

# ○ PHILOSOPHIA ANCILLA THEOLOGIAE

## ALLEGORY AND ASCENSION IN PHILO'S *ON MATING WITH THE PRELIMINARY STUDIES (DE CONGRESSU QUAERENDAE ERUDITIONIS GRATIA)*

*Hent de Vries, Johns Hopkins University Baltimore*  
*Translated by Jack Ben-Levi*

This essay takes Philo of Alexandria's allegorical reading in 'De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia' of Genesis 16: 1–6, which recounts Abraham's temporary relationship with Hagar, as anticipation of the philosophia ancilla theologiae motif that has informed much of Western Christian and philosophical thought. In so doing, it explores the ways in which Philo's view in 'On Mating with the Preliminary Studies' gives new meaning to the ancient Greek curriculum of the *enkyklios paideia* that would remain decisive for the idea of the artes liberales and the humaniora, from early modernity up until Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Since its beginnings, Christian theology has considered it necessary to defend, in the court of contemporary opinion, the claim made by religious faith for its own universal truth. Yet at the same time, if this theology did not want simply to identify the God of faith with that of the philosophers, it had to keep alive a sense of the discrepancy between its doctrine and secular knowledge. A resolution of the resulting dilemma is to be found in one Platonic tradition that did indeed grant a certain importance to formal knowledge (*epistēmē*, scientia) and to philosophy (*philosophia*, philosophia), while in the end nonetheless subordinating them to Christian doctrine, considered to be the source of wisdom (*sophia*, sapientia).<sup>1</sup> This position, familiar to us from the medieval dictum 'philosophia ancilla theologiae' (philosophy is the handmaiden of theology), was established much earlier. In this connection, one often points to the church father Clement of Alexandria,<sup>2</sup> who, however, in his treatment of the question of the relationship between secular culture and Christian wisdom, for his part was paraphrasing from a text by the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (ca. 30 B.C.–A.D. 45). It is the latter's treatise *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia* which can be taken as initiating this Platonic tradition.<sup>3</sup>

The treatise is one of Philo's allegorical commentaries on the Pentateuch preserved by tradition. In it he delivers an allegorical exegesis of Genesis 16:1–6, the continuity of which is interrupted, however, by a variety of imagery, expressions, and corresponding citations from other parts of the Bible, as well as by a few personal remarks. Yet for each interruption Philo is careful to find some reason or occasion in the Biblical text itself.

The title of the treatise clearly indicates its main theme. In the Loeb edition, *Peri tēs pros ta propaideumata synodou* is translated, rather too strongly, I think, as 'On Mating with the Preliminary Studies'.<sup>4</sup> In view of the overarching aim of the treatise to provide an allegorical interpretation of the relationship between Abraham and Hagar, as well as in view of the connotations of the term *synodos*, one sees that this word, translated as 'mating', refers to the association of the human mind (*nous*[12], *logismos* [63]) with a certain form of erudition, a connection which

is needed if a human being is to acquire virtue, philosophical virtue, or Wisdom. By such virtue or wisdom alone does knowledge of divine things become possible [79]. Furthermore, the term ‘preliminary studies’ (*propaideumata* [9, 24, 35, 152, 180]) makes one think of a topos already quite common even before the Hellenistic age. Plato, too, had spoken of a ‘preparatory education’ (*propaideia*, *Republic*, VII, 536d) that ought to precede the full-fledged study of dialectic.<sup>5</sup> In the Hellenistic world as well there was a great deal of discussion about the importance of the propaedeutic course of instruction (*enkyklios paideia*) for philosophy. The various schools and, since Chrysippus, the Stoics all emphasized the propaedeutic significance of such instruction, while the Cynics, the Sceptics, and – up to a certain point – the Epicureans each considered it to be useless. During the Hellenistic age the general tendency was to value education to such an extent that one even can say that culture itself became an ideal, wherein the unfolding of human potential took a central place. Not without reason were Varro and Cicero to render the term *paideia* (education) into Latin with ‘humanitas’ (culture, being cultivated).<sup>6</sup> And we have seen the inception, articulation, and continuation of the tradition of so-called spiritual exercises in which Philo played a central role.<sup>7</sup> Later on, and even far into modern times, the course of preparatory instruction survived under a new guise in what were called the *artes liberales*.<sup>8</sup>

Before discussing Philo’s treatise with a view to deciding whether it represents, historically, the beginning of reflection upon the question of theology vs. secular culture, knowledge, and philosophy, or indeed constitutes a first attempt to determine the proper relationship between faith and reason, a number of matters have to be cleared up. What kind of insight, to begin with, did Philo think could be attained by means of the ‘preliminary studies’ (see Section III, below)? And what significance did he attribute to these studies, in view of the goal of acquiring Wisdom? What difference is there, if any, between this Wisdom and philosophy? Can it be considered to be a kind of knowledge of God with a specificity of its own (see Section IV)?

In posing questions like these, two concerns have to be kept in mind. Firstly, although Philo’s works owe their preservation and transmission to the Christian apologists, who found in his doctrine of the Logos and in the allegorical method an interpretative framework able to support the claim to truth of Christian faith, Philo is not a Christian author. Accordingly, only the search for a paradigm for theology – one that Christianity would later put to use – can concern us here, not the traditional theme of ‘*philosophia ancilla theologiae*’ itself. Secondly, we have to remember that the question of the relationship between the *enkyklios paideia* and *philosophia*, on the one hand, and *sophia*, on the other, is a properly philosophical one. Then it behooves us to consider whether Philo’s thinking about and exposition of the topic at hand really can be characterized as a philosophically rigorous position in its own right. In the ‘Philo-Forschung’, for instance, one meets with criticisms of the tendency to consider Philo to have been a systematic thinker and to approach his treatises as philosophical or theological in nature, rather than as being simply exegeses of the Bible.<sup>9</sup> Is it permissible to discern a guiding principle, or a certain unity of thought, in Philo’s exegetical activity? Is his treatise merely a loose composite of unrelated traditions of exegesis?<sup>10</sup> It isn’t possible to decide in advance. But if one intends to understand him, surely one has to begin by assuming that a *unité de propos* will indeed become manifest in his work?<sup>11</sup>

Before we turn to the text of the treatise, it may be helpful to derive an initial sense of our subject from a number of influential scholarly works on Philo and *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia*. It was only starting in the second half of the 19th century that scholars began

to study Philo in the light of his own intellectual sources. Among the works of ‘Philo-Forschung’, the classic example of such an approach, aiming to understand Philo in terms of his Egyptian-Hellenistic, mythic-religious context, is Emile Bréhier’s book, first published in 1908.<sup>12</sup> Bréhier relates the allegorical method to the Orphic mysteries and to the mystical theories of the Neo-Pythagoreans. Philo’s exegetical procedures would then stand quite apart from the rest of Jewish literature in the Hellenistic age, and from rabbinical exegesis. For Philo, figures from the Bible then designate states of the human soul, and the story from Genesis outlines its elevation to virtue. In this sense, according to Bréhier, one can speak of Philo’s individualist and mystical religiosity. Ideas central to his text, such as those of the Logos and of Sophia, can be understood to result from a spiritualization of the corresponding Egyptian deities.

Philo’s work manifests the influence of nearly all the main Greek schools of philosophy during the Hellenistic age, yet, according to Bréhier, one ought to recognize that a thorough transformation of those philosophies takes place along the way. Accordingly, Philo’s originality would consist in his having reinterpreted Greek cosmology, metaphysics, and psychology in religious-moral terms. Here two developments are of central importance: firstly, [‘une] conception nouvelle dans l’histoire des idées d’un Dieu absolu et transcendant’, [‘a] conception new in the history of ideas of an absolute, transcendent God’,] that is, a God which no positive definition befits, and secondly, a strong sense of the nullity of human faculties.<sup>13</sup>

With regard to the subject of Philo’s treatise, this means in Bréhier’s view that Philo, all his displays of Hellenistic erudition notwithstanding, could not keep himself from doubting whether education was at all worthwhile: ‘Il rencontre dans le encycliques et même dans la philosophie une espèce de résistance à l’idéal mystique de la connaissance de Dieu’.<sup>14</sup> [‘He encountered in preparatory education and even in philosophy itself a sort of resistance to the mystical ideal of awareness of God’.] Hellenistic paideia he would have taken to be morally neutral, and, remarks Bréhier, Philo ‘reconnaît que le moindre effort moral vaut mieux que toutes les sciences’.<sup>15</sup> [‘acknowledged that the slightest moral effort had more worth than any knowledge’.] Considered in this light, however, it does seem rather paradoxical that Philo should have dedicated such an extensive treatise to the proper role of paideia.

Bréhier’s work has been quite influential in the subsequent ‘Philo-Forschung’.<sup>16</sup> In a certain sense, Harry Wolfson’s long monograph can be seen as a response to his predecessor’s ‘religions-und traditions-geschichtliche’ orientation. Wolfson suggests that Philo fully appreciated the rational insights of Greek philosophy, and he disputes the general view of Philo as an eclectic, that is to say, a weak thinker.<sup>17</sup> On the contrary, according to Wolfson, in Philo one finds a quite conscious working-out of the problems raised by Greek philosophy. To be sure, Philo does present his philosophical insights in a fragmentary form, but this characteristic should be understood as a function of the literary, homiletic nature of his works, which, in turn, anchors him squarely in the Jewish tradition.<sup>18</sup>

It is the philosopher in the preacher that interests Wolfson.<sup>19</sup> Although Philo does interpret the Bible in the terms of Greek philosophy, he is mainly concerned with the conceptions of the different philosophical schools. Philo is ‘a critic of Stoicism and a reviser of Platonism’.<sup>20</sup> For Wolfson, Philo is the father of the notion of ‘philosophia ancilla theologiae’; he helped found a religious-theological tradition that, over the course of the next seventeen centuries, was to insist that a ‘preamble of faith’ had to precede all philosophical inquiry.<sup>21</sup> In other words, Philo not

only interprets Scripture in light of Greek philosophy, he also utilises some of the premises of faith he discovered there as criteria in his attempt to come to grips with the philosophical tradition. '[W]henver philosophy is found to be at variance with what is conceived by him to be the uninterpretable position of Scripture, the former must be set aright in the light of the latter'.<sup>22</sup> According to Wolfson, in Philo's view there is a far-reaching set of correspondences between philosophy's teachings and the insights deposited in the Bible, though he does consider Divine revelation to be the source of a higher certainty.

With respect to the main topic of *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia*, this means that Wolfson, remarkably enough, treats the relationship between the *enkyklia* and philosophy simply as a paradigm for the relationship between philosophy and theology. That the *enkyklia* and philosophy might be a necessary step on the theological ladder to Wisdom, Wolfson does not consider. A discussion of *paideia* is lacking in his book.<sup>23</sup>

## II. THE PATH TO VIRTUE

Philo's treatise begins with a citation from the Septuagint (Genesis 16:1–2), which relates that Sarai, bearing Abraham no children, appealed to him to go to her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, to obtain children from her [1].<sup>24</sup> The historical figure Sarai is interpreted by Philo in an allegorical manner; her name is taken as indicative of the individual soul (and more specifically, of one's proper relation to oneself), and as a symbol of virtue (*archē mou* [2], *hē archousa mou tēs psychēs aretē* [6]). The particular virtues that Sarai is said to represent are prudence (*phronēsis*), deliberation (*sōphrosynē*), and righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) – indeed, every virtue that can be formed in an individual human being [2].<sup>25</sup> Although courage (*andreia*) is not mentioned, what is at issue is a traditional list of the cardinal virtues that one already meets in Plato, and then finds in a popularized form in the Stoics.<sup>26</sup> Philo calls virtue the most important subject (*megistē de hypothesis*) because it concerns the whole course of life [11]. This is the reason why his treatise starts with an inspiring preface (*prooimion*), and, more importantly, why in his view instruction in virtue must be considered to be preliminary.

The first paragraphs [3–10] elucidate Sarai's infertility. That Moses by turns depicts Sarai (Sarah) as infertile and as the grandmother of all Israel both seems highly paradoxical (*paradoxotaton* [3]) and suggests how important the allegorical interpretation Philo intends to undertake is.<sup>27</sup> What is more, virtue's fruits, Sarai, are not to be understood as bodily; rather, they are well-formed thoughts, blameless decisions, praiseworthy actions [4], and, Philo adds, the attitude of piety (*to sysebein* [6]). Philo's interpretation is twofold. In the first place, he says that virtue is infertile only with regard to whatever lacks moral worth (*ta phaula panta* [3]); she judges some to be too young to share in her life [5], for in youth, all too often one is still preoccupied with empty opinions [6]. The Biblical text, Philo remarks, speaks of Sarai being infertile only in her relation to a specific person (*autō* [9]), that is to say, with Abraham, and, we are invited to conclude, with young Philo himself [6]. Virtue's infertility we shall have to consider to be an index of our own incapacity. That the text does not say this in so many words is indicative, according to Philo, of Sarah's magnanimity (*sophia* [13; cf. 71, 122]). Yet in the second place, virtue is not infertile with regard to the good [3]; without pausing [4] she bears children for God alone, when in gratitude she tenders Him the first fruits of the blessings He has bestowed upon her [7]. As, too, the menorah, turned towards God, casts its beams upwards to 'the Existent' (*to on*) [8].<sup>28</sup>

Those who have not yet set out on the way to being virtuous, those who now are not immediately (*euthys* [12]) able to conceive virtue's children, will first (*proteron* [9 and 14]: in the latter paragraph, Philo even inserts the word into the quotation from the Bible!) need to be prepared (cf. *proteleion* [5]) by having intercourse with her handmaid – which is a symbol for the completion of the *enkyklios paideia*. Only then (*authis* [14]) is it possible that one's relation to virtue will become fruitful. The propaedeutic and temporary character of one's intercourse with Hagar, which Philo will specify later on, is thus already announced here [11–24]. (See Section III, below.)

That in introducing the *enkyklios paideia* Philo suddenly switches terms and begins to talk about the handmaid of Virtue (*sophia* [9]), suggests that he does not adhere all that strictly to his own interpretation of the difference between Sarai and Sarah. According to his treatise, both symbolize virtue (*aretē*), prudence (*phronēsis*), and wisdom (*sophia*), while it is only the latter who personifies philosophy (*philosophia*) and formal knowledge (*epistēmē*). We shall need to examine, on the one hand, the extent to which we have to acknowledge that these concepts are all encompassed in a certain hierarchy, as well as, on the other hand, the lengths to which Philo goes in order to set *sophia* apart from the others and to establish its place as being that of an otherworldly Wisdom. (See Section IV, below.)

Once the central subject of the treatise has been introduced in this way, there follows an excursus [24–62] concerning the wives and concubines of the various patriarchs, in which a thematic unity can be discerned only with difficulty. Beginning with Jacob and ending with his antipode Esau, this excursus can perhaps be read as a sketch of a number of parallels between Biblical figures and the various human virtues and faculties [cf. 63], for which the motto 'the less good must always serve as foundation for the better' [33] may serve as the allegorical key.<sup>29</sup> So it becomes evident that a number of hierarchies are being discussed here, of which those exemplified by the lineage Abraham-Jacob-Isaac are for our purposes the most important.

For whomever has to acquire the virtue Philo names first, prudence (*phronēsis* [2]), for himself by means of instruction (*didaskalia*), intercourse with Hagar, that is, the completion of the course of preliminary studies, is indicated [24]. Abraham is portrayed by Philo as a person who strives for contemplation or speculation (*theōria*) and formal knowledge (*epistēmē*) [23]; he dedicates himself to the virtue that one can learn (*hē didaktikē aretē*) [35]. When Philo, following this excursus, comes back to his argument and offers an interpretation of the sentence, 'And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai' (Genesis 16:2) – though here, it should be said (see note 22), he writes *Sarra*, thus departing from the Biblical text, which reads *Sara* – he remarks that the learner (*ton manthanonta*) will have to obey virtue's precepts [63]. Only they can obey, however, whom a great love (*erōs*) of formal knowledge inspires: for, says Philo, already philosophers are beginning to hold daily disputes with one another about virtue [64], heedless that most of their listeners are ceasing to pay attention to the proceedings [65]; while of the remainder, some do not know how to profit from what they have heard [66] and others show themselves to be sophists whose words are not in accord with the conduct of their lives [67].<sup>30</sup> An attentive person who recalls what he has heard and who considers actions more important than mere words, is rare. Abraham, the very image of eager studiousness (*philomatēs* [68]), the exemplary student of virtue or Wisdom, is proof enough of that.

In Philo's treatise, however, Abraham is not the only figure dealt with, for Jacob, who arrives at virtue by means of exercise in practice (*askēsis*) [24–33, 35, 69–70], and Isaac, who is virtuous

simply by his nature [34, 36–38], are also discussed. Are we obliged from this to conclude that instruction in the preliminary studies is not necessary in order to acquire virtue? As is well known, the distinction between three different modes of acquiring or possessing some aptitude, namely, though instruction, by exercise in practice, or from nature, stems from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>31</sup> In Philo, such a tripartite distinction could well delineate the successive stages of the soul's increasing elevation.<sup>32</sup> The differences among these three modes then represent no argument against the fact that the mental propaedeutic of the *enkyklios paideia* is something every beginner will have need of.

The figure of Jacob stands as much for the disciplining of the body as for the training of the mind, in accord with the twofold nature of the soul (*psychē*) as having both an irrational (*alogon*) and a rational part (*logikon*) [26]. Taking account of the senses and the passions (*pathē*), the former sort of education aims to make self-mastery (*enkrateia*) possible, whereas the latter cultivates the moral perfection of the soul (*kalokagathia*) [31].

Isaac, the type of the perfect wise man, a superior nature, does not have to make any great effort to become virtuous, as do Abraham and Jacob; nor is he called upon in the Bible to change his name.<sup>33</sup> He is in the best of conditions; his state of mind is good (*hē eupatheion aristē chara*). Well-being as conceived of by the Stoics (*eupatheia*), however, Philo understands to be a gift of God. At the moment when God lets the good (*to kalon*) rain down from the heavens upon Isaac, it no longer is possible that Isaac could still (*eti*) be making use of the subsidiary arts (*technai*): henceforth he is a person who has formed and educated himself (*automathes, autodidaktos* [36]). Isaac is the man whom virtue (now called Rebecca) rules, the soul that has found Wisdom, a Wisdom which renders all exertion and practice superfluous [37]. Isaac possesses a consummate gift of God [38].

### III. THE STATUS OF THE ENKYKLIOS PAIDEIA

Hagar is the symbol (*symbolon* [11]) for the entirety of the disciplines encompassed by the term *enkyklios paideia*.<sup>34</sup> In other of his writings, Philo poses the question of the importance of education.<sup>35</sup> This was, as I suggested, a common topic during the Hellenistic age, to which, however, Philo gives a very distinctive turn. Before we can discuss this matter it is necessary to consider more closely the word *enkyklios* (course or cycle, round) in the phrase *enkyklios paideia*. What kind of education and knowledge did Philo have in view?

Marrou thought that the expression *enkyklios paideia* should not be understood in the sense of something 'encyclopedic', for that is a modern notion which first appears in the 16th century and which fails to cover the range of meaning of the ancient idea.<sup>36</sup> The 16th century conception was based upon an etymology (<*kyklos*, cycle, circle) suggestive of the full extent of human knowledge. But during the Hellenistic age, according to Marrou, the Greek adjective *enkyklios* had the more derivative meaning of 'in circulation', 'current' or 'common', indicating that which 'happens periodically', on a 'daily' basis or 'everyday', and thus the phrase *enkyklios paideia* meant 'the usual everyday education received by all'. Marrou therefore proposes that it be translated simply as 'general education'. The term designated, in Illmer's words, 'die allgemein übliche höhere Bildung [...]. Sie war allgemein im Sinne von üblich, d.h. es herrschte in der griechischen Gesellschaft weitgehender Konsens über ihre Inhalte, sie war nicht fachmännisch, d.h. wurde nicht professionell ausgeübt und war damit Angelegenheit der Freien'.<sup>37</sup> [(generally]

standard higher education’, which ‘was general in the sense of being taken for granted, that is, in Greek society a widespread agreement about what it included was dominant; it was not specialized, that is, it had nothing to do with gaining expertise in a profession: it was, accordingly, a concern of free citizens’].

De Rijk has delved more deeply into the history of the term. He distinguishes between an archaic usage whereby it was linked to *mousikē* in the sense current before Plato, and the return to this older definition under the influence of the educational ideals of the Neo-Pythagoreans. With respect to this later period (beginning in the first century B.C.), De Rijk rejects Marrou’s criticism of the 16th century understanding of the *enkyklios paideia* as having been a form of education with an encyclopedic character.<sup>38</sup> Later on in antiquity, De Rijk writes, the expression was understood as meaning ‘a more or less limited circuit of disciplines’.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, we ought to acknowledge that the *enkyklios paideia* had a function more specific than Marrou would have cared to admit. De Rijk suggests that there emerged a ‘new ideal of all-round education preparatory to any specialistic training’.<sup>40</sup> The controversies over the question of which subjects belonged to such preparatory education first began to take place only at this point. But according to De Rijk, the term never meant the education all free citizens ordinarily received, and thus one is not at all entitled to translate the adjective *enkyklios* as ‘general’ or ‘common’, especially because the definition of the education in question as being non-vocational is firmly ensconced in the very meaning of the noun *paideia* itself.

We ought to understand the original significance of the term *enkyklios* in connection with the pre-Platonic sense of the word *mousikē*. It is the early Pythagoreans who appear to have been the originators of the theory that music is valuable in education. Of *paideia* in music, the singing of poetry to the accompaniment of lyre and dance formed an essential part. Here, Homer and Hesiod had their place. De Rijk relates the early meaning of the word *enkyklios* to that of *choros* (dance or chorus, or alternately, the place where the dances were held).<sup>41</sup> In view of his elucidation of the nature of education by reference to dance, understood as an expression of the harmony of the cosmos, we ought to think of a pedagogical ideal in which, to begin with, *mousikē* and ‘physical education’ (*gymnastikē*) were as one. Only later, with Plato, does a distinction between them emerge. Then *mousikē* comes to mean the cultivation of literature, the unity of which will in turn eventually decompose, yielding the various distinct *technai*.

In Philo’s discussion of *paideia*, too, terms are utilized that recall the original mode of education by means of dance and/or chorus (*choreia paideusis*); this suggests that Philo was influenced by the Neo-Pythagoreans.<sup>42</sup> Yet at the same time, in Philo the word *enkyklios* has a broader range of meaning; it connotes ‘allround’.<sup>43</sup> More specifically, it encompasses not only *mousikē* in the sense of the cultivation of literature (composed of what would later become the subjects of the *trivium*), but also mathematics (later to be called the *quadrivium*).<sup>44</sup> With this usage, according to De Rijk, Philo locates himself squarely in the ranks of the tradition that, beginning in the first century B.C., promulgated an educational ideal whereby universal (*enkyklios*) knowledge is considered to be the necessary preparation (*paideia*) for any philosophical or rhetorical activity whatsoever: it is ‘the ideal of the specialist whose intellectual horizon is coterminous with the whole circuit (*kyklos*) of subjects’.<sup>45</sup> To summarize: one can best translate the term *enkyklios paideia* as ‘the education that is concluded by completing a certain course of subjects’.

In *De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia*, Hagar is the symbol for all the subjects this ideal of education comprises.

Now, what precisely are the subjects Philo has in mind, and what function does he assign them? Rather early on he provides a list [11], which is then recapitulated in part [15–18, 74–77]; he names grammar, geometry, astronomy, rhetoric, and music, and also makes allowance for all other theoretical activities that have a bearing on human reason. Later he mentions dialectic as well [18]. Thus, in these various lists a fixed sequence of subjects can hardly be discerned.<sup>46</sup> Yet it is clear that the subjects to which he gives the most attention are grammar, geometry, and music [cf. 142, 144, 146, 148].

Philo does seem to have been quite well informed about the various conceptions of the *enkyklios paideia* prevalent in his time.<sup>47</sup> Here, however, we are interested only in the moral-religious turn Philo gave them. According to him, more advanced instruction in grammar ought to involve the elucidation of the texts of the poets and historians [148]; this is how history (*historia*) is to be taught [15, 74]. Grammar develops insight (*noēsis*) and breadth and depth of knowledge (*polymatheia*), though these serve merely the negative purpose of arousing suspicion of everything engendered by mere opinion; they are to bolster the antipathy to which literature's recounting of the numerous failures of the figures of mythology is, in Philo's view, likely to give rise [15]. This moralistic approach to secular or pagan literature is noteworthy, but it is to be found in Plutarch or Epictetus as well.<sup>48</sup>

The subject of *music* teaches rhythm, harmony, and melody [16, 76], and thus fashions unity and order among the soul's various motions. This theory of the improvement of the soul goes back to Pythagoras and Plato.<sup>49</sup>

In engendering equability (*isotēs*) and proportion (*analogia*) in the soul (*psychē*), *geometry* thereby arouses the desire for righteousness (*dikaiosynē*) [16; cf. 75]. This idea, too, goes back to Plato.<sup>50</sup>

The benefit of *rhetoric* is to emphasize that the human being is in essence a being with the gift of reason (*logikon ontōs*). It can sharpen the mind (*nous*) for speculation or contemplation (*theōria*),<sup>51</sup> and exercise and prepare human reason (*logos*) so that arguments may be interpreted properly (*hermēveia*) [17; cf. 29, 30, 33]. This double assignment of tasks is suggestive of the Stoic distinction between inner reason (*logos endiathetos*) and the spoken word (*logos prophorikos*).<sup>52</sup>

The twin sister of rhetoric, *dialectic*, is in a position to cure the worst sickness of the soul, deceit (*apathē*), by virtue of being able to distinguish true from false arguments and to refute otherwise convincing sophisms [18; cf. 29].

In Philo's conception, finally, there is some confusion as to *astronomy's* place. She is the queen of the sciences by virtue of her concern with the heavens, the most impressive of created things; she is the queen of the reality perceptible to the senses [50]. In this regard, astronomy seems to be able to lead to knowledge of the creator. On the other hand, Philo often criticizes it for being a pastime of those who, remaining imprisoned in the study of the created, fail to ascend higher.

By means of the subordinate *enkyklia*, we will become acquainted with the royal virtues [18]. Just as in early childhood the human body first requires milky pabulum if it is then to digest more solid food, so do the *enkyklia* constitute the soul's initial nourishment, while the virtues



represent provisions fit for adults [19]. The propaedeutic significance of the *enkyklia* is thus expressed in two distinct ways, in their subordinate and in their transitional function. This important distinction is echoed in the dual symbolism Philo highlights in the figure of Hagar, namely, that of her descent [20–21] and that of her name [22–23].

So, *firstly*, he emphasizes that she comes from Egypt. Someone who has completed the entire course of subjects and is thus immersed in knowledge (*polymatheia*), will of necessity (*anankē*) be bound to his earthly, Egyptian body, because he has need of the evidence of all his senses [20]. For, without sensory perception (*aisthēsis*) it is not possible to know anything with accuracy of the perceptible world (*kosmos aisthēsis*), which after all is where, claims Philo, the greater part of philosophizing takes place. Sensory perception, the most material part of the human soul, is rooted in that which is the soul's receptacle, of which Egypt is the symbol [21].

In a certain sense, the body as the bearer of sensory perception is here thought of positively by Philo, on the grounds that sense-perception is necessary for the acquisition of the knowledge the *enkyklia* provide [cf. 155], and thus indirectly for virtue as well. Also, the necessity of caring for the body is emphasized [29, 30]: without proper nourishment the good life (*to eu zēn*) is not even possible [33]. Quite often in Philo's treatise, however, the body is primarily considered to be the source of the affects, and Egypt is portrayed as the symbol of the passions, from which the human being has to depart [83–85, 163–64]. Thus, in connection with the figure of Jacob (*ho askētēs*), mention is made of a virtue appropriate to the irrational part of the soul [26]; its role is to fight against the affects, to oppose all sense-perception, and to assist in the soul's training in self-control (*enkrateia*) [31]. (Philosophy is essentially instruction in self-control, Philo, with a religious aim in mind, will later insist [80].) However much sense-perception is necessary along the propaedeutic route to virtue, it belongs to the soul's irrational part, and as such it poses a threat [27].<sup>53</sup> Yet by means of our senses we can learn to despise things like honor, riches, and physical pleasure and to condemn what is, in comparison to the pure nature of things invisible and intelligible, the profanity of those that are merely visible and tangible [25].<sup>54</sup>

Philo translates Hagar's name, *secondly*, with *paroikos*, 'a temporary resident', someone who is neither a full citizen nor simply a foreign guest. While in Philo's allegorical imagery formal knowledge (*epistēmē*), Wisdom (*sophia*), and every virtue (*aretē*) are depicted as natives with all the rights of citizens, the preliminary stages of education are accorded a distinctly lower rank. From this we can infer that Philo would grant the *enkyklios paideia* only a certain intermediate status, and for a limited time only. Later in his treatise, he will develop this idea so as to suggest that secular culture is legitimate solely insofar as it is related to higher things; in no case may one take it to be sufficient unto itself.

Philo therefore contrasts Abraham with his brother Nahor, who symbolizes the study (*theōria*) of the cosmos. Nahor did not accompany Abraham when he departed from the land of the Chaldees, which represents the journey from the created world to the Uncreated (*agenēton*), from the cosmos to the Creator (*kosmoplastēs*) [48].<sup>55</sup> Nahor is unable to do more than to consider the cosmos and God to be one and the same; and because Abraham, by contrast, looks beyond the cosmos, in the terms of Philo's allegory he receives the epithet of wise man (*sophos* [48; cf. 109]). Nahor knows only the perceptible heavens (*ton aisthēton ouranon*): the harmonious order and the musical dance of the stars. But it is reserved for the most noble alone to gaze upon the Truly Existent (*ontōs on*): for in Hebrew, the literal meaning of 'Israel' is 'seeing God' [51].

In summary, we are able to say that the *enkyklios paideia* occupies a certain intermediate position. Here it should be mentioned that Philo often describes it with the adjective *mesos*, ‘being located in the middle’.<sup>56</sup> Now, in the Stoic tradition the terms *mesa* and *adiaphora* were used as synonyms; are we not then obliged to acknowledge that Philo thought the *enkyklios paideia* to be morally indifferent?<sup>57</sup> Perhaps here, however, we can understand *mesa* in a more derivative sense, as indicative of that which has a certain worth, though not the highest.<sup>58</sup> In that case, we would be able to think of the *mesa paideia* as having been a lower, intermediate education, preparatory to the more advanced sort.

Philo provides an allegorical interpretation of Abraham’s marriage with Sarah [73–78]. All the fruits one can gather from instruction in the *enkyklios paideia* will have to serve virtue and philosophy or Wisdom. The occasion for this interpretation is given by the passage in the Bible (Genesis 16:3) where it is repeated that Sarai is Abram’s wife. There has to be a reason for this repetition, Philo claims: now that Abraham is linked to Hagar by the force of circumstance, he has to show that he has not forgotten the vows binding him to her mistress [73].

In the passage then following [74–76], Philo’s discourse switches to the first person, and he presents himself as a reliable witness (*martys*): he too has successfully completed (*peponthōs*) the course of the *enkyklios paideia* [74].<sup>59</sup> All the fruits he has received by having done so, he dedicates to philosophy.<sup>60</sup> Other students, however, are diverted by the handmaids; they grow old amidst poetry, geometrical figures, and the subtleties of music, without coming back to their mistress, philosophy [77]. Each propaedeutic art (*technē*), grants Philo, does have its own power of attraction and elegance, but one’s obligations to philosophy ought not to be forgotten. For Scripture expresses its trust in Abraham’s fidelity (*pistis*) because, after all, he is consorting with Hagar in order to satisfy Sarah [78].

#### IV. PHILOSOPHY VERSUS THE MYSTIC WAY TO WISDOM

‘Toute la philosophie n’a pour but que de conduire à des questions qui la dépassent’ (Bréhier, p. 294).

(‘All philosophy aims at nothing else than to lead to the questions that exceed it’.)

What had merely shimmered through in a variety of metaphors is formulated explicitly in a crucial passage of the text [79–80]. Just as the *enkyklia* help students to take up (*analēpsis*) philosophy, so too does philosophy assist them in the acquisition (*ktēsis*) of Wisdom. For philosophy is the striving for (*epitēdeusis*) Wisdom, and Wisdom is knowledge (*epistēmē*) of things human and divine and their causes. Just as the *enkyklios mousikē*, the course of, so to speak, the liberal arts, is the slave (*doulē*) of philosophy, so too must philosophy be a slave to Wisdom [79].

Philosophy teaches control (*enkrateia*) of the affects and of speech. That, however, is valuable not so much in its own right, but only insofar as it is requisite to honor and please God [80]. With this, the most important distinction of the treatise is made clear, as is its religious orientation. In what follows we shall have to examine the terms Philo utilizes, especially considering the fact that by Hellenistic times, the conceptual move of distinguishing between ‘philosophy’ and ‘Wisdom’ was not at all new. Pythagoras, for instance, was said to have called himself a ‘philosopher’ (*philosophos*), that is to say, a lover of wisdom, because he insisted that no one is wise except

God. In the development of Plato's thought, the distinction emerged once again.<sup>61</sup> And that Wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human was originally a definition of the Stoics.<sup>62</sup> Yet for all this we ought not to lose sight of the distinctive meaning Wisdom had for the Hellenistic Jewish mystic Philo.

Following this passage, the treatise provides an allegorical interpretation of the fact that Sarai gave Hagar to Abraham only after a ten years' sojourn in the land of Canaan [81–88]. It is only in puberty that reason (*logismos*) begins to foster the human capacity to distinguish between good and evil, though initially it may well be that the latter is chosen for, as the human being is still predominantly a mortal being. That it was ten years serves as the occasion for Philo to introduce [89–121] several quotations from the Bible which together, interpreted allegorically, form a kind of doxology to the perfect number, 10, from which we can gain a sense of Philo's conception of transcendent Wisdom [21]. Then Philo goes on to discuss the words 'And he went in unto Hagar' (Genesis 16:4), and identifies two episodes from the Bible (the stories of Jacob and Leah and of Judah and Tamar) as offering analogies for the pupil's conduct with his teacher [122–26]. The phrase 'having in the womb' (*en gastri echein*) is interpreted allegorically as indicating the haughtiness of believing that one naturally possesses virtue. This attitude he contrasts with that of 'receiving' (*gastri lambanein*) the ability to be virtuous [127–38].

Philo clearly distinguishes philosophy from the intermediate subjects in his discussion of the words 'and when she saw that she had conceived' (Genesis 16:4) [139–50]. Here it is Sarai who sees this and not Hagar herself, claims Philo [139], for the intermediate subjects (*hai mesai technai*) only 'see' in a thoroughly confused manner at best, and it is the insights of knowledge (*epistēmai*) alone that allow one to comprehend things clearly. In this connection, Philo calls upon a few Stoic definitions in order to distinguish between *technē*, art, and *epistēmē*, formal or scientific knowledge.<sup>63</sup> The latter is superior to the former because it yields a well-founded and, on account of the reason which permeates it (*hypo logou*), irrefutable insight [140; cf. 141].

A *technē* is defined as a system of intelligent observations (the terminus technicus is *katalēpsis*) that can be applied to attain a useful end. At the same time, however, Philo also speaks of evil practices (*kakotechnai*), by which he most often means the Sophists' misuse of rhetoric.<sup>64</sup> *Epistēmē*, by contrast, requires a reliable and well-founded concept (*katalēpsis*) [141]. The various subjects that comprise the *enkyklios paideia* are designated *technai*, arts or practical proficiencies, whereas philosophy and the other virtues are called *epistēmai*, that is to say, kinds of formal knowledge. Those who study the latter are considered to be prudent (*phronimoi*), attentive (*sōphrones*), and philosophers (*philosophoi*) [142].

Furthermore, the difference between the arts and, as it were, the sciences is considered to be not only a function of the different degrees of certainty of the knowledge inherent in each, of the fact that the former is linked to the body's faculties and the latter to the mind (*nous*) and the intellect (*dianoia*) [cf. 143]. The relation between the two is also of concern to Philo, as is their difference in objects. What the mind is with respect to sense-perception, formal knowledge is to the arts. Just as the soul is the sense of the senses, so is – we probably have to infer – formal knowledge the art of the arts [144].<sup>65</sup> Thus one is able to conclude that formal knowledge both establishes the order of the various subjects and represents their overarching aim.

Every other subject only deals with a part of nature, but philosophy is concerned with the whole. Its material is the cosmos and the entire substance of the visible and the invisible (*ho*

*kosmos kai pasa ē tōn ontōn oratē to kai aoratos ousia*) [144]. This conception recalls Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where 'first philosophy' (*prōtē philosophia*) considers that which is in its totality and not, as do the various disciplines, in its parts.<sup>66</sup> According to Philo, the disciplines receive their basic concepts from philosophy [146–51]. Thus, for him philosophy is the subject concerned with the cosmos, and it occupies the highest rung on the ladder towards the virtuous condition that the human soul can acquire through instruction.

Yet philosophy is not in a position to attain knowledge of God, and one may well ask oneself whether in Philo's view God can be known at all. In the excursus mentioned earlier [89–121], where Philo speculates about the perfect number 10, he emphasizes that it is the symbol of divine perfection and transcendence. The number 10 points to the truly unique being itself, God, and not, as does the number 9, to the perceptible reality of God in the realm of appearances (*dokēsei*) [103]. That which is perfect (*ho teleios*) does not pay homage to the cosmos and its parts, but rather transcends them – as the Creator (*dēmiourgos*), the number ten, or God. When Philo goes beyond God's work, he begins to yearn wistfully for the Maker (*ho technitēs*) and to endeavor to supplicate Him and to be His servant. Here Philo provides an allegorical explanation of the fact that the priest dedicates the tenth part to the Tenth, to the Unique and Eternal [105].

In this image a further development of Philo's polemic against the Chaldees is contained, which is to say, his attack upon the Aristotelian and Stoic cosmologies. Against the peripatetics, Philo affirms the createdness of the world; against the pantheism of the Stoics, the transcendence of God. One must honor God alone, not natural reality or the cosmos. In order to be able to attain communion with God, one must rise above the limits of creation. For His part, God gives Himself to those who have done so and who serve Him without reserve [133, 134].

The metaphor of transcendence is Platonic.<sup>67</sup> In accord with this metaphor, Philo interprets the Passover ceremony as being the passage (*diabasis*) of the soul from perceptible reality with all the affects it engenders to the intelligible, the divine realm. The Passover offerings are the praiseworthy advances the soul has made towards virtue, which, however, the soul does not yet offer up as it is still only two-thirds illumined. When it first becomes a heavenly light (*phengos ouranion*), then it will make its offerings [106]. Thus the idea of the soul's moral progress, one can say, eventually develops into a mysticism. However, Philo also insists that the light true virtue casts upwards to God is stronger than a mortal eye can bear [8]. For light is a symbol of Wisdom: just as formal knowledge is the light of the soul, so too is it Wisdom which illuminates the human mind (*dianoia*) [47].

The soul supplicates God after it is convinced (*pepoithuias*) by reason's deliberations (*logismos*) of the nullity (*oudeneia*) of everything that has ever become, and been instructed (*dedidagmenēs*) in the inaccessibility, transcendence (*hyperbolē*), and supremacy of that which never was created (*agenētou*) [107]. The activity of human intelligence, therefore, seems to fall short, and we are required to assume, above the formal learning of the various disciplines as well as the insights of philosophy, a third level constituted by knowledge of Wisdom, which is to say, an intellectual contemplating that is also a participating in it.<sup>68</sup>

Yet God alone is wise [114]; He is the measure of all things [101] and knows no human form [115]. He is simple (*aplastos*), formless (*aneideos*) and without any particular quality (*apoiios*) [61]. This last definition entails that God's essence cannot be comprehended.<sup>69</sup> Between divine

transcendence and the human soul, however, there is Wisdom, the intelligible dwelling place (*noētos oikos*) of God [117].

Mack, attempting to understand Philo in terms of the Jewish tradition of wisdom,<sup>70</sup> shows that he is concerned with a heavenly Wisdom defined in the sense of a cosmic dualism.<sup>71</sup> This heavenly Wisdom, however, is the knowledge of God, a mystical contemplation in God's light; thus it is proper to Him alone.<sup>72</sup> With this, the world of Wisdom is divorced from earthly reality; it becomes the extra-worldly realm of salvation.<sup>73</sup> Yet for Philo a way to Wisdom does exist; it leads via the 'imitatio' of the different types of character ('Chiffren' (ciphers), Mack calls them) which the various patriarchs in the Bible each symbolize.<sup>74</sup> On this side is the awareness of one's own nullity, which is all that a human being is able to attain on his own; on the other, the mystical elevation of the soul, which in the end will surrender itself.

That goes no less for propaedeutic education, which one has afterwards to cast away, like a ladder once it has been climbed. Thus the treatise ends with an allegorical explanation of the fact that Abraham hands Hagar over to an indignant Sarah to be chastised [151–80].

## V. CONCLUSION

Mack has attempted to persuade us that in Philo's treatise various Alexandrian traditions of exegesis are utilized, traditions that cannot in fact be combined systematically because each has its own theological and conceptual presuppositions. Thus the treatise comprises an encomium as well as three sets of allegories, for each of which a more complicated exegesis is provided. In the *encomium*, the main concern is the virtuous life of Abraham and Sarah, which is addressed not only apologetically but also with a view to their exemplary piety, understood as something by which the Hellenistic conception of virtue is to be supplemented. In the *allegory of wisdom*, the historical figure of Sarah becomes the symbol of Wisdom and Abraham the eager pupil. The *allegory of the enkyklia* is concerned to emphasize the connection between the Pentateuch and certain features of Hellenistic culture. Here the summit of wisdom is no longer to know all things (that is, philosophy), as an earlier tradition of interpretation had maintained, but to acknowledge God. In its present-day form, finally, the treatise is an *allegory of the progress of the soul*, wherein the particular characteristics of figures from the Bible are removed so that they remain only as 'Chiffren' of the moral-religious stages along the soul's journey. Now Abraham is the soul (*nous*), Hagar the perception of the senses (*aisthēsis*), and Sarah formal knowledge (*epistēmē*).<sup>75</sup>

However that may be, despite the changes in imagery and the inconsistent terminology, one can nonetheless discern a clear *unité de propos* among Philo's different allegories. Philo, whose knowledge of Plato's works probably derived from the exegetes,<sup>76</sup> partakes of a middle-Platonic tradition when he teaches that the soul has to transcend the reality perceptible by the senses in its entirety. Yet Philo does not speak of the mind's gradual intellectual progress, as did the Greek philosophy of antiquity, but rather of the mystical-religious elevation of the soul.<sup>77</sup> The spiritual roots of his position probably have to be sought in Eastern or Egyptian influences or those of the mystery religions, of which the Hellenistic age was so replete and to which the 'religionsgeschichtliche Forschung' has directed our attention.

Accordingly, the cosmic dualism undeniably present in Philo's thought entails the consequence that religious life as he describes it appears to rest upon a paradox: the human being has to have arrived at an awareness of his own nullity in order to be open to divine sublimity.<sup>78</sup> Cultivation

and education can therefore represent no more than a ‘Vorstufe’, a transitional stage.<sup>79</sup> Though Philo certainly does not hold that the relationship between the subjects of the *enkyklios paideia*, philosophy, and, as it were, theology could be established once and for all, in the sense that the former would be defined as morally indifferent (as Bréhier claims is the case) or that philosophy’s particular place would be decided and secure (as Wolfson does), it is true nonetheless that, however much he advocated a ‘devout science’ and believed that philosophy had to be theology’s handmaiden (*philosophia ancilla theologiae*), in the end his thought was not able to avoid the idea that there is an antithesis or conflict between formal knowledge and mystical revelation.<sup>80</sup>

Philo explicitly makes use of the allegorical method [cf. 4, 12, 43, 44, 54, 172, 180]. With the rise of historical-critical exegesis, the legitimacy of this method has rightly been disputed. But have its claims been entirely invalidated?<sup>81</sup> That every religious utterance has a symbolic or metaphoric aspect is not likely to be denied. But might not this also apply to allegory?<sup>82</sup> After all, as Hans-Georg Gadamer remarks, symbol and allegory do have something in common: ‘In beiden Worten ist etwas bezeichnet, dessen Sinn nicht in seiner Erscheinungshaftigkeit, seinem Anblick bzw. seinem Wortlaut, besteht, sondern in einer Bedeutung, die über es hinaus gelegen ist’. [‘Both words refer to something whose meaning does not consist in its external appearance or sound but in a significance that lies beyond it’].<sup>83</sup> Allegory arises from the theological need to conceive of a higher meaning behind whatever may seem offensive. As with the symbol, allegory’s *raison d’être* consists in the fact that it is not possible ‘das Göttliche anders als vom Sinnlichen aus zu erkennen’. [‘it is not possible to know the divine in no other way than by starting from the world of the senses’].<sup>84</sup> Provided one understands it to be not a method of exegesis but a hermeneutical figure, allegory can be truthful to the extent that it explicitly emphasizes the link between every religious idea and human language and reality. Allegory enlarges, photographically as it were, the conditions under which every religious philosophy has to operate: the necessity, namely, of saying something about that which lies beyond the created world by the means available in this world. Awareness of such a limitation and the insight that philosophy does not dispose over the means to express the essential: these at least Philo’s treatise does manage to convey.

---

## ENDNOTES

- 1 On the notion of *sophia*, see Hadot (1995): 39 ff; Hadot (2002): 17 ff.
- 2 Cf. Pannenberg (1977): 14.
- 3 Several other figures in the early history of the church could well be instanced here. For the development of the themes of Philo’s treatise by Origen, the Cappadocians, John Damascene, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, see the discussion in Monique Alexandre’s commentary in her edition of Philo’s treatise (1967): 13–97, 86–97. See also Chadwick (1966): 286–307; Runia (1993), and Runia (2009): 210–230. On the motif of the *ancilla theologiae*, see also Hadot (1995): 32 and Hadot (2002).
- 4 Philo (1932): 449–582. Of course, *synodos* does not only signify ‘discussion’ and ‘deliberation’, but is also synonymous with *synousia*, which specifically means ‘sexual intercourse’, according to the Liddell-Scott Lexicon. The conception of an eventual *synousia* with Wisdom, depicted by Philo as one’s proper spouse, clearly suggests this equivalence. See Mack (1973): 155–58.
- 5 Plato (1991): 215.
- 6 See Marrou (1982): 217–26. See also Jaeger (1969).

7 See Hadot (1995): 84/25–26: ‘Thanks to Philo of Alexandria ... we do possess two lists of spiritual exercises. They do not completely overlap, but they do have the merit of giving us a fairly complete panorama of Stoic-Platonic inspired philosophical therapeutics. One of these lists [Hadot refers to *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, 253, HdV] enumerates the following elements: research (*zētēsis*), thorough investigations (*skepsis*), reading (*anagnōsis*), listening (*aknoasis*), attention (*prosochē*), self-mastery (*enkrateia*), and indifference to indifferent things. The other [the reference is to *Allegorical Interpretations*, 3, 18, HdV] names successively: reading, meditations (*meletai*), therapies of the passions, remembrance of good things, self-mastery (*enkrateia*), and the accomplishment of duties’.

8 Illmer (1979): 156–71.

9 Cf. Mack (1973–75): 24; and Thyen (1955/56): 235.

10 Cf. Mack (1973–75): 38.

11 Alexandre (1967): 26.

12 Bréhier (1950).

13 Bréhier (1950): 78.

14 Bréhier (1950): 294.

15 Bréhier (1950): 295.

16 Cf. Windisch (1909): 86–95; and Mack (1973): 108 ff.

17 Wolfson (1982).

18 In the ‘Philo-Forschung’ there is often reference to the ‘Zwang des Textes’. Cf. Thyen (1955/56): 236.

19 Wolfson (1982; vol. I): 102.

20 Wolfson (1982; vol. I): 113.

21 Wolfson (1982; vol. I): 164ff.

22 Wolfson (1982; vol. I): 144.

23 On account of his thesis that Philo ‘built up a system of philosophy which is consistent, coherent, and free from contradictions, all of it being based upon certain fundamental principles’ (Wolfson 1982; vol. 1: 114–15), Wolfson has been charged with a certain tendency to harmonize away Philo’s discrepancies. Cf. Völker (1950).

24 The currently established Greek text of Philo’s treatise (Wendland) spells Abraham’s wife’s name as *Sara*, *Sarai*, in paragraphs 1 through 12, and as *Sarra*, *Sarah*, everywhere else. Cf. Alexandre, *De Congressu*, p. 233 f. On this point the text disagrees with the Septuagint, where, in accord with the Hebrew, the change of name is first found in Genesis 17:15.

25 It has been suggested that Philo utilizes the distinction between *Sarai* and *Sarah* in his allegorical procedure in order to make a distinction between the particular specific, worldly and human virtues, for which *Sarai* stands as the symbol, and overarching heavenly virtue, which is typified, in contrast, by *Sarah*. Colson (Philo, 1932: 452) remarks that ‘while Virtue or Wisdom[,] which are represented by *Sarah*[,] is never barren, she is at this stage in the story *Sarai* [...], that is wisdom in the individual, who is as yet incapable of begetting by her’. Cf. also Mack (1973–75): 30, 31, n. 21, and Alexandre (1967): 234 ff. According to the latter, Philo is here translating Jewish-Hellenistic speculation about a pre-existent Wisdom into the terms of a Platonizing philosophy.

26 For Plato, see *The Republic*, IV, 427e.

27 Cf. Alexandre’s remark (1967: 17): ‘Cette donnée, claire pour qui lit le texte sacré en une perspective chronologique, est paradoxale pour qui le lit d’une lecture intemporelle’. [‘This circumstance, clear to those who read Holy Scripture with a view to its chronological unfolding, is paradoxical to those who read it in a synchronic fashion’.]

28 In some manuscripts, Colson and Whitaker note, one reads instead to hen, ‘the One’, an expression  
 29 which is, of course, more Neoplatonic.

30 Alexandre (1967): 18, 23.

31 See Winter (1997/2002), 72–75.

32 See Aristotle’s, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 9, 1099b15–16, II, 1, 1103a14–18, and X, 9, 1179b20–23.

33 Alexandre (1967): 49ff. Wolfson (1982, vol. I: 197) speaks in this connection of ‘three methods’, all  
 34 of which have to be seen, in the end, as gifts of God.

35 Mack (1973): 157, n. 14; for the figure of Isaac, see also pp. 162–65. In Philo’s treatise, Moses, too,  
 36 is described as a truly wise man [132].

37 There are a number of expressions indicating the preliminary studies in the treatise: *hē enkyklios*  
*paideia* [72, 73, 121, 154], *hē dia tōn propaideumatōn enkyklios mousikē* [9], *hē enkyklios mousikē*  
 38 [23, 79, 156], *ta enkyklia* [10, 19, 79, 155], *hē tōn mesōn kai enkykliōn epistēmōn mesē paideia* [14],  
 39 *hai enkykliai theōpiai* [20], and *hai kata ta enkyklia propaideumata* [35]. Philo also speaks, moreover,  
 40 of a *nomimos paideia* [88], an education in accord with the Law. Each of these expressions encompasses  
 41 all of the various preparatory disciplines. (The word *mousikē* designates a specific discipline or study.)

42 Cf. Alexandre (1967): 27, 28, ns 1 and 2; and De Rijk (1965): 74–77. See also Mendelsohn (1982).  
 43 Marrou (1950/1982): 176 ff. and 406–07, ns 2 and 3. Cf. the quotation from the *Grande Encyclopédie*  
 44 in De Rijk (1965): 24: ‘[C]e que les Anciens appelaient encyclopédie (*enkyklios paideia* c’était l’ensemble  
 45 des connaissances générales que tout homme instruit devait posséder avant d’aborder la vie pratique  
 46 ou de se consacrer à une étude spéciale [...].’ [‘W]hat the Ancients called ‘encyclopedia’ (*enkyklios*  
 47 *paideia*) was the sum of common knowledge that every educated man ought to have acquired before  
 48 setting out into practical life or dedicating himself to a particular discipline [...].’]

49 Illmer (1979): 157.

50 De Rijk (1965): 24 (also n. 1), 36, n. 1.

De Rijk (1965): 30; cf. 40.

De Rijk (1965): 92.

De Rijk (1965): 41. Here De Rijk also remarks that ‘*enkyklios* (<*en kyklō*) = ‘keeping within the  
 chorus’, i.e. keeping tune, rhythm (‘not making a faux pas’) and metre; in short, *enkyklios*: ‘being  
 musical’ = being well- educated [...]. So *enkyklios paideia* = choric education’. In the fifth century  
 B.C., therefore, *enkyklios* was equivalent to *choreios* or *chorikos*. De Rijk (1965): 85.

Cf. Alexandre (1967): 32 ff. and De Rijk (1965): 77–79. In Philo’s treatise we read *ton enchoreuonta*  
*tais enkykliois theōpiais* [20] and *hē pammousos choreia* [51].

De Rijk (1965): 79.

Cf. Illmer (1979).

De Rijk (1965): 82.

Cf. the table in Alexandre (1967): 34–35. Arithmetic is conspicuously absent from Philo’s treatise; it  
 is mentioned in other of his works. It is possible that he considered it to be included in the study of  
 geometry (*ibid.*, p. 38).

Cf. the sketch in Alexandre (1967): 41–47.

This is Alexandre’s claim (1967): 57.

Alexandre (1967: 58 ff.) refers to the *Timaeus*, 47d-e; cf. De Rijk (1965): 44, 49 ff.

Alexandre (1967: 60) refers to the *Gorgias*, 508a, and to *The Laws*, VI, 756b [perhaps 757b?].



51 Alexandre (1967: 50, 117) translates *theōria* with ‘spéculation’ and ‘contemplation’. Less accurate, it seems to me, are Colson’s ‘the observation of facts’ [17] and Heinemann’s (1938: 8) ‘eine wissenschaftliche Erkenntnis’.

52 Alexandre (1967): 116, n. 3, 128, n. 2; cf. De Vogel (1963): 102 ff.

53 Bréhier (1950: 207 ff., 290) shows that Philo made use of skeptical arguments in order to puncture the human claim to knowledge.

54 Cf. Alexandre’s remark (1967: 123–24, n. 4): ‘[I]l s’agit d’un passage par la sensation qui est en même temps lutte purificatrice’. [‘What is broached here is an ascent by means of the senses, one which is, at the same time, a purifying struggle.’]

55 Concerning the significance of Philo’s criticism of ‘the Chaldees’, cf. Mack (1973): 122–33, 139.

56 For instance, *mesē paideia* [12, 14, 20, 22, 145], *mesai epistēmai* [14, 127, 128], and *mesai technai* [140, 142, 143].

57 Alexandre (1967: 47) makes this point.

58 See Colson’s remark in the first volume of the Loeb edition (1971): xvii, note a; and De Rijk (1965): 75 ff.

59 It has been disputed whether in fact Philo is here invoking his own personal experience (cf. Wolfson, 1982: 81). And it is true that his treatise does not give any more specific information as to the source of his knowledge of the matter at hand. Thus it may be tempting to assume, on the basis of Philo’s position in society, either that he was educated by Greek tutors, or that he was formed in a school associated with the synagogue (cf. Wolfson, 1982: 78–81). Yet according to Alexandre (1967: 47), there is documentary evidence to suggest that around 30 B.C. Jews had no trouble gaining admittance to the gymnasium, from which they were excluded only in A.D. 42. So it is pertinent to ask: ‘Philon fut-il, en des temps plus libéraux pour la communauté juive, un des anciens du gymnase?’ [‘Was Philo, in those years of greatest freedom for the Jewish community, one of the gymnasium’s first teachers?’]

60 Perhaps Philo thought that the study of grammar could facilitate the interpretation of the Pentateuch, the comprehension of the various etymologies, etc.; and that astronomy might lead to the recognition of the existence of the Creator, and so on.

61 Concerning the conceptual progression from Plato’s *Lysis* (218a) and *Symposium* (203d) to the *Phaedrus* (278), cf. De Rijk (1965): 45–47. Only in the later text does Plato reserve wisdom for God.

62 Cf. De Vogel (1963): 50; and see 1 Maccabees 4:16–17.

63 However, earlier in the treatise the latter term had already been used to designate the intermediate subjects [14, 128].

64 Alexandre (1967): 203, n. 4.

65 Probably, because *outōs technē tis technōn epistēmē* is an emendation of Wendland’s (cf. Alexandre, 1967: 206 and 250 ff.).

66 This is Alexandre’s summary (1967: 206, n. 2).

67 Cf. the *Phaedrus*, 247b.

68 Concerning the third level of knowledge, cf. Alexandre (1967: 72), as well as Bréhier (1950: 314), who compares Philo’s position with Spinoza’s.

69 Wolfson (1982, vol. II): 101–26; cf. Windisch (1909): 37–39, 43, 44, 46, 49.

70 According to Mack (1973: 110), Philo is a theologian of wisdom. Mack attempts to bridge the divide in the ‘Philo-Forschung’ which consists in Philo being studied either in mythic-religious terms (as Bréhier, Windisch, Thyen all do), or in terms of Greek-philosophical and Jewish sources (as Wolfson does). Mack, though he questions the idea of ‘Mytho-logie als ‘Vergeistigung’ vom Mythischen’ [wonders whether mythology in fact represents a ‘spiritualization’ of the mythic] (Mack, 1973 109;

- cf. 108), does pursue the line of research initiated by Bréhier to the extent that he takes the Jewish tradition of wisdom to be a Hellenistic reworking of Egyptian cultic practices, especially the Isis cult.
- 71 Philo was aiming at ‘eine Korrektur des stoischen Pantheismus durch mittel-platonische Vorstellungen’ [‘a modification of the pantheism of the Stoics by means of the theories of the middle Platonists’] (Mack, 1973: 114; cf. 113, 187).
- 72 Mack (1973): 116, esp. n. 37.
- 73 Mack (1973): 121; cf. the discussions of the various symbolizations of wisdom as the place at the end of the exodus (Mack, 1973: 117, 133–35), as mother and spouse (157 ff.), and as a source or lightsource (171–74).
- 74 Mack (1973): 193; cf. 194 ff.
- 75 Cf. Mack (1973–75).
- 76 Cf. P. Boyancé (1981): 33ff.
- 77 Mack (1973): 121, n. 28; cf. Bréhier (1950): 199.
- 78 Windisch (1909): 21; cf. 24ff.
- 79 Windisch (1909): 78ff.
- 80 Windisch (1909): 79ff.
- 81 Cf. Mack’s judgment (1973–75: 51): ‘Mit dieser Freiheit, in jeder kleinsten Merkwürdigkeit des Textes eine Deutung in bezug auf das schon ausgearbeitete, bewusste und vorhandene Muster des Seelenweges wieder zu ‘entdecken’, ist [...] die alexandrinischen Exegese [...] in die Gefahr geraten, statt Theologie eine Erudition der Spitzfindigkeit zu treiben’. [‘With this freedom to ‘rediscover’ in the smallest peculiarity of the text a meaning in accord with the plan of the soul’s journey, which, worked out deliberately in advance, is assumed to be inherent in it, Alexandrian exegesis runs the risk of developing, not a theology, but only the skills of mere erudition’.]
- 82 Bréhier (1950): 313; cf. 312.
- 83 Gadamer (1990/1998): 78/72.
- 84 Gadamer (1990/1998): 79/73.

---

## REFERENCES

- Alexandre, M. 1967. *De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia, Introduction, traduction et notes*. In *Les œuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie*. Vol. 16. Ed. Roger Arnaldez et al. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
- Boyancé, P. 1981. ‘Philon-Studien’. In *Der Mittelplatonismus*. Ed. C. Zintzen. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Bréhier, Emile. 1950. *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d’Alexandrie*. Paris: Librairie Alphonse Picard & Fils.
- Chadwick, Henry. 1966. ‘St. Paul and Philo of Alexandria’. *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. Vol. 48, 286–307.
- De Rijk, L. M. 1965. ‘*Enkyklios paideia*: A Study of its Original Meaning’. *Vivarium*. Vol. 3, 74–77.
- De Vogel, C. J. 1963. *Greek Philosophy: A Collection of Texts with Notes and Explanations*. Vol. III. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Gadamer, H-G. 1990/1998. *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik, Gesammelte Werke*. Vol. 1. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990; *Truth and Method*. Second revised edition. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York: Continuum, 1998.
- Hadot, P. 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Ed. and Introduction by Arnold I. Davidson. Trans. Michael Case. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Hadot, P. 1995/2002. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Paris: Gallimard, 1995; *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Trans. Michael Chase. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Hadot, P. 2002. *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique: Préface d'Arnold I. Davidson*, Nouvelle édition revue et augmentée. Paris: Albin Michel.
- Heinemann, I. 1938. *Die Werke Philos von Alexandrien*. Breslau: S. Münz.
- Illmer, D. 1979. 'Artes Liberales'. In the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. Vol. IV, 156–71.
- Jaeger, Werner. 1969. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, 3 vols., trans. G. Highet (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Mack, B. L. 1973. *Logos und Sophia: Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie im hellenistischen Judentum (Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, Band 10)*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Mack, B. L. 1973–75. 'Weisheit und Allegorie bei Philo von Alexandrien: Untersuchungen zum Traktat De congressu eruditionis'. *Theokratia: Jahrbuch des Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum*. Vol. 3.
- Marrou, H-I. 1950/1982. *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité*. Paris: Seuil, 1950; *A History of Education in Antiquity*. Trans. George Lamb. London: Sheed and Ward, 1956; reprint, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982.
- Mendelsohn, A. 1982. *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press.
- Pannenberg, W. 1977. *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Philo. *On Mating With the Preliminary Studies*. In *Philo*. Vol. IV, Loeb Classical Library. Trans. F.H. Colson, with G.H. Whitaker. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.
- Plato. *The Republic of Plato*,. Second edition. Trans. Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books.
- Runia, D.T. 1993. *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*. Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum. Vol 3. Assen and Minneapolis: Van Gorcum and Fortress Press.
- Runia, D.T. 2009. 'Philo and the Early Church Fathers'. In *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*. Ed. Adam Kamesar. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 210–230.
- Thyen, H. 1955/1956. 'Die Probleme der neueren Philo-Forschung'. *Theologische Rundschau*, n.s.
- Völker, W. 1950. 'Review'. *Deutsche Literaturzeitung*, vol. 7, 288–295.
- Windisch, H. 1909. *Die Frömmigkeit Philos und ihre Bedeutung für das Christentum: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie*. Leipzig: Hinrichs.
- Winter, B.W. 1997/2002. *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, U.K.: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Wolfson, H.A. 1982. *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. 2 vols. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.

Cite this article as: de Vries, Hent. 2009. 'Philosophia ancilla theologiae: Allegory and ascension in Philo's *On Mating with the Preliminary Studies (De congressu quaerendae eruditionis gratia)*'. Translated by Ben-Levi, Jack. *The Bible and Critical Theory* 5 (3): pp. 41.1–41.19. DOI: 10.2104/bc090041.