review cit. 403, Philo tackles the problem "from an opposing point of view."

a unity". The intellect therefore perceives two apparitions: one is God with the two highest powers, the other consists of three foreign men. The intellect grasps different specific aspects according to whether it turns its attention towards one or the other forms of the vision of God. It is thus clarified that the apparition of three men indicates that the intellect in question is incapable of seeing God in His oneness. The passage is particularly significant because it clarifies that seeing the powers is closely connected with human capacities. The powers are presented here not as autonomous forms, but as they relate to humans, who can only grasp partial aspects of God. In *Abr* 119–121 too, it is affirmed that the soul, illuminated by God, perceives as follows:

> the single object presents to it a triple vision, one representing the reality, the other two the shadows reflected from it [. . .] Who in the sacred scriptures is called He that is as His proper name, while on either side of Him are the senior potencies, the nearest to Him, the creative and the kingly.

Thus the being in the middle, flanked by the powers, "presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometimes of one, sometimes of three",[74] of one when the mind is purified and is in contact with the Idea which is free from mixture and complexity, of three when,

> as yet uninitiated into the highest mysteries, it is still a votary only of the minor rites and unable to apprehend the Existent alone by Itself and apart from all else, but only through Its actions, as either creative or ruling (*Abr.* 122).

As A. M. Mazzanti[75] puts it, "la distinzione in δυνάμεις" non esiste dunque in Dio, ma solo nel rapporto imperfetto che l'uomo instaura con il divino". Abraham, who is on the road to perfection, sees the royal power of God, called κύριος. Proceeding along the path toward knowledge, he will perceive the creative power, θεός. Only for those who reach the end of the path, the perfect ones, will God be Lord *and* God. In other words, the Being will appear to them at the same time

[74] *Abr.* 122. An analysis of the three readings given by Philo of the episode describing Abraham at Mamre in *Abr.* 107–132 can be found in J. Cazeaux, "Le repas de Mambré dans le 'De Abrahamo' de Philon" in M. Quesnel, Y.-M. Blanchard et C. Tassin (edd.), *Nourriture et repas dans les milieux juifs et chrétiens de l'antiquité.* Mélanges offerts au Professeur Charles Perrot, Lectio divina 178 (Paris 1999) 55–73.

[75] "ΘΕΟΣ ε ΚΥΡΙΟΣ. I 'nomi di Dio in Filone di Alessandria", *Studi Storico Religiosi* 5 (1981) 16. See also Ead., *L'uomo nella cultura religiosa del tardo-antico tra etica e ontologia* (Bologna 1990) 35–38.

as Lord and God. The complexity of the text, and of other passages of this sort, is increased by the two-fold sense of the terms θεός and κύριος, which indicate God and, at the same time, are names for one of the powers.

Names of God

Texts which comment on *Gen.* 18. 1–2 find themselves having to explain the apparition of "three men" and the fact that Abraham goes from the plural to the singular when he addresses his interlocutors. In these passages, Philo, who is particularly careful to avoid anthropomorphism and to stress the oneness of God, stresses the role played by the different levels of humans when they see God and the powers: the powers are aspects of the Being which the seer perceives. In other texts, the powers are presented as ways in which God acts, different aspects under which he carries out his activity. Thus, in *Cher*. 27: with His goodness, God created things; with His sovereignty, He rules them. Here, rather than the cognitive possibilities of humans, the focus is on the manifestations of God's acting, to the extent that some critics tend to view the powers as divine attributes.[76] However, as we have seen, many Philonic works devote a great deal of time to interpreting the powers as related to the theme of man's capacity for comprehension, and this capacity is linked to the moral development of the subject in question, who is progressing towards perfection. For humans, God's essence is unknowable: they can only grasp flashes of Him, aspects which will depend on the moral level of whoever seeks knowledge. In order to try to clarify these theories, I hold it advisable to follow the development of one text, out of the many that we could choose, step by step. My reference will be *De Mutatione nominum*. The work opens with the passage from *Genesis* 17. 1:

> Abraham became ninety-nine years old and the Lord (κύριος) was seen (ὤφθη) by Abraham and said to him, 'I am thy God (θεός)'.[77]

---

[76] This is the interpretation of δυνάμεις and λόγος given, for example, by J. Gorez, in his translation of *Cher.* 27–28 (Paris 1963). The same goes—as we have seen—for Drummond. Cfr. E. Starobinski-Safran, op. cit. 172–173, n. 4; J. Daniélou, op. cit. 150–153.

[77] See also *Deus* 46; *QE* II 39.

Philo's interpretation starts by clarifying the sense of the apparition. As in *De Deo* 1, it is explained that the vision of God is not a real perception of the senses, physically registered by the eyes of the body, but a vision experienced by the eyes of the soul. The distinction between sensible vision and noetic vision is thus introduced. "Do not however suppose that the Existent which truly exists is apprehended by any man" (§7). Not even Moses, when he asked "show me now thy ways, that I may know thee and find favour in thy sight" [*Ex*. 33. 13] could see God, but only "all that follows on after God [*Ex*. 33. 23]".[78] This is the starting point for an explanation of the unknowability of God and His unnameability. Humans cannot even reach the point of knowing the true name of God: He allows mankind to use an improper name.

> For those who are born into mortality must needs have some substitute for the divine name, so that they may approach if not the fact at least the name of supreme excellence and be brought into relation with it. And this is shown by the oracle proclaimed as from the mouth of the Ruler of all in which He says that no proper name of Him has been revealed to any, 'I was seen', He says, 'of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being their God (θεός), and My name of 'Lord' (κύριος) I did not reveal to them' [*Ex*. 6. 3].[79]

Κύριος ὁ θεός is a name improperly used, seeing that God's essence is unknowable and thus He cannot even be named (name-thing relationship). However, humans have been allowed to use a name improperly, a name connected with the temporal limitations which are our lot, not an expression of eternity (*Mut*. 12).[80]

The reference to temporal duration is a further notch in the construction of an image of human limitations as compared with the infinity of God's dimension. Here, the stress is not so much placed on the impossibility of seeing, of knowing, of naming (limitation of sensible organs and noetic tools), as much as on the existence in time of those who are subject to death and decay.

So, in *Mut* 13, it is affirmed that those who enter into the generation of mortals have to resort to using an improper name for God, as His real name is not known. The textual support for this is found in *Ex*. 6. 3:

[78] Cf. *Fug.* 163–165.
[79] *Mut.* 13–14.
[80] On these themes see D. T. Runia, "Naming and Knowing" cit. 76 ff.

> I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them.[81]

In the paragraphs which follow, Philo explains the two names θεός and κύριος, by means of the powers. Now, let us force the text and, instead of translating κύριος as Lord, let us try rendering it with "proper name", or even saying θεός = common name, κύριος = proper/personal name. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a generic God, as a divine being, but I did not show my personal name.[82] At Peniel God does not tell Jacob his personal/proper name (τὸ ἴδιον καὶ κύριον) since "names, those symbols which indicate created beings, look not for them in the case of imperishable natures".[83] It is again stressed that God cannot be named, not only because He is unknowable and so any name we might use would be the result of incomplete forms of knowledge, but also because of the language we use: the names are σύμβολα (signs, symbols, passwords, conventions, signs of identifying marks) applied to beings subject to decay. We then have the problem of how to reconcile this with the assertion that the names fully correspond to the reality, which Philo repeats on a number of occasions. According to him,

> with Moses the names assigned are manifest images of the things, so that name and thing are inevitably the same from the first and the name and that to which the name is given differ not a whit.[84]

There seems to be a contradiction with the assertion that the names are σύμβολα of beings subject to decay. However, in fact, the reality to which Moses, or even Adam, gave a name was what was created, not God himself. On the other hand, if God assigned names to things[85] at the time of creation, and "Adam made appellations that were accurate, taking aim in excellent fashion at what was revealed, so that their natures were pronounced and understood at the very same

[81] Colson and Whittaker translate: "I was seen of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, being their God (θεός), and My name of 'Lord' (τὸ ὄνομα κύριον) I did not reveal to them". R. Arnaldez [*Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf). *De Mutatione nominum* (Paris 1964)] translates: "Je me suis fait voir à Abraham, à Isaac et à Jacob comme étant leur Dieu; <u>mais</u> mon nom de Seigneur (κύριος) je ne le leur ai pas revélé". The text, however says καί and continues on: "τὸ ὄνομα μου κύριον οὐκ ἐδήλωσα". Is it then "my name of κύριος" or "my proper name, my true name"? Further on, Arnaldez maintains that in the hyperbatus Philo means κύριος no longer as Lord, but as a proper name.

[82] Cf. R. Arnaldez in Philon d'Alexandrie, *De Mutatione* cit. 36–37, n. 2.

[83] *Mut.* 14.

[84] *Cher.* 56. See also *Leg.* II 15.

[85] Cf. *Opif.* 36–39.

time",[86] can we suppose that the names expressed by Adam—which correspond perfectly to the reality denoted—are the same as those used by God?[87] Names undoubtedly corresponded with things at the time of creation, so they are names given by God, names assigned by Adam, names appearing in the *Torah*, which expresses the law of reality. However, here we are dealing with names that designate the reality created, not the Incorruptible, the Eternal, who, as is repeatedly said, remains unknowable for mankind and cannot, therefore, even be called by a proper name.[88] It is thus explained, in *De mutatione*, that people's understanding of the names of God, and those of the powers too, is flawed, because the system used for naming and representing is based on human understanding, and thus on human incapacity to know the essence of God. It is therefore a language which anthromorphizes and hypostatizes. It is a language which speaks of powers as if they were autonomous beings, and of *logos* in terms of 'a second God'; it is a language which thematizes a particular aspect of God: mercy, justice, His methods of punishment etc. In actual fact, the only thing that can be said about God is that He *is*. Every attempt to describe Him, or to ascribe qualities to Him, assigns to Him improper attributes and idolatrizes Him.[89] Perhaps speaking of θεός and κύριος as powers is just an incorrect way of speaking, just as incorrect as improperly assigning a proper name to God, since a proper name is then being given to someone unnameable.[90] Moreover, with κύριος one aspect is isolated: one of the powers, somehow breaking up God's oneness. The 'improper use of the name' might mean giving the semblance of a proper name, a true name (which corresponds to the essence of God), to a name which is only a limited, human way of designating something which escapes the grasp of humans. It could mean attributing to this improper name characteristics which it does not have, in a certain sense, hypostatizing the name. Perhaps, taking into account the fact that we are dealing

---

[86] *Opif.* 150.

[87] Cf. F. Calabi, "Lingua di Dio lingua degli uomini. Filone alessandrino e la traduzione della Bibbia", *I Castelli di Yale* 2 (1997) 96–99; M. Niehoff, "What is in a Name? Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995) 220–252.

[88] The theme of powers as names of God is thus introduced (*Mut.* 28–29).

[89] Cf. Runia, "Naming and Knowing" cit.; F. E. Brenk, "Darkly beyond the Glass" cit. 51 n. 31.

[90] Wolfson, op. cit. II 120 ff. links this impossibility of saying the name *kyrios* with the prohibition on naming God which is proper to the Hebrew tradition and quotes passages from the *Targum*, *Mishnah* and *Ghemarah* in this connection.

with names of the powers, this improper use might mean hypostatizing the powers too, even making them into quasi autonomous beings. In a number of passages, Philo clarifies that θεός and κύριος are ways in which man may know God: so this might be a case of names, of attributions made by men, not of characterizations of the divine. Let us analyze, specifically, κύριος. Κύριος and θεός are powers. So, are they the proper names of the powers or the improper names by which we call them? Do the names correspond with reality i.e. are they really God's names? Do they belong to His essence? What are the powers? Properties? Names? Attributes? Our own ways of knowing?

Middle Platonism and the Rabbinic Tradition

When connecting vision of the powers at the different levels at which humans find themselves, Philo clarifies that these are not hypostases of God, they are not divine attributes[91] or, even less, qualities. At *Leg.* I 36, Philo states that God "is not only not in the form of man, but belongs to no class or kind (ἄποιος γὰρ ὁ θεός, οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἀνθρωπόμορφος)."[92] God Himself says He is without any other thing.[93] As clarified by D. Winston,[94] Philo repeatedly affirms that God is absolutely ἄποιος.[95] He is without any accidental quality, distinction of genus or species. All God's predicates are properties.[96]

---

[91] See the book by Daniélou quoted above, which tends to consider the powers as attributes of God.

[92] As A. Passoni Dell'Acqua, "Innovazioni lessicali and attributi divini: una caratteristica del giudaismo alessandrino?" in R. Fabris (ed.), *La Parola di Dio cresceva (At 12,24).* Scritti in onore di C. M. Martini nel suo 70° compleanno, (Bologna 1998) 87–90, notes "Dio è senza qualità, perché è uno e semplice, le qualità lo renderebbero molteplice: gli attributi divini non vanno dunque celebrati." The author then goes on to compare the two main powers, the creative and the ruling powers, to the *middoth* in rabbinic thought, as related to the tetragrammaton and the name *Elohim.* She analyses the problems evinced by the critics both as concerns the rabbis' inversion of the aspect of mercy with that of judgement in the attributions of God's names, as compared with Philo, and in connection with "dissonanze dottrinali sull'abbinamento di nomi e attributi divini riscontrabili nel pensiero di Filone e in quello rabbinico documentato dal II secolo."

Cfr. also A. Marmorstein, "Philo and the Names of God", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 22 (1931–32) 295–306.

[93] See *Deus* 109.

[94] "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature" cit. 21 sgg.

[95] Cf. *Leg.* III 36; 51; 206; *Deus* 55–56; *Cher.* 67.

[96] "They are derivative of his essence but, unlike definitions, do not indicate that essence itself and, unlike qualities, are not shared with others. Further, since the essence

J. Dillon[97] tackles the theme of powers as causes. He visualizes a division whereby God is the cause of the intelligible world, the creative power is the cause of the heavenly power, the royal power is the cause of the sublunar world. For Dillon, there would thus be a connection between Philo's writings and theories according to which our world is directly governed by a reality that is other than God. In Dillon's opinion Philo is identifying it with an aspect of God to safeguard monotheism, although he goes on to claim that in actual fact Philo is merely reflecting contemporary doctrines on the existence of divinities or daemons assigned to the sublunar world. This argument sometimes leads Dillon to almost personify the powers, to see them as forms of God, not as ways of acting and—above all—not to consider their interaction with the human level. There is definitely an idea that the powers are causes in Philo, for example at *Deus* 108, where ἡ τοῦ ὄντος ἀγαθότης [...] πρεσβυτάτη of the powers is αἰτία γενέσεως κόσμου. However, I do not hold that passages like this authorize us to consider the powers as separate forms, let alone to hypostatize them as, for example, Wolfson does.[98] According to this scholar, the powers, or at least the powers identified with "glory", might indicate ideas. He opines that they are

of God is one and single, whatever belongs to it as a property must be one and single. Thus Philo reduces all divine properties to a single one, that of acting (*Cher*. 77). In Philo's hierarchy the essence of God, although 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* (*Op.* 24)" (27). In this connection see here: chap. two.

[97] Cf. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. in particular 127 ff. in which the author compares the theses of Philo and Eudorus on the Monad and Dyad. The comparison made by Dillon seems a little forced: in Philo it appears to be problematic to speak of the creation of the material world by the logos without any mediation i.e. without considering the sense of creation by means of the word in Jewish culture. Moreover, Monad and Dyad, which are respectively the archetypes of form and matter, seem different from the Philonic powers, which may act jointly even if under different aspects, although there are passages in Philo which deal with the theory of an active principle in the universe which transcends virtue, knowledge—even the good itself—and a passive matter tied to the world (*Opif.* 7–9). These themes are also present in *De Deo*. At the same time Dillon clarifies certain complexities in Eudorus' theory, "who would make the Good and the One epithets of the Supreme Principle, both being more primordial than the Monad" (156). Philo's affinities with Middle Platonism seem to be stronger with regard to the theory on *logos* (160–161) and negative theology. Dillon wonders whether Philo and Eudorus had sources in common for the divine epithets.

R. Radice, *Platonismo e creazionismo* cit. 249–260) finds that drawing a parallel between Philo and Eudorus is rather problematic.

[98] Wolfson, *Philo* cit., I, 220.

created externally to God and assist Him as bodyguards.[99] Wolfson uses precisely the passage of *De Deo* on the seraphim to maintain that the powers are ideas: the meaning of the term seraphim in the sense of *typoi* is seen by the author as a clear reference in this respect.[100] Wolfson sees the concept of powers in Philo as very like that of *middoth* and, following this logic, the author quotes the passage from *Sacr*. 59 in which the concepts of "measures", "rules" and "parameters" appear. In this author's opinion, one can hypothesize a connection between powers and *middoth* and it is possible that, where the two concepts have had no reciprocal influence on each other, they have arisen out of a common tradition.[101]

Likening the powers to the *middoth*, on the basis of the two names by which God is called, κύριος and θεός in the Greek Bible, tetragrammaton and *Elohim* in the Jewish Bible, plus the explanation given by the rabbis of this double name, leads to an interpretation of the Philonic powers in terms of "measures".[102] Thus, a series of authors have pondered on the inversion of creative power and royal power and between *middath ha-din* and *middath ha-rahamin*, seeking the explanation of what appears to be a difficulty in the text in exciting hypotheses regarding the origin of the conception of *middoth* in the rabbinic literature.[103] N. A.

---

[99] See Wolfson, *Philo* cit., I, 276–277 who draws a sharp distinction between Philonic and Stoic powers.

[100] The power that the ideas have to act as causes does not however derive from their nature, but is given to them by God. Moreover, "since the powers possessed by the ideas are derived from God, in whom they are eternal, Philo sometimes refers even to the created powers which stand around Him as uncreated" (op. cit. I, 222). Wolfson maintains that, generally speaking, it could be said that the ideas in Philo are real beings created by God: "The difference between powers as a property of God and powers as created beings corresponds to the difference between the two ways in which God acts upon the world, the direct and the indirect. The term powers in the sense of a property of God merely means the power of God to do things directly in His own person; the term powers, in the sense of created beings, means the power of God to do things indirectly through intermediaries." In this context, Wolfson is clearly considering the powers to be ways in which God acts, directly or indirectly, while the idea of powers as means by which mortals may know Him has been set aside.

[101] Ibid. 226.

[102] Note that in *Sacr.* 59 the powers are referred to precisely as measures. Cf. J. G. Kahn (ed.), *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf). *De Confusione linguarum* (Paris 1963) 184–186, n. 31.

[103] A. Marmorstein, for example, examines the possibility that the connection tetragrammaton = *middath ha-rahamim*, *Elohim* = *middath ha-din* might be relatively late, whereas in the more ancient *haggadah*, represented by the *midrash* of the Tannaim, this terminology is practically unknown. In this it would seem to be a lot closer to Philo than the tradition which later took root. The terms *middath ha-din* and *middath ha-*

Dahl and A. F. Segal[104] highlight the complexity of the problem with regard to the unifying function of the *logos* for the powers. The authors in question maintain that the concept of *middoth* was used by rabbis who objected to any hypostatization of the divine powers. In their opinion, it also served as a response to groups who were considered heretics, who undermined the oneness of God. According to Segal,[105] Philo is actually presenting an idea of *logos* as a visible emanation of God, as a hypostasis of God, which would exclude any interpretation of a second divinity in terms which did not resemble the rabbinic ones. According to Segal, who accepts Wolfson's interpretation, Philo's use of the powers is very similar to that of the divine attributes of mercy and justice, which are identified with the tetragrammaton and the name Elohim in the rabbinic literature, except for the inversion of the attributes. However, the picture is complicated by the fact that Philo uses κύριος and θεός sometimes for God's powers, and sometimes to refer to the *logos* or to God.[106] In actual fact, Philo's punishing power is connected with the merciful power, with that goodness which constitutes royal power precisely because, using mercy and punishment, God rules the created world by means of the creative power. And, as I have mentioned

---

rahamim appear to replace the more ancient *middath ha-tov* and *middath puranut* after the war of Bar Kokva (*Philo and the Names of God* cit. in partic. 301. See also Siegert, *Über die Gottesbezeichnung* cit. 73–74.). Marmorstein's interpretation has not gained a great following amongst scholars, despite the fact that he raises issues that other critics have also pondered. See C. Termini, *Le potenze di Dio* cit. 92 ff.

[104] N. A. Dahl and A. F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9 (1978) 1–28. D. Winston, in *Logos and Mystical Theology* cit. 22, criticises Dahl and Segal's analysis on a link between tetragammaton and justice, *Elohim* and mercy. For Winston the analysis drawn in the *Mekiltà* on *Exodus* shows "that the rabbis are not basing their comments on a correlation of the tetragrammaton with justice and *Elohim* with mercy, but rather on the contents of the verse quoted. Thus the verse in *Exod.* 15.3 refers explicitly to the punishing aspect of God at the Red Sea, and the verse in *Exod.* 24.10 is interpreted by the rabbis to refer to God's compassion [...]. We may therefore conclude that it was indeed Philo's utter dependence on the *Septuagint* which had caused him to reverse the Palestinian tradition."

[105] N. A. Dahl and A. F. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis" cit. 164–165.

[106] Cf. Segal, *Two Powers* cit. 175. J. R. Royse, "Philo, *Kyrios* and the Tetragrammaton", *SphA* 3 (1991) 167–183, examines the use of κύριος to indicate the tetragrammaton in some Greek manuscripts of the *Septuagint* and highlights the distinction between the written form and the pronunciation of the name which had already been pointed out by Origen. The author maintains that Philo had probably read a manuscript in which the tetragrammaton was not translated, and that Philo had become used to reading it as κύριος, which was common in his environment. In his comment, Philo would thus use κύριος to indicate the tetragrammaton. Instead, in "Naming and Knowing" cit. 76–78, Runia expresses doubts as to whether Philo's interpretation of τὸ ὄνομα μου κύριος actually refers to the tetragrammaton.

several times above, the divine powers are infinite. It is therefore hard to draw a definite line between divine modes of acting. The relationship between powers and *middoth* does not stop at an inversion in the attribution of justice and mercy which, as we have seen, in Philo, seem basically to be attributed to the same power. Leaving aside these specifications, what I feel we should concentrate on is whether this parallel with the *middoth* does not in fact introduce a way of understanding the powers which is rather inflexible. At this point, the problem shifts to the nature of *middoth*, which I do not intend to discuss here. What we have to determine is whether the *middoth* are to be seen as ways in which God acts, as attributes or as forms in which mortals see God, thus returning to the big question left unanswered in Philo.

Once again, the complex problem of the relationship between powers, attributes and names of God poses itself.[107] This was a particularly delicate question in Ptolomaic Alexandria, where polytheistic theories, conceptions and beliefs were rife. In this connection, A. Passoni maintains that

> il problema della corrispondenza fra nomi e attributi risulta superficiale. Ben più essenziale è la questione di fondo se i nomi simbolizzassero attributi complementari del medesimo Dio o rimandassero a una pluralità di esseri divini più o meno indipendenti.[108]

Segal[109] postulates the existence of sectarian, Jewish fringes which kept on identifying the names with the divine attributes during the II century.[110] One could interpret Philo's reticence to hypostatize the divine attributes in this perspective,[111] together with his efforts to avoid every possible departure from the oneness of God. These positions correspond with a similar caution displayed in the rabbinic literature.[112] According

[107] Cf. A. Mazzanti, art. cit. 17–20.
[108] Art. cit. 90.
[109] *Two Powers* cit. 180.
[110] The ambiguity of the notion of δυνάμεις, which may be used to designate at times the virtues of the soul, at others the powers of the angels or the attributes of God, is brought out by J. Pipin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne* (Paris 1964) 374 ff. quoted in Philon, *De Fuga et inventione* cit. 171, n. 7.
[111] According to J. Cazeaux, "Etre Juif et parler Grec: l'allégorie de Philon" in Ch. B. Amphoux e J. Margain (ed.), *Les prémières traditions de la Bible* (Lausanne 1996) 179, n. 19, "c'est l'erreur de Goodenough d'avoir hypostasié ce qui reste à mi-chemin entre une notion métaphysique et un instrument de lecture." Cf. A. Passoni, op. cit. 89 who quotes W. Bousset – H. Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im Späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 21 (Tübingen 1966) 342–357.
[112] For Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 169–170, as Philo is always concerned with stressing the oneness of God, he avoids any possible identification of the ruling Power

to Segal,[113] Philo, when speaking of a second God who is the emanation of the most High (*Somn.* I 227–229), and clarifying the incorrectness of considering that there are two Gods, would seem to be positioning himself in a very lively debate taking place in the Judaic circles of his times. A. P. Bos[114] also points out that great caution should be exercised before considering the powers as independent and autonomous from God, and gives an interpretation of the notion of powers, of the increate nature of the cosmos and of divine unchangeability, by setting them in relationship with *De Mundo*.[115]

Kneaded Measures

Let us briefly summarize the possible definitions of powers: ways in which God acts, manifestations of God, measures, divine attributes, ideas, names of God, ways in which man sees God. In the play of reflections by which the powers are seen as ways in which God acts and, together, as ways in which mortals can know Him, I feel that the affirmation according to which the powers are infinite in number[116] is extremely significant, so whether one pinpoints five or two main powers is a choice to be made according to the occasion, depending on which aspects are of greatest interest.

So, even the seraphim-cherubim in *De Deo* cannot be seen as the only powers of God; in a sense they become relative. Besides, Philo speaks of the hosts of angels and archangels to which the seraphim belong (*De Deo* 3) and it is by no means certain that these are hierarchically superior to other powers. They do, however, undoubtedly have a prominent role and the names they are given, θεός and κύριος, names of God, render their domain explicit. These are specific fields pertaining to the powers, which are not exactly spheres of action: we are not dealing with autonomous beings who have been assigned specific duties. They are 'yardsticks', measures in relation to which things can be set, rules

with a principle other than God. However, "it is hard to resist the conclusion that we have here a reflection, at least, of a contemporary doctrine about a distinct God or daemon who rules the world below the Moon, whether as an agent or as a rival of the Supreme Deity."

[113] Segal, *Two Powers* cit. 164.

[114] A. P. Bos, "Philo of Alexandria: A Platonist" cit. 66–86.

[115] R. Radice, *La filosofia di Aristobulo e i suoi nessi con il 'De Mundo' attribuito sol Aristotele* (Milano 1994) 69–95.

[116] Cf. *Sacr.* 59.

whose rational form has been drawn from God, with respect to whom they remain inferior and detached.

According to *Cher.* 106–107, God's powers will descend into those men who have made their houses ready to receive them.

> With laws and ordinances from the heaven they will descend, to sanctify and consecrate them on earth, according to their Father's bidding. Then joined in commonalty of daily life and board with virtue-loving souls, they sow within them the nature of happiness [...]. The purified mind rejoices in nothing more than in confessing that it has the lord of all for its master.

This passage seems to sum up the various ways of understanding the powers: the image of God's powers descending into man highlights the point that the initiative is His, a point which is made again in the following lines, which speak of powers that obey the Father and bring down laws and precepts from heaven. It would seem that here the author is alluding to angels at the service of God. On the other hand, the concept of powers as companions for souls, in life and at table, of those souls which have prepared their houses to receive them, rather refers to the concept of powers as linked with the forms and degrees of knowledge and virtue in mankind. The relationship between God's ways of acting and human capacity is rendered still more explicit in *Fug.* 95–101. We have already seen how the powers of the One who speaks act in the created world in *Fug.* 95: through them, God creates, governs, feels mercy towards His creation and orders or forbids whatever shall or shall not be done. In sections 97–98 it is clarified that the various cities which Moses calls 'places of refuge' are related to the different levels of human capacity: those who are able to aim for the highest goal are exhorted to orientate themselves towards the divine *logos*, the source of wisdom. Those who are less gifted should aim towards the creative power, the royal power, or other powers considered as God's ways of acting, manifestations of Himself, but also forms under which man sees God. They can, in other words, be seen as human relationships. God is unchangeable and devoid of positive attributes. It is man who changes, and therefore his perception of God's acting also changes: the vision of God is related to the changes in humans.

Seeing the Shadow

In *Deus* 109, God shows himself in a different way to individuals who are at different intellectual levels:

> Noah was most pleasing to the powers of 'He who is', to the Lord and God, while Moses [was pleasing] to He who is attended by the powers. Unlike them, He is only conceived as being. (translation mine)

The greater or more limited possibilities of seeing God, the more or less direct vision of Him (as in a mirror) does not vary vis-à-vis God, who is unchangeable and unknowable, but as regards man who, in any case, can only know God's works (the created world) or the powers. In other words, the vision of God is directly related to the level of the person seeing. In this perspective, Philo's theories can be likened, at least in part, to the levels of knowledge of a Platonic mould even if, naturally, we are not precisely and solely dealing with knowledge, in the strict sense of the word, as much as with different levels of virtue. It is a question of different approximations, of varying kinds, to a complete vision—which is, however, totally precluded. Taking this argument a little to the extreme, V. Nikiprowetzky[117] goes so far as to state

> Since God is unknowable, the whole system of the Potencies of which Wisdom and Logos are constituents, must be seen in the perspective of an infinitely plastic nominalism. In themselves, all these names are but flatus vocis which have meaning only in relation to the degree of intellectual and spiritual advancement of the mind that conceives them. They participate in the nature of the glory that the Israelites perceived in the great fire at Sinai: a supreme illusion, the reflection of a supreme truth.

Nikiprowetzky inserts these comments of his in a text focussing on the theme of multiple names attributed to some men, to the *logos*, to the powers and to God. In particular, the author analyses *Leg.* I 43 where it is clarified that *sophia* is designated with many names: principle, image, vision of God.[118]

Although considering the powers, wisdom and the *logos* in a purely nominalistic perspective is perhaps excessive, Nikiprowetzky's thesis does have the merit of clarifying that powers, *logos* and wisdom are not autonomous entities and, perhaps, rather than attributes or manifestations of God, they reflect, at least to a certain extent, the forms of knowledge man is capable of achieving. The fact that the vision of

[117] "The Name of Moses in Philo of Alexandria" in F. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert, B. L. Mack (eds.) *Nourished with Peace. Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in memory od Samuel Sandmel*, Scholars Press Homage Series, 9 (Chico, California 1984) 123, n. 5.

[118] The author then criticises E. Bréhier (op. cit. 112 ff.) who emphasizes Stoic influences, while playing down the biblical references, and Wolfson (op. cit. II 122–127), who enumerates what are actually abstract attributes of God, such as *aghenetos, akatonomastos, aoratos, arretos* etc., as if they were names.

God is a function of the levels humans can reach does not however imply that it is possible without God's taking the initiative, something which is actually necessary.[119] Jacob-Israel, for example, is "endowed with eyes to apprehend" God "in bright light".[120] Quoting *Somn.* I 64, Delling[121] speaks of a clear vision of God, which is possible for man only if God provides him with the eyes to see this vision by means of His word. In this regard, he makes reference to *Post.* 102 and *QE* II 42. We see here a knowledge obtained via the word, which is greater than that obtained through the senses, and which is also different from the vision that derives from the powers. It is the distinction between knowledge of God drawn from the vision of the created world and knowledge gained by means of revelation.

The 'Vision' of God

Doubt seems to be cast on the impossibility of seeing God and His powers, and Philo stresses this repeatedly in *Deus* 3, which speaks of illumination of the soul by the pure rays of wisdom. In *Mos.* II 289, the man who sees has had a clear vision of God with the eyes of the soul, in a dream. In this context, it is clear that we are in the sphere of knowledge of God in terms of knowledge of His existence, not of His essence, in terms of a vision of the powers and the created world, nor of God Himself, who is unknowable and ineffable.[122] However, other passages give us a glimpse of a complex conception which is not always univocal. In this connection, F. E. Brenk brings to our notice some Philonic texts which maintain the impossibility of seeing God directly and interprets others which instead, seem to maintain that it might be possible to see God.[123] Brenk voices the doubt as to whether

[119] Cf. G. Delling, "The 'One who sees God' in Philo" in *Nourished with Peace* cit. 33 ff.

[120] See *Mut.* 81–82. Cf. also *Ebr.* 82.

[121] Op. cit. 33–36.

[122] See *Deus* 62; *Fug.* 162–163; *Praem.* 39 ff.; *Virt.* 215.

[123] According to Brenk, "We face three different types of texts: those apparently denying a vision of God in the next life, those apparently affirming it, and ones suggesting only direct contact with His thoughts (sometimes His ideas as the Forms) or the *logos* (or *Logos*, as though a kind of Second God)." ("Darkly beyond the Glass" cit. 47). Brenk sets his analysis of Philonic texts in the context of Middle Platonism and considers the notions of negative theology and unknowability of God against this

this vision is something achievable in this world, or rather in the world to come. Brenk is actually interested, first and foremost, in the theme of the vision of Forms, which are perhaps the ideas of God, and he approaches Philo in this light. In any case, the theme tackled by Brenk is vision in the world to come. But, as concerns vision in this world, Philo's problem consists in the impossibility of seeing the essence of God as set against the possibility of knowing of His existence.[124] He thus highlights an improper use of the language employed to affirm the possibility of this vision. So even the use of the term κατάχρησις to bring out the improper use of an expression may here become an intentional choice, a theoretical option. In parallel with the impossibility of knowing God properly comes the impossibility of giving Him any 'proper' name.[125] As Runia notes, Philo hints at the possibility of a higher path towards knowledge of God which reveals His existence directly, without the mediation of the created world and the powers (for instance, at *Praem* 40–46). As Runia sees it,[126] Philo is alluding to a sort of noetic comprehension which can intuitively grasp the existence of God in His oneness, at the level of *logos*. The almost mystic type of vision that seems to be present in the *Legatio ad Caium* (4–6) is on a totally different level, according to J. Dillon.[127] On his part, E. Vanderlin[128] had previously clarified that even the highest level of

background. More specifically, he compares Philonic passages relating to visions seen as in a dream to passages from Plutarch (*E apud Delphos* 391E–394C).

[124] Cf. D. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus* cit. 436 ff. who stresses the importance of knowing the rational order of the world as a way of gaining access to knowledge of God.

[125] See the quoted paper by Runia "Naming and Knowing" discussed by J. Whittaker, "Catachresis and Negative Theology: Philo of Alexandria and Basilides" in S. Gersh and Ch. Kannengiesser, op. cit. 61–82. See also F. Calabi, *The Language and the Law* cit. 11–116.

[126] *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus* cit. 366.

[127] "The Transcendence of God" cit. 6. See also D. Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology* cit. 44; 53–55, which suggests that true friends of God may be able to directly apprehend Him, without recourse to reasoned inference, just as light is seen by means of light. As regards ecstatic visions of God see J. Ménard, *La Gnose de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1987) 163 ff.

[128] "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu" cit. 285–304, in partic. 301: "La contemplation parfaite nous fait atteindre directement l'action de Dieu (et non plus seulement le terme de cette action, comme l'orasis), c'est-à-dire Dieu lui-même en tant qu'agissant. Le sage perçoit donc directement la présence de la nature divine, sans pouvoir d'ailleurs en rien dire, sinon qu'elle existe et qu'elle agit par sa Providence et par la Création." See also S. Giversen, "L'expérience mystique chez Philon" in S. S. Hartman, C.-M. Edsman (eds.), *Mysticism* (Stockholm 1970) 98.

contemplation of God, perhaps reached only in a state of ecstasy for a few precious moments by those able to uplift themselves, does not lead to knowledge of His essence.

The possibility of knowing God directly is discussed in *Leg.* III 100–103, a key text on the subject. Once again, the type of knowledge that the intellect can have of God is related to its noetic level and to the degree to which it has been purified: the knowledge achieved by Moses is different from that reached by Bezaleel.[129] The difference between seeing and hearing, between the manifestation of God via images and via the word appears in the text. This is an extremely complex question which originates from the language of the biblical text, where this distinction is already made.[130] In any case, what I would like to stress here is the impossibility of having any direct knowledge of God. Not even Moses, who directly perceived an image of the Cause and directly conversed with God, was said to have actually seen God. V. Nikiprowetzky[131] speaks of a spiritual category of the sense of hearing: "L'oreille di l'âme voit les paroles proférées au lieu de les entendre". The author identifies various levels of knowledge and various levels of vision represented by the different human levels of the people mentioned in the *Bible*. Thus, God can be seen in His shadow, as experienced by Bezaleel, in a vision of an ethical kind, as in Jacob-Israel, or in a prophetic type of vision, as in Moses. In particular, for Moses, it is a question of an intellectual intuition, an immediate feeling of the existence of God which implies a break-off from the created world. Considering the various modes of access to knowledge, ecstasy and theophany constitute the highest levels of prophecy. Man's approach to God may take a number of different forms, on different levels of knowledge and be closer or more distant according to the virtues and capacities possessed.[132]

---

[129] Philo's reading of Moses' request to see God is analysed by Wolfson, op. cit., I 218–219, who attributes the identification of 'glory' with powers to the use of verses, such as *Psalms* 24. 9–10, for example, which were read in the synagogues of Alexandria in Philo's times. Wolfson's introduction to this explanation discusses the divine powers which, according to Wolfson, Philo seems to identify with Platonic ideas.

[130] Cf. B. Lévy, *Le logos et la lettre. Philon d'Alexandrie en regard des pharisiens* (Lagrasse 1988) 144 ff. See Nikiprowetzky's and Delling's analyses quoted infra in the section entitled "Seeing the shadow".

[131] "Thémes et traditions de la lumière chez Philon d'Alexandrie", *SPhA* 1 (1989) 21 ff.

[132] In this connection, when E. Birnbaum ("The Place of Judaism" cit. 85–90) maintains that Philo presents contradictory ideas on the question of vision and attributes these contradictions to aspects which are external to Philonic theorization, such as the

Comparison with Parallel Passages

In view of the preceding analysis, let us return to *De Deo*, seeking to make a comparison between this work and parallel Philonic passages: *Abr.* 119–132 and *QG* IV 1–2; IV 30, for *Gen.* 18. 1; *QE* II 68 for *Ex* 25. 22.

Let us examine *De Abrahamo* in detail. In section 113, the theme of changes in perception of the vision that Sarah has of the three men is introduced. When her disposition is different, these no longer have ὁμοίαν φαντασίαν: they have a more venerable appearance, one proper to prophets or angels whose πνευματικὴ καὶ ψυχοειδής οὐσία has taken on a human form. In section 107 too, the travellers mentioned have a nature that is more similar to God's and have disguised their nature ὡς ἄνδρες. The story recounted is of a literal type and so the figures are very concrete. The question of metaphorization and of the appearance of the vision concerns the human nature of the travellers and not their divine nature. There is no mention of powers. The reference to Sarah's doubts about her vision recalls the passage concerning the way that the vision passed from seeing one to seeing three. Moreover, in section 115, the three men are termed ἄγγελοι [...] ἱεραὶ καὶ θεῖαι φύσεις, ὑποδιάκονοι καὶ ὕπαρχοι τοῦ πρώτου θεοῦ, δι' ὧν [...] διαγγέλει.

Here, it seems that these are autonomous figures, not divine ways of being or human ways of knowing, but intermediaries of God, envoys of His, who have appeared in a human semblance. Without really eating or drinking, they gave the impression of eating and drinking; although they did not actually have a body, they took on a bodily form.

In section 119, an allegorical interpretation of the biblical passages is introduced, passages which are in the foregoing text, interpreted literally: when the soul is illuminated by God and pervaded by noetic light, it perceives a triple vision of a single object—the object itself in its real form, plus the 'shadows' which radiate from it. The fact that the powers are not separate from God, which is repeated in sections 131–132, where the scriptural evidence is based on a linguistic analysis

---

exegetic context, different traditions in reference, the literary genre, or the author's interlocutors, in my opinion she is focussing on the question of God's visibility and knowability, much more than on human levels of knowledge. Significantly, amongst the possible sources and references for Philo's arguments, the Platonic passages she cites are those relating to the good and the vision of the intelligible. We also find references to Speusippus and Eudorus. The passages chosen stress the limited nature of the vision, the impossibility of contemplating the Being in all His glory.

of the verse, is explicitly stated. The appearance of three is our way of perceiving and this is how the explanation in *De Abrahamo* seems to differ from that of *De Deo* i.e. the first substantial difference between the two texts occurs here. In section 122, the Being in the middle, flanked by the two powers, sometimes gives the thought perceiving the vision the impression that there is one entity, sometimes three. In the first case, the person is experiencing a pure vision of the unmixed Being, "which is free from mixture and complexity, and being self-contained needs nothing more"; in the second case the person is not yet an initiate; he has not yet reached a high level, and sees the Being via His actions. It is clearly stated that these different visions are related to the level of the human seeing the vision. We are far from a presentation like the one in *De Deo*, where God appears to be autonomous from the powers. So here there is another big difference between *De Abrahamo* and our fragment, although it is the perspective which differs.

Isaiah's vision reveals the knowledge of a person not yet initiated, unable to perceive the Being in its oneness and simplicity; in this context, Abraham's knowledge is also at a lower level. However, here we can see a significant difference between the texts we are examining. A third difference can be found in the way the two powers—the creative and the royal powers, which are the most ancient and the closest to the Being—are depicted. It is assumed that other powers exist, which do not appear in *De Deo*, although Philo mentions them in other texts.

Let us now look at the other parallel passage *QG* IV 2: for those who can see, it is possible for the one to be three and the three, one. To the human intellect, three people appear, because our vision is not sharp enough to see He who is above the powers. "Secundum rationem supernam" the Being <u>is</u> one, but to the human intellect, this one appears to be three. Here, it is not that the vision alternates between the appearance of one and the appearance of three entities: we find the constant appearance of three entities, although we know that it is one alone. A little further on, the text clarifies that two visions are actually happening at the same time: "Unica visio apparet ei sicut trinitas et trinitas velut unitas". The two apparitions occur contemporaneously and the seer is attracted first to one, then to the other, in such a way that he cannot tell which is the truer perception. When one looks at God, the powers that exist together with Him appear at the same time: the intellect, which is incapable of grasping the One in his oneness perceives three, and the single vision appears as three and the three as one. The intellect perceives the vision of God that comes with the two powers, and that of three travellers. We find here, as in *De Abrahamo*, the two-fold vision, together with a clarification that it is a vision conditioned by the limitations of the human intellect. Moreover, here too, there is mention of higher powers, thus presupposing the existence of other powers.

Further on, the text affirms that the seer has focused on one of the two ways in which he has seen God. The attention here, rather than being on God in His oneness and God together with the powers, is focussed on the vision of God as alternative to the three men. Given that the latter refers to the aspects of communication and love for the human race, the aspect of actions carried out by the powers with regard to man is accentuated. The aspects highlighted would seem to be: God-Being versus God-acting. So there are some differences when we compare the argument to the one set forth in *De Abrahamo*. It almost seems that one of the two apparitions appears as Deus and the other as Dominus, that either one or the other of the powers appears i.e. one or the other of the two aspects is highlighted. Moreover, it seems that one of the concerns is to emphasize an attitude of reverence and devotion towards God and mankind i.e. the need for virtuous acts directed both upwards and horizontally, towards man. Here, the text is very different from both *De Abrahamo* and *De Deo*.

Finally, let us consider the *QG* IV 30 passage: the difference of this vision is due to the level of virtue of the seer. Three individuals appear to Abraham at midday, two to Lot in the evening. This is the difference between being perfect and being on the path to perfection. Those who are perfect see a triad, which is full, and devoid of emptiness; the 'man of progress' sees a divided duality. The former perceives the Father, who is in the middle, assisted by the two powers; the latter sees the two powers without the Father appearing.

While the texts of *De Abrahamo* and *Quaestiones in Genesim* that we have analysed regard *Gen*. 18. 1–2, *Ex*. 25. 22, is analysed in *QE* II 68,[133] a passage in which it is stated that there exist other powers flanking the creative and royal ones. Above the cherubim, and in the midst of them, is found "vox et verbum, et supra illud Dicens". We thus have a depiction at the topmost point of which is He who is the one and the beginning: "Primus est [Ens] ille, qui major [natu] est etiam uno, vel

[133] See also *Her.* 166 and *Fug.* 101 where the λόγος, εἰκὼν θεοῦ, πρεσβύτατος τῶν νοητῶν ἁπάντων is said ἡνίοχος of the powers.

unico, et principio". Then, the *logos*, "Entis verbum, seminativa entium vera essentia". The powers derive from the Being, elsewhere called Dicens, and from the *logos*. The system described is thus very much more rigid than that in *De Deo*. God, the *logos* and the powers seem to be separate beings, each with their own autonomy. The relationship between the image of God and the powers and the capacities of the seer is missing.

Conclusion

Can we actually perceive any interpretative analogies in the various works?

To a certain extent, some ideas in *De Deo* are definitely similar to interpretations found in other texts. However, the relationship between the vision of the powers and the differing moral and noetic levels of the perceiver is more blurry. In other words, the powers are presented more as an aspect of ways God has of acting, manifestations of God, rather than in terms of the stage reached on the path to perfection. Only in connection with Abraham is the vision of the three men set in relation to Abraham's capacity to perceive in terms of one or three. It should be pointed out that here we are speaking of visions: Isaiah saw the seraphim, Abraham saw the three men; the question is not how God acts in the world, but how God appears to those who see Him. In *De Mutatione*, God is seen as κύριος or as θεός, or as both: after a first stage at which people see the power κύριος, there is a second stage at which they see the creative power. Those who reach the end of the path, the perfect ones, will perceive the Being as Lord and God at the same time. In the case of Isaiah, it could be hypothesized that Isaiah saw θεός and κύριος because, being a prophet, he had reached a certain level of knowledge, which is not, however, necessarily the highest one. Isaiah saw the two powers and God in the middle of them at the same time. One might wonder, however, whether his vision, which led him to contemplate not one or another aspect of the divinity, but God together with his powers, did not also lead him to see God as one, or whether he had remained attached to a vision of God as consisting of three. Abraham—as we have seen—saw differently depending on his attitude and the level he had reached. He saw He who is, plus two shadows emanating from Him, together perceived sometimes as one and sometimes as three. Isaiah, perhaps, perceived God and the two powers as separate. There is no mention of progression of knowledge, but one can conjecture that Isaiah, as he is presented, was at a level of the path which approaches perfection. This opens onto the subject of prophesy and the degree of perfection of a prophet such as Isaiah.

It is also possible that we have misunderstood the point of the argument. Perhaps an exegetic constriction is at work here or this text was not written by Philo. However, if we take it that the text is genuine, why is Philo interpreting *Isaiah* 6? Normally, Philo's attention is focussed on the *Pentateuch.* Only the story of Anna in the *book of Samuel* is explained in detail. Otherwise, the prophets are only quoted every so often. In this perspective, one might wonder whether, if we accept that this text was written by Philo, there is a particular reason for quoting Isaiah instead of using solely *Genesis* and *Exodus*. Does this provide proof for the opinion that the text is not authentic (Philo would not have quoted *Isaiah*) or is there perhaps a specific reason for his decision to comment on this passage? In *Isaiah* the seraphim appear, via which the text connects the creative functions up to the ordering-punitive functions: the idea of fire which does not destroy the elements, but orders them. *Isaiah* is thus the basic text, the bridge which connects the theory of powers in all its ramifications with the biblical text. Philo's use of a prophetic text which might seem unusual is thus apparently a function of the need to provide his theory with biblical support. It would therefore seem to be an indispensable step.

CHAPTER FIVE

ROLES AND FIGURES OF MEDIATION

Demonology in Philo

The question of whether separate figures, endowed with a mediating role, do exist recurs in connection with the existence of daemons and angels. The problem is: can we speak of a demonology in Philo i.e. are there intermediate beings set between God and men or between powers and men, a hierarchy of figures which mediate between the upper and lower spheres? In this connection certain questions arise.

1) Are daemons and angels figures which are different from souls?

As souls inclined towards goodness and souls attracted by evil do exist, can we speak of good angels and bad angels, good daemons and bad daemons or are the latter punitive figures, an instrument of divine will? In other words, are we dealing with autonomous beings with their own free will or are they always intermediaries with good as their aim?

3) If the angels are souls to whom tasks of mediation are assigned, who are the helpers that collaborate with God in the creation of mankind?[1]

The critics have pondered on these problems, providing responses set within a more overall interpretation of Philo's arguments in its relationships with Middle Platonism and with the coeval Judaic literature. Thus Dillon[2] and Moreschini[3] have read Philo's texts on the subject—and, in particular, one extremely controversial passage from *De Gigantibus*—in parallel with Middle Platonic texts, and Wolfson[4] has identified analogies with Enochic literature. Although Wolfson and Dillon[5] (albeit from a rather cautious position) answer that there is indeed a demonology

[1] The reference is to the passage of *Gen.* 1.26.

[2] J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* cit. 173–174 asserts that in Philo an angelology and a demonology of a Middle Platonic type exist.

[3] C. Moreschini, "La demonologia medioplatonica e le Metamorfosi di Apuleio", *Maia* XVII (1965) 30–46, in partic. 35.

[4] H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* cit. I 383–384.

[5] J. Dillon, "Philo's Doctrine of Angels" in D. Winston – J. Dillon, *Two Treatises* cit. 197–216 maintains that, in *Gig.* 6, there exists a demonology very similar to that of the Middle Platonic version (197–198).

in Philo, Nikiprowetzky[6] and, again Dillon, in a subsequent article,[7] introduce a series of fine distinctions and provide a glimpse of an extremely elaborate system.

In my opinion, rather than beings which mediate between God and men, it would probably be preferable to speak of mediatory roles, aiming to overcome the problem of the unbridgeable gap that divides the two poles of the relationship. I hold that the answer to the initial question as to whether mediating beings actually exist is not univocal. In my opinion, unlike Dillon[8] seems to suggest, there are no metaphysical intermediaries. The powers are not mediatory entities[9] and neither is the *logos*, the first of the powers, the most ancient and most venerable. Instead, mediation appears in the cosmic sphere at the level of creation, where what are perhaps the only true mediatory figures act, the helpers of *Opif.* 72–75, which I shall discuss below. As concerns the angels, which appear a number of times in the text, I think that, at least in part, Nikiprowetzsky is right when he says that the angels are introduced mainly so as to avoid distancing the argument from the biblical text.[10] However, an allegorical meaning can easily be read into them. The interlocutor is God himself,[11] or the powers. So

---

[6] V. Nikiprowetzky, "Sur une lecture démonologique de Philon d'Alexandrie" in Id., *Études Philoniennes* (Paris, 1996) 217–242.

[7] J. Dillon, "Philo's Doctrine of Angels" cit., in partic. 197–198. In this article, Dillon revises many of his previous positions in the light of Nikiprowetzky's theories.

[8] *The Middle Platonists* cit., 169. A comparison between Philo's exegesis of *Gen.* 6.1–4 and the *Book of Jubilees* and the tradition of Henoch is drawn by J. P. Martin, "Alegoría de Filón sobre los ángeles que miraron con deseo a las hijas de los hombres", *Circe* 7 (2002) 261–282.

[9] If we wish to speak of powers as intermediaries, we have to consider them from the point of view of human knowledge, not from God's side. In other words, the powers are not mediating beings, something which would be in contrast with monotheism. They are forms of divine manifestation. One can, therefore, speak in terms of intermediaries only in the sense that they constitute the object of an intermediate consciousness: compared with the unknowability of the divine, the powers—which are also unknowable—are, however, a form of approach to God. See C. Termini, *Le Potenze di Dio. Studio su δύναμις in Filone di Alessandria*, Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum, 71 (Roma 2000), 233: «Δύναμις appartiene al linguaggio della rivelazione, non della mediazione».

[10] See V. Nikiprowetzky, "Note sur l'interprétation littérale de la loi et sur l'angélologie chez Philon d'Alexandrie" in Id. *Études philoniennes* cit. 133–143, in partic. 140.

[11] Cf. *Somn.* I 232: "To the souls indeed which are incorporeal and are occupied in His worship it is likely that He should reveal Himself as He is, conversing with them as friend with friends; but to souls which are still in a body, giving Himself the likeness of angels, not altering His own nature, for He is unchangeable"; *Somn.* I 238: "Why,

are the three figures shown to Abraham,[12] the angel which appeared to Agar,[13] the personage who struggles with Jacob. The angels in the controversial passage are not ontologically separate beings as much as souls gifted with particular functions. Nikiprowetzsky correctly maintains that at *Gig.* 6 "God's angels" designates human souls, and the ἄγγελοι πονεροί are souls attracted by the passions. This does not imply that souls cannot have a mediating role. There exist souls which take on this role in the relationship between God and men, without being, for this reason, ontologically separate figures and even less fallen angels, as they are described in the *Book of Jubilees* or by Enochic literature. The reference is more properly Platonic: there are souls which have a mediating role, just as there are some which will never descend into bodies and others which, having done so, will ascend from them again: the philosophers.

The Angels of God and the Daughters of Men

The text the discussion starts out from is a passage from *De Gigantibus* which comments on *Gen.* 6.2:

> 'And when the angels of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, they took to themselves wives from all, those whom they chose' (*Gen.* VI.2). It is Moses' custom to give the name of angels to those whom other philosophers call demons (or spirits), souls that is which fly and hover in the air. And let no one suppose that what is here said is a myth. For the universe must needs be filled through and through with life, and each of its primary elementary divisions contains the forms of life which are akin and suited to it. The earth has the creatures of the land, the sea and the rivers those that live in the water, fire the fire-born, which are said to be found especially in Macedonia, and heaven has the stars. For the stars are souls divine and without blemish throughout, and therefore as each of them is mind in its purest form, they move in the line most akin to mind—the circle.

---

then do we wonder any longer at His assuming the likeness of angels, seeing that for the succour of those that are in need He assumes that of men?"

[12] Cf. *Abr.* 107 ff.

[13] Cf. *Somn.* I 240.

> And so the other element, the air, must needs be filled with living beings, though indeed they are invisible to us, since even the air itself is not visible to our senses.[14]

The reference to *Timaeus* is clear and immediate (39e–40a).[15] The explanation of the presence of animated beings in every sphere of reality is reminiscent of chapter VIII of *De deo Socratis* by Apuleius.[16] Out of the necessity for the air to be inhabited—it would be unconceivable that it should be the only element which lacked animated beings—Philo goes on to distinguish the different types of souls:[17]

> Now some of the souls have descended into bodies, but others have never designed to be brought into union with any of the parts of earth. They are consecrated and devoted to the service of the Father and Creator whose wont it is to employ them as ministers and helpers, to have charge and care of mortal man. But the others descending into the body as though into a stream have sometimes been caught in the swirl of its rushing torrent and swallowed up thereby, at other times have been able to stem the current, have risen to the surface and then soared upwards back to the place from whence they came. These last, then, are the souls of those who have given themselves to genuine philosophy [...]. But the souls which have sunk beneath the stream, are the souls of the others who have held no count of wisdom.[18]

The souls have made different choices: some have disdained bodily status,[19] whilst others have chosen it for a short time. Yet others have completely immersed themselves in it. We are dealing with entities of the same type, which have acted in different ways, thereby changing their function.[20] Those who are the Father's assistants, who are assigned

---

[14] *Gig.* 6–8. A detailed analysis of the passage, from the point of view of the development of the reasoning and the form of the exegesis is conducted by P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria* cit. 104 ff.

[15] Cf. also *Epinomides* 984d, in which, after the stars, which are composed of ether, one also has to consider the daemons, composed of air, which have mediatory functions.

[16] Cf. Dillon, "Philo's Doctrine of Angels" cit., 199.

[17] Cf. *Somn.* I 135: "The air is the abode of incorporeal souls, since it seemed good to their Maker to fill all parts of the universe with living beings. He set land-animals on the earth, aquatic creatures in the seas and the rivers, and in heaven the stars, each of which is said to be not a living creature only but mind of the purest kind through and through; and therefore in air also, the remaining section of the universe, living creatures exist".

[18] *Gig.* 12–15.

[19] "For souls that are free from flesh and body spend their days in the theatre of the universe and with a joy that none can hinder see and hear things divine, which they have desired with love insatiable." (*Gig.* 31). See also *Conf.* 177.

[20] Cf. H. W. Attridge, *Philo and John* cit. 106.

the task of acting as mediators, are thus not separate figures, ontologically different from the other souls.

Angels and Daemons

> So if you realize that souls and demons and angels are but different names for the same one underlying object, you will cast from you that most grievous burden, the fear of demons or superstition. The common usage of men is to give the name of demon to bad and good demons alike, and the name of soul to good and bad souls. And so, too, you also will not go wrong if you reckon as angels, not only those who are worthy of the name, who are as ambassadors backwords and forwards between men and God and are rendered sacred and inviolate by reason of that glorious and blameless ministry, but also those who are unholy and unworthy of the title.[21]

Reality is one and one only, whatever the term used to designate it. If we can understand this fact, we can overcome superstition. But in what exactly does "superstition" (*deisidaimonia*) consist? In believing that souls, daemons and angels are different entities or in holding that there are good daemons and bad daemons, angels worthy of their name and unworthy angels? The following passage introduces further doubts:

> I have as witness to my argument the words of the Psalmist, where in one of the psalms we read 'He sent out upon them the anger of His wrath, wrath and anger and affliction, a mission by evil angels' (*Ps.* 77.49). These are the evil ones who, cloaking themselves under the name of angels, know not the daughters of right reason, the sciences and virtues, but court the pleasures which are born of men, pleasures mortal as their parents—pleasures endowed not with the true beauty, which the mind alone can discern, but with false comeliness, by which the senses are deceived.[22]

Here, Philo seems to admit the existence of bad angels. However, immediately afterwards, he says that the name used is not the proper one; it is a mask. An improper name is used to designate evil beings who have chosen to give precedence to pleasures. As is clarified in *Gig.* 18, the angels do not take all the "daughters" of men, but "some take the pleasures of sight, others those of hearing, others again those of palate and the belly, or the sex".

[21] *Gig.* 20.
[22] *Gig.* 17.

Different choices are made, focusing on different forms of pleasure but, in any case, the path is a downward one. Indeed, "Among such as these then it is impossible that the spirit of God should dwell and make for ever its habitation".[23]

It would thus seem that this path has no connection with God's emissaries, and it is precisely in connection with these considerations that Wolfson attributes to Philo the concept of fallen angels, rebel ministers who have become Satan. As Nikiprowetsky[24] has shown, this reference cannot be found in Philo. The problem, however, still remains, and all the more so because it is precisely Philo who uses the term "angels" in this context instead of the name "sons of God", which is found in the *Septuagint* version.[25]

In my opinion, once we have taken it that souls, daemons and angels are the same thing under different names, what Philo is trying to say is that the different names are applicable to souls that have made different choices. So they are not ontologically different beings, but beings which, according to their choices, have taken on different roles. The ones who serve the Father and act as his assistants are called angels.[26] The union of angels with the daughters of men is a task assigned by

[23] *Gig.* 19.

[24] See Nikiprowetzky, "Sur une lecture démonologique" cit. 217–242.

[25] It seems to be unarguable that some of God's angels have chosen to follow the path of evil, and the following quotation from *Psalms* alluding to wicked angels would seem to confirm this interpretation. The difference between the ideas of punishing angels and evil angels is highlighted by Dillon, who speaks of punitive intermediaries, those of God's emissaries who have been assigned the task of inflicting punishment. Far from being evil, these ministers of God have positive functions, reminding and exhorting people to be good, and driving evil away. Speaking of such figures, Dillon ("Philo's doctrine of angels" 203) quotes a passage from *Fug. 66* relating to the inappropriateness of God's punishing directly. Dillon then refers to some passages relating to punitive powers (*Conf.* 171; *Sacr.* 132; *Spec.* I 307) and likens the function of the intermediaries we are discussing here to the entities created in heaven to whom God has given powers, "but these certainly do not mean full autonomy" cited in *Opif.* 46. It is thus clear that, here, Dillon is referring to powers and celestial beings. Instead, for Nikiprowetzy, the beings in question are souls which have chosen the path of evil. In my opinion, he very rightly considers angels and human souls to be in the same category. However, he maintains that there are ἄγγελοι πονεροί which are ψυχαὶ πονεραί, i.e. wicked souls (cf. "Sur une lecture démologique" cit., 233). The name "angels" is supposedly given as an alternative term to souls who have chosen the path of evil as, in Philo, the term "sons of God" always refers to good beings (*ibid.* 220). Philo would not have wanted to use this term for beings that had chosen the path of pleasures. Nikiprowetsky's explanation does, however, leave one contradiction unresolved: how can beings who choose the path of evil be called angels if evil angels do not exist?

[26] The function of the angels as God's servants is stressed in *Fug.* 212; *Somn.* I 141, 189–190; *Abr.* 115; *Mos.* I 166; *Virt.* 74.

God: it is for this reason that his emissaries are called angels. The choice that they make amongst the "daughters of man" may be more or less negative: some souls may seek the higher pleasures, such as sight or hearing, others might go for the baser passions.[27] These are options upon which souls are allowed to decide, as they are given their freedom to choose which direction to take. This is an aspect that does not concern God, whereas it is He who has directed the angels to turn towards the daughters of men, the pleasures—only they must then know how to give them up. Some of them will choose the path of wisdom, but most of them will turn towards the pleasures.[28] "Nay, even over the reprobate hovers often of a sudden the vision of the excellent."[29] In other words, it is the souls who decide whether or not to come into contact with bodily existence and the form this contact shall take. Everyone is given the possibility of seeing the good and, to this purpose, it was necessary for God's emissaries to unite with the daughters of man, that is, the pleasures, to guarantee the possibility of choosing.[30] This, in my

[27] Some forms of bodily existence are necessary for people, who cannot do without it, "but we must reject with scorn the superfluities which kindle the lusts that with a single flameburst consume every good thing" (*Gig.* 35).

[28] Of the souls sent by God to unite with the daughters of men—souls which, as they were sent by God, were angels—some have known how to choose those of the daughters of man that were acceptable and then were able to leave them in order to turn towards good. These are God's men, priests and prophets or, at least, belonging to heaven, souls who are inclined towards acquiring knowledge. Those who chose earthly pleasures generated the giants, the symbol of abandoning one's own place, of abandoning reasoning to give oneself over to negativity, to opposition to God (Cf. *QG* II 82), to evil and to the passions. In *Gig.* 60–61 the distinction between men of the earth, of heaven and of God is described. Men of the earth are those who pursue bodily pleasures, men of heaven those who love to learn and are devoted to an art or a science, while men of God are priests and prophets who "have risen above the sphere of sense perception and have been translated into the world of the intelligible". The biblical reference which lies behind this explanation is *Gen*. 6.4 "the nephilim were on the earth in those days", a passage inserted between another two relating to the coming together of angels and daughters of men. The exegesis is therefore connected: the giants who were on earth in those days are men of the earth, those who in *Gig.* 17 have chosen the pleasures, are the same as those who in *QG* I 92 are called, even if improperly, "the sons of angels and women". In *Gig.* 65–66, in connection with the sons of the earth, there is an explicit reference to Nimrod and the giants: "For the lawgiver says 'he [Nimrod] began to be a giant on the earth' (*Gen.* 10.8), and his name means 'desertion'."

[29] *Gig.* 20.

[30] On the connection between human condition and pleasures, see A. M. Mazzanti, *L'uomo nella cultura religiosa* cit. 48: «la γένεσις come condizione caratterizzante l'uomo, necessariamente fa emergere l'ἡδονή per mezzo della quale si realizza anche il perpetuarsi generazionale.»

opinion, is the reason for which Philo alters the biblical text, speaking of angels rather than sons of God: he highlights the fact that they are envoys of God who carry out His will, and stresses the fact that they are free to make their own choices.

Using incorrect terminology, the masses speak of good angels and evil angels, but this is superstition. In *QG* I 92 it is asserted that Moses uses the term "giants" wrongly to refer to the sons of angels and women. If, in this case, *improprie usurpat* a name, why cannot the same happen for angels: *enim vero spiritualis est angelorum, substantia*? However, it happens that, sometimes, these beings take on a human form with specific aims, for example, to lie with women. Allegorically, the angels—envoys of God—temporarily take on the appearance of souls which have yet to make their choice: souls possibly ready to come together with the pleasures and generate giants i.e. sons of the earth. On the other hand, the *Bible* also sometimes calls the angels sons of God, as they are incorporeal, whereas Moses calls the virtuous *filios dei* and the wicked *corpora vel carnes.*[31]

Superstition consists, amongst other things, in thinking that souls, angels and daemons are ontologically different figures: that, in other words, God has created different beings instead of just one type of soul. Here we see the question, which was already tackled by Plato, of whether the choice made by souls is predetermined, which here, according to my interpretation, Philo is denying. According to Wolfson's perspective, if we wanted to give different names to the same being, we could use the term "angels" for God's emissaries, "souls" for those who are still in bodies or who have, in any case, descended into it and have not yet made a choice, and "daemons" for souls which have chosen the path of pleasure. However, this last name in not attributed to any being by Philo and this is no coincidence. Indeed, for Philo, the name "daemons" is equivalent to the term "angels", it just belongs to a different theoretical sphere: the former is a Platonic name, the latter a Biblical one.

If this interpretation is correct, the parallel drawn by Wolfson with the fallen angels of Enochic literature[32] does not prove particularly appropriate. Far from being rebel helpers, the wicked angels in Philo

[31] Cf. Nikiprowetzky, "Sur une lecture démonologique" cit. 220: *filii Dei* could not be souls which chose bodily existence; hence the need to call them angels even though the *Septuagint* speaks of sons of God.

[32] Cf. Wolfson *Philo* cit. I 383–385.

would thus be souls that are ontologically similar to the souls of men who have chosen wisdom or philosophy. The main field of reference for this theory can apparently be found in Middle Platonism rather than in the coeval Judaic literature. In particular, the relationship between souls and daemons can be found in Plutarch in *De genio Socratis* (593d–594a), where the souls that are no longer compelled to be reborn and are free from the body are daemons who take care of humans. The identification of communicative[33] and oracular functions and aspects of mediation and help provided to mankind which goes back to *Symposium* 202e can be found in Plutarch, in *De genio Socratis, De Iside et Osiride* and *De defectu oraculorum.*[34] In *De Iside et Osiride* (360e361b), a distinction is drawn between daemons according to the sorts of qualities they have, and it is clarified that there are good daemons, which protect men, but also dark and malevolent daemons. We have seen that wicked angels also appear in Philo, but this term can be interpreted in a number of ways. On the one hand, it designates evil intermediate beings, analogous to the malevolent daemons in Plutarch or the rebel angels. However, it seems to me that—as I said above—this hypothesis should be rejected. What we are dealing with would seem to be an improper term used to indicate souls that have chosen bodily existence.[35]

[33] Cf. P. Donini, "Socrate 'pitagorico' e medioplatonico", *Elenchos* XXIV (2. 2003) 333–359. This author brings out the importance of Pythagorism in Plutarch's daemonology (351–357).

[34] Cf. F. E. Brenk, "In the Light of the Moon: Demonology in the Early Imperial Period", in *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986) 2068–2145 (esp. 2117–2130); G. Sfameni Gasparro, "Daimon e Tyche nell'esperienza religiosa ellenistico: strutture ideologiche e pratiche culturali", in Ead., *Oracoli, Profeti, Sibille. Rivelazione e salvezza nel mondo antico* (Roma 2002) 255–301, esp. 256–270); D. Babut, "La doctrine démonologique dans le 'De genio Socratis' de Plutarque: cohérence et function", *L'Information Litteraire* 35 (1983) 201–205; Id., "Le dialogue de Plutarque 'Sur le démon de Socrate'. Essai d'interprétation", *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1984 (Supplément) 51–76 (reprinted in Id., *Parerga.* Choix d'articles de Daniel Babut (1974–1994), (Paris 1994) 405–430; F. E. Brenk, "The Origin and the Return of the Soul in Plutarch", in Id., *Relighting the Souls. Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion, and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Stuttgart 1998) 170–181; Y. Vernière, "Nature et fonctions des démons chez Plutarque", in J. Ries, *Anges et démons* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1989) 241–251; C. Moreschini, "La demonologia medio-platonica e le 'Metamorfosi' di Apuleio", *Maia* 17 (1965) 30–46 reprinted in *Apuleio e il platonismo* (Firenze 1978) 19–42.

[35] That it is a question of soul anchored to the bodies, fascinated by sensory pleasures, is also stressed by Winston and Dillon (*Two Treatises* cit. 237–238) although they do introduce doubts with regard to the thesis of *QE* I 23.

Other analogies can be found with various Middle Platonic texts: in particular, in Apuleius, a series of statements are reminiscent of themes in *De Gigantibus*. Underlying it is the common Platonic model. If soul, daemons and angels are different names used to designate the same reality considered from different points of view, when they perform different functions, they must, however, have basic features in common: they are invisible beings who live in the air and act as mediators between different realms of the real world. That there must necessarily exist beings that live in every sphere of the cosmos is similar to the condition Apuleius would later make, but there are also a lot of other aspects which are reminiscent, at least on the surface, of *De deo Socratis*. With regard to the elements, the regions of the cosmos and their inhabitants, Apuleius maintains that thinking that the air is inhabited by the birds is a mistake, because their flight does not take them beyond the peak of Mount Olympus. There is an immense mass of air which extends as far as the lowest circle of the moon, beyond which lie the higher regions of the ether.[36] Reason leads us to think that there must be specific living beings in the air and that they are neither composed of earth nor of fire. At this point, it is postulated that they have bodies that are half way between heaviness and lightness. The daemons, therefore, are corporeal beings, composed of a thin element, purer than air, which makes them invisible "unless God's will drives them to show themselves spontaneously". In Philo too—as we have seen—we find a division into areas inhabited by different beings, together with the idea of intermediate beings which live in the air (even if there is no mention of the area lying between ether and earth).[37] However, according to Philo, these are invisible beings which have no body and can, at most, enter others' bodies. "Those unbodied and blessed souls—are the host and people of God".[38]

In chapter VI, Apuleius clarifies that the daemons mediate between gods and men. They are the conveyors of prayers and divine gifts and they have predictive functions at times when they allow humans to

[36] Cf. *De deo Socratis* IX.

[37] Cf. also *Plant.* 14: in the air there are souls, some of which enter mortal bodies and which, after a certain number of revolutions then abandon them. Others, who are more divine, are not interested in having any place on earth, "but those of them that are purest are found in the highest reaches, even close to the ether".

[38] *Sacr.* 5. Cf. *Conf.* 174–176.

know their future. They are vehicles for the gods' words, but they can also cause dreams and vaticination to occur.

There are hostile gods and favourable gods, gods who persecute man and those who help him, and they have emotions and feelings. They are animated beings, endowed with rational faculties. Their life is eternal, yet their souls are subject to passions and their bodies are made of earth.[39]

The human soul too, both when it is still in the body and when it has abandoned the body, can be called a daemon. We thus have a three-part division closely resembling Philo's. A daemon may be:

– a human soul which is still immersed in the body
– a soul which has abandoned the body
– beings which have never had any contact with the body, such as Sleep or Love, or the daemons which protect individuals, like Socrates' daemon.

So daemons which act as guardians for individual people belong in the third category; they watch every human action and will be present after death as witnesses at whatever judgement the soul will have to undergo. They watch over the individual assigned to them and protect him. They condemn evil and approve of good. They provide guidance in uncertain situations and predictions during difficult situations. They can intervene by means of dreams, omens, or even directly to avert evils and promote good.[40]

Souls and Daemons

Above we have outlined a series of characteristics which also describe the souls Philo talks about. On the one hand we have the distinction deriving from Plato's writings between souls which may enter a body and souls which refrain from doing so, on the other, the idea of intermediate beings which act directly upon the lives of individuals by protecting and/or helping them and preventing evil. Their intervention may take the form of dreams or signs, of a "a sort of voice", as in the case of Socrates' daemon, or of direct action. All this re-evokes the interventions

[39] Cf. *De deo Socratis* XIII.
[40] Cf. *De deo Socratis* XVI.

of angels who "met" Agar,[41] who stopped Balaam,[42] who appeared to Jacob in a dream,[43] according to Philo's interpretation.

The mediating action of the angels, ambassadors and messengers conveying good tidings to the subjects, the conveyors of the needs of His subordinates to the sovereign, is evoked in *Plant.* 14.[44] In *Somn* I 140–141, some souls:

> are of perfect purity and excellence, gifted with a higher and diviner temper, that have never felt any craving after the things of earth, but are viceroys of the Ruler of the universe, ears and eyes, so to speak, of the great king, beholding and hearing all things.[45] These are called 'demons' by the other philosophers, but the sacred record is wont to call them 'angels' or messengers, employing an apter title, for they both convey the biddings of the Father to His children and report the children's need to their Father.

The image of angels going up and down the ladder in Jacob's dream aims to show precisely this mediating function. God has no need of informers to come to him and tell him what is happening in the world, but it is helpful for mortals to avail themselves of

> the services of 'words' acting on our behalf as mediators, so great is our awe and shuddering dread of the universal Monarch and the exceeding might of His sovereignty.[46]

The function of mediation is thus determined by a need arising at one of the two poles; it is not an absolute necessity. Intermediaries carry out a consoling function, which coexists—under certain circumstances—with a punishing[47] function. All these functions are, in any case, governed by God. In addition to the *Symposium* (203a), we can mention at this point *Epinomides* (985a), where the daemons are an air-dwelling species with the functions of interpreters, to whom we should pray, to express our

[41] *QG.* III 26–27.
[42] *Mos.* I 273.
[43] *Somn.* I 132 ff.
[44] "These are the purest spirits of all, whom Greek philosophers call heroes, but whom Moses, employing a well chosen name, entitles 'angels', for they go on embassies bearing tidings from the great Ruler to His subjects of the boons which He sends them, and reporting to the Monarch what His subjects are in need of".
[45] Cf. [Aristotele], *De mundo* 398a21 = Apuleius, *De mundo,* 347. 7–8 "the king's ears, the emperor's eyes".
[46] *Somn* I 142.
[47] Cf. *Conf.* 182.

gratitude for their favourable mediation. They know the human soul down to its very depths, and share human suffering.

Mediating Roles

From what has been said up to now it emerges that there are mediating roles filled by angels, who are souls in the service of God. They cannot be said to be divine figures or, in any case, superior or autonomous intermediaries. This question arises in connection with the creation of the world. In *Opif.* 74–75, Philo is seeking to explain the plural verb form in the biblical phrase "Let us make man". Was more than one figure perhaps required to create mankind?

> Now for God the universal Father it was highly appropriate to make the virtuous beings on his own because of their family relationship with him, and in the case of the indifferent beings it was not alien to him to do so, since these too have no part in the wickedness that is hateful to him. In the case of the mixed natures, however, it was partly appropriate and partly inappropriate [. . .]. It is only in the case of the genesis of the human being that he states that God said let us make, which reveals the enlistment of others as collaborators, so that whenever the human being acts rightly in decisions and actions that are beyond reproach, these can be assigned to God's account as universal Director, whereas in the case of their opposite they can be attributed to others who are subordinate to him. After all, it must be the case that the Father is blameless of evil in his offspring, and both wickedness and wicked activities are certainly something evil.

Timaeus 42d–e immediately springs to mind, where the demiurge, in order to avoid becoming the cause of evils, gives the young gods the task of modelling human bodies and "whatever else needed to be added to the human soul". The interpretation of the passage from Philo that first comes to mind is connected with the notion of powers. However, we could not thus explain the specificity of the formation of man. In the creation of heaven, earth and animals, God created directly. Only man required the intervention of collaborators. These are said to be συνεργήσαντες; there is mention of σύμραξις. The term "power" does not appear and, on the other hand, the whole world was created by means of the creative power. So this would be a question of helpers other than powers by means of which the rest of creation took place. Moreover, speaking of powers in terms of helpers implies that the powers are hypostatized, an idea that they are separate. Again, at *Mut.*

29–31, after having explicitly stated that all things were created by means of the creating power, it is maintained that the human soul was not forged by God alone: it is for this reason that we find the words "Let us make man after our likeness" so that man could appear to be the work of others if he came out badly. It therefore seems plausible that the reference is to another type of collaborator. In fact, the interpretation remains open.[48] If we consider *Fug*. 70, the plural "Let us make" is interpreted as God's words to the powers

> Therefore God deemed it necessary to assign the creation of evil things to other makers, reserving that of good things to Himself alone.

The creation of a negative part in man, a part which is necessary to guarantee the possibility of choice, partially answers the question: what need does God have of intermediaries? In an absolute sense, He has absolutely no need at all of them; the angels are not there to fulfil a divine need—as we have seen—but a human one. Humans, who are infinitely distant from perfection, cannot cope with the power of God, they cannot tackle a direct relationship. Hence the presence of mediators to ensure that the relationship exists. The question of man's relationship with God, which appears a number of times in the *Bible* and which is also taken up by Philo, is reintroduced here: you can never see God face to face. Even God's word often requires an intermediary-interpreter: the prophets, or Moses.[49]

---

[48] In *Conf.* 168–175 the question is posed again, and analyzed in connection with other biblical passages which seem to postulate a plurality of Gods. After having stressed that, as there is only one God, He will necessarily be the only maker and also the only father and master, it is then clarified that "God is one, but He has around Him numberless Potencies, which all assist and protect created being [...]. Through these Potencies the incorporeal and intelligible world was framed [....]. There is, too, in the air a sacred company of unbodied souls, commonly called angels in the inspired pages, who wait upon these heavenly powers. So the whole army composed of the several contingents, each marshalled in their proper ranks, have as their business to serve and minister to the word of the Captain who thus marshalled them, and so to follow His leadership as right and the law of service demand. [....] Now the King may fitly hold converse with his powers and employ them to serve in matters which should not be consummated by God alone" (*Conf.* 171–175).

We find here a clear distinction between powers and angels, which is also found at *Spec.* 1 66, where there is mention of angels who serve powers, incorporeal souls of a noetic nature. Instead, in other texts, we find an overlap between angels and powers: at *De Deo 3*, for example, God manifests himself to Abraham at Mamre with "His powers, the heads of armies and archangels." On the relationship between angels and powers, cf. C. Termini, op. cit., 374.

[49] In *Somn* I 143 the role of the mediatory word of Moses is explicitly likened to the function of the angels. "It was our attainment of a conception of this that once made

However, on some occasions, people have directly heard the word of God: for example, on Sinai.[50] So, sometimes, mediation proved to be unnecessary: thus it proved in God's encounters with Moses, Abraham, Jacob, and other key personages, even if it was in the only possible form in which His powers could be seen. It is stressed that the intermediaries are not needed by God; it is men who need angels. There is solely one case in which there seems to have been an ontological need for collaborators, even if connected with the human condition, and that was the formation of men in the whole of their complex entirety. As they are two-fold in nature, they imply a dualism in creation: it is ontologically impossible—or, at least, inappropriate—that perfection should create evil. Negativity permeates the whole world; however, we do have a hiatus as far as human nature is concerned, a new dimension marked out by the introduction of beings which have the specific function of forging mankind.[51] In other words, if the world was created by God by means of His powers, and these can shape imperfection, amongst other things, since the world is imperfect, only the negativity inherent in man requires a special action, the work of beings who, without being independent, are actually separate from God. There is, therefore, a difference between forms of imperfection. For the creation of beings who are subject to evil, specific and autonomous figures are required, even if these are inferior.

us address to one of those mediators the entreaty: 'Speak thou to us, and let not God speak to us, lest haply we die (*Ex.* 20.19). For should He, without employing ministers, hold out to us with His own hand, I do not say chastisements, but even benefits unmixed and exceeding great, we are incapable of receiving them. Cf. also *Gig.* 54, in which Moses entering the darkness, "learns the secrets of the most holy mysteries. There he becomes not only one of the congregation of the initiated, but also the hierophant and teacher of divine rites, which he will impart to those whose ears are purified."

[50] Cf. Wolfson, *Philo* cit. II 38 ff.

[51] Cf. A. M. Mazzanti, *L'uomo nella cultura religiosa* cit. 12–16.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SNAKE AND THE HORSEMAN—PLEASURE AND *SOPHROSYNE* IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

The Ambivalence of the Snake

The two-sided nature of humans, the copresence of divine elements and negativity within them, is clearly reflected in the choices they make in life. There are various different types of life men can lead: a contemplative life, a political life, a poietic life which are not reciprocally exclusive. So the true choice does not consist in what type of activity to pursue, but rather in how to make it compatible with the virtues. Thus the Therapeutae and the Essenes, the Patriarchs and kings, the Levites and common mortals have God and His law as a reference. In every waking moment, the complexity of human nature sets individuals before a forking path: we can take the road of virtue and self mastery or, instead, pursue egoistical interests and abandon ourselves to pleasure. This is symbolized by the snake, which already existed in Paradise i.e. at the very beginning of Adam and Eve's lives. The snake alternately constitutes either a means of enriching one's knowledge, an element that mediates between intellect and sensation allowing these to express themselves, or a source of transgression and excess. So all individuals on earth can make an ethical choice at any time, whatever the activity they have previously carried out. All they need to do is opt for temperance and self-mastery, comply with God's commandments and cope with the pangs of desire and the pleasure-snake.

The snakes Philo speaks of are of four types: there is the snake that lived with Adam and Eve in Paradise, Moses' bronze snake which cured the bites of the desert snakes, the Dan-snake, which is the symbol of rational judgement, and Moses' other snake, which turned into a rod when the patriarch was ranged against the Egyptian magicians. In all cases, the snake is a cunning and ambivalent creature which, depending on the context, features positive or negative connotations.

However, in some cases, it has both at the same time. Philo calls it by the three terms ὄφις, δράκων, ἑρπετόν. The use of different terms is perhaps not a coincidence and may have a precise significance. The animal is characterized by epithets which highlight its sinuosity, the movements of its coils, its cunning. *Leg.* II 53 follows in the wake of the *Genesis* text, which characterises this animal in the very same way ὄφις, and describes it as the most cunning of all creatures (φρονιμώτατος). The term used, which is quoted in the *Septuagint*, has echoes of *phronesis* and connotes positive characteristics, unlike *panourgia*, which appears in other passages, such as *Leg.* II 106, and which is also found in other literature, for example in Paul's *Second Letter to the Corinthians.*[1] The text of the *Massorah ʿarum* contains an ambiguity that the Greek is obliged to resolve using two adjectives.[2]

The context is represented by the nakedness of Adam and Eve who, in Philo, symbolize intellect and sensation. After an explanation of the different senses of the term 'naked', the text introduces the quotation from the *Bible* relating to the nakedness of our forebears: "And the two were naked, Adam and his wife". The intellect did not think, sensation did not feel: they were inactive, in a sort of 'vacuum', in a state preceding shamelessness (ἀναισχυντία) and modesty (αἰδώς), which are aspects connected with the ability to make moral judgements. Bare of thought and feeling, not yet aware of good and evil, Adam and Eve were free from the presumptuousness brought by knowledge; they did not feel shame.[3] "Here the mind is irrational and has no part as yet either in virtue or in vice".[4] Although, on the one hand, the absence of thought and sensation involves a corresponding detachment from

[1] 11. 3: ἐξηπάτησεν ἐν τῇ πανουργίᾳ. In *QG* I 31 Philo highlights the *sapientia* of the snake/serpent which, effectively, is said to be the most intelligent animal, but a creature thus designated to indicate the passion it symbolizes i.e. concupiscence amongst other things.

[2] M. Harl (*La Bible d'Alexandrie* (Cerf) 1. *La Genèse* cit. 107n.) observes that *phronimos* has a positive value, unlike the corresponding Hebrew term. Theodotion and Aquila read a pejorative meaning into the text, to the extent that they translate with *panourgos.*

[3] The interpreters read Adam and Eve's unawareness of their own nakedness and their awakening realization after the Fall in a variety of ways. Irenaeus (*Demonstratio Apostolica* 14), for example, reads into it an awakening of sexual desire; Origen, in his C*ontra Celsum* (IV 76 ff.) connects it with an awareness of the requirements of practical life which distract mortals from their contemplation of God. See M. Harl, "La prise de conscience de la nudité d'Adam", *Studia Patristica* 7. Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristilichen Literatur, 92 (1966) 486–495.

[4] *Leg.* II 64. Cf. *Leg.* II 70 "So long then as they are naked, the mind without self-exertion, the perceptive sense without perceiving, they have nothing shameful: but when they have begun to apprehend, they fall into shameful and wanton conduct, for they will be found often showing stillness and folly rather than healthy knowledge [...]; but when the mind is in the ascendant, the bodily sense is seen to have nothing to do and to be powerless to lay hold of any object of sense-perception".

the moral sphere it does, on the other, entail a lack of noetic power. The intellect on its own, separated from the sphere of the sensible world, is unable to know reality; sensation, anchored to what is purely sensible, cannot gain access to the noetic plane. Only in the union of Adam and Eve, intellect plus sensation, can knowledge be gained. Due to its contact with sensation, the intellect was able to fill its original emptiness with content.

> There was a time when Mind neither had sense-perception, nor held converse with it, but a great gulf divided it from associated interdependent things. Rather was it then like the solitary ungregarious animals. At that time it formed a class by itself; it had no contact with body, no all-collecting instrument in its grasp wherewith to bring into its power the external objects of sense. It was blind, incapable.[5]

Without the contribution of the senses, the intellect is—as it were—amputated, devoid of any possibility of knowing, and at the same time bodies have no possibility of being known. The intellect is devoid of sensation and thus, in a way, cleft,[6] incomplete.

> God then, wishing to provide the Mind with perception of material as well as immaterial things, thought to complete the soul by weaving into the part first made the other section, which he called by the general name of "woman" and the proper name of "Eve", thus symbolizing sense.[7]

Immediately the intellect "like one enlightened by the flash of the sun's beam" received everything; it was struck by the elaborateness and multiplicity of the new world which unclosed and which, up to then, it had never even dreamed of. Fascinated, as if inebriated, it turned towards this multi-hued reality. Hence knowledge, but hence error too. Adam, strong from his meeting with Eve, who has opened up to him a wonderful world of sensible knowledge heretofore unknown to the intellect,

[5] *Cher.* 58.

[6] On intellect-sensation/male-female polarities, see R. A. Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden 1970) 15–50; R. Radice, "Il femminile come concetto allegorico", *Ricerche storico-bibliche* 6 (1994) 167–177; Cf. also D. Sly, *Philo's Perception of Women* (Georgia 1990); S. L. Mattila, "Wisdom, Sense Perception, Nature and Philo's Gender Gradient", *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996), 103–129; A. Van Den Hoek, "Endowed with Reason or Glued to the Senses: Philo's Thoughts on Adam and Eve", in G. P. Luttikhuizen (ed.), *The Creation of Man and Woman. Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions* Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions, 3 (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000) 63–75.

[7] *Cher*. 60.

swells with pride; he thinks he knows everything and fails to acknowledge God's function.[8] The sin in Eden was the result of hubris.

The element which mediates between intellect and sensation is pleasure, symbolized by the snake,[9] the most cunning of all creatures on earth.

> Two things, mind and bodily sense, having already come into being, and these being in nakedness after the manner that has been set forth, it was necessary that there should be a third subsistence, namely pleasure, to bring both of them together to the apprehension of the objects of mental and of bodily perception. For neither could the mind apart from bodily sense apprehend an animal or a plant or a stone or a log or any bodily shape whatever, nor could the bodily sense apart from the mind maintain the act of perceiving.[10]

The need for intellect and sensation to meet so that knowledge can be had is stressed. At the same time, it is stated that, for the two to unite, a *tertium* is required, a mediator represented by the tie of love and desire (δεσμὸς τρίτος ἔρωτος καὶ ἐπιθυμίας), guided by pleasure, and symbolically referred to as 'snake'.[11]

One may wonder why intellect and sensation need the mediation of pleasure in order to come together.[12] Plato's *Symposium* (191d; 206b–207a) immediately springs to mind. Moreover, the relevant biblical text, *Gen.* 3. 1: "the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made" immediately follows the verse "The man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed". It follows, however, without the two verses in the *Septuagint* text being linked in any way.[13] It is Philo who introduces the connection. In the relationship established by love between sensation and intellect a strong Platonic influence is at work. This, however, radically changes direction when pleasure does not so much lead from love of beautiful bodies to beauty per se, but rather establishes a relationship between intellect and sensation, which

---

[8] Cf. *Cher*. 57–59. On the attribution of intellect and sensation to oneself instead of to God, see also *Leg.* III 198–199.

[9] Cf. *Agric*. 97; *Opif.* 157.

[10] *Leg.* II 71.

[11] Cf. *Leg.* II 72.

[12] On the relationship between pleasure and sensation see A. Le Boulluec, "La place des concepts philosophiques dans la réflexion de Philon sur le plaisir", in C. Lévy (ed.), *Philon d'Alexandrie et le langage de la philosophie* (Paris 1995) 129–152.

[13] M. Harl (*La Bible d'Alexandrie* 1. *La Genèse* cit. 106) points out that the Rahlfs edition separates *Genesis* 2. 25 and 3. 1. Instead, some ancient manuscripts connect the two verses.

cannot gain knowledge separately one from another. So, the path does not really lead to a fully noetic knowledge but, on the contrary, to a "filling" of the intellect—which is otherwise empty—with the contents of sensation. In other words, we have the image of a nakedness that is "clothed" as soon as pleasure intervenes to bring intellect and sensation together.[14]

Intellect, Sensation and Pleasure

Intellect, sensation and pleasure are thus essential stages in gaining knowledge and Philo presents them sequentially: however, the order is only a conceptual and potential one, since they are chronologically undifferentiated.

> The soul brings all together with herself, some parts in virtue of actual existence, others in virtue of the potentiality to arrive, even if they have not yet reached their consummation.[15]

At this point begins an explanation of why pleasure is likened to the snake, variegated, devious and varied in its approach (ποικίλη and πολύπλοκος). Just as the movement of the snake unwinding its many coils, complex and ever-changing, becomes the symbol of cunning and devious action, pleasure is multi-faceted, always seething beneath the surface in a ferment,[16] and presents itself in various guises: it may derive from sight, hearing, touch, taste or smell. Above all other pleasures, the most intense are those deriving from relationships with women, leading

[14] The sequence of verses by which the snake is introduced immediately after the statement that Adam and Eve were naked has also been pointed out by various other commentators, who interpret it in different ways. Thus, in *Bereshit Rabba* (XVIII. 6) one of the interpretations says that the snake "saw them engaged in their natural functions, he [the serpent] conceived a passion for her" (transl. by H. Freedman). Along the same lines, Rashi maintains that the continuity of the verses indicates that the snake's suggestion was prompted by its desire for Eve when he saw her lying with Adam. Instead Augustine makes a connection between the theme of nakedness and temptation.

[15] *Leg.* II 73.

[16] Against the Epicurean theory of pleasures see *Leg.* III 160: "pleasure does not belong to the category of things becalmed and stationary, but to that of things moving and full of turmoil. For as the flame is in movement, so, not unlike a blazing thing, passion moving in the soul does not suffer it to be calm. Thus the prophet does not agree with those who say that pleasure is tranquil". On possible connections between the idea of pleasure in Philo's writings and Epicurean thought, see A. P. Booth, "The Voice of the Serpent: Philo's Epicureanism", in W. Helleman (ed.), *Hellenisation Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham, 1994) 159–172.

to the procreation of other human beings.[17] From the multiplicity of the types of pleasure existing derives its association with variety and tortuousness: pleasure clings tightly to all parts of the irrational soul, and is entwined about each of them.[18] The irrational soul is divided.[19] Set beside the irrational soul proper to humans and animals,[20] there is the rational soul, referred to as *nous, logos,*[21] *logikon pneuma,*[22] *loghismos, pneuma,*[23] *psyche tes psyches*,[24] eye of the eye.[25]

The opposition between the irrational part of the soul and *loghismos* and *nous* is rendered explicit in *Praem.* 26.[26] The rational faculty, *loghismos*,[27] is "a piece torn off from the soul of the universe,[28] or, as it might

---

[17] The types of pleasure mentioned are reminiscent of the Stoics' pleasures. According to Cicero's evidence (*SVF* III. 381), for the Stoics, the term ἡδονή included both bodily and non-bodily pleasures. Cf. P. Cosenza and R. Laurenti, *Il piacere nella filosofia greca* (Napoli 1993) 281 n. 13.

[18] Cf. *Leg.* II 74–75.

[19] Cf. *Heres* 232; *Agr.* 30–31; *Leg.* I 39; *Mut.* 110–111. Classifying the senses and the organs of speech and reproduction as elements of the irrational part of the soul echoes some Stoic conceptions: see *SVF* II 834–872. Regarding points of contact and differences between these passages and Stoic theses cf. J. Bouffartigue, "La structure de l'âme chez Philon: terminologie scolastique et métaphores" in C. Lévy (ed.), *Philon et le langage de la philosophie* (Paris 1998) 59–75 (61).

[20] Cf. *Det.* 82.

[21] Cf. *Det.* 83.

[22] Cf. *Spec.* 1 171.

[23] Cf. *Det.* 83.

[24] Cf. *Opif.* 66.

[25] Cf. *Opif.* 66.

[26] The binary division of the soul that separates the rational part from the irrational part is reintroduced in *Congr.* 26; 100; *Leg.* I 24.

[27] As J. Whittaker points out ("How to define the Rational Soul?", in C. Lévy (ed.), *Philon et le langage* cit. 229–253) Philo very frequently uses two formulae *nous kai loghismos* and *nous kai logos*. Whittaker identifies the possible derivations of these expressions in the philosophy preceding Philo and that written by his contemporaries, analyzing, on the one hand, the Platonic language in *Timaeus* and the *Laws*, on the other the Stoic terminology. He also points out similarities between these and texts from Plutarch, *Didaskalikos*, Galen and Cicero. Whittaker seeks to explain the use of the two terms *nous kai loghismos* and *nous kai logos*, attributing the former to a Platonic influence and the latter to other sources, probably of Stoic origin. In many cases the *logos* in the text refers to speech, in others to the function of reasoning (cf. J. Whittaker, op. cit., p. 247 who quotes as an example of *logos* in terms of speech *Congr.* 17; *Fug.* 90; *Mut.* 69; 208; *Abr.* 83; *Mos.* I 173; *Migr.* 3 ff.; 52 and 80 ff.; *Det.* 66; 125–127 and 168; *Post.* 107; *Spec.* II 256. Instead, according to Whittaker, examples of *logos* in terms of reasoning can be found in *Opif.* 73: *Aet.* 75; *Spec*. I 260 and *Det.* 83). As Whittaker sees it, it is obvious that the two meanings should be used fluidly, as the term itself is intrinsically fluid. The Stoics too used the expressions λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός in their writings (Cf. Sext. Emp., *Pyrr. Hyp.* I 65), a distinction taken up by Philo.

[28] Cf. *Det.* 90.

be put more reverently [...] a faithful impress of the divine image."[29] It is the copy of the idea of soul created directly by God, on day one of creation."[30] The human mind is created according to an intelligible image,[31] a likeness and copy of the divine *logos*,[32] the archetype, rationality and guide that created and ordered the cosmos.

> On that single intellect of the universe, as on an archetype, the intellect in each individual human being was modelled. In a sense it is a god of the person who carries it and bears it around as a divine image. For it would seem that the same position that the Great director holds in the entire cosmos is held by the human intellect in the human being.[33]

The Voice of the Serpent

In *Legum Allegoriae*, the pleasure that allows intellect and sensation to come together is the source of knowledge, the basis for the arts, for the appreciation of beauty, whence sculpture, music and theatre draw their power to fulfil, not to mention the variety in plant life and the melodious sound of the birds. There is a vast array of pleasures of sight and hearing, and the pleasures of taste are also many and varied, just as the snake's movements are various and complex. With a sudden leap,

---

[29] *Mut*. 223. See also *Spec*. IV 123; *Heres* 231; *Deus* 46 reads: "This branch of the soul was not formed of the same elements, out of which the other branches were brought to completion, but it was allotted something better and purer, the substance in fact out of which divine natures were wrought. And therefore it is reasonably held that the mind alone in all that makes us what we are is indestructible."

[30] Cf. *Opif.* 29. "Denying that mind is "breath" or "blood" or "body in general", he declares that it is "no body but incorporeal" (H. A. Wolfson, *Philo* cit. I 391). As Dillon has clarified (D. Winston and J. Dillon (eds.), *Two Treatises* cit. 200–203) there is some ambiguity in the presentation of the human intellect, heavenly bodies and *logos* as incorporeal, even though they are—it would seem—made up of *pneuma*. In a later article "Asomatos: Nuances of Incorporeality in Philo", in C. Lévy (éd.), *Philon d'Alexandrie* cit. 99–110, by analyzing the use of the term *asomatos* in Aristotle, Posidonius and Antiochus, Dillon maintains that not only may the immanent *Logos* and the individual intellect may be said to be incorporeal, but also the heavenly bodies, as the latter contrast with the corporeality of the sublunar beings.

[31] Cf. *Leg.* I 42; *Decal.* 134.

[32] Cf. *Spec.* III 207; *Heres* 230, 233–234.

[33] *Opif.* 69. Cf. *Det.* 86–87; 90. In other passages (for example in *Spec*. IV 92; *Virt.* 13; *Leg.* I 70; III 115), the rational part of the soul is set beside an irascible part and a concupiscent part, clearly echoing Plato's tripartition. According to the Platonic schema in *Timaeus* (69e, 90a), the soul has a physical seat in the body: the rational part lies in the head (Cf. *Spec.* IV 92) or in the heart (Cf. *Det.* 90), the irrational part in the chest and diaphragm.

the pleasures of sight and hearing, positive, gratifying and connected with knowledge, are now replaced with the pleasures of death, the source of corruption and desolation: inordinate pleasures which lead to evil.[34] Correspondingly, the snake is no longer Eve's snake, which mediates between intellect and sensation. It is no longer the source of knowledge, a positive symbol of the extension of knowledge, but is replaced by the poisonous snakes, the bringers of death that bit the children of Israel in the desert.

The *Bible* reference text is *Num*. 21. 6, which recounts that the Israelites complained against God and Moses during the long journey from Egypt towards the land of Canaan. Following the people's protests, "the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died". Then the Israelites went to Moses, admitting that they had been wrong to grumble about God, and asked him to make the snakes go away. God then told Moses to make a snake out of bronze. Anyone bitten by the snakes recovered if they looked at the bronze snake.

So we have three different types of snake: Eve's snake, the mortal snakes in the desert and the bronze snake. There is also the Dan-snake, the symbol of justice, which we shall examine below.

The poisonous snakes of the desert represent those excessive pleasures that cause the death of the soul and lead to evil.[35] On the other hand, Eve's snake too—which from a gnoseological point of view represents a means of gaining knowledge—is no longer seen as a positive pleasure, a vehicle of the union between intellect and sensation when considered in connection with the passions and self-mastery. It becomes a harmful thing, connected with guile. When the snake, the most cunning of all beasts (φρονιμώτατος), is seen in terms of pleasure it is referred to as πανουργότατος.[36] The term contains the idea of a malevolent craftiness, a shrewdness that weaves webs of deceit, plays cunning tricks. Everything is the slave of pleasure: pleasure dominates the lives of the wicked and induces bad deeds to be done out of malice and cunning.[37] In *QG*. I 34, the snake is a liar. It intentionally deceives Eve with its ambiguous words; it uses its cunning to cause the woman's downfall.

[34] Cf. Filone di Alessandria, *Tutti i Trattati del Commentario allegorico della Bibbia*, ed. R. Radice (Milano 1994) 170 nn. 21 and 22. For an interpretation of why ἡδονή is used instead of κακία cf. A. Le Boulluec, art. cit. 129 ff.

[35] Cf. *Leg.* II 78.

[36] Cf. *Leg.* II 106.

[37] Cf. *Leg.* II 107.

It is no longer just cunning, not merely the most intelligent of the wild animals: the snake is now a sort of 'sophist', which uses its voice, the same sort of voice humans are gifted with, in order to lie. The fact that the snake speaks with a human voice raises a few questions for Philo.[38] Three hypotheses are advanced.[39]

1) At the time of creation all animals spoke,[40] although humans had a clearer voice; or
2) our forbears, being exempt from evil, had finer senses than their successors, eyes with which they could see nature and the essences in the heavens, ears with which they could hear all types of voice; or
3) we have to suppose that, since a miracle had to happen, God changed the nature of the lower beings.[41] It was therefore a question of something sudden and unheard of, a break in the order of nature that God wanted in order that a specific event (the coming together of intellect and sensation) should occur. This would lead to the possibility of the snake's action having been ordained by God. However, this does not change the fact that the snake is a deceiver, a bringer of evil.[42]

The hypothesis that God was involved in the fall can also be found in other texts. In particular, in Gnostic thought, God is an invidious and wicked being, while the snake takes on a positive role, being the source of self-improvement and of knowledge.[43] In the text *Testimony of Truth*,

---

[38] Concerning the question of whether this biblical passage should be read allegorically or literally and the distinction that Philo introduces in this context between allegory and myth see J. Pépin, "Remarques sur la théorie de l'exégèse allégorique chez Philon", in *Philon d'Alexandrie*, Lyon 11–15 septembre 1966: colloques nationaux du CNRS, (Paris 1967) 131–167 (139–150); T. H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation* (Washington 1983) 160–161.

[39] Cf. *QG* I 32.

[40] *Opif.* 156 reads: "It is said that in ancient times the venomous and earth-born reptile, the snake, could project a human voice". In the *Book of Jubilees* (III 28), after Adam and Eve have sinned, the mouths of all animals are closed—wild and tame, winged and earthbound. Up to that time, they had all spoken one and the same language.

[41] Cf. J. Pépin, "Remarques sur la théorie de l'exégèse allégorique" cit. 131–167.

[42] The symbology of the snake as an emblem of violent passions, unrestrained ire, revenge or love is a central theme in Seneca's *Medea*. As Martha C. Nussbaum (*The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J. 1994) 439–483 (454–459) observes, duplicity and ambiguity are amongst its features. Its movements are silent and indirect, its action insidious and lethal.

[43] On the noetic function of the snake considered as the ally of men seeking to gain awareness and autonomy with regard to a jealous God, see R. Piazza, *Adamo, Eva e il serpente* (Palermo 1988) 45–48.

which is however later, and can be dated at around the end of the second or beginning of the third century, the snake is not called *therion* but *zoon*; it does not belong to this earth but to heaven; it does not deceive Eve but, on the contrary, it informs her, by explaining that the eyes of her intellect will be opened.[44] As far as God is concerned, the text debates the nature of a jealous God[45] who does not want Adam to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and connects up with the passage declaring "I the Lord your God am a jealous God" (*Ex.* 20. 5).Then again, when God asked Adam where he was, did He not already know everything that was to take place, right from the beginning?

The text contains other passages on snakes,[46] passages which have been tampered with. Nevertheless, it can be deduced that the snakes in the story of Moses and the Egyptian magicians (*Ex.* 7. 10–12) had miraculous, salvational powers and that the bronze snake in *Num.* 21 is explained as a manifestation of Christ.

In the *Apocryphal Acts of John*, another Gnostic text of the II C., which is also quoted by Irenaeus, Christ speaks and rectifies what is said in the *Bible.* On the subject of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, Christ speaks to John and tells him that it was He who actually gave Adam and Eve the fruit of knowledge. John is amazed and asks: but was it not the snake? Christ smiles: the snake taught them about sexual desire and corruption (Cf. 22. 12). So in these texts God—a wicked being—or, alternatively, Christ the Saviour, plays a direct role in the Fall.

To return to Philo, the cunning which undermined the innocence and simplicity of our progenitors, the wily wickedness that led to transgression, also characterizes the snake in *De Opificio* (156 ff.). Endowed with a human voice, and thus able to communicate with humans, the snake reproaches Eve for being excessively scrupulous and hesitating to try the fruit of the tree of knowledge.[47] The object of desire was pleasant to look at and tasted sweet. Moreover, it was a most useful thing as it

---

[44] Cf. G. P. Luttikhuizen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies, 58 (Leiden-Boston 2006) 76 ff. points out that the snake is upgraded, while God is degraded, with an emphasis on His anthropomorphic aspect.

[45] Cf. 47.14–48.4.

[46] See 48.23–49.11.

[47] Cf. M. Harl, "Adam et les deux arbres du Paradis ('Gen.' II–III) ou l'homme milieu entre deux termes (μέσος-μεθόριος) chez Philon d'Alexandrie. Pour une histoire de la doctrine du libre-arbitre", *Recherches de science religieuse* 50 (1962) 321–388.

would lead to a knowledge of good and of evil.[48] It thus takes on a positive value, both within the sphere of the sensible world and with regard to the ability to judge.

Eve's is a vacillating and groundless γνώμη, an instable judgement that has developed without any reality testing. It leads from a state of simplicity and absence of evil to cunning, choosing—even if unconsciously—to share the awareness of choice. Eve opts for a time of misery instead of a lasting life of virtue; she opts to move from a stage of undetermined atemporality on to history.[49] In Philo's interpretation Eve, sensation, is thus faced with the choice between a blithe unawareness and painful knowledge, and pleasure lies at the root of the problem. In the biblical text, it is not a question of choosing between the tree of knowledge and the tree of life, even if Adam and Eve are deprived of the latter only after they have gathered the fruit of good and evil. There are however other texts which propose an alternative: the snake presents Eve with choice. Even though it deceives her, it explains to her that the fruit is the source of knowledge and will let her control reality. It is not true that if they eat of the tree they will die; on the contrary, they will have the power to create and destroy worlds, like God: to give death and create new life.[50]

The Snake's Legs

In Philo the snake is a symbol of pleasure because it has no feet,[51] lying prone upon its belly,[52] it feeds on clods of earth, "it carries poison in its

[48] Philo likens the tree of knowledge of good and evil (*Opif.* 154) to φρόνησις μέση. For an interpretation of being forbidden to eat of the tree of knowledge cf. R. Arnaldez, *De Opificio mundi* cit. 244–245 n. 4 which links the φρόνησις μέση here mentioned with the φρόνησις of the *Eudemian Ethics* (II 37. 1121a12). The text stresses that this is different from the φρόνησις of *Eth. Nic.* VI 25. 1140b 20, all consequences aiming at good.

[49] A. M. Mazzanti (*L'uomo nella cultura religiosa* cit. 40 ff.) points out that the presence of Eve, which is basic to procreation, lies at the origin of the historic Adam, who is no longer a unique being, made "in the image and likeness" of God.

[50] Cf. *Pirké de Rabbi Eliezer* 13; *Bereshit Rabba* XIX, 3–4; *Avoth de Rabbi Nathan* 1. 4–5; *Sanhedrin* 29a. some aspects of this discourse also appear in Philo, in *QG* 1 33–34.

[51] Regarding this connection between the tendency to move close to the ground and reptiles, Runia (op. cit. 377) refers to *Timaeus* 92a7, where those who have no wits have been born without feet, and slither.

[52] Cf. *Heres* 238.

teeth, by which it [is] able to kill those whom it bites".[53] Its association with pleasure arises out of its characteristics, which represent pleasure-lovers: they are dragged down by their intemperance[54] instead of nourishing themselves with the heavenly food of wisdom; they feed on the products of the earth: wine and delicacies that stimulate the appetites of the belly and awaken sexual desires. They voraciously search for foods, which they consume down to the last crumb. "Hence, this person, no less than a snake, carries poison in his teeth." These are the servants of gluttony, as they cut their food up small, place it on their tongues and swallow it down their throats; moreover, eating to excess poisons the body, as it prevents it from digesting the food properly.

Just as the snake uses a human voice to enchant Eve, pleasure deploys an infinite range of stratagems in order to deceive.[55] There is no doubt that pleasure guides the first physical contact between men and women, leading to procreation, and the newly born are also inclined towards pleasure and cry if they are made to suffer.[56]

Philo's interpretation of the snake's behaviour towards Adam and Eve, which opens with a very Platonic kind of image, set within the story of how Eve was made from Adam's rib, is thus closed in a circular fashion. In *Opif.* 152, love is interpreted as the reconjunction of what had before been united and was then separated. Out of the love between the two divided parties of a single, halved being arises the desire to unite in order to procreate another being. However physical pleasure (τῶν σωμάτων ἡδονή), too, arises out of this desire and lies at the very root of transgression and wickedness. In this context, pleasure is the condition and the consequence of the union between male and

---

[53] *Opif.* 157.

[54] Cf. *Migr.* 65; *Spec.* IV 113; *QG* I 48.

[55] "The snake is said to project a human voice because pleasure makes use of countless defenders and champions, who have taken its care and advocacy upon themselves and go so far as to teach that the power of pleasure attaches itself to all things great and small without any exception whatsoever" (*Opif.* 160).

[56] On babies' crying and their awareness of pain and pleasure cf. R. Radice (in Filone di Alessandria, *La filosofia mosaica* cit., who quotes the analyses of Giusta regarding the similarities of these theses by Philo with Cicero and Sextus Empiricus.

On the instinctive nature of the Epicurean brand of pleasure, see C. Lévy, "Philon d'Alexandrie et l'épicureisme", in M. Erler (ed.), *Epikureismus in der späten Republik und der Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart 2000) 122–136 (127–130); Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, Introduction, Translation and Commentary by D. T. Runia (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2001) 375.

female; it first finds Eve—sensation—and through her it deceives the intellect.[57]

> Pleasure encounters and consorts with the senses first, and through them she deceives the ruling intellect as well. Each of the senses is seduced by her charms. They rejoice in what is set before them, sight responding to varieties of colour and shape, hearing to melodious sounds, taste to the sweetness of flavours, and smell to the fragrances of exhaled vapours. On receiving these gifts, in the manner of female servants, they offer them to reason as their master, taking persuasion along as their advocate so that none of the offerings whatsoever would be rejected. He is immediately ensnared. Instead of being a ruler he becomes a subject (ὑπήκοος)[58] a slave instead of a lord, an exile instead of a citizen, a mortal instead of an immortal being.[59]

Pleasure, which is, at the same time, seducer and seduced, deceives our feelings and, through them, the intellect.[60]

> When the soul is swaying and tossing like a vessel, now to the side of the mind now to that of body, owing to the violence of the passions and

[57] According to other interpretations, Adam and Eve did not have a sexual relationship until after they were driven from the garden of Eden. Theophilus of Antioch (a bishop in 168–169), for example, speaks of the fall of Adam in his treatise *Ad Autolycum* and suggests that he was driven from Paradise before he had lain with Eve. "It was when Adam had been cast out of Paradise that he knew his wife Eve, whom God had made out of his side to be his wife" (II. 28, transl. by R. M. Grant). His reasoning probably derives from textual considerations: *Gen.* 4. 1 mentions sexual relations between the two only after Adam had been sent out of Eden: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain".

Augustine, on the other hand, accepts the possibility of marriage and intercourse in Paradise. "I do not see in what other way the woman was made to be the helper of the man if procreation is eliminated, and I do not understand why it should be eliminated" *De Genesi ad Litteram*, IX 7. 12. Those who deny that "perhaps suppose that all union of the sexes is sinful" (IX 8. 13), but if the earth had to be filled with beings, how else could they have managed it? Procreation in Paradise could have taken place without sin because "man and woman would have complete control over their bodies and could have union without desire" (IX 10. 16–18). However, this is only a theoretical possibility because, in actual fact, Adam and Eve lay with each other only after they were driven away.

[58] Cf. *QG* I 47.

[59] *Opif.* 165. In connection with these passages, R. Radice highlights the Stoic connotations which are, in his opinion, greater than the Platonic influence. Cf. Filone di Alessandria, *La filosofia mosaica* cit. 309–310 n. 33B.

[60] "For Eve's serpent, being as was shewn before, a symbol of pleasure, attacks a man, namely, the reasoning faculty in each of us; for the delightful experience of abounding pleasure is the ruin of understanding; whereas the serpent of Dan, being a figure of endurance, a most sturdy virtue, will be found to bite a horse, the symbol of passion and wickedness, inasmuch as temperance makes the overthrow and destruction of these its aim" (*Agric.* 108–109).

> misdeeds that rage against her, and the billows rising mountains high sweep over her, then in all likelihood the mind becomes waterlogged and sinks; and the bottom to which it sinks is nothing else than the body of which Egypt is the figure.[61]

The snake, a poisonous creature, born of the earth and endowed with a human voice, uses all the wiles it possesses: its cunning, its ποικιλία, its sinuosity, the complexity of its movements, the mobility of its coils.[62] It approaches silently, and manifests itself insidiously but with determination, always ready to act.[63] With its subtlety, it induces Eve and Adam to transgress and so it is accursed, ἐπικατάρατος.[64] Its punishment consists of walking on its chest and belly and eating dust. Note that in other passages it is said that the nature of the snake-desire is to direct itself downwards, towards the drives of the belly. It thus seems that these characteristics were inherent to the subject prior to the punishment and the punishment was not consequent upon them. There is a double reading: 1) the snake which has always slithered on its belly, is directed downwards; 2) our tendency to give priority to our baser instincts, and walking on our chests and our bellies as a punishment. This dual meaning appears in many other explanations and derives from a reading of *Gen.* 3. 14: "The Lord God said to the serpent, «Because you have done this,/ cursed are you above all cattle,/ and above all wild animals;/ upon your belly you shall go,/ and dust you shall eat/ all the days of your life.»". If after having been cursed by God this creature had to "go upon its belly", this means that the snake had previously walked in a different fashion. The fact that it slithers is thus a punishment following upon the beast's behaviour, and it originally had legs and looked like a camel.

The theme of the being on its belly eating dust appears throughout various exegeses. In several texts we do however find different interpretations, both as to the time at which the snake was obliged to slither and also, consequently, as to its shape. In many exegeses the snake originally had four legs, sometimes even wings, and its punishment was to lie on the ground, without any legs. In some passages, the snake, which originally had a human face, lost these characteristics when God deprived it of its likeness with the being who, even if he

[61] *Agr.* 89.
[62] Cf. *Leg.* II 74: πολύπλοκος.
[63] Cf. *Agric.* 95.
[64] Cf. *Leg.* III 65.

had sinned, was still in the image and likeness of God. This we find in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*[65] In his vision, Abraham sees Adam, Eve, the snake and various forms of evil. The fruit of the tree appears to be a bunch of grapes. Behind the tree is lurking a being that looks like a snake, with arms and legs like those of a man, plus six wings on the right and six on the left. It is tempting Adam and Eve, who have their arms round each other. When Abraham asks for an explanation, he is told that Adam is man's inclination, Eve is covetousness, and the one between them, the wickedness of their action which will lead them to perdition, is Azalel himself. Abraham then asks God why He has given Azalel the power to lead the human race to ruination. And the reply is that mankind wants evil.[66]

Some much later texts also opt for the interpretation that the snake walked upright and had hands and feet that were cut off by the angels as a punishment.[67]

The story in the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* is more complex. It contains three different accounts of the Fall. The first (chaps. V–VIII) is an account narrated by Adam when he was ill. Here, Adam maintained that the cause of sin was Eve, who was tempted by the Enemy when the angels set to watch over her went off to adore the Lord and left her on her own. Chapters XV–XXX contain Eve's account: God has given Adam one part of Paradise to govern and Eve the other: Adam is to rule the male animals, Eve the females. The devil goes to the snake, which is in Adam's domain, and asks it to help him get Adam thrown out of paradise. The fact that the devil and the angels were driven from Paradise because they refused to adore the man God had just created in His image, which is presented in other texts (e.g. The *Latin Life of Adam and Eve* XII–XVI) is taken for granted here. The snake hesitates out of fear that God may be angry with him, but the devil responds: lend me your body, I will pronounce words with your mouth to deceive Adam

[65] A text with strong Essenic elements, which has come down to us in a Slavonic version from a Greek translation, which was in turn translated from a Hebrew text. It is presumably composed of two separate texts, the first on Abraham's vocation and the destruction of the idols, the second on Abraham's vision, when he went up to heaven, accompanied by the archangel Jaoel. Possibly dated slightly after 70 A.D.

[66] Cf. *Apocalypse of Abraham* XXIII.

[67] See *Bereshit Rabba* XIX. 1; XX. 5. In the *Pirké de Rabbi Eliezer* (13–14) the snake is an animal similar to a camel. Samma'el, the prince of evil, gets on the snake and rides it. After the snake has tricked Eve with its cunning, its legs are cut off as a punishment and it is condemned to crawling on its belly. It becomes poisonous and it is also established that, every seven years, it will lose its skin thus undergoing great suffering.

and Eve. The snake agrees and when the angels leave Eve alone and go up to adore God, it speaks to her. Having tempted Eve, the devil, speaking out of the snake's mouth, threatens not to give her the fruit if she does not then give one to her husband. Eve swears she will do as requested and eats the fruit. She then realizes she has sinned and despairs, but when she sees Adam, she induces him to transgress—and it is the devil who speaks within her. There follows God's curse: "you shall be deprived of the food that you eat and you shall henceforth eat dust. You shall walk upon your belly and your hands and feet shall be taken from you. Your ears shall not be left to you nor shall your wings nor even one of the limbs that those you have seduced possess".[68]

When he is driven from Paradise, Adam asks God to let him eat of the tree of life, but God refuses. God does however promise Adam that, if he accepts death when it comes, at the resurrection God will raise him from the dead, give him the fruit of the tree of life and Adam will be immortal for ever.

In the second part of the work (XXXII 1.2). we find Eve's confession of her sins. Eve's responsibility is much greater than that of Adam: the woman, a wicked creature, seduced the man, a glorious being.

The theme of woman as the origin of sin can also be found in *Siracides* 25.24 and in Paul:[69] it was Eve who was deceived and who transgressed.[70] In *2 Enoch* III 17g[71] Adam and Eve were already endowed with wisdom as God created them. Before they went into Paradise He showed them what was good and what was evil (30. 15b–d) and gave them free will 30.15a. Adam's sin seems to have consisted in not using his free will, Eve's was having sexual intercourse with the snake.[72]

---

[68] *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* XXVI.

[69] *Ad Timotheum* I 2. 13–15.

[70] *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* appears to be suspicious of sexuality (XXV. 3); even in Paradise Adam and Eve live in different places (XV. 2). After the Fall, when they lie down at night, one beside the other, they are still separated (II. 1).

The passage XXI. 6 gives an example of misogyny: "Evil woman, what have you done against me?" Similar attitudes appear in the *Testaments of the 12 Patriarchs*, particularly in the *Testament of Ruben* V 1–5.

[71] Text probably written in the Ist century A.D., perhaps in Greek. It was Eve who brought death to Adam.

[72] A union between Eve and the snake also appears in *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* A, 1 in which we also find the theme of the snake's envy both of the man and of God. See also *Bereshit Rabba* XIX 1; *2 Enoch* XXIX 4–5; XXXI 3.

God's Curse

In Philo the snake is not given a trial; it is not allowed to defend itself against the accusations of the woman who declares it has deceived her.[73] Unlike Eve-sensation, who is neither part of the wicked, nor of the virtuous but who, in some cases tends towards good in others towards evil,[74] by its very nature, the snake-pleasure is wicked, far from any form of virtue. As it is a passion it "shifts the standards of the soul and renders it a lover of passion instead of a lover of virtue".[75] It is passion in its true sense, as opposed to virtue, which entails the curse. Cursed be the snake who deceives Eve! Cursed be those who make the blind stray from the road![76] Cursed be those who smite their neighbour secretly![77] Pleasure is responsible for all these sins. Sensation, which has no power to reason, and is blind,[78] incapable of seeing suprasensible realities, is not responsible.

The clarification made in *Leg.* III 61 and 67 is thus repeated and stressed i.e. that sensation, which is neither good nor evil, is susceptible of developing in different directions according to whether or not it follows the guidance of the intellect. Pleasure draws sensation away from the intellect and guides it towards the sensible. In its turn, the intellect, led by sensation and pleasure, loses its self control.[79] The pleasure-snake is thus cursed "from" all cattle i.e. by all the senses, which see pleasure as their worst enemy, since it takes the capacity to feel away from them, and "beyond all the wild beasts" i.e. the passions of the soul which undermine the intellect. This double reading of the verse of *Gen.* 3. 14 is based on the presence of the preposition ἀπό, which indicates both the agent complement and the act of driving away. Philo's reading is based on the complexity of meaning of the preposition and aims to establish pleasure as the source of errors of the senses and deception of the passions. The link of passion with the belly—the seat of desire, and the chest—the seat of anger—justified literally by the words quoted

---

[73] Cf. *Leg.* III 65.
[74] Cf. *Leg.* III 67.
[75] *Leg.* III 107.
[76] Cf. *Dt.* 27. 18.
[77] Cf. *Dt.* 27. 24.
[78] In *Deus* 46 the intellect is called "the sight of the soul". On the theme of sensation, blindness, choice, cf. R. Radice, *Allegoria and paradigmi etici in Filone di Alessandria. Commentario al 'Legum Allegoriae'* (Milano 2000) 332.
[79] *Leg.* III 109.

from verse 14 of *Gen.* 3. "upon your belly you shall go and dust you shall eat" introduces the Platonic-flavour division of the soul into three parts: a rational part, an irascible part and a concupiscent part.[80] The symbol, which was initially positive, now becomes decidedly negative.

The Poisonous Snakes and the Snake of Bronze

The duplicity of the snake, which makes it a double symbol, reappears in connection with poisonous snakes, bringers of death. In *Leg.* II 78 ff. it is said that: "that which dies is not the ruling part in us, but the part that is under rule" and it will go on dying until it manages to retrace its steps. In the aforementioned passage from *Numbers* (21. 7) the Israelites, having admitted they were wrong, ask Moses to make the snakes go away. The reference to the error of the intellect, which has strayed from virtue, clarifies that we are still within the sphere of interaction between intellect and sensation. Adam and Eve are united and error is engendered by the Israelites' desire for the houses in Egypt, which symbolizes an excess of pleasures that leads them to behave wrongly on the relational and intellectual levels. The children of Israel turned against God and were punished by the bites of snakes. So snakes are the punishment inflicted by God, as the text of *Numbers* has it and, at the same time, they represent the pleasures, according to an interpretation which seems to turn the reference text upside down. The request to make the snakes go away is read as a prayer to drive pleasure away and as a request to be cured of evil. The snake thus comes to have the ambivalent function of *pharmakon*, the origin of evil, and a remedy for evil itself. A new snake, Moses' bronze snake,[81] the principle of self-mastery, is set in opposition to Eve's snake, "self-mastery runs counter to pleasure, a variable virtue to a variable affection, and a virtue that defends itself against pleasure its foe".[82] So passion can be cured by means of *sophrosyne*, self-mastery, ποικίλη virtue just as ποικίλη was ἡδονή. Their multi-faceted nature, their complexity, constitute a homogeneous aspect which is shared by the two elements and brings out the comparison. The snake Moses made at God's command is a

[80] See note 33 here. Cf. *Leg.* III 115.
[81] Cf. *Numb.* 21. 8. In the *Book of Wisdom* (16. 5–12) the snake of bronze is a sign of salvation, a call to comply with the law. Unfortunately, I was unable to consult the text written by D. W. Ullmann, *Moses' Bronze Serpent (Numbers 21:4–9) in Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (diss. Dallas Theological Seminary 1995).
[82] *Leg.* II 79.

sign, a reminder of the fact that not everyone can have *sophrosyne:* it is made of bronze, a strong. massive material, just as self-mastery is vigorous and steadfast.

"Every one who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live" reads the biblical text. Indeed,

> if the mind, when bitten by pleasure, the serpent of Eve, shall have succeeded in beholding in soul the beauty of self-mastery, the serpent of Moses, and through beholding this, beholds God Himself, he shall live; only let him look and mark well.[83]

Although the snake appears in Egypt, the place of pleasures *par excellence*, it is found in the desert, amongst other places, together with scorpions, thirst and drought.[84] Even in the desert the soul is bitten by pleasure, changeable and snake-like passion: it is no coincidence that the effect of pleasure is called 'bite'. Yet again, even those who are not in the desert, but are lost, can suffer the pangs of pleasure. Moreover, the effect of encountering snakes is not the same in Egypt as it is in the desert. In the first case poisonous snakes, insatiable pleasures, lead to death. In the second case, the bite of pleasure leads to 'dispersion', not to death. The treatment is also different: in the desert the cure derives from self control, the snake of bronze produced by Moses, the wise man; in Egypt it is God himself who assuages the thirst, by making His wisdom gush out like a spring. In opposition to pleasure we find *paideia*, represented by the rod in Moses' hand, which turns first into a snake and then back into a rod.

The reference here is to a passage of *Exodus* 4. 1–5 in which, answering Moses' question as to how to convince the children of Israel that God has appeared to him, Moses is told to take a rod in his hand and show it to the people. When it is thrown upon the ground, the rod becomes a snake. In Philo's interpretation, the hand represents the practical side of life, the rod is παιδεία, upon which rest the actions of the virtuous man. The snake taken by its tail represents pleasure dominated and its becoming a rod indicates that bridled pleasure becomes education. If cast away, the rod turns into a snake, just as education rejected by the soul gives way to pleasure.[85] All this indicates that we should not flee pleasure, but govern it by means of παιδεία and, as found in other passages, σωφροσύνη.

[83] *Leg.* II 81.
[84] Cf. *Dt.* 8. 15.
[85] Cf. *Leg.* II 90.

Self-mastery and Judgement

The snake that turns into a rod is the fourth snake the text speaks of after having introduced Eve's snake, snakes that bring death in the desert and the snake of bronze. It is a symbol of pleasure just like the first two and is opposed to *paideia*, while the snake of bronze, the symbol of *sophrosyne*, combats the other snake-pleasures. Moses is thus associated with two snakes: the bronze one that represents *sophrosyne* and counteracts excessive pleasures, and the one that turns into a rod and controls pleasure, a means of "taking *hedone* by the tail" and governing it. Indeed, the term περικρατῆσαι is used. The two snakes are thus two different ways of symbolizing self-mastery.

Finally, we have the snake of Dan. As he drew close to death, Jacob blessed his sons one by one. When it was Dan's turn, his wish was that Dan would be like a serpent along the way.

> "Dan shall judge his people,/ as if indeed one tribe of Israel," and/ "Let Dan become a serpent in the way,/ Seated on the beaten track, biting the horse's heel,/ And the horseman shall fall backward,/ Waiting for the salvation of the Lord."[86]

Philo interprets the passage in an allegorical key.[87] Dan means judgement,[88] the soul's faculty to examine, analyse precisely, judge in such a way as to counteract the passions (the horse) which tempt the soul (the way). The capacity to discern is likened to the snake, δράκων, an

---

[86] *Gen*. 49. 16–18, as it is reported in Colson and Whittaker's translation of *Legum Allegoriae* II 94. In the biblical text in question, Philo reads περιμένων as a participle, attributing the expectation of salvation to the horseman. Rahlfs' edition, instead, has περιμένω in the first person singular, returning to the form that appears in the Hebrew text of the *Massorah* (See the Standard Revised Version: "Dan shall judge his people/ as one of the tribes of Israel./ Dan shall be a serpent in the way,/ a viper by the path,/ that bites the horse's heels/ so that his rider falls backward./ I wait for thy salvation, O Lord").

In this case it would be separate from the preceding part of the verse, and would either introduce an exclamation by Jacob "I expect salvation from the Lord" (Ramban) or a prophesy by Jacob regarding Samson's prayer to God (Rashi). In this passage, the Midrashic interpretations, taken up by Rashi, actually foreshadow the trials of Samson, the descendent of Dan. Dan, as a snake, fights in an indirect, implicit manner, struggling alone against his enemies, without openly warring with them. In Philo's reading, the horseman who falls backwards represents the intellect, which is pitched about by the passions 'when they get bitten at the heel'; it is the rider-intellect who asks God for help.

[87] Cf. *Leg.* II 94.

[88] Cf. *Gen*. 30. 6.

intelligent animal with sinuous movements, ready to attack, and able to fight off attacks. In *Agric.* 95 the capacity to look at the different realities with a critical eye is likened to the features of the snake ποικίλα and φρονιμώτατος. These characteristics are useful in order to combat ἡδονή and counteract the unsound and unfounded judgement exemplified by Eve when she ate the forbidden fruit.[89]

> This is a creature tortuous in its movements, of great intelligence, ready to shew fight, and most capable of defending itself against wrongful aggression. He did not liken the faculty to the serpent that played the friend and gave advice to "Life"—whom in our own language we call "Eve"—but to the serpent made by Moses out of material brass. When those who had been bitten by the venomous serpents looked upon this one, though at the point of death, they are said to have lived on and in no case to have died.[90]

Here the Dan-snake, which expresses the ability to judge, is explicitly identified with the snake of bronze which, in *Leg.* II 79, is a symbol of the self-mastery required to control excessive pleasures. The symbols shift: in both cases it is a question of fighting pleasures and passions, in the first case, however, the struggle is carried out using σωφροσύνη, in the second, the intellectualistic aspect, the use of the noetic faculty to distinguish what is advisable and what is iniquitous, is supported by καρτερία, the power of the soul which counteracts ἀκρασία, intemperance.

In actual fact, throughout the whole of *De Agricultura* (95–110) we can find a set of abilities and virtues—σωφροσύνη, καρτερία, ἐγράτεια, δύναμις ἀκριβοῦσα καὶ διακρίνουσα καὶ δικάζουσα—that combat pleasures, intemperance, immoderation. Thus there is no clear distinction between types of virtues and kinds of intemperance; ἀκολασία, ἀκρασία, ἡδονή, λαιμαργία are different forms of a single evil against which evil the snakes of Moses and Dan provide a φάρμακον.

Unlike other passages previously quoted in which the term used for snake is always ὄφις, in *Agric.* 95 the term δράκων appears to indicate the Dan-snake, described as an animal with many resources: as intelligent, capable and able to fight off attacks. This is set against the ὄφεις of the desert, the poisonous snakes that symbolize pleasure, which are overcome by Moses' snake of bronze. The use of two terms might lead

[89] Cf. *Opif.* 156.
[90] *Agric.* 95.

one to believe that ὀφις and δράκων have different connotations, at least in this passage. This impression seems, however, to be immediately contradicted by the presentation of Eve's snake, which in *Agric.* 96–97 is called both δράκων and ὄφις. We could be dealing with a significant indicator as to the ambivalence of Eve's snake/serpent, which is seen, in turn, as a source of knowledge and the cause of man's being deceived and enslaved by pleasure. The root of δράκων, associated with δέρκομαι, refers to observation, to the ability to watch, the faculty of sight proper to Eve's serpent, which is endowed with a human voice, and can see that the tree of good and evil leads to knowledge. The Dan-serpent also has the power of discernment[91] and can separate the immortal from what is mortal.[92]

The Snake as Pleasure and as Self-mastery

When Jacob blesses his son, the wish is that the norm of self-mastery should be a serpent along the path which is the soul, in which there are good parts and bad parts, virtuous aspects and aspects that are incomplete.

> The path of virtue is unworn, for few tread it, while that of vice is well worn. He calls on him to beset with his ambuscade and to lie in wait upon the beaten road of passion and vice, on which reasoning powers that flee from virtue wear out their life.[93]

The horse whose heel is bitten by the snake indicates the passions, which have four legs[94] and are shady creatures, swollen with pride and inconstant. Σωφροσύνη bites and wounds passion. As soon as the latter takes a false step, the intellect, which bridles the passions, as represented by the horseman, will tumble backwards: he "falls off the passions when they are brought to a reckoning and overthrown".[95] The snake, symbol of σωφροσύνη, bites the passion allied with the pleasure represented by

---

[91] In other passages the snake is ἑρπετόν, which recalls the root ἕρπω, and this means to slither, to insinuate oneself.

[92] Cf. *Leg.* II 96.

[93] *Leg.* II 97.

[94] Here we find a reference to Stoic theory, according to which there are four main passions: λύπη, φόβος, ἐπιθυμία, ἡδονή. The association of quadrupeds with the passions, together with the fact that there are four kinds of vice, as there are of passions, is found in a number of Philo's works, for example, in *Agr.* 83; 92.

[95] *Leg.* II 99.

the snake, the most cunning of all beasts. Once again, the snake's role is ambivalent, as it represents both pleasure and what combats it.

Its two-fold nature is even clearer if we consider *Leg.* II 105, which interprets a passage from *Leviticus* (11. 21), relating to permitted foods. These include one of the winged insects that jump, the cricket, a "snake-fighter" (ὀφιόμαχος).[96] The name of the creature already hints at its nature: it fights *ofis*, the snake.[97]

> And this is as it should be. For if serpentlike pleasure is a thing unnourishing and injurious, self-mastery, the nature that is in conflict with pleasure, must be wholesome and full of nourishment.[98]

In *Opif.* 164 the snake-fighter symbolises ἐγκράτεια,[99] "which engages in an unrelenting battle and unremitting war against lack of self-control and pleasure. Self-control especially welcomes simplicity and frugality and whatever is required for an austere and holy life."[100] In *Heres* 274 it is said that ἐγκράτεια, a virile virtue linked to the intellect and closely connected with cultural enhancement, overcomes wicked pleasures.[101]

When ἡδονή is considered negatively, it is attacked by σωφροσύνη, ἐγκράτεια and κρίσις, symbolized by the snakes of Moses and Dan,

---

[96] Cf. Filone di Alessandria, *L'erede delle cose divine*, ed. R. Radice (Milano 1981) 194, n. 4, which classifies the various types of reptile and the allegorical meaning they have. A description of the snake-fighter and its links with the rational soul also appear in *Spec.* IV 114.

[97] Cf. C. Kraus Reggiani, *Filone Alessandrino, De Opificio mundi, De Abrahamo, De Josepho. Analisi critiche, testi tradotti e commentati* (Roma 1979) 118–119 n. 95.

[98] Cf. *Opif.* 163–164; *Heres* 239.

[99] The indiscriminate use of σωφροσύνη and ἐγκράτεια reminds us that there is an association between the two terms, which can also be found in other authors: see, for example, Xenophon, *Cyrop.* VIII 1. 30 and Plato *Resp.* IV 430 quoted in this connection by M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité* 2. *L'usage des plaisirs*, Paris Gallimard (Series: Bibliothèque des Histoires) 1984. For H. North ("Sophrosyne, self-knowledge and self-restraint in Greek literature", *Cornell Studies in Classical Philology* 35 (1966) 123–206 the clear-cut and systematic distinction between the two ideas is introduced by Aristotle.

[100] In Philo, *enkrateia* is opposed to immoderation and lack of self control in three spheres: diet, sexual activity and speech. The theme of the relationship between *enkrateia* and sexuality has been studied by A, Mazzanti, "Motivazioni protologiche nell'antropologia di Filone di Alessandria, con riferimento al tema della distinzione dei sessi" in U. Bianchi (ed.), *La tradizione dell'enkrateia: motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Milano, 1982) 541–559. As to the way later authors have dealt with the Philonic idea of ἐγκράτεια and its relationship with pleasure, the subjugation of the intellect and the transgression of Adam and Eve, cf. G. Sfameni Gasparro, "Motivazioni protologiche dell'enkrateia", in U. Bianchi, *La tradizione dell'enkrateia* cit., pp. 239–253.

[101] Cf. also *Conf.* 229 where it is stressed that education is a tool for achieving *enkrateia* and that the erudite are better equipped to combat evil pleasures than the ignorant.

and by the snake-fighter. These are means of controlling and opposing the excesses to which Eve's snake can drive the intellect and sensation. As we have seen, the union of Adam and Eve is not just positive; it is essential to ensure procreation on the one hand and knowledge on the other: to emerge from the indeterminate, pre-noetic, pre-ethical and pre-historical stage and be fully determined. The dangers of immoderation and of ὕβρις, of excesses of pleasures—both from the ethical and gnoseological points of view—are always lying in wake. In this sphere, the Dan-serpent and Moses' snake, the snake-fighter, act as a brake and control: self-mastery, moderation, the ability to judge and thus make choices become a direct response to the possibilities of transgression awakened by Eve's snake. The *pharmakon* action of these tools is highlighted by the choice of animal used as a contrast—which is the same. The snake thus belongs to various different and contrasting semantic spheres: on the one hand Eve's snake, a possible source of death for the soul: on the other, the snakes which lead to virtue, to life for the soul. So they are complementary symbols: moderation, self mastery and good judgement are the right way to vanquish an excess of pleasures. Just as the snake of bronze counteracted the poison of the other snakes, the σωφροσύνη of Moses' snake combats the ἡδονή of Eve's snake.

Conclusion

From the above, it emerges that, notwithstanding the different biblical contexts in which the snake appears, it has two meanings for Philo. It alternately represents pleasure and self-mastery. In the ethical sphere regarding the bridling of passions these meanings are antithetical and actually represent the two poles of an opposition. However, when the sphere of the argument regards the formation of knowledge, the perception of the sensible world by the intellect, pleasure, far from representing wicked cunning which must be subdued and if possible eliminated, constitutes the means of gaining knowledge, the *tertium* which, alone, can guarantee the union of Adam and Eve.

The ambivalence characterizing the snake is the same as that characterizing pleasure. This can forebode death, but in other situations it is a source of knowledge, of generation, and thus of life, of historical and ethical determination for mortals who, prior to their encounter with it, are undetermined and unable to choose. So we do not only have the ambiguity of something which is gnoseologically positive and ethically negative, but ambivalence in all spheres: in knowledge, without an encounter with sensation the intellect is empty and the aspect to be activated is its relationship with the sensible world; in the ethical sphere, Adam and Eve become capable of choice; in the ontological sphere, the transition from their primitive state sets mortals in the context of history.

The elements that characterize the animal, ποίκιλος, πολύπλοκος, ready to act, constitute the means by which symbols that are presented as plural and contrasting may be united. These features lend themselves to extremely different interpretations: the variety in the creature's movements, its alertness and vigilance, perfectly suit the ambivalence of un animal that is called upon to represent now positive aspects, now negative elements—although the former are always symmetrical with the latter.

There is a conspicuous shift which takes place on a number of levels: the snake seen as pleasure is replaced by snakes seen as an excess of pleasure, bringers of death and these, in their turn, are defeated by the snake of bronze, the symbol of self-mastery. From a snake seen positively as a source of knowledge, we pass on to negative snakes leading mortals into error and to corruption, and then to a healing snake,[102] allowing mortals to see the beauty of virtue and even a vision of God. The shifts slip from positive evaluations to negative considerations, from gnoseological conceptions to ethical evaluations, but we also find shifts in the Philonic text with respect to the biblical text and, above all, shifts within the Philonic text itself.

As concerns the differences from the passages in the *Septuagint*, there are two aspects in our author's analysis that I feel are significant. The first is the need to have an element to mediate between Adam and Eve, the intellect and sensation, in order that these may be activated—something that is absent in *Genesis*, at least in these terms.[103] The second is the interpretation of the poisonous snakes that bite the people of Israel

[102] Snakes with a healing function are common in Greek thought, from the 'incubation' provided in the Temple of Epidaurus to the association of the snake with the Asclepians, but I cannot see any explicit references in Philo.

[103] In *Genesis*, it is actually the snake that invites Adam and Eve to eat from the tree of knowledge, with the promise that their eyes will be opened and they will be like God and know good and evil. This does actually happen, and thus the snake is a means of gaining knowledge. What is absent in *Genesis* is the idea that Adam and Eve come together because of the snake.

in *Numbers*, which are seen not as God's exhortation to stop protesting, or as a punishment, but rather as emblematic of immoderate pleasures that lead to the death of the soul.

Finally, we come to the shifts within the Philonic text itself: in *Leg.* II 81 pleasure (Eve's snake) bites the intellect and the intellect will have the strength to look at Moses' snake but, in the preceding passages, Eve's snake does not bite the intellect, implying the need to look to *sophrosyne* which, indeed, leads to the search for knowledge. As for the snakes that afflicted the people of Israel, they do not bring death to the intellect, but to the baser faculties of the soul.

PART THREE

GOD AS A MODEL

CHAPTER SEVEN

HAPPINESS AND CONTEMPLATION
THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

In six days God made the world and on the seventh day he rested. He looked upon what He had done and He saw that it was good. By means of this twofold action God became the model both for active and for contemplative life. His work brings out a rhythm according to which the two kinds of life—which are equally worthy and significant—alternate. He is a model in two senses: He is a paradigm of the advisability of cultivating both active and theoretical life and, at the same time, of the need to mark time with a binary rhythm: the time reserved for practical life during the week, and time for contemplation on the Sabbath, which must be dedicated to study, to thought, to the analysis of the sacred text and one's own doings. Thus this is the contemplative life: 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.

The temporal rhythm that makes the Sabbath the crowning moment of working life, an occasion awaited with joy and trepidation as a time of pure happiness, stresses that this joy may be attained only after six days of work. It is not possible to extend it to other days of the week.

God as a Model

It is explicitly stated in *De Decalogo* 96–98 that God is the model for both active and contemplative life:

> The fourth commandment deals with the sacred seventh day, that it should be observed in a reverent and religious manner. While some states celebrate this day as a feast once a month, reckoning it from the commencement as shown by the moon, the Jewish nation never ceases to do so at continuous intervals with six days between each. There is an account recorded in the story of the Creation containing a cogent reason for this: we are told that the world was made in six days and that on the seventh God ceased from His works[1] and began to contemplate what

[1] The cessation of work expressed by the participle introduces the action of the seventh day, contemplation, expressed by the verb in the objective infinitive.

> had been so well created,[2] and therefore He bade those who should live as citizens under this world-order follow God in this as in other matters. So He commanded that they should apply themselves to work for six days but rest on the seventh and turn to the study of wisdom, and that while they thus had leisure for the contemplation of the truths of nature they should also consider whether any offence against purity had been committed in the preceding days.[3]

The need for a break from work, a pause for reflection which allows us to think about ourselves and the things contained in nature, is couched in these terms. The seventh day becomes an archetype: it commands us to think about things in philosophical terms, to break off everyday activities, our toil, the profane thoughts for which the other six days of the week are reserved. We must instead devote ourselves to happiness,[4] improve our conduct, examine our own consciences,[5] and analyze the relationships pertaining between ourselves and the world, between mortals and God. The model for the two best kinds of life, the practical kind and the theoretical kind, is thus introduced.[6]

Alternation between Theoretical and Practical

In *De Specialibus Legibus* II 60–64, it is clarified that the right, healthy equilibrium is established between soul and body by means of the temporal rhythm marked by the Sabbath, which alternates six days of work with a pause for rest. Indeed, the Sabbath allows our fatigued

---

[2] Rather than God's contemplation of His own actions, the biblical text highlights His judgement "He saw that it was good". It does not refer just to the Sabbath, but concerns every single day. Regarding God's contemplation of His work and the awareness of His perfection, see *Migr.* 42, 135; *Her* 159–160.

[3] Cf. *Opif.* 89; *Post.* 64–65; *Mos.* II 209 ff.; *Spec.* II. 39; 56–70; 249–251; *QG.* II 41; III 49.

[4] *Decal.* 100: "'Always follow God', it says, 'find in that single six-day period in which, all-sufficient for His purpose, He created the world, a pattern of the time set apart to thee for activity. Find, too, in the seventh day the pattern of thy duty to study wisdom, that day in which we are told that He surveyed what He had wrought, and so learn to meditate thyself on the lessons of nature and all that in thy own life makes for happiness.'"

On contemplation as a pleasure, see *Fug.* 37.

[5] See *Opif.* 128.

[6] *Decal.* 101: "Let us not then neglect this great archetype of the two best lives, the practical and the contemplative, but with that pattern ever before our eyes engrave in our hearts the clear image and stamp of them both, so making mortal nature, as far as may be, like the immortal by saying and doing what we ought."

bodies to recover and, at the same time, permits us to strengthen our souls by means of virtuous teachings. The seventh day a vast number of schools are open in every city, in which masters teach virtue, and activities proper to the soul are practised.

The chronological sequence according to which working time is followed by a time for rest is taken from the weekly dimension and applied to the whole course of life: practical activities are proper to mature life while, after the age of fifty, those who have played a role in the community are allowed to devote themselves to contemplation.[7] As V. Nikiprowetzky[8] points out, this cut-off point is also mentioned in Plato's *Republic*.[9] However, it seems to me that the transition established by Plato, from a life of preparation to political activities and government of the city, is set on a different plane from that in Philo. It seems to resemble rather more closely the way the Levites did things. In *De Fuga* 37–38 Philo states that

> the Levites were charged to perform their active service until the age of fifty (*Numb*. 4.3 ff.), but, when released from their practical ministry, to make everything an object of observation and contemplation; receiving as a prize for duty well done in the active life a quite different way of life whose delight is in knowledge and study of principles alone.[10]

Thus theoretical activity is a reward for those who have already done their duty (have duly busied themselves with practical activities).

Kinds of Life

An explicit distinction is therefore made between types of life characterized not only by the different activities carried out, but also by the beneficiaries of these activities: oneself or others. Underlying this Philonic

[7] Cf. *Praem.* 51: the contemplative life in old age, the practical life during youth.
[8] "Les suppliants chez Philon d'Alexandrie" in Id., *Études philoniennes* cit. 37–38.
[9] Cf. *Republic* VII 540a–c.
[10] Cf. *Det.* 63. In *QE* II 31 too, it is stressed that practical activities are reserved for the young, and contemplation of nature for the old. The interesting aspect of this passage is the clarification that youth and old age are not, however, necessarily connected with the age of the individuals in question, as old and young principles interact in every soul. Just as in the life of every individual, work days and Sabbath follow in a *continuum* of practical and contemplative activities, so in the soul of all of us there are elements of youth and old age, which lead one to carry out different activities at various times of life. Normally these are determined by biological age, but they can also alternate in accordance with other criteria.

distinction between kinds of life there is undoubtedly a rethinking of previous theorizations. In Greek thought, the theme of different types of life is so ancient that it is impossible to trace it back to its original sources. Ancient poetry already examines the choices made by men who crave riches, pleasure and fame as compared with the quest for happiness.[11] In Plato's Academy and the Socratic schools one of the subjects under discussion was the characteristics of the *bios theoretikos* and the different types of life men could choose: the pleasure-seeking life, political life, the quest for knowledge. The relationship between philosophical activities and happiness is also discussed.

The first chapters of book VII of Aristotle's *Politics*, which examines the nature of the *bios hairetotatos*, paint an eloquent picture of previous discussions on practical-political life as opposed to philosophical life. Those who primarily pursue a philosophical ideal contrast with those who cling to a political ideal, as do those who criticise the despotic aspects of power with those who seek to identify non-tyrannical forms of government. In Aristotle's arguments, tensions emerge between ideals of contemplative life and political life; different stances are taken in *Politics* and in the *Ethics* as regards the preferability of *bios theoretikos* to *bios politikos.* There is also much debate as to what *praktikos bios* means and how this relates to *theoretikos.*[12] It would not be appropriate here to go into whether or not the theoretical life is preferable to the political one in Plato and Aristotle and under what conditions, or to examine the relationship pertaining between the two authors; nor is there room to dwell on the debates raging in Hellenistic and imperial thought, in particular with regard to the discussion of Stoicism and Cicero's theses.[13] What I would, however, like to point out is that some Philonic themes are partially developed in previous authors, whose ideas probably provided a reference for his thought. In IV century theorization, there was lively debate as to the following questions in particular:

---

[11] Cf. R. Joly, *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l'antiquité classique* (Bruxelles 1956) 12 ff.

[12] Cf. S. Gastaldi, *Bios hairetotatos. Generi di vita e felicità in Aristotele* (Napoli 2003) 17.

[13] For recent works which focus on these themes and the relative interpretative discussions, see F. L. Lisi (ed.), *The Ways of Life in Classical Political Philosophy* (Sankt Augustin 2004). On the subject of the contemplative life, the definitive text remains that of A. Grilli, *Vita contemplativa. Il problema della vita contemplativa nel mondo greco-romano* (reprint. Brescia 2002). On Seneca see J.-M. André, "Les rapports entre vie active et vie contemplative dans l'oeuvre philosophique de Sénèque: le 'De brevitate vitae', le 'De constantia sapientis', le 'De tranquillitate animae' et le 'De otio' ", *ANRW* II 36.3 (1989) 1724–1778.

a) The desirability of a life devoted to study and philosophy, even if the word philosophy as used in Philo has some rather singular connotations, which should be clarified.
b) The need to take part in community life not for personal ends, due to ambition or a thirst for power, but in order to pursue the common interest.
c) The problem of political commitment under a despotic regime: Philo was certainly not the first author to debate the distinction between a man of politics and a demagogue, nor to discuss the right attitude to take when dealing with a man with power.
d) The hypothesis that happiness is closely connected with contemplation.

Exegesis and Contemplation

I would now like to clarify the first point. In Philo contemplation equals study: exegesis. Given that the cosmos is the work of God, who made it following the order and the law expressed in the *Torah*, any exegesis of the biblical text throws light on the nature of reality, and interpretation of the world of nature is tantamount to the analysis of a text that is symmetrical to and consistent with the biblical text. The *Torah* gives a reading of the cosmos and its rules, together with the relationships existing between men, animals, God and nature.[14] *Theorein* is exegesis; contemplative life is study. Moses was able to grasp the principles of nature; he understood the order of the universe, and also the relationship between active cause and passive cause, between "the absolutely pure and unadulterated intellect of the universe"[15] and the world. Moses' laws are "firm, unshaken, immovable, stamped, as it were, with the seals of nature herself".[16] Reading the words of Moses thus does not allow

[14] "La *contemplation du monde*, s'agissant des Juifs dont parle Philon, ne saurait désigner une science de la nature au sens où nous l'entendons aujourd'hui. Un texte comme *Spec*. I 49 dans lequel Dieu lui-même révèle à Moïse qu'il appelle l'homme à la contemplation de l'Univers, spectacle, ajoute-t-il, qui s'adresse non aux yeux corporels, mais à ceux, toujours vigilants, de l'esprit—vient encore confirmer ce jugement. [...] La notion de «contemplation de la nature» ou de «physique» est, chez Philon, étroitement liée, parfois, à celle de l'allégorie. [...] la contemplation de l'univers, n'est qu'un autre nom de la sagesse ou de la philosophie véritable" (V. Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l'Écriture* cit. 103).

[15] *Opif.* 8; Cf. *Her*. 227 ff.

[16] *Mos.* II 14.

one solely to gain indications for one's own moral improvement, or to learn about virtue and good conduct. Moses also provides a study on the natural truths,[17] teachings as to the nature of reality, the cause of the universe, man's place in the world. Contemplation of the things in nature thus leads one back to God's law, the rules laid down in the κοσμοποιία. Studying the *Torah* one learns about the first cause, one studies philosophy:

> What the disciples of the most excellent philosophy gain from its teaching, the Jews gain from their customs and laws, that is to know the highest, the most ancient Cause of all things.[18]

The Jews' schools of philosophy were the synagogues where they met to study the philosophy of the Fathers, the relationships between God and men, the nature of virtue.[19] The aim of their studies was not purely to know about nature, but rather to consider the law of nature seen as God's law.

> And the wisdom must not be that of the systems hatched by the word-catchers and sophists who sell their tenets and arguments like any bit of merchandise in the market, men who for ever pit philosophy against philosophy without a blush.[20]

On the contrary, one example of philosophical activity was that carried out by the Essenes, who neglected logic and natural philosophy in favour of a physics which taught about the existence of God and the creation of the universe, a moral philosophy that hinged on the law, an exegesis performed using an ancient method of research. This was based on the interpretation of symbols, not confining itself to a purely literal reading, and gained insight into the hidden sense of the text.[21] The prime example of the contemplative life is given by the Therapeutae, whose entire existence was devoted to study and exegesis, to the analysis of God's precepts and contemplation of

---

17 *Mos.* II 216.
18 *Virt.* 65.
19 Cf. *Spec*. II 62–65; *Somn.* II 127; *Mos.* II 216.
20 *Mos.* II 212.
21 Cf. *Prob.* 80–82. As to possible sources of the passages in question, see R. A. Argall, "A Hellenistic Jewish Source on the Essenes in Philo, Every Good Man is Free 75–91 and Josephus, Antiquities 18. 18–22", in R. A. Argall, B. A. Bow, R. W. Werline, *For a Later Generation. The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 2000) 13–24. On exegesis as a philosophy, see V. Nikiprowetzky, *Le Commentaire de l' Écriture chez Philon* cit. 97–155; Id. *Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): *De Decalogo* (Paris 1965) 149–153, n.c. 18.

> nature and what it has to teach [. . .] citizens of Heaven and the world, presented to the Father and maker of all by their faithful sponsor Virtue, who has procured for them God's friendship.[22]

With regard to their activities, it is clearly said that contemplation consists in exegesis, allegorical interpretation of the philosophy of the Fathers, analysis of hidden reality and the covert meanings contained in the texts,[23] a vision of the Being who leads to perfect happiness,[24] prayer to lead the soul to follow truth,[25] θεωρεῖν following the allegorical method, contemplation of the things in nature according to the principles of Moses.[26] This essentially consists in study and exegesis: even the way we see the things in nature, our view of reality, our contemplation of the Being depends on the texts and interpretation of the same. The Therapeutae prayed that they would know how to follow the truth: it was a request that they might know how to study and gain knowledge.

For Philo, the Therapeutae, who chose philosophy and contemplation above all things, are a model of life for common mortals: study and exegesis are a goal to pursue for everyone. The people of Israel, "the people who sees God", who were able to contemplate and delve into natural realities,[27] devoted themselves to interpreting nature and their own actions via the study of the *Torah*.[28]

The Practical Life

Just as contemplative life does not really indicate the study of natural reality or knowledge for the sake of knowledge, as it could be defined in most of Greek philosophy, Aristotle first and foremost, the idea of practical life should also be set in the context of the political choices and participation in community life foreseen by Philo. When he traces out his own personal choices, the Alexandrian describes why he opts for a life that does not consist purely of study in terms of a need imposed by

---

[22] *Contempl.* 90.
[23] See *Contempl.* 28.
[24] See *Contempl.* 11–12.
[25] See *Contempl.* 27.
[26] See *Contempl.* 64.
[27] Cf. *Her.* 279.
[28] In *Her.* 79, Israel "extends his vision to the ether and the revolutions of the heaven; he has been trained also to look steadfastly for the manna, which is the word of God, the heavenly incorruptible food of the soul which delights in the vision".

circumstances. A purely theoretical life would be much more congenial to him, but Philo felt the obligation to devote himself to his community and take a political role in it. It was a painful choice required by his preoccupation with the political situation, a choice from which the author continuously seeks to escape, at least briefly, in order to devote himself to study and exegesis: in contemplation lies happiness and the joy found in feeling uplifted, investigating matters pertaining to what is divine and admiring what is most beautiful in nature.[29]

With regard to this swing between being thrust downwards by practical life and surging upwards in contemplation, Philo cites the example of the Platonic philosopher kings who, for the good of the city, returned to the cave from which they had escaped after great efforts, even though it was the last thing they really wanted to do. For Philo politics, as such, is an ambiguous activity, positive if its aim is to further the community's interests, negative if it serves egoistical ends. It is mostly seen as something extra, the pursuit of superfluous assets, of honours and recognition devoid of all substance, a compliance with special codes which have been added to the only true law of nature, thus introducing changeability, multiplicity and individual peculiarities.[30] Whereas Abraham and Jacob represent those who search for truth,[31] Joseph, the politician *par excellence*, has a name which already proclaims the additional, essentially superfluous, nature of an activity directed wholly towards enhancing one's public appearance, towards superficial goals, acquiring useless riches and deceptive honours.[32]

The two-fold nature of politics is clearly brought out in *De Josepho* where, on the one hand, we have a view of political life in terms of a pastoral activity aiming to guide subjects along the right road,[33] to provide an orientation for their conduct in terms of virtue, the ability to choose and indicate what should and should not be done; on the other we have an example of the good politician degenerating into the demagogue who acts as servant and master of the mob, who are bent to his desires while, at the same time, he practically becomes their slave.[34]

---

[29] Cf.. *Spec.* III 1–6.
[30] Cf. *Jos.* 28–34.
[31] Cf. *Ebr.* 82–94.
[32] Cf. *Mut.* 89–90; *Somn*. II 47.
[33] Cf. *Jos.* 2.
[34] Cf. *Jos.* 35.

By interpreting the wishes of the man in the street,[35] the politician can stand as a positive figure, able to realize the people's daydreams and set them on the right road.[36] On the other hand, he can take advantage of others' desires and exploit them for his own egoistical ends.[37]

Since he clearly contrasts contemplative life and practical life when speaking of himself and his own choices, Philo obviously has activities regarding the public interest in mind, such as being an ambassador to Rome and other initiatives aiming to promote the well-being of his own community. If one is considering a life that is not solely contemplative, however, practical working activities must be taken into account. In other words, the identification of different types of life and the decision as to the best choices does not imply a clear-cut distinction between *bios politikos, bios praktikos* and *bios poietikos*. On the contrary, the divine model which created the world in six days has more in common with productive activities than political life, while the call to be present in society is more on the political side.

Coessentiality of Practical and Contemplative Activities

Practical and contemplative activities are—as we have seen—coessential and choosing one over the other would be sterile and egoistic. Out of the various types of life,[38] the contemplative choice is the best and theoretical activity brings pure happiness, but one can only devote oneself to it after having played an active role in the community. It is affirmed that, from an abstract point of view, the theoretical life[39] is the most preferable in *Migr.* 47; however here, the text refers not so much to the decision between a contemplative life and a practical life as to the preferability of vision over hearing. More direct praise of the wisdom of choosing the theoretical path can be found in a passage of *QG* (IV 47):

---

[35] Cf. *Ios.* 125 ff.

[36] Cf. *Ios.* 67–69; 143 ff.

[37] Cf. *Ios.* 61–66.

[38] On the contemplative life as the best life and as regards the discussion on various types of life cf.. V. Nikiprowetzky, *De Decalogo* cit. 155 n. 21. As regards eudaimonism with respect to a good life and the theological connotations see D. T. Runia, "Eudaimonism in Hellenistic-Jewish Literature", in J. L. Kugel (ed.), *Shem in the Tents of Japhet: Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 74 (Leiden 2002) 131–157.

[39] Cf. *Fug.* 36.

> the wise man (pursues) peace and _____ and leisure in order that he may devote himself to following after divine contemplation. But the wicked man (pursues) the city and the excitement of the multitude and the crowding of the city and the stream of men and things as well. For the love of business and greed and zeal to obtain authority are honourable to such a man, but quiet is not honourable. But he who is progressive between both moves toward the peacefulness of security [...].[40]

Jacob, the symbol of ascetic effort, whose name is changed to Israel, 'he who sees God', stands for study and progress, the transition from active to contemplative life, the achieving of vision that can only take place after a lengthy quest.[41] The validity of both types of life and the need to devote oneself to both is explicitly stated in *De Vita Mosis* (I 48) where it is said that Moses

> was carrying out the exercises of virtue with an admirable trainer, the reason within him, under whose discipline he laboured to fit himself for life in its highest forms, the theoretical and the practical.[42]

In *Spec.* II 64, it is affirmed that everyone needs to alternate practical life and contemplative life. Clarifying the meaning of the rhythm with which the days of the week follow each other, Philo connects work days with caring for the body, and the Sabbath with caring for the soul. In a person's life, the two best types of life continuously follow one after the other, and life will be rhythmically marked out by a continuous swing from practical to contemplative life and vice versa.

To a certain extent, Therapeutae and Essenes represented the two best types of life. At least, so Philo affirms in *De vita contemplativa* (§1) where he contrasts the Essenes, who "persistently pursued the active life" with the Therapeutae "who embraced the life of contemplation". It is set in the context that the practical life in question does not consist in political commitment but in a life of work. Once again, the lack of distinction between political life and poietic life, which would pose a big problem for a IV century theorist, is perfectly acceptable for Philo, who is interested in social activity in terms of participation in com-

---

[40] "There are three ways of life which are well known: the contemplative, the active and the pleasurable. Great and excellent is the contemplative; slight and unbeautiful is the pleasurable; small and not small is the middle one, which touches on, and adheres to, both of them" (*QG* IV 47).

[41] Cf. *Ebr.* 82–83.

[42] On the importance of the copresence of practical life and contemplative life cf. *Ebr.* 87.

munity life, and is indifferent to a political choice, such as participating in government.

However, in *Fug.* 36, when speaking of the need for a practical life, Philo clearly alludes to political activity, which is seen as a preparation for a contemplative life.[43]

Solitude and Desolation

Isolation or a secluded life are to be deprecated. The zeal that drives some individuals to lead a life apart, dedicated exclusively to the veneration of God and neglecting social relationships and a life in the community is to be criticised.

> Truth would therefore rightly find fault with those who without full consideration give up the business and financial side of a citizen's life, and say that they have conceived a contempt for fame and pleasure. For they do not despise these things, they are practising an imposture. Their dirty bodies and gloomy faces, the rigour and squalor of their pinched life, are so many baits to lead others to regard them as lovers of orderliness and temperance and endurance.[44]

[43] "Begin, then, by getting some exercise and practice in the business of life both private and public; and when by means of the sister virtues, household-management and statesmanship, you have become masters in each domain, enter now, as more than qualified to do so, on your migration to a different and more excellent way of life. For the practical comes before the contemplative life; it is a sort of prelude to a more advanced contest; and it is well to have fought it out first" (*Fug.* 36).

The old who have previously acted in the world are permitted to contemplate (*Fug.* 37–38; *Det.* 63–66. The Therapeutae, too, can devote themselves to contemplation only after having led an active life. See V. Nikiprowetzky, "Le thème du désert chez Philon d'Alexandrie" in Id., *Études philoniennes* cit. 306.

[44] *Fug.* 33. Cf. *Fug.* 35: "To such men, then let us say: Do you affect the life that eschews social intercourse with others, and courts solitary loneliness? Well, what proof did you ever give before this of noble social qualities? Do you renounce money-making? When engaged in business, were you determined to be just in your dealings? Would you make a show of paying no regard to the pleasures of the belly and the parts below it—say, when you had abundant material for indulging in these, did you exercise moderation? Do you despise popular esteem? Well, when you held posts of honour, did you practise simplicity? State business is an object of ridicule to you people. Perhaps you have never discovered how serviceable a thing it is". Cf. *Mut.* 44–45. For criticism of an exclusively allegorical interpretation of the law leading to lack of compliance with the same, see *Migr.* 89 ff.

Individuals who choose to neglect and isolate themselves as symbols of a virtuous life are judged to be despicable. Choosing abstinence and self-denial as a mark of commitment is not a good idea; one should rather cultivate one's capacity for control and good judgement, the ability to make useful choices, to overcome one's egoism and narcissistic behaviour, in order to promote wisdom and justice.

Contemplative activity can be engaged in only after an active life and, in any case, contemplative life does not mean isolation, a solitary and secluded life, separation from social interaction or making sacrifices. In *Mut.* 39 "men inspired with heaven-sent madness, men who have gone out into the wild" are contrasted with those who do not abandon civilised life or neglect their bodies. Those who "have followed a tame and gentle wisdom, and such are both eminent in the practice of piety and do not despise human things" are definitely preferable to pale, drawn ascetics, "wasted and withered, so to speak".[45] Again in *Post.* 173, Abel, who took refuge in divine matters, is contrasted with Seth, who did not abandon his fellow men. So, seeking God, contemplation and study of the sacred text do not justify a secluded life, or isolation.

> There are some who, regarding laws in their literal sense in the light of symbols of matters belonging to the intellect [. . .] as though they were living alone by themselves in a wilderness, or as though they had become disembodied souls, and knew neither city nor village nor household nor any company of human beings at all, overlooking all that the mass of men regard, they explore reality in its naked absoluteness.

Being convinced that their theories are correct, they only pursue the truth, and fail to concern themselves with the reality surrounding them.

> these men are taught by the sacred word to have thought for good repute, and to let go nothing that is part of the customs fixed by divinely empowered men greater than those of our time.[46]

Choosing to be alone and take refuge in a quiet place makes sense when the idea is to flee from the turmoil of the crowd, courts, gatherings, assemblies, theatres which present a mix of true and false, profane and sacred, the ridiculous and the serious, occasions pervaded with disorder, lack of moderation and error. On the other hand, the worthless man

[45] *Mut.* 33.
[46] *Migr.* 89–90.

> whose life is one long restlessness haunts market-places, theatres, law-courts, council-halls, assemblies, and every group and gathering of men [...] The man of worth on the other hand, having acquired a desire for a quiet life, withdraws from the public and loves solitude, and his choice is to be unnoticed by the many, not because he is misanthropical [...] but because he has rejected vice which is welcomed by the multitude who rejoice at what calls for mourning and grieve where it is well to be glad. And therefore he mostly secludes himself at home and scarcely ever crosses his threshold, or else because of the frequency of visitors he leaves the town.[47]

And there he spends his time amongst his books.

So he does not leave the city and his commitments towards the community because he hates his fellow men, but in order to avoid vice.[48] In any case, it is not a question of rejecting social life. In this way, the Essenes avoided the chaos, the crime and the violence of the cities by living in villages, taking up a trade, making themselves useful to themselves and others. The philosophical aspects that interested them, beyond anything relating to the existence of God and the creation of the universe, were first and foremost moral issues, the laws of the Fathers, the right way to behave, economics and politics. In other words, they were interested in love both of God and of mankind and they led a community life devoted to work and study.[49]

The Therapeutae, who chose to leave the city in order to devote themselves to contemplation, did not then become hermits or recluses. Their asceticism consisted in allegorical interpretation of the Fathers' philosophy, in their exegeses that they would carry out for six days in isolation and, then, on the Sabbath, in the company of the others (*Contempl.* 28 ff.). Theirs was a community life, which is possible only after a practical life carried out in society. The desert is not necessarily a place of solitude. It may constitute a time of liberation from the past, a *tabula rasa* upon which to construct a new set of laws and a new

[47] *Abr.* 20–23. Cf. *QG* IV 47 where, speaking of the three possible types of life: the contemplative one, the practical one and the one devoted to pleasure, it is maintained that the wise man escapes from the turmoil of the crowds, in which the wicked find their pleasures.

[48] Cf. *Spec.* II 44–45.

[49] Cf. *Prob.* 76–91. As regards the activities of the Essenes, who work during the week and philosophize on the Sabbath and are representatives of the active life, whereas the Therapeutae are contemplative, full-time philosophers, cf. V. Nikiprowetzky, *Le Decalogue* cit. 150 n.c. 18.

society, an environment free of the dregs and conflicts of the past: it does not constitute a choice to isolate oneself from society.[50]

Thus, at Sinai, the people received the law in the desert and this is no coincidence: cities are riddled with innumerable evils, falseness, deceit, deception; they are contaminated and impure places.[51] Israel left the city to found a new society, to receive a law which established new social and political relationships. Choosing to take the people into the desert was thus one way of creating a new situation free of negative conditioning and pre-existing rules, a place where extraordinary events could be accepted as true and believed.[52] The desert is a place where exceptional events can take place, a suspended condition in which unique phenomena can occur: manna from heaven, dazzling lightening and deafening noises; one may even 'hear' the voice of God. In the desert, we have a break from everyday life, which can be returned to after divine revelation. The law was given in the desert, but its range of application was not confined to the desert: it constituted an indication of the relationships between man, God and nature. Those it was destined for were not hermits.

The city-nature opposition can be found in Platonism, Cynicism and Stoicism, and it is also common in some biblical texts, in which human community life is often connected with social inequality.[53] The theme

---

[50] Cf. F. Calabi, "Ordine delle città e ordine del mondo nel 'De Decalogo' di Filone di Alessandria", in A. M. Mazzanti e F. Calabi (a c. di), *La rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria: natura, legge, storia* (Villa Verucchio 2004) 139–158; Ead., "Introduzione" in Filone di Alessandria, *De Decalogo*, a c. di F. Calabi (Pisa 2005).

[51] The city as a den of vice and unbridled desires also appears in other passages from Philo, for example in *Det.* 174 and *Spec.* III 37, while the passages in *Conf.* 84 and 196 highlight the wickedness and the confusion which reign supreme in the cities, a confusion of which the Tower of Babel is emblematic. In *Sacrif.* 50 Moses led his people away from the vulgar concerns of political life into the desert, where there was no injustice, and in Prob. 76 we find an explanation of the Essenes' choice to live in villages: they have escaped from the cities because they are places where every sort of crime takes place, where impurity and sicknesses are rife. The image in *Hypoth.* 11.1 is rather different as, according to this text, the Essenes also live in the cities.

The image of the cities as places of impurity and transgression is related to cities "bloated with luxury" and ambition, places where community living has degenerated, aiming not to achieve order and establish and apply the law, but to acquire worldly possessions and seek to achieve egoistical ends. It is the exact opposite of the image of the city as a symbol of order, the example of cosmic order and the right relationship of government, the explication of providence that Runia advances in "The Idea and the Reality of the City in the Thought of Philo of Alexandria", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (2000) 361–379 (367–8).

[52] *Decal.* 2–16.

[53] Cf. V. Nikiprowetzky, "Le thème du desert" cit. 298–299.

of leaving the cities, places of depravation and vice, is a very frequent one in the imperial literature[54] and became a *topos* for diatribe.[55] One significant example is the *VII Letter* of Pseudo Heraclitus,[56] where the cities are devoid of virtues and surrounded by walls, the symbol of wickedness. Within them, hate and conflicts, violence and transgression, ambition and greed reign. The cities are deserted, desolate and arid.

> Cities have been deserted by virtues; as regards the committing of evil deeds, deserts are crowded (αἱ πόλεις ἔρημοι καλοκαγαθίας, αἱ ἐρημίαι πρὸς τὸ ἀδικεῖν ὄχλοι). Walls, the symbols of men's wickedness, have been built to keep out violence (transl. mine).[57]

There is an inversion of the desolation that is, theoretically, proper to the desert and the barrenness of the city, which becomes the truly deserted place.

In a number of texts, the laws of nature are contrasted with the special laws of cities, inequality and violence. This also applies to Philo. However, while in other authors, such as the Cynics for example, nature represents the search for isolation and seclusion, the Philonic desert is characterized by the presence of the people, the establishment of social laws and relationships among men; there is no opposition between nature and social life, the desire for solitude and seclusion. The desert is a place of peace, of serenity, of freedom from passions and impurity. It is also a place of deprivation and trial,[58] of self knowledge and growth.[59] It is the opposite of the cities, with their hubbub and disorder. Nikiprowetzky[60] reminds us that, in *De vita contemplativa*, the city is riddled with evil and injustice. The Therapeutae chose to leave it and to abandon habits common to it.

It was not for this reason, however, that they opted to reject community life. Unlike the radical Allegorists, who lived as if they were

---

[54] See e.g. the third *Satire* of Juvenal.

[55] Cf. Runia, "The Idea and the Reality" cit. pp. 10–11.

[56] Cf. P. Wendland, "Philo und die Kynisch-Stoische Diatribe", in P. Wendland–O. Kern (hrsg.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie und Religion* (Berlin 1895) 1–75 (33 ff.).

[57] VII 53.

[58] See V. Nikiprowetzky, "Le thème du desert" cit. 295–298. Nel *De Posteritate* (155–169), instead, the desert is an allegory of the obstacles to be overcome in order to attain virtue.

[59] Cf. I. Davidzon, "Il deserto nel 'De Vita Mosis' di Filone alessandrino: possibilità di un'ascesa etica e conoscitiva attraverso i prodigi", *Materia giudaica* VII/1 (2002) 67–73.

[60] "Le thème du desert" cit. 306 ff.

alone, the Therapeutae devoted themselves to study and exegesis; they celebrated the Sabbath and the anniversary of the Red Sea events and the exodus. At all times in their lives, they relived the experience of the desert as the time of revelation, together with its meaning: rapport with God, exegesis, relationships with other people, the acceptance of rules and regulations. On the other hand, the desert as a place of solitude and isolation has no positive connotations. It is negative, indicating dissipation. It is also a haven for snakes and scorpions, which symbolize the pleasures and the passions.

> For many a time have I myself forsaken friends and kinsfolk and country and come into a wilderness to give my attention to some subject demanding contemplation, and derived no advantage from doing so, but my mind scattered or bitten by passion has gone off to matters of the contrary kind. [...] The soul falls in with a scorpion, which is 'scattering', in the wilderness, and the drought of the passions seizes upon it, until God send forth the stream from His strong wisdom and quench with unfailing health the thirst of the soul that had turned from Him.[61]

Solitude is thus not necessarily of value. It has a sense and should be pursued when it enhances our relationships with God and the law. In this perspective, the choice made by those who translated the *Bible* into Greek, sent to Ptolemy Philadelphus by the Great Priest, is significant. After banquets during which they were able to display their wisdom, they devoted themselves to the task they had been assigned: the translation of the *Torah*.

> They proceeded to look for the most open and unoccupied spot in the neighbourhood outside the city. For, within the walls, it was full of every kind of living creatures, and consequently the prevalence of diseases and death, and the impure conduct of the healthy inhabitants, made them suspicious of it.[62]

---

[61] *Leg.* II 85–86. In his article "The Idea and Reality of the City" cit. (361) Runia discusses this passage, reading it however as in praise of solitude. Runia thus stresses the positive aspect of leaving the city in order to be alone. According to this interpretation the desert is not so much the place of an experience common to the whole people or, at least, to a certain group, as an attempt to find solitude as a way of getting closer to God. Runia interprets *Abr.* 87 thus: "Those who seek God and yearn to find Him love the solitude which is dear to Him". This scholar reads the passage literally, even if he stresses that, in other passages, Abraham's emigration should be understood "in terms of the soul's emigration out of the body or her departure from an earthly to a heavenly fatherland".

[62] *Mos.* II 34.

The first reason for isolating themselves was thus their need to distance themselves from the impurities found in the city. Here we are still in the sphere of an opposition: isolated place = pure / city = contaminated place. However, the text goes on to introduce a new theme: the advisability of solitude in order to get into contact with one's own inner being and gain access to forms of knowledge.

> In front of Alexandria lies the island of Pharos, stretching with its narrow strip of land towards the city, and enclosed by a sea not deep but mostly consisting of shoals, so that the loud din and booming of the surging waves grows faint through the long distance before it reaches the land. Judging this to be the most suitable place in the district, where they might find peace and tranquility and the soul could commune with the laws with none to disturb its privacy, they fixed their abode there; and, taking the sacred books, stretched them out towards heaven with the hands that held them, asking of God that they might not fail in their purpose.[63]

Isolation, the silence broken only by the water lapping, the absence of any contact other than that with the elements of nature, so enhanced their rapport with God's words that "they became as it were possessed, and, under inspiration, wrote".[64]

The Therapeutae

The prime examples of the contemplative option, the Therapeutae, can be medicinal for the soul, and they also serve the Being in accordance with nature and the sacred laws: it is for this reason that they are so named.[65] Driven by the desire to see the Being, and thus achieve happiness (*Contempl.* 11), they are dominated by their ardour for philosophical studies (16), enraptured by God's spirit like corybants (12). In them, happiness and contemplation are linked and coexistent:[66] "they have taken to their hearts the contemplation of nature" (90). The contemplative philosophy is the best thing and the most divine (67). They pray

---

[63] *Mos.* II 35–36.
[64] *Mos.* II 37.
[65] *Contempl.* 2.
[66] Cf. P. Graffigna, in Filone d'Alessandria, *La vita contemplativa*, a c. di Ead. (Genova 1992) 163. On possible references to Aristotle regarding the happiness of the contemplative life, see P. Graffigna, "Modelli di vita felice. Felicità e stabilità in Filone di Alessandria", in A. M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi (a c. di), *La rivelazione in Filone* cit. 193–215 (213–214).

that their intelligence may be full of light (27) and that they may gain knowledge of truth and the penetrating insight of reason (89). They never forget God, even in their dreams (26).

Leaving their riches to sons, daughters or friends (13), free from all bonds (18), they lived outside the walls in deserted places. Leaving the cities, which are rife with hubbub and disturbances and unsuited to those seeking to gain wisdom (19–20), they practised philosophy.

> This kind exists in many places in the inhabited world [...] but the best of these votaries journey from every side to settle in a certain very suitable place which they regard as their fatherland [...]. This place is situated above the Mareotic lake on a somewhat low-lying hill very happily placed both because of its security and the pleasantly tempered air (21–22).

So we are not talking about a separatist "sect",[67] but about people who, after an active life, have decided to retire to an agreeable place where they can study and lead a quiet life. They have rejected the excesses of the city, a life with too many commitments and bustle, in order to serve God and live out an asceticism consisting in reading the sacred writings and allegorical interpretation of the philosophy of their fathers (28).[68]

The rhythm of their lives is marked out by the alternation of solitary philosophical exercises[69] and exegesis, which they come together to perform (30–33). They thus alternate periods of solitude (during the week) with periods of community life (the Sabbath).[70] Their rhythm is opposite to the habitual one, where working life is in the community, while contemplation equals life alone. This provides further confirmation of the fact that the contemplation carried out by the Therapeutae was not a solitary activity like that of a hermit might be. They lived in a community, in very plain and simple houses (24), just as the furnishings were simple, and likewise the foods served at the feasts which took place every seven weeks (69 ff.). Their goods were community owned and

---

[67] Cf. D. M. Hay, "Foils for the Therapeutae: References to other Texts and Persons in Philo's 'De Vita Contemplativa'", in D. E. Aune, T. Seland, J. H. Ulrichsen (eds.), *Neotestamentica et Philonica. Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen* (Leiden-Boston 2003) 330–348 (344). Runia ["Philo of Alexandria and the Greek Hairesis Model", *Vigiliae Christianae* 53 (1999) 117–47] discusses Philo's use of αἵρεσις in *Contempl.* 29.

[68] Cf. *Contempl.* 75–79.

[69] They contemplate and compose chants and hymns to God (29).

[70] See L. Gusella, "Esseni, Comunità di Qumran, Terapeuti", *Materia giudaica* VI/2 (2001) 223–247 (227).

they really looked forward to the Sabbath, when they met to comment on the holy scriptures.

The Identity of the Therapeutae

One question which arises is whether the Therapeutae were a self-contained group, autonomous from or even set against the priests of Jerusalem, a sort of separate 'sect', or whether, as Nikiprowetzky[71] maintains, they were fully aligned with the Levites, with whom they maintained a respectful—even submissive—relationship, evidence for which could be found in their choice of foods, which were different from those reserved for the Levites.[72] In Nikiprowetzky's opinion, there was an almost total agreement between the Therapeutaes' doctrine and the Levites' ideals of life. This scholar[73] sees the very name that they were given, a name that was not specifically used only for the group from lake Mareotis, as proof that it was not some sort of separate group: the Essenes described in *Quod omnis probus* 75 are also called θεραπευταὶ θεοῦ.The hypothesis is, therefore, that the Therapeutae were a group of volunteers who had gathered to live a type of life parallel to that of the rest of Israel.[74]

In the opinion of Riaud,[75] the community by Lake Mareotis actually worked like a Temple. It is as if the Therapeutae, in their turn, were priests: theirs was a cult.[76] Perhaps the question is not whether the Therapeutae should be considered as substitutes for priests, but whether the Therapeutae followed the same *halachà* as the Levites of

---

[71] "Les suppliants chez Philon" cit. 34 ff.

[72] See *Contempl.* 37.

[73] "Les suppliants chez Philon" cit. 34–35.

[74] "Les suppliants chez Philon" cit. 35.

[75] "Quelques réflexions sur les Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie à la lumière de 'De Vita Mosis' II, 67", *SPhA* 2 (1991) 184–191.

[76] In Riaud's opinion ("Quelques Réflexions" cit. 189–190, who quotes *Contempl.* 81–82 in this respect), the Levites lived and worked in Jerusalem, the Therapeutae at Lake Mareotis; the Levites made sacrifices, the Therapeutae spiritual sacrifices i.e. study and contemplation. They are both supplicants ἱκέται. The condition of supplicants is not linked to prayer which, as such, is not particularly significant: every one of the people prays, it is not solely a privilege restricted to the priests. What sets the Therapeutae apart is an asceticism consisting in interpretation. The true contemplatives are the Therapeutae and, in general, allegorists, exegetes, people who studied; the Levites were anything but. The Therapeutae did not however aspire to replacing the priests, whose role and functions they respected.

Jerusalem. As D. M. Hay[77] sees it, not much of what is said in *De vita contemplativa* refers to any literal compliance with the legislation in the *Pentateuch*. In fact, the role of the Therapeutae within the Jewish community is a much debated theme in the interpretation of Philo's works and authors are totally divided as to the Therapeutaes' identity, and even formulate doubts as to the author of *De vita contemplativa*.

As is clearly explained by Jean Riaud in his elaborate and exhaustive work "Les Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie dans la tradition et dans la recherche critique jusqu'aux découvertes de Qumran" published in *ANRW* 20.II.2, a series of doubts as to the picture depicted by Philo arise out of the consideration that neither Flavius Josephus nor Pliny made any mention of the Therapeutae, nor did Strabo or Apion, and Philo himself did not refer to them in his other works. They are most notably absent from *Quod omnis Probus.*

Is it possible that these authors all kept quiet about such a significant community if it really existed just outside the gates of Alexandria? This is the line followed by F. Daumas,[78] who argues that it would have been difficult to invent the existence of a group living near to Alexandria without being 'found out'. Can we perhaps identify this community with other groups that the aforementioned authors describe or is it an idealization on Philo's part? Rather than describing a community that really existed, was he not maybe tracing out the image of an elevated and pure form of Judaism, a sort of ideal society that came purely out of his imagination, a model of reference, an "utopie de l'ascétisme"[79] and of the contemplative life?[80] What we have to understand is whether

---

[77] "The Veiled Thoughts of the Therapeutae" in R. M. Berchman (ed.), *Mediators of the Divine. Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams and Theurgy in Mediterrerranean Antiquity* (Atlanta Georgia 1998) 167–184 (181, n. 46). Again by Hay, see also "Philo's Anthropology, the Spiritual Regimen of the Therapeutae, and a possible Connection with Corinth" in R. Deines and K.-W. Niebuhr (eds.), *Philo und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen*. 1. Internationales Symposium zum Corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti (Eisenach/Jena, Mai 2003), Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 172 (Tübingen 204) 127–142.

[78] "La 'solitude' des Thérapeutes et les antécédents égyptiens du monachisme chrétien", in *Philon d'Alexandrie. Colloque national du CNRS* (Lyon 11–15 Septembre 1966, Paris 1967) 348.

[79] An expression used by Michel Nicholas in his article "Les Thérapeutes", *Nouvelle Revue de Théologie* (1868) 25–42.

[80] According to J. E. Taylor and P. R. Davies ["The So-called Therapeutae of *De Vita Contemplativa*", *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998) 3–24] with the name Therapeutae people who serve God are designated. The designation has to be understood universally and should not be restricted to a particular community.

we are dealing with a focal point, an ideal, or whether the picture Philo is painting is a true depiction of an existent group. Opting for the former view, T. Engberg-Pedersen[81] speaks of it in terms of a dream. He maintains that Philo 'constructed' *De vita contemplativa* by elaborating the existence of an ideal community starting out from a limited number of real facts. So, in his opinion, what we have here is a fictional story. L. Gusella[82] is of another opinion, and has written one of the most interesting, recent books on the subject, presenting the various interpretative hypotheses most lucidly and thoroughly. She seeks to demonstrate

> come la narrazione del *De vita contemplativa* non coincida mai in tutto e per tutto col pensiero filoniano e neppure sia mai interamente spiegabile in termini di invenzione o racconto di fantasia.

D. Winston[83] is of the opinion that the Therapeutae really existed. He speaks of a community of which Philo had personal knowledge.[84] In Hay's opinion,[85] it was a monastic community which gathered in order to live in accordance with specific ideals, which are not shared *in toto* by Philo, although he recognises that they are in fact examples of contemplative virtue.[86]

---

[81] "Philo's 'De vita contemplativa' as a Philosopher's Dream", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30 (1999) 40–64. See anche M. A. Beavis, "Philo's Therapeutae: Philosopher's Dream or Utopian Construction", *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14 (2004) 30–42.

[82] *Esperienze di communità nel giudaismo antico. Esseni Terapeuti Qumran* (Firenze 2003) 197.

[83] *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, the Giants and Selections* (New York 1981) 41.

[84] According to P. Bilde ["The Essenes in Philo and Josephus", in F. H. Cryer and T. L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran between the Old and the New Testament*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplementary Series, 290 (Sheffield 1998) 32–68] it is possible that the Therapeutae were a Diaspora group closely related to the Essenes.

[85] "The Veiled Thoughts of the Therapeutae" cit. In the article "Foils for the Therapeutae" cit. 347–348 Hay sees *De vita contemplativa* as "an encomium, a description written in praise of contemplation and of a particular community of Jewish contemplatives". For M. Alexandre jr ["The Eloquent Philosopher in Philo's *De Vita contemplativa*", *Euphrosyne* 29 (2001) 319–330] the treatise could be an exhortation to the Jews not to allow themselves to become fully assimilated.

[86] With regard to how the Therapeutae supported themselves, some critics suggest contributions may have been procured by friends and relations in Alexandria. The means of survival of the Therapeutae is one of the themes upon which the critics are divided. The scholars formulate various hypotheses, starting out with what Philo says about the Therapeutae, who "abandon their property to their sons or daughters or to other kinsfolk". Unlike Anaxagoras and Democritus who "smitten with the desire for philosophy [...] left their fields to be devoured by sheep. [...] these men "did not let

According to other scholars, the Therapeutae can be identified with Jewish groups such as the Essenes, Christian communities, or even—and this is the most far-fetched hypothesis—with certain Buddhist groups. Many critics have compared Therapeutae and Essenes, seeking to focalize the similarities and differences between them. Starting out from the assertion made in *De vita contemplativa* 1, which seems to establish some sort of opposition between the Essenes, representatives of the active life, and the Therapeutae, who were devoted to the contemplative life, several authors have hypothesized a division of duties within the same group. Thus, for example, Geza Vermes,[87] taking the etymology of the name Essenes proposed by Epiphanius (from the Aramaic *ase, asajja*, physicians, healers), maintains the existence of a link between Essenes and Therapeutae.[88] This thesis has been taken up by various scholars, who have discussed the relationships which may have existed between Essenes and Therapeutae. Some see in the latter an Egyptian branch of the Palestinian Essenes, while others hold that the two groups were independent.[89]

---

their estates serve as feeding ground for cattle but made good the needs of men, their kinsfolk and friends" (*Contempl.* 13–16).

According to some interpretations, the Therapeutae's relatives maintained them once they had withdrawn to the lake (Cf. J. Riaud, "Quelques Réflexions sur les Thérapeutes" cit. 185 n. 3). Another hypothesis contemplates the possibility that the Therapeutae practised simple crafts or grew vegetables so as to procure what they needed to survive. Another possibility, supported by J. E. Taylor and P. R. Davies, for example ("The So-Called Therapeutae of *De Vita Contemplativa*: Identity and Character", *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998) 3–24 (20–24)), is that the younger members did a whole variety of jobs within the community, while the older members devoted themselves wholly to contemplation.

[87] "The Etymology of 'Essenes'", *Revue de Qumrân* II (1960) 127–143.

[88] G. Vermes, "Essenes-Therapeutai-Qumran", *The Durham University Journal* LII, n. 3 (1960) 95–117.

[89] Amongst those who emphasize the similarities and see a close connection between the two groups, I would like to mention M. Simon, *Les sectes Juives au temps de Jésus* (Paris 1960) 105–113; P. Geoltrain "Le Traité de la Vie Contemplative de Philon d'Alexandrie", *Semitica* X (1960) 28–29, G. Vermes, "Essenes-Therapeutai-Qumran" cit., M. Petit, *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): *Quod omnis probus liber sit* (Paris 1974) 124–128, E. Schürer, *Storia del popolo giudaico al tempo di Gesù Cristo (175 a.C.–135 d.C.)* II (Brescia 1987) 708–713. On the other hand, F. Daumas, *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Cerf): *De vita contemplativa* (Paris 1963) 55–58.); V. Nikiprowetzky "Recherches esséniennes et pythagoriciennes" cit. 313–352); J. Riaud, "Les Thérapeutes" cit. 1288 and J.-Y. Leloup, *Prendre soin de l'être. Philon et les Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1993) 17–18 consider Essenes and Therapeutae to be autonomous and separate groups. In Nikiprowetzky's opinion ("Les Suppliants chez Philon d'Alexandrie" cit. 11–43), for example, the Therapeutae represent the highest level of spirituality in Hellenistic

One of the theses I would particularly like to mention is that proposed by L. Gusella,[90] who maintains that the Therapeutae and the Essenes were totally independent movements, evidence for which can be found in the strong divergences between the two groups. One difference lies in the rhythm of their lives, as they alternated solitude with community events, another consists in the

> composizione mista della comunità, in cui uomini e donne sono ritenuti membri a pari diritto [...] Viceversa, le somiglianze riscontrabili, se analizzate a fondo, si dimostrano spiegabili in altri termini che non quelli della parentela tra questi gruppi. [...] Le uguaglianze tra esseni-qumranici da un lato e Terapeuti dall'altro sono riconducibili al fatto che entrambi questi movimenti scelsero di organizzarsi in una vita comunitaria. [...] I Terapeuti non sono pertanto una ramificazione egiziana dell'essenismo palestinese, né l'ordine contemplativo esseno accanto a quello esseno attivo, ma sono un'esperienza comunitaria distinta e autonoma rispetto agli esseni, con fisionomia e caratteri propri.[91]

In the author's opinion, they were given a sophisticated education and belonged to the highest social classes.[92]

Most of the authors of the ancient tradition saw the Therapeutae as Christians. This theory originated with Eusebius, according to whom Philo met Peter in Rome[93] and the Therapeutae were actually the first Egyptian Christians converted by Mark.[94] Some aspects of the Therapeutae mentioned as closely relating them to Christians were: giving up their worldly belongings and families, in a similar way to that recounted

---

Judaism, in this sense setting them on the level of the priestly tribe (See Id., "Recherches esséniennees et pythagoriciennes" cit. 334–335). The Therapeutae are thus an expression of the Judaism of the Hellenistic diaspora. In a later article ("Le 'De vita contemplativa' revisité", in V. Nikiprowetzky, *Études philoniennes* cit., 199–216 (216), Nikiprowetzky returns to the theme of spiritualization, seeing it in connection with the observance of the Sabbath: "les Thérapeutes étaient des sabbatisants per excellence dont l'originalité, par rapport à d'autres variétés du judaïsme, tenait dans leur spiritualisation particulière de l'institution sabbatique, dans le style de l'*histoire du Salut* où il la faisaient entrer".

[90] *Esperienze di communità* cit.; Ead., "Esseni, communità di Qumran" cit.

[91] "Esseni, comunità di Qumran" cit. 243–244.

[92] Cf. "Esseni, comunità di Qumran" cit. 227.

[93] *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 17, 1; 19, 8.

[94] *Historia Ecclesiastica* II 16–17. For an account of the legend of Philo Christianus see D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature. A Survey* (Assen 1993) 3–7. The related texts can be read in R. Radice and D. T. Runia (eds.), "Testimonia de Philone" in the Italian translation of Runia's book, *Filone di Alessandria nella prima letteratura cristiana. Uno studio d'insieme* a c. di R. Radice (Milano 1999) 365–445.

in the *Acts of the Apostles*, celebrating the eve of an occasion, in particular that of the great feast of the fiftieth day, reading the *Scriptures* and books written by the ancients, explaining texts allegorically, their use of meetings, the presence of women in the community (and the value given to their virginity), plus their respect for a hierarchical order in their prayers and their chants. Eusebius gives us a hint of his own and others' doubts in this respect,[95] but subsequent authors do not seem to have the same feelings. Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome and Cassian thus accept the thesis that Philo was speaking of the church founded by Mark at Alexandria and the customs followed by the Therapeutae are taken to be those described in the *Acts of the Apostles*. Moreover, according to these authors, certain terms used, such as *semneion, monasterion* and *presbyteros*, derive from the language of the Church.

Over the following centuries, the idea that Philo was describing a group of Christians was continuously brought up, resulting in hypotheses such as that of G. Fayot,[96] according to whom *De vita contemplativa* was the work of an Alexandrian Jew who lived during the II century and was converted to Christianity. With the Reformation, the description of the life of the Therapeutae was used in the dispute between Protestants and Catholics as to how ancient the monastic institution was.[97] The Therapeutic and Essenic experiences and forms of Christian monkhood have been studied by A. Penna[98] and A. Guillaumont,[99] amongst others. R. Cacitti[100] returns to the historiographic issue of the identity of the Therapeutae and whether they can be identified with Christians, setting his argument within the sphere of the debate on the genesis of Christianity in Alexandria. He highlights the fluidity of an environment out of which Christianity and Rabbinism later developed, referring to Middle Judaism, and maps out the parallel development of

95 Cf. Riaud, art. cit. 1211–1212.

96 *Étude sur les Thérapeutes et le traité de la vie contemplative*, Thèse presentée à la Faculté de Théologie protestante de Montauban pour obtenir le grade de bachelier (Genève 1889) quoted by Riaud, art. cit. 1201 ff.

97 Cf. Riaud, art. cit. 1215 ff.

98 "Il reclutamento nell'essenismo e nell'antico monachesimo cristiano", Revue de Qumran 1 (1958) 345–364. Penna declares that a few instances of what appear to be similarities do not justify hypotheses that any one derives from the other (425–426).

99 "Philon et les origines du monachisme", in AA.VV., *Philon d'Alexandrie.* Colloque national du CNRS, Lyon 11–15 Septembre 1966 (Paris 1967) 361–373.

100 R. Cacitti, "Οἱ εἰς ἔτι νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς κάνονες. I Terapeuti di Alessandria nella vita spirituale prorocristiana" in L. F. Pizzolato e M. Rizzi (eds), *Origene maestro di vita spirituale*. Atti del Convegno, Milano 13–15 settembre 1999 (Milano 2001) 47–89.

theories and choices which came to be defined as clearly autonomous only after Philo's times.[101]

[101] The reference to the Christians converted by Mark introduces the Markian issue and the theme of the relationships between John, Mark and Paul. The letter of Clement related by Merton Smith bears witness to the presence of a Markian tradition in Alexandria, a strong libertine tradition lasting for many years, of which the Carpocratians may have been just the latest representatives. This tradition, which Paul attacked harshly at Corinth was also, according to Cacitti, to a certain extent the object of an attack in *De Vita Contemplativa*. Passages 46–47 relating to the banquets of those who lead an inebriated and dissolute life, "I know of some who when they are half-seas-over and before they have completely gone under arrange donations and subscriptions in preparation for to-morrow's bout, considering that one factor in their present exhilaration is the hope of future intoxication" would seem to be the expression of Philo's distaste for "gli esiti libertini dell'escatologia realizzata", rather than an attack on pagan banquets.

This interpretation of Cacitti's provides much food for thought and introduces possible interpretations of the Sabbath and readings of Messianic and eschatological hopes. However, I wonder whether the object of Philo's attack was not, instead, the feasts at which Donysian elements were intermingled with generic excess, show and ostentation. On 48 ff. of *De Vita Contemplativa* explicit reference is made to Italic luxury, to banquets at which the participants, reclining on three-seat or larger sofas, made of tortoiseshell or ivory, surrounded by carpets and precious fabrics, goblets, tankards, glasses and pottery, served by attractive slaves, with their faces smoothed and painted with cosmetics and dressed in seductive garments, feasted on delicacies and every kind of sophisticated dish and drink. This reads like a description of the sumptuous Roman banquets. Philo compares these magnificent gatherings, at which one could not only titillate one's taste buds but also feast one's eyes, to the philosophical banquets Socrates used to attend, accounts of which are given by Xenophanes and Plato. These feasts too, which are praised in Greek culture as opportunities for philosophizing, exalted pleasure and vulgar love, were an object of contempt for Moses' disciples, who loved truth and devoted themselves to "knowledge and the contemplation of the verities of nature" (§64). The sober inebriation of the Therapeutae forms a contrast with the lack of all moderation displayed by the guests at these vulgar feasts. The former "not with heavy heads or drowsy eyes but more alert and wakeful than when they came to the banquet [. . .] pray for bright days and knowledge of the truth and the power of keen sighted thinking" (§89). According to P. Wendland, "Philo und die Kynisch-Stoische Diatribe", in P. Wendland – O. Kern (hrsg.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie und Religion* (Berlin 1895) 1–75, in partic. 18–24) the reference to the luxury of the banquets, which is also found in Clement (*Paed*. II 3) could also have connections with Cynic-Stoic themes (see e.g.. Seneca, *De brevitate vitae* XII 5–6). In any case, we have here an opposition between a life in pursuit of the superfluous and luxury, and an austere life marked by virtue, simplicity and study. This is an opposition often found in Philo between those who waste their lives without having any precise aim or proper awareness of their own role and those who assign the right value to virtue. I, instead, cannot see any specific attack on eschatological positions in his writings, unlike Cacitti, who draws a parallel between these Philonic passages and Paul's diatribe in *1 Corinthians*.

In the light of this interpretation, Cacitti hypothesizes that Paul's adversaries in Corinth were the followers of Apollo of Alexandria. Apollo takes to Corinth "una decisa accentuazione della componente estatica che si concretizza essenzialmente in una grande considerazione della glossolalia", a feature which would seem to recall Philo's depiction of the community of Therapeutae. References to ecstatic aspects undoubtedly

The Therapeutae as an Emblem of Contemplative Life

The attempts to identify the Therapeutae with various coeval groups seem to be rather fanciful. Even likening them to the Essenes seems to be extremely problematic, and scholars increasingly tend to view the Therapeutae as a specific group, devoted to study, which chose a community life, a group certain features of which Philo admired, although he does not necessarily approve of all their choices. They are, in any case, an emblem of the contemplative life, representative of those who have chosen theoretics and full devotion to God's service. Constantly heeding God and His works, the rhythm of creation, the need for constant reference both to practical and to theoretical activities, the Therapeutae manage to apply God's model, thus becoming a sort of human archetype of the right choices to make. God is the paragon on whom one's work should be modelled, the object of a *homoiosis* which leads men to seek to be like Him. At a lower level, the Therapeutae provide another type of model, an example of realization of God's directions in a human environment, a sort of mediation between the perfection of God and human limitations. Their choices thus become an example of a perfect life, following the right rhythms.

---

appear in various passages of Philo throughout his work, and the Alexandrian gives them positive connotations that I feel Cacitti tends to play down. The theme which concerns the scholar is, in any case, a reconstruction of the nature of the disagreement between Paul and Mark, and an interpretation of the Church of Alexandria.

Cacitti also sees Messianic and eschatological references in the chants and dances of the Therapeutae, who divide into two choirs, one of men, another of women, and then join in one choir, thus echoing the song of Mary by the Red Sea (*Ex.* 15.20). Cacitti constructs his argument using references to the Qumrân 4Q 365 manuscript. It seems to me that all Cacitti's interpretations tend to accentuate the eschatological and Messianic aspects in Philo, as a point of contact with subsequent developments, traces of which are found, for example, in Paul and, obviously, in a different form, in Johanian christology. Philo and Pseudo Philo in *De Jona* provide a reference for successive interpretations. On the other hand, Cacitti also sees a strong reference to eschatology in the description of the celebration of the seven weeks (*De Vita contemplativa* 65 ff.) which he links with the Essenes' celebration of the Pentecost. Cacitti's reference to the calendar of feast days of eschatological Israel sets the Philonic passages within an interpretation which sees them as a description of Pentecost. The thesis that *megale heorté* is comparable with "pentecostality" should perhaps be totally rethought in the light of Nikiprowetzky's arguments ("Le 'De Vita Contemplativa' revisité" cit). According to this author, the Therapeutae did not celebrate the fiftieth day, but the forty-ninth day. The feast day in question is not in this case Pentecost, but a feast tied to the number fifty. The celebration would thus play a role in the accentuation of the Sabbath which the Therapeutae practised.

The hypothesis that the Therapeutae were a group that broke away from the rest of Israel or even a 'sect' which had, to a certain extent, rebelled against Jerusalem is fanciful in my opinion, and I do not think the positions which see the Therapeutae as practising a totally different sort of Judaism, almost the opposite of Philo's religion, are very persuasive. The Therapeutae were Jews who decided on a form of relationship with God that was perfectly compatible with the indications contained in the *Torah*, complied with the law and respected the role of the Levites. Their choice to accentuate some contemplative aspects, to devote themselves to exegesis and live far from the city, to have a particular lifestyle, does not clash with the indications in the *Bible*, just as interpreting the text allegorically did not necessarily mean contempt for its literal meaning.[102]

Even if contemplation is the highest and happiest activity, those who choose to devote themselves to it *in toto* without having first worked actively are destined to lead a barren life. Their choice is senseless and sets them outside God's wishes. Those who estrange themselves from the community, choose isolation and live a secluded life, devoting themselves only to study, without having first worked amongst their fellow men. are strongly reprimanded for having made an egoistical and senseless choice. The Therapeutae withdrew from society after having led an active life. Theirs was the choice of people who could afford to indulge in the pleasure of theoretical activities because they had already played their role in community life. Although they led a life of hard work while they were young, once they reached a certain age they could devote themselves to theorizing. They extended the Sabbath to the whole of the second part of their lives and it was no coincidence that they observed and venerated the Sabbath more than others did.

The rhythmic division into working time and study time could thus be transferred from the weekly dimension to their whole lives: youth and maturity should be employed in practical life, while old age is the crowning glory of an active life and may be devoted to contemplation. The Therapeutae chose to live outside the city, far from the uproar of political activities, the bustle and commotion of the crowds. However, this did not mean they were hermits; they lived in a community. Their desert was not a place of solitude, indicative of withdrawal and rejection of social life; it was a place where they could live together, making common choices: a place of individual and collective growth.

[102] See *Migr.* 89 ff.

CONCLUSION

Therapeutae and Essenes are a reference model for men seeking the path of virtue. In their way, they follow God, who is the paradigm for a life devoted to both contemplation and poietic activities. Their lives provide a model for other men, but may also provide a key for the interpretation of God's activity, a means of gaining a knowledge which allows us to glimpse, by analogy, the paradigm.

In my interpretation, man's alternation of theoretical life and practical life in, built up around the model of divine activity, becomes the key to understanding God's acting. The qualifications and lack of qualifications applied to God, elements which are apparently contradictory or—at the very least—relatively incompatible, are clarified in an interpretative context where the words are more comprehensible in human terms: rougher, less well-focussed, but also closer to our way of thinking. God is the model for humans and this paradigmatic role, by its very nature, allows us to arrive at a form of interpretation. Precisely because man's acting is modelled on God's acting, understanding the former can help to cast light on the latter. In Platonic terms—although we are moving in the opposite direction—one might say that "we should employ the method of search that we should use if we, with not very keen vision, were bidden to read small letters from a distance, and then someone had observed that these same letters exist elsewhere larger and on a larger surface. We should have accounted it a godsend, I fancy, to be allowed to read those letters first, and then examine the smaller, if they are the same" (*Republic* II 368d1–7, transl. by P. Shorey). From the known to the unknown, from little to big, from knowledge of people and their kinds of life to an awareness of God's activities and His "contemplation".

Here, we are obviously in the realm of analogy. Theoretical activity, the alternation of study and practical activities, the seven days of the week, can provide a means of understanding the reality (which, in any case, remains unknowable and unreachable) of a God we can seek to approach by means of exegesis, analogy or in various other ways, but without ever aspiring to actually reach Him.

Alternation applies specifically to mankind. God has no need to mark out His time: Philo clearly expresses the simultaneity of creation:

"Even if the maker proceeded to make all things simultaneously, it is nonetheless true that what comes into a beautiful existence did possess order, for there is no beauty in disorder" (*Opif.* 28). The distinction between days of creation and a day of rest is logical, not chronological; it is indicative of the two-fold nature of the activity God undertook. Human language is inadequate to provide an account of divine reality, and for this reason it brings in God's resting, the halt in His activities, His contemplation of the work He had done. Saying that God's activity is two-fold implies introducing a break into an incessant activity, a split in He who is simple, one, undivided, a change in the immutable. Speaking of alternation is thus a form of expression which seeks to gain a grasp of the unknowable, to reconcile a copresence that, left without explanation, would seem contradictory. The expression of alternance is a measure of the complexity of God's acting: of His capacity to be immobile and the demiurge at one and the same time.

APPENDIX TWO

PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA AND ECPHANTUS' *PERI BASILEIAS**

Treatises on Kingship

A series of problems that crop up in Philo are also found in other authors, which leads on to the theme of possible connections between them. In particular, in this study I would like to compare certain points of Philonic texts with some passages by Ecphantus, starting out from the hypothesis advanced by B. Centrone[1] that the passages on kingship collected by Stobaeus under the name of Ecphantus[2] introduce aspects that can be traced back to Middle Platonism. This is a relatively isolated position in the panorama of studies, which I hold to be worthy of closer examination. Indeed, there are notable affinities between Philo and the Pythagorean text and some interpretative difficulties in the latter can perhaps be clarified by means of a comparison with the Alexandrian.

The texts on kingship handed down under the names of Diotogenes, Sthenidas and Ecphantus are traditionally set by the critics over a vast time span that goes from the 3rd century before to the 3rd century after Christ. The two extremes of this span have been suggested by

---

* I would like to thank all the participants at the Conference "Platonismo e pitagorismo in età imperiale" (Gargnano 2005) whose observations have induced me to rethink some points of my paper.

[1] "La letteratura pseudopitagorica: origine, diffusione e finalità" in G. Cerri (a c. di), *La letteratura pseudepigrafa nella cultura greca e romana* (Napoli 2000) 429–452; Id., *Pseudopythagorica ethica. I trattati morali di Archita, Metopo, Teage, Eurifamo*. Introduzione, edizione, traduzione e commento a c. di B. C. (Napoli 1990); Id., "Cosa significa essere pitagorico in età imperiale. Per una riconsiderazione della categoria storiografica del neopitagorismo" in A. Brancacci (a c. di), *La filosofia in età imperiale. Le scuole e le tradizioni filosofiche* (Napoli 2000) 139–168 (167).

[2] A Pythagorean Ecphantus from Syracuse is mentioned by Hippolytus (*Ref.* I 15 p. 18) and Aetius (3.19) in texts reported by Diels Kranz (51.1, 2). Iamblichus (*V.P.* 267) says he was originally from Croton. The theories of Ecphantus are said to be a combination of Pythagorism and Atomism: the world is constituted of monads of corporeal nature and limited in number, moved by a divine power called *psyche* or *nous.*

H. Thesleff[3] and E. Goodenough[4] on the one hand, who hold that the works belong to the Hellenistic period and, on the other, by L. Bertelli,[5] who has recently hypothesized that the *Treatises* were probably written during different periods and within an Alexandrian environment. In Bertelli's paper Diotogenes is said to reveal the influence of the *Letter of Aristeas* and could be dated towards the end of the 2nd century B.C., while Ecphantus is probably set during the 3rd century A.D. and connected with the Pythagorean interests of Julia Domna's circle. This is not the first time Ecphantus has been dated so late: Burkert had already considered a late attribution and defended the thesis that the three treatises were written during different periods in a 1971 essay.[6] Burkert's position is extremely complex because it has varied over the years. In a study[7] published in 1961 he suggests the 3rd century B.C. as the right dating, but in 1971[8] he holds that the various Pseudo-Pythagorean texts could also come from very different periods. The true date appears to be indeterminable in many cases, as the dating spans an arc running from 150 B.C. for some works to the 3rd cent. A.D. for others. Ecphantus is placed at the beginning of the 3rd cent. A.D., and set in an Italic environment.

L. Delatte, an author who believes the *Treatises* can be dated as 1st–2nd century A.D.,[9] has carried out a very analytical study. He brings out some similarities with texts of the imperial period, above all Seneca, but also Musonius and Plutarch. The works that he thinks have most influenced the *Treatises* are Philo of Alexandria, on one hand, and some Hermetic texts, particularly the *Kore Kosmou* (2nd–3rd A.D.), on the other. The author also analyzes Dio Chrysostom, Aelius Aristides, Tertullian, Eusebius and Themistius, going as far as Synesius in his

---

[3] *An Introduction to the Pythagorean Writings of the Hellenistic Period*, Åbo, 1961; "On the Problem of the Doric Pseudopythagorica: An Alternative Theory of Date and Purpose" in *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* XVIII: Pseudepigrapha I (Genève 1972) 59–87.

[4] "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship", *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (1928) 55–102.

[5] "Perì Basileias: i trattati sulla regalità dal IV secolo a.C. agli apocrifi pitagorici" in P. Bettiolo-G. Filoramo (eds.), *Il dio mortale. Teologie politiche tra antico e contemporaneo* (Brescia 2002) 17–61 (47).

[6] "Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Einordnung einiger Pseudopythagorica", in *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* XVIII cit. 25–55.

[7] "Hellenistische Pseudopythagorica", *Philologus* 105 (1961) 16–43 and 226–246.

[8] "Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Einordnung" cit.

[9] *Les Traités de la Royauté d'Ecphante, Diotogène et Sthénidas* (Liège 1942) in partic. 85–87.

search for similar themes. Particular attention is paid to Pythagorean work or Pythagorean attributes. On the other hand, a recent text by J. W. Martens[10] re-proposes Thesleff's hypothesis,[11] according to which Ecphantus and Philo have a common source. Martens holds that the Pseudo-Pythagorean texts on kingship, which all derive from the same environment, were more or less contemporary, dating them during the third or, at the latest, the 2nd century B.C.[12] G. Chesnut,[13] although without discussing the matter very thoroughly, opts for the Hellenistic period or, in any case, for a pre-Ciceronian date.

The positions are, therefore, extremely diverse and span a six century time frame. The opinions of the critics also differ as to the place of origin: Zeller[14] thinks it was Alexandria, Burkert[15] chooses Rome, while

---

[10] *One God, one Law. Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law* Studies in Philo of Alexandria and Mediterranean Antiquity, 2 (Boston-Leiden 2003) 165–174. Convinced of the Hellenistic setting of the treatises on kingship, Martens asserts: "The Pythagorean texts themselves speak for a Hellenistic date and against a late date in two ways: they are not influenced by the syncretistic, philosophical ideas which one expects if they are from the first century C.E./first century B.C.E.; and they give the impression that they are working with a concept in its infancy and developmental stage" (171). Given the dating adopted for the texts on kingship, however, Martens is surprised that such texts have not exercised an influence directly on Musonius Rufus, Plutarch or other authors who have dealt with the same themes. The only author who apparently felt this influence may have been Philo. In Martens's view, there would therefore be a missing stage in the transmission of ideas. The first origin could be found in Archytas, with his theory of government of the ideal king being taken up by the Pythagoreans of the Hellenistic period and reworked in Middle-Platonic circles. It is hypothesized that the tradition could have come into contact with Stoicism and passed from there to Cicero and Plutarch, and then on to Philo, Clement of Alexandria and Themistius (172–4). See also: "Philo and the 'Higher Law'", SBL Seminar Papers 30 (1991) 314 n. 18; "Nomos Empsychos in Philo and Clement of Alexandria", in W. E. Helleman (ed.), *Hellenization Revisited. Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham Maryland 1994) 324 ff. and 334 n. 3).

[11] Maintained in *An Introduction* cit. 50.

[12] In a later work too ("On the Problem of the Doric Pseudopythagorica" cit.) in which he discusses Burkert's theories, Thesleff reproposes his thesis that the Pseudo-Pythagorean texts reflect a homogeneous tradition which follows the model of Archytas of Tarentum and that their setting is southern Italy of the III century B.C. with, at the most, a few derivations in the II century. Seeking a compromise with Burkert's ideas, the scholar leaves the dating of Ecphantus open to discussion.

[13] "The Ruler and the Logos in Neopythagorean, Middle Platonic and Late Stoic Political Philosophy" in *ANRW* II.16.2 (1978) 1310–1332.

[14] E. Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* 3. Teil, 2 Abteilung (Leipzig, 1923 (5ed.); reprint. Hildesheim 1963) 120–123.

[15] "Hellenistische Pseudopythagorica" cit. 236–246; "Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Einordnung" cit. 41 ff.

Thesleff[16] opts for southern Italy. These arguments derive from the different spheres to which the works are attributed: not only the *Treatises on kingship*, but also all the Pythagorean Pseudoepigrapha. Zeller's thesis[17] of a Neo-Pythagorean revival manifesting itself solely in Alexandria between the 1st cent. B.C. and the 1st cent. A.D., of which all the ancient Pythagorean Pseudepigrapha are allegedly the product, is now criticized by many authors. The current trend is to opt for a rather extensive time span.[18] In any case, within this body of work, the Doric Pseudo-Pythagoreans seem to constitute a relatively compact nucleus: a significant trend in the criticism, despite the variety of positions held, places them between the 1st cent. B.C. and the 1st cent. A.D., within the ambit of Middle Platonism.[19] Yet, as regards the Treatises on kingship, the debate seems to remain open. These—as we have seen—have been attributed to a considerable number of different periods.

Out of the various hypotheses, I tend to agree with Centrone's position,[20] in that he believes that the Treatises on kingship are contemporary to Περὶ νόμω καὶ δικαιοσύνας of Pseudo Archytas[21] and he focuses possible relationships with Middle Platonism. Given the uncertainty that surrounds the texts in question, one needs to proceed with a certain caution in proposing solutions. In any case, what I would like to show are some parallels between Ecphantus and Philo of Alexandria.

---

[16] *An Introduction* cit. 96–105; "On the Problem of the Doric Pseudopythagorica" cit. 59.

[17] Op. cit. 123.

[18] Cf. P. Donini, *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino* (Torino, 1982) 137–138; Centrone, "La letteratura pseudopitagorica" cit. 431.

[19] The studies of H. Dörrie ["Pythagoreismus 1C" in *Real-Enciclopädie* XXIV (1963) 268–277; Id., "Der Platoniker Eudoros von Alexandreia" in Id. *Platonica minora* (München 1976) 297–309] are particularly important in this sphere. On the attribution of Pythagoric Apocripha to the circle of Eudorus, see also W. Theiler, "Philo von Alexandreia und der Beginn des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus" in K. Flasch (hrsg.), *Parusia. Studien zur Philosophie Platons und zur Problemgeschichte des Platonismus.* Festgabe für J. Hirschberger (Frankfurt a.M. 1965) 199–218 (209 ff.); M. Baltes, *Timaios Lokros. Über die Natur des Kosmos und der Seele, kommentiert von M.B.* (Leiden 1972) 22–23. A clear picture of the problem has recently been given by B. Centrone, "Platonism and Pythagoreanism in the Early Empire" in Ch. Rowe and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge 2000) 559–584 in partic. 567–575 and B. Centrone, "Cosa significa essere pitagorico in età imperiale" cit. 150.

[20] See note 1.

[21] Cf. B. Centrone, "Il Περὶ νόμω καὶ δικαιοσύνας di Pseudo Archita" in M. Tortorelli Ghidini, A. Storchi Marino, A. Visconti (a c. di), *Tra Orfeo e Pitagora. Origini e incontri di culture nell'antichità* (Napoli 2000) 487–505 (489).

Possible Similarities between Ecphantus and Philo

Philonic critics have often wondered whether there was any connection between Philo and Diotogenes with regard to the notion of νόμος ἔμψυχος. Much less attention has been devoted to the texts of Ecphantus, although I hold them to be extremely significant in a search for common themes. Actually, L. Delatte does draw a number of comparisons between the two authors, but he follows an interpretative line that I see as presenting some difficulties. The researcher considers the Alexandrian as a representative of a *koine* that goes from Philo, through the Hermetic texts down to Eusebius, Neoplatonic texts and much later mystical work. By this interpretation, it seems to me that Delatte gives a partial image of Philo. Moreover, he removes the specificity from some similarities, which no longer appear to be precise and well defined relationships, but seem to belong to a broad and vaguely indistinct tide of thought that includes to some extent all the authors active between the 1st century B.C. and the 2nd–3rd centuries A.D.

Moreover, the analysis of the specific themes supporting his thesis turns on some Philonic texts that I think should be interpreted more cautiously. The reading of the two types of man: heavenly man and earthly man, for example, which Delatte relates to the distinction between king and common men introduced by Ecphantus, is founded upon the conviction that the two types of man in Philo represent typologically different individuals. What is brought to light, instead, in Philo's analysis is the role of two constitutive elements which are present in every man, the model for which consists of the archetypal Adam and the historical Adam. Heavenly man made according to the divine archetype does not participate in any corruptible substance[22]—this is an element that certainly finds no echo in Ecphantus—while earthly man is sensible man and is a copy of the intelligible archetype.[23]

[22] Cf. *Leg.* I 88.

[23] "We must account the man made out of the earth to be mind mingling with, but not yet blended with, body. But this earthlike mind is in reality also corruptible, were not God to breathe into it a power of real life; when He does so, it does not any more undergo moulding, but becomes a soul" (*Leg.* I 31). On the notion of the man made after God's image and of the man fashioned out of earth see *QG* I 8; *Plant.* 41–45. At *Opif.* 69 the concept of man made after God's image is analyzed: "The term image has been used here with regard to the director of the soul, the intellect. On that single intellect of the universe, as on an archetype, the intellect in each individual human being was modelled. In a sense it is a god of the person who carries it and bears it around as a divine image".

Although Delatte has played an essential role in bringing out possible similarities between Ecphantus and Philo, various points of his comparison are debatable, in my opinion. However, many of the texts I refer to have already been mentioned by the scholar to whom the merit for having shown the relationships between the two authors must belong.

Homoiosis Theo

I would now like to introduce a Philonic passage from *De specialibus legibus* (IV 186–188).[24] The subject is the concept of ἀρχή whose εἶδος penetrates the whole sphere of existence. In every context—whether we are speaking of political community, of family or of work situations—there is a commander who establishes an authoritative relationship with his subordinates. The relationship between city and king is the same as the one that ties the village and its chief, the οἰκία and its master, the patient and the doctor, the army and the general, the navy or sailors and their admiral, ships and their ship owner, seafarers and their captain. In all these situations, those in charge could, in theory, choose between good and bad, but are supposed to desire the best for their own subordinates. We are talking about a duty, a requirement the commander cannot ignore. Although they can, in theory, choose whether or not to act for good, commanders have a single option (ὀφείλουσι τὸ ἄμεινον) and in this they follow God, who can choose to act in either way, but desires what is good.[25]

---

[24] Φθάνει δὲ τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς εἶδος καὶ διαδέδυκεν, ὀλίγου δέω φάναι, πρὸς ἅπαντα τὰ τοῦ βίου μέρη, διαφέρον αὐτὸ μόνον μεγέθει καὶ τῷ ποσῷ. ὅπερ γὰρ πόλεως βασιλεύς, τοῦτο καὶ κώμης ὁ πρῶτος καὶ οἰκίας δεσπότης καὶ νοσούντων ἰατρός, καὶ στρατοπέδου μὲν στρατηγός, ναύαρχος δ' ἐπιβατικοῦ καὶ πληρωμάτων, καὶ πάλιν φορτίδων μὲν καὶ ὁλκάδων ναύκληρος, κυβερνήτης δὲ πλωτήρων· οἳ πάντες δύνανται μὲν ἄμφω τό τε εὖ καὶ τὸ χεῖρον, βούλεσθαι δ' ὀφείλουσι τὸ ἄμεινον· τὸ ἄμεινον δ' ἐστὶν ὠφελεῖν ἀλλὰ μὴ βλάπτειν ὅσους ἂν οἷόν τε ᾖ. τὸ γὰρ ἕπεσθαι θεῷ τοῦτ' ἐστίν, ἐπεὶ κἀκείνῳ δύναμις μέν ἐστι δρᾶν ἑκάτερα, βούλεται δὲ μόνα τἀγαθά. μηνύει δὲ ἡ τοῦ κόσμου γένεσίς τε καὶ διοίκησις· τὰ γὰρ μὴ ὄντα ἐκάλεσεν εἰς τὸ εἶναι τάξιν ἐξ ἀταξίας καὶ ἐξ ἀποίων ποιότητας καὶ ἐξ ἀνομοίων ὁμοιότητας καὶ ἐξ ἑτεροιοτήτων ταυτότητας καὶ ἐξ ἀκοινωνήτων καὶ ἀναρμόστων κοινωνίας καὶ ἁρμονίας καὶ ἐκ μὲν ἀνισότητος ἰσότητα ἐκ δὲ σκότους φῶς ἐργασάμενος· ἀεὶ γάρ ἐστιν ἐπιμελὲς αὐτῷ καὶ ταῖς εὐεργέτισιν αὐτοῦ δυνάμεσι τὸ πλημμελὲς τῆς χείρονος οὐσίας μεταποιεῖν καὶ μεθαρμόζεσθαι πρὸς τὴν ἀμείνω. ταῦτα μιμεῖσθαι προσήκει τοὺς ἀγαθοὺς ἄρχοντας, εἴ γέ τις αὐτοῖς φροντίς ἐστιν ἐξομοιώσεως τῆς πρὸς θεόν.

[25] The goodness of God is a topos commonly found in the Pseudo-Pythagoreans. Cf. Hippodamos, Περὶ πολιτείας 101, 26.7 for whom God, the cause of the *cosmos*, is good.

The choice in favour of the governed recalls many of the political theories of the 4th century,[26] but the duty to ἕπεσθαι θεῷ[27] and the pursuit of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ goes back, in particular, to Plato. God only wants good[28] and God's will is brought out by the order of the universe, where God has drawn existence from non-existence, order from disorder,[29] quality from what was devoid of attributes, similarity from dissimilarity, identity from difference, κοινωνία and ἁρμονία from discordant things that have no elements in common, equality from inequality, light from darkness.[30] His concern is to act on the inherent imperfection of the inferior being and to change it for the better. This way of behaving constitutes a model for good rulers, whose ideal is ὁμοίωσις θεῷ.[31] In the background lie *Theaetetus* (176b) and *Timaeus* (90d), where

---

[26] Centrone (*Pseudopythagorica ethica* 143 recalls many Pseudo-Pythagorean passages in which the thesis of governors' care for their subordinates is maintained (Callicratides, *De dom. felic.* 105, 10–25; Diotogenes, *De regno* 74, 25–6; Ecphantus, *De regno* 81, 22.6).

[27] In the same sentence there appear both μιμεῖσθαι divine actions and ὁμοίωσις θεῶ, while the previous passage speaks of ἕπεσθαι θεῷ. For the conception of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ in Philo, cf. *Fug.* 63; *Virt.* 168; on *similitudo Deo* see: *QG* V, 147. For an analysis of the idea of assimilation to God in Philo cf. W. E. Helleman, "Deification and Assimilation to God", *SphA* II (1990) 51–71.

[28] Cf. *Mut.* 129.

[29] See also *Spec.* I 48; *Plant.* 3; *De Deo* 6. Cf. *Timaeus* 29e–30a.

[30] Cf. *Mut.* 46; *Opif.* 21; *Cher.* 127.

[31] I would like to thank M. Bonazzi for having drawn to my notice a passage from Stobaeus (II 7.3,49. 8–50 Wachsmuth) which introduces an interesting and complex distinction regarding assimilation to God. According to Stobaeus, Socrates, Plato and Pythagoras say the same thing about the *telos*, assimilation to God. Plato says "as far as this is possible". It is possible only for *phronesis* and this consists in living according to virtue. "Ἐν μὲν γὰρ θεῷ τὸ κοσμποποιὸν καὶ κοσμοδιοικητικόν· ἐν δὲ τῷ σοφῷ βίου κατάστασις καὶ ζωῆς διαγωγή." Pythagoras says «ἕπου θεῷ»: δῆλον ὡς οὐχ ὁρατῷ καὶ προηγουμένῳ, νοητῷ δὲ καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἁρμονικῷ. Plato in *Timaeus* says φυσικῶς, in *Republic* ἠθικῶς, and in *Theaetetus* λογικῶς." Now, it is not clear what the passage means by this distinction: many readings of it have been given and the whole speech has been interpreted by the critics in various different ways. In particular the text has been studied in connection with the *Didaskalikos*, by Dörrie, Theiler, Giusta and Donini. Among others, T. Göransson [*Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus* (Göteborg 1995) 189 ff.] gives quite a particular interpretation, according to which the ὁμιόωσις θεῷ is directed towards an invisible, guiding, intelligible God, the harmoniser of the cosmic order. According to the scholar, here, there is no opposition between a visible and a noetic god, the cause of harmony in the world, but a recommendation to follow the invisible, noetic god, who puts order in the *cosmos*. This interpretation, and the whole connected discussion, may recall certain Philonic passages. As regards this subject, see points 6 and 7 below. I would like, moreover, to recall the theses of Helleman (art. cit. in partic. 60–65), who deals with the question, even if he proposes a different solution. On one hand, Helleman highlights the fact that, in Philo, ὁμοίωσις θεῷ is a process whereby one moves from evil towards good, from vice towards virtue, an assimilation to a God that imposes order and rules on the universe. On the other hand, basing his

those who contemplate make themselves similar (ἐξομοιῶσαι) to the object of contemplation and the *Laws* (716c), according to which one should follow (ἀκολουθεῖν) God. The idea of the king who has God as a model and who, in turn, is a source of virtue for those who look upon him, becomes a *topos* and appears in various works.[32] In the *Letter of Aristeas* (188 ff.), for example, the king has to imitate God at all times and in all of his expressions. In Plutarch, whoever governs is the image of God and seeks to imitate Him.[33] In the Pseudo-Pythagorean sphere, for Sthenidas, the king has to be wise because he will thus be a copy and an imitator of the first God.[34] The first God is the first king and ruler by nature, while the king is only so by birth and imitation. The former governs the whole universe, the latter the earth. The former is eternal, He has σοφία, the second is temporary and has ἐπιστήμη. God is the creator not only of all things, but also the master of what is good, and the legislator. This way it is *themis* that the king should

argument on *QG* II 62—which is a difficult passage mainly due to the inherent textual problems—He introduces a distinction between a first and a second god, the λόγος, to whom in his opinion ὁμοίωσις θεῷ should be directed. In this connection, the author wonders whether people can possibly assimilate themselves to a God of which they can have no knowledge. Again, with reference to *QG* IV 188, Helleman emphasizes the comparison between Isaac's joy and that which God feels in contemplating the incorporeal and in reproducing images of the invisible world in the visible one.

[32] Cf. Seneca *De clementia* I 7. 1; I 19. 8–9 The σεμνότης of the governor, whose appearance causes admiration and love in those who watch him, is present in Diotogenes, who could be influenced by Panaetius (see Delatte, *Les Traités* cit. pp. 265–267). See also Cicero, *De natura deorum* II 14. 37: "homo ortus est ad mundum contemplandum et imitandum"; *De senectute* 21. 77

[33] *Ad principem ineruditum* 780e: he who governs is the image of God, who rules all things ἄρχων δ' εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος. This is a discussion of the analogy between king and God from the point of view of kingship and ruling; there is no mention of any ontological superiority of the king. It is analogous to a Philonic passage on divine kingship as a model of human kingship: *Spec.* IV 164. Plutarch then continues with the image of the king who sets himself up in the image of god and creates the most beautiful statue ever seen, a king who seeks to emulate god in terms of virtue and equal him in good 780f–781a.

[34] The topic occurs widely in the Pseudo-Pythagoreans even if, according to Centrone (*Pseudopythagorica ethica* cit. 29), it is not introduced in a form which is usual in the Middle Platonic tradition: "alcuni *loci communes* che ricoprono un ruolo importante in autori medioplatonici sono, negli pseudopitagorici etici assenti, o quantomeno, non si presentano nella forma di *topoi* consolidati. Si pensi, ad esempio, al tema della ὁμοίωσις θεῷ. Negli apocrifi si trova espressa la tesi per cui la εὐδαιμονία consiste nell'occuparsi delle cose divine o, secondo una formula attribuita anche a Pitagora, nel seguire il divino (θεῷ ἕπεσθαι); nei trattati sulla regalità questa indicazione è ulteriormente motivata: Dio che è buono, infonde nell'uomo il desiderio di divenire a lui simile ed il re, Dio in terra, è il tramite di questa assimilazione. Ciò nonostante non è mai detto che il τέλος del vivere umano si identifichi con la ὁμοίωσις θεῷ come accade invece nella tradizione medioplatonica."

govern on earth. The wise king is an imitator and a servant of God. Nothing that is devoid of kingship (ἀβασίλευτον) and government (ἄναρχον) is beautiful and without σοφία and ἐπιστήμη it is impossible to be a king or ruler.

That the ruler should act as a model for his subjects is an extremely widespread recommendation, already present in Isocrates (*Ad Nicoclem* 31; 37) and Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* XXI 10), and taken up by Cicero (*De republica* II 42. 69; *De legibus* III 13. 31), by the *Letter of Aristeas* (218) and by Plutarch (*Ad principem ineruditum* 781f ff.). In Philo it is explicitly mentioned various times, for example in *De vita Mosis* (I 158) and in *De specialibus legibus* (IV 164).

Order and Harmony: The Musical Analogy

The language employed in the passage of *De Specialibus* quoted (IV 186 ff.) uses terms that recall music: πλημμελής, ἁρμονία, ἀνάρμοστος, μεθαρμόζειν. The idea of harmonization, of accord between dissonant elements which reach a state of unity and harmony is pervasive. This process concerns all the spheres of reality and operates in political situations when the ruler takes God as a model and imitates His behaviour. God is the first, indeed, the only king of the universe (*Migr.* 146). He is the great King, whose army deploys virtues (*Agr*. 78–79), brings order into the cosmos and is a guide to the meditation of what is beautiful and to wisdom.[35] A plurality of principles and discord must be opposed by a single principle organizer and harmonizer. The order ordained by God acts against disorder and anarchy.

> The laws on God's monarchical rule[36] declare that there is one First Cause of the World, one Ruler and King, who guides that chariot and steers the bark of the universe in safety, and has expelled from the purest part of

[35] Cf. *Post*. 101; *Deus* 159–160.

[36] On the divine monarchy as the government of the world, see *Opif.* 171; *Conf.* 170; *Virt.* 179–180; 214; 220. In *Heres* 301, God "steers the common bark of the world, in which all things sail; He guides that winged chariot, the whole heaven, exerting an absolute sovereignty which knows no authority but its own". God is the μέγιστος βασιλέυς, father and king, creator of the world, king of the universe (*Somn.* II 290), king of kings (*Conf.* 173), God of the gods (*Decal.* 41), He who rules all things (*Congr.* 116), παντόκρατωρ (*Gig.* 64), the guide (*Cher*. 29), the commander, the king and master (*Gig.* 45), he rules with justice (*Mos.* II 100; *Spec.* I 207), mercy and φιλανθρωπία (*Cher.* 99); He is the author of everyone's welfare (*Somn*. II 289), he acts providentially (cf. *Legat.* 3; *Flacc*. 170), He is the benefactor of the persecuted and punishes their persecutors (cf. *Flacc.* 123–4).

> all that exists, namely heaven, those mischievous forms of government, oligarchy and mob-rule, which arise among the vilest of men, produced by disorder and covetousness.[37]

The order of the universe thus becomes an archetype of the social τάξις The ἀρχή that dominates the world also governs the city and the king is the promoter and guarantor of the order of the community and the good of his subjects, just as God is the promoter and guarantor of the order of the cosmos and the good of the beings that live there. Kingship, which expresses order and legitimate authority in opposition to disorder, thus has as a model divine kingship,[38] which seeks justice and is concerned for the good of men and guides man along the kingly way that leads to truth.

The idea of the ordering rule of God, which is expounded in a universe bound by affinity between its parts, is explicitly described in *Migr*. 180–182:

> Moses, [...] while he seems to confirm the sympathetic affinity of its parts displayed throughout the universe (ἐν τοῖς μέρεσι κοινωνίᾳ καὶ συμπαθείᾳ τοῦ παντός), [...] by declaring the universe to be one and to have been made; [...] holding that neither the universe nor its soul is the primal God, and that the constellations or their revolutions are not the primary causes of the things that happen to men. Nay, he teaches that the complete whole around us is held together by invisible powers, which the Creator has made to reach from the ends of the earth to heaven's furthest bounds, taking forethought that what was well bound should not be loosened: for the powers of the universe are chains (δεσμοί) that cannot be broken.[39]

The theory that there is an accord in the universe, an ἁρμογά that harmonizes the different parts of it, is widely held in the Pythagorean apocrypha. It is said, for example, in Ocellus' Περὶ νόμω,[40] that the world is preserved by means of an accord that derives from God. For Callicratides there is an analogy between city and cosmos, as both are held up by a "political" authority: the same kind of agreement exists

---

[37] *Decal.* 155.

[38] Cf. *Spec.* IV 164, where the good governor who seeks to comply with Mosaic law follows "an ensign of sovereignty which none can impeach, formed in the image of its archetype the kingship of God." A king does not have a divine nature but, by practicing virtue, he can assimilate himself to God (see *Legat.* 114).

[39] Συνέχεσθαι μὲν τόδε τὸ πὰν ἀοράτοις δινάμεσιν ἃς ἀπὸ γῆς ἐσχάτων ἄχρις οὐρανοῦ περάτων ὁ δημιουργὸς ἀπέτεινε, τοῦ μὴ ἀνεθῆναι τὰ δεθέντα καλῶς προμηθούμενοι. Δεσμοὶ γὰρ αἱ δυνάμεις τοῦ παντὸς ἄρρηκτοι.

[40] Stobaeus I 13,2, p. 139,15 Wachsmuth.

in the cosmos, among the gods, in the family and in the city, amongst men, and its aim is to benefit both rulers and those ruled. World, soul, family, cities are συστήματα i.e. organisms, complex wholes comprising different and discordant elements, ordered in function of the common interest according to the model of the best component, which becomes a regulating element.[41] The *philia* present in a city imitate the accord present in the *cosmos*.

For Euryphamos[42] men have imitated the order of the whole world by bringing harmony to political communities through customs and laws. The theme of accord among the different components of a city is also present in Diotogenes[43] for whom in every σύστημα the different and discordant elements must be attuned: just as it is God's duty to attune the *cosmos*, so the king must bring harmony to the community. The king shall be just and justice is a principle that maintains the society and strengthens its bonds.

> For justice bears the same relation to communion as rhythm to motion and harmony to the voice; for justice is a good shared in common between the rulers and the ruled and is accordingly the harmonizing principle in the political community.[44]

The terminology employed in various texts dealing with cosmic harmony probably originated in the sphere of music. According to Theo of Smyrna,[45] the Pythagoreans explained all phenomena—be they cosmological, political, moral, or medical—in terms of the laws of music. They called music an ἐναντίων συναρμογὴ καὶ τῶν πολλῶν ἕνωσις. From music this terminology is extended to every type of aggregate (σύστημα): among others, the family and the city.[46] The apocryphal Περὶ πολιτείας attributed to Hippodamos,[47] for example, uses the musical

[41] Cf. Callicratides in Stobaeus IV 28,16–17, pp. 681–687 Hense. Uncertain dating: for Thesleff, *An Introduction*, cit. 110 e 115 it should be 3rd cent. B.C., for F. Wilhelm, "Die Oeconomica der Neopythagoreer Bryson, Kallikratidas, Periktione, Phyntis", *Rheinische Museum* (70) 161–223 (222–223) 2nd cent. A.D.

[42] IV 39,27, p. 914 Hense. Centrone places the text between the ethical Pseudo-Pythagoreans and shows its similarities with the Middle Platonists. See also fragment 2 of Περὶ νόμῳ attributed to Archytas which, for Centrone (Il Περὶ νόνω καὶ δικαιοσύνας cit. 489), should be dated between the 1st cent. B.C. and the 1st cent. A.D.

[43] IV 7,61 p. 264, 11–18 Hense.

[44] IV 7,62 p. 269,1–5 Hense.

[45] *Expositio in Platonis philosophiam* p. 12,10 ff. ed. Hiller.

[46] Cf. A. Delatte, *Essai sur la Politique Pythagoricienne* (Liège-Paris 1922) 138.

[47] Stobaeus reports four fragments (IV 34,71 p. 846.15–848.5 Hense; IV 1,93; 94; 95 pp. 28.14–36.12 Hense) of a Περὶ πολιτείας written in Doric, attributed to a Hippodamos who has much in common with Pseudo Archytas. In this connection

image of the city as a collection of discordant elements brought into harmony: the political community is a composition of συστάματα, that must be brought to a state of accord (ἁρμογά) and union (ἕνωσις). Every political community resembles a lyre that must be tuned.[48]

Besides, the musical analogy in the ethical and political spheres was also present in Plato, who spoke in *Republic* IV 443d 5–6 of the accord between the parts of the soul that must be harmonized (συναρμόσαντα) in exactly the same way as the three notes of a chord.

Foreigners on this Earth

In the texts of Ecphantus reported by Stobaeus (IV 7, 64–66, pp. 271,13–279,20 Hense) there are echoes of Stoic theories relating to the union of all beings and the *pneuma* which permeates the entire world and ensures it that it has cohesion.[49] However here, too, resound Pythagorean theses and Platonic references referring to the harmonization of the universe (*Timaeus* 41b) and to the march of the universe that directs its course with a view to the common εὐκοσμία and the preservation of everything. There is also an echo of the idea of the cosmos as the ζῷον ἔμψυχον of *Timaeus* (30b9; 31a2; 32c7), of the δεσμοί between the elements and of their composition (*Timaeus* 31c ff.), of the disordered motions of the χώρα and the order imposed upon the universe (*Timaeus* 52d ff.). The themes in question, and even the terminology employed, recall the Philonic passages quoted, which speak of the δεσμοί and κοινωνία between the parts of the universe.

For Ecphantus, the universe is composed of different parts dominated by a single divine principle. The nature of every living being is in tune with the world, with which it breathes (συμπνείουσα) and to which it is linked (συνδεδεμένα). There is a hierarchy of beings that, according

---

A. Delatte, *Essai sur la Politique pythagoricienne* cit. 125 ff., recalls a Hippodamos of Thurii, a Pythagorean, whose Περὶ εὐδαιμονίας Stobaeus handed down (IV 39, 26, pp. 908–914 Hense).

[48] IV I. 94, p. 30, 18 Hense. Callicratides (IV 28,16, p. 682,10 Hense) likens the family to a harp.

[49] Cf. *SVF* II 416. Amongst the many texts I could mention, I shall confine myself here to quoting a passage from Cicero's *De natura deorum* (II 7.19), already mentioned in this context by Louis Delatte (166) which speaks of affinity, harmony, the connection amongst things *tanta rerum consentiens, conspirans, continuata cognatio* and also of a reciprocal accord amongst all parts of the universe, regulated by a single divine spirit: "*haec ita fieri omnibus inter se concinentibus mundi partibus profecto non possent, nisi ea uno divino et continuato spiritu continerentur*".

to their degree of divinity, are set in different spheres of reality and governed by a principle of order and harmony, linked together by φιλία and κοινωνία, which are as necessary for the survival of the cosmos as they are for the survival of any σύστημα. In that relationship which holds the different components of the whole together, connected by a common goal, there is nothing that is ἄναρχον (p. 274,12 Hense): a principle of order governs the whole and keeps every single part in a state of ὁμόνοια.

In the heavenly region, stars and planets constitute the most important part of the procession that follows God; in the sublunar region daemons rule supreme; on the earth man has the best nature, but the most divine being is the king.[50] The division of the universe into three spheres in which different beings are lodged is widespread. Suffice it to think of Apuleius' *De deo Socratis* or of *Epinomides.*[51] The idea that there are men who can rise to the role of quasi-divinity is present in the Pythagoreans, according to the Aristotle quoted by Iamblichus in *Life of Pythagoras* 31 in which reference is made to gods, men and beings such as Pythagoras. However perhaps, in Ecphantus, the king plays a specific role: he is an ontologically superior being between men and daemons; in a certain sense he constitutes a fourth level, a fourth type of being. He shares with other men the matter from which he is made, but is superior to all the others because the maker has used himself as the model for creating him.[52] It can be supposed that his virtues are the work of God. He has emigrated onto this earth; he is a foreigner come among men from on high (275, 1).

While the references to ἁρμογά, the ἀρχή of the cosmos, the ὁμοίωσις θεῷ found throughout passage 64 of Ecphantus recall Philo's *De specialibus legibus*, the theme of migration—a theme that is actually extremely

[50] W. Burkert, "Zur geistesgeschtlichen Einordnung einiger Pseudopythagorica" cit. 51 asserts that the cited cosmological schema is an isolated case in the Pythagorean literature, whereas we can perhaps find echoes of it in Hermetic texts, as indicated by L. Delatte (154 ff.).

[51] Delatte, *Les Traités*, cit. 169 refers to Ocellus (§38 e §40: the world is divided into three regions: the heavens, the earth and τὸ μεταξὺ τούτων. Every region is given a γένος to govern it: the heavens have the gods, the earth has man, the intermediate zone has the daemons. However, there is no mention of a superior being amongst men.

[52] Cf. Chesnut, "The Ruler and the logos" cit. 1317, 1318 n. 33: The king participates more than others in the divine nature; he seems to be ontologically superior. In Sthenidas, the king copies the attributes of God. The divinity of the king is distinguished from that of the first God because what God is by nature, the king is by *genesis and imitation*. He becomes a second god, an image that, according to Chesnut (1317), fits perfectly into the ruler cult.

common in the Platonic tradition—echoes many Philonic passages, particularly his *De Confusione* 76–82:[53] the wise are on the earth as if in a foreign place in which they have founded a colony, always ready to return to their country, the heaven, whence they have descended. Their desire is up there, their reference is there. They reside provisionally on the earth, well aware of the limits of such a situation, as foreigners and guests, desirous to return to their native country, driven by their love of contemplation. Unlike the fools that live in sin as if it were their country and who have no intention of leaving the earth in which they have made their abode, the wise

> when they have stayed a while in their bodies, and beheld through them all that sense and mortality has to shew, they make their way back to the place from which they set out at first. To them the heavenly region, where their citizenship lies, is their native land; the earthly region in which they became sojourners in a foreign country (*Conf.* 78).

Thus, in various situations, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses are introduced as foreigners on this earth and aspire to put an end to their pilgrimage away from their home country. Other passages also allude to the drive that leads them to ἀποδημεῖν, to migrate, to be ξένοι (*Migr.* 7–16), in which escaping from the body and from sensation is, instead, introduced as the adoption of a foreign mentality, a choice to be distant and separated. Here, their migration from their father's house takes on a connotation that is diametrically opposite to the sense of the passages of *De Confusione* quoted: the migration is a path toward heaven[54] while in Ecphantus the king has emigrated onto the earth.[55]

---

[53] Cf. Delatte, *Les Traités*, cit. 186–7.

[54] The idea of exile, of escape from a foreign land as an anti-Stoic concept, as *antioikeiôsis* has been studied by C. Lévy, "Éthique de l'immanence, éthique de la transcendence. Le problème de l'oikeiôsis chez Philon", in Id. (éd.), *Philon d'Alexandrie et le langage de la philosophie* (Turnhout 1998) 157: "C'est dans le *De confusione*, 82, que s'exprime le plus clairement, à travers la présence du terme *oikeiôsis,* le rejet philonien de l'idée qu'il existe une adaptation naturelle de l'homme à son propre être. [...] La presence de la pensée dans le corps relève non pas d'une appropriation (*oikeiôsis*) mais d'une *allotriôsis*, d'une aliénation. Philon utilise donc ici le vocabulaire du stoïcisme, mais pour affirmer très exactement le contraire de ce que pensent les Stoïciens." B. Besnier makes an analysis of the allegorical interpretation of Abraham's migration as a means of attaining virtue, particularly in connection with the Stoic definition of *telos*, in "Migration et 'telos' d'après la 'de migratione Abrahami', *SPhA* 11 (1999) 74–103.

[55] The Platonic and Pythagorean references are clear and, moreover, the theme of the descent into the body seen as an exile is widespread. In Seneca's *Letter* 41. 5–6, for example, the wise man has come down onto earth and is foreign.

The Blinded Eagle

In Ecphantus, the king belongs to two natures and it is this characteristic that puts him into an intermediate space and allows him to maintain relationships with both men and God. Given his partly divine essence, the king is the only human who can look upon God, the superior king, and have some notion of Him, without being struck by the divine light. The king, who is known by his maker, is also contemplated by men who see him in his kingship as surrounded by a light.[56] He is comparable to an eagle put to the test by the light of the sun.

According to a story told by Lucian,[57] the eagle, an animal endowed with the most acute sight, is the only living being that can look at the sun. The fact that a bird can look at the rays of the sun without being blinded is the test that finds the truly royal Golden Eagle.The birds that cannot tolerate staring at the rays of the sun are considered bastards and are rejected.[58] In Aristotle (*Historia animalium* IX 620a1–5) too, the sea-eagle has a penetrating sight and forces its as yet unfeathered fledglings to look directly at the sun: those that refuse are struck and chased from the nest, those whose eyes shed tears are killed, the others are fed and raised.[59]

Among eagles, therefore, only those of legitimate birth can bear the sight of the fiery rays, while the illegitimate children are chased away from the heights that are not for them. Thus, kingship is divine, pure, incorruptible and hard to attain, and those who do not aspire to it legitimately cannot contemplate it because of its brightness. The

[56] For Goodenough the model of the king in the *Treatises* is surely oriental. On p. 78 ff. the scholar explains the words on the splendour of the king and his dazzling power by recalling Egyptian solar symbolism. He refers the topic back to the Persian and Egyptian idea according to which the king is protected by a luminous solar divinity. I actually think that the Ecphantus text is most reminiscent of Plato's solar metaphor and the blinding produced by the sunlight, even if many of Goodenough's references are convincing (see e.g. p. 78 the reference to government according to the law with respect to Mazda). On the light surrounding the king, see Plutarch, *Alexander* 30.2 in connection with Darius. Again, Goodenough compares Xenophon' description of the Persian king who used special stratagems so as to appear super-human, cited by the scholar on p. 79, to Diotogenes' description of the king and the majesty of his appearance. In Persia the king is a living law for the people. When the king dies there must be ἀνομία for five days so that the people realize the importance of the king and the law.

[57] *Icaromenippus* 14.

[58] Goodenough, op. cit. 83 remarks that the term employed by Lucian is the same as that used by Ecphantus to indicate the usurper.

[59] See also Pliny X 3 and Aelianus II 26.

ὑπερβολή of divinity proper to kingship is parallel to the ὑπερβολή of brightness of the sun upon which the eagles can gaze. The legitimate king therefore plays a unique role; he is set between men and God and must be aware of his superiority over the former, and of his inferiority to other beings more divine than he is, whom he will have to imitate.

There is a full parallelism between the divine sphere and the human sphere, the same τάξις that governs both, the figure of a mediator, the king that belongs partly to both spheres and, because of his intermediary role, can look at and be looked upon by God and by his subordinates. In this visual possibility of his, he is unique since no other man can look upon God. His contemplation leads him to desire assimilation and to imitate God while he, in turn, is imitated by the subjects, for whom he is a model of virtue.

The part of divinity present in the king is, therefore, a source of contemplation. Although in all men there is a θεομοιρὴς ἐμπνοίησις, a breath of divine origin that connects the better part of man to God and allows a vision of his aspect, of his πότοψις ἱερά (IV 6, 22, p. 244 17H), the king, being more divine since his best part is built on the model of the best maker (245. 5), has a greater capacity for contemplation. In Philo too, the *pneuma* was breathed into all living people by the moulder of living things[60] and it constitutes the rational part of them.[61] It is what allows man to have a vision of God:

> accounting that it would be greatly to the advantage of the thing wrought should it obtain a conception of Him, who wrought it [...] He breathed into him from above of His own Deity.[62]

In *Leg.* I 38 the human soul would not have been able to know God if He Himself had not inspired it.[63] There is, however, a distinction between common men and some exceptional beings: the πνεύμα has

[60] Cf. *Det.* 80.

[61] It is "an impression stamped by the divine power, to which Moses gives the appropriate title of 'image', thus indicating that God is the Archetype of rational existence, while man is a copy and likeness" (*Det.* 83).

[62] *Det.* 86.

[63] On the relationship between πνεῦμα θεῖον and οὐσία coming from the materiality of the earth, see Mazzanti, "Creazione dell'uomo e rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria," in A. M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi, *La rivelazione* cit. 75–103 (83 ff.). "Il πνεύμα costituisce l'elemento ontologico originario che dà vita vera e conoscenza" (87). On the problems inherent in Philo's use of the term *pneuma* and on the innovative meaning given by the author see F. Alesse, "Il luogo del 'nous': alcuni aspetti dell'antropologia di Filone alessandrino", in A. M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi,, *La rivelazione* cit., 105–122 (109 ff.).

been breathed into all men, but only those who divest themselves of becoming and place themselves in the right situation to approach God, their thoughts free from multiplicity, keep it. Thus Moses, entering the darkness, the invisible region,

> abides there while he learns the secrets of the most holy mysteries. There he becomes not only one of the congregation of the initiated, but also the hierophant and teacher of divine rites, which he will impart to those whose ears are purified[64]

to those people, that is, who have rejected the wrong λόγους. The divine πνεύμα always stays close to him and guides his progress along the right road. Abraham too is inspired in his search for the vision of God.[65] When the divine πνεύμα possesses him, everything in him is transfigured: eyes, complexion, height, gestures, voice; he resplends with beauty and majesty and persuades those who listen to him. Even if his origins are obscure, and he has no great relatives and no friends, he is almost considered as a king by those people among whom he lives. This is not due to his birth, but to his virtue. He becomes a model of nobility, a source of imitation. This is also one of Moses' characteristics. Moses is elected head of the people not because of his dynastic merit or his wealth, but because of his ἀρετή,[66] which allows him to reach a higher level of knowledge.

The cases cited concern special personages, whose abilities are heightened whenever they are inspired. The same thing happens to prophets[67] and also to genuine priests who are endowed with special noetic faculties. Thus, when judges are in difficulty and are unable to judge a case, the solution is to turn to the γνήσιοι priests, who can look

---

[64] *Gig.* 54. Cf. *Virt.* 217–219.

[65] Even Philo, at certain times, is inspired, almost as if he was possessed by the divine spirit. "I have approached my work empty and suddenly become full, the ideas falling in a shower from above and being sown invisibly, so that under the influence of the Divine possession I have been filled with corybantic frenzy and been unconscious of anything, place, persons present, myself, words spoken, lines written. For I obtained language, ideas, an enjoyment of light, keenest vision, pellucid distinctness of objects, such as might be received through the eyes as the result of clearest shewing. Now the thing shewn is the thing worthy to be seen, contemplated, loved, the perfect good" (*Migr.* 35–36).

[66] *Mos.* I 148–149.

[67] *Deus* 139: "The men of old days called the prophets sometimes 'men of God' and sometimes 'seers'. And the names they gave were names of literal truth and well suited, the former to their inspiration, the latter to the wide vision of reality which they possessed." See also *Migr.* 38.

to the noetic sun that is within them. Those who really are priests are, perhaps, also prophets, and enter into divine service due to their virtue, not their birth. Indeed, for a prophet, nothing is ἄγνωστον,

> since he has within him a spiritual sun and unclouded rays to give him a full and clear apprehension of things unseen by sense but apprehended by the understanding (*Spec.* IV 192).

Here we have the image of a being that is differentiated from other men and, due to his virtue, is placed on a special noetic level, able to see the intelligible.[68] He has the rays of the sun within him and he has acquired some superior abilities in terms of knowledge.

So both in Ecphantus and Philo all humans, due to their most noble part, can have some sort of vision of God, but there are some—the king or Moses, or even the prophets—who due to their virtue, their more divine nature, the inspiration that characterizes them, can go beyond a mediated vision such as that of common man. The vision of these superior beings is not reflected, as in a mirror, but direct and not blanked out in the blaze produced by that excessive brightness. Such individuals can contemplate the blinding rays of the source of the light, just as the eagle can look at the sun's rays.

The Sacred "Aspect"

In passage IV 6, 22 (p. 244,13–245,10 Hense), in what is almost a kind of summary of the Ecphantus text, there is mention of man, weighed down by the earth, who

> could hardly lift himself from his mother if a θεομοιρής breath had not connected him to the eternal living being,[69] showing the sacred aspect of his parent to his superior part, inasmuch as it is impossible to contemplate it (τῷ κρείσσονι μέρει δεικνῦσα τὰν ἱερὰν τῷ γεννάτορος πότοψιν, ὡς ἀδύνατον ἐκείναν θεάσασθαι" (244.18).[70]

[68] On the idea of a theory of noetic prophecy in Philo see D. Winston, "Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon on Creation, Revelation, and Providence: The High-Water Mark of Jewish Hellenistic Fusion" in J. L. Kugel (ed.), *Shem in the Tents of Japhet. Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism*, Supplements for the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2002) 109–130 (123 ff.).

[69] At this point Delatte corrects the text: in place of ἐλέω (ἐλαίω) ζώω he puts ἀιδίῳ ζῴῳ and the correction—which allegedly obviates a writing error—seems to shed light on a passage that is otherwise hard to interpret.

[70] Cf. Delatte's translation: "il est alourdi par une forte proportion de terre, de sorte qu'il se serait à peine élevé de sa Mère, si un souffle spirituel, participant de la divinité,

What does the text mean when it asserts that the πότοψις of the parent is shown because it is impossible to contemplate it? Delatte considers that the θεομοιρής τις ἐμπνοίησις is the king who uplifts common man from his baseness and connects him to God, whose nature is revealed through his own person[71] given that man cannot contemplate it. This interpretation presupposes that the king is identified in terms of θεομοιρής τις ἐμπνοίησις, whereas it seems to me far more likely that the breath derives from God. Moreover, the text maintains that it is impossible θεάσασθαι the aspect of the parent. In other words, there seems to be an opposition between δείκνυμι and θεάομαι, two different ways of knowing the image of the parent. One might also think that the best part to which the θεομοιρής τις ἐμπνοίησις shows the divine πότοψις is not the human intellect, but the king; however, I feel that the general interpretation does not change. There is probably a distinction between a mere indication of the superior being and contemplation of the same. A reading of the forms of knowledge of God in Philo might clarify the passage.

According to Philo, God cannot be seen in his essence. Despite the desire to contemplate the light, whoever desires to look at it is confused: the eye of the soul is dazzled by the splendour of the rays,[72] a distinct vision of God is prevented,

> as it strains to see, pure and unmixed beams of concentrated light pour forth like a torrent, so that the eye of the mind, overwhelmed by the brightness, suffers from vertigo.[73]

Thus Abraham, desirous to know the divine essence, has a confused vision; he has to be satisfied with receiving a representation of the existence and the providence of God,[74] gaining an intuitive insight into the action of the divine powers[75] and striving to see,[76] since no human mind is able to contain the immensity of the vision of the universal cause in all its splendour.[77] Not even Moses is able to see

---

ne l'avait rattaché à l'Etre éternel, en montrant à sa partie supérieure l'aspect sacré de son Géniteut; il est, en effet, incapable de le contempler lui-même".

[71] Delatte, *Les Traités* cit. 184 ff.

[72] On the image of God as the intelligible sun, see *Virt*. 164; *Spec.* I 279; *Migr.* 40. On the blinding produced by incorporeal beams, see *Praem*. 38; *Opif.* 71; *Spec*. I 37.

[73] *Opif.* 71.

[74] Cf. *Virt.* 215.

[75] Cf. *QG* IV 2.

[76] Cf. *Migr.* 36–39, where the most frequently used word is δείκνυμι.

[77] Cf. *Mut.* 15.

God; he can only have an indirect perception of His image. Moses' request to see the divine essence, to see God directly, is denied: man cannot gain any grasp (κατάληψις) of the inaccessible being, nor can the powers of God be perceived in their essence. It is only possible to have "a sort of impress and copy of their active working (ἐκμαγεῖόν τι καὶ ἀπεικόνισμα τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐνεργείας)".[78] Vision of the essence is, therefore blocked to men. However,

> There is a mind more perfect and more thoroughly cleansed, which has undergone initiation into the great mysteries, a mind which gains its knowledge of the First Cause not from created things, as one may learn the substance from the shadow, but lifting its eyes above and beyond creation obtains a clear vision of the uncreated One [...]. The mind of which I speak is Moses who says, 'Manifest Thyself to me, let me see Thee that I may know Thee' (*Ex*. 33.13 [...] 'If a prophet be raised up unto the Lord, God shall be known unto him in a vision' and in shadow, not manifestly; but with Moses the man who is 'faithful in all His house, He will speak mouth to mouth in manifest form and not through dark speeches' (*Numb*. 12.6–8).[79]

Despite the difficulties inherent in any discussion of Moses' possibilities of seeing God when, in nearly all his works, Philo affirms that this is impossible, it is certain that the Patriarch has a superior potentiality, a noetic ability that, beyond all his limits, does allow a direct relationship with God. The exceptionality of Moses is stressed by the names "god" and "king" that are assigned to him.[80] They emphasize the close relationship that the Patriarch has with the creator and his hegemonic role with respect to the people.

> He was named god and king of the whole nation, and entered, we are told, into the darkness where God was, that is into the unseen, invisible,

---

[78] Cf. *Spec.* I 41–48; *Mut.* 7.

[79] *Leg.* III 100–103. Cf. *Abr*. 79–80; *Fug.* 141.

[80] Here Philo is alluding to a passage of *Exodus* (7 1), where God says: "I make you as God to Pharaoh". Cf. *Mut.* 125; *Sacr.* 9. On the attribution of the name God to Moses and on a possible divinisation of Moses see W. A. Meeks, "Moses as God and King" in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity.* E.R. Goodenough Memorial Volume (Leiden 1968) 354–371; C. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism* (Missoula, Mont. 1977) 1–22; D. T. Runia, "God and Man in Philo of Alexandria", *Jounal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988), reprint. In Id., *Exegesis and Philosophy* cit. 48–75 esp. 58 ff.); P. Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria* cit. 201–205. On Moses as God to Pharaoh see L. H. Feldmann, "The Death of Moses, according to Philo", *Estudios Bíblicos* 60 (2002) 225–254. On the role of Moses who is the head of the Jews (*Mos.* I 243), as king, legislator, prophet, priest see *Mos.* II 3 ff.; 292; *Praem.* 53–56; *Virt.* 54.

> incorporeal and archetypal essence of existing things. Thus he beheld what is hidden from the sight of mortal nature.[81]

Moses' position of supremacy made him a king and an exceptional being, able to see the incorporeal, to enter into the essence devoid of form. His status as an extraordinary being is connected with his unique relationship with God. It is not affirmed here, as in Ecphantus, that the king is a being more divine than other men, formed directly by God according to his own model: there is no mention of a divine nature for the king, an affirmation that would sound wrong to Philo's monotheistic ears.[82] The reference to the name of "the god of the people", however, his dominion over the whole earth, over the sea, over the rivers, the fact that "every element obeyed him, as a master, changed its natural properties and submitted itself to his orders",[83] his exceptional κοινωνία with God, closely reflects Ecphantus' king, who has an intermediate nature and is the only one able to perceive a representation of God, and to look directly at the light.[84] In parallel, the difficulty of vision is present in both the authors and some semantic shifts in Philo may clarify the passage of Ecphantus relating to the πότοψις of God.

The King as a Model

The archetypal function of the king as a model for his subjects is present both in Philo and in Ecphantus: for the Alexandrian, Moses

> in himself and his life displayed for all to see, he has set before us, like some well-wrought picture, a piece of work beautiful and godlike, a model for those who are willing to copy it.[85]

---

[81] *Mos.* I 158.

[82] Cf. D. L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker* (Missoula, Mont. 1972) 241 who shows how apparently similar conceptions of the charismatic figures and their possible divine status are in fact different. I. W. Scott ["Is Philo's Moses a Divine Man?", *SPhA* 14 (2002) 87–111 (in partic. 107 ff.)] after having analyzed the meaning of the locution θειὸς ἀνήρ in the Hellenistic pagan culture and the implications of the divinization of the heroes, asks about Moses. He analyzes his birth and education, his prodigies and death in the light of his possible divinization. As regards us here, he debates whether Moses' possibility of contemplating the divine truths renders him ontologically divine, comparable to Hellenistic divine men, and he concludes that it does not (107–109).

[83] *Mos.* I 156.

[84] Cf. D. Runia, "God and Man" cit. 62–63.

[85] *Mos.* I 158. On Moses' gifts, see *Mos*. I 17–33; 148. As to the function of the governor as a model, see also *Ios*. 80.

Taking God as his archetype, the Patriarch is in turn a model for the people. Likewise, for Ecphantus the king has a duty, first of all, to imitate God, whose essential role is being good. With echoes of Aristotle, God is self-sufficient, he does not give orders, he does not have servants at his command and he does not punish. He confines himself to being good and a source of example. In this way, the king must put himself forward as a model, as an object of imitation for man. He maintains one, single virtue that is the same whether applied to Himself or others. He is a self-sufficient and temperate king who, from the limited nature of his desires, draws the ability to command himself as well as others. He is not, therefore, a king who gives orders and has them carried out, not a king who punishes transgressors, but a king who by his example leads his subjects to be virtuous. Not even persuasion reaches the degree of positiveness of imitation. Persuasion, a second-level remedy, is sister to constraint; it may be adopted as a second resort, not chosen in the first instance.

The presentation of persuasion introduces some problems: in 278.7 it is explained that those people who spontaneously (αὐτοφυῶς) use the beautiful, do not consider persuasion because they have no fear even of constraint.

> For whatever things can by their own nature use the Beautiful, have no occasion for obedience, as they have no fear of necessity. The king alone is capable of putting this good into human nature so that by imitation of him, their Better, they will follow in the way they should go (transl. by Goodenough).

As for "those who have been corrupted by evil nurture as if by drink, and who have fallen into forgetfulness", the λόγος they accept strengthens them, heals their illnesses and, having chased away the forgetfulness, re-establishes memory, from which springs so-called persuasion.

The problem arises over the source of the λόγος: it is not clear if the persuasion arises out of the λόγος of the king who is, therefore, in any case, the source of virtue for the subjects, or if the λόγος is a separate thing from the king and, in this case, from whom it originates. In some ways it would seem not to be the word of the king, inasmuch as he is essentially the object of imitation. His model is God, αὐτάρκης, who does not use servants to achieve his desires, does not give orders, does not punish. Furthermore, in 278.12, when λόγος is mentioned, it is introduced in absolute terms, not anchored to another subject. It seems to be an autonomous reality that inhabits the earth and resides amongst men. Why not think, then, of the word-rationality that lodges among men and is manifested in each of them and in their mutual relationships? 275.17 ff., however, speaks of regulation in the government of the cities, of laws, of political authority, of maintenance of harmony (ὁμοφωνία) by persuasion, of constraint (278.1). It does not thus seem that, in this context, the λόγος that causes πειθώ is the individual and general rationality that acts without reference to political authority. A hiatus appears between what is stated in 278.12 and what appears in 275.17. This difficulty has led two critics who have studied these passages analytically—Delatte and Goodenough—to interpret the λόγος that arouses persuasion as the word of the king, although they give the λόγος and its action a completely different meaning.

I think that we can consider another hypothesis: that persuasion is not necessarily tied to the action of the king. Some are able to follow his virtue by imitation—and these are the best; others, those people who have fallen into forgetfulness and into a kind of drunkenness,[86] will be convinced by persuasion. Two roads thus stand open before man, the first consists in spontaneity, the second is πειθώ. The former is pursued by means of imitation and assimilation, μίμησις and ὁμοίωσις, the latter through the λόγος. It is the method that is different: imitation or listening, independently of who the source of either is. Thus, in Philo, the argument applies to God when He addresses Moses, to Moses when he addresses the people, and to the Patriarchs. It is not a case of expressions of authority proper just to one person, but of alternative forms which are always possible and always marked by a hierarchy, so imitation is superior to the word. Ecphantus maintains that the king has this superiority, that his virtue consists in presenting himself as a model of imitation and that his function may be assimilated to that of God. The king guarantees sovereignty according to virtue and has, towards his subjects, the same φιλία and the same κοινωνία that God feels towards the world and what it contains. In no passage is the king proposed as a source of persuasive speeches, nor is there any focus on military leadership or judicial or priestly activities, as there is in Diotogenes (264.1–265.1).

It seems there is a distinction between men who could potentially imitate the king and thus spontaneously do good, and men who have

[86] On drunkenness and sleep in Philo see *QG* IV 2; *Ebr.* 95; *Somn.* II 101–106.

fallen into forgetfulness and need persuasion, the sister of constraint. Persuasion is generated by the λόγος that, once accepted, relates with man and re-establishes the memory of a former and forgotten situation. Underlying the discourse on persuasion and λόγος there is probably a rethinking of Sophist thought and of the political theorizing of the 5th–4th centuries on notions of concord, ὁμόνοια, φρόνησις, πλεονεξία, on the one hand, and the Pythagorean idea of ἁρμογά and harmony as an accord between discordant elements on the other. In Ecphantus' text the action of the λόγος establishes an immediate relationship between man and king and between king and God; it is a spontaneous situation that does not need persuasion, a harmonious relationship that binds the nature of every living being, συμπνείουσα and συνδεδεμένα with the whole in a relationship of εὐκοσμία (271.15). The word is at a lower level than imitation, which is connoted by immediacy, συγγένεια and the harmonious relationship in which vision rules as a source of imitation. The people look at the king and they behave well; the king looks at God and he is good, his only function, for which reason he is αὐτάρκης (277.1). The λόγος, however, does accompany mankind, with whom ὁμιλέων; persuasion resides (οἰκεῦσα) on earth.

Delatte's Interpretation

In his commentary[87] Delatte debates the λόγος and explains—as we have seen—that we are dealing with the kingly Word; according to this scholar true spontaneity does not exist even for the king, who is bound to imitate God. Delatte distinguishes three motives in the actions of men: the fear deriving from violence, the persuasion resulting from the Word and the spontaneity characterizing imitation. The scholar assigns the three motives to different states of mind and to the paths that lead to virtue which are spoken of in various "Pythagorean" treatises, such as Hippodamos' Περὶ πολιτείας[88] and Clinias' Περὶ ὁσιότατος καὶ εὐσεβείας.[89] For the former, there are three means of reaching political accord: laws that inspire fear, words that arouse a desire for virtue in the soul, customs that create the feeling of αἰδώς and the habit of

[87] Op. cit. 232 ff.
[88] IV, p. 31,3.
[89] III, pp. 31 ff.

virtue. In Clinias these means oppose three tendencies of the soul, called πλεονεξία, φιλαδονία, and φιλοδοξία.

> De cette théorie, Ecphante à conservé ce qui convenait à son sujet et à ses intentions, c'est-à-dire les éléments qui concernent la crainte (et les lois) et ceux qui se rapportent aux discours (et au désir). Les mœurs et coutumes ont été remplacés par l'imitation qui crée aussi la vertu par la simple observation et en quelque sorte par une accomodation instinctive.[90]

For Delatte, true spontaneity characterizing imitation does not exist,[91] while to me it seems that Ecphantus is speaking expressly of imitation of God by the king and of the king by men: only the individuals who have fallen into forgetfulness need the persuasion of the λόγος.

The scholar thinks that the kingly Word (capitals his) is personified, thus assigning it a kind of autonomy and introducing a mediating element, superior to human words. It is no coincidence that, in the following pages,[92] he likens Ecphantus' λόγος to Philo's λόγος, in the sense of divine λόγος, "messenger" and power of God. It is not very clear to me how this personified λόγος could be reconciled with the tendencies of the soul in the treatises of Hippodamos and Clinias, nor how it can be the word of the king. I do not feel it is necessary to postulate a higher-level λόγος, almost an intermediary between God and man but, even aside from this, I do not think that the λόγος is the king's word. Indeed, the king imitates God and, like God, acts as a model, an archetype to whom one should assimilate oneself. Otherwise, we would have to imagine a God who speaks and acts in the *cosmos*. On the contrary, God is self-sufficient, his only function is goodness, which inspires emulation (277.16). By assimilating himself to God and seeking to induce imitation in men, the king, too will be αὐτάρκης. The king arouses μίμησις in his subjects; he does not use constrictive measures, which remove all desire to imitate (278.1). As for persuasion, it is close to constraint and the beings that spontaneously do good do not care about persuasion, just as they are not worried by constraint. Only the king could cause τόδε τὸ ἀγαθόν to arise in human nature. Now, to what could this τόδε refer, other than the αὐτοφυῶς τῷ καλῷ χρῆται previously mentioned in the text? The reference in my opinion is the spontaneous practice of the beautiful that is aroused in individuals

[90] *Les Traités* cit. 234.
[91] Cf. *Les Traités* cit. 232–233.
[92] 238–239.

able to conform with the king, i.e. to the one who is best. As for the men immersed in drunkenness and in forgetfulness, the λόγος, which they accept, strengthens them and re-establishes the μνήμη from which persuasion is born. Persuasion has drawn strength from having dwelt on the earth where λόγος lives among mortals.

So we have a bipartite schema. On one side we see the imitation that characterizes the sphere of virtue: the king's emulation of God and man's emulation of the king. On the other side, we find the sphere in which the ruined live, those who have surrendered to forgetfulness. These people can only be governed by constraint or by persuasion, its close relation. Hence the need for laws made to govern the city and for that persuasion which guarantees ὁμοφωνία. This is no longer a spontaneous harmony engendered by a general ἁρμογά, a κοινώνια and φιλία, but an ὁμοφωνία built on persuasion and on discourse, on the action of political forces that create social accord through words, the acceptance of rational argument in preference to the immediacy of spontaneity. In this sense it seems to me that Delatte's interpretation does not properly interpret Ecphantus' argument. The scholar rightly draws comparisons with passages of Philo[93] but, in my opinion, the chosen texts do not seem to suggest the sort of explanation given by Delatte, but rather provide evidence for a bipartite schema separating imitation and word. In any case this is one of the points at which Philo may provide a good basis for interpreting some of the more obscure concepts in Ecphantus.

The distinction between imitation of the king, who is assimilated to God and, in turn, constitutes the object of contemplation and imitation by his subjects, on the one hand, and the persuasive word that establishes a second type of accord between men on the other is, in fact, parallel to a similar distinction in Philo where contemplation and imitation are on a level surpassing that of verbal relationships and sight is superior

[93] Delatte (*Les Traités* cit. 235) compares the topics of imitation and persuasion to the Philonic distinction between the self-taught and those who learn by instruction (see *Migr.* 39; *Sacr.* 7; *Congr.* 36; 70; *Leg.* III. 96). He also makes a comparison with a passage of Plutarch (*Ad principem ineruditum* 3) that, however, according to Delatte, presents differences from Ecphantus because the λόγος in the king does not have a mediating role. In my opinion, Plutarch is not speaking of the king's word, but of the reason that resides in the king, the λόγος ἔμψυχος that is the law. This is a λόγος that always speaks to the king and urges him on. But in Plutarch, the λόγος of the king talks to the king, it's a sort of δαίμων, it is not a word that induces others to act.

to listening.[94] The privileged position of sight is such a common theme in Platonic tradition that there is no point in discussing it here, but the specificity of Philo's discourse in this context is not so much due to the accentuation of sight, but to the choice to opt for imitation rather than words. In *Congr.* 69–70 those people who learn through teaching and therefore pay attention to words, τοῖς λόγοις, and to their contents (τοῖς λεγομένοις) are contrasted with others who learn by imitation, conforming their own actions to those of blameless models (τοῖς λέγουσι προσέχει, μιμούμενος τὸν ἐκείνων βίον ἐν ταῖς κατὰ μέρος ἀνεπιλήπτοις πράξεσι). Thus, with regard to Jacob, the choice advocated is to imitate a certain type of life, and not listen to words.

In *Mut.* 98–102 the natural inclination that leads to spontaneous vision is compared with learning by listening and with the teaching that brings the awakening of recollection. A distinction is made between the memory (μνήμη) proper to a happy nature (εὐφυία) i.e. a natural inclination connected with vision and recollection (ἀνάμνησις) as it has emerged from forgetfulness (λήθη), a recollection bound up with study and teaching (μάθησις and διδασκαλία), with learning by means of listening (ἀκούειν):

> For just as natural excellence which resembles sight is better than learning which resembles hearing, the inferior of sight, so memory is in every way the superior of recollection, since while that is mixed with forgetfulness memory remains from first to last free from mixture or contamination (*Mut.* 102).

[94] In *Migr.* 38–39 "The Trainer of self was eager to exchange ears for eyes, and to see what before he heard, and, going beyond the inheritance which has hearing as its source, he obtains that of which sight is the ruling principle. For the current coin of learning and teaching from which Jacob took his title is reminted into the seeing Israel. Hereby comes to pass even the seeing of the Divine light, identical with knowledge, which opens wide the soul's eye, and leads it to apprehensions distinct and brilliant beyond those gained by the ears". On the changing of Jacob's name to Israel, the man who has seen God, cf. *Abr.* 57; *Mut.* 81–88; *Ebr.* 82 ff.; *Conf.* 72. As to the preferability of the eyes over the ears, see *Abr.* 150; *Conf.* 140; 148; *Mut.* 102; *Sacr.* 34. The superiority of sight over listening is claimed in particularly strong terms with regard to God's voice. "The voice or sound that was not that of verbs and nouns but of God, seen by the eye of the soul, he rightly represents as 'visible'. [...] Words spoken by God are interpreted by the power of sight residing in the soul, whereas those which are divided up among the various parts of speech appeal to hearing" (*Migr.* 48–49).

Goodenough's Interpretation

Goodenough,[95] too, interprets the passage of Ecphantus and opines that the λόγος inducing persuasion, or—as he translates—obedience, is that of the king, although he interprets the λόγος as a λόγος σπερματικός that sows new vitality, i.e. memory, in man. Thus transformed, people imitate the king as the king imitates God. According to this interpretation, the λόγος causes man to imitate the king, i.e. to act well, not because he is persuaded into good behaviour, but because he is persuaded to imitate. It is as if by persuasion/obedience man were passing from the lowest level on to the imitative level. The idea of the λόγος σπερματικός might explain the action of a λόγος that is nowhere said to be expressed in words; however, the distinction between the phase of imitation and that of obedience is not very clear. Goodenough does not make a distinction between people who imitate and those who give way to persuasion/obedience; by obedience, these people imitate and become similar to the king. Another point which remains unexplained, in this reading, is the relationship between obedience and constraint, which are allied. The text expressly states that obedience is inferior to spontaneity and to imitation and is similar to violence. With the λόγος, one leaves behind spontaneous harmony and εὐκοσμία, the relationship of ἁρμογά by which every living being is bound up with everything else. The inspirational chain relationship that passes from God to the king, from the king to man, is broken, just as the "visual" relationship whereby common mortals contemplate the king, who contemplates God, is broken. As there is no longer any harmony, the accord between the parts must be preserved by strong means: violence or, at the very least, words which have to persuade because they replace the natural bonds. This is not, therefore, the Stoic λόγος of which Goodenough speaks. In my opinion, the references are the συναρμογά that echoes "Pythagorean" texts and the persuasive words evoking the political theorization of the 5th and 4th centuries.

A comparison with Philo brings out the connection between the immediacy of a visual relationship with God and the mediation of the word. However, even if vision is superior it is not, for this reason, necessarily detached from the word. In his role as a prophet Moses is an object of imitation, a model for his subjects and, at the same

[95] Op. cit. 89–90.

time, he is a mediator of the word for his people. When He appears to Moses, God manifests Himself both visually and verbally, while His appearance to others is only verbal.[96]

Imitation and Persuasion

In *Gig.* 52 Philo introduces a distinction between silent contemplation of the being that is based on the monad, while the uttered word is dual in nature. There is a clear distinction between contemplation and λόγος προφορικός, which is tied up with multiplicity and becoming. The distinction refers to the difference between those who remain immersed in becoming and Moses, who enters the dark cloud and sees the invisible. In his contemplation Moses does not confine himself to understanding truths, he also teaches them to those who have purified their ears i.e. to those who are ready to welcome truthful λόγοι.

The Patriarchs exemplify three ways of acquiring virtue: the path through teaching represented by Abraham; practice, exemplified by Jacob; and the spontaneous learning of the self-learnt kind, of whom Isaac is an example.[97] The last mentioned has no need of practice or teaching; he feels the joy, the immediacy of learning for its own sake.[98] This is a privileged situation, a condition of superiority that sets him on a different plane from that of other men. For Philo, the typological distinction of which the Patriarchs are emblematic alludes to a distinction between the various conditions of the soul, approaches to virtue and ways of accepting knowledge; it does not necessarily correspond to different types of people. In this sense it is, perhaps, a different distinction from that which Ecphantus makes between human beings able to follow the model of virtue immediately and those induced

---

[96] At Sinai the people saw the voices, not God.

[97] Abraham is a paragon of teaching, Isaac of self-teaching, and Jacob of asceticism. Cf. *Congr*. 35–38; *Praem.* 27 ff.; *Migr.* 39; 165; *Mut.* 12; *Somn.* I 168–172; *Sacr.* 5–7; *Mos*. I 76.

[98] "He who has gained the wisdom that comes without toil and trouble, because his nature is happily gifted and his soul fruitful of good, does not seek for any means of betterment: for he has ready beside him in their fullness the gifts of God, conveyed by the breath of God's higher graces" (*Congr.* 37). The Philonic passages cited introduce positions which are, to some extent, different: in one case the distinction between imitation and words seems to regard teaching imparted through words or acquired through practise, on the other, the dimension of immediate and spontaneous learning is also introduced.

by persuasion. Even this distinction, however, would not differentiate between different types of mortals if all men fell into the forgetfulness from which they were to be re-awoken by the λόγος. Yet, the king's role is simply the imitation of divine virtue; he is naturally endowed with ethical and noetic gifts: he does not need persuasion. There is thus at least one person who is set on a different plane to the others.[99]

Conclusion

From what has been said above, it seems plausible to maintain that Philo and Ecphantus have certain affinities, and that a reading of Philo may, at some points, help to explain certain difficulties in the Pseudo-Pythagorean text. In particular, I feel it may shed light on the notion of πότοψις ἱερά, a vision of the divine aspect. A θεομοιρὴς ἐμπνοίησις connects the best part of humans to God and shows them the sacred aspect of their parent (γεννάτορος), because it is impossible to contemplate it. The interpretation of the passage has given rise to many explicative hypotheses, which do, however, present problems. One source of clarification may emerge from an explanation of the forms of knowledge of God, from direct contemplation and reflected vision. In Philo, the *pneuma* has been breathed into all men, but it only remains in some superior beings who have distanced themselves from becoming. Due to their virtue and the inspiration deriving from attraction towards higher forms of knowledge, these individuals can overcome the vision proper to ordinary men, a vision which is reflected and indirect, and gain access to contemplation, even if this is limited by their human condition. What we are talking about is a representation of the existence of God, not of his essence, knowledge of which is precluded to mankind. The supremacy and superiority of Moses enable him to see what is incorporeal, to contemplate the blinding rays of noetic light without being dazzled, just as, in Ecphantus, the eagle can look directly at the sun.

Then again, the distinction between imitation and persuasion, which Philo clearly expresses when speaking of the superiority of contemplation and imitation over words, perhaps clarifies Ecphantus' ideas

[99] Possible analogies between the two authors with respect to spontaneous learning and instruction by means of teaching have been brought out by Delatte (*Les Traités*, cit. 235 ff.).

regarding imitation, persuasion and constraint, forms that characterize the relations between God, king and subjects.

To conclude, a series of ideas and terms used by Ecphantus reflect a highly variegated panorama and involve extremely complex references. Comparing this author's work with texts from Philo allows us to shed light on some obscure points in Ecphantus and to grasp a series of unclear theoretical aspects. At the same time, in my opinion, it leads one to place the text in a Middle-Platonic setting. This might help to revise Delatte's mystical interpretation,[100] whereby he tends to flatten Ecphantus, Philo, Porphyrius and Clement of Alexandria into a single position.

---

[100] For example, on p. 215 and p. 221 where he gives a mystical interpretation of ὁμοίωσις θεῷ or on p. 253 where, in connection with Diotogenes and the priestly function of the king who must honour the gods, he makes reference to Alexandrian mysticism and speaks of a gnosis that illuminates the soul, a gnosis that is obtained by means of meditation and ecstasy and constitutes true piety.

APPENDIX THREE

GALEN AND MOSES

Moses and Epicurus

In *De usu partium* (XI, 14, K III 905–906) Galen sets the doctrine of Moses against that of Epicurus, showing that they had both fallen into error. Unlike Epicurus, Moses admits that there is an order in nature and a providential plan but—and in this lies the reason for Galen's attack—he maintains the possibility of God's intervening at any time to establish order in nature, and acting in an arbitrary manner foreign to any rule or law. He says:

> Did our demiurge simply enjoin this hair to preserve its length always equal, and does it strictly observe this order either from fear of its master's command, or from reverence for the god who gave this order, or is it because it itself believes it better to do this? Is not this Moses' way of treating Nature and is it not superior to that of Epicurus?[1]

It is not only that God can intervene to change nature; nature itself keeps to certain, particular rules. This is not for intrinsic reasons, because there exists a set of rules and this is for the best, but in order to obey God's will, out of fear or reverence. However, continues Galen,

> it was certainly not sufficient merely to will their becoming such: it would not have been possible for him to make a man out of a stone in an instant, by simply wishing so.[2]
>
> It is precisely this point in which our own opinion and that of Plato and of the other Greeks who follow the right method in natural science differs from the position taken up by Moses. For the latter it seems enough to say that God simply willed the arrangement of matter and it was presently arranged in due order; for he believes everything to be possible with God, even should He wish to make a bull or a horse out of ashes.[3]

[1] See R. Walzer, *Galen on Jews and Christians* (Oxford-London 1949) 10–13; 26–36.

[2] Οὐ γὰρ δὴ τὸ βουληθῆναι τοιαύτας γενέσθαι μόνον ἦ αὔταρκης· οὐδὲ γὰρ, εἰ τὴν πέτραν ἐξαίφνης ἐθελήσειεν ἄνθρωπον ποιῆσαι, δυνατόν αὐτῷ.

[3] Τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἀρκεῖ τὸ βουληθῆναι τὸν θεὸν κοσμῆσαι τὴν ὕλην, ἡ δ' εὐθὺς κεκόσμηται· πάντα γὰρ εἶναι νομίζει τῷ θεῷ δύνατα, κἂν εἰ τὴν τέφραν ἵππον ἢ βοῦν ἐθέλοι ποιεῖν.

> We however do not hold this; we say that certain things are impossible by nature and that God does not even attempt such things at all but that he chooses the best out the possibilities of becoming.

Although Moses' interpretation is preferable to that of Epicurus, it is, in any case, incorrect. The best system is that which does not consider only the demiurge as a source of creation, but adds the material principle. In the specific case of the length of the eyebrows, the demiurge created them because he considered it good to do so and, as a consequence of his decision, he took care of the material conditions. Even if God were to express his will an infinite number of times, the eyebrows would never issue forth from a soft substance and they can be nothing other than straight, and fixed in something hard. That is why God put cartilage there.

For Moses, instead, 1) it is sufficient that God should wish to give an order to nature and this immediately becomes ordered 2) everything is possible for God, even the creation of a man out of stone or a bull or a horse out of dust 3) not only does Moses think that God *can* do impossible things, but he also maintains that He does do them; whereas for Galen, He does not even try, because He chooses the best out of the things that can be done. In other words, for Moses, order in nature is given by God by an act of will that immediately translates into reality, notwithstanding the material conditions which might be opposing it. Moreover, the conviction that everything is possible for God induces Moses to believe that God can do the impossible and achieve things which are unconnected with the natural order, such as creating a horse out of dust. According to Moses, God can, at any time, impose His will on each individual phenomenon, by intervening in an individual and arbitrary manner in order to set up or change the order of anything. It is not a case of rules and laws taken tied up with nature, but extraordinary interventions, impossible things which, as such, Galen cannot accept as being the best thing, which is what God always chooses.

There thus emerges the image of a world subject to arbitrariness, to irregularity, to a capricious will which does not necessarily pursue what is best. The very use of the verb βουληθῆναι instead of προαιρεῖσθαι indicates a will which does not consider all the possibilities and disregards the option of choosing the best.[4]

---

[4] Cf. R. Walzer, op. cit. 25: προαιρεῖσθαι «denotes the discursive activity of the will

Galen's Referent

What is Galen referring to when he speaks of Moses, providing this image? Does he have in mind a precise referent, a specific author? Is he thinking of the *Bible* or is he thinking of a common opinion, a vulgate relating to Jewish opinions? Some critics, for example, R. Radice,[5] hold that Galen is thinking of Philo of Alexandria. Radice feels that some elements of Philo seem to agree with Galen's view: 1) the principle of the creating word, 2) the absoluteness of God 3) His omnipotence 4) the fact that all things were made simultaneously. Moreover, in Radice's opinion, Galen is supposedly maintaining that Moses supports the principle of creation *ex nihilo* which, in my opinion—leaving aside the complexity of the problem and the doubts on the principle of *creatio ex nihilo* in Philo—is not the subject of Galen's argument.[6] Actually, Galen's exposition does contain some elements that

as directed towards the realization of an end in action, whereas βούλησις means the will directed towards an end without considering the possibility and means of its realization, and emphasize that Galen, speaking of the Jewish God, uses only βουληθῆναι and says nothing of a reasoned choice of the best among the possibilities.»

[5] *Platonismo e creazionismo* cit. 365–369.

[6] Walzer too reads a reference to *creatio ex nihilo* in Galen's text. For both Radice and Walzer, when Galen attributes to Moses a creation wholly founded on divine will and free from the cogent power of a material principle, he is maintaining that Moses believes that matter did not exist before divine creation. As regards this aspect too, Walzer and Radice see Galen as referring to Philo and, indeed, they actually base their arguments on this passage from Galen to stress that Philo believes in *creatio ex nihilo.* However, in actual fact, Philo is not—in my opinion—explicit in this regard. Indeed, although various passages in Philo seem to move in this direction, other passages use Platonic language and describe divine action as an ordering action carried out by a demiurge shaping disorder. It is as if there were a first creating action which forms an unordered matter and a second action which orders the disorder, but Philo's writings on this matter are not clear. Moreover, I would not be so sure that Galen's text alludes to *creatio ex nihilo*. When he speaks of adding the material principle to the Mosaic conception, I hold that he does not necessarily mean that for Moses the material principle does not exist, but that this does not have a cogent power; it is not autonomous from divine omnipotence. Galen speaks of the independence of God from any order or necessity. As Radice himself notes, the theme is reminiscent of "l'obiezione di Celso e quindi va ritenuta come espressione di una obiezione diffusa [. . .] con ciò Galeno mostra di avere ben presente la differenza [. . .] il Dio greco ha 'fuori di sé' la norma del suo agire (la natura) e ad essa si attiene, il Dio mosaico non tiene conto di alcuna norma, se non della propria volontà, essendo questa stessa la vera 'natura'" (*Platonismo e creazionismo* cit. 368).

A further difficulty with regard to the theory of *creatio ex nihilo* arises when we take into account that, as A. M. Wolters affirms in his "*Creatio ex nihilo* in Philo" in W. Helleman (ed.), *Hellenisation Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman* are truly present in Philo, whereas others seem to lead directly back to *Genesis*. Let us go back then to the question already posed: is Galen's source of reference Philo, a common knowledge of Judaism, or is it some other author? I shall quote some positions of Philo to see how far they agree with Galen's image, I shall then go on to refer to some theories maintained by Greek and Latin writings on Judaism and, finally,

World (Lanham 1994) 107–124 the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is a later formulation, which developed in the polemical context upon the encounter between the Hellenic and biblical traditions. In the one sense it is anachronistic to wonder whether Philo believed in this doctrine, because the theological doctrine had not yet been formulated. However, according to Wolters, from another perspective it is not, seeing that the doctrine is implicit in the biblical account of creation. According to Robert L. Wilken [*The Christians as the Romans saw them* (New Haven and London 1984) 88 ff.], the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* began to take root in Christian circles shortly before Galen. The first Christian to elaborate the doctrine was the Gnostic Basilides, who lived during the second quarter of the II century. More or less a contemporary of Galen, the bishop of Antioch, Theophilus, declared the new Christian vision according to which God created *ex nihilo* (*Ad Antol* 2.4). In Galen's times, there was no strict interpretation of the creation in *Genesis* and thus we do not find a clear rejection of a Platonic idea of demiurge. The hypothesis of *creatio ex nihilo* in Philo has been very much studied over the last few years and has given rise to various formulations. In parallel, the theme of principles has also been tackled, together with the reinterpretation of the *Timaeus*. Cf. J. Dillon, "Reclaiming the heritage of Moses: Philo's confrontation with Greek philosophy", *SPhA* 7 (1995) 108–123, which looks at Philo against the background of Platonism. For Dillon, "It seems, therefore, that despite the apparently uncompromising assertions by Philo at various points in his works of the createdness of the world, we may take it that all he really wishes to assert is the logical and ontological dependence of the physical world on its creator—through the medium of the intelligible world, which, as a system of *logoi*, constitutes the contents of his mind. After all, a doctrine of temporal creation would conflict with another deeply-held doctrine of Philo's, that God is unchanging in all respects, since the sudden creation of a physical cosmos, even as an image of the eternally subsistent intelligible one, would constitute a significant change in his circumstances" 113–114).

While R. Sorabji in *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London 1983) 203–9, even if with some caution, returns to the hypothesis that matter was created directly by God, D. Winston ("Philo's Theory of Eternal Creation: *Prov.*1.6–9" in G. Sterling (ed.), *The Ancestral Philosophy* cit. 117–127) maintains that Philo taught a doctrine of eternal creation: matter has always existed and was produced *ab aeterno* by God's thinking the forms. "Corroboration for this interpretation may be found in an oft-repeated principle of Philo's theology that God is unchangeable, so that a temporal creation involving as it does a change in God's nature would thus stand in open contradiction to a fundamental assumption of Philo's thought" (122). The theory of a temporal creation has also been studied by G. E. Sterling, "Creatio Temporalis, Aeterna, vel Continua? An analysis of the Thought of Philo of Alexandria", *SPhA* 4 (1992) 15–41 who gives a sound account of the discussion, also providing full bibliographical data. According to Sterling too, rather than a *creatio ex nihilo*, in Philo, we can find the idea that matter has always existed, and was produced by God's thinking the ideas.The notion of a temporal beginning of the cosmos is an important assumption for P. Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria* Text and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 77 (Tübingen 1999) 100 ff., who

I shall consider some passages from Christian authors. My hypothesis is that Galen, when speaking of Moses, does not clearly distinguish between the theories propounded by Jews and Christians: Galen knows perfectly well that Jews and Christians are different "schools"—as he calls them—but perhaps he doesn't always clearly differentiate between the theories he assimilates. It is therefore possible that the referent of *De usu partium* is a composite: *Genesis* (which was already well-known and in circulation in Galen's time), Philo and Christian authors, all seen in a unitary manner, as a thesis of Moses'.

---

studies the problem in relation to the theme of Divine Providence while, according to D. T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* cit. 96–103; 140–157; 280–83), we should speak of a *creatio continua*, as it is both *temporalis* and *aeterna*. In a recent article D. T. Runia ("Plato's 'Timaeus', First Principle(s), and creation in Philo and early Christian Thought", in G. J. Reydams–Schils (ed.), *Plato's 'Timaeus' as Cultural Icon* (Notre Dame 2003) 133–151, has given a clear picture of the different critical positions. The question tackled by Runia is whether one should speak of *creatio ex nihilo* or rather of *creatio aeterna* in Philo. Starting out from the work of M. Baltes and H. Dörrie [*Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus: Einege grundlegende Axiome/Platonische Physik (im antiken Verständnis)*, vol. 1: *Bausteine* 101–24: *Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar,* Der Platonismus in des Antike: Grundlagen—System—Entwicklung, 4 (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 1996) B 110.0] he delineates a picture of various theories whose principles can be traced in Middle Platonic authors. He identifies different positions, from those deriving from *Timaeus*, which postulate three principles: God-model-matter or God-evil soul-matter to those which mention four, five, six or two principles: God-matter (Theophrastus on Plato); divine soul-irrational soul (Plutarch), and, finally, those which are not based on Plato's *Timaeus* and which speak of two principles: One-unlimited dyad (Aristotle on Plato, Plutarch) or a single principle: the One (Eudorus, Moderatus).

In his exegesis of *Genesis*, Philo interprets the opening words of *Genesis*: "In the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth. But the earth was invisible and unstructured". "These verses", Runia continues, "do not in themselves spell out a clear doctrine of creation at all" (136). *De Opifici mundi* 8 introduces two principles, one of which is the cause, and the other passive: "He recognized that it is absolutely necessary that in reality there is an activating cause, but also the passive object, and that the activating cause is the absolute pure and unadulterated mind of the universe, superior to excellence and superior to knowledge, and even superior to the good and the beautiful itself. But the passive object, which of itself was without soul and change, was changed and formed and ensouled by the mind, who transformed it into the most perfect piece of work, the cosmos." The question arising here recalls both the Stoic doctrine of two principles and the Middle Platonic theories, and concerns what is to be understood by 'passive object'. In Runia's interpretation, Philo "does not call passive matter a principle or a cause" (137). The problem of whether creation was *ex nihilo* or whether matter has always existed draws substance and sense from these different conceptions and is substantiated in connection with the activity of the demiurge. Runia proposes that we should see a "monarchic dualism" in Philo. "God is the sole creator and rules and first principle of reality, but [...] for giving a philosophical account of created reality, something else besides God is required, something that may be called 'matter' or 'passive object' or 'non being', but is not a principle or cause" (139–140).

The Will of God

The thesis that the will of God is sufficient to make something happen, in other words, that it was sufficient for God to want nature to be ordered for it to duly arrange itself in the right order is undoubtedly present in Philo, as it is, moreover, in a large part of the Jewish tradition. The whole story of Genesis develops according to the schema: "God said 'Let there be light and there was light'". God's word is creating and its expression immediately translates into realization. It is God, therefore, who establishes the order, and He establishes it by His will: He is omnipotent and does not need any external element for what he establishes to be carried out. In Philo, God creates an ideal world of which the empirical world is a copy

> When he had decided to construct this visible cosmos, he first marked out the intelligible cosmos, so that he could use it as a incorporeal and most god-like paradigm and so produce the corporeal cosmos.[7]

The plan "had no location outside but had been engraved in the soul of the craftsman" (*Opif.* 20). The reference to *Timaeus* is clear, in the idea of an ideal pattern of which the sensible world is a copy, but what I wish to point out is the clear statement that the plan was in the mind of God and was not in any external place. Although the plan was only in God's mind, there was, however, also a material element to it.

> For if anyone should wish to examine the reason why this universe was constructed, I think he would not miss the mark if he affirmed, what one of the ancients also said, that the Father and Maker was good. For this reason he did not begrudge a share of his own excellent nature to a material which did not possess any beauty of its but was able to become all things.[8]

So there is divine will, but there is also a material element on which God acts.

The reference to *Timaeus* is explicitly explained by Philo himself: creation is an act of will by God who, due to His goodness, establishes an order where there was a lack of order and harmony. Here we can

[7] *Opif.* 16.
[8] *Opif.* 21.

find a particularly significant element for the purposes of our argument. As Galen says, for Moses creation happened in a single instant: it was all simultaneous. The fact that the *Bible* speaks of a creation in six days does not imply that God actually took six days; it is just an expression used to indicate order.[9]

> Even if the maker proceeded to make all things simultaneously, it is nonetheless true that what comes into a beautiful is a sequence and series of things that precede and follow, if not in the completed products, then certainly in the conceptions of the builders. Only in this way could they be precisely arranged, and not deviate from their path or be full of confusion.[10]

The temporal succession is thus indicative of the order, the perfection, of creation—not of the actual succession in the coming into being of things. God creates in just one instant by an act of will.

> At that time everything was constituted simultaneously. But even though everything was constituted together, it was still necessary that the ordered sequence should be outlined in an account, because in the future beings would originate from each other.[11]

Although the narration speaks of successive creation, this does not imply that the creation was not simultaneous and did not happen at just one moment: εὐθύς, as Galen says. Creation was simultaneous and was a single event; what happened afterwards followed rules and laws established at the time of creation, from which the creation itself was free. In this sense, the creation—a pure act of God's will—was not subject to any outside will or law, but the continuation of the world and its preservation proceed according to rules and norms which will never be changed.[12] The order and hierarchy within the creation, dominated by providence, which watches over the world (the father does not abandon his son) was established at the very same time as the creation. At that time, the order established had an intrinsic perfection.[13] In the very beginning the earth was covered with vegetation, the trees bore fruit

[9] Cf. *Opif.* 13.
[10] *Opif.* 28.
[11] *Opif.* 67.
[12] Cf. *Opif.* 60.
[13] Cf. *Opif.* 8–9.

all at the same time, without being subject to the seasonal cycle—all species were thus perfect. Galen's assertion whereby it was enough that God should want to give order to nature and it immediately became ordered would thus find confirmation.

> Then he starts giving the earth its adornment. He commands it to bear green shoots and crops, and to bring forth all kinds of plants and well-grassed plains [...] he also caused all kinds of trees to grow [...] Immediately on their first creation these trees were all heavily laden with fruit, contrary to the manner in which this now takes place. For now plants develop in succession at different times, and not all together at a single opportune time.[14]

For God everything is possible: after the earth, God ordered the sky. First he created the fruits, then the sun which makes them ripe. God knew that mankind would give greater credit to the phenomenic world than to its creator and would consider the stars as the cause of all that arises. So He wanted men to think things back to "the first coming into existence of the universe, when, before the sun and moon even existed, the earth bore all manner of plants and all manner of fruits".[15]

The reference made is to *Genesis* 1.11–12. The need to explain the *Bible* is used to declare that God has an independent power and has no need of other entities, such as the stars: "He guides each process according to law and just desert in whichever direction he wishes, not needing anyone else's help. After all, for God all things are possible.[16]

Although the creation was an act made in total freedom by God, the universe is preserved by the application of rules. Obviously, this does not imply a limitation of divine freedom, but the continuance of His will according to an unchangeable plan. Thus the movements of the heavenly bodies and their functions "contribute to the preservation of the whole. These are fully and invariably achieved in accordance with the ordinances and laws which have been immutably established in the universe by God".[17]

In other words, God's acting is voluntary, not arbitrary. He creates according to His will, but he then keeps to the order he has imposed. One cannot entertain the idea of God's acting arbitrarily not because God is incapable of acting freely (He is omnipotent), but because He

[14] *Opif.* 40–41.
[15] *Opif.* 46.
[16] *Opif.* 46.
[17] *Opif.* 60.

does not want to as He is in pursuit of the best: the preservation of the norm and the harmony established. Here we can hear a strong echo of *Timaeus*. The law of nature was established by God and is governed by rational principles. God, who is goodness and providence, has set up a rational order and is not detached from the rationality which He, himself, has established. Even prodigious events, far from being a break in natural rationality, are the restitution of a broken-off order, extraordinary events which happen by divine will and seem to overturn the natural order, but which are actually set within the logic of this order.[18]

De Vita Mosis I 113 discusses the punishments handed out to the Pharoah, partly by Aaron, partly by Moses, and partly by God Himself. As regards the punishments inflicted by Moses, the question asked is "out of which elements of nature he made them arise": nature changes its rhythms and its laws; water turns into blood (cf. *Mos.* I 99); aquatic animals invade dry places (cf. *Mos*. I 103), the air undergoes changes which cause unusually inclement weather (cf. *Mos*. I 118). Day becomes night and night becomes day. These are extraordinary events produced by God's wrath (cf. *Mos*. I 119), phenomena which break off the balance between the natural phenomena (cf. *Mos*. I 117). The elements, ordered so as to make up the universe, turn towards destruction and disorder due to the will of God. The order of the world is overturned and the elements that God used for the formation of the universe now act to cause the perdition of the wicked. (Cf. *Mos*. I 96).[19] In other words,

[18] This theme has been studied by D. Winston, "Philo's Theory of Eternal Creation" cit. In this text Winston goes back to his treatment of miracles appearing in a previous article ("The Book of Wisdom's Theory of Cosmogony", *HR* 11 (1971) 185–202 reprint. in *The Ancestral Philosophy* cit. 59–77) where he had examined the passage III 39.92 in Cicero's *De natura deorum* regarding the fact that the gods can do anything they want without violating the order of nature, as they can move and alter all things. Nature is flexible and subject to change, so there is nothing which cannot be moulded and transformed: the agent that transforms and changes is providence, which can carry out all that it wants. Winston sees this statement as being based on the idea that probably, for the Stoics, what appear to be miracles actually have a natural explanation (cf. 68 n. 26). According to this scholar, in Philo, biblical miracles are part of "the complex patterns of an unchanging and eternal Logos in which past, present and future are one" (126). So Philo is apparently explaining the miraculous acts of God "within the framework of the existing natural order, by simply expanding its parameters" (124). In other words, what we are dealing with here is an extension of the limits set by God himself in nature and the parallel impossibility of interventions which completely overturn the order originally imposed.

[19] Cf. J. Mansfeld, "Heraclitus, Empedocles and others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria", *Vigiliae Christianae* XXXIX (1985) 131–156.

nature has a share in the punishment, not because it has its own will, but as an instrument in the hands of God (*Mos.* I 113).[20] The regular patterns of nature have been changed so that the evil can be punished, in order that transgressions within the sphere of the human order may be prevented. The rule which governs the cosmos is one and one alone: the *Law* established by God[21] and the prodigious interventions in some way implied by the unity of the law of the cosmos[22] are induced by the need to re-establish an order which has been broken up in one of the spheres. Prodigious events sometimes show themselves as an unnatural action of natural elements or as the unnatural coexistence of contrasting elements: in the burning bush the flames are consumed like wood, while the wood devours like fire;[23] in the plague of hailstones, the bolts of lightening do not melt and do not stop the hail, but leave it intact. The "unusual manifestation" and the "extraordinary nature of the event" consist in the use of elements present in nature presenting themselves in ways which are not proper to the element in question.[24] Nature collaborates with God in order that an equilibrium should be restored between men; in order that conflicts and injustices should find a just response. What is acting is the concept of a universal harmony based on the Law which structures the cosmos (*Opif.* 10; 13), the relationships between men and animals (*Opif.* 84) and the human sphere (*Opif.* 69; 82).

The wonders the Jewish people witnessed during their exodus from Egypt were extraordinary and exceptional events, a manifestation of the greatness of God and also of His providential action. Yet they are nothing as compared with the real wonder, which consists in the creation of the world and its preservation.[25] We thus return to the description of

[20] *Mos*. I 156 In connection with the great virtue of Moses and his position, which is unique in creation, Philo declares that "the elements obeyed him as their master, changing their characteristics and submitting to his orders". With regard to manna, the exceptional nature of the phenomenon is brought out as compared with the natural order (*Mos*. I 200), even if it is considered that some inexplicable phenomena might not be due to extraordinary intervention by God, but to possibilities of nature previously unknown to us (*Mos*. I 185).

[21] Cf. *Conf.* 98.

[22] "It is because Mosaic Law is rooted in the law of nature that Moses portrays the transgressor as punished by the forces of nature themselves" H. Najman, "The Law of Nature and the Authority of Mosaic Law", *SPhA* XI (1999) 64.

[23] Cf. *Mos*. I 65.

[24] Cf. *Mos.* I 118–119.

[25] Cf. *Mos.* I 212.

God's prodigious acts at the time of the creation and to the assertion that God is omnipotent.

The Autonomy of Nature

The aforementioned theses of Philo's seem to fit Galen's statements very well: God's omnipotence, simultaneous creation, nature's preservation of the order imposed by God. There are, however, some aspects of his argument which are not easily reconciled with what the Alexandrian says: in Galen, it seems that God is divorced from rationality and any choice for the best, whereas Philo repeatedly stresses the opposite. Divine omnipotence seems to be absolute and seems to admit possibilities not previously written into the natural order. In other words, it seems that wonders are not, as Philo affirms, an accentuation or, at the very most, an overturning of natural laws which, even if they are to be broken, do however constitute a necessary basis for reference. In Galen's description, the autonomy of nature leads to wonders removed from its structure, like the creation of a man starting out from a stone. We cannot find any counterpart for this affirmation in Philo from a terminological point of view either. At various points, in the wake of *Genesis*, he states that man is earth and ashes[26] (even if no reference is made to ashes as regards animals like the ox and the horse), never stone. This term is instead found in Homer and Plato with reference to an "old story" (probably that of Deucalion and Pyrrha)[27] which, however,

[26] *Gen.* 2. 7: "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground (χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life". Χοῦς is dug out, piled up earth, mud, dust. In *Heres* 29 Abraham says: "I perceive that I am earth and cinders (γὴν καὶ τέφραν) and quotes *Gen.* 18. 27 "I am dust and ashes (γὴ καὶ σποδός). In *Somn.* I 211 it is said: "It is the beginning of wisdom not to be forgetful of one's own self, but ever to set before one's eyes the elements of which one consists [. . .] ashes and water (τέφρα καὶ ὕδωρ) are for him the beginning of existence. (cf. also I 220; *Spec.* I 262; 264). In *Deus* 161 Abraham "when he drew nigh to God straightway knew himself to be earth and ashes (γὴ καὶ σποδός) (*Gen.* 18. 27)". Also the reference to the human being as a statue uses the terms earth and clay: "It is not likely that God took clay from any part of the earth which he happened to come across when he wished to mould this statue in the form of a human being with the utmost care, but rather that he separated out the best part from the entire mass, taking from pure matter the purest and utmost refined part which was especially suited for the construction" (*Opif.* 137).

[27] References to man being born from a stone are found in the *Odyssey* XIX 163: "You were certainly not born from an oak nor out of stone as the old story tells". The image is present also in Plato, even with some mediation: "Do you suppose that constitutions spring from the proverbial oak or rock and not from the characters of the

does not seem to have much to do with this context. Looking in the biblical sphere, we find a reference in *Isaiah* 51.1 which reads

> Hearken to me, you who pursue deliverance,/ you who seek the LORD;/ look to the rock from which you were hewn (εἰς τὴν στερεὰν πέτραν), / and to the quarry from which you were digged

Leaving aside our doubts as to whether Galen could know this passage of *Isaiah*, the argument here seems to be different from that in *De usu partium*. There may, perhaps, be some analogy with a passage from *Matthew's Gospel* 3.9 = *Luke* 3.8 in which John the Baptist turns on the Pharisees and the Sadducees:

> Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones (ἐκ τῶν λίθων τούτων) to raise up children to Abraham

The term used is λίθος, not πέτρα, but we have here a reference which seems significant. In connection with these very passages, Walzer hypothesises that Galen, or the author Galen based himself on, could have come into contact with a Jewish conception that is otherwise unknown. However, the hypothesis which seems most plausible to me is that, here, Galen has put together Christian and Jewish quotes and theses (perhaps Philonic) without distinguishing clearly between the different sources. In any case, at this point the problem posed is whether there is any historical possibility of Galen's having known Philo's writings. To what extent is it plausible that the physician knew Philo's theories, whether directly or indirectly?

In cultivated circles, reference to the laws of Moses was quite common. There are many authors who explicitly quote them, from the author of *On the Sublime* to Numenius, from Plutarch to Celsus. More or less polemical references to the Jews and their traditions are, moreover, ancient and commonplace: in the case of Galen, are we dealing with a generic knowledge of Judaism or a direct or indirect reading of Philo? Undoubtedly, Galen knew the Jews who lived all over in the Diaspora and was particularly influenced by the writings of Rufus of Samaria, a Hellenized Jew. D. T. Runia reminds us that, although some critics

---

citizens?" (*Republic* 544d, transl. by P. Shorey). Behind this there is the "old story", in other words probably the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, where new men and women sprang up out of the stones the two people threw behind them. However, this is clearly not what Galen was referring to, as he speaks of this birth out of stone in Moses.

disagree, Numenius is considered to have known Philo's writings, even though this cannot be proved and there is just "a single case where it can be proven beyond all doubt that a pagan author did read Philo":[28] this was Heliodorus, the author of the late ancient novel *Aethiopica*. He lived in the III or perhaps the IV century A.D., thus much later than Galen.

Some Christian contemporaries of Galen's knew Philo's writings: perhaps Justin, perhaps Theophilus, and certainly Clement. Thus, historically speaking, it is possible that Galen knew Philo, which does not however necessarily imply that in *De usu partium* he was referring to Philo's theories. By reading Celsus, we can perhaps find some useful clarification in this respect. Celsus uses the Jews (not Philo!) more as an object of dispute against the Christians than as a specific subject. They are the source from which Christians drew their origins and a series of mistakes and absurdities found amongst the Christians can also be found amongst the Jews. Examples are their belief in resurrection, anthropocentrism, the attribution of passions to God, the representation of creation in six days and the idea that, on the seventh day, God rested, like some bad worker who gets tired. Celsus criticises the Jewish and Christian theories of divine omnipotence in connection with the theme of the resurrection of bodies. Jews and Christians hold to the opinion that "anything is possible to God [...]. He Himself is the reason of everything that exists; therefore He is not able to do anything contrary to reason or to His own character."[29] Yet, Celsus brings out a distinction between Jews and Christians and, indeed, he puts his attacks on the Christians into the mouth of a Jew. In other words, as regards the case at point, Celsus is well aware that Jews and Christians are different, and perhaps even hostile to one another, but he does not always make a clear distinction between the arguments of the two groups (for example, resurrection). Might one hypothesize that something similar has happened in Galen? He definitely speaks of the schools of Moses and Christ and makes a distinction between the followers of one and

[28] D. T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature. A Survey* (Assen-Minneapolis 1993) 12. See also G. E. Sterling, "Recherché or representative? What is the relationship between Philo's Treatises and Greek speaking Judaism?", *SphA* XI (1999) 18–19.

[29] Origen, *Contra Celsum* V 2 (transl. Stern). Cf. M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem 1976–1980) II 254; 284. Origen replies to Celsus that God is incapable of doing evil, which is contrary to His own nature. As God's omnipotence is tied to His nature, there is no arbitrariness.

the other but, perhaps, he confuses their ideas. He certainly describes them as alike: in *De pulsuum differentiis*, the followers of Moses and Christ accept undemonstrated laws (II 4) and not novelties (III 3); in a passage surviving only in Arabic,[30] drawn from a work entitled Εἰς τὸ πρῶτον κινοῦν ἀκίνητον, they believe everything out of faith alone.[31] It is thus possible that in his *De usu*, Galen attributes ideas and opinions to Moses that would be better suited to the Christian point of view, bringing together Philo, the Jews in general and also the Christians under the name of the ancient law-giver.

A suggestion in this direction can perhaps be found in the writings of Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyon born in Asia Minor and Galen's contemporary.[32] In his *Adversus haereses* (II 10,4), Irenaeus quotes the passage of *Luke* 18.27 that I mentioned above. Attacking some Gnostic theories, Irenaeus asserts

> They wish to explain whence the substance of matter derives, but without believing God by His will and His power has formed all things out of what did not previously exist.[33]

To attribute the substance of the things created to the power and the will of God should be credible, admissible, probable and well said, because

> 'the things which are impossible with mortals are possible with God.' (Lc. 18.27). While mortals cannot make anything out of nothing, but only from a matter already existing, God is in this superior to mortals, that He Himself called into being the substance of His creation, which previously did not exist.[34]

Here, the question Irenaeus is concerned with is that of creation *ex nihilo* which—as I have already said—I do not believe to be the subject

[30] It is quoted by Walzer, op. cit. 14–15.

[31] Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans saw them* (New Haven and London 1984) 83 n. 10 speaking of the passage from *De usu partium* mantains: "this text mentions only Moses, not Christ; but because Galen deals with Christians and Jews together in other places it seems reasonable to see his philosophical criticism as also applying to Christian teaching. Christians also used the *Book of Genesis* and it is the account in *Genesis* that Galen is criticizing here. Further, Christian writers in the next several decades responded to criticisms similar to those of Galen."

[32] According to Wilken (*The Christians* cit. 88) *Adversus haereses* was probably written about twenty years after *De usu partium*.

[33] *Adversus haereses* II 10.2.

[34] *Adversus haereses* II 10.4.

of Galen's argument. However a series of statements and, especially, the quote from *Luke* are very reminiscent of *De Usu Partium*. It is thus plausible that some theses were circulating during the period in question: passages from *Genesis*, interpretations of Philo, statements by Christians, and Galen who—as we have seen—tends to liken Jewish theories to Christian ones, has presented them as one and the same thing. In this presentation, Galen does not seem to know of or have noticed attempts at rationalization such as those made by Philo.

Divine Omnipotence

One last point: the question of divine omnipotence and its limits is not a question which arises solely in a Judaic or Christian environment. Walzer[35] compares criticism of the argument set out by Galen (according to whom, for Moses, God can accomplish the impossible) with early Stoicism, in particular with Chrysippus. We have few direct texts from this ambit, although polemical references present in Cicero, Plutarch and Alexander of Aphrodisia have been preserved. In *De natura deorum* (III 92) the Academic Cotta maintains, arguing against the Stoics:

> vos enim ipsi dicere soletis nihil esse quod deus efficere non possit, et quidem sine labore ullo; ut enim hominum membra nulla contentione mente ipsa ac voluntate moveantur, sic numine deorum omnia fingi moveri mutarique posse, neque id dicitis superstitiose atque aniliter sed physica constantique ratione; materiam enim rerum, ex qua et in qua omnia sint, totam flexibilem et commutabilem, ut nihil sit quod non ex ea quamvis subito fingi convertique, eius autem universae fictricem et moderatricem divinam esse providentiam; haec igitur quocumque se moveat, efficere posse quicquid velit.

A similar position is taken by Alexander of Aphrodisia, in *De Fato*, even if here the argument concerns the question of divine prescience:

> It is impossible even for God to make the diagonal of a parallelogram commensurate with its side or to make twice two five or to undo some past event.[36]

[35] *Galen on Jews and Christians* cit. 28–32.
[36] *De fato* 200. 22 Bruns.

The criticisms made by Cicero, Alexander, Galen and Celsus seem to be similar: attacks on positions which maintain a divine omnipotence that goes against the rationality of nature, which does not accept changes to its laws. In other words, it seems that, in all the assertions mentioned, the focus of criticism is that God—or the gods—can do anything they want to, instantaneously and effortlessly. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the position of the ancient Stoics criticized by Cicero and the Judaic theses attacked by Galen and Celsus: the Stoic divine providence is a principle that is immanent in the world whereas, in Jewish and Christian positions, the principle which changes everything according to His will is external to the world on which He acts. In actual fact, the accusations against the early Stoics made by Cicero, Plutarch and Alexander of Aphrodysias are specious: Stoicism does not speak of omnipotence overcoming the rationality of nature because God is the intrinsic *logos* within the cosmos; there is no antithesis between the two terms. However, the polemical criticisms made by Cicero, Plutarch and Alexander do provide evidence of a strong attack on every possible form of divine omnipotence.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

AA.VV. *La figure de Moïse. Écriture et relectures* (Genève 1978).
Aalders, G. J. D. *Political Thought in Hellenistic Times* (Amsterdam 1975).
Abbate, M. "Non-dicibilità del 'Primo Dio' e 'via remotionis' nel cap. X del 'Didaskalikos'" in F. Calabi (a c. di) *Arrhetos Theos. L'ineffabilità del primo principio nel medioplatonismo* (Pisa 2002) 55–75.
Alesso, M., "La alegoría de la serpiente en Filón de Alejandria: 'Legum Allegoriae II, 71–105'", *Nova Tellus* (2004) 97–119.
Alexandre, M. Jr, "The Eloquent Philosopher in Philo's 'De Vita contemplativa'", *Euphrosyne* 29 (2001) 319–330.
Altmann, A. "The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends" in Id. *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, New Hampshire 1981) 1–16.
Amir, Y. "Philo and the Bible", *SP* II (1973) 1–8.
——. *Die hellenistische Gestalt des Judentums bei Philon von Alexandrien* (Neukirchen 1983).
André, J.-M. "Les rapports entre vie active et vie contemplative dans l'oeuvre philosophique de Sénèque: le 'De brevitate vitae', le 'De constantia sapientis', le 'De tranquillitate animae' et le 'De otio'", *ANRW* II 36.3 (1989) 1724–1778.
Annas J., *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford 1993).
Argall, R. A. "A Hellenistic Jewish Source on the Essenes in Philo, 'Every Good Man is Free' 75–91 and Josephus, 'Antiquities' 18. 18–22" in R. A. Argall, B. A. Bow, R. W. Werline, *For a Later Generation. The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 2000) 13–24.
Attridge, H. W. "Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos", *SphA* XVII (2005) 103–117.
Aune, D. A., Seland, T., Ulrichsen, J. H. (eds.) *Neotestamentica et Philomica*. Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen (Leiden 2003).
Baarde, T. (1988), see Van der Broek.
Babut, D. "La doctrine démonologique dans le 'De genio Socratis' de Plutarque: cohérence et function", *L'Information Litteraire* 35 (1983) 201–205.
——. "Le dialogue de Plutarque 'Sur le démon de Socrate'. Essai d'interprétation", *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé* 1984 (Supplément) 51–76 (reprint. in Id., *Parerga.* Choix d'articles de Daniel Babut (1974–1994), (Paris 1994) 405–430.
Badilita, S. "La communauté des Thérapeutes: une 'Philonopolis'?", *Adamantius* 9 (2003) 67–77.
Baer, R. A. *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden 1970).
Baltes, M. *Timaios Lokros. Über die Natur des Kosmos und der Seele*, kommentiert von M.B. (Leiden 1972).
—— and Dörrie, H. *Die philosophische Lehre des Platonismus: Einige grundlegende Axiome/ Platonische Physik (im antiken Verständnis), vol. 1: Bausteine* 101–24: Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, Der Platonismus in des Antike: Grundlagen—System—Entwicklung, 4 (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 1996).
——. "Is the Idea of the Good in Plato's 'Republic' beyond Being?" in M. Joyal (ed.), *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition.* Essays presented to John Whittaker (Aldershot 1997) 3–23.
Barclay, J. M. G. "Judaism in Roman Dress: Josephus' Tactics in the *Contra Apionem*" in J. U. Kalms (ed.) *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium* Aahrus 1999 (Münster 2000 = Münsteraner Judaistische Studien, 6) 231–245.
Barraclough, R. "Philo's Politics. Roman Rule and Hellenistic Judaism" in *ANRW* II.21.1 (1984) 417–553.

Bassler, J. M. "Philo on Joseph. The Basic Coherence of *De Josepho* and *De Somniis* II", *JSJ* 16.2 (1985) 240–255.
Beavis, M. A. "Philo's Therapeutai: Philosopher's Dream or Utopian Construction", *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 14 (2004) 30–42.
Beierwaltes, W. *Lux Intelligibilis. Untersuchung zur Lichtmetaphysik der Griechen* Dissert. (München 1957).
——. *Denken des Einen. Studien zum Neoplatonismus und dessen Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main 1985).
Belkin, S. *Philo and the Oral Law: the Philonic Interpretation of Biblical Law in Relation to the Palestinian Halakah* (Cambridge, Mass. 1940).
Berchman, R. "Arcana Mundi: Prophecy and Divination in the 'Vita Mosis' of Philo of Alexandria", *SBL Seminar Papers*, 27 (1988) 385–423.
——. "The Categories of Being in Middle Platonism: Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria" in J. P. Kenny (ed.), *The School of Moses. Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion*. In Memory of Horst R. Moehring, Brown Judaic Series, 304 (Studia Philonica Monograph Series, 1) (Atlanta 1995) 98–140.
Bertelli, L. *L'utopia greca*, in L. Firpo (ed.), *Storia delle Idee politiche, economiche e sociali* I (1982) 463–581.
——. "*Perì Basileias*: i trattati sulla regalità dal IV secolo a.C. agli apocrifi pitagorici" in P. Bettiolo-G. Filoramo (a c. di), *Il dio mortale. Teologie politiche tra antico e contemporaneo* (Brescia 2002) 17–61.
Besnier, B. "Migration et 'telos' d'après la 'de migratione Abrahami'", *SPhA* XI (1999) 74–103.
Betz, O. "The Essenes" in *The Cambridge History of Judaism* vol. III: The Early Roman period (W. Horbury, W. D. Davies, J. Sturdy (eds.) (Cambridge 1999) 444–470.
Bilde, P. "The Essenes in Philo and Josephus", in F. H. Cryer and T. L. Thompson (eds.), *Qumran between the Old and the New Testament*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplementary Series, 290 (Sheffield 1998) 32–68.
Birnbaum, E., "What does Philo mean by 'Seeing God': some Methodological Considerations", *SBL Seminar Papers*, 34 (1995) 535–552.
——. *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*, Brown Judaic Series, 290 (Studia Philonica Monographs, 2 (Atlanta 1996).
Blumenberg, H. "Licht als Metapher der Wahrheit. Im Vorfeld der philosophischen Begriffsbildung", *Studium Generale* 10 (1957) 432–447.
Bonazzi, M. "Eudoro di Alessandria e il *Timeo* di Platone (A proposito di Simpl. *In Phys*., p. 181.7–30 Diels)", in F. Calabi (a c. di), *Arrhetos Theos. L'ineffabilità del primo principio nel medioplatonismo* (Pisa 2002) 11–34.
——. *Eudoro di Alessandria alle origini del platonismo imperiale*, in M. Bonazzi e V. Celluprica, *L'eredità platonica. Studi sul Platonismo da Arcesialo a Proclo* (Napoli 2005) 115–160.
Booth, A. P. "The Voice of the Serpent: Philo's Epicureanism", in W. Helleman (ed.), *Hellenisation Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World* (Lanham, 1994) 159–172.
Borgen, P. "Philo of Alexandria" in M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum Section 2. Vol. 2. (Assen Philadelphia 1984) 233–282.
——. "Heavenly Ascent in Philo: an Examination of Selected Passages" in J. H. Charlesworth and C. A. Evans, *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield 1993) 243–268.
——. "Autobiographical Ascent Reports: Philo and John the Seer" in Id, *Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism* (Edinburgh 1996) 309–320.
——. *Philo. An Exegete for his Time*, NT Suppl., 86 (Leiden 1997).
Bos, A. P. "Philo of Alexandria: A Platonist in the Image and Likeness of Aristotle", *SphA* X (1998) 66–86.
——. "God as 'Father' and 'Maker' in Philo of Alexandria and its Background in Aristotelian Thought", *Elenchos* 2 (2003) 311–332.

Bouffartigue, J. "La structure de l' âme chez Philon: terminologie scolastique et métaphores" in C. Lévy (ed.), *Philon et le langage de la philosophie* (Paris 1998) 59–75.
Bousset, W.—Gressmann, H. *Die Religion des Judentums im Späthellenistischen Zeitalter,* Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 21 (Tübingen 1966).
Bowersock, G. W. *Studies on the Eastern Roman Empire*. Social, Economic and Administrative History, Religion, Historiography (Goldbach 1994) 293–320.
Boyarin, D. *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington 1990).
——. *Unheroic Conduct. The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley 1997).
Bréhier, E. *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1925).
Brenk, F. E. "In the Light of the Moon: Demonology in the Early Imperial Period" in *ANRW* II.16.3 (1986) 2068–2145.
——. "An Imperial Heritage: The Religious Spirit of Plutarch of Chaironeia" in *ANRW* II. 36.1 (1987) 248–349.
——. "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.
——. "The Origin and the Return of the Soul in Plutarch", in Id., *Relighting the Souls. Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion, and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background* (Stuttgart 1998) 170–181.
Brewer D. I., *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 C.E.* (Tübingen 1992).
Broek van der, R. – Baarda, T. – Mansfeld, J. (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden-New York-Copenhagen-Köln 1988).
Bultmann, R. "Zur Geschichte der Lichtsymbolik im Altertum", *Philologus* 97 (1948) 1–36.
Burkert, W. "Hellenistische Pseudopythagorica", *Philologus* 105 (1961) 16–43 and 226–246.
——. "Zur geistesgeschichtlichen Einordnung einiger Pseudopythagorica", in *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* XVIII: Pseudepigrapha I (Genève 1972) 25–55.
Burkhardt, H. 'Inspiration der Schrift durch weisheitliche Personal Inspiration: zur Inspirationslehre Philos von Alexandrien', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 47 (1991) 214–225.
——. *Die Inspiration heiliger Schriften bei Philo von Alexandrien* (Basel 1992).
Cacitti, R. "Οἱ εἰς ἔτι νῦν καὶ εἰς ἡμᾶς κάνονες. I Terapeuti di Alessandria nella vita spirituale protocristiana" in L. F. Pizzolato and M. Rizzi (eds.), *Origene maestro di vita spirituale*. Atti del Convegno Milano 13–15 settembre 1999 (Milano 2001) 47–89.
Calabi, F. "Lingua di Dio lingua degli uomini. Filone alessandrino e la traduzione della Bibbia", *I Castelli di Yale* 2 (1997) 96–99.
——. *The Language and the Law of God. Interpretation and Politics in Philo of Alexandria*, South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 188: Studies in Philo of Alexandria and Mediterranean Antiquity (Atlanta, Georgia 1998).
——. (a c. di), *Arrhetos Theos. L'ineffabilità del primo principio nel medioplatonismo* (Pisa 2002).
——. "Il sole e la sua luce" in M. Vegetti (a c. di), *Traduzione e Commento alla 'Repubblica' di Platone* vol. V, libri VI e VII (Napoli 2003) 327–354.
——. "Ordine delle città e ordine del mondo nel 'De Decalogo' di Filone di Alessandria", in A. M. Mazzanti e F. Calabi (a c. di), *La rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria: natura, legge, storia* (Villa Verucchio 2004) 139–158.
——. (2004), see Mazzanti.
Canfora, L. *Il viaggio di Aristea* (Bari 1996).
Caquot, A. – Hadas-Lebel M. – Riaud J. (eds.), *Hellenica et Judaica: Hommage a V. Nikiprowetzky* ז״ל (Paris 1986).
Carabine, D. *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, 19 (Leuven-Grand Rapids 1995).
Carlier, C. "Sur un titre latin du 'De Vita contemplativa'", *SPhA* VIII (1996) 58–72.

Cazeaux, J. *La trame et la chaîne, ou les structures littéraires et l'Exégèse dans cinq des Traités de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Leiden 1983).

——. 'Nul n'est prophète en son pays. Contribution à l'étude de Joseph d'après Philon' in Kenney J. P. (ed.), *The School of Moses* 41–81.

——. "Le repas de Mambré dans le 'De Abrahamo' de Philon" in M. Quesnel, Y.-M. Blanchard et C. Tassin (eds.), *Nourriture et repas dans les milieux juifs et chrétiens de l'antiquité.* Mélanges offerts au Professeur Charles Perrot, Lectio divina, 178 (Paris 1999) 55–73.

Celluprica, V. (2005), see Bonazzi.

Centrone, B. "La letteratura pseudopitagorica: origine, diffusione e finalità" in G. Cerri (a c. di), *La letteratura pseudepigrafa nella cultura greca e romana* (Napoli 2000) 429–452.

——. *Pseudopythagorica ethica. I trattati morali di Archita, Metopo, Teage, Eurifamo*. Introduzione, edizione, traduzione e commento a c. di B. C. (Napoli 1990).

——. "Cosa significa essere pitagorico in età imperiale. Per una riconsiderazione della categoria storiografica del neopitagorismo" in A. Brancacci (a c. di), *La filosofia in età imperiale. Le scuole e le tradizioni filosofiche* (Napoli 2000) 139–168.

——. "Platonism and Pythagoreanism in the Early Empire" in Ch. Rowe and M. Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (Cambridge 2000) 559–584.

——. "Il Περὶ νόμω καὶ δικαιοσύνας di Pseudo Archita" in M. Tortorelli Ghidini, A. Storchi Marino, A. Visconti (a c. di), *Tra Orfeo e Pitagora. Origini e incontri di culture nell'antichità* (Napoli 2000) 487–505.

Chesnut, G. "The Ruler and the Logos in Neopythagorean, Middle Platonic and Late Stoic Political Philosophy" in *ANRW* II. 16.2 (1978) 1310–1332.

Cohen, N. G. "The Greek Virtues and the Mosaic Law in Philo. An Elucidation of 'De Specialibus Legibus' IV 133–135", *SPhA* (1993) 9–19.

——. *Philo Judaeus: his Universe of Discourse* (Frankfurt 1995).

——. "Context and Connotation. Greek Words for Jewish Concepts in Philo" in Kugel, J. L. (ed.), *Shem in the Tents of Japhet. Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism* Supplements for the Journal for the Study of Judaism, Leiden-Boston-Köln (2002) 31–61.

Collins, J. J. *Between Athens and Jerusalem. Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, The Biblical Resource Series, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, Mich. (Cambridge 2000).

Cosenza, P. and Laurenti, R. *Il piacere nella filosofia greca* (Napoli 1993).

Crouzel, J. *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'* (Paris-Bruges 1963).

Dahl, N. A. and Segal, A. F. "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9 (1978) 1–28.

Daniélou, J. *Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1958).

Davidzon, I. "Il deserto nel 'De Vita Mosis' di Filone alessandrino: possibilità di un'ascesa etica e conoscitiva attraverso i prodigi", *Materia giudaica* VII/1 (2002) 67–73.

Davies, P. R. (1998), see Taylor.

Dawson, D. *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley-Los Angeles 1992).

——. *Cities of the Gods* (Oxford 1992).

Day, J. "Echoes of Baal's Seven Thunders and Lightnings in *Psalm* XXIX and *Habakkuk* III.9 and the Identity of the Seraphim in *Isaiah* VI", *VT* 29 (1979) 143–151.

Decharneux, B. "Mantique et oracles dans l'oeuvre de Philon d'Alexandrie" in A. Motte (ed.), *Oracles et mantique en Grèce ancienne* Actes du colloque de Liège (Mars 1989) = *Kernos* 3 (1990) 123–133.

——. "Apparitions et miracles des anges et des démons chez Philon d'Alexandrie et Plutarque" in A. Dierkens (ed), *Apparitions et miracles*, Problèmes d'histoire des religions, 2 (Brussels 1991) 61–68.

——. *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 (Brussels 1994).

——. "De l'evidence de l'existence de Dieux et de l'efficacité des ses puissances dans la théologie philonienne" in C. Lévy and L. Pernot (ed.), *Dire l'evidence: philosophie et rhétorique antiques*, Cahiers de philosophie de l'Univ. de Paris XII, Val de Marne, 2 (1997) 312–334.

——. "Quelques chemins détournés de la parole dans l'oeuvre de Philon" in C. Lévy (1998) 313–326.

Deines, R. and Niebhur, K.-W. (edd.), *Philo und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen. 1. Internationales Symposium zum Corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti (Eisenach/Jena, Mai 2003),* WUNT, 172 (Tübingen 2004).

Delatte, A. *Essai sur la Politique Pythagoricienne* (Liège-Paris 1922).

Delatte, L. *Les Traités de la Royauté d'Ecphante, Diotogène et Sthénidas* (Liège 1942).

Delling, G. "The 'One who sees God' in Philo" in Greenspahn F. E., Hilgert E., Mack B. L. (eds.), (1984) 27–41.

Dietz, L. "Bibliographie du Platonisme impériale antérieur à Plotin" in *ANRW* II. 36.1 (1987) 124–182.

Dillon, J. *The Middle Platonists. A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London 1977, 1996[2ed]).

——. (1983), see Winston.

——. "Knowledge of God in Origen" in Van der Broek, Baarda, Mansfeld (eds.), *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman world* (Leiden 1988) 219–228.

——. *The Golden Chain. Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* Collected Studies Series, 333 (Aldershot 1990).

——. "Reclaiming the heritage of Moses: Philo's Confrontation with Greek Philosophy", *SPhA* VII (1995) 108–123.

——. "Asomatos: Nuances of Incorporeality in Philo", in C. Lévy (1998) 99–110.

——. "'Orthodoxy' and 'Eclecticism': Middle Platonists and Neo-Pythagoreans", in J. Dillon and A. A. Long (eds.), *The Question of Eclecticism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1998) 103–125.

——. "The Essenes in Greek Sources: Some Reflections" in J. R. Bartlett (ed.), *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (London 2002) 117–128.

D'Ippolito, G. and Gallo, I. (eds.), *Strutture formali dei 'Moralia' di Plutarco, Atti del 3 Convegno Plutarcheo* Palermo 1989 (Napoli 1991).

Donini, P. *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino* (Torino 1982).

——. "La connaissance de Dieu et la hiérarchie divine chez Albinos" in Van der Broek, Baarda, Mansfeld (1988) 118–131.

——. "Medioplatonismo e filosofi medioplatonici" *Elenchos* XI (1990) 79–93.

——. "Alessandro di Afrodisia e i metodi dell'esegesi filosofica" in C. Moreschini (ed.), *Esegesi parafrasi e compilazione in età tardo antica* (Napoli 1995) 107–130.

——. "*Socrate* 'pitagorico' e medioplatonico", *Elenchos* XXIV (2. 2003) 333–359.

Dörrie, H. "Pythagoreismus 1C" in *Real-Enciclopädie* XXIV (1963) 268–277.

——. "Der Platoniker Eudoros von Alexandreia" in Id. *Platonica minora* (München 1976) 297–309.

——, (1996), see Baltes.

Drummond, J. *Philo J. or the Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy in its Development and Completion* (London 1888, reprint. Amsterdam 1969).

Engberg-Pedersen, T. "Philo's 'De vita contemplativa' as a Philosopher's Dream", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30 (1999) 40–64.

Evans, N. A. "Diotima, Eros, Cherubim and the Source of Divine Knowledge", *SBL Seminar Papers*, 33 (1994) 822–846.

Fayot, G. *Étude sur les Thérapeutes et le traité de la vie contemplative*, Thèse presentée à la Faculté de Théologie protestante de Montauban pour obtenir le grade de bachelier (Genève 1889).

Feldman, L. H. *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* (Leiden 1996).

——. "The Death of Moses, according to Philo", *Estudios Bíblicos* 60 (2002) 225–254.

Ferber, R. *Platos Idee der Guten* (Sankt Augustin 1989[2] ed.).
Ferrari, F. *Dio, idee e materia. La struttura del cosmo in Plutarco di Cheronea* (Napoli 1995).
——. "La causalità del Bene nella 'Repubblica' di Platone", *Elenchos* 1 (2001) 5–37.
——. "La trascendenza razionale: il principio secondo Plutarco" in F. Calabi (2002), 77–91.
——. "L'idea del bene: collocazione ontologica e funzione causale" in M. Vegetti (2003), 287–325.
Festugière, A. J. *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 voll. (Paris 1949–1953), vol. 2: *Le Dieu cosmique* (1949); vol. 4: *Le Dieu inconnu et la Gnose* (1954).
Filoramo, G. *Luce e Gnosi. Saggi sull'illuminazione nello Gnosticismo* (Roma 1980).
Finazzi, R. B. "Note sulla versione armena del 'De Deo' di Filone Alessandrino", *Annali di Scienze Religiose* 4 (1999) 213–220.
Flasch, K. *Eva und Adam. Wandlungen eines Mythos* (München 2004).
Foucault, M. *Histoire de la sexualité* 2. *L'usage des plaisirs* Bibliothèque des Histoires (Paris 1984).
Frede, D. and Laks, A. (eds.), *Traditions of Theology. Studies in Hellenistic Theology, its Background and Aftermaths* Philosophia Antiqua, 89 (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2002).
Frede, M. "Numenius", *ANRW* II. 36.2 (1987) 1040–1050.
Frick, P. *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria*, Text and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 77 (Tübingen 1999).
Froidefond, Ch. "Plutarque et le Platonisme" in *ANRW* II. 36.1 (1987) 184–233.
Früchtel, U. *Die Kosmologischen Vorstellungen bei Philo von Alexandrien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Genesisexegese* (Leiden 1968).
Gallo, I, (1991), see D'Ippolito.
Gastaldi, S. *Le immagini delle virtù. Le strategie metaforiche nelle 'Etiche' di Aristotele* (Alessandria 1994).
——. *Bios hairetotatos. Generi di vita e felicità in Aristotele* (Napoli 2003).
Genot Bismuth, J. *Le scenario de Damas. Jérusalem Hellenisée et les origines de l'Essénisme* (Paris 1992).
Geoltrain, P. "Le Traité de la Vie Contemplative de Philon d'Alexandrie", *Semitica* X (1960) 25–32.
Göransson, T. *Albinus, Alcinous, Arius Didymus* (Göteborg, 1995).
Goodenough, E. R. "The Political Philosophy of Hellenistic Kingship", *Yale Classical Studies* 1 (1928) 55–102.
——. *The Politics of Philo Judaeus: Practice and Theory* (New Haven 1938, reprint. Hildesheim 1967).
Goodman, M. D. (1989), see Vermes.
——. (ed.) *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford 1998).
Goulet, R. *La philosophie de Moïse: essai de reconstruction d'un commentaire philosophique préphilonien du Pentateuque* (Paris 1987).
Grabbe, L. L. *Etimology in Early Jewish Interpretation: the Hebrew Names in Philo* (Atlanta Georgia 1988).
Graffigna, P. "Il molteplice e l'eccedente: τῦφος in Filone d'Alessandria", *Quaderni di semantica* 2 (1988) 347–356.
——. "Modelli di vita felice. Felicità e stabilità in Filone di Alessandria", in A. M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi (2004) 193–215.
Greene, J. T. *Balaam and his Interpreters: a Hermeneutical History of the Balaam Traditions* (Atlanta Georgia 1992).
Greenspahn, F. E.–Hilgert, E.–Mack. B. L. (edd.), *Nourished with Peace. Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* Scholars Press Homage Series, 9 (Chico, California 1984).
Girardet, K. M. "Naturrecht und Naturgesetz: eine gerade Linie von Cicero zu Augustinus?" *Reinische Museum* 138 (1995) 266–298.
Grilli, A. *Vita contemplativa. Il problema della vita contemplativa nel mondo greco-romano* (Brescia 2002).

Guillaumont, A. "Philon et les origines du monachisme", in AA.VV. *Philon d'Alexandrie.* Colloque national du CNRS, Lyon 11–15 Septembre 1966 (Paris 1967) 361–373.
Gusella, L. "Esseni, Comunità di Qumran, Terapeuti", *Materia giudaica* VI/2 (2001) 223–247.
——. *Esperienze di communità nel giudaismo antico. Esseni Terapeuti Qumran* (Firenze 2003).
Joly, R. *Le thème philosophique des genres de vie dans l'antiquité classique* (Bruxelles 1956).
Jones, S.–Pearce, S. *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha. Supplement Series, 31 (Sheffield 1998).
Hadas-Lebel, M. "Le paganisme à travers les sources rabbiniques de II et III siècles. Contribution à l'étude du syncretisme dans l'empire romain" in *ANRW* II.19.2 (1979) 397–485.
——. *Jérusalem contre Rome* (Paris 1990).
Hadot, P. "Théologie, exégèse, révélation, écriture dans la philosophie grecque" in M. Tardieu (ed.) *Les règles de l'interpretation* (Paris 1987).
Hamerton-Kelly, R.–Scroggs, R. *Jews, Greeks and Christians: Religious Cultures in Late Antiquity,* Essays in Honor of W. D. Davies (Leiden 1976).
Harl, M. "Adam et les deux arbres du Paradis (*Gen.* II–III) ou l'homme milieu entre deux termes (μέσος—μεθόριος) chez Philon d'Alexandrie. Pour une histoire de la doctrine du libre-arbitre", *Recherches de Science religieuse*, 50 (1962) 321–388.
——. "La prise de conscience de la nudité d'Adam", *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Altchristilichen Literatur*, 92 (1966) 486–495.
Hay, D. M. "Philo's Treatise on the Logos-Cutter", *SphA* II (1973) 9–22.
——. "Philo's View of Himself as an Exegete: Inspired but not Authoritative", *SPhA* III (1991) 40–52.
——. "The Veiled Thoughts of the Therapeutae" in R. M. Berchman (ed.), *Mediators of the Divine. Horizons of Prophecy, Divination, Dreams and Theurgy in Mediterrerranean Antiquity* (Atlanta Georgia 1998) 167–184.
——. "Foils for the Therapeutae: References to other Texts and Persons in Philo's 'De Vita Contemplativa'", in D. E. Aune, T. Seland, J. H. Ulrichsen (2003) 330–348.
——. "Philo's Anthropology, the Spiritual Regimen of the Therapeutae, and a possible Connection with Corinth" in R. Deines and K.-W. Niebuhr (eds.), *Philo und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen.* 1. Internationales Symposium zum Corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti (Eisenach/Jena, Mai 2003) WUNT, 172 (Tübingen 2004) 127–142.
Hecht, R. D. "Scripture and Commentary in Philo", *SBL Seminar Papers*, 20 (1981) 129–164.
Helleman, W. E. "Deification and Assimilation to God", *SphA* II (1990) 51–71.
——. (ed.), *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within Greco-Roman World* (Lanham, Maryland 1994).
Hengel, M.–Schwemer, A. M. (eds.) *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult im Judentum, Urchristentum und in der hellenistischen Welt* (Tübingen 1991).
Hilgert, E. (1984), see Greenspahn.
——. "The Dual Image of Joseph in Hebrew and Early Jewish Literature", *Biblical Research* 30 (1985) 5–21.
Hoek van den, A. "Endowed with Reason or Glued to the Senses: Philo's Thoughts on Adam and Eve", in G. P. Luttikhuizen (2000) 63–75.
Holladay, C. *Theios Aner in Hellenistic Judaism: A Critique of the Use of this Category in New Testament Christology* (Missoula 1977).
Hollander, H. W. *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Leiden 1981).
Horsley, R. A. "The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero", *HTR* 71.1–2 (1978) 35–59.
Horst van der, P. W. *Japheth in the Tents of Shem. Studies on Jewish Hellenism in Antiquity*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology, 32 (Leuven-Paris-Sterling,Virginia 2002).

Keizer, H. M. *Life Time Entirety. A Study of ΑΙΩΝ in Greek Literature and Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo*, Academisch Proefschrift (Amsterdam, 7 September 1999).
Kenney J. P. (ed.), *The School of Moses. Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion*. In Memory of Horst R. Moehring, Brown Judaic Series, 304 (Studia Philonica Monograph Series, 1) (Atlanta 1995).
Klein, F. N. *Die Lichtterminologie bei Philon von Alexandrien und in den hermetischen Schriften* (Leiden 1962).
Koester, H. "ΝΟΜΟΣ ΦΥΣΕΩΣ: the Concept of Natural Law in Greek Thought" in J. Neusner (ed.) *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in memory of E. R. Goodenough*, Studies in the History of Religions. Supplements to Numen, 14 (Leiden 1968) 521–541.
Kooten, C. H. van. "The 'True Light which enlightens everyone' (*John* 1:9): John, *Genesis*, the Platonic Notion of the 'True Noetic Light', and the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*", in Id. (ed.) *The Creation of Heaven and Hearth: Re-interpretations of Genesis 1 in the Context of Judaism, Ancient Philosophy, Christianity and Modern Physics*, Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions, 8 (Leiden-Boston 2005) 149–194.
Kraus Reggiani, C. "I rapporti tra l'impero romano e il mondo ebraico al tempo di Caligola secondo la *Legatio ad Gaium* di Filone alessandrino" in *ANRW* II.21.1 (1984) 554–586.
Kugel, J. L. (ed.) *Shem in the Tents of Japhet. Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism* Supplements for the Journal for the Study of Judaism, Leiden-Boston-Köln (2002).
Laks, A. (2002), see Frede
Le Boulluec, A. "La place des concepts philosophiques dans la réflexion de Philon sur le plaisir", in C. Lévy (1998) 129–152.
Leloup, J.-Y. *Prendre soin de l'être. Philon et les Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1993).
Leonhardt–Balzer, J. "Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Streiflichter bei Philo (*Opif.* 20–25) und im Johannesprolog (*Joh* 1,1–18)" in J. Frey and U. Schelle (edd.), *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums* Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 175 (Tübingen 2004) 295–315.
Levison, J. "Two Types of Ecstatic Prophecy according to Philo", *SphA* VI (1994) 83–89.
Lévy, B. *Le logos et la lettre. Philon d'Alexandrie en regard des Pharisiens* (Lagrasse 1988).
Lévy, C. "Éthique de l'immanence, éthique de la transcendence. Le problème de *l'oikeiôsis* chez Philon", in Id. (éd.), *Philon d'Alexandrie et le langage de la philosophie* 153–164.
——. (ed.) *Philon d'Alexandrie et le langage de la philosophie*: Actes du Colloque international organisé par le Centre d'études sur la philosophie hellénistique et romaine del l'Université de Paris XII-Val de Marne (Créteil, Fontenay, Paris 26–28 octobre 1995), Monothéismes et Philosophie (Turnhout 1998).
——. "Philon d'Alexandrie et l'épicureisme", in M. Erler (ed.), *Epikureismus in der späten Republik und der Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart 2000) 122–136.
Lisi, F. L. (ed.) *The Ways of Life in Classical Political Philosophy* (Sankt Augustin 2004).
Long, A. A. (1998), see Dillon.
Luttikhuizen, G. P. (ed.) *The Creation of Man and Woman. Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions, 3 (Leiden-Boston-Köln 2000).
——. *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Traditions*, Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies, 58 (Leiden-Boston 2006).
Mack, B. L. (1984), see Greenspahn.
——. "Moses on the Mountaintop: A Philonic View", in J. P. Kenney (1995) 16–28.
Mansfeld, J. "Heraclitus, Empedocles and others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria", *Vigiliae Christianae* XXXIX (1985) 131–156.
——. "Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception" in R. Van der Broek, T. Baarda, and J. Mansfeld (1988) 92–117.
——. (1988), see Van der Broek.

Marmorstein, A. "Philo and the Names of God", *Jewish Quarterly Review* 22 (1931–32) 295–306.
Martens, J. W. "*Nomos Empsychos* in Philo and Clement of Alexandria", in W. E. Helleman (1994) 323–338.
——. *One God, one Law. Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law*, Studies in Philo of Alexandria and Mediterranean Antiquity, 2 (Boston-Leiden 2003).
Martín, J. P. "El motor inmóvil de Aristóteles y el Dio de Filón", *Methexis. Revista Argentina de Filosofia Antigua* 9 (1996) 84–98.
——. "Alegoría de Filón sobre los ángeles que miraron con deseo a las hijas de los hombres", *Circe* 7 (2002) 261–282.
Mattila, S. L. "Wisdom, Sense Perception, Nature and Philo's Gender Gradient", *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996) 103–129.
Mayer, G. "Die herrscherliche Titular Gottes bei Philo von Alexandrien'", in D.-A. Koch and H. Lichtenberger (edd.), *Begegnungen zwischen Christentum und Judentum in Antike und Mittelalter*: Festschrift für Heinz Schreckenberg. Schriften des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum, 1 (Göttingen 1993) 293–302.
Mazzanti, A. M. "ΘΕΟΣ ε ΚΥΡΙΟΣ. I nomi di Dio in Filone di Alessandria", *Studi Storico Religiosi* 5.1 (1981) 15–30.
——. "Motivazioni protologiche nell'antropologia di Filone di Alessandria, con riferimento al tema della distinzione dei sessi" in U. Bianchi (a c. di), *La tradizione dell'enkrateia: motivazioni ontologiche e protologiche* (Milano 1982) 541–559.
——. *L'uomo nella cultura religiosa del tardo-antico tra etica e ontologia* (Bologna 1990).
—— and Calabi, F. *La rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria: natura, legge, storia*, Biblioteca di Adamantius, 2 (Villa Verucchio 2004).
Meeks, W. A. "Moses as God and King" in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in memory of E. R. Goodenough*, Studies in the History of Religions. Supplements to Numen, 14 (Leiden 1968) 354–371.
Ménard, J. *La Gnose de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1987).
Montes-Peral, L.A. *Akataleptos Theos: Der unfassbare Gott* (Leiden 1987).
Moreno Rodríguez, I. "La demonología y la angelología en los inicios del Imperio. Filón de Alejandría", *Helmantica* 49 (1998) 58–70.
Moreschini, C. "La demonologia medioplatonica e le *Metamorfosi* di Apuleio", *Maia* XVII (1965) 30–46 reprint. in Id., *Apuleio e il platonismo* (Firenze 1978) 19–42.
——. "Attico: una figura singolare del medioplatonismo" in *ANRW* II. 36.1 (1987) 477–491.
Myre, A. "La loi dans l'ordre cosmique et politique selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *Science et Esprit* 24 (1972) 217–247.
——. "Les caractéristiques de la loi mosaïque selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *Science et ésprit* 27 (1975) 35–69.
Napolitano Valditara, L. *Lo sguardo nel buio. Metafore visive e forme grecoantiche della razionalità* (Roma-Bari 1994).
Najman, H. "The Law of Nature and the Authority of Mosaic Law", *SPhA* XI (1999) 55–73.
——. *Seconding Sinai. The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple*, Judaism Supplement to the Journal for the Study of Judaism, 77 (Leiden 2003).
Neusner, J. *A Life of Yohanan ben Zakkai. Ca 1–80 C.E.* (Leiden 1970).
——. *Development of a Legend. Studies on the Tradition concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai* (Leiden 1970).
——. *The Rabbinic Tradition about the Pharisees before 70; I. The Masters* (Leiden 1971).
——. "The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Yavneh (Jamnia) from A.D. 70 to 100" in *ANRW* II. 19.2 (1979) 3–42.
Nicholas, M. "Les Thérapeutes", *Nouvelle Revue de Théologie* (1868) 25–42.
Niehoff, M. "Philo's Views on Paganism" in G. N. Stanton and G. G. Stroumsa, *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge 1988) 135–158.

——. *The Figure of Joseph in Post-Biblical Jewish Literature* (Leiden 1992).
——. "What is in a Name? Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 2 (1995) 220–252.
——. *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 86 (Tübingen 2001).
Nikiprowetzky, V. *Le commentaire de l'Écriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (Leiden 1977).
——. "'Moyses palpans vel liniens': On some Explanations of the Name of Moses in Philo of Alexandria", in Greenspahn F. E., Hilgert E., Mack B. L. (1984) 117–142.
——. "Thèmes et traditions de la lumière chez Philon dAlexandrie", *SPhA* I (1989) 6–33.
——. "'Recherches esséniennes et pythagoriciennes': à propos d'un livre récent", *Rej* 125 (1996) 313–352.
——. *Études philoniennes* (Paris 1996).
North, H. "Sophrosyne, self-knowledge and self-restraint in Greek literature", *Cornell Studies in Classical Philology* 35 (1966) 123–206.
Nussbaum, M. C. *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, N.J. 1994).
Opsomer, J., *In Search of the Truth: Academic Tendencies in Middle Platonism* (Brussels 1998).
Pearce, S. "Belonging and not Belonging: local Perspectives in Philo of Alexandria" in S. Jones and S. Pearce *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* JSPS Suppl. Ser., 31 (Sheffield 1998) 79–105.
Penna, A. "Il reclutamento nell'essenismo e nell'antico monachesimo cristiano", *Revue de Qumran* 1 (1958) 345–364.
Pépin, J. "Remarques sur la théorie de l'exégèse allégorique chez Philon", in *Philon d'Alexandrie*, Lyon 11–15 septembre 1966: colloques nationaux du CNRS, (Paris 1967) 131–167
Pilhofer, P. *Presbyteron Kreitton. Der Alterbeweis der jüdischen und christlichen Apologeten und seine Vorgeschichte* (Tübingen 1990).
Petit, M. "L'homme politique: interprète de rêves selon Philon d'Alexandrie (*De Josepho* 125) ὁ πολιτικὸς πάντως ὀνειροκριτικός ἐστιν" in D. Tollet, *Politique et religion* 41–54.
Piazza, R. *Adamo, Eva e il serpente* (Palermo 1988).
Radice, R. *Platonismo e creazionismo in Filone di Alessandria* (Milano 1989).
——. *La filosofia di Aristobulo e i suoi nessi con il 'De mundo' attribuito ad Aristotle* (Milano 1994).
——. "Il femminile come concetto allegorico", *Ricerche storico-bibliche* 6 (1994) 167–177.
——. *Allegoria e paradigmi etici in Filone di Alessandria. Commentario al 'Legum Allegoriae'*, prefazione di C. Kraus Reggiani (Milano 2000).
Ramelli I., *Il 'basileus' come 'nomos empsychos' tra diritto naturale e diritto divino. Spunti platonici del concetto e sviluppi di età imperiale e tardo-antica* (Napoli 2006).
Rajak, T. *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome. Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction*, Arbeiten zur Geschichte der antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, 48 (Leiden 2001).
Reydams-Schils, G. J. "Stoicized Readings of Plato's *Timaeus* in Philo of Alexandria", *SphA* VII (1995) 85–102.
——. *Demiurge and Providence: Stoic and Platonist Readings of Plato's 'Timaeus'*, Turnhout (1999).
——. (ed.) *Plato's 'Timaeus' as Cultural Icon* (Notre Dame 2003).
Riaud, J. "Les Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie dans la tradition et dans la récherche critique jusqu'aux découvertes de Qumran" in *ANRW* II. 20, 2 (1987) 1189–1295.
——. "Quelques réflexions sur les Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie à la lumière de 'De Vita Mosis' II, 67", *SPhA* II (1991) 184–191.

——. "La célébration de chaque septième sabbat dans la communauté des Thérapeutes d'Alexandrie", in L.-J. Bord and D. Hamidovic (eds.), *Jubilé…Jubilés*. Actes du colloque tenu à Angers les 1er, 2 et 3 mars 2000 (Paris 2001) 107–123.

Royse, J. R. "Philo, Kyrios and the Tetragrammaton", *SphA* III (1991) 167–183.

Runia, D. T. *Philo of Alexandria and the* Timaeus *of Plato*, Philosophia Antiqua, 44 (Leiden 1986).

——. "God and Man in Philo of Alexandria", *Journal of Theological Studies* 39 (1988) 48–75.

——. "Naming and Knowing: Themes in Philonic Theology with special Reference to the 'De Mutatione nominum'" in R. Van Den Broek, T. Baarda, L. Mansfeld (1988) 69–91.

——. *Exegesis and Philosophy. Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Aldershot 1990).

——. *Philo in Early Christian Literature. A Survey*, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, 3 (Assen-Minneapolis 1993). The related texts can be read in R. Radice and D. T. Runia (eds.), "Testimonia de Philone" in the Italian translation of Runia's book, *Filone di Alessandria nella prima letteratura cristiana. Uno studio d'insieme* a. c. di R. Radice (Milano 1999) 366–445.

——. "The Reward for Goodness: Philo, *De vita contemplativa* 90", in D. T. Runia and G. E. Sterling (edd.), *Wisdom and Logos: Studies in Jewish Thought in Honor of David Winston* (= *SphA* IX 1997) 3–18.

——. "A brief History of the Term 'Kosmos Noetos' from Plato to Plotinus", in J. J. Cleary (ed.), *Traditions of Platonism*. Essays in Honour of J. Dillon, Aldershot (1999) 151–172.

——. "Philo of Alexandria and the Greek Hairesis Model", *VC* 53 (1999) 117–147.

——. "The Idea and the Reality of the City in the Thought of Philo of Alexandria", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61 (2000) 361–379.

——. "The Beginnings of the End: Philo of Alexandria and Hellenistic Theology" in D. Frede and A. Laks (2002) 281–316.

——. "Eudaimonism in Hellenistic-Jewish Literature", in J. L. Kugel (2002) 131–157.

——. "Philo of Alexandria, 'Legatio ad Gaium' 1–7", in D. A. Aune, T. Seland, J. H. Ulrichsen (2003) 349–370.

——. "The King, the Architect, and the Craftsman: A Philosophical Image in Philo of Alexandria" in R. W. Sharples and A. Sheppard (eds.), *Ancient Approaches to Plato's 'Timaeus'*, BICS Supplement 78 (London 2003) 89–106.

——. "Clement of Alexandria and the Philonic Doctrine of the Divine Power(s)", *Vigiliae Christianae* 58 (2004) 256–276.

——. "Plato's 'Timaeus', First Principle(s), and Creation in Philo and early Christian Thought", in G. J. Reydams–Schils (2003) 133–151.

——. "Early Alexandrian Theology and Plato's 'Parmenides'" paper delivered at the SBL Conference (Philadelphia 2005).

Rutten van, J. T. A. *The Creation of Man and Woman in Early Jewish Literature*, in G. P. Luttikhuizen (2000) 34–62.

Sandmel, S. "Some Comments on Providence in Philo", in J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (eds.), *The divine Helmsman. Studies on God's Control of Human Events presented to Lou H. Silberman* (New York 1980).

Schofield, M. *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge 1991).

Schwemer, A. M. (1991), see Hengel.

Scott, I. W. "Is Philo's Moses a Divine Man?", *SPhA* XIV (2002) 87–111.

Scroggs, R. (1976), see Hamerton-Kelly.

Segal, A. F. *Two Powers in Heaven. Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden 1977).

Seland, T. (2003), see Aune.

Sellin, G. "Gotteserkenntnis und Gotteserfahrung bei Philo von Alexandria", in H.-J. Klauck (ed.), *Monotheismus und Christologie: Zur Gottesfrage im hellenistischen Judentum und im Urchristentum*, Quaestiones Disputatae, 139 (Freiburg 1992) 17–40.

Sfameni Gasparro, G. *Oracoli Profeti Sibille. Rivelazione e salvezza nel mondo antico* (Roma 2002).

——. "Mosè e Balaam, Propheteia e *mantiké*. Modalità e segni della rivelazione nel *De Vita Mosis*'" in A. M. Mazzanti e F. Calabi (2004) 32–74.

Shaw, F. "The Emperor Gaius' Employment of the Divine Name", *SphA* XVII (2005) 33–48.

Siegert, F. "Le fragment filonien 'De Deo'. Première traduction française avec commentaire et remarques sur le langage métaphorique de Philon" in C. Lévy (1998) 183–228.

——. "Der Logos, 'älterer Sohn' des Schöpfers und 'zweiter Gott'. Ein Erinnerung an Philon" in J. Frey und U. Schelle (eds.), *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums* WUNT, 175 (Tübingen 2004) 277–294.

Sills, D. "Vicious Rumours: Mosaic Narratives in First Century Alexandria" *SBL Seminar Papers*, 31 (1992) 684–694.

Sly, D. *Philo's Perception of Women* (Georgia 1990).

Squilloni, A. *Il concetto di «regno» nel pensiero dello ps. Ecfanto: le fonti e i trattati 'Peri Basileias'* Accademia La Colombara: Serie studi, (Firenze 1991).

Sterling, G. E. "Recherché or representative? What is the relationship between Philo's Treatises and Greek speaking Judaism?", *SphA* XI (1999) 1–30.

——. "Creatio Temporalis, Aeterna, vel Continua? An analysis of the Thought of Philo of Alexandria", *SPhA* IV (1992) 15–41.

——. "Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism" *SphA* V (1993) 96–111.

——. (ed.) *The Ancestral Philosophy. Hellenistic Philosophy in Second Temple Judaism. Essays of David Winston*, Brown Judaic Studies Studia Philonia Monographs, 4 (Providence 2001).

——. "'Day One': Platonizing Exegetical Traditions of Genesis 1:1–5 in John and Jewish Authors", *SPhA* XVII (2005) 118–140.

Stern, M. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem 1976–1980).

Strickert, F. "Philo on the Cherubim", *SPhA* VIII (1996) 40–57.

Szesnat, H. *Pretty Boys' in Philo's 'De vita contemplativa*' *SphA* X (1998) 87–107.

Szlezák, T. A. "Das Hölengleichnis" in O. Höffe (hrsg.) *Platon: Politeia* (Berlin 1996) 205–28.

Taylor, J. E. and Davies, P. R. "The So-called Therapeutae of *De Vita Contemplativa*", *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (1998) 3–24.

Taylor, J. E. *Jewish Women Philosophers of the First-Cenury Alexandria. Philo's 'Therapeutae' Reconsidered* Oxford 2003.

Terian, A. *Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus. The Armenian Text with and Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Chico, California, 1981).

Termini, C. *Le Potenze di Dio. Studio su* δύναμις *in Filone di Alessandria*, Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum, 71 (Roma 2000).

Theiler, W. "Philo von Alexandreia und der Beginn des kaiserzeitlichen Platonismus" in K. Flasch (hrsg.) *Parusia. Studien zur Philosophie Platons und zur Problemgeschichte des Platonismus.* Festgabe für J. Hirschberger (Frankfurt a.M. 1965) 199–218.

Thesleff, H. *An Introduction to the Pythagorean Writings of the Hellenistic Period* (Åbo 1961).

——. "On the Problem of the Doric Pseudopythagorica: An Alternative Theory of Date and Purpose" in *Entretiens Fondat. Hardt* XVIII: Pseudepigrapha I, (Genève 1972) 59–87.

Tiede, D. L. *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, Society of Biblical Literature. Dissertation Series, 1 (Missoula, Mont. 1972).

Tobin, T. H. *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series, 14 (Washington D.C. 1983).

——. *Tradition and Interpretation in Philo's Portrait of the Patriarch Joseph*, SBLSPS, 25 (1986).
Tollet, D. (ed.) *Politique et religion dans le judaïsme ancien et médiéval* (Paris 1989).
Troiani, L. *Il perdono cristiano e altri studi sul cristianesimo delle origini*, Studi Biblici, 123 (Brescia 1999).
——. "Giudaismo ellenistico e cristianesimo" in B. Virgilio (ed.), "Aspetti e problemi dell'ellenismo" *Studi Ellenistici* IV (1994) 187–201.
Ullmann, D. W. *Moses' Bronze Serpent ('Numbers' 21:4–9) in Early Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (diss. Dallas Theological Seminary 1995).
Ulrichsen, G. H. (2003), See Aune.
Vanderlin, E. "Les divers modes de connaissance de Dieu selon Philon d'Alexandrie", *MSR* III (1947) 285–304.
Vegetti M., *L' Etica degli antichi* (Bari 1989).
——. "*Megiston Mathema*" in Id. (a c. di), *Traduzione e Commento alla 'Repubblica' di Platone*, vol. V, libri VI e VII (Napoli 2003) 253–286.
Vermes, G. "The Etymology of 'Essenes'" *Revue de Qumrân* II (1960) 127–143.
——. "Essenes-Therapeutai-Qumran" *The Durham University Journal* LII, n. 3 (1960) 95–117.
—— and Goodman, M.D. *The Essenes according to the Classical Sorces*, Oxford Centre Textbooks, 1 (Sheffield 1989).
Vernière, Y. "Nature et fonctions des démons chez Plutarque", in J. Ries (ed.), *Anges et démons* (Louvain-la-Neuve 1989) 241–251.
Villari, E. *Il morso e il cavaliere. Una metafora della temperanza e del dominio di sé* (Genova 2001).
Virgilio, B. (ed.) *Studi Ellenistici* II (Pisa 1987).
Walzer, R. *Galen on Jews and Christians* (Oxford-London 1949).
Wendland, P. "Philo und die Kynisch-Stoische Diatribe", in P. Wendland-O. Kern (hrsg.), *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Griechischen Philosophie und Religion* (Berlin 1895) 1–75.
——. *Die Therapeuten and die Philonische Schrift vom Beschaulichen Leben. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Hellenistischen Judentums* (Leipzig 1896).
Whittaker, J. "Ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ οὐσίας", *Vigiliae Christianae* XXIII (1969) 91–104.
——. "ARRHTOS KAI AKATONOMASTOS" in Id. *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought* (London 1984) XII, 303–306.
——. "Platonic Philosophy in the Early Centuries of the Empire" in *ANRW* II. 36.1 (1987) 81–123.
——. "How to define the Rational Soul?", in C. Lévy (1998) 229–253.
——. *Alcinoos, Enseignements de doctrines de Platon* (Paris 1990).
——. "Catachresis and Negative Theology: Philo of Alexandria and Basilides", in S. Gersh, Ch. Kannengiesser (edd.), *Platonism in Late Antiquity*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 8 (Notre Dame (1992) 61–82.
——. "The Terminology of the Rational Soul in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria", *SPhA* VIII (1996) 1–20.
Wilhelm, F. "Die Oeconomica der Neopythagoreer Bryson, Kallikratidas, Periktione, Phyntis", *Rheinisches Museum* (70) 161–223.
Wilken, R. L. *The Christians as the Romans saw them* (New Haven and London 1984).
Winston, D. *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, the Giants and Selections* (New York-Toronto 1981).
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).
Winston, D. *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati 1985).
——. "Philo and the Contemplative Life" in A. Green (ed.), *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, 13 (New York 1988) 198–231.
——. "Two Types of Mosaic Prophecy According to Philo of Alexandria" *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 4 (1989) 49–67.

——. "Aspects of Philo's Linguistic Theory" *SPhA* III (1991) 109–125.
——. "Philo's Mysticism" *SPhA* VIII (1996) 74–82.
——. (2001), see Sterling.
——. "Philo and the *Wisdom of Solomon* on Creation, Revelation, and Providence: The High-Water Mark of Jewish Hellenistic Fusion" in J. L. Kugel (2002) 109–130.
Wolfson, H. A. *Philo. Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (Cambridge Mass. 1962, 4th rev. ed. 1968).
Wolters, M. "*Creatio ex nihilo* in Philo" in W. Helleman (1994) 107–124.
Zeller, D. *Gott bei Philo von Alexandrien*, in U. Busse (ed.), *Der Gott Israels im Zeugnis des Neuen Testaments*, Quaestiones Disputatae, 201 (Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2003) 32–57.

INDEX OF ANCIENT AUTHORS AND TEXTS

1. *Philo*

2. *Greek and Latin Authors and Texts*

3. *Hebrew Bible/LXX*

4. *Dead Sea Scrolls*

5. *Pseudepigrapha*

6. *Hellenistic Jewish Authors and Texts*

7. *New Testament*

8. *Early Christian*

9. *Gnostic Texts*

10. *Rabbinic*

INDEX OF MODERN AUTHORS