Ramelli, I. L. E. 2019. "Philo's Dialectics of Apophatic Theology, His Strategy of Differentiation and His Impact on Patristic Exegesis and Theology" [in English]. *Filosofiya. Zhurnal Vysshey shkoly ekonomiki [Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics]* III (1), 36–92.

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# Philo's Dialectics of Apophatic Theology, His Strategy of Differentiation and His Impact on Patristic Exegesis and Theology**

**Abstract:** This paper deals with several aspects of the impact of Philo's ideas on Patristic thought. First, the author shows how Philo's «dialectics of apophatic theology» influenced later theological systems, in the first place in respect to what we call «a strategy of differentiation» between unknowable divine substance and knowable divine activities. These activities for Philo were connected to the notion of Logos/Wisdom (which Philo used most probably in a non-hypostatic sense), understood in a middle-Platonic sense as «intelligible cosmos». However, Philo's apophatic theology is always supported by his allegorical interpretation of Scripture. After considering both the Platonic and the Jewish background of the Philonic Logos, the author traces the transformation of this concept in Clement, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. These authors, in line with Philo's apophaticism, also stress the unknowability of God's essence. Philo's gnoseological theocentrism determines what has been labeled as his «religious psychology»: since human reason is itself a gift from God, one's life needs to be dedicated to worshipping God in a continuous effort to know Him. This creates a sort of tension between the knowledge of God as the ultimate goal of human life and the fact that the nature of God is, after all, incomprehensible for humans. That is why Philo, according to his «strategy of differentiation», describes the process of cognition in «mystical» terms. Although the Christian Platonists follow him in this respect, in their writings mysticism acquires a clear eschatological dimension which, in the case of Philo, is either lacking or very elusive.

**Keywords:** Philo of Alexandria, Dialectics of Apophatic Theology, Gregory of Nyssa, Origen of Alexandria, Christian Platonism, Middle Platonism, Intelligible Cosmos, Strategy of Differentiation.

**DOI:** 10.17323/2587–8719–2019–3–1–36–92.

Both Philo of Alexandria and many Patristic thinkers can be placed at the convergence between philosophy and the sacred. After offering an overview

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**© Ilaria Ramelli. © Philosophy. Journal of the Higher School of Economics. Warmest thanks to Olga Alieva and to the organisers and publics of some invited lectures in which I delivered earlier parts of this study, especially in Rome in October 2017 at the Cardinal Bea Centre of the Gregorian University, and at a Seminar on Philo at SBL in November 2016.

of Philo's impressive impact on Patristic thought, I shall concentrate on what I call Philo's "dialectics of apophatic theology" and his adoption of a "strategy of differentiation".

The first expression, "dialectics of apophatic theology", as we shall examine in due course, refers to the following paradox, which emerges clearly from the writings of Philo: the cognitive impairment of human beings before the divine should not stop their "theo-logical" investigation. Philo and the apophatic theologians who were inspired by him show indeed a tension between apophaticism and the discourse on God, which they did nevertheless pursue. This is what I call the "dialectics of apophatic theology". This paradox and tension between apophaticism and the discourse on God is implicitly present in the very expression "apophatic theo-logy", through the clash between *apophatic* and *-logy* (the ideas of negating vs saying). I, therefore, wish to make this notion explicit this notion by speaking of dialectics.

In response to the aporia posed by the dialectics of apophatic theology, Philo adopted what I call a "strategy of differentiation". By "strategy of differentiation", as we shall see in detail, I mean Philo's systematic distinction between God's *ousia* and God's *dynameis*, which exerted a big influence on subsequent Patristic theologians who were very familiar with Philo's thought. I will finally highlight the connection between Philo's theology and his eschatology, however elusive it may be, and his doctrine of restoration. I shall briefly point out some important similarities and differences between Philo's ideas and those of Patristic and Neoplatonic thinkers.

## PHILO'S INFLUENCE ON PATRISTIC EXEGESIS AND THEOLOGY, THE MEMRA, AND THE ISSUE OF "SUBORDINATION"

One of the most significant examples of the encounter between philosophy and the sacred, as mentioned, is given by Patristic Philosophy, which drew a great deal of inspiration from Hellenistic Jewish Philosophy. The main exponent of the latter is Philo of Alexandria, a rough contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul. The philosophy Philo professes is the Mosaic philosophy[1], which in Philo's oeuvre shows the greatest affinities with Platonism, although Philo also had a good deal of familiarity with Stoicism

[1]Philo often describes "us" as "the disciples of Moses" (e. g. Phil. Spec. Leg. 1.345; Phil. Det. 86). On Philo's commitment to revealing the universal philosophical message of the Bible to the Gentiles, and especially learned Greeks, see Nikiprowetzky, 1977: 117–155; Borgen, 1997: 140–157, 206–260.

and Pythagoreanism[2]. He praises Plato himself as "the great Plato" (ὁ μέγας Πλάτων, Phil. De aet. 52) and, if the variant in the manuscript tradition is correct, "the most sacred Plato" (τὸν ἱερώτατον Πλάτωνα, Phil. Prob. 13, a phrase that introduces a quotation from Pl. Phaedr. 247a7). Philo used Plato's dialogues selectively: he preferred Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Timaeus*, *Republic*, and *Laws*. These preferences correspond to the Platonic readings that were widespread in Middle Platonism[3]. As Daniel Boyarin's remarks, "Philo's Judaism is simply an important variety of Middle Platonism" (Boyarin, 2004: 115). He has also a good knowledge of Pythagoreanism, Aristotelianism[4], and Stoicism.

The influence that Philo exerted on Patristic thinkers through the two interrelated channels of exegesis and theology is staggering and variegated (Runia, 1993; Runia, 1999; Dillon, 1999, and works cited below, and The Reception of Philo of Alexandria, [2019]) especially on Clement[5], the first Christian author who overtly cited Philo's works, Origen, Eusebius, Didymus, Gregory of Nyssa — who read Philo but was arguably also influenced by Origen's reception of Philo[6] — Ambrose, Jerome — who described Philo as a Jewish Platonist and stressed the Rome-Alexandrian connection first established by Clement in relation to Philo (Ramelli, 2011e: 81–84) — and Augustine[7]. Origen only mentioned Philo by name three times in his extant works, but he referred to him anonymously as a "predecessor" on at least

[2]See Runia, 2007. Ekaterina Matsuova rejects the widespread hypothesis of the influence of Stoic allegoresis on Philo's allegorical method, rather pointing to Pythagorean allegorical criticism (Matsuova, 2010: 21).

[3]According to David Lincicum, Plato is quoted 18 times by Philo, and alluded to 315 times. Among his works, the *Apology* is alluded to twice, the *Cratylus* 11 times, the *Crito*, *Letters*, and *Eryxias* once, the *Gorgias* 12 times, the *Ion* thrice, the *Laws* 22 times, the *Meno* twice, the *Menexenus* is quoted once and alluded to once, the *Phaedo* is alluded to 16 times, the *Phaedrus* is quoted twice and alluded to 61 times, the *Philebus* is alluded to 7 times, the *Politicus*, *Parmenides*, and *Protagoras* are alluded to once, the *Republic* is alluded to 25 times, the *Symposium* is quoted once and alluded to 9 times, the *Sophist* is quoted once and alluded to thrice, the *Theaetetus* is quoted thrice and alluded to 16 times, and the *Timaeus* is quoted 11 times and alluded to 120 times (!) (Lincicum, 2013; Lincicum, 2014).

[4]Lincicum lists no direct quotation, but 36 allusions to Aristotle in Philo's corpus (ibid.).

[5]See Hoek, 1988; now Jennifer Otto, who argues that Patristic authors cited Philo essentially to define the continuities and distinctive features of Christian beliefs and practices in relation to Judaism (Otto, 2018). My review is forthcoming in *Studia Philonica*.

[6]As I argued in Ramelli, 2008a.

[7]A discussion on "Philo's Reception in Augustine" will appear in The Reception of Philo of Alexandria, [2019].

twenty-three other occasions[8]. As I have thoroughly demonstrated elsewhere (Ramelli, 2008a, further Ramelli, 2012b)[9], Origen tends expressly to refer to Philo as a predecessor precisely in points that are crucial to his Scriptural allegorical method. This strongly suggests that Philo was his main inspirer for the very technique of philosophical allegoresis of Scripture, and that Origen both was well aware of this and acknowledged his debt.

The name of Philo occurs more frequently (20 times) in the extant oeuvre of Eusebius than in those of any other ancient author. Eusebius' library has indeed allowed the very survival of Philo's works, following a trajectory from Alexandria to Caesarea, where Origen brought his works when he moved there, to the library of Pamphilus and that of Eusebius, which became the episcopal library of Caesarea. Here, in 376–379, bishop Euzoius had Philo's rolls transferred to parchment codices (Runia, 1993: 20–22; Runia, 1996: 476–495), — within his larger work of having the whole library of Origen copied from papyri to parchment (Jerome Vir. Ill.113), confirmed by the colophon of Ms. Vindobonensis theologicus graecus 29n, fol. 146v).

The striking resemblance between Eusebius' portrait of Philo (Euseb. HE. 2.4.2–3) and his portrait of Origen in Euseb. HE. 6[10] reveals that both are understood as models; both Philo and Origen are praised by Eusebius because they were famous for their learning, even among "pagans"; illustrious for their scriptural competence; they worked very hard; they produced an impressive literary output, and both had great philosophical proficiency and

[8]Annewies van den Hoek's work is a starting point for all subsequent research. See Hoek, 2000 and Hoek, 2002.

[9]Otto, 2018 deems Origen's appeals to Philo an effort to define the continuities and distinctive features of Christian beliefs and practices vs those of the Jews. This can surely be a component of Origen's references to Philo (for the same on the Jewish side see Ophir, Rosen-Zvi, 2018), but does not obliterate the value of Origen's appeals to Philo as an authoritative antecedent, which is explicit, including in *Contra Celsum*, and significant, since — as I argued — it appears in connection with fundamental exegetical strategies, which Origen appropriated and come from Philo. This is also confirmed by the attempt, on the part of "pagan" Platonists such as Celsus and Origen, to sever Origen's allegoresis of Scripture from its most important Biblical antecedent (Philo) and rather connect it exclusively to Stoic allegoresis, of which Origen would be a deformation, applied as it was to a "spurious" book such as the Bible (Porphyry). Origen's move in his appeal to Philo as antecedent (Otto herself calls Philo a "predecessor" according to Origen) should be viewed against the backdrop of his anti-Marcionite polemic: while Marcionites rejected the Jewish heritage, Origen appealed to it, but through a philosophico-allegorical reading of what for the Christians became "the Old Testament".

[10]This resemblance has been highlighted in Ramelli, 2011e and, with further points, in Ramelli, 2016c: 295, and, following these remarks (1, 8, 10), by Rogers, 2017.

recognition. By presenting him as "Hebrew" and not as Jew, Eusebius shows respect for Philo and locates him in a middle position between Judaism and Christianity, since he connected Christianity with the older Hebrew race in Euseb. HE. 1.4.4–5. Philo's description of the ascetic Therapeutae, men and women, in *De vita contemplativa* was interpreted by Eusebius as the representation of early Christian ascetics near Alexandria, after the apostolic preaching (Inowlocki, 2004; Ramelli, 2011e; Ramelli, 2016c: 9–13, 82–92; Bruns, 1973).

Not the Rabbis, but Patristic exegetes and theologians both transmitted Philo's works (see above concerning Pamphilus and Euzoius) and received his exegesis and Logos / Wisdom theology. Especially Origen consistently interpreted Philo's theology (close to so-called Middle Platonism), with its Binitarian notion of God and God's Logos and Wisdom[11] in a non-subordinationistic sense, attributing to the Hypostasis of Logos / Wisdom (God's Son) the various *dynameis*, such as Logos and Wisdom / Sophia, which Philo used most probably in a non-hypostatic sense[12]. It is in fact debated whether Philo's Logos and Wisdom were hypostatised or not; they were God's powers (δυνάμεις) rather than essences. David Winston believes that the Logos was not identical with the divine Essence, in that the process of self-intellection involved a duality (Winston, 1985). Certainly, when Origen reinterpreted Philo's *dynameis* in reference to the Son, he hypostatised them within the hypostasis of the Son. Indeed, Philo's *dynameis* of God, such as Logos and Sophia, were transferred onto Christ-Logos-Sophia by Clement and especially Origen (Ramelli, 2017b).

The roots of the Logos / Memra theology in Philo and Jewish Hellenistic traditions impacted Patristic theology profoundly (Boyarin, 2004: 112–147)[13] although the relations of the Logos / Memra theology in Philo and Jewish Hellenistic thought to Greek philosophies of the Logos, and at times even to the Christian Logos theology, must be taken into account in turn. Official Rabbinic theology significantly suppressed the Binitarian doctrine of "Two Powers in Heaven" (God + God's Logos or Memra and Wisdom), although

[11]See Boyarin, 2001; also Otto, 2018. For Origen's appropriation of Philo's theology and the hypostatisation of Philo's Logos, see Ramelli, 2019h.

[12]See Ramelli, 2017b; also Ramelli, 2011a, received by: Maspero, 2013: 79; Drijvers, 2014: xv; Gyurkovics, 2016: 281.

[13]For Boyarin what theologically distinguished Christianity from Judaism is not the doctrine of God's Logos, but that of its incarnation (Boyarin, 2004: 125). See also (Hengel, 1975).

with some possible exceptions[14], by replacing the Logos with Torah, probably also because the Rabbis deemed Logos theology too close to Christian theology such as it had meanwhile developed. Origen was one of the main agents of this development[15].

Daniel Boyarin calls attention to the fact that Philo's theology was not isolated in his day, but was rather an expression of Hellenistic (and especially Alexandrian) Judaism (largely inherited by Christianity, again particularly Alexandrian Christianity): "Both before the Rabbis and contemporaneously with them there was a multitude of Jews, in both Palestine and the Diaspora, who held onto this version of monotheistic theology" (Boyarin, 2001: 254). Likewise, Joan Taylor insists that Philo was not singular, but someone representative of an intellectual environment that is largely lost to us (Taylor, 2003). Boyarin proposes a comparative reading of Philo's Logos, the Targum's analogous Memra, and John's Logos: they stem from the same ideas — in which case the real novelty of the Johannine Logos is its incarnation. However, the Memra of the Targum, which Boyarin deems "an actual divine entity, a mediator" that was "hypostatised" (Boyarin, 2001: 255, 259). and has as functions creation, speaking to humans, punishing the wicked, saving, and redeeming, cannot be demonstrated to be anterior to Christ-Logos and might be a development of the Christian Logos (the Memra is absent in the Talmud). The very fact that Rabbinic Judaism largely rejected the Logos-Memra theology as the aforementioned heresy of "Two Powers in Heaven" suggests that the Memra theology was associated with Christian Logos theology by some Rabbis, and was dismissed also for this reason.

The Logos is described by Philo as "second God", a perfectly Middle Platonic expression that was later used as a weapon against Origen's supposed "subordinationism" — unwarrantedly, as has been thoroughly demonstrated elsewhere[16]. Remarkably, in the work of the Christian Platonist Justin,

[14]It must be noted, however, that there is some Logos Theology in Rabbinics (see Bictenhard, 1979, on Dibbur as Word, word of God, and Hypostasis in Rabbinics, with some discussion of the work on Origen ibid.: 609–611). And Origen himself reports a "Hebrew master's" exegesis of Isa. 6:3 in which the two seraphim who sing the Trisagion are "the unigenit Son of God and the Holy Spirit" (Orig. De prin. 1.3.4).

[15]See Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, Origen of Alexandria's Philosophical Theology, in preparation, esp. Introduction and Ch. 5.

[16]See Ramelli, 2011b (I use "anti-subordinationism" more as a response to "subordinationism" than as a term that is satisfactory in its own right as a representation of Origen's doctrine) and Ramelli, 2012a, referred to, e. g., by Karamanolis, 2013: 307; Martens, 2015: 611; by Havrda, 2016: 35.

ἕτερος θεός designated the Father, not the Son (Just. Dial. 56.1), so this expression *per se* cannot entail "subordinationism", as is often assumed. It does not imply it in Origen, while in Philo it probably does (although "subordinationism" is a term heavily loaded with meanings from Patristic controversies), since Logos / Wisdom in his view is likely not hypostatic. Philo called the Logos "second God" in Quaest. Gen. 2.62, indicating — like later Patristic exegetes — that humans are in the image of the Logos, who is in the image of God: "Nothing mortal can be made in the likeness of the Most High and Father of the universe, but only in that of the *second God*, who is His Logos (πρὸς τὸν δεύτερον θεόν, ὅς ἐστιν ἐκείνου λόγος) ... Of this (Logos), the human mind is a likeness and an image" (Ramelli, 2019a).

Philo's "subordinationism" (but this term, as I warned, is too heavily charged by later Patristic controversies), or his deeming the Logos of God inferior to God, is evident, while Origen, who made the Logos a divine principle (ἀρχή) and hypostasis (ὑπόστασις), took a different direction[17]. In Orig. Contr. Cels. 5.39, Origen was defending himself precisely from those who understood the Logos as a second God in the sense of a secondary God (i. e. in a "subordinationistic" sense): "Even if we may mention a 'second God', nevertheless they should know that by 'second God' we do not mean anything else than the virtue that circumscribes all virtues and the Logos that circumscribes every *logos* of every being", that is, the intelligible world (κόσμος νοητός). Indeed, the very characterisation of the Logos (qua agent of creation) in Philo as κόσμος νοητός (Ph. De opif. 24) will become a prominent feature of Origen's theology of the Logos. But the Logos for Origen is the second Hypostasis of God. Also, the representation of the Logos as High Priest in Philo (Her. 205; Quaest. Ex. 2.13) will profoundly influence Origen, but in Philo the High Priest is the *discarnate* (ἄσαρκος) Logos, while Origen, who based himself on *Hebrews*, saw the *incarnate* Christ too as High Priest, who offered himself once and for all for the salvation of all rational creatures through all aeons[18].

Many other characterisations of Logos / Wisdom in Philo influenced Origen's Christology. For example, according to Philo, Sophia is the "daughter of God and mother of all things", but can also be understood to be "male and Father", in that she sows and begets in souls knowledge and good actions

[17]Argument in Ramelli, Origen of Alexandria's Philosophical Theology, in preparation, Chs 3–6.

[18]On Origen's argument to this end, see Ramelli, 2007, received, e. g., by: Scott, 2010: 354, 358; Scott, 2012: 204, 206 etc.; Cooper, 2012. For the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice as High Priest in Origen, see my argument in Ramelli, 2008b.

(Ph. Fug. 50–52). Origen in his Commentary on the Song of Songs will reflect that Christ-Logos-Wisdom is not only male and Bridegroom, but also female and Bride[19], but metaphysically Christ, being God, transcends all gender.

The aspect of the Patristic reception of Philo on which I shall concentrate in the rest of this essay will lie within the field of theology — and the relevant exegetical strategies, especially what I call "the dialectics of apophatic theology" (whose explanation I have briefly anticipated at the very beginning of this article), and, partially, its relation to Philo's (and patristic) philosophy of history, soteriology, and eschatology. Through his mystical apophaticism, indeed, "Philo exerted, along with Plotinus, an immeasurable influence on the Christian mystical tradition"[20] (understanding mysticism and mystical theology as an approach to the divine that involves ecstatic and meta-intellectual knowledge of the divine)[21].

## PHILO'S THEOLOGY BETWEEN PLATONISM AND THE BIBLE, AND WHAT WILL BE ARGUED

In ancient and late antique philosophy, including Hellenistic Jewish and patristic philosophy, the study of God, i. e. theology (θεο-λογία, from θεός, "God" + λόγος, "discourse, theory"), was the culmination of philosophy. Philosophy and theology were not separate disciplines, each with a different scope and methodology, as they are in our post-Kantian perspective[22] Thus, the knowledge of God was arguably the highest achievement of philosophy. But here the problem immediately arose of the very possibility of such knowledge, and of the possibility of *theo-logy* as a theory of the divine, a discourse about the divine, which is transcendent from the Platonic perspective and therefore difficult to know or even unknowable on the cognitive plane.

[19]C. Cant. 1.6.14; H. Gen. 14.1: "Qua God's Logos he is called Bridegroom, and qua God's Wisdom (Σοφία) he is called Bride".

[20]Stang, 2012: 253. Apophatic or negative theology are used here primarily according to the definition of patristic philosophical theology, the main ideal successor of Philo's theology. Students of ancient philosophy may use the term somewhat differently, in relation to a specific philosophic discourse which originated in the Old Academy (Pl. Symp. 1902. 211AB, Pl. Phaedr. 247C, the first part of *Parmenides* where the method is rejected), went through the school of Aristotle, and was adopted by Neo-Platonists for a specific noetic practice leading to the knowledge of God or the first principle. Scholars in ancient philosophy would not call "negative theology" in the strict sense of the term the denial of the possibility to know God; see, e. g., Whittaker, 1969; Whittaker, 1973.

[21]Definition in my Ramelli, 2018c.

[22]See especially Ramelli, 2016a; cf. Ramelli, 2015b, received by *Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken* 2016: 1–6.

Hence the rise of apophatic theology — and later, in Neoplatonic thinkers such as Proclus and Dionysius, even a hyper-apophatic theology.

Philo's ideas about the knowledge of God, indeed, seem to belong to the tradition of apophatic theology, which for him is grounded both in Scripture and in Plato. The latter, in his highly influential *Timaeus* — influential on Middle Platonists, Bardaisan of Edessa[23], Neoplatonists, and Christian Platonists — famously proclaimed the divinity to be difficult to know and impossible to express (Pl. Tim. 28C), an assertion that was cited or echoed very often in imperial and late antique Platonism, "pagan" Jewish and Christian alike, including by Philo himself[24]. Plato's statement of course is not so apodictic: "difficult to know" does not mean utterly "impossible", and "impossible to express" is probably meant as impossible to explain "to all people", a motif that was certainly shared by Clement, Ammonius Saccas, Origen, and other Christian Platonists. This passage from the *Timaeus* was surely treated as a founding text for apophaticism even by Christian Platonists. The most important text, however, was Pl. Resp. 509B: οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος, "the Good itself is not essence, but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power". Origen will make the most of this passage, although his ambiguity between God as Nous and Being and beyond Nous and Being must be accounted for (this point need not detain us here)[25].

This Platonic foundation may explain the reason why some aspects of the approach to apophatic theology are very similar in Philo, Plotinus, Origen, Gregory Nyssen, and Evagrius, all Platonists from different religions[26]. They shared the same philosophy, although belonging to different cults, and this

[23]Ramelli, 2009a, reviewed by Crone, 2012; by Marx-Wolf, 2013; received by: Possekel, 2012: 522; Spiedel, 2012; Drijvers, 2014: xv; Johnson, 2013: 207, 209, 255, 284, 364; Bakker, 2011: 262; Litwa, 2016: 801; Scholten, 2016: 283, 287; Crone, 2017; Wet, 2017: 37, 171; S. J. D. Cohen, 2019: 1; Robertson, 2017: 512, 513, 515, 516, 517, 529, 537; Burns, 2017: 213, 352; Andrade, 2018; Battistini, 2017: 137 passim; Possekel, 2018. Further elements in my Ramelli, 2018b; Ramelli, 2019b.

[24]Phil. Somn. 1.67; Phil. Legat. 3.5.3; Ph. Mut. 14–15; Ph. Her. 170, etc.; Plut. Is. 383a; Alinoous, Didask. 164.8,31; 165.5; Apuleius, Plat. 1.90; Deo Socr. 124; Apol. 64.7; Celsus, ap. Origen. Cels. 6.65; 7.42; Maximus of Tyre, Diss. 2.10; 11.9; Numenius, F2.13–14 Des Places; Poimandres (CH 1.31) and other passages from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Justin, I Apol. 9.3; 10.1; 61.11; 63.1; II Apol. 5.1–2; 10.8; 12.4; 13.4; Dial. 126.2; 127.2,4; Clement, Strom. 5.79.1, and "Gnostics" treatises from Nag Hammadi.

[25]Analysis in Ramelli, 2009b and *Origen to Evagrius* 2018; full discussion in a work on Origen in preparation.

[26]This is pointed out in Ramelli, 2014d esp. for Plotinus; for Evagrius Ramelli, 2018c.

explains their common approach to apophatic theology. They all shared both Platonist transcendentalism and Plato's warning in Pl. Tim. 28C.

Philo interpreted Scripture, and more specifically the Septuagint, in the light of Platonic philosophy, and indeed his thought reveals many elements that are common with so-called Middle Platonism[27]. As Sharon Weisser rightly notes, "Philo is part and parcel of late Hellenistic philosophical discussions on God" (Weisser, 2017). In particular, if Philo could read Scripture from a Platonic perspective, this was due to the allegorical interpretation that he applied to it. This is what Christian exegetes of the Bible such as Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius will also do — to the point that, as I thoroughly argued elsewhere (Ramelli, 2008a) most of the important philosophical and *theological* doctrines that passed from Philo on to these Christian Platonists did so through specific *exegetical* points and strategies.

However, unlike some extreme Jewish Hellenistic allegorists against whom he seems to have reacted, Philo did not reject the historical level of the Bible. He kept both the historical and the allegorical planes at the same time, as Origen will do after him, reacting both against literalists and against the extreme ("Gnostic") allegorisers of his own day (Ramelli, 2011f; Ramelli, 2014c). From Philo's perspective, theology mainly coincided with the interpretation of the Bible, which is all about God, and this interpretation was to be performed by means of philosophy — primarily Platonism, but also Stoicism. Philo's attention was directed first and foremost to Scripture, as scholars such as Valentin Nikiprowetzky, David Runia, Peder Borgen, David Winston, and Otto Kaiser have highlighted with good reason (Borgen, 1997; Nikiprowetzky, 1973; Nikiprowetzky, 1977; Runia, 1989; Runia, 2001; Winston, 2002; Kaiser, 2015). Indeed, Philo's attitude was exegetico-theological, but philosophy provided the necessary tool and framework for his scriptural allegorical interpretation. Winston is right, I think, to remark that Philo "wish*ed* to link his Platonist views to the Biblical text in order to achieve his goal of preserving his ancestral tradition while yet filling it with a new philosophical content" and that Philo can be described as "a thoroughly Hellenised Jew who has clearly been intellectually seduced by Platonic philosophy, but who nevertheless remained steadfastly loyal to his Jewish faith, and therefore felt compelled to bend every effort to the task of reconciling the two opposing passions that energised his spiritual

[27]I limit myself to referring to Runia, 2011. See also Runia, 2016b.

existence ... He chose to Platonize his Jewish heritage through the medium of Biblical commentary" (Winston, 2010: 235).

Besides Plato (with his transcendence theme plus the warnings in Pl. Tim. 28C), indeed, the roots of Philo's apophaticism are found in his Biblical exegesis. As I shall indicate in the section below, "Exegetical support to Apophaticism", Philo interpreted some Biblical episodes as the allegorical expression of the necessity of apophaticism[28]: this meant the awareness of the limit of human cognitive and discursive-expressive power when it came to the Divinity in itself, that is, its nature or essence as distinct from its activities and their products. This presupposed a transcendent notion of the divine, which squares perfectly well with Platonism (at least with Platonism after Aristotle, given his development of transcendentalism) but, because of the transcendence of the biblical God[29], not with an immanentistic system such as Stoicism — let alone Epicureanism, for which Philo, like Origen later, had very little sympathy. This is why Philo, like most Patristic Platonists, took over Stoic ethical, physical, and logical aspects, but not Stoic metaphysics (or the Stoics' refusal of Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics).

These allegorical expressions appear precisely in passages which can be fruitfully compared with the parallel interpretations of Origen and Gregory Nyssen. I shall analyse how Philo grounded his tenet that, because of its transcendence, the Divinity is unknowable in its *essence* (οὐσία), and therefore also ineffable, but knowable through its *activity*. Even the epithets that are ascribed to God in the Bible, according to Philo, do not reveal God's very essence, but God's relationship to the creation. What humans can know about God is *that* God *is*, but not *what* God is. Philo's God is τὸ γενικώτατον, the most generic being (Gig. 52). And, since God belongs to no class, we do not know what God is (Winston, 1992: 21–22).

Divine revelation in Scripture of course moderates negative theology to some extent, for Philo as well as for his patristic followers such as Clement, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, but is also subject to strict rules of interpretation. *Allegoresis*, for Philo and his Patristic followers, is the key to understanding the true meaning of the Bible, but it is also a key available to few — those who master this hermeneutical tool.

[28]Mainly Ex. 20:21 and Ex. 33:20–23; see below, the section on the Scriptural exegetical foundations of apophaticism.

[29]This is emphasized, e. g., in Q.Gen. 2.54; Abr. 79–80; Leg. 3.36, where for this reason God is called ἄποιος; Somn. 1.67, where God is declared ineffable; Mut. 9–10, where God is said to be incomprehensible, ἀκατάληπτος, cf. Post. 15. See Ramelli, 2014d.

However difficult or in some respects even impossible, the search for God, as Philo insists, is the noblest among human activities, as we shall see. Therefore, the cognitive impairment of human beings before the divine should not stop their "theo-logical" investigation. Philo and the (Platonic) apophatic theologians who were inspired by him[30] show indeed a tension between apophaticism and the discourse on God that they did nevertheless pursue. This, as anticipated at the beginning, is what I call *the dialectics of apophatic theology*[31]. As mentioned, Θεολογία means reasoning and speaking or theory (λόγος) about the divine (θεός), but if the divine is unknowable, how can theology work? This is why Philo, as I shall show in detail below, opted for what I name *the strategy of differentiation*: God's intimate nature or essence is unknowable, at least to embodied human intellects, but the Divinity manifests itself in its activities. This strategy of differentiation proved enormously influential on later Christian Platonism.

For the Christian Platonists, however, from Origen onwards, apophaticism and its counterpart, mysticism, have also an eschatological dimension as anticipation of the final restoration and deification. This dimension may be lacking in Philo, as will be discussed in the final section of this essay. This obviously bears on the issue of Philo's elusive view of the end.

## PHILO'S GNOSEOLOGICAL THEOCENTRISM

Before tackling Philo's dialectics of apophatic theology and his related strategy of differentiation in depth, it is important to point out what I would name his gnoseological theocentrism. Philo, in other words, placed the knowledge of God at the core of all knowledge. In Philo's view, the knowledge of God — to the extent that is possible to human minds, even just as knowledge of the existence of God and of God's operations in the world (see below) — is crucial to human knowledge in general. This is but one aspect (the epistemic one) of the theocentrism of all of Philo's thought[32]. There can be no knowledge without some knowledge of God. Indeed, Philo describes the right opinion (Leg. 3.31) as "referring all things

[30]Some scholars think they were inspired by a common tradition, rather than a direct influence, see Dodds, 1928; Rist, 1967: 101; cf. also Thesleff, 1994. However, some studies, such as Ramelli, 2008a and other previous studies cited therein show a direct influence of Philo on Patristic apophatic theologians in several cases.

[31]Ramelli, 2014d. For the tension within Neoplatonism between the Neoplatonists' extensive writings and their acknowledgment that they seek wisdom that cannot be discursively grasped, see Rappe, 2000: IX–XVII passim; also Hoffmann, 1997.

[32]On which see now Holtz, 2017; see also Sterling, 2006.

to God" (Leg. 3.29). Failing to recognise God brings about both ignorance and wickedness: "the wicked person sinks down into his own incoherent (σποράδα) mind as he strives to avoid the One who is" (Leg. 3.37).

For Philo, who follows a well-known Stoic argument, only the philosopher is king, since the king is the one who contemplates the noetic paradigms of the cosmos, like Moses the perfect philosopher (Mos. 2.17) (Damgaard, 2014) — a line that will be developed by Clement of Alexandria (Gibbons, 2015). Now, again, this contemplation is connected with the knowledge of God, not least because the paradigms of the cosmos are in the mind of God, the "noetic cosmos"[33] (a Middle Platonic feature that will be developed by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, all very well acquainted with Philo[34] — and also by Bardaisan of Edessa, whose familiarity with Philo would be very interesting to assess!). Knowledge of God and knowledge of the cosmos are inseparable, and they are both a prerogative of the philosopher. Even an exegetical tool so often used by Philo such as arithmology turns out to be in the service of the knowledge of the cosmos and of God[35]. Philosophy itself is God's Logos and constitutes the royal way to the divine (Post. 101–102).

Just as all knowledge refers to the knowledge of God, so also all virtues are crowned by piety, the queen of virtues, which is closely related to God and the knowledge of God. For Philo, those who are worthy of the knowledge of God possess piety, the greatest virtue (Spec. 4.135; 147) (Sterling, 2006); the link between knowledge and virtue — which will return prominently in Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius[36] — is also clear from Philo's principle that virtue illumines the soul, therefore immediately acquiring an intellectual, gnoseological value (Leg. 1.46). As Gregory of Nyssa will detail, "knowledge of the Good that transcends every intellect comes to us through the virtues" (Hom. in Cant. 3.91: Gregorius Nyssenus, Norris, 2012). The lack of virtue, common to most human beings, hinders the functioning of *logismos* to a dramatic extent according to Philo.

[33]See especially Opif. 20: ἐκ των ἰδεων κόσμος ἄλλον ἂν ἔχοι τόπον ἢ τὸν θειον λόγον; Cher. 49: ὁ θεὸς ... ἀσωμάτων ἰδεων ἀσώματος χώρα. Clement will elaborate on this when stating: νοῦς δὲ χῶρα ἰδεῶν, νοῦς δὲ ὁ θεός (Strom. 4.25.155.2–157.2).

[34]Ramelli, 2019c; Ramelli, 2011a, reviewed by Simone, 2011; referred to in Maspero, 2013: 79; in Drijvers, 2014: xv; in Gyurkovics, 2016: 281; in Biriukov, 2016: 34, 173.

[35]Moehring, 1995; Berchman, 2013 on Philo's use of Pythagorean physics and Plato's *Timaeus*.

[36]See the introductory essay (VII–LXXXIV) and the commentary on KG 1.32 in Ramelli, 2015a.

Consistently with the centrality of God and the knowledge of God for Philo, Carlos Lévy calls Philo's doctrine of the soul a "religious psychology", meaning "one in which it is not important to determine the exact nature and function of the soul, but its relation to God" (Lévy, 2019; Cover, 2014). Everything, indeed, revolves around God: Philo defines soul as a divine emanation and identifies the real human prerogative as the capacity for worshipping the One Being, God (Somn. 1.35). According to Philo, *logismos* is not a property of humans, but a gift from God. In Cher. 69 Philo stresses the weakness of human reason, as he also does, and to a greater extent, in Praem. 29, where he warns against the self-affirmation of human λογισμός (reasoning faculty) and αἴσθησις (sense perception). One should rather "take God for one's sole stay and support with a reasonableness whose resolution does not falter, and a faith unswerving and securely founded" (Praem. 29).

In Congr. 155, Philo proposes a positive meaning of *logismos* in opposition to human lower faculties: "mind is more powerful, more active (δυνατώτερον καὶ δραστικώτερον), and altogether better than the hand". In Mos. 2.185, *logismos* is described as "the highest authority within us", because it is the part of the soul that can make us closer to God as far as possible. The key resides in the relation of one's *logismos* to God. The notion that underlies Philo's words here is that of ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ[37], both a Biblical (Gen. 1:26) and a Platonic (Theaet. 176AC) ideal, which was received by Aristotle (EN 10.7.1177b), Antiochus of Ascalon (ap. Cicero Leg. 1.8.25), Philo (Opif. 142–144), and Middle Platonists[38]: for Origen this was a further proof that Plato was inspired either by Scripture or by the same Logos who inspired Scripture. Indeed, in Prin. 3.6.1 Origen states that Theaet. 176B corresponds closely to Gen. 1:26. Actually, the *Tübingen Theosophy* 1.40 as well recognised that not only "pagans" but also Moses maintained this ideal[39]. The basis, according to Origen, who reasons like Philo in Mos. 2.185 above, is the "affinity" between human *nous* and God, who is *nous* (Princ. 1.1.7). The same was maintained by Clement, another good knower of Philo[40].

[37]See also Phdr. 248A; 253B; Rep. 10.613A; Pl. Tim. 47C; Leg. 4.716B–717B; Merki, 1952; in Plato: Sedley, 1999; Annas, 1999; Armstrong, 2004; Lavecchia, 2005; Riel, 2013: 19–24.

[38]Eudorus, frg. 1 Mazzarelli: "for Socrates, Plato and Pythagoras the *telos* is ὁμοίωσις Θεῷ"; Albinus Isag. 6.4; Alcinous Didask. 28.1; 2.2; Anonymous C.Theaet. 7.18. On the passage from the Stoicizing "concordance with Nature" to that of "assimilation to God" as *telos* in Middle Platonism, see Boys-Stones, 2018: 437-456.

[39]Beatrice (ed.), 2001: 21. This text also describes the Son-Logos as *homoousios* with the Father in 1.45 (ibid.: 23). On the *Theosophy* see now Busine, 2016.

[40]Strom. 4.25.155: νοῦς δὲ ὁ θεός. Examined in Ramelli, 2019c.

## THE INTELLIGIBLE FORM OF GOD, THE LIMITS OF HUMAN EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE, AND MYSTICAL KNOWLEDGE

Crucial to the issue of the knowledge of God in Philo is the fact that he seems to have been the first to mention an intelligible Form of God[41], a notion with Platonic roots: God's Logos, for Philo, is the archetypal idea of the ideas (ἀρχέτυπος ἰδέα τῶν ἰδεῶν)[42]. In Somn. 1.232, he mentions "the archetypal Form" (τὸ ἀρχέτυπον εἶδος) of God. Incarnate souls, that is, souls that are found in bodies such as those of human beings living on earth, cannot have any grasp of the Form of God, which is only accessible to incorporeal souls, such as those of angels who serve God and are close to God. Angels, indeed, are described as disembodied souls, without any irrationality, similar to monads through their pure *logismoi* (Spec. Leg. 1.6). From the very ontological point of view, thus, the fact of being embodied renders this kind of perfection impossible. Origen, indeed, will take on this point by Philo, like many others related to apophatic theology and all of philosophical theology. Origen will stress not only the thesis of the incomprehensibility of God's nature or essence on the epistemic plane, and the possibility for humans to know only God's activities and the expressions of God's power (a tenet that from Philo passed on to several Patristic authors), but also the emphasis on the limitedness of human intellectual capacity, all the more on earth, which Philo had highlighted: "In the limits of our scarce forces, we have known the divine nature (*natura*) by considering it more from its works (*ex operum suorum contemplatione*) than through our cognitive capacity (*nostri sensu contemplatione*). We have observed its visible creatures and have known by faith those invisible, because human frailty (*humana fragilitas*) cannot see everything with its eye and know everything with its reason (*ratione complecti*). For the human being is the weakest and most imperfect among all rational beings" (Princ. 2.6.1).

Philo insists that incarnate human beings cannot know God, or contemplate God's intelligible Form, also in Spec. Leg. 1.45. Here Philo is reporting Moses' words, which address God: "I bow before Your admonitions, that I never could have received the manifest Form of your appearance (*τὸ τῆς σῆς φαντασίας ἐναργὲς εἶδος*), but I implore You that I may at least contemplate the glory that is around You (*περὶ σέ*)". We shall return very soon to the distinction that Philo draws between seeing God (banned to humans on

[41] See also Giulea, 2015: 268–269.

[42] Migr. Abrah. 18.103; Opif. 16; Her. 280; Mut. 135, 146; Somn. 1.188; Spec. 1.171 etc.

earth) and what is "around God" (permitted), which will have a remarkable *Wirkungsgeschichte* especially in Christian Platonism.

First, in the light of Philo's remarks concerning the inaccessibility of the Form of God for embodied humans, we have to ask the following question: when Philo speaks of the "heir of the divine things" in *Quis heres rerum divinarum sit*, and he is thinking of the person who inherits what is divine, does this include the knowledge of God? If so, wouldn't this contradict the inaccessibility of the Form of God? The answer seems to be that there is in fact no contradiction, since Philo envisages a kind of knowledge of God that is not discursive knowledge, and not even the intuition of an intelligible Form, but a mystical, ecstatic knowledge — besides the knowledge of the existence of God and that of God's powers, activity, and operations (on which see more thoroughly the next section: *The Strategy of Differentiation*).

Indeed, in Her. 68 Abram, before becoming Abraham, asks who will inherit the divine things, and the reply he receives points to a mystical knowledge of God, which requires an ecstasy, a leaving behind of oneself: the heir will be "not the way of thinking that abides in the prison of the body of its own free will, but that which, released from its fetters into liberty, has come forth outside the prison walls, and, so to say, has left itself behind"[43]. This ecstasy is further detailed by Philo as an allegorisation of Abram's departure from his land: "Leave not only your land, that is, the body; your family, that is, the senses; your father's house, that is, the *logos*-but also become a fugitive from yourself, and exit yourself" (Her. 14). To inherit God, that is, to know God, means to perform an ecstasy or departure from one's very self — body, senses, *logos*, and all. This idea will be taken over and developed by Gregory of Nyssa, who will theorise what is known as *epektasis*: not only *ekstasis*, that is, going out of oneself to find God, but also a continual striving towards God, without end, an ideal that finds its roots in Origen[44]. This means not only setting aside sense-perception and the form of knowledge based on sense-perception, but also rational knowledge, with its knower-known dualism (Ramelli, 2014d).

The same is stressed by Philo in Mos. 2.162–163: in the divine darkness, both sense-perception and intellection are left behind. What must be achieved is a form of ecstasy that is the fourth, and highest, kind of

[43]Trans. Colton-Whitaker with slight modifications. On Abraham in Philo Yoshiko Reed, 2009. On mystical theology in Philo see Noack, 2000.

[44]As I argued in Ramelli, 2018a, referred to by Moreschini, 2016: 1544; by Oort, 2019; Maspero, 2018: 365 passim.

ecstasy classified by Philo in Her. 51: the divine possession that is typical of prophets[45]. In this case, the human *logos* must set, like the sun, and when darkness spread after sunset, this turns out to be the divine light, which overpowers human faculties and is therefore experienced as darkness. This intellectual passivity, however, differs from passion, the former being utterly positive, being a sign of divine agency, the latter negative, being the opposite of the ethical ideal of *apatheia*[46].

Philo himself experienced divine possession, as he recounts, and in this state his knowledge seems to have been "divine" in the sense that it came directly from God, not in the sense that he could have either a discursive or an intuitive knowledge of God's essence. The presupposition is, again, that one must empty oneself: he had to be "empty" in order for him to "become full all of a sudden"; he was "showered with ideas falling from on high" (Migr. 7). "Language, ideas, light, and keenest vision" were all received by him "as in a clearest showing": he obtained knowledge from God. But again the knowledge of the essential Form of God is (here only implicitly) precluded.

The Hebrew Bible's terms *urim* and *thummim*, designating parts of the vestments of the high priest, are translated in the LXX as δήλωσις and ἀλήθεια (Kamesar, 2016). According to Philo, both of these concepts have much to do with knowledge, and possibly with the knowledge of God — to which, as we have seen above, all knowledge refers. For δήλωσις represents the *logos prophorikos*, which is uttered, and ἀλήθεια the *logos endiathetos*, which is immanent (Spec. 4.69; QE 2.116; Mos. 2.127–129) — and which can be guaranteed to be true only if it is that of God or if it comes from God. In Ex. 28:30 LXX and Lev. 8:8 LXX, the breastplate of the high priest, on which the *urim* and *thummim* are found, is called λογεῖον or λόγιον, which Philo connected with the *logos* (QE 2.110–111; 2.116). The fact that the *logos*, δήλωσις, and ἀλήθεια belonged primarily to the high priest — according to an interpretation that was taken over by Origen[47] — suggests that the knowledge they indicate refers first and foremost to the knowledge of God, and that this comes from revelation and worship, represented by the high priest. Again, however, there is no hint that humans can achieve a discursive or intuitive-intellectual knowledge (in Platonic terms, coming

[45]For Philo's impact on Origen's theory of prophecy see Ramelli, 2017c.

[46]For Philo's association of passion with feminine imagery, as opposed to positive ecstasy, see Mackie, 2014.

[47]Hom. Lev. 6.4, followed by Jerome, Comm. Hos. 3.4–5.

from διάνοια or νοῦς) of the Deity's essence. The mystical knowledge of God is of a different kind.

## THE STRATEGY OF DIFFERENTIATION

This does not mean that Philo thought that humans on earth can know absolutely nothing of God. He rather availed himself of the above-mentioned strategy of differentiation, as a reaction to the issue posed by the dialectics of apophatic theology, and thereby established that what is unknowable is God's essence, and what is knowable is God's powers (δυνάμεις) and operations / activities (ἐνέργειαι). This differentiation will return in various Patristic theologians, and especially in Gregory of Nyssa[48].

Indeed, Philo elaborated his whole doctrine of God's powers as knowable expressions of the unknowable divinity[49]. God's *dynameis* are, as it were, impressed upon the human mind as far as the latter can receive them (Leg. 2.1–3). Logos and Wisdom were prominent among God's *dynameis*; creative, royal, gracious, legislative, and providential powers are the main divine powers that Philo singles out[50]. At least Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa were indebted to Philo in this respect, and more generally in their theology, both apophatic and cataphatic (as was also the theology of another early Christian Platonist, Basilides: he reserved apophatic theology to the transcendent Deity, who is "not even ineffable", and cataphatic theology, in positive or comparative degrees, to the cosmic degrees of the divine[51]).

Philo's Logos and Dynamis of God — which in turn bear similarities with the Middle Platonic theological Logos of Plutarch's *De Iside et Osiride*, as noted by Harold Tarrant (Tarrant, 1996) — in some respects became Christ-Logos in Clement, Origen, and other Christian thinkers; Clement took over Philo's doctrine of the divine *dynameis* and for the most part transposed them to Christ-Logos[52].

[48]A thorough investigation of the views of Gregory of Nyssa and the other Cappadocians here is offered in Ramelli, 2019d.

[49]See Frick, 1999: 73–88; Calabi, 2008; Alexandre, 2015: 9-35; Runia, 2015: 245–256; Ramelli, 2017b.

[50]On the (relative) revelatory power of the Logos in Philo see Albano, 2014.

[51]See Hertz, 2017.

[52]See Runia, 2004. On divine δυνάμεις, which count 187 occurrences in Philo's corpus (of which 79 singular), see Termini, 2000, who argues for their theophanic nature vs. an independent ontological reality; Calabi, 2004; Neher, 2004: 155–63.

Clement's apophaticism and his distinction between God's powers (knowable) and God's essence (unknowable) derives mainly from Philo. For Clement, too, the human *logos* is frail and incapable of grasping or expressing God; the names and appellatives that both philosophers and poets have attached to God "do not express God's essence, which is ineffable, but God's powers and operations" (Strom. 6.18.165; 5–166.2) (Trigg, 1997; Choufrine, 2002; Hägg, 2006; Hoek, 2009; Attridge, 2017). Philo also seems to have contributed to shape Origen's concept of the divine Hypostasis of the Son, Christ-Logos, as I have suggested elsewhere[53]

The divine power is an aspect of the divinity that can be known together with its operations, as opposite to its unknowable essence/nature. This dichotomy will be developed especially by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa[54]. Jang Ryu distinguishes two epistemological approaches to the issue of the knowledge of God and its limits in Philo's oeuvre, one in each of his exegetical series of writings: in the Allegorical Commentary (Ryu, 2015: 23–70) and in the Exposition of the Law (ibid.: 71–147). While these two perspectives depend on Philo's prevailing interests in each of the two sets of writings, and Ryu's analysis is basically sound, the main tenet of Philo's general strategy of differentiation, namely the unknowability of God's essence and of the knowability of God's existence and works, holds true, I find, as representative of Philo's thought as a whole.

To Philo's mind, even the knowledge of the divine powers, let alone of God's essence, is not a purely human achievement, but a gift from God: "How could the soul have conceived of God, had He not 'breathed into' it [...] the human mind would never have ventured to soar so high as to grasp the nature of God, had not God Himself drawn it up to Himself, so far as it was possible that the human mind should be drawn up, and stamped it (ἐτύπωσε) with the powers that are within the scope of its understanding" (Leg. 1.38). The last sentence would even suggest that there are other powers that are beyond the grasp of embodied human intellects' understanding (on the limits of embodied human knowledge, as opposed to that of angels, see above the remarks in section "The Intelligible Form of God, the Limits of Human Embodied Knowledge, and Mystical Knowledge"). In this connection, it is worth noting that Philo influenced Clement in the

[53]Ramelli, 2012a; further in "The Logos / Nous One-Many between 'Pagan' and Christian Platonism'", forthcoming in *Studia Patristica*.

[54]As is argued in Ramelli, 2014d. On Philo's understanding of the mysteries of Jeremiah and Moses see Gregory Sterling, 2017. On Gregory's mystical theology see Ramelli, 2018a and Ramelli, 2019e.

exegesis of Ex. 33:13ff. and in his related apophaticism. For Philo, Ex. 33:13 indicates that it is the Divinity itself that makes itself known; Clement took over this exegesis, only adding the identification of the divine Logos, mediator of this knowledge, with the Son: "Only through divine grace and through the Logos coming from God can one conceive the Unknowable (τὸ ἄγνωστον)" (Strom. 5.12.82.4).

The "strategy of differentiation" in Philo is also a basis for a concept of θέωσις that does not derogate from the strict unicity of God[55]: although Moses is often called θεός by Philo, for example in Mos. 1.158–9, Sacr. 9–10, and Somn. 2.189, this should be understood precisely against the backdrop of the "strategy of differentiation", as a reference, not to the unknowable essence of God, which cannot admit of ontological participation by a creature, but to God's ἐνέργεια or activity in the created world, which is shared, in this case, with Moses. Therefore, Philo can call Moses θεός without implying that Moses participates in the very essence of God.

For Philo, as later for Clement, Abraham sees the place of God from far away (Gen. 22:4) because the place of God is difficult to reach. This is what Plato called "the region of Ideas / Forms" (χώρα ἰδεῶν), having learnt from Moses that it is a region because it encompasses the multiplicity and totality of beings (Strom. 5.11.73.3; elsewhere in the *Stromateis*, too, Clement equates the χώρα ἰδεῶν with *nous*, primarily God's Nous, but also the *nous* in every human being[56]). Here, Clement is using again Philo's exegesis of Gen. 22:4. Concerning divine appellatives, such as One, Good, Nous,

[55]See Pino, 2017.

[56]In Strom. 4.25.155.2–157.2, examined in "The Logos-Nous One-Many". Clement begins to speak in 155.2 of a God posited by Plato that contemplates the Ideas (τὸν τῶν ἰδεῶν θεωρητικὸν θεόν), like Numenius' θεωρητικός God (F16.10–12), because it contains the Forms of all, as Christ-Logos-Wisdom does in Origen. Clement is observing that, according to Plato, the *nous*, or Intellect, is like a divinity which is able to contemplate the Ideas and the invisible god and inhabits the human beings (155.2). The *nous* or intellect is the seat of the Ideas, and is itself God, as God is *nous* (νοῦς δὲ χώρα ἰδεῶν, νοῦς δὲ ὁ θεός). Note the recurrence of the expression χώρα ἰδεῶν. Now, this god who can contemplate the invisible God (τὸν ἀοράτου θεοῦ θεωρητικὸν θεόν) lives within humans and is indeed human *nous*; indeed, Socrates called "god" the Stranger of Elea, because he was most dialectic. The soul depicted by Plato, absorbed in the contemplation of the Ideas and detached from the sense-perceptible world, is assimilated by Clement to an angel who is with Christ, contemplates (is θεωρητικός), and always looks at the will of God (155.4). Clement, building up the equation, soul: Ideas = angel: Christ, draws a parallel, not only between the soul and an angel, but also between the Ideas and Christ. This, which at first might sound odd, is perfectly clear on the basis of Clement's very notion — surely partially indebted to Philo — of Christ as Logos and, as such, as the seat of the Ideas (again, χώρα ἰδεῶν).

Being, or Father, "none of these, taken separately, can designate God, but all of them together indicate (ἐνδεικτικά) the power of the universal Master" (Strom. 5.12.82.1–2). For Philo as well as for Clement, no divine name reveals the essence of God — thus, in Protr. 11.114.1–2, God is inaccessible light — but they indicate the divine powers and activities, which are knowable.

The knowledge of God can be only knowledge of God's manifestations in the world through divine powers and activities such as creation and providence, which do not convey the knowledge of God's essence. Philo warns that one has to lift one's intellectual eyes above creation — beyond all created beings — to apprehend God (Leg. 3.100–102). Indeed, there can be knowledge of the Divinity itself, but not discursive or intellectual knowledge, namely not dualistic knowledge as a cognitive relation of knower and known — something that Plotinus later will locate at the level of the Nous, but which the superior One transcends: thence, only mystical, non-dualistic knowledge is possible in the case of the One, as Plotinus emphasises[57] — but a mystical knowledge, which is not dichotomous (in the knower-known divide), but unitive[58]. Within such a framework, it will not come as a surprise that, like Plutarch and later Clement[59], Philo characterised the instruction in the "Mosaic philosophy" as an initiation into the mysteries[60]. In *Cher.* 42–48 Philo speaks of the knowledge of God in terms of piety and adopts mystery terminology — just as Clement and Origen will do when speaking of theology as "epoptics"[61].

Indeed, expounding the division of philosophy into ethics, physics, epoptics, and (optionally) logic — the Stoic tripartition plus *epoptica* — Origen posits epoptics as the crowning of philosophy: now, epoptics is theology (*de divinis et caelestibus*)[62], which he thus deems part and parcel of philosophy, insisting that theology cannot be studied without philosophical bases (Comm. Cant. prol. 3.1–3). Porphyry too divided Plotinus' Enneads into

[57]See Ramelli, 2014d.

[58]See also Afterman, 2013 on direct mystical vision of God and union with God.

[59]For Clement see Ramelli, 2016d; Ramelli, 2018c; for Plutarch, see Is. 68.378B: "We must take the *logos* that comes from philosophy as a mystagogue". A comparison between Philo's and Plutarch's theology is offered in Brenk, 2014.

[60]See on Philo Riedweg, 1987; N. Cohen, 2004: 173–188. Philo was highly critical of "pagan" mysteries per se, as is clear from Spec. 1.319–323. See Nuffelen, 2011: 201–205.

[61]Clement, Strom. 1.176.3; 1.15.2; 5.66.1–4; Div. 37. See Ramelli, 2015b.

[62]According to Theon of Smyrna, epoptics for Plato was metaphysics, the study of the Ideas (Exp. mathem. 15.16–18 Hiller). According to Plutarch, Is. 77.382DE, for Plato and Aristotle epoptics studied "what is first, simple, and immaterial".

ethics (1), physics (2–3), and epoptics (4–6) — without logic. Indeed, according to Plotinus, too, philosophy included the investigation of the divine and the divine realm, which was metaphysics at its highest level. Aristotle himself treated theology as a synonym of metaphysics, as opposed to physics: "Three are the theoretical branches of philosophy: mathematics, physics, and theology (μαθηματική, φυσική, θεολογική)" (Aristotle, Metaph. 1026a18). Thus, Plotinus' discourse on the One is both protological (taking the One as first principle) and theological (taking the One as supreme deity), but theological theory — theology — can only be attempted, suggestive, and hinted at[63].

The association between theology and mysteries is well attested, as I mentioned, already in Philo. In Cher. 42 he claims to teach as a hierophant "the divine mysteries" (τελετὰς θείας) only to those initiates (μύστας) who are worthy of the most sacred mysteries (τελετῶν τῶν ἱεροτάτων), who are also identified as those who practice the true piety (εὐσέβειαν). Here, we see again the virtue of piety as central to the knowledge of God. Philo can present himself as a hierophant who initiates others because he in turn has been initiated into Moses' "great mysteries" (μεγάλα μυστήρια, Cher. 49 — a terminology that Clement will abundantly deploy), which enabled him to reach "the knowledge of the Cause and of virtue" (Cher. 48).

In this way, Philo keeps to what I have called the dialectics of apophatic theology: he speaks of the knowledge of God, the Cause, but at the same time he warns that this knowledge is a mystery. Remindful of Philo, Clement Strom. 2.6.1 will cast Moses' entrance into the darkness on Mount Sinai as a journey towards the intelligible realities, the Tabernacle containing (Middle Platonically) the paradigms of the cosmos with all existing beings, to which only Christ-Logos grants access as to "the great mysteries" (Strom. 2.134.2)[64]. Elsewhere too, indeed, Philo pointed out that the Temple is the cosmos itself[65], and his identification of the soul with the Temple as God's house (Cher. 99–100) was developed by Origen's spiritual reading of the Temple as composed by rational souls. This is why in Comm. Jo. 6.1.1-2, identifying the precious stones that make up the Temple with rational creatures, Origen called the temple a "rational building"[66]. Origen, indeed, conflates the Temple

[63]See Ramelli, 2014d.

[64]See Kovacs, 1997; for the reception in Gregory of Nyssa see Artemi, 2015, and especially Conway-Jones, 2014 and review Ramelli, 2017a. See also Carabine, 1995; Alesso, 2013.

[65]Spec. 1.66–67; Somn. 2.248–251.

[66]See also H. Luc. 20: "I suspect that it is the Christian full of faith, and not the construction built by earthly labour as a type, to be the rational Temple of God, the living and true Temple".

as Christ's body (Cels. 8.20: a *logikon* is "a precious stone of God's whole temple") with Revelations' City of God of precious stones (C. Rom. 8.8.10).

## EXEGETICAL SUPPORT TO APOPHATICISM

Philo's theory of the knowledge of God, essentially resulting in apophatic and mystical theology, is grounded not only in Platonic categories of thought, but also in his Biblical exegesis — which, as I pointed out above, was performed through a Platonic lens. Philo read some scriptural passages (such as Ex. 20:21 and Ex. 33:20–23, examined below) as expressing allegorically that an apophatic approach to theology is indispensable. Through this kind of exegesis, he intended to raise the awareness of the limits of the cognitive discursive-expressive power of embodied human beings with respect to the divinity in itself, i. e. the divine nature or essence (φύσις, οὐσία) as distinct from the divine powers and activities (δυνάμεις, ἐνέργειαι) and their products.

This clearly presupposed a transcendent notion of the divinity, which squares with Platonism, but, as anticipated above[67], not with an immanentistic system such as Stoicism (the latter influenced Philo as well, but more on the ethical than the ontological plane, and Philo tended to subordinate Stoicism to Platonism[68] ). But Philo aimed at showing that this theory is what emerges from Scripture itself and is ferreted out through meticulous and consistent exegetical efforts.

The allegorical expressions of the necessity of apophatic theology according to Philo appear precisely in passages which can be compared[69] with the parallel interpretations of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. This means that there was a strong continuity in this respect between Philo, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, and that the very tenets of apophaticism — just like other philosophical and theological doctrines — were conveyed precisely through scriptural exegesis.

Indeed, it is through Biblical exegesis that Philo himself came up with, and posited his main tenet of the strategy of differentiation: namely, the immensely influential principle that the divinity is unknowable in its essence (οὐσία), and therefore also ineffable (*Mut.* 11–13[70]), but knowable through its activity. Consistently, in *Spec.* 1.32 Philo gives up determining "what is

[67]In the section "Philo's Theology between Platonism and the Bible, and What Will be Argued".

[68]This subordinating tendency is rightly noted in Bonazzi, 2008.

[69]See Ramelli, 2008a.

[70]See Runia, 1988.

God's essence" or οὐσία[71]. For "What Is cannot be grasped *from itself* alone, without anything else, but *only through its works*, either qua creator or qua ruler" (μὴ δύνηται τὸ ὄν ἄνευ ἑτέρου τινὸς ἐξ αὐτοῦ μόνου καταλαβεῖν, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῶν δρωμένων ἢ κτίζον ἢ ἄρχον, Abr. 122). These works are the *energeiai* or activities or operations of God, descending from God's *dynameis* or powers. The Divinity in itself, in its very nature, is "ineffable, unintelligible, impossible to grasp" (Mut. 10; 15). Even the epithets that Scripture attaches to God do not describe God's very essence (οὐσία), that is, God's true nature or φύσις, but they rather indicate God's relationship to the creation. This is why Philo insists that what human beings — at least in their embodied existence on earth — can know about God is *that* God *is*, as Ex. 3:14 reveals ("I am the One who Is"), but not *what* God is (Mos. 1.75). Indeed, in the large fragment *De Deo* or (using the title attributed to this text by Abraham Terian) *De visione trium angelorum ad Abraham*, 4, Philo warns that even "'Existent' is not God's personal and proper name, since God is unnamable and ineffable, being also inapprehensible"[72].

Human intellective faculties cannot grasp God's essence due to God's transcendence; however, the revelation of God in Scripture represents an important factor that moderates apophatic theology for Philo (Leg. 3.100), just as later for Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Evagrius. The gnoseological help available from Scripture, however, is subject to precise hermeneutical rules in Philo's view. Allegoresis, in the sense of the allegorical exegesis of a sacred, authoritative text — in the case of Philo and his patristic Platonic followers, that of Scripture, but in the case of "pagan" Neoplatonists, for instance, poetry and various forms of traditional myths and rituals[73] — is the key to comprehending the true meaning of the Bible. Now such a key was available to few, those who mastered this philosophical tool. This will also be the case from the viewpoint of Clement and, to some extent, Origen and Evagrius, but also "pagan" Middle Platonists and Neoplatonists who applied philosophical allegoresis to Homer and other traditional, authoritative texts, just as the Stoics had done before them[74]. Philosophy is therefore the key to the knowledge of God, which in its highest form becomes mystical. Origen

[71] See also Spec. 1.43; Deus 62; Post. 15.

[72] Trans. Terian with slight modifications. I adopt Abraham Terian's title of this work by Philo, which he studies and translates in Terian, 2016.

[73] See Ramelli, 2014e.

[74] See, e. g., Ramelli, 2019g.

based his allegorical exegesis of Scripture on Philo, who inspired it deeply[75], on Paul, who is the main Scriptural authority that Origen cites in support of Biblical allegorical exegesis (Ramelli, 2018e), and on Stoic allegorists such as Cornutus and Chaeremon[76].

Philo bases his apophatic theology on Ex. 20:21, like Clement, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa after him. This is the episode in which Moses enters the darkness in which God is: "Now the people were standing at a distance, but Moyses went into the darkness (σκότος) where God was" (NETS). Philo and his followers read this darkness as an allegory of God's unknowability[77]. Darkness is a metaphor of human cognitive limits before the divine and, as I mentioned above when speaking of Philo's allegory of the setting of human rational faculty, at the same time is divine light, which is too strong for human faculties and thereby humans see it as darkness. It is a metaphor of apophatic theology, that is to say, the awareness that the human *logos* (word and thought) cannot grasp and express the divinity, whose transcendence is allegorised as a light that is so bright as to blind human (intellectual) eyes. Not even the wise can see God (Abr. 79–80). Jacob struggles to see God — the meaning of "Israel"[78]: so, Israel is whoever sees God. Of course, it all depends on how this seeing or knowing God is conceived. What Israel certainly sees is *that* God exists; *what* God is, is often deemed precluded to humans here by Philo[79].

In the foundational Biblical text for apophatic theology, Ex. 33:20–23, God states that Moses will not be allowed to see God's face, but he will only be able to see God's back: "You shall not be able to see my face. For a person shall never see my face and live [...] You shall stand on the rock. Now, whenever my glory passes by, then I will put you in a hole of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I pass by. And I will take my hand away, and then you shall see my hind parts, but my face will not appear to you". Philo interprets v. 23 about seeing only the "back" of God, but not God's face, as expressing allegorically that only what is "behind" God, "at his back", "after" God — including his operations and works — is knowable

[75]See esp. the above-mentioned Ramelli, 2012b, reviewed in Runia et al., 2014: 220; received by Kovacs, 2016: 23; Platova, 2016: 50; by Rogers, 2017: 10.

[76]So Porphyry, in a fragment quoted by Eusebius (C.Chr. F39), analysed in Ramelli, 2009b. There are also traces of Stoic allegoresis in Origen, which I documented in Ramelli, 2006; Ramelli, 2011f and further in a book on Origen in preparation, the chapter on exegesis.

[77]Philo Post. 14; Mut. 7.

[78]See Birnbaum, 1996.

[79]On the gnoseological use of the figures of Abraham and Jacob see Bittrich, 2013.

to humans on earth: "God says: 'You will see my back parts (τὰ ὀπίσω), but my face (τὸ πρόσωπον) you will not behold'. For it is sufficient for the wise man to know what comes after and follows (τὰ ἀκόλουθα καὶ ἑπόμενα), and the things which are after God (ὅσα μετὰ τὸν θεόν); but whoever wishes to see the principal Essence / Being (τὴν δ' ἡγεμονικὴν οὐσίαν) will be blinded by the exceeding brilliancy of its rays before he can see it" (Fug. 165). Here we find again at work the metaphor of the divine light that blinds and therefore manifests itself as darkness to human impaired intellectual sight.

The visual metaphor of blindness caused by the excessive brightness of the divine essence was indeed typical of Philo (Bradshaw, 1998). Gregory of Nyssa was later inspired by Philo in his exegesis of this scriptural passage with reference to apophatic theology (as well as in what I would call his "theology of silence"[80]), although, as I suggested elsewhere,[81] he seems to have read Philo's words through the filter of Origen (there can be scarce doubt that Gregory had direct access to Philo's works, but his reception of specific exegetical points and themes are clearly shaped by Origen's exegesis). The difference between Philo and Origen in this particular exegesis is that Origen seems to introduce an eschatological nuance in the interpretation of τὰ ὀπίσω that is absent in Philo. This is indeed a more general element of disagreement between Philo and Origen, as I shall point out in the final section of this essay: Origen's thought is strongly eschatologically oriented, whereas Philo's eschatology is very elusive[82].

Philo states in a different context that when the mind becomes pure and monadic, then it can "see God" or know God (Mos. 2.288), just as Israel is the "seer of God". The issue here is whether this "seeing God" may mean seeing or knowing the very essence of the Divinity. Even in Abr. 121–122, what is described are the powers or *dynameis* of God, God's relation to creation[83] and the number of God one or three (something of course very suggestive for later Christian Trinitarian theologians), rather than the very essence of God: "The one in the middle is the Father of the universe, who in the sacred Scriptures is called by his proper name, 'I am that I am'; and the beings on each side are those *most ancient powers* which are always close to the living God, one of which is called his *creative power*, and the other his

[80] Argument in Ramelli, 2012c, received in Iozzia, 2015: 106.

[81] In "Philosophical Allegoresis".

[82] This is to some extent a characteristic of contemporary Judaism, as delineated in Klawans, 2012.

[83] See my Ramelli, 2017b.

*royal power*. And the creative power is God, for it is by this that he made and arranged the universe; and the royal power is the Lord, for it is fitting that the Creator should lord it over and govern the creature. Therefore, the *middle person* of the three, being *attended by each of his powers* as by body-guards, presents to the mind, which is endowed with the faculty of sight, a vision at one time of *one being*, and at another time *of three*; of one when the soul being completely purified, and having surmounted not only the multitudes of numbers, but also the number two, which is the neighbour of the unit, hastens onward to that idea which is devoid of all mixture, free from all combination, and by itself in need of nothing else whatever; and of three, when, not being as yet made perfect as to the important virtues, it is still seeking for initiation in those of less consequence, and is not able to attain to a comprehension of the living God by its own unassisted faculties without the aid of something else, but can only do so by judging of his deeds, whether as creator or as governor..."

Through allegoresis, Philo refers to Ex. 33:20–23 to God's unknowability also in Spec. 1.32.50. Philo's exegesis, which was followed rather closely by Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, is that God's existence is easy to apprehend, but God's essence or nature is impossible to grasp. However, as we have seen, Philo insists that the search for God — and therefore the whole theological endeavour — is the noblest of all human activities. As a consequence, the unknowability of God's essence should not discourage human "theo-logical" investigation.

Indeed, as I have examined in the course of this analysis, Philo, like later Platonist philosophers-theologians such as Clement, Origen, Plotinus, and Gregory of Nyssa, reveals a tension between the apophatic theology that he professes (with its claim that the Divinity cannot be known in its essence or expressed by humans because of its transcendence) and the θεο-λογία or theory / discourse about the divine that he does not renounce pursuing—and even recommending as the highest human activity. In order to develop his theory / discourse about the divine notwithstanding its unknowability, Philo, like the above-mentioned Platonists, "pagans" and especially Christians, pursued what I have called a strategy of differentiation. He thereby posited that, while the Divinity's very nature or essence is inaccessible, it manifests itself in its powers and operations and their effects.

## the role of platonism, the question of philo's eschatology, and its relation to apophaticism through the restoration to god

Philo's above-mentioned conviction that the divine in its essence cannot be grasped by the minds of human beings is similar to that of Plotinus, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and other philosophers-theologians who shared the same philosophical tradition (Platonism), notwithstanding their different religious affiliations (Jewish, "pagan", or Christian). In this framework, Platonism seems to have played a remarkable role, since the Platonic category of transcendence applied to God — as opposed to immanentistic systems such as Stoicism — helps to explain the largely homogeneous nature of their reflections on God as unknowable to human minds qua object in a subject-object cognitive relation, but an object which can nevertheless be experienced in a meta-intellectual way (what we might call mystical knowledge, as I have shown above in the case of Philo). Plotinus opposed dualistic intellectual knowledge, imprisoned in the knower-known dualism, to mystical "knowledge", which allows one to "touch" the One (God), while one cannot "see" it either with the eyes of the body or with those of the soul. But God simply becomes "present" (a notion that is central to Philo's theology as well (Leonhardt-Balzer, 2014)). This is a way of hinting at what is impossible to comprehend or express[84].

Unlike Plotinus, and like Christian Platonists such as Clement, Origen, Gregory, and Evagrius after him, Philo admitted that a mitigation of apophaticism, or at least a mediation, can come from the revelation of God in Scripture — and I have already noted that this revelation is however to be attained through an essentially Platonic allegorical reading, which once again brings Biblical exegesis into the realm of Platonism. Moreover, Scripture itself, according to Philo (as well as to Origen), as I have shown in the previous paragraph, manifests the necessity for apophatic theology.

But for the Christian Platonists, in so many other respects the heirs of Philo, apophaticism and mysticism also have an eschatological dimension, as an anticipation of the final restoration (ἀποκατάστασις) and deification (θέωσις)[85]. This dimension would seem to be lacking in Philo, who appears to have entertained a rather elusive view of the end. Even *De praemiis*,

[84]On Plotinus' "mystical" knowledge of God see Ramelli, 2014d and Ramelli, 2018c.

[85]See Ramelli, 2013), with the reviews Meredith, 2014; Edwards, 2014; Oort, 2014; Wet, 2015; Nemes, 2015; Karamanolis, 2016; Parry, 2016. The concept of θέωσις in Origen is addressed in the work on Origen in preparation.

as Thomas Tobin has observed, is striking for "its corporate, this-worldly aspects of eschatology" (Tobin, 2016: 352).

Moreover, Philo's eschatology is fraught with incertitude in several respects, and specifically concerning the doctrine of metensomatosis and its relation to annihilationism. Indeed, if Philo adopted, at least as an esoteric and unsystematic doctrine, the theory of metensomatosis — to which he seems to allude in at least three passages (Somn. 1.139; Cher. 114; QE 2.40, besides fr. 7.3 Harris)[86] — this would square well with a view that does not contemplate the end of the world, and with the doctrine of the preexistence of souls. This, at least, is precisely the charge that later readers levelled against Philo. In Codex Monacensis Graecus 459, containing works by Philo, on page 1, at the bottom of the page, a scholium notes that Philo supported "three doctrines opposed to the church": "matter without beginning, preexistence of souls, and stars and air regarded as alive"[87]. In particular the preexistence of disembodied souls was the necessary premise for the doctrine of metensomatosis — this is also why Origen, as I argue, rejected the preexistence of disembodied souls (Ramelli, 2018d), just like (as we shall see in the next paragraph) that of metensomatosis. In the same manuscript, a passage from De somniis, 1.137–139, concerning the preexistence of souls and metensomatosis is lacking, probably by an act of censorship. Metensomatosis, however, is not explicitly singled out here as a doctrine typical of Philo: only its premise is.

That metensomatosis implied the rejection of the end of the world — which Origen regarded as a Biblical doctrine — was pointed out by Origen himself, who refused to support this theory exactly for this reason (probably being aware that Philo hinted at it, at any rate, without explicit condemnation: but Origen condemned metensomatosis explicitly on the basis of Scripture, the same Scripture that Philo also knew, apart from what became the New Testament). The end of the world — an expression repeatedly found in the Bible — as the reason for the rejection of metensomatosis is stressed by Origen more than once: "If indeed, according to the authority of Scripture, the end of the world will come soon (*consummatio immineat mundi*) and the present corruptible state will change into an incorruptible one, there seems

[86]See Yli-Karjanmaa, 2015, taking the cue from David Winston, who deemed it likely that Philo accepted some cycles of metensomatosis according to the deserts of each soul (Winston, 1985: 34–42; Yli-Karjanmaa, 2015: 19). See the review Sterling, 2019. Possibly Josephus, too, alludes to metensomatosis: see Yli-Karjanmaa, 2017.

[87]See Runia, 2016a: 262.

to be no doubt that in the state of the present life it is impossible to return to a body for a second or third time. For, if one admits this, it will necessarily follow that, given the infinite successions of these passages, the world will have no end (*finem nesciat mundus*)" (Comm. Cant. 2.5.24). Likewise, in a surely authentic work preserved in Greek, Origen states: "Those who are alien to the Catholic faith think that souls migrate from human bodies into bodies of animals [...] On the contrary, we maintain that human wisdom, if it becomes uncultivated and neglected due to much carelessness in life, becomes like an irrational animal (*efficitur uelut irrationabile pecus*) due to incompetence or neglectfulness, but not by nature (*per imperitiam uel per neglegentiam, non per naturam*)" (C. Matth. 11.17 and Apol. 180). Likewise, "The doctrine of the transmigration of souls (*de transmutatione animarum*) is alien to the Church of God, since it neither has been transmitted by the apostles nor is supported in any place in Scriptures [...] the transmigration of souls will be absolutely useless if there is no end to correction, nor will ever come a time when the soul will no longer pass into new bodies. But if souls, due to their sins, must always return into ever new, different bodies, what end will there ever come to the world (*qui umquam mundo dabitur finis*)?" (C.Matth. 13.1–2; Pamph. Apol. 182–183). And even in the more ancient Commentary on John, to which we shall return below, the same argument appears: "If one supports metensomatosis, as a consequence one will have to maintain the incorruptibility of the world" (Comm. Io. 6.86). But this contradicts Scripture, at least on Origen's reading if not on that of Philo, possibly also because Origen, unlike Philo, included the "New Testament" and specifically the Apocalypse of John in Scripture as inspired[88]. Therefore, Origen explicitly rejects metensomatosis in many passages[89].

Philo, unlike his patristic followers, is far removed from an eschatological orientation, as well as from universalism, as I have thoroughly argued elsewhere[90]. I refer the readers to that treatment for a complete analysis of the sources and a thorough assessment. Here I will point out only the most important aspects. Philo's concept of *apokatastasis* revolves around the restoration of the individual soul and the restoration of Israel[91].

[88]See, e. g., Ramelli, 2011c.

[89]E. g. Comm. Matt. 10.20; 13.1. For his Commentary on John 6.7; 85 and 2.186, see below. Further passages in which Origen rejects metensomatosis in Tzamalikos, 2007: 48–53.

[90]Ramelli, 2014b; reviewed by Oort, 2015.

[91]The texts by Philo that support the idea of restoration are thoroughly analysed in Ramelli, 2014b. On the restoration of Israel see Ramelli, 2013: 1–221; Elledge, 2013: 104–107; also Simkovich, 2017, who emphasises that Jewish universalism in the time of Jesus and early

Unlike the Stoics, who emphasised the astronomico-cosmological meaning of ἀποκατάστασις, Philo took up mainly the medical meaning of the term, related to the notion of the illness of the soul and its recovery, within the framework of his focus on spiritual pedagogy or psychagogy: the guidance of souls toward God through the Logos[92], who performs an action of spiritual illumination (something that Origen will take over in his own doctrine of apokatastasis). This is a mystical work as a spiritual pedagogue and exemplar at the same time (Winston, 1985: 15–18; 43–58), as made clear especially in Sacr. 8 and Conf. 145–147. In the former passage, Philo remarks that, "by the same Logos with which God has made the universe, God also elevates the perfect person from earthly things up (ἀνάγει) to Himself"[93]. The noun ἀποκατάστασις, which in the LXX is unattested (whereas ἀποκαθίστημι / ἀποκαθιστάνω is often attested therein), is used by Philo at Her. 293, where it is applied to the restoration of the soul to perfection, through its restoration to health or recovery. In Her. 293 he interprets Gen. 15:16 according to the Septuagint's text: "at the fourth generation they will return here" (τετάρτῃ δὲ γενεᾷ ἀποστραφήσονται ὧδε). He reads this verse allegorically: this return was mentioned "not only in order to point to the time in which they will inhabit the Holy Land, but also to indicate the perfect *restoration of the soul* (ὑπὲρ τοῦ τελείαν ἀποκατάστασιν ψυχῆς)". In this way, Philo joins the concept of the restoration of Israel — on which more below — to that of the restoration of the soul. The perfect restoration of the soul is its restoration to its original perfection, when it was untainted by sins (an idea that both Origen and Gregory of Nyssa will stress)[94].

As Philo explains in sections 293–299, at the beginning the soul is like a wax tablet without marks, but soon it begins to acquire evils (κακά), sins (ἁμαρτήματα), and passions (πάθη). Here Philo cites Gen. 8:21 in support of his argument: "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (RSV). The superimposition of πάθη, that is, evil passions — Philo uses Stoic terminology[95] — onto the soul demands the therapeutic action of philosophy (ἰατρικὴ φιλοσοφία), which consists in *logoi* (arguments, reasoning) that bring

Christianity did not require that the nations be naturalised into the Israelite covenant; they will rather actively worship God and participate in the Israelite cult. She rightly includes Philo within this universalistic trend (Simkovich, 2017: 139–144; Fredriksen, 2018).

[92]This emphasis on spiritual pedagogy is singled out by Paul Blowers as one of the most characteristic features of Philo's thought (Blowers, 2012: 47).

[93]On this passage see Cox, 2007: 87–94.

[94]Documentation on the chapter devoted to them in Ramelli, 2013.

[95]On Stoic *pathe, eupatheiai* and *propatheiai* see Graver, 2007; Ramelli, Konstan, 2010.

about health and salvation (λόγοις ὑγιεινοῖς καὶ σωτηρίοις). As a result of the action of philosophy, vigour and strength grow in the soul, and the latter will therefore remain stable "in all virtues". This is Philo's account of the apokatastasis of the soul, when it turns away from sin (ἀποστραφεῖσα τοῦ διαμαρτάνειν) and recovers its original purity and "inherits wisdom" (κληρονόμος ἀποδείκνυται σοφίας). The apokatastasis of the soul is also described by Philo as a restoration of the soul to health (ὑγίεια) after it has repudiated evil (ἀποστρεφόμενοι τὰ φαῦλα). The concept of ἀποκατάστασις as the restoration of the soul, also implying its attainment of perfection and beatitude, will impact Clement of Alexandria[96], who was very well acquainted with Philo, and Origen, who was also profoundly familiar with Philo's ideas and elaborated the most complete and consistent conception of the *apokatastasis* of souls, or better of rational creatures[97].

Another notion in Philo is closely related to the concept of *apokatastasis* of the soul understood as a return of the soul to its proper health: the above-mentioned theory of the death of the rational soul, as a parallel to that of the body[98]. This motif is found not only in Philo (e. g. Det. 47–51; Post. 39; Congr. 54–57: see below), but in early imperial philosophy as well, in the New Testament[99], and later in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, who both were thoroughly acquainted with Philo's thinking. John Conroy in a recent essay views Philo's notion of the death of the soul as ontological and not just metaphorical[100], though he does not take into account the close parallels that are to be found in ancient philosophy, especially Roman Stoicism, and the New Testament (Paul and the Pastoral Epistles, but also Luke), as well as in Origen, who after Philo probably made the most of the notions of the illness and death of the soul[101].

Although in Aet. 5 Philo sets forth, or reports, the principle that "just as nothing comes into existence from nothing (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος), so nothing perishes / is destroyed (φθείρεσθαι) so to be reduced to non-being (εἰς τὸ

[96]See Ramelli, 2012d.

[97]Besides the chapter devoted to him in Ramelli, 2013, new arguments in a work on Origen in preparation, Ch. 6.

[98]See Zeller, 1995.

[99]Wasserman, 2008; Ramelli, 2010; Ramelli, 2011d. On the issue of the death of the soul underlying Luke 22:45 see Ramelli, 2011g.

[100]Conroy, 2011, who insists on the specific notion of the death of the *rational* soul in Philo, with the corollary that impious and vicious people descend to the level of animals, having only their vital soul left but only their rational soul. This idea was later developed by Origen, who, however, denied the ontological death of the soul and any annihilationistic theory.

[101]These parallels are pointed out in my articles indicated two notes before.

μὴ ὄν)"[102] (a principle to which we shall return towards the end of the essay), he may have postulated a substantial death of the rational soul, when the soul dies because it adheres to vice rather than virtue, and especially rejects piety, which makes it immortal (QG 1.10; Opif. 154). This means that the soul without piety becomes mortal. The impious are "really dead in their souls" ((ὄντως [...] τὰς ψυχὰς τεθνᾶσι, *Spec.* 1.345); this is "the real death" (Leg. 1.105–108), of which Origen was obviously remindful when describing the death of the soul in his *Dialogue with Heraclides* as "the real death" (ὁ ὄντως θάνατος): Origen, however, did not accept the ontological death of the soul, and in his view, the real death will be overcome in the restoration). After the death of the body, neither does the soul exist any longer, because with the rejection of virtue it has gravitated to matter rather than to the Logos of immortality (QG 3.1). This is consistent with Philo's statement in Spec. 4.187 that God's creation consists in bringing non-being into existence, essentially by means of an ordering action: "God called into existence what did not exist (τὰ μὴ ὄντα) by bestowing order (τάξιν) out of disorder (ἐξ ἀταξίας) [...] union and harmony from what was dispersed and discordant". Therefore, if one chooses evil, which is non-being, disorder, and conflict, one necessarily regresses into non-being, and therefore becomes non-existent. This is essentially the death of the soul according to Philo. He often uses θάνατος and related terms to indicate spiritual death, that is, the death of the soul brought about by sin.

In Leg. 2.77–78 Philo draws a distinction between the death of the body and that of the soul. Pleasures bring about death (ἡδοναῖς [...] θάνατον ἐπαγούσαις), not physical death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, but the death of the soul, i. e. the destruction of the soul by sin / evil (ὑπὸ κακίας φθοράν). In this connection, Philo interprets Num. 21:6 allegorically and interprets the "death-giving serpents" therein as immoderate passions: "For really there is nothing that brings about death to the soul so much as immoderate passions" (ὄντως γὰρ οὐδὲν οὕτως θάνατον ἐπάγει ψυχῇ, ὡς ἀμετρία τῶν ἡδονῶν). Philo remarks: "The true Hades—that is to say, the true death—is the life of the wicked man" (Congr. 57). A life led in vice is tantamount to death. Consistently, in Fug. 58 he describes virtuous life as a good (ἀγαθόν) and death produced by wickedness (κακία) as evil (κακόν). Philo is commenting on Deut. 30:15: "I have set before your face

[102]Blowers, 2012: 59 takes this principle as endorsed by Philo himself; those critics who attribute to Philo a doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* or a theory close to that do not think, consistently, that the principle at stake was subscribed by Philo himself.

life and death (τὴν ζωὴν καὶ τὸν θάνατον), good and evil (τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ κακόν)". Philo identifies life with the good and virtue (τὸ μὲν ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἡ ἀρετή ἐστιν ἡ ζωή) and death with evil and vice (τὸ δὲ κακὸν καὶ ἡ κακία ὁ θάνατος). In Deut. 30:20, "This is your life and length of days: to love the Lord your God", Philo identifies life with virtue, in this case the love of God, as per the Biblical verse at stake: "The most beautiful definition of immortal life is this: to be taken by unfleshly and incorporeal passion and love of God" (ὅρος ἀθανάτου βίου κάλλιστος οὗτος, ἔρωτι καὶ φιλίᾳ θεοῦ ἀσάρκῳ καὶ ἀσωμάτῳ κατεσχῆσθαι).

Philo also theorises the restoration of Israel[103], without using the lexicon of apokatastasis here, but only the concept. In Praem. 162–172 he is speaking of those Jews who have adopted polytheism, forgetting their ancestral faith in the One and supreme God. If these people "change their ways" and purify their souls and minds, then God, who is the merciful Saviour, will forgive them. For the relationship of human beings to God's Logos is a work of God: the human mind was formed after God's Logos, which is its archetype (§163). At §164 Philo goes on to foresee the restoration of all these Israelites to freedom through virtue, after their enslavement to vice: "although they may be at the very extremities of the earth, acting as slaves to those enemies who have led them away in captivity, still they shall all be restored to freedom (ἐλευθερωθήσονται) in one day, as at a given signal; their sudden and universal change to virtue causing panic among their masters; for they will let them go because they are ashamed to govern those who are better than themselves" (Philo, Yonge, 1995). The notion of restoration is explicit in the translation, but not in the text, which literally reads: "they will all be liberated". This is a reminiscence of the liberation of the Jews from captivity in Egypt, which Philo allegorized as vice. Here, however, this new liberation configures itself as a gathering of Israelites from all places and is explicitly identified by Philo with their salvation (§165): "But when they have received this unexpected liberty, those who but a short time before were scattered about in Greece, and in the countries of the barbarians, in the islands, and over the continents, rising up with one impulse, and coming from all the different quarters imaginable, all hasten to one place pointed out to them, being guided on their way by some vision, more divine than is compatible with its being of the nature of humanity, invisible indeed to everyone else, but apparent only to those who were saved, having their separate inducements and intercessions, by

[103]On Philo's eschatological expectations about Israel see Runia, 2013: 36–38.

whose intervention they might obtain a reconciliation with the Father". This restoration, Philo explains, will be made possible by the merciful nature of God and by the intercessory prayers of the holy founders of the nation of Israel. The gathering and restoration of the Israelites will result in an enormous prosperity of the Land of Israel: "And when they come, cities will be rebuilt which but a short time ago were in complete ruins, and the desert will be filled with inhabitants, and the barren land will change and become fertile, and the good fortune of their fathers and ancestors will be looked upon as a matter of but small importance, on account of the abundance of wealth of all kinds which they will have at the present moment" (§168). When in 169–170 Philo warns the enemies of Israel that God has permitted them to take hold of Israel only "for the sake of giving an admonition" to the Israelites who "had forsaken their national and hereditary customs", Philo's words are impressively similar to Paul's, when he warns the nations that God has hardened Israel only for a while, for the sake of their own salvation, but will finally restore Israel, so that, once "the totality (πλήρωμα)[104] of the nations has entered", then "all (πᾶς) of Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:23–26). For, "if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! [...] If their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" (Rom. 11:12, 15). Though, while Paul, here and elsewhere, impresses a universalistic tone to his eschatological soteriology, this is not the case with Philo. At any rate, the parallels look impressive, and even include the simile of the tree that is cut away but can revive again, which is the same in both Philo and Paul. Philo has in Praem. 172: "For as, when the trunk of a tree is cut down, if the roots are not taken away, new shoots spring up, by which the old trunk is again restored to life as it were; in the very same manner, if there be only left in the soul ever so small a seed of virtue, when everything else is destroyed, still, nevertheless, from that little seed there spring up the most honourable and beautiful qualities among humans; by means of which, cities, which were formerly populous and flourishing, are again inhabited, and nations are led to become wealthy and powerful". Paul likewise speaks

[104]Πλήρωμα in the LXX means "totality", and not simply "fullness", e. g., Ps. 23:1, where it corresponds to πάντες; 49:12; 88:12; 95:11, where it corresponds to πάντα; 97:7; Jer. 8:16; 29:2; Ezek. 12:19, where it corresponds again to πάντες; 19:7; 30:12.

of the trunk from which some of the Jews have been broken off, but God will graft them in again (Rom. 11:16–24)[105].

According to Paul, the restoration of Israel will take place at the end of times and will follow the salvation of all nations. As for Philo, it is doubtful how eschatological and universal the restoration of Israel described by him is, and whether it applies to Israel ethnically understood or to philosophical souls, who actually make up Israel in Philo's view[106]. This motif of the restoration of Israel interestingly also appears, with overtly eschatological and ethnic overtones, in some so-called intertestamentary literature, broadly contemporary to Philo, and later in Origen, according to whom the restoration of Israel is eschatological and refers to all Jews, who will be all restored and saved eventually, as all gentiles will[107].

Philo's theory of apokatastasis seems to bear scarce or no relation to the doctrine of the eventual universal salvation, nor to the resurrection of the body, whereas Origen's doctrine of apokatastasis (and that of many other patristic supporters of universal restoration) implies both the resurrection of the body and the absolute universality of such restoration and salvation[108]. In spite of these divergencies, Philo must be credited all the same with being one of the main inspirers of Origen's doctrine of *apokatastasis* as well as, more generally, his exegesis and theology.

Indeed, both Clement of Alexandria and Origen, as well as later Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrius, were certainly influenced by Philo's idea of the restoration of the soul, as well as of the restoration of Israel (which they viewed against the general picture of universal restoration), although with remarkable differences too. One such difference concerns the resurrection of the body, which Philo denied but which Origen and his followers maintained as constitutive of the restoration, conceiving it essentially as a "spiritualisation" of the body — this will be crystal clear in Evagrius, who will posit the subsumption of body into soul and soul into intellect, and a resurrection of the body, the soul, and the intellect[109].

[105]For a comparison between Philo's and Paul's soteriology and eschatology see Ramelli, 2019f

[106]In Leg. 2.9.34, too, when he mentions the offspring of Israel, from the context he seems to mean the philosophical soul: "God will not permit the offspring of the seeing Israel to be changed in such a manner as to be stricken down by the change, but will compel it to emerge and rise again like one who rises from the deep, and so will cause it to be saved".

[107]As examined in the section on Origen in Ramelli, 2013.

[108]See ibid.: 137–215.

[109]KG 5.19, 5.22, 5.25 which I commented on in Ramelli, 2015a, received, for instance, in Costache, 2016: 115–118 and Corrigan, 2018. Further arguments in Ramelli, 2014a.

The resurrection-restoration, in Origen's view, will undo both the death of the body and the death of the soul. For the life of the soul, according to both Philo and Origen, is virtue, and the death of the soul is vice, evil, and detachment from God-the Good. Philo, in particular, spoke of the death of the soul as dying to the life of virtue (Leg. 1.105–107). This should by no means compromise theodicy, since God "created (ἐδημιούργησεν) no soul barren of good" (Leg. 1.34) and the choice for the adhesion to, or detachment from, the Good depends on the individual soul — exactly as Origen will maintain, also in an effort to defend theodicy[110].

That virtue is the life of the soul is a tenet shared also by a disciple of both Plotinus and Origen, Porphyry, whose acquaintance with Philo's ideas would be very interesting to investigate (when he accused Origen of being the first to apply Greek allegoresis to Scripture, he was obviously bypassing Philo, as Celsus had already done, but this will most probably be, not out of ignorance, but for the sake of polemic[111]). He posits two kinds of death, the death of the body and philosophical death to the body, that is, detachment from the body — which is good and which Origen classified as a good kind of death, namely death to sin — in order for one to live a life of virtue[112]. Exactly like Origen in his *Dialogue with Heraclides*, Porphyry takes soul to admit of death as well, since passions leading to vices are non-life (Sent. 23), but the soul is "the essence / being / substance whose existence is life" (ἡ οὐσία ἧς ἐν ζωῇ τὸ εἶναι, Sent. 21), as Origen also maintained. This is why according to Origen, too, there cannot be substantial / essential death of the soul, *substantialis interitus*[113]. Therefore, the death of the soul is not ontological, but moral: for Porphyry, too, it is passions that lead to the death of the soul — a point on which Philo agreed (but he did not agree about the ontological death of the soul, as we hall see in the next paragraph). For both Origen and Porphyry, who likely derived this notion from Origen, the soul does not perish ontologically, but dies morally in passions and sin. Plotinus also speaks of the death of the soul in Enn. 1.8 as a kind of filling

[110]On this point see Ramelli, 2009b.

[111]See Ramelli, 2012b and further, with new arguments, in the work on Origen in preparation.

[112]Sent. 9, p. 4.3-6 Lamberz, commenting on Plato Phaedo. 64C: "Death is of two kinds: one is commonly recognised, when the body is disjoined from the soul; the other is typical of the philosophers, when the soul is disjoined from the body — and one kind does not at all follow from the other" (Ὁ θάνατος διπλοῦς, ὁ μὲν οὖν συνεγνωσμένος λυομένου τοῦ σώματος ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς, ὁ δὲ τῶν φιλοσόφων λυομένης τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος· καὶ οὐ πάντως ὁ ἕτερος τῷ ἑτέρῳ ἕπεται); "Nature looses the body from the soul, while the soul looses itself from the body" (Sent. 8). See also Alexidze, 2015: 48–52.

[113]Hom. 2 in Ps. 38, 12. See Ramelli, 2013: 141–143.

up with matter. Origen and Porphyry mention, not so much matter, as passions and sins as the causes for the death of the soul.

Philo also thought that virtue is the life of the soul and vice produces the aforementioned death of the soul[114], but his position concerning the possibility of an ontological death, i.e. annihilation, of the soul — which is accepted as real by John Conroy[115] — is somewhat more puzzling, since Philo might be thinking of a moral kind of death. Philo is clear, as pointed out above, that only piety makes a soul immortal (Opif. 154; QG 1.10; Spec. 1.345), which implies that an impious soul dies. Origen postulated the moral death of the soul, but not its ontological death, whereas Philo might have viewed the death of the soul not only as moral, but as ontological. Moreover, this issue is complicated by the possibility of some penchant on the part of Philo for the foregoing theory of metensomatosis, which would offer a way out from the ontological death of the soul through repeated transmigrations, although this is highly problematic and never explicitly professed by Philo[116]. If Philo stuck to the ontological death of the rational soul, this would make metensomatosis difficult, unless one thinks of a reincarnation in an animal. The charge of believing in such a doctrine was levelled against Origen, who, however, only spoke of a moral death of the soul and, as mentioned, explicitly ruled out its ontological death, which in his view would mean the defeat of the Creator[117].

Another core difference between Philo and Origen (and his followers) is the above-mentioned *eschatological* orientation of their thought, which is lacking or very elusive in Philo in general[118], and in particular in his doctrine of the restoration of the soul, while it is paramount in Clement, Origen,

[114]See Ramelli, 2014b and Ramelli, 2010; Zeller, 1995; Wasserman, 2008).

[115]Conroy, 2011: the notion of the death of the rational soul in Philo implies that impious and vicious people descend to the level of animals, having only their vital soul left but not their rational soul (see above, n. 100). This idea was later developed by Origen, on the moral but not ontological plane. Should Philo have embraced metensomatosis, the picture would get once again complicated.

[116]It may be that Philo's sojourn in Rome changed his perspective on this issue as well. The influence that this sojourn may have exerted on Philo even from the intellectual and philosophical viewpoint is emphasised by Niehoff, 2017: his trip to Rome in 38 CE was a turning point in his life. There he was exposed not only to new political circumstances but also to a new cultural and philosophical environment.

[117]See Ramelli, 2014b.

[118]See Grabbe, 2000; Eisele, 2003: 160–240. According to Eisele, Philo can be said to have an "eschatology" only up to a certain point: it is better to speak of human destiny in terms of aretalogy, since immortality for Philo depends on virtue. However, in case Philo should have accepted metensomatosis, even just hypothetically or esoterically, the attainment of virtue

Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, and other patristic supporters of the doctrine of universal restoration. Philo tends to explicitly refer eschatological pictures to the moral life of the soul, thus de-eschatologising everything; for instance, in Congr. 57, he identifies Hades with the life of the wicked person.

One further difference may lie in the *universality* of the restoration itself, which Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, and other Origenians upheld, but which is not present, or at least is not clear in the least, in Philo, who, as remarked above, rather spoke of the restoration of the individual soul and of Israel[119]. Here, however, Philo's possible interest in the theory of metensomatosis, at least on the esoteric plane and to some extent[120], seems to potentially complicate the picture. For this would leave the door open for an imperfect soul, or even a morally very deficient soul, to attain restoration and the knowledge of God in a future reincarnation — although this theory in his oeuvre is far from being deployed systematically and from being fully, explicitly, or organically developed, either because this was an esoteric doctrine, or because Philo was not interested in integrating it into his anthropology, ethics, and soteriology, let alone his rather enigmatic eschatology, or even just because he was handling this possibility hypothetically (after all, as David Winston noted, this doctrine did not seem to have a very solid scriptural foundation[121]). If Philo did so "zetetically", this would be an anticipation of Origen's methodology: not only did Origen work "zetetically" and heuristically in all of his philosophical theology[122], but he even considered zetetically the possibility of metensomatosis in one of his first works, the Commentary on John; however, he finally seems to reject this hypothesis even in this earlier work[123], and he forcefully rejected metensomatosis in his later oeuvre, as I have pointed out above. At any

could be spread over more cycles of reincarnation. The problem, as in Neoplatonism, would be what happens to the finally perfect soul: will it have to undergo reincarnation forever or not?

[119]See Ramelli, 2014b.

[120]Runia, 2019, thinks that Philo, uninterested as he was in eschatological issues, was "not strongly committed to the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of metempsychosis, but that he uses its language and conceptuality to illustrate the journey and fate of the soul while it is joined with the body in the συναμφότερον that is the human being". See already Runia, 1986: 347–348.

[121]Winston, 2010: 249: "He was most reluctant to give too prominent a place to the Platonic doctrine of reincarnation and its role in providing ultimate escape from the wheel of rebirth, inasmuch as this conception was quite alien to the Biblical view".

[122]A specific essay will be devoted to this. Some aspects of Origen's zetetic method with be analysed in the work on Origen in preparation.

[123]In C.Io. 6.7;85 Origen still presented metensomatosis as a hypothesis to be discussed, but in the end he dismisses it: John the Baptist is not Elijah's reincarnation, but an angel sent onto earth (ibidem 2.186).

rate, this avenue of research is worthy of further investigation, both per se and in its implications for the relation between Philo's and Origen's ideas, as well as Clement's.

Even though Origen, after discussing it as a hypothesis, did not support metensomatosis (rather supported by his "pagan" Platonic colleagues), and instead opposed to it his own doctrine of "ensomatosis"[124], Philo's possible notion of allowing souls much more time beyond one single earthly life to attain perfection is not too dissimilar from Origen's idea of a long sequence of aeons that allows rational creatures to improve and attain perfection beyond their earthly life[125]. In both cases, the ultimate motivation seems to have been theodicy.

The main differences here between the "pagan" Platonic doctrine of metensomatosis and Origen's doctrine of ensomatosis are two (which I numbered below as 1 and 3), and it would be very interesting, if at all possible, to determine on which side Philo stood. The annihilationist hypothesis (here below, nr. 2) seems to be fundamentally incompatible not only with Origen's doctrine, as he himself made clear, but also with a consistent theory of metensomatosis.

(1) Will rational creatures change bodies, as the "pagan" doctrine of metensomatosis presupposes, or will they keep one single body, which changes according to their moral choices and advancements or regressions (Origen's own position in his doctrine of ensomatosis)? Did Philo espouse the former view, as ancient readers denounced (as pointed out above) and as recent scholarship has suggested, and to what extent?

(2) The issue of annihilationism: Do rational souls of evil people perish or not? Origen rejected this conclusion by arguing against the soul's *substantialis interitus*, as seen, and opted for universal healing (by the Logos) and salvation. Origen might have had Philo in mind as a possible annihilationist[126]. Indeed, there are many passages in Philo that can be read in this direction[127]. It must be noted in this

[124]On which see my arguments in Ramelli, 2019i.

[125]For Origen's view of the aeons as a room given to rational creatures for moral and spiritual improvement, see Ramelli, 2013, section on Origen.

[126]On Philo on the death of the soul see my analysis in Ramelli, 2010 and parallels with Paul in Ramelli, 2011d.

[127]Many are the passages in which Philo refers to spiritual death — a very interesting parallel to 1 Cor. 11:30. In Her. 293, Philo, using the Stoic distinction between the wise person and the fool, affirms: "According to the Legislator (*sc.* Moses), only the wise enjoys a good old age and a very long life, whereas the fool has an extremely short life (ὀλιγοχρονιώτατον δὲ τὸν φαῦλον) and is always learning to die (ἀποθνήσκειν ἀεὶ μανθάνοντα), or rather *is already dead* to the life

connection that, if Philo embraced the doctrine of the death of the soul understood as ontological, this would have ruled out the possibility of metensomatosis.

(3) Is the sequence of aeons or cosmic cycles infinite (as in "pagan" Platonism) or finite (Origen's position)? and therefore is *apokatastasis*, with the attainment of the knowledge of God and "deification" (*theōsis*), only temporary, before another cycle and so on forever, or is it definitive and eternal, after the end of all aeons (Origen's position)?[128]

The same difference with respect to the philosophy of history and *apokatastasis* will later obtain between Origen and Proclus[129]. The latter thought that cosmic cycles are infinite in number. Judging at least from *De aeternitate mundi* and *De Deo* or *De visione trium angelorum ad Abraham* — where it appears that Philo deemed the world created and incorruptible, not so much in itself as by divine will (Aet. 13–14; *Vis.* 7), a position that he ascribes to both Plato (Pl. Tim. 41B) and Moses — Philo would seem

according to virtue (τὴν ἀρετῆς ζωὴν ἤδη τετελευτηκότα)". Like the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11:30, and like the widow in 1 Tim. 5:6 and the addressee of Rev. 3:1–2, Philo's fool, who acts badly, precisely because of this is always dying, or is spiritually dead. Likewise, in Fug. 55 Philo remarks that one can be apparently alive, but in fact be spiritually dead: this is the situation of immoral and foolish persons, even when they live very long; the wise and virtuous, on the contrary, live a perpetual life, even though their earthly life is very short: "Some are dead even if they are living (ζῶντες τεθνήκασι), and some live although they are dead (τεθνηκότες ζῶσι). The fools, he said, even if they keep living until the most advanced old age, are dead (νεκρούς), in that they are deprived of the life according to virtue. The virtuous, instead, even though they are separated from the company of the body, keep living forever (ζῆν εἰσαεί), in that they have attained immortality (ἀθανάτου μοίρας ἐπιλαχόντας)". Similarly, in Det. 49, the life of the wise is said by Philo to be spiritual life, whereas the fool, characterized by κακία, is declared to be spiritually dead: "the wise person seems to be dead to corruptible life (τεθνηκέναι τὸν φθαρτὸν βίον), but lives the incorruptible one; the fool, instead, is alive to the life according to vice, but is dead to the happy life", ζῶν τὸν ἐν κακίᾳ sc. βίον τέθνηκε τὸν εὐδαίμονα. In Praem. 79 Philo observes that one may endure for long in spiritual death, even as long as one's earthly life lasts: "People think that death is the culmination of punishments, but at the tribunal of God this is only the very beginning. Since the crime is extraordinary, it was necessary that an extraordinary punishment be found for it. Which? To be always dying while living (ζῆν ἀποθνήσκοντα ἀεί) and, in a way, to undergo an immortal and unending death (θάνατον ἀθάνατον ὑπομένειν καὶ ἀτελεύτητον). For the kinds of death are two (θανάτου γὰρ διττὸν εἶδος): the first is to be dead *sc.* physical death, which is a good or an indifferent thing; the other is to continue to die (ἀποθνήσκειν, *sc.* spiritual death), which is an evil (κακόν), absolutely, and the more enduring, the heavier: and consider how this kind of death can endure together with the sinner for an entire life (συνδιαιωνίζει)". This distinction of physical and spiritual death, of which the second is evil, returns in Origen, who, like Philo, also conceives of physical death as a good or indifferent thing and of spiritual death as an evil.

[128]See Ramelli, 2013, section on Origen, with demonstration.

[129]See Ramelli, 2016b.

closer to Proclus here than to Origen. According to Francesca Calabi, there can be no doubt that for Philo the world is incorruptible: "Che il mondo sia incorruttibile è per Filone indubbio ed egli lo afferma più volte con vigore" (Calabi, 2008: 25). She suggests that when Philo, on the other hand, speaks of the world's corruptibility, this just refers to its ontological dependence on God. The issues surrounding the authenticity of *De aeternitate mundi* and its relation to the rest of Philo's oeuvre have been studied by David T. Runia (Runia, 1981), who observed that in this treatise, Philo expounded the Peripatetic view that the world had neither beginning nor end, but what we have of this text drops at the beginning of Philo's refutation of this view. In Vis. 7, I note, God is said to preserve the universe; even God's consuming matter is for the sake of conservation. This is a concept that is very much stressed by Philo.

But Philo seems also to reject the cyclical recurrences highlighted by Stoics such as Chrysippus through the doctrine of periodical conflagrations. He discussed the Stoic notion of conflagration, especially in Aet. mundi 48–51 and 76–107. Thus, Philo may not have espoused a view of a succession of aeons without end, as the Stoics as well as Proclus and other Platonists did, and as Origen also envisaged, albeit in a different manner and with the tenet of the end of the world. As will be clear from a separate study, Origen's soteriology and eschatology were inspired more by Paul than by Philo, although Philo did exert some influence on Origen even in this respect, for instance through his aforementioned notion of the apokatastasis of the soul (Ramelli, 2014b).

## CONCLUSION

This essay has offered a specific case study within Philo's impressive impact on Patristic thought: that of Philo's "dialectics of apophatic theology" and his adoption of a "strategy of differentiation", as I defined them, and their remarkable influence on Patristic thinkers. I assessed Philo's relation to the Memra theology, the issue of the hypostatisation of the Logos, and the related issue of the "subordination" of the Logos to God, an aspect that was known to Origen but that Origen readdressed differently, pointing to the coeternity between Father and Son and to their common divinity. He was followed by the Cappadocians: especially Gregory of Nyssa attributed to the Son-Logos, as well as to the Father, the characteristics of Plotinus' highest principle, the One.

After explaining how apophatic theology works in Philo and the role played by allegoresis in supporting this theological view on the basis of

Biblical evidence, I have devoted a full section to the analysis of the Biblical exegetical support that Philo adduced in favour of his apophatic theology. I have noted that the allegorical expressions of the necessity of apophatic theology according to Philo appear precisely in Scriptural passages which can be compared with the parallel interpretations of Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. This means that there was a strong continuity in this respect between Philo, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, and that the very tenets of apophaticism, like those of other philosophical and theological doctrines, were conveyed through scriptural exegesis.

I have pointed out Philo's gnoseological theocentrism and analysed his notion of the intelligible form of God and its relation to the mystical knowledge of God. I pointed out how, faced with the dialectics of apophatic theology, namely the problem of theorising (λογία) about God (θεός), who is inaccessible to human intellectual knowledge at least essentially, Philo opted for a strategy of differentiation between God's essence and God's powers and operations or activities. This strategy influenced a great deal Patristic theologians well acquainted with Philo. The last part of this investigation has addressed first the issue of the role of Platonism in Philo's apophatic theology and has proposed a comparison with other Platonic philosophers-theologians (of different religious traditions: not only Hellenistic Jews, but also Christians and "pagans") who addressed a similar issue of apophatic theology. Then, it has investigated the elusive question of Philo's eschatology and its relation to apophaticism through the restoration to God. For the Christian Platonists, indeed, from Origen onwards, apophaticism and its counterpart, mysticism, have also an eschatological dimension as anticipation of the final restoration and deification. This dimension might be lacking in Philo, or it is very elusive. I offered, therefore, some points of comparison with, and divergence from, the eschatology of Christian theologians who were inspired by Philo.

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Ramelli I. L. E. [Рамелли И.] Philo's Dialectics of Apophatic Theology, His Strategy of Differentiation and His Impact on Patristic Exegesis and Theology [Филон Александрийский: диалектика апофатического богословия, стратегия различения и влияние на патристическую экзегезу и богословие] // Философия. Журнал Высшей школы экономики. — 2019. — Т. III, № 1. — С. 36–92.

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# Филон Александрийский: диалектика апофатического богословия, стратегия различения и влияние на патристическую экзегезу и богословие

**Аннотация:** В этой статье рассматривается влияние идей Филона Александрийского на патристическую мысль. Автор показывает, во-первых, что «диалектика апофатической теологии» Филона повлияла на позднейшие богословские системы, в первую очередь в том, что касается «стратегии различения» непознаваемой божественной сущности и познаваемых божественной энергий. Для Филона эти энергии были связаны с понятием Логоса, или Премудрости. При этом Логос у Филона, по всей видимости, не гипостазирован и понимается как «умопостигаемый космос» в духе среднего платонизма. В то же время апофатическая теология Филона всегда опирается на аллегорическую интерпретацию Писания. Рассмотрев как платонические, так и иудейские корни понятия Логос у Филона, автор переходит к анализу этого понятия у Климента Александрийского, Оригена и Григория Нисского. Эти авторы, в духе филонова апофатического богословия, также подчеркивают непознаваемость божественной сущности. Гносеологический теоцентризм Филона определяет то, что получило в литературе название «религиозной психологии»: поскольку сам человеческий разум — это дар Бога, то вся жизнь должна быть посвящена богопочитанию в беспрестанном усилии Его познать. Это создает определенное напряжение между познанием Бога как целью человеческой жизни и тем фактом, что сущность Бога непознаваемая для людей. В силу этого Филон, следуя избранной им «стратегии различения», описывает процесс познания в «мистериальных» терминах. Хотя христианские платоники следуют за ним в этом отношении, в их сочинениях мистицизм приобретает отчетливое эсхатологическое измерение, которое у Филона либо отстутствует, либо плохо артикулировано.

**Ключевые слова:** Филон Александрийский, диалектика апофатического богословия, Григорий Нисский, Ориген, христианский платонизм, средний платонизм, умопостигаемый космос, стратегия различения.

**DOI:** 10.17323/2587–8719–2019–3–1–36–92.