Pulling Up or Climbing Up? Philo of Alexandria on the role of God and human beings in the heavenly ascent of the soul

Keulen, William van

Pulling Up or Climbing Up?

Philo of Alexandria on the role of God and human beings in the heavenly ascent of the soul

Master Thesis Classics and Ancient Civilizations
Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University
William van Keulen
s1572458
w.j.van.keulen@umail.leidenuniv.nl
Supervisor: Prof. dr. J.K. Zangenberg
Second reader: dr. A. Celkyte
16 July 2022

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Jewish-Hellenistic philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE - 49 CE) characterises the experience of seeing God as 'the crowning point of happiness' (*Abr*. 58) and as 'the beginning and ending of human happiness' (*QE* 2.51). The experience of a heavenly journey of a human being and the aspiration to see God was a widespread motif in antiquity.[1] In Greco-Roman literature, for example, the heavenly journey of the soul is captured in the fragmented epic poem of Parmenides, where Parmenides relates how he is escorted out of the realm of night toward the light.[2] Another instance is found in the last book of Cicero's *De Re Publica.* This work ends with the *Somnium Scipionis*, in which Scipio, during his sleep, is taken up in the heavenly spheres.[3] Heavenly ascent did not only occur in Greco-Roman literature, but is also found in the Old Testament and pseudepigrapha. For example, Moses's ascension on Mount Sinai (Ex. 33:10), the throne vision of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 1) and the pseudepigraph 1 Enoch depict heavenly ascents.[4] To be sure, heavenly ascent in the aforementioned examples are all experienced during the life of the involved persons. This type of heavenly ascent relates a temporary assumption into heaven, away from earthly matters, and will also be the topic of this thesis.[5]

Philo of Alexandria was a wealthy Jewish intellectual, who lived in the first half of the first century CE. Philo is notoriously secretive about his personal life and not much is known about him.[6] Philo did leave an abundance of treatises in which he expounds his philosophical synthesis of contemporary Greco-Roman thought with the Laws of Moses.[7] Heavenly ascent is a major philosophical theme to Philo, as it integrates Philo's views of human beings and their relation to the cosmos, as well as God who created the universe and human beings. In addition, heavenly ascent also involves how a transcendent God is related to the material world and how human beings are able to conceive of a notion of God. The focal point of Philo's philosophical considerations on anthropology, cosmology, and theology is located in a true understanding of the Laws of Moses. Philo's concept of heavenly ascent seeks to gain insight into human beings, their existence within the cosmos, and of God through an exegetical study of the Laws of Moses. However, Philo remains silent on what this experience exactly comprises, as he emphasizes - as a consequence of the biblical contexts in which these ascents are addressed - different aspects of the heavenly ascent. In general, according to Philo, this experience can be generated by oneself, but the help of God does remain a prerequisite. The conception of heavenly ascent and Philo's expositions on seeing God do not uniquely originate from his own thought, but rather demonstrate a reflection and innovation of several schools of thought that were present in Alexandria in his time. For that reason, a context of Alexandria in Philo's time will be provided.

The geographical context of Alexandria was an integral part of Philo's identity, seeing his upbringing as a Jew and his Greek *paideia*. Since its founding in the late fourth century BCE, Alexandria grew into a

---

[1] See Segal 1980 for an overview of heavenly ascent in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity.
[2] Segal 1980, 1344.
[3] See chapter 4 of this thesis.
[4] Schäfer 2009, 27-28.
[5] Heavenly ascents are also described after one's death, such as the *metempsychosis* in the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*, or as an alternative to death (*apotheosis*), Romulus's ascension (Ov. *Met*. 14.805-852). In the Old Testament the biblical account of the ascension of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and of Elijah (2 Kings 2:2-15) are found.
[6] Niehoff 2018, 1-2. Philo can only securely be dated by his *Legatio ad Gaium,* in which he relates his embassy (38-41 CE) to Rome.
[7] Niehoff 2018, 6-11 & 245-246.

prosperous city, becoming the second largest city in the ancient Mediterranean world.[8] The economic power of the city incited migration, which lead to a high density of exchange and pluriformity of philosophical and religious views and practises, due to its many different ethnicities and social identities. It is estimated that in the first century CE one-fifth of the Alexandrian population, circa 100,000 inhabitants, was Jewish.[9] The city gained substantial prosperity in science, philosophy, and religious thought. Due to this influence and impact, the city can be qualified as a multidimensional Hub.[10] In that respect, Alexandria was the leading centre of Homeric scholarship, with special textual and philological attention through composing commentaries.[11] In this context Philo, who was integrated into the Hellenistic intelligentsia, constructed and developed his thought, drawing upon the same academic methods as well as incorporating literal and allegorical approaches.[12] However, Philo did not remain in Alexandria but travelled as an ambassador to Rome to visit emperor Gaius Caligula. During his stay (38-41 CE) Philo was exposed to a new cultural and intellectual environment, which had a lasting impact on his thought: Roman perspectives on philosophy innovated his theology and ethics, especially by the Stoic school, as well as his use of literary genres and exegetical methods.[13]

Philo's ideas on seeing God did not remain a novelty of his own time, but also had a lasting impact on future philosophers and mystics. His innovative use of Platonic, Stoic, and other Greco-Roman philosophical thought, as well as Jewish thought, paved the way for philosophers such as Plotinus and theologians such as Augustine of Hippo.[14] For that reason, this thesis is not only relevant in its analysis of Philo's views on heavenly ascent and understanding of Philo's thoughts. Moreover, the findings of this study may also be of assistance to Philo's *Nachleben* in Neoplatonism and early Christianity.

1.2 Research history

Heavenly ascent is a highly debated research topic in Philonic scholarship. Philo's descriptions of the experience of seeing God are scattered around in his exegetical works and other treatises.[15] This means that Philo's descriptions are sometimes unclear and seemingly contradictory given his general philosophical framework. Although previous scholarship has attempted to resolve these inconsistencies, the proposed solutions remain unsatisfactory. To give an overview of recent scholarship on seeing God in Philo's thought, one cannot disregard Erwin Goodenough's impactful study *Light by Light - the Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism.* In his 1935 publication, he theorizes that Judaism in the Greek diaspora was transformed into a mystic religion, as it was influenced by Greco-Roman and Egyptian mystery cults.[16] Although his study was heavily criticised and his arguments regarding mystery cults are no longer accepted, it did raise attention to understudied aspects of Jewish religious thought in Hellenistic environments. This brings us to the American scholar David Winston, who in his *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* attempts 'to

[8] Sly 1993, 28. See pp. 29-51 for an overview on Philo's thought on Alexander and the city.
[9] Rüggemeier 2021, XXXIII-XXXIV. According to Philo himself, there was a need for many synagogues in each of the city districts (*Leg*. 132-134).
[10] Rüggermeier 2021, XIII.
[11] Niehoff 2011, 2.
[12] Niehoff 2011, 7-8.
[13] Niehoff 2018, 11.
[14] Plotinus: *Enneads* VI-VII. Augustine of Hippo: *De Genesi ad litteram* VII and *Confessiones* VII.16. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite: *Mystical theology*.
[15] Mackie 2012.
[16] Goodenough 1969, 7: "The objective of this Judaism was salvation in the mythical sense. God was no longer only the God represented in the Old Testament: He was the Absolute, connected with phenomena by his Light-Stream, the Logos or Sophia." See also Lease 1987 for an overview of Goodenough's theory.

trace the line of reasoning' of 'intellectual mysticism'.[17] In this collection of lectures he argues that, given the fact that Philo was well-versed in middle platonic thought, he should be qualified as an educated Alexandrian Jew, who appears to have been 'a convinced Platonist with mystical tendencies' and 'had decided to effect a grand synthesis between his ancestral faith and the philosophical-mystical tradition which constituted his first intellectual love'.[18] David Runia rightfully remarks that Winston's views on mystical philosophy essentially are a revision of Goodenough's Mystic Way, since more significance has been assigned to Platonist philosophy rather than the Hellenistic mystery cults.[19] These two works rely strongly on the theory that Judaism and Hellenism are to be considered opposite cultural movements, that needed to be conciliated. This assumption, however, leads to forced conclusions that either overemphasize or minimize one of these two developments. In more recent scholarship, this separation is no longer considered, and Peter Schäfer in his *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* strongly dismisses these views as stereotypes.[20] His chapter on Philo accentuates Philo as a representative of the philosophical discourse of his time, especially Middle Platonism.[21] Schäfer analyses a few passages about the ascent of the soul, identifying the heritage of Greco-Roman thinking as well as the exegetical context of the Laws of Moses. His observations regarding God and the soul are astute and insightful but owing to the scope of his study not exhaustive in contextualizing the origins of Philo's thought. For that reason, attention must be paid to two articles by Scott Mackie, who in detail explores the content and nature of seeing God.[22] In his most recent article, he explores the effectual means of seeing God, concluding that sole dependence on God is insufficient and that human effort is required to achieve the ascent of the soul.[23] He rightfully attributes the discrepancies in Philo's accounts to various factors, such as his use of Greco-Roman philosophy, the rhetorical context, and his intellectual development.[24] In doing so, he imposes a tripartite categorisation of "divine monergism", "human effort" and "synergism".[25] This thematic approach, however, does not do justice to the versatility and diversity of the Philonic corpus, especially neglecting to fully contextualize human agency.[26]

1.3 Research question

As shown above, research has on the one hand synthesized Philo's philosophical thought too eagerly with the mysterious, religious air that surrounds Hellenistic cults. Although the term 'mystic' has been adopted in the discourse regarding Philo's description of seeing God, it must be observed that Philo in this regard never used this terminology himself. It is striking that μύω only occurs nine times and μυστήριον eighteen times in all of his writings.[27] Moreover, he criticizes mystics for the fact that they isolate themselves from the

[17] Winston 1985, 7 and 11. Also note that he qualifies Goodenough's work as a more sympathetic approach.
[18] Winston 1985, 13.
[19] Runia 1986, 25. Runia qualifies Winston's characterisation of Philo as a "philosophico-mysticus".
[20] Schäfer 2009, 155.
[21] Schäfer 2009, 154. Schäfer's argument is strongly founded upon Dillon 1977.
[22] Mackie 2009 & 2012.
[23] Mackie 2012, 150-152 and 178.
[24] Mackie 2012, 148.
[25] Mackie 2012, 150. He borrowed this approach from Pauline scholarship and to a lesser extent of Josephus's account on the three schools of thought among the Jews (*Ant.* 13.171-173).
[26] McFarland 2015, 96n229: "But he [Mackie] employs a simplistic monergism/synergism distinction such that the presence of human agency can imply synergism or human action alone. Consequently, Mackie gives insufficient weight to: 1) Philo's commitment to divine omni-causality; 2) Philo's belief that humans, if they do anything good, do it by the power of divine gifting in them; and 3) Philo's insistence that good actions can never be attributed to oneself but to God."
[27] Borgen 1997 s.v. μυστήριον and μύω.

community and withhold their alleged virtuous views from other people.[28] For that reason, even though 'seeing God' and 'heavenly ascent' do not capture the full extent of this experience, this study will not use the term 'mysticism' and its derivatives to refer to the act of evoking the heavenly ascent and the union with the One.[29]

On the other hand, more emphasis on his philosophical thought resulted in a rigorous categorization of the evidence, overlooking the historical context and setting of his writings. That is why this thesis will re-examine heavenly ascent in Philo's thought to do justice to both the historical context of his writings as well as the philosophical and religious context of his thought. This thesis will answer the research question: 'how does Philo as a Jewish-Hellenistic thinker evaluate the role of God and human beings regarding seeing God?'.

1.4 Methodology

Philo operated in a continuum of various philosophical schools and, as mentioned above, Alexandria and Rome were thriving cities that gave rise to a variety of philosophical schools. In that regard, Niehoff's influential approach must be introduced. She illustrates how Philo participated in the intellectual discourse of both cities and that these interactions shaped the development of his thought.[30] She supports this observation upon striking differences between his early series *Allegorical Commentary,* which is highly Alexandrian in style and thought, and his commentary *Exposition of the Law*, written after his embassy, which reflects a later stage in his intellectual development.[31] Although this approach implies a sharper demarcation than can be established, it will be taken into account to consider how it affects the results of this study. To be sure, Philo's thought will be approached as a consistent body of thought, presuming that all his works coherently express an aspect of his thought.[32] This thesis, therefore, will investigate an aspect of the *Ideengeschichte* of Philo's thought on heavenly ascent and analyse his intellectual development.[33] This theoretical framework allows for an analysis of the origins and innovation of his thought as well as examines the historical climate in which his writings came into being. The literary genre of the writings itself and the implied audience must also not be overlooked.

The method of this thesis will be a close reading and will contribute to a successful application of the aforementioned framework and evaluate Philo's intellectual development. Owing to the scope of this thesis, Philo's thought can only be studied in a limited way. For that reason, this thesis has selected *Spec.* 3.1-6 as its key text of examination.[34] In this text passage, Philo relates his personal experience of his ascent into heaven and his attempt to see God. In contrast to Philo's other accounts of the heavenly ascent, *Spec.* 3.1-6 is not directly connected to a biblical context. This account is a description of an actual, practical experience, instead of a theoretical description in response to an exegetical study. Rather, *Spec.* 3.1-6 functions as the opening to Book 3 of *De Specialibus Legibus*, a four-volume treatise on the specific laws and customs in the Laws of Moses. The personal character of *Spec.* 3.1-6 allows for an examination of Philo's self-fashioning in his personal account as well as unfolding the role of God and human beings in this process. A close reading

[28] *Spec.* 1.319-323. See also Sly 1996, 99-107 & 133-134.

[29] In his chapter on Philo, Schäfer 2009 avoids these terms either. Alternative options such as *Visio Dei* or *Unio Mystica* are also not suitable, as they are anachronistic and bear a distinctive Christian connotation.

[30] Niehoff 2018, 1-22.

[31] Niehoff 2018, 5 & 245-246. Royce 2009, 33 also notes this distinction, labelling the *Allegory Commentary* and the *Exposition of the Law* respectively 'esoteric' and 'exoteric' in nature.

[32] Timmers 2022, 46-47.

[33] Dorschel 2010, 23, 155. Rüggemeier 2021, XVIII: 'According to social network analysis, Hubs can be defined as the central part of a network, where many of a network's members are connected.

[34] The edition used is that of Colson 1937.

of *Spec*. 3.1-6 allows for a careful study of Philo's text and ensures to remain as close as possible to Philo's development of his thoughts. A thorough understanding of *Spec*. 3.1-6 will also be gained by contextualizing this passage in relation to Philo's other works.

1.5 Outline

Next to the context of Philo's works, *Spec*. 3.1-6 will also be embedded in a broader intellectual context of Greco-Roman thought. Philo's account of his ascent is immensely indebted to Plato, of which Philo abundantly used and adapted his views and terminology.[35] For that reason, in chapter three, three texts of Plato will be introduced and analysed to elucidate aspects of Philo's views in *Spec*. 3.1-6. Firstly, *Resp*. 518a-e will be implemented in this study to shed light on how an instrument within the mind facilitates seeing the Forms. Secondly, *Phdr*. 249c3-4 will be introduced, where, in connection with seeing accurately, it is related to how the soul of a philosopher is able to properly recollect the divine things. Lastly, *Tht*. 176a-177b, the goal of seeing God will be discussed. In this passage, Plato describes how one should escape from earth to heaven and become like God.

The examination of *Spec*.3.1-6 will also demonstrate that Philo prominently expressed the misery and struggle of his political career. He laments how he is obligated to participate in politics and no longer is able to leisurely contemplate and study philosophy. As a consequence of the pogroms in Alexandria (38 CE), Philo was assigned as an ambassador of the Jews in Alexandria. He was required to stay in Rome (38-41 CE) to plead for the rights of the Jews and ease the political tensions in Alexandria. For that reason, in chapter four, the near-contemporary politician, orator, and philosopher M. Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) will be introduced, to better understand how Philo constructs his struggle in *Spec*. 3.1-6. A comparison with Cicero provides an opportunity to place Philo outside of its expected philosophical context and put him in a broader Greco-Roman perspective. Cicero experienced a turbulent political career and his duties to the *res publica* were frequently sabotaged by his political opponents. This meant that Cicero, more than once, was forced to leave Rome. On multiple occasions, Cicero reflects on his service to the state (*negotium*) and his lack of duty (*otium*) as an exilic. Such reflections on the balance between public life and private life are also present in Philo. For that reason, Cicero will be an insightful dialogue partner to Philo.

In addition, Cicero denounced Epicureans for their lack of concern for public life and their negligence of public affairs. However, a surprising and similar perspective on the avoidance of public life is also found in Philo. For that reason, the epicurean maxim "live unnoticed" (λάθε βιώσας) will be introduced and compared to Philo's account in *Spec*. 3.1-6.

Lastly, chapter five will end with a general conclusion of the findings of this study.

[35] Runia 2001, 229.

Chapter 2 - Philo's heavenly ascent in *De Specialibus Legibus* 3.1-6

2.1 Introduction

In Philo's extensive oeuvre, the experience of seeing God is assigned to patriarchs, ordinary biblical figures, and even himself.[36] Although their experiences are described along the same lines, their experiences must not be placed on an equal level: biblical figures, especially the patriarchs are exemplars to which Philo mirrors himself as their pupil.[37] Although these biblical figures give insight into how the ascent of the soul functions, it remains an indirect source, drawn from an exegesis of a biblical text. Philo's personal account, however, is based upon his own lived experience, rather than a textual interpretation.[38] His personal account is documented in *Spec.* 3.1-6 and provides a unique insight into how he portrays himself, how he engages with the Laws of Moses as his prime source of wisdom, and his evaluation of contemporary Greco-Roman thought on seeing God. Prior to the examination of *Spec.* 3.1-6, a short context will be provided of the treatise in which this account is found.

The third book of *De Specialibus Legibus* opens with Philo's personal account of his ascent of the soul (*Spec.* 3.1-6). This treatise is part of Philo's second series of exegetical treatises, which was written after his embassy in Rome. In this series, also known as the 'Exposition of the Law', Philo explains the character of biblical law in comparison to other legal codes.[39] In four volumes of *De Specialibus Legibus,* he relates how the specific ordinances are connected to these heads of the law as stipulated in the ten commandments (*Dec.* 19; *Spec.* 1.1). Through these writings, Philo aims to construct a philosophy of law, focusing especially on how one can observe the law in such a way that it is in accordance with the purpose of nature. With these treatises, he aims to show the meaning and ethical rationale of Jewish customs and legislation to a Roman audience not familiar with Jewish law.[40] He also shows that reading and explaining the Laws of Moses are cardinal characteristics of being a philosopher, which in turn appear to be intertwined with his ascent experiences. After two books of *De Specialibus Legibus*, he opens the second part of this series with a personal account of his ascent of the soul.

With this context in mind, this chapter aims to unpack Philo's metaphor 'ascent of the soul'. Philo's personal account will be examined as a representative text for his thought in order to identify his views on agency in the experience of seeing God. Seeing God is not a unilateral activity, solely achieved by human beings through study and contemplation or dependent on revelation by God. It is an experience that occurs as a consequence of complex interaction and interplay between human beings and God. This raises the question: how is the experience of seeing God organized and what role assume the actors, i.e. God and Philo, in this process?

To establish the agency of God and Philo in *Spec.* 3.1-6, a close reading will be conducted using two lines of research. Firstly, *Spec.* 3.1-6 will be analysed with special attention to Philo's depiction of himself. As Maren Niehoff argued, Philo's self-fashioning is highly stylized and complex. Philo self-consciously takes up different roles of a Jewish philosopher assigned with political duties: an Alexandrian Jew with a Greek

---

[36] Moses: *Mos.* 2.288; Abraham: *Her.* 63-74; Jacob: *Praem.* 36-40; Isaak: *Fug.* 166-169; Hannah: *Ebr.* 152.

[37] Schäfer 2009, 164-170.

[38] Borgen 2021, 256-258.

[39] Niehoff 2018, 7-8. 154. In *Opif.* Philo discusses how creation is in accordance with the law. In *Dec.* Philo embarks on an exegetical expounding of the heads of the law, the ten commandments.

[40] Niehoff 2018, 149-150. In *Spec.* 1.2, for example, Philo discusses circumcision, which was practised in Alexandria and thus familiar to Greek and Egyptian people of Alexandrian, but not to Romans. It is doubted if these works actually were read by outsiders. It is more probable that these texts served as a way to build and maintain Jewish self-esteem. See Timmers 2022, 199n612 in support of this idea, comparing Philo, the *Letter of Aristeas* and Josephus.

education who operates in elite Roman circles.[41] For that reason, Philo's self-fashioning in *Spec.* 3.1-6 will be taken into account by providing a historical context.

In addition to a historical perspective, Najman's recent article '*imitatio Dei* and the Formation of the Subject in Ancient Judaism' provides insightful arguments on how a human being is created in the image of God. She explores the philosophical implications of a subject that is created in the image of God and how it understands itself in relation to its efforts to see God.[42] She contends that seeing God must be considered an inapproachable state of perfection that nevertheless must be aspired. This aspiration to perfection starts from within the subject by observing the Laws of Moses. This means that the aspiration to become godlike is ultimately achieved by internalizing wisdom, retrieved from the Mosaic law, and also from the law of nature.[43] Ultimately, both scholars aim to contribute to an understanding of how human beings are created. How can a human being, who is created, be able to conceive of heavenly matters? This will be the first line of examination in this chapter.

Secondly, it must be established how God's role is represented in *Spec.* 3.1-6. God, indicated by the Platonic term τὸ ὄν, is fully transcendent and does not intervene in the material world. Although τὸ ὄν is not mentioned in *Spec.* 3.1-6, it does appear in other Philonic accounts of the ascent of the soul.[44] This introduces a contradiction: how does a transcendent God operate in the material world and still be able to communicate with mortal human beings?[45] This will be the second line of examination: how does God make himself known in the ascent of the soul in *Spec.* 3.1-6 and what do these findings say about God's approachability and knowability to human beings?

These questions will be reflected upon in the examination below by contextualizing *Spec.* 3.1-6 within Philo's works. In this way, a basic understanding of the ascent of the soul will be established.

2.2 Examination of *Spec.* 3.1-6

Spec. 3.1-6 can be divided into three parts: §§1-2 describes Philo's ascent to the ether (αἰθήρ). §§3-4 describe his descent out of the ether, down to earth between its afflictions within the *politeia* (πολιτεία). §§5-6 describe his infrequent and unpredictable lower ascents to the air (ἀήρ). Although dissatisfied with this suboptimal situation, he nonetheless concludes with thanks to God, as these ascents nevertheless enable him to reveal and unfold the meaning of the Laws.[46] This division will also be applied to the examination below and will be concluded with a summary of each part. Finally, chapter 2.3 will end with concluding observations on the whole of *Spec.* 3.1-6.

§1

Philo's personal account opens with an undefined moment in the past when he leisurely engaged in philosophical and contemplative matters. The opening line can be characterized as a start of a story (μῦθος), implying that these activities are from a distant, idealized past.[47] In the past, he was free of political and administrative obligations, having time to commit to philosophical and contemplative matters. Before we turn to the precise contents of these matters, it must be observed that Philo is not alone in this style of

[41] Niehoff 2018, 45.
[42] It would be outside the scope of this chapter to offer a theoretical assessment of the self and selfhood. Najman 2021, 310-312 offers a concise overview of these concepts.
[43] Najman 2021, 320. Philo argues in *Abr.* 3-5 that the patriarchs, as exemplars, are "ensouled laws" (ἔμψυχοι νόμοι).
[44] Schäfer 2009, 155-160.
[45] A general examination of these questions in Philo's thought is found in Timmers 2022, 52-81 & 100-106.
[46] The tripartite division is taken from Borgen 2021, 252-253.
[47] Méasson 1986, 231.

prologue, but uses his exposition of σχολή as a literary topos. In this way, Philo marks book three of *De Specialibus Legibus* as the halfway point of his great four-volume project.[48]

In the first sentence, Philo relates how he seized his opportunity (ὄντως νοῦν ἐκαρπούμην) during his contemplation to ascent and become fully bestowed with beauty, happiness and blessedness.[49] Philo implies that contemplative efforts may result in a happy and blessed life. Although it does not directly emerge from *Spec.* 3.1, it can be surmised that God is responsible for initiating the mind to see past the material world (see the discussion of *Opif.* 69-71 below) and that it is the responsibility of a human being to act upon this. This also explains Philo's insurance that he is not perceptible to inferior desires, such as fame, wealth, or bodily comforts (οὐδὲν ταπεινὸν φρονῶν ἢ χαμαίζηλον οὐδὲ περὶ δόξαν ἢ πλοῦτον ἢ τὰς σώματος εὐπαθείας ἱλυσπώμενος), but that he dwells in divine themes and verities (θείοις ἀεὶ λόγοις συγγινόμενος καὶ δόγμασιν).

What does Philo mean by being in the company of divine themes and verities? This phrasing is a reference to Philo's activities of studying the Laws of Moses.[50] Philo considers the Laws of Moses to be stamped into the soul of humans by the seals of nature herself.[51] This means that the Laws of Moses are copies of the laws of nature.[52] Philo implies here that the Laws of Moses, next to precepts and specific laws for moral conduct, also contain natural truths on reality and the universe.[53] These natural truths can be revealed by studying the Laws of Moses. This is addressed in Philo's other personal account in *Migr.* 34-35. In this passage, Philo relates that he frequently experiences ascents (ὃ μυριάκις παθὼν οἶδα), which occur during his writing on philosophical ideas (κατὰ τὴν συνήθη τῶν κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν δογμάτων γραφήν). Philo emphasises that his writing process is either successful or not. Philo explains this by relating that he can be convinced of himself being full of thoughts, while realizing that during the exegetical process his mind is incapable of giving birth to ideas. For that reason, Philo concludes in this passage that he is dependent on God, who is in charge of giving birth to ideas (παρ' ὃν τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνοίγνυσθαί τε καὶ συγκλείεσθαι μήτρας συμβέβηκεν). On the other hand, it also occurs that Philo embarks on his work empty-minded, without any ideas. Against his expectation, Philo, however, finds himself full of ideas, which he can express in writing.[54] He qualifies this experience as being under divine possession (ὡς ὑπὸ κατοχῆς ἐνθέου κορυβαντιᾶν). Philo's mind is taken over and is not consciously present in this experience (πάντα ἀγνοεῖν). Rather, he receives proper interpretation (ἑρμηνεία), ideas (εὕρεσις), enjoyment of light (φωτὸς ἀπόλαυσις), sharp vision (ὀξυδερκεστάτη ὄψις) and clear distinctiveness of objects (ἐνάργεια τῶν πραγμάτων ἀριδηλοτάτη). Philo shows in *Migr.* 34-35 that the successful and truly insightful process of exegetical study is fully dependent on God's involvement. Philo

[48] Colson 1937, 631-632. See also chapter 4.2 of this thesis, where it is discussed how Cicero addresses *otium* in his prologues of *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis.*

[49] Méasson 1986, 240-241. As debated by several commentators, the meaning of νοῦν is not clear. Although the manuscripts are in agreement, the textual emendation to βίον appears to be plausible. This results in the meaning that grasping life is connected to happiness or blessedness. This reading is also present in *Her.* 111 and *Opif.* 156. *Her.* 111 discusses how God has allowed the human mind to perceive the intelligible world and discover the truth by using the soul to philosophize the higher verities of mental things and real existences. This also ties in with the following sentence in *Spec.* 3.1 where Philo describes how he is accompanied with divine themes and verities. In *Opif.* 156 the construction is used to describe the fact that Adam and Eve chose to not grasp a paradisical life of virtue, but a life of misery. Both texts convey how God facilitates the opportunity, but that a human being has to actually react.

[50] Mackie 2012, 153.

[51] *Mos.* 2.14. Najman 2010, 111.

[52] Najman 2010, 111-112. The metaphor of stamping with a seal is also present in the intimate relationship between God and human beings.

[53] Calabi 2009, 159-161.

[54] *Migr.* 34. Philo experiences inspiration as a precipitation (ἐπινίφω) from above and as being sown (σπείρω) inside his mind.

demonstrates that it is possible to engage with the Laws of Moses, but emphasizes that true understanding only arises when it is provided by God.[55] This observation must also be taken into account in *Spec.* 3.1-6.

In *Spec.* 3.1, Philo identifies his dependence on God with ἐδόκουν ἀεὶ φέρεσθαι κατά τινα τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπιθειασμόν. The striking use of ἐπιθειασμόν is only attested three times in Philo's works.[56] Next to its use here, it is also found in *Deus* 139 and *Her.* 69. In both contexts, Philo attributes this adjective to prophets, who as "God of men" are inspired to be an interpreter of God (*Deus* 139). In *Her.* 69 Philo argues that inspired prophets are comparable to ecstatic experiences, which can be associated with Greek mystery cults.[57] In the context of Philo's personal account, it is sufficient to establish that Philo is exposed to divine inspiration. This enables him to interpret the Laws of Moses and to be taken over by an upward desire to the Existent One. Philo accomplishes his ascent in association with God: he is of the impression that his soul is captured (ἐπιθειασμόν), rather than solely being induced by himself. This introduces the question: how is Philo able to be exposed to divine inspiration? Philo's treatise *De Opificio Mundi* will prove to be a profitable consultation to understand how a human being is able to obtain a conception of God. In this work, Philo presents his exegetical study of Gen. 1:1-3:19, the biblical account of the creation of the cosmos.

In *Opif.* 69-71, Philo addresses Gen. 1.26, where human beings are created after the image of God and after his likeness. Philo explains that human beings of all creatures bear the greatest resemblance to God, namely in respect of the mind. Every human mind is modelled (ἀπεικονίσθη) after the mind of the universe, as some sort of God (τρόπον τινὰ θεός) and every human being holds the mind as a sacred shrine (ἀγαλματοφοροῦντος).[58] The point of similarity is found in the activity of the mind: God's mind thinks of the intelligible world through ideas and Forms and provides existence to the material world. Likewise, the human mind thinks in terms of ideas and forms to make sense of the material world. This is how every human being is able to conceive a tentative notion of God. It is, however, crucial to note that the essence of both the mind of God and the human mind cannot be grasped (ἄδηλον ἔχει τὴν οὐσίαν τὰς τῶν ἄλλων καταλαμβάνων). This already shows that a human being cannot be fully in control of himself, seeing that the mind is the sovereign element of the soul (κατὰ τὸν τῆς ψυχῆς ἡγεμόνα νοῦν). What the human mind is able to do within its limits, is addressed in the remainder of *Opif.* 70-71. First of all, the mind is able, using the arts and sciences, to discern the material objects within the material world. As a consequence, the mind is able to obtain an understanding of the immaterial ideas behind these material objects. Philo relates that the mind initiates the investigation (διερευνώμενος) of the nature behind these material objects. The mind of a human being must be equipped by his *encyclia* to commence this investigation.[59] The encyclical education will pave the way to the *paideia* by philosophy, especially the Laws of Moses, and wisdom. In this way, the curious mind and the soul, searching for God, can evoke further understanding of God. Only then a human being is able to ascent (καὶ πάλιν πτηνὸς ἀρθείς), transcend the material world, the ether, and enter the intelligible world.[60] In short, Philo shows how God and human beings are related and how they can become connected through their mind.

---

[55] See also the examination of *Spec.* 3.6 below.

[56] Borgen 1997 s.v. ἐπιθειασμός.

[57] *Her.* 69: ὥσπερ οἱ κατεχόμενοι καὶ κορυβαντιῶντες βακχευθεῖσα καὶ θεοφορηθεῖσα κατά τινα προφητικὸν ἐπιθειασμόν. De Jonge 2020, 148-151 provides a concise overview of ἔκστασις in Plato. See also *Mos.* 2.181-191 where Philo discusses Moses as a prophet.

[58] Runia 2001, 227.

[59] Zurawski 2017, 484. Preliminary studies consisted of a curriculum that included the subjects of grammar, geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, music, dialectic, and, unique to Philo, rhetoric.

[60] See Timmers 2022, 105-112 for an extensive close reading of this passage.

After having clarified how God and human beings are related, it is now necessary to clarify what is meant by the object of thinking, namely the contents of φιλοσοφία καὶ θεωρία τοῦ κόσμου. These activities are typical of his way of observance of the sabbath. In *Dec.* 98-101, Philo discusses the practice of the sabbath as a balance between the practical and contemplative life in light of the fourth commandment.[61] Philo argues that God has ordered human beings to contemplate the world, just as God did when he ceased his works and contemplated how well the cosmos was created (τὰ γεγονότα καλῶς θεωρεῖν). For that reason, Philo explains that one should take leisure and turn to philosophy and contemplate the universe on the sabbath.[62] This is Philo's ideal way of life: God has provided an ideal pattern for either activity or for the duty to study wisdom and contemplate the universe to achieve happiness in one's own life.[63] The practical and contemplative life must be thoroughly engraved in the mind to say and do what is required from God, namely observing rest and engaging in the Laws of Moses.[64] In this way, one can approximate a more immortal nature rather than his mortal nature. In short, by acting more like God, one becomes more godlike. Thus, by abstaining from any form of work and solely being devoted to philosophy and nature, one acts more like God and becomes more godlike.[65] Philo describes this contemplative experience as a continuous dwelling in the universe among the heavenly bodies (συμπεριπολεῖν). From this perspective, as Philo relates in §2, he is also able to look down on earth.

§2

§2 marks the crucial moment in which Philo, after having been seized and traveling to the ether, looks down (διακύπτων) to the earthly matters. Philo illustrates this with a sense of overview (ὥσπερ ἀπὸ σκοπιᾶς) and beholds the earthly spectacles. Philo relates that this peak activity is exhausting the mind's eye (τὸ τῆς διανοίας ὄμμα), the instrument with which he can see.[66] He is happy that he – with his capabilities and power (ἀνὰ κράτος) – was able to definitively flee the sorrows of mortal life.

Summary of §§1-2

In sum, with the use of a common literary topos, Philo declared throughout §§1-2 that he was truly glad in this state of mind and that he rejoiced in engaging in the divine themes and ideas. Philosophizing and contemplating the universe are Philo's ideal way of life and prove that he is a true intellectual, like other recognized Greek philosophers. This ideal way of life is designed after God's creation of the world: just like God rested and contemplated, likewise must a human being contemplate the world to gain a higher understanding. Philo shows that this way of life can only be grasped in dependence on God. This dependence is constructed after the mind of God and the human mind. Every human being is able to gain a notion of God, as it bears a divine element in the soul. Contemplating nature through the Laws of Moses only bears true insight on the universe and God, if these are provided by God himself. This activity must be initiated by a human being, but, as Philo makes clear, is only successful when he was possessed by some kind of divine inspiration and ascended into heaven to acquire exegetical truths about God. Spending time

---

[61] Zurawski 2017, 497-498 emphasises Philo's educational purpose of the fourth commandment.

[62] *Dec.* 98: τῇ ἑβδόμῃ καὶ φιλοσοφοῦντας καὶ θεωρίαις μὲν τῶν τῆς φύσεως σχολάζοντας. See also *Cont.* 24-30.

[63] Zurawski 2017, 487. *Dec.* 100. This also ties in with the suggested reading in footnote 48 of this thesis.

[64] *Dec.* 101: τοιοῦτον οὖν ἀρχέτυπον τῶν ἀρίστων βίων, πρακτικοῦ τε καὶ θεωρητικοῦ, μὴ παρέλθωμεν, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέποντες ἐναργεῖς εἰκόνας καὶ τύπους ταῖς ἑαυτῶν διανοίαις ἐγχαράττωμεν ἐξομοιοῦντες θνητὴν φύσιν ὡς ἔνεστιν ἀθανάτῳ κατὰ τὸ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν ἃ χρή.

[65] The imagery of observing nature is also strongly present in *Spec.* 2.44-46, where Philo characterises the ἀσκηταὶ σοφίας, who by observing nature aspire to live a life in peace. True philosophers avoid public service and mass congregations in general. Their bodies are planted on earth, while they fly to the upper air and contemplate (τὰς δὲ ψυχὰς ὑποπτέρους κατασκευάζοντες). Ultimately, men who practice wisdom are delighted (ἐνευφραίνομενοι) in their virtues.

[66] "Eye of the mind" will be discussed in chapter 3.2 of this thesis.

leisurely refers by no means to an absence of activities, but rather the studious and secluded engagement with God, the universe, and the Laws of Moses.

§3

After the description of Philo's ideal in §§1-2, he introduces in §3 the current, opposite situation of §2. Instead of a sudden transcendental manifestation in the mind, Philo is surprised[67] (ἐξαπιναίως) by the malice that befell him against his own will (πρὸς βίαν).[68] Philo considers this to be an attack, as if earthly matters lay in wait as an enemy waiting for an opportunity to attack and corrupt the heavenly experience.[69] Philo accuses the "the hater of good, envy" (ὁ μισόκαλος φθόνος) of sabotaging his ascents. Philo does not clarify here what he meant by "envy". *Flacc*. 29 indicates that Philo refers to "envy" as the period in which the pogroms in Alexandria (38 CE) occurred. In this passage, Philo describes how the visit of the Judean king Agrippa in Alexandria provoked major envy (ὑπὸ φθόνου) towards and hostility against the Jews among the Egyptian Alexandrians.[70] As a consequence of these pogroms, civil turmoil ensued and Philo is assigned the duty to visit emperor Gaius Caligula in Rome to plea for the rights of the Jews in Alexandria.

Philo is now confronted with an "ocean of civil worries" (μέγα πέλαγος τῶν ἐν πολιτείᾳ φροντίδων) and must now embark on an embassy to Rome (39-41 CE).[71] Philo uses the same imagery of an overwhelming ocean of worries in *Legat*. 370-372, where he also describes the troubles regarding the unrest in Alexandria.[72] Philo can no longer be occupied with his contemplative activities: at first, he was carried (φέρεσθαι) upwards, now he is being carried away (φορούμενος) in the ocean of troubles.

Philo is frustrated with this new situation, as it obstructs his former quiet life without any obligations. Philo looks back to the period when he was a free man.[73] At those times, he was not tied to any duty, as the political situation did not require his involvement. He was able to avoid worrying about the cares of the *politeia*, comparable to his conduct on the sabbath.

§4

In §4, however, Philo reports the rare occasions in which he – or rather the submerged soul[74]- has been able to rise above the worries that bother him. He is able to hold on (ἀντέχω) due to his longing for *paideia* (παιδεία). This desire to *paideia* and, in turn, to a breath of life encompasses the message in §4. He enjoys the lasting (ἀεί) benefits of *paideia*, a capability that was planted in him from his youth onwards through training (ἄσκησις) by his instructors and his parents to live a good life.[75] Philo does not only indicate the desire for education, but also the contents of education: wisdom.[76] The eternal component of wisdom, in

---

[67] McGinn 1992, 30. In Plato, a sudden appearance of the transcendental goal is mentioned in order to note that the summit is not achieved solely by personal effort. See for example Pl. *Smp*. 211d.

[68] Méasson 1986, 234. Philo now shifts the tempus of his verbs from imperfecta to praesentia.

[69] Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1968 s.v. ἐφεδρεύω and ἐπιπίπτω. Both verbs bear a military connotation.

[70] Borgen 2021, 253. Van der Horst 1999, 105-106 & 121-122.

[71] See *Legat*. 1-5. Philo indignantly opens his narration of his embassy to Rome with a description of the instability and insecurity of a men's character.

[72]In Borgen 2021, 253 a thorough examination of the historical context is found.

[73] In *Prob*. 63, Philo discusses the characteristics of a good man. He argues that every good man is also a free man, because a free man distances himself from crowds in order to be available for philosophy and contemplation.

[74] Méasson 1986, 182-188. Imagery of the submerged soul is Platonic in origin and illustrates the struggle of human beings in dealing with waves that attack the soul, such as folly or passions. Here, Philo uses the imagery predominantly to show that such submersion is not perpetual, but that the soul can be rescued.

[75] *Spec*. 2.228-229.

[76] Zurawski 2017, 488: "all forms of *paideia* are preparatory, as they are designed to lead the student to greater things like virtue and immortality. *Paideia* is always the means, not an end in itself."

which he dwelt, is already referred to by Philo several times in §1. Philo's search for wisdom predominantly ties in with *Opif.* 71: the mind is filled with the desire to transcend the intelligible world to see God, the great king himself. The pure and unmixed rays of God (ἀθρόου φωτὸς ἄκρατοι καὶ ἀμιγεῖς αὐγαὶ) are perceptible, but have become too strong and bright. The rays have become so concentrated that they stream forth like a torrent, dazzling and overwhelming the mind. The act of vision must be denoted as an event of intuitive revelation, which Philo describes as an emotional and overpowering experience.[77] In contrast to *Opif.* 71, the object of desire in §4 is not the Great King Himself, but rather the light of wisdom.[78] This does not necessarily mean that his ascent of the soul has failed, but rather must be explained by the fact that Philo speaks of a lower level of ascension than in *Opif.* 71. It also reveals that education and wisdom always have been his object of desire by which he is able to reach godlikeness. In earlier times, he visited the synagogue to be trained in his ancestral philosophy, the Mosaic law.[79] Even amidst afflictions regarding his education, he remains able to lift himself up, find relief from his pain, and raise his head.

Summary of §§3-4

In short, in §3 Philo's ideal life is replaced by the dire state of his current life. The political position of the Jews required Philo to take up a civic office, a tumultuous task that absorbed all his time for study and dragged him into worldly affairs. In these politically turbulent times, access to God and gaining knowledge of him and his presence is impeded, although it does not necessarily demonstrate that God himself is absent. In §4 it turned out that in these circumstances, education turns out to be Philo's anchor, and remains functional in achieving knowledge, despite his current life. The eternal and all-encompassing character of wisdom continues to be Philo's resort to persevere and to – sometimes - grasp the light of wisdom.

§5

Philo has concluded §4 with a spark of hope, seeing that his *paideia* enabled him at times to ascent. In §5 Philo continues to describe such flawed ascents. Occasionally, Philo is even able to look around and transcend the mist that clouds his eye of the soul.[80] From Philo's perspective, he describes how he seizes every opportunity, remaining cautious due to the unpredictability and unexpectant brief occurrences of the ascents. At the right moment, he gains wings and rides the waves. In *Migr.* 125, Philo similarly describes the imagery of waves of a righteous mind that buoyed among perils.[81] Philo, despite his enormous efforts, is only able to ascent to the lower air (ἀήρ). Although he previously reached the ether, at this time Philo is not comfortable with his experience.

Moreover, Philo portrays himself as a runaway fugitive slave (δραπετεύειν) from matters of the *politeia*. In light of his earlier views, this situation is completely inversed of what is supposed to be right: he feels

---

[77] Niehoff 1997, 238-239.

[78] In *Spec.* 3.4 it is named "breath of life", but in connection with §4 (αὔραις τῆς ἐπιστήμης καταπνεόμενος) it can be safely established that Philo refers to the light of wisdom (see also §6)

[79] *Legat.* 156: ἠπίστατο οὖν καὶ προσευχὰς ἔχοντας καὶ συνιόντας εἰς αὐτάς, καὶ μάλιστα ταῖς ἱεραῖς ἑβδόμαις, ὅτε δημοσίᾳ τὴν πάτριον παιδεύονται φιλοσοφίαν.

[80] See, for example, *Ebr.* 88 where Philo describes how wisdom shows its true, unchanged form to those with a sharp vision (τοῖς ὀξυδορκοῦσι).

[81] In *Fug.* 49, Philo allegorically explains that 'fleeing into Mesopotamia' stands for riding the waves of the torrent of life's river. He also encourages to be standfast among the current of affairs. τουτέστιν εἰς μέσον τὸν χειμάρρουν ποταμὸν τοῦ βίου, καὶ μὴ ἐπικλυσθεὶς ἐγκαταποθῇς, στηριχθεὶς δὲ βιαιοτάτην ἄνωθεν καὶ ἑκατέρωθεν καὶ πανταχόθεν ἐπικυματίζουσαν φορὰν τῶν πραγμάτων σθεναρῶς ἀπώθει.

enslaved by his masters and, when he is elevated, a fugitive from his earthly obligations.[82] His masters are merciless and he is not happy at all.

Philo, however, has been sucked down for such a long period that he feels estranged from the ascent of the soul. He is no longer a "cosmopolitan", who rightly fled from earthly matters, but rather a citizen of the *polis* that considers fleeing his duties as inappropriate conduct.[83] Philo is now fully engaged in earthly matters and has concluded that an ascent of the soul has become an impossible activity. Philo laments the loss of his former contemplative lifestyle, which resembled and included his activities in the synagogue. He has realized that he no longer is in charge of his daily activities but is fully made subject to the developments within the *politeia*.

§6

Despite the afflictions in §5, Philo gives thanks to God in § 6 for not losing his sight and still being able to be irradiated by wisdom. He is thankful for the fact that his mind has not been fully swallowed up by the huge amounts of earthly matters pouring in on his soul, and that he is able to at least occasionally experience a limited ascent.[84] Philo recognizes that he needs to accept the actual situation and that God protects Philo's crushing under the political worries. Therefore, with renewed hope and courage, Philo embarks on his usual work, inviting his audience to behold (ἰδού γε) his explanation of the Laws of Moses. The Mosaic law is the sole way to gain knowledge of God, as the laws reveal the contents of nature and God. Philo needs the light of wisdom to ascent and peer into (διακύπτειν, see also *Spec.* 3.2) the sacred messages of Moses from a vantage point of distance and reflection. Philo's enlightening enabled him to explain the Laws of Moses. Firstly, from this position, he is able to unfold (διαπτύττειν) the deeper message of the Laws of Moses.[85] Secondly, it enabled him to reveal and display the messages of the law to the multitude.[86]

Summary of §§5-6

In sum, Philo realizes that efforts on his part do not automatically result in a successful ascent: God's contribution is indispensable. That is why Philo is thankful, although his ascents are of lesser intensity than before. He describes his care for the *politeia* and the care for others as a burden. He describes this burden in terms of a forced relationship with one another, rather than a beneficial kinship that envisions one's perfection towards the Mosaic law and oneself. Lastly, the light of wisdom is his source to achieve his final goal. Although Philo is aware that it is impossible to see God, as God is the blinding source of light. Philo does use the light of wisdom to contemplate the contents of the Laws of Moses. God provides enlightenment, and human beings can receive the light through the implanted mind, to properly understand the deeper meaning of the Laws of Moses and the law of nature.

2.3 Concluding observations on *Spec.* 3.1-6

In this chapter, *Spec.* 3.1-6 was examined with two lines of research, namely Philo's self-fashioning and the knowability of God. Philo opens his third book of *De Specialibus Legibus* with an idealistic portrayal and melancholic commemoration of his philosophical and contemplative activities in the past. His tranquil period is ruined, owing to the current civic unrest in Alexandria. He commences an extensive lament on his

---

[82] Similarly, as a counterexample, in *Migr.* 209, Philo explains that a runaway is someone whose mind flees the intelligible world and turns to the material world. See also *Prob.* 45.

[83] See *Dec.* 99-101 in §1 and *Spec.* 2.44-46 in footnote 59 of this thesis.

[84] *Det.* 100: τότε γὰρ ἐγκαταποθεὶς ὁ νοῦς τοσούτῳ κλύδωνι βύθιος εὑρίσκεται, μηδ' ὅσον ἀνανήξασθαι καὶ ὑπερκῦψαι δυνάμενος.

[85] *Somn.* 2.127 also describes a context of studying and elucidating (διαπτύττειν) obscurities in the Laws of Moses.

[86] Borgen 2021, 255. He connects this to the allegorical interpretation itself, to people who are not equipped to interpret allegorically, as in *Hyp.* VII 12-13.

dearth of supply of wisdom and the lack of what he calls “ascents”. The first line of research has shown that Philo has constructed his personal account carefully. Throughout his account, he clearly distinguishes between present and past through the tempus and rigorously speaks in the 1st singular. His language is immersed in Platonic thought by using Platonic accounts of the ascent, such as the eye of the mind, the submerged soul, or the flight of the soul itself. Philo shows that his imagery of the ascent of the soul is predominately used to describe his engagement with the Laws of Moses and gaining a true understanding of the cosmos, God, and himself. The second line of research has shown that this is a persistent effort, in which Philo is fully dependent on God. Despite God’s transcendence and unknowability of his essence, God’s implant in the human mind can provide insights and, therefore, facilitate the ascent. Philo’s part, however, must not be overlooked. He is required to be focused on heavenly matters, which he realizes by his desire for wisdom, acquired through his education. This enables him to persevere. Although infrequent, Philo achieves some ascents, though less intense than he was formerly used to accomplish. Therefore, he thanks God for not fully abstaining from wisdom. Encouraged by this experience, he concludes by embarking again on reading, interpreting, and explaining the Laws of Moses.

2.4 Outlook

As established above, Philo’s language is immersed in Platonic thought by using Platonic accounts of the ascent. As was common in Middle Platonism, these allusions evoke a pastiche of platonic ideas, rather than a systematic adoption of a platonic ascension of the soul. The underlying platonic themes will be examined in chapter 3 to gain a better understanding of Philo’s thoughts on the ascent of the soul.

Within the context of studying and living in accordance with the law the aspiration to see God is sustained. The political unrest, however, and Philo’s duties to the *politeia* have created a rift between his former life and his current life. This is Philo’s confrontation with the insurmountable impasse between heaven and earth, between human beings and God. Philo realizes two things. Firstly, on a personal level, Philo’s ideal life as a philosopher who studies the Laws of Moses has disappeared. Secondly, as a consequence of the political unrest, his life as a politician commenced. He must now take care of the *politeia* of Alexandria. This struggling balance of private and public life will be examined in chapter 4 by introducing Cicero, who also relates his struggles with the *res publica* as well as Epicurus, who shares a peculiar similarity with Philo concerning the avoidance of public life.

Chapter 3 - Philo's origins for the ascent of the soul

3.1 Introduction

The examination of *Spec.* 3.1-6 in the previous chapter has shown that Philo was influenced by various Hellenistic philosophical schools and expressed his ideas with extensive use of contemporary Greco-Roman thought.[87] For that reason, it is insightful to trace the origins of Platonic thought on the ascent of the soul to better understand Philo's thought. This will ultimately shed light on Philo's strategies for reconciling Greco-Roman intellectual trends with the ideas from the Laws of Moses and consequently the construction of his thought of ascent of the soul.[88]

This chapter will take on a thematic approach by examining three passages of Plato that are associated with Philo's use and adoption of Platonic terminology in his personal account. To evaluate Philo's reception, three key aspects of the ascent of the soul will be examined. Firstly, in *Spec.* 3.1-6, Philo argues that he gains knowledge of God due to God's willingness to enlighten him via the eye of the soul. The use of light as a metaphor to enlighten and bedazzle is reminiscent of the allegory of the cave. For that reason, chapter 3.2 will trace Philo's thought on the knowability of God using the dialogue in *Resp.* 518a-e, where the text discusses how an instrument within the mind facilitates properly seeing the Forms. Secondly, in chapter 3.3 *Phdr.* 248e4-249d3 will be introduced, where, in connection with seeing accurately, it is related how the soul of a philosopher is able to properly recollect the divine things. A proper recollection enables the soul to rise up and become divine. This ties in with Philo's description in *Spec.* 3.3-5 how he is able to achieve an ascent of the soul by his *paideia*. Lastly, in chapter 3.4, it must be examined how Philo understood the goal of seeing God. Indications for Philo's thought are found in *Tht.* 176a-177b, where Plato describes how one should escape from earth to heaven and become like God.

3.2 Seeing the light - *Resp.* 518a-e

In *Spec.* 3.1-6, Philo argues that he gains knowledge of God by the enlightenment of the eye of the soul (τὸ τῆς διανοίας ὄμμα), which enabled him to rise and see God. The eye of the soul as a kind of instrument within the mind is reminiscent of *Resp.* 518a-e, which relates a dialogue on how human beings are capable of being educated. The selected text passage is embedded within the narration of the allegory of the cave (514a-520a). However, before contextualizing this passage within the allegory of the cave, it must also not be overlooked that this passage should be read in connection with the sun simile in 506e-509e, as Plato adopts this imagery in the allegory of the cave. In 506e-509e Plato explains that the sun has the function of light, warmth, and growth and that, therefore, the sun makes sensible objects visible and generates growth. In this metaphor the sun represents the Good, meaning that, the Good makes other ideas visible. In addition, the Good is also the cause of truth and being.[89]

As narrated in the allegory of the cave, people who are liberated from the cave and see the light, represent the elevation of the soul upwards into the intellectual region and contemplate the Forms, especially the Good. Using the direct light outside the cave, the liberated souls are able to see the Forms in the intellectual world and come to an understanding of the Good. The transition from darkness into direct light initially causes blindness and confusion, but as time progresses the intelligible world becomes clearer until the Good itself is perceived.[90] Vice versa, the transition from direct light to darkness is met with equal confusion

[87] Najman 2010, 88-89.
[88] Najman 2010, 88-89.
[89] Calabi 2009, 60.
[90] Jowett and Campbell 1894, 320-321.

and frustration, as the liberated souls are confronted with a shadowed and distorted view of the Forms in the sensible world (518a-b6).

One can only gain knowledge of the Forms, if the light of the Good is shed on the mind. For that reason, in 518b7-e, the narration concludes that education is not an activity of making blind people see. It is rather an activity of turning the organ of knowledge away from darkness to the light. This metaphor intends to show that education is not an activity of putting knowledge in the mind, but a human activity of turning away from the reality of becoming to the reality of being.[91]

In sum, Plato concludes that knowledge of the Good is not acquired by some understanding that must be implemented from external sources. The knowledge is already implanted by the capacity of the mind, as the soul is of divine origin. The instrument of the mind must only be applied correctly: it must turn the whole soul away from the world of becoming, until it is able to endure contemplating reality, that is: to see the light of the Good.[92]

The imagery of the sun and the eye of the soul, who senses the light also appears in Philo. Philo adopts the light as a source but equals God to the light who illuminates the intelligible world instead of the Good. On the other hand, the light of God is also blinding and impossible to be perceived directly. In *Spec*. 3.1-6 the light predominantly appears as enlightenment in darkness, while the blinding bedazzling light is emphasized in *Opif*. 69-71. Philo both adapts the visibility of the Good itself to the invisibility of God. Like the Good, the rays of light are indirectly still visible. Because God is the light, Philo stresses the bedazzlement of the light in his thought.[93]

3.3 Flight of the soul - *Phdr.* 248e4-249d3

As related in *Spec*. 3.3-5, both *paideia* and the light of wisdom are required to achieve an ascent of the soul. This is also strongly present in *Phdr*. 248e4-249d3, the concluding part of the myth of the flight of the soul in *Phdr*. 246-249. In this segment of the dialogue, the soul is depicted as having wings, so that is carried aloft to heaven and joins Zeus with his heavenly chariot. *Phdr*. 248e4-249d3 begins by showing two types of souls and their consequences for their next life: the soul of a righteous human being is rewarded with a better life, while an unjust human being is punished by confiscation of its wings for at least ten thousand years. There is, however, an exception for the soul of a philosopher, which will attain wings after three successive periods of ingenuous behaviour and engaging in proper erotic conduct and is subsequently raised up into heaven.[94]

Plato continues in 249a4-249b5, where he describes the various possible reincarnations of the soul that human beings can experience. A human being holds a distinctive position from other animals, as a human being possesses the ability to reason the Forms by inducing the unity out of a multiplicity of perceptions.[95] A human being is able to do so, as it recollects knowledge that the soul has formerly seen. The soul, before it

[91] Pl. *Resp*. 518c6-8: οὕτω σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ ἐκ τοῦ γιγνομένου περιακτέον εἶναι, ἕως ἂν εἰς τὸ ὂν καὶ τοῦ ὄντος τὸ φανότατον δυνατὴ γένηται ἀνασχέσθαι θεωμένη.

[92] Pl. *Resp*. 518d4-6: οὐ τοῦ ἐμποιῆσαι αὐτῷ τὸ ὁρᾶν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἔχοντι μὲν αὐτό, οὐκ ὀρθῶς δὲ τετραμμένῳ οὐδὲ βλέποντι οἷ ἔδει, τοῦτο διαμηχανήσασθαι.

[93] Calabi 2009, 62-67.

[94] Pl. *Phdr*. 249a1-2: πλὴν ἡ τοῦ φιλοσοφήσαντος ἀδόλως ἢ παιδεραστήσαντος μετὰ φιλοσοφίας.

[95] See Yunis 2011, 145-146 for an extensive commentary on the complex syntaxis. Pl. *Phdr*. 249b8-c1: δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον ξυνιέναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῷ ξυναιρούμενον.

passes into a human being, journeyed with God, to see beyond the existent reality and lifted itself up towards true Being.[96]

As mentioned above, Plato also shows that a philosopher holds an exceptional position compared to other human beings, seeing that a philosopher's soul can fly to the intelligible world. The mind of the philosopher is, as much as he is able (κατὰ δύναμιν), occupied with recollecting things that approximate the Forms and true Being. In fact, Plato qualifies recollection of divine things as being initiated in a mystery cult and accomplishing a state of perfection.[97] A philosopher who is oriented towards the divine, rather than earthly matters, must be understood as someone who is possessed.[98]

In short, the pursuit of knowledge is inseparable from the orientation to the divine. Recollecting knowledge is a divine activity, as it traces back to the former place of the soul, where it dwelt with the Forms and the Good. The recollection of knowledge is solely successful by a perfect and continual initiation of the soul in the Forms. A philosopher, who accomplishes such intensity of recollecting knowledge, must be inspired.

Philo also adopts the flight of the soul, most notably in *Opif* 69-71. Plato describes the flight of the soul as events that happen after the death of a human being, while Philo adapts these activities during one's lifetime. In that case, the soul temporarily dissociates from the body and ascents into heavenly spheres.[99] Philo uses this imagery to show the longing of the soul for the intelligible world, in particular God, and its ability to experience higher forms of knowledge and wisdom. This longing occurs as a consequence of the fact that it was already implanted in the human mind as an imprint of the mind of God. this imagery emerges quite strongly in *Spec*. 3.6, where Philo thanks God for providing light and wisdom into the mind and experiencing an ascent.

3.4 Becoming like God - *Tht*. 176a-177b

The final aspect of the ascent of the soul involves the aspiration to become like God. The Platonic dialogue *Theaetetus* includes the discussion on how becoming like God (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), a prominent theme in middle Platonism.[100] The selected passage is part of a digression (171d-177c) on the character of the philosopher in comparison with that of the practical man.[101] Socrates describes how a philosopher is absent-minded concerning earthly matters, as he pursues heavenly matters (173d). In contrast to people who are occupied with earthly matters, philosophers know what true justice is and are therefore truly righteous.

Theodorus concludes that if everyone became a philosopher, there would be more peace and less evil on earth. Socrates rejects this conclusion and argues that evil and good are an inseparable pair. For that reason, a human being must escape earth as soon as possible to heaven, to be with God. This flight entails becoming like God as much as possible, meaning that a human being will become righteous, pious, and equipped with understanding.[102]

---

[96] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c2-4: τοῦτο δ' ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἐκείνων, ἅ ποτ' εἶδεν ἡμῶν ἡ ψυχὴ συμπορευθεῖσα θεῷ καὶ ὑπεριδοῦσα ἃ νῦν εἶναί φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὂν ὄντως.

[97] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c7-9: τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἀνὴρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὀρθῶς χρώμενος, τελέους ἀεὶ τελετὰς τελούμενος, τέλεος ὄντως μόνος γίγνεται.

[98] Pl. *Phdr*. 249c9-d3: ἐξιστάμενος δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σπουδασμάτων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θείῳ γιγνόμενος νουθετεῖται μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ὡς παρακινῶν, ἐνθουσιάζων δὲ λέληθε τοὺς πολλούς.

[99] Runia 2001, 229.

[100] Zambon 2006, 569.

[101] Burnyeat 1990, 252.

[102] Pl. *Tht.* 176b1-2: φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι.

Socrates also reasons that God is utterly righteous.[103] If this notion is properly understood and observed by being righteous among other people, a human being has achieved true virtue and wisdom.[104] In that way, he has become like God.

Secondly, as a counterexample, Socrates shows that unjust and impious people - those who manipulate public affairs or who are careless in their manual labour - manifest foolishness and evil. These people themselves are unaware of their unscrupulous conduct and must be warned of their expected punishment of the soul (see chapter 3.3). A blessed soul, however, will escape the cycle of reincarnation and be with God.

In short, Socrates establishes that God is utterly just and also portrays two types of people who live diametrically different lives. A philosopher who is oriented towards the divine knows what true righteousness is. This means that, if he is just, he can truly escape earthly sorrows. In this way, he becomes like God: philosophers who approach true righteousness will approximate God. Every other person, who is not fully oriented towards the divine, has an incomplete understanding of righteousness and of God. Their flight to become like God is thwarted by earthly matters.

Philo also acknowledges the sorrows that are inherent to earthly matters and in *Spec.* 3.2 Philo has accomplished his flight from the earth. As Philo has explained in *Opif.* 69, God and human beings are alike concerning their minds. For that reason, becoming like God is Philo's ultimate confirmation of their kinship to one another.[105]

3.5 Concluding observations

In all three Platonic texts, different aspects regarding how a human being gains knowledge of God come to the fore. Firstly, every human being possesses an instrument in his mind that is able to sense the light, which originates from the Good. This light source radiates both itself as well as other Forms. Secondly, the soul of a human being is able to recollect the Forms. These Forms were prenatally seen by the soul, where it was a fellow traveller of God and was fully oriented towards true Being. Thirdly, the mind of a philosopher is constantly recollecting the Forms and the Good. This automatically results in negligence of political involvement, because a philosopher exerts himself to be in communion with the divine as much as possible. In that regard, a philosopher stands out in comparison to other human beings, as he wants to become like God as much as possible. God, who is fully devoid of injustice and utterly righteous, provides the knowledge to a philosopher to aspire to become truly righteous, pious, and wise.

Philo used and adapted these Platonic ideas and terminology to align them with his views from the Laws of Moses. For that reason, seeing the primacy of the Laws of Moses, the Platonic terminology is used rather to fit its respective Philonic context, without considering its former Platonic context. Despite this finding, Philo proved to be fully immersed in Platonic thought and used it throughout his works.

Plato and Philo share a few aspects concerning agency. Firstly, both Plato and Philo use the metaphor of an eye in the mind as an instrument to gain knowledge. The object of knowledge is slightly different. While the Platonic eye of the mind is able to see the light of the Good, it is not the case with Philo. Philo's object of seeing is God and God's transcendence prohibits perceiving him. Secondly, in both Plato and Philo, the philosopher is responsible for his efforts. In the case of Plato, it appears that seeing the Forms is always successful, but that becoming an actual philosopher is not destined to happen for everyone. Philo maintains

[103] Pl. *Tht.* 176c1: θεὸς οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς οἷόν τε δικαιότατος.
[104] Pl. *Tht.* 176c4-5: ἡ μὲν γὰρ τούτου γνῶσις σοφία καὶ ἀρετὴ ἀληθινή.
[105] Lévy 2009, 146-149.

that everyone who thoroughly studies the Laws of Moses can be considered a philosopher. In that regard, Philo emphasises the dependence on God more strongly, and not necessarily on the efforts of becoming a philosopher.

Chapter 4 - Public and private life

4.1 Introduction

The close reading of *Spec.* 3.1-6 has shown that Philo makes a clear distinction between on the one hand his political life, engulfed by duties to the *politeia*, and on the other hand his private life, which enabled him to realise his ideal, namely studying in leisure. Philo's description of and attitude towards his obligations to the state are reminiscent of near-contemporary politician M. Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE). Cicero, like Philo, was called to serve the *res publica* and, for different reasons, also struggled with his political duty. Both Cicero and Philo show in their writings that they were strongly influenced by Platonism, although they show a different evaluation of Platonic thought.[106] For these reasons, Cicero and his views on the *res publica*, political duty, and leisure will serve as an insightful dialogue partner with Philo. Cicero had a turbulent political career and experienced exile, enforced by his political opponents. For that reason, chapter 4.2 will examine the first line of research, namely how Cicero dealt with the balance of his public life (*negotium*) and his private life (*otium*). It will become apparent in the prologues of *De Re Publica* (1.1-9) and *De Officiis* (2.1-6; 3.1-5) that Cicero struggled with his abundance of *otium*.

Chapter 4.3 will consist of the second line of research, namely Cicero's philosophical considerations concerning a statesman as described in the last book of *De Re Publica*, the *Somnium Scipionis*. The dream of Scipio in *De Re Publica* 6.9-29 relates the journey of Scipio's disembodied soul. At first glance, Philo and Cicero describe a similar experience and share ideas that resemble one another. There are however fundamental differences in how Cicero balances a political life and a contemplative life. For that reason, two questions will be raised. Firstly, how does Cicero portray political duty in *Somnium Scipionis*? Secondly, how does Cicero consider statesmanship from a cosmological standpoint?

This chapter predominantly discusses Cicero's views on public life. However, a surprising similarity is found in the Epicurean maxim "live unnoticed" (λάθε βιώσας), an advice to avoid public life. Although both Cicero and Philo refuted Epicurean hedonism, it is striking that, at first glance, Philo seems to adhere to this adage. For that reason, the third and last line of research in this chapter will be an examination of the Epicurean maxim "live unnoticed" (λάθε βιώσας).

4.2 Cicero's *otium* and *negotium*

Cicero's political career was impressive. His statesmanship is best known for his thwarting of the conspiracy of Catalina during his consulship in 63 BCE. For this accomplishment, he was rewarded as *parens patriae*.[107] After the failed conspiracy, however, the political turbulence did not cease. During Caesar's consulship in 59 BCE, Clodius, an opponent of Cicero[108], passed legislation that banished anyone who had put a citizen to death without a trial. This legislation forced Cicero to leave Rome and go into exile to Thessalonica, seeing that he had executed several members of the conspiracy of Catalina without a trial.[109] Cicero's exile was later, in 56 BCE, annulled by a senatorial vote. Cicero however could only enjoy his political freedom for a short period, because Caesar reaffirmed his partnership with Pompey and Crassus during the conference of Luca (56 BCE) and solidified their dominion as a triumvirate. This amounted to a significant diminish of influence for Cicero and gave him no other option but to support the triumvirate to not be fully excluded

[106] Philo's use of Plato was examined in chapter two of this thesis. See also Schofeld 2021, 88-102.

[107] Tatum 2006, 196.

[108] Tatum 2006, 197. In 62 BCE, P. Clodius Pulcher was caught invading the nocturnal rites of the Bona Dea. Cicero unsuccessfully attempted to try Clodius.

[109] Tatum 2006, 201.

from public life. This period provided Cicero with leisure to write *De Re Publica* between 54 and 51 BCE.[110] Eventually, in 49 BCE, the outbreak of the civil war, after Caesar crossed the Rubicon and his subsequent dictatorship, Cicero thought it necessary to leave politics altogether. The Roman Republic ceased to exist, and to his grief, Cicero retired from politics to devote himself to writing and studying philosophy. It was in this period that Cicero wrote *De Officiis* (44 BCE).[111]

Both *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis* were written when Cicero's political power was limited and was confronted with leisure.

4.2.2 *De Re Publica* 1.1-9

De Re Publica has not been completely transmitted and pens in the middle of a discussion of individual *virtus* in relation to patriotism.[112] Cicero argues that virtue must be considered an art that is best used in public life (*usus autem eius est maximus civitatis gubernatio*). For that reason, Cicero denounces philosophers, especially Epicureans, who only discuss virtue for intellectual exercise (*in angulis personant*) and do not put their virtue to practise. Rather, virtue is truly advanced, Cicero concludes, by men who are trained by customs or laws (*disciplinis informata alia moribus confirmarunt, sanxerunt autem alia legibus*).[113]

This assertion is rather painful in light of Cicero's personal situation, as he had been excluded from public life and was not able to devote himself to virtuous conduct. In the remainder of the prologue of book one, it will become apparent that Cicero laments his inability to contribute to the state. Cicero denotes his inability as his *otium*. In the introduction of *De Re Publica* (1.1-9) *otium* occurs eight times in different ways.[114] Firstly, Cicero discusses the salutary effects of *otium* and argues that periods of relaxation from public service provide the opportunity for reflection and contemplation.[115] It is, however, expected of a statesman to be available at all times to take care of the state, putting one's attention to his *otium* on a secondary level. In that regard *Rep*. 1.7 is an insightful passage, that can be interpreted as a consolation for his personal situation. In this passage, Cicero describes how a statesman at all times, even in politically turbulent times, is required by his citizens to guarantee order and security. For that reason, Cicero is even willing to sacrifice his own *otium* to ensure *otium* to his fellow citizens.

Secondly, the pejorative nuance is also found in Cicero, predominantly in connection with Epicurean pleasure (*voluptas*) and their rejection of participating in public life.[116] Men who deny their political duties, like Epicureans, in order to enjoy a quiet life (*otio perfruantur*) must be condemned. In *Rep*. 1.8-9 Cicero argues that citizens are indebted to the *patria*, because the fatherland produces and educates citizens. In that regard, an educated citizen does not receive an education for his benefit, but must pay his dues to the *patria* by contributing to public affairs. After a statesman has taken proper care of the *patria*, only then there is time left for proper *otium*.

In the prologue of book one Cicero vehemently pleads for contribution to the state as the best suitable way of conducting virtue. He deems *otium* only to be justified after sufficient care is provided to the state. To show the gravity of this attitude, Cicero is prepared to sacrifice his own *otium* if it would be beneficiary to

[110] Keyes 1928, 2-3.
[111] Steel 2013, 377-376.
[112] Zetzel 1995, 95.
[113] Sauer 2020, 28.
[114] Zetzel 1995, 96. Zetzel discerns three kinds of *otium* in the prologue of book one: pejoratively, positively and politically.
[115] Zetzel 1995, 96-97. Cic. *Rep*. 1.7.4; 1.14.3; 1.14.5 and Cic. *Brut*. 8.
[116] Zetzel 1995, 96. See also chapter 4.4 of this thesis.

the state. This honourable stance of Cicero is praiseworthy, but all the more pitiful given his personal predicament.

4.2.3 *De Officiis* 2.1-6 and 3.1-5

Cicero also addresses his struggle between *otium* and *negotium* in the prologues of *De Officiis.* This work is written in 44 BCE when he was no longer participating in public life.[117] In *Off.* 2.1-6, Cicero defends himself against the charges of the writing project of *De Officiis* and its philosophical principles (*de instituto ac de iudicio meo*). His defence is aimed at two distinct groups of critics. The first group consisted of members of the senatorial class (§§2-6), who criticised Cicero for devoting too much time to philosophy. The second group consisted of men who criticised Cicero that this project was inconsistent with his general philosophical stance of Academic scepticism (§§7-8).[118] Cicero's defence against the first group will be examined more closely, the latter group will be omitted in this examination.

Cicero argues that earlier he spent all his time on the *res publica*, but now no longer is needed, as the state ceased to exist (*cum autem dominatu unius omnia tenerentur neque esset usquam consilio aut auctoritati locus*). He looks back on his life and wished that the *res publica* still functioned (*utinam res publica stetisset*). Cicero was fully committed to his duties to the state and had almost no *otium* for other matters, such as reading and writing philosophy. But now, instead, he devotes his time to reading and, especially, writing. He is happy that he can pursue wisdom and finds mental enjoyment (*oblectatio animi*) and relaxation (*requies curarum*) in studying philosophy. In the prologue of book two, Cicero concludes panegyrically how, while he is deprived of public service, now pursues the study of wisdom.[119]

In *Off.* 3.1-5 the literary topos is once again employed with more pathos. In this passage, Cicero argues that *otium* and solitude (*solitudo*) contribute to idleness (languor). He meditates on the different attitudes towards *otium* and *solitudo*, by comparing his work ethic towards the *res publica* with that of the eminent politician Scipio Africanus. Cicero esteems Scipio higher than himself and concludes in lamentation that he cannot equal – not even by imitation - Scipio's excellence of character (*Sed nec hoc otium cum Africani otio nec haec solitudo cum illa comparanda est*). Scipio never had leisure, as even his *otium* and *solitudo* were occupied with affairs of the state (*in otio de negotiis cogitare et in solitudine secum loqui solitum*). Cicero, however, has no choice, as his *otium* and *solitudo* were enforced on him due to his exclusion from public life. However, due to these circumstances beyond his control, he relates, with a sense of self-pity and pride, how he adapted himself to study philosophy and write treatises.[120]

In the prologues *De Officiis*, Cicero speaks more freely of his *otium*, seeing that the Roman Republic has ceased to function. Although Cicero laments this development, he also realizes the beneficial aspects of studying philosophy and acquiring wisdom.

4.3 *Somnium Scipionis – De Re Publica* 6.9-29

The *Somnium Scipionis* is the concluding segment (6.9-29) of Cicero's *De Re Publica*.[121] In parallel with the myth of Er, *De Re Publica* ends with Scipio's report of his remarkable dream to his interlocuters.[122] The

---

[117] Dyck 1996, 8-9.

[118] Dyck 1996, 362-363.

[119] Dyck 1996, 362-369. Cic. *Off.* 1.5: Sed cum tota philosophia, mi Cicero, frugifera et fructuosa nec ulla pars eius inculta ac deserta sit, tum nullus feracior in ea locus est nec uberior quam de officiis, a quibus constanter honesteque vivendi praecepta ducuntur.

[120] Dyck 1996, 496-500.

[121] Keyes 1948, 2-7.

[122] Powell 1990, 122. Plato's *Republic* ends with the myth of Er (614b-621d). In contrast to the dialogue form in *Somnium Scipionis*, here Socrates tells the story of Er, the son of Armenius, who was found on the battlefield and assumed dead.

subject of Scipio's dream is a philosophical exposition of the rewards of a good statesman after death. The themes in Scipio's dream cannot be strictly attributed to one philosophical school, but show, like Philo's works, a broad imaginative synthesis of different philosophical schools.[123] The rewards of political virtue are supported with cosmological and geographical imagery.[124]

4.3.1 Examination of *Somnium Scipionis*

The report commences with Scipio's arrival at the palace of Massinissa, king of the Numidians (206-148 BCE), a friend and ally of his adoptive grandfather Scipio Africanus Maior (§9). The visit is emotional as well as elated and they intensively discuss the current political state of affairs of both the Roman empire and the Numidian power (*ego illum de suo regno, ille me de nostra re publica*).

4.3.1.1 duty of a politician

After a full day of meeting with the king, Scipio falls into a deep sleep when his grandfather Africanus appears. Africanus shows the city of Carthage and predicts that Scipio will overtake the city and that Scipio as a censor and consul will bring political rest, after a period of wars (§11). In §12 Africanus warns Scipio that the state will be disturbed by the designs of his grandson Tiberius Gracchus and that Scipio must prove himself to the fatherland as a man of character, as resourceful, and as wise (*oportebit patriae lumen animi, ingenii consiliique tui*). Africanus prophesizes how Scipio will be charged with the restoration of order and peace in the state (*tu eris unus, in quo nitatur civitatis salus, ac, ne multa, dictator rem publicam constituas oportet*).

4.3.1.2 Cosmology

The text continues in §13 by Africanus encouraging him and revealing that there is a place in heaven set apart for the souls of virtuous statesmen. He assures him that nothing is more pleasing to the supreme God than men who devote themselves to the state to enforce justice (*nihil est enim illi principi deo* (…) *acceptius quam concilia coetusque hominum iure sociati, quae civitates appellantur*). With this statement, Cicero shows that the great statesman is the living embodiment of the universe as a natural cyclic order (*harum rectores et conservatores hinc prefecti huc revertuntur*).[125]

This cyclic view also implies that human beings are immortal, which leads Scipio to ask if his father Aemilius Paulus is still alive. Africanus confirms this and reunites Scipio with Paulus. Paulus argues that life on earth is death and death – by being liberated from bodily bonds – is life. However, this eternal life cannot be hastened by suicide, as Paulus explains that reality, i.e. the visible things, are part of God's temple (§15). This also means that God is in charge of one's life and death, because good men should not desert the duty assigned by God.[126]

At this point in the narration (§16), Scipio has drifted away to such a distance that earth has become a globe within the milky way. Scipio contemplates all the impressions from his beautiful surroundings (*ex quo omnia mihi contemplanti praeclara cetera et mirabilia videbantur*). The dream continues by Africanus

---

He was taken home for cremation, but came back to life on the twelfth day on the funeral pyre. Er recounts his vision of the fate of the soul after death in the Hades.

[123] Luck 1956, 207-208.

[124] Powell 1990, 124.

[125] Luck 1956, 208.

[126] *Somn.* 15: Quare et tibi, Publi, et piis omnibus retinendus animus est in custodia corporis nec iniussu eius, a quo ille est vobis datus, ex hominum vita migrandum est, ne munus humanum adsignatum a deo defugisse videamini.

showing the ordering of the planets, which reminisces Plato's *Timaeus* and less explicitly the cosmic description in the myth of Er.[127]

Both in §17 and §20 Scipio, however, remains fixated on earth (*quam cum magis intuerer, quaeso, inquit Africanus, quousque humi defixa tua mens erit?*). For that reason, Africanus delivers a speech employing an extensive geographical and astronomical description to show how small and how short the fame of a Roman statesman on earth is (§§20-25). He urges Scipio to behold the heavenly things and scorn the earthly things (*haec caelestia semper spectato, illa humana contemnito*), especially the pursuit of fame or glory (*celeberitas sermonis hominum and gloria*).

The last four sections (§§26-29) are devoted to the immortality and divinity of the soul. Africanus urges Scipio to commit himself to the honourable labours of the state, knowing that the mind is immortal and divine (*deum te igitur scito esse*).[128] A virtuous mind, set to the affairs of the state, provides an entrance to heaven. §§27-28 discuss how the soul moves itself and is therefore eternal, an argument taken from Pl. *Phdr*. 245c-e. Africanus concludes (§29) by saying that the soul must be used for the best tasks, namely the duties for the fatherland. This will enable the mind to fly faster to its proper home and permanent abode (*sunt autem optimae curae de salute patriae, quibus agitatus et exercitatus animus velocius in hanc sedem et domum suam pervolabit*). Africanus warns that sensual pleasures and desires are slaves to men and will not gain a higher flight. After these last advisory remarks, Africanus leaves, and Scipio awakes.

4.3.2 Concluding observations

The *Somnium Scipionis* is a closing dream report in *De Re Publica*, adopted and innovated from the narrative model of the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic*. This work shows that a proper statesman is a man of character, resourceful and wise. He is also righteous and dutiful. It becomes clear that statesmanship must be characterised as divine duty, as it is provided by the Supreme God. For that reason, one's duty towards the *patria* must be prioritised over one's parents and family. This attitude will guarantee a successful road to the skies after his life. In this regard, contemplation becomes an activity that is at the service of politics. A politician, however, should not aspire to temporary fame and glory on earth. Rather, he must be aware of the magnitude of the heavenly spheres and, vice versa, of the smallness of earth. On the scale of the whole universe, the significance Roman Empire and one's role and impact as a politician within public administration vanish. For that reason, a politician achieves true glory by virtue itself. This is comprehended by the eternal mind, which is aware of the worthlessness of a life of pleasure in light of eternal bliss. For that reason, the mind exerts itself to realize the duties of the fatherland. A politician with this mindset will ensure a faster flight to the actual home of the soul into heaven, according to Cicero.

4.4 Conclusions on Cicero

Cicero's political career was turbulent, but he also considered his duties to the *res publica* virtuous and honourable. Statesmanship was in his view the only way to true virtue. For that reason, *otium* could only be observed in the service of the state, after the business of the state had been taken care of. This view was mainly outlined in his prologue of *De Re Publica*, which was written during a constrictive period of the triumvirate. At the same time, this view also implies that other ways of virtuous conduct were inferior, especially philosophers who only intellectually shaped virtue rather than conduct virtue. Cicero refuted Epicureans in particular, as they fully neglected public life to live a quiet life. Although Cicero strongly emphasized the *usus* of virtue, he also provides a philosophical evaluation at the end of *De Re Publica.* In *Somnium Scipionis* Cicero explores the meaning of the duty of a politician. He shows that a proper

[127] Powell 1990, 157. Pl. *Tim*. 38b-39e & Pl. *Rep*. 10.616b-717c.
[128] Powell 1990, 164-165. §§27-28 are taken from Pl. *Phdr*. 245c-e.

statesman is virtuous and righteous and that his task must be characterized as a divine duty. The duty of a politician is provided by the Supreme God and it therefore must be acknowledged as a higher purpose. For that reason, one's service to the state must be contemplated as such. In view of the cosmos, one's personal glory and fame are futile and true glory solely originates from virtue itself. In Cicero's view, the mind of a politician is properly aimed to understand how this eternal bliss is accomplished.

Later in Cicero's life, on the brink of the civil war, Cicero's tone on *otium* changes. He is now fully excluded from public life and is confronted with an abundance of *otium*. In *De Officiis,* he laments that he no longer has any obligations and that his *otium* is, in his view, idle. Eventually, he accepts his fate and concludes that his *otium*, without the prospect of *negotium*, is also well-spent on writing philosophy and the search for wisdom.

4.5 Epicurus and his maxim λάθε βιώσας

4.5.1 Epicurean thought

Epicurus's life (341 - 270 BCE) and thought revolved around acquiring a life of pleasure (βίος ἀπολαυστικός).[129] Stronger than other contemporary philosophical schools, Epicurean philosophy can be assigned as *Seelenheilung*: a therapeutic philosophy that is intended to help people get rid of fears and insecurities.[130] It also means that Epicureanism was not solely an intellectual activity, but also required training and mediation to achieve the state of unperturbedness (ἀταραξία). An adherent to Epicurus's thought achieved this way of life by calculated reasoning of choices: either repudiating (ἔλεγχος) irrational fears and unfulfillable desires and also of adopting better alternatives (νουθέτησις).[131]

4.5.2 Goals of λάθε βιώσας

Within the aforementioned philosophical framework, Epicurus implemented in the component of νουθέτησις the advice to "live unnoticed" (λάθε βιώσας). This advice must not be understood as an exhortation to isolate oneself from others and avoid any form of human contact, as the second century Platonist Plutarch (50-150 CE) polemically did in his treatise *Is "Live Unknown" a Wise Precept?*.[132] Plutarch was proud to be a convinced follower of the "divine" Plato and strongly refuted both the Stoics and Epicureans. Anti-Epicurean polemic occupies an important place in Plutarch's philosophical writings.[133]

Rather, Epicurus intended the application of his advice predominantly in the context of public life and one's service to the *politeia*.[134]

4.5.2.1 Unsatisfactory desires: abandonment that what is honourable

Epicurus proposes that human beings must control their desires by assessing if such a desire is natural and necessary. In this way, the ultimate goal of a pleasurable life is feasible. He holds that not all desires are fulfillable, especially the desires that are specific to a politician. Seeing how desires for political glory and fame are only temporary and complicated to achieve, Epicurus urges to abstain from political affairs.[135]

This is plainly illustrated in *De aud. Poet*. 37A, where Plutarch characterizes adherents of Epicurus:

---

[129] Roskam 2007b, 5.
[130] Berner 2001, 121.
[131] Roskam 2007a, 19.
[132] Greek: εἰ καλῶς εἴρηται τὸ λάθε βιώσας. This work is abbreviated as *De Lat. Viv.* from *De latenter Vivendo*.
[133] Roskam 2007a, 85-86. Plutarch rejected Epicureanism vehemently in five treatises.
[134] Berner 2000, 121.
[135] Roskam 2007b, 46.

τὸ εὔδαιμον καὶ μακάριον οὐ χρημάτων πλῆθος οὐδὲ πραγμάτων ὄγκος οὐδ᾽ ἀρχαί τινες ἔχουσιν οὐδὲ δυνάμεις, ἀλλ᾽ ἀλυπία καὶ πραότης παθῶν καὶ διάθεσις ψυχῆς τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ὁρίζουσα.

[Happiness and blessedness do not consist in vast possessions or exalted occupations or offices or authority, but rather a freedom from pain and calmness and a disposition of the soul that sets its limitations in accordance with nature.][136]

In this passage, Epicureans are characterised as people who do not adhere to possessions or reputation. Instead, avoidance of pain and calmness are foundational to their goal of a pleasurable life. This state of mind is achieved by limiting one's desires properly. Next to material desires such as wealth and possessions, immaterial desires, such as authority can also be controlled. For that reason, opting for the exclusion of participation in public life is a profitable choice.

This conviction, however, is strongly refuted by Plutarch. He does not consider public life as if it can be used for one's pleasure or displeasure, but rather as something honourable (τὸ καλόν).[137] For that reason, abandonment of public life and considering it an idle desire is out of the question. This is elucidated in *De Lat. Viv.* 1129A:

ἐὰν δέ τις ἐν μὲν φυσικοῖς θεὸν ὑμνῇ καὶ δίκην καὶ πρόνοιαν, ἐν δὲ ἠθικοῖς νόμον καὶ κοινωνίαν καὶ πολιτείαν, ἐν δὲ πολιτείᾳ τὸ καλὸν ἀλλὰ μὴ τὴν χρείαν, διὰ τί λάθῃ βιώσας;

[But consider one who in natural philosophy extols God and justice and providence, in ethics: law and society and participation in public affairs, and in political life the upright and not the utilitarian act, what need has he to live unknown?][138]

Plutarch shows the egotistical and licentious repercussions of the Epicurean attitude and puts forward his own views of what an ideal life should be viewed.[139]

4.5.2.2 Personal security by avoidance of harm of people

A second component of the maxim "live unnoticed" is avoiding the harm of other people (βλάβαι ἐξ ἀνθρώπων), specifically from public life, to maintain one's unperturbedness. This is clearly expressed in *Pyrr.* 20.3, where Plutarch describes that Epicurus and his school would have nothing to do with the civil government because it was injurious and the ruin of happiness (πολιτείαν δὲ φεύγοντες ὡς βλάβην καὶ σύγχυσιν τοῦ μακαρίου). The efforts and strife that are required for political glory and fame are not proportionate to the pleasure they may generate.[140] Therefore, a secluded life, away from the public, ensures no harm from others.[141]

4.5.3 Concluding remarks

Epicurus' maxim λάθε βιώσας was powerful advice to achieve and maintain a life of pleasure. Political ambitions and desires for glory and fame are idle, unnatural and cannot be satisfactorily fulfilled. Secondly,

[136] Roskam 2007b, 46-47. Text and translation are taken from Babbitt 1927, 196-197.
[137] See also Cic. *Tusc.* 5.119 and above in chapter 4.2.
[138] Text and translation are taken from Roskam 2007a, 120-121.
[139] Roskam 2007a, 127.
[140] See Diog. Laert. 10.117 and Cic. *Fin.* 1.67. Although Epicurus did participate in public life if it guaranteed greater pleasure. Roskam 2007a 37-40.
[141] Gildenhard 2007, 37-38. Note, however, the puzzling outcry in favour of Epicureanism in Cic. *Tusc.* 105. Cicero concludes that a wise man should escape the vexations of the masses and devote oneself in leisure to literature (*otio litterato*).

participating in public life involves competition and envy between human beings, as this is harmful and damaging to one's goal of a pleasurable life.

The last part of this chapter investigated a position that Cicero vehemently criticised, namely the avoidance of public life in epicurean thought. In Epicureanism, one's pleasure is a central goal, which was acquired by a state of unperturbedness. To reach this state, a human being must thoroughly weigh the feasibility of the fulfilment of desires as well as eliminate fears. The maxim "live unnoticed" contributes to that goal. Firstly, if someone enters public life, he will be exposed to all kinds of desires, such as personal glory and fame. These desires only provide temporary pleasure and are difficult to accomplish. Secondly, participating in public life also means that someone is exposed to competition, hatred, and envy from other people. This is harmful to one's unperturbedness and undermines a pleasurable life. For that reason, it is better to avoid other people in politics to ensure a life of undisturbed hedonism.

4.6 General conclusions

This chapter investigated the balance of public life and private life in Cicero, while also paying attention to the Epicurean maxim "live unnoticed".

Although Cicero's life and Philo's life profoundly differ from one another, a few similarities and differences can be pointed out. Both Cicero and Philo struggled with their political career, although their points of departure can be considered complete opposites. Cicero was a politician, who was sentenced to a life of *otium*. Philo, however, was a philosopher, who was sentenced to a life of *negotium*.

Cicero constructs his sentence to *otium* in lamenting prologues of *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis*. Philo does not lament his *otium*, but rather his *negotium* in *Spec.* 3.1-6. Cicero relates in his prologues that the duties of a politician and his virtues are a pinnacle of the life of a politician, while Philo considers such aspirations as a low point in the life of a philosopher.

The experience of ascent into heaven in *Somnium Scipionis* has shown that a politician is continually in the service of the res publica, as its duties are endowed upon him by the Supreme God. This relationship between the Supreme God and a statesman is slightly comparable to Philo's views on the relationship between God's mind and the human mind. The cosmos in both these ascents serve a different purpose. The universe in *Somnium Scipionis* predominantly shows the vastness of the universe to demonstrate the triviality of political power and fame and vice versa the higher, virtuous purpose of political duty. In Philo, the mind can ascent into the universe and perceive the heavenly bodies, as it functions as the way in the process to see God.

Lastly, Philo is convinced that politics and public life are distracting to the mind and these activities must be avoided. Only in seclusion and in quiet the human mind can properly concentrate on the Laws of Moses, the cosmos, and the mind of God. These conditions of a successful philosophical experience are reminiscent of the Epicurean maxim "live unnoticed". Epicurean thought is founded on entirely different ideas, such as the avoidance of pain and fear. Epicurus and Philo however both share the same dangers of public life. Philo denounces his hedonistic way of life, but does agree with Epicurus on the need for a blissful peace to sustain and improve one's care of oneself.

Chapter 5 - General conclusions

This thesis has examined the research question "how does Philo as a Jewish-Hellenistic thinker evaluate the role of God and human beings regarding seeing God?"

This research question was answered by close reading the autobiographical account of Philo in *Spec.* 3.1-6. *Spec.* 3.1-6 was taken as the key text to understanding Philo's thought on seeing God, and, for that reason, its interpretation was supplemented with Philonic passages from his other works.

Spec. 3.1-6 reports Philo's personal account of the heavenly ascent with rich intertextuality and in a multifaceted manner. In this thesis, *Spec.* 3.1-6 was examined with attention to the fashioning of Philo's persona, the role of human beings in general, and the role of God.

Chapter two - Three autobiographical experiences of heavenly ascent

Besides, *Spec.* 3.1-6 unfolds Philo's attempt to see God in three different experiences of the heavenly ascent of the soul, which can be characterised as Philo's pinnacle, Philo's downfall, and Philo's redemption. Each of the ascents relates a different level of ascent, of which the highest is reported in Philo's ideal way of life, namely as a philosopher in leisure. The other two ascents are of lower intensity, as a consequence of his new life as a politician fully concerned with the turmoil of the *politeia*.

Philo's pinnacle experience in §§1-2 is characterised as the "ideal life", with plenty of time for leisurely philosophizing and contemplation. In these sections, Philo finds himself in a state of happiness and blessedness, which he partly achieved through his own efforts by satisfying his desire to engage with the Laws of Moses. Philo's desire for wisdom enabled him to persist in his studies. This desire is present as a consequence of the kinship between God and human being through the mind. God's mind and the mind of a human being are linked to one another, as a human being is created after the image and likeness of God. This is how God's role comes into play, as God is present as an imprint in the human mind. For that reason, Philo is able to flee earthly matters and distance himself from the sense world. Philo fashions himself as a successful example of healthy kinship and the successful interplay between God and man.

Philo's downfall in §§3-4 is primarily portrayed as a betrayal by "envy", a rather abstract description of the pogroms in Alexandria. As a consequence, Philo is assigned as an ambassador and must now react as a representative of the *politeia.* Although he is fully negative of his new way of life, he nevertheless resorts to *paideia* as a hopeful resource. Philo is illuminated by his *paideia* and consoles himself with minimal enlightenment of the mind. These moments of ascent alleviate the pain of his political career. Philo shows that the political turmoil is not necessarily his true crisis, but rather the disturbance of his peace of mind and his quiet way of life. This is corroborated by his emphasis on *paideia* and the importance of studying the Laws of Moses.

Philo's redemption following his downfall in §§5-6 is described in two phases. At first, Philo laments the full eradication of his ascents following his political duties. This grievous state, however, is then dissolved by the light of wisdom, which is provided by God. Somehow Philo achieves an ascent. This, however, does not happen through his own efforts, but rather with the enlightenment of wisdom. For that reason, Philo gives thanks to God, who has provided him with the light and wisdom to read and reveal the Laws of Moses. Philo shows in these sections that the close interplay between God and himself is easily thwarted by external forces, but that the kinship of God and Philo remained strong through his desire for wisdom in the Laws of Moses.

In *Spec.* 3.1-6 Philo fashions himself as a righteous man who suffers as a consequence of unjust, external forces. For that reason, Philo does not blame God for his predicament, but identifies the *politeia* as the

source of evil. To properly deal with external evils, Philo permeates his account with the significance of *paideia*, especially the Laws of Moses. The Laws of Moses are the source of Philo's ideal life, the resort amidst Philo's afflictions, and the redemption of Philo's demise. God's essence is unknowable, but the human mind acknowledges his kinship at every stage of the ascent.

Philo expresses his ideas using Platonic imagery and terminology. Philo also constructed the demise of his private life by the rise of his public life. These two elements were explored in chapters three and four.

Chapter three - Plato's heritage in Philo's autobiographical account

Chapter three has examined how Philo reconceives ideas previously uttered by Plato. Philo abundantly uses Platonic ideas in his terminology, but he does alter their meaning to fit his own philosophical framework. The use of Plato's philosophy was not necessarily a Philonic innovation, but must be considered a frequent phenomenon in Middle Platonism. Philo's synthesis of the Laws of Moses with Plato, however, was innovative.

Plato is introduced by Philo along three aspects of heavenly ascent in *Spec*. 3.1-6. The passage *Resp*. 518a-e contributed to the understanding of how Philo envisions the capability of human beings to see God. Although Philo uses the concept of an eye of the mind, he does not adhere to the full perceptible capabilities like Plato did with perceiving the Good. In Philo, the object of seeing is not the Good, but rather God himself. As a consequence, the perceptibility of the eye of the mind shifts to the background, and God is not discerned directly. Rather, Philo uses Platonic imagery to demonstrate the bedazzlement of the rays of light that originate from God. For that reason, the desire to see God cannot be fulfilled.

Philo uses the Platonic metaphor of the flight of the soul in *Phdr*. 248e4-249d3 to illustrate how the desire to see God is attempted. This passage contributes to the understanding of *Spec*. 3.1-6 about how a soul can ascent and approximate God. *Phdr*. 248e4-249d3 also demonstrated the special position of a philosopher in relation to regular human beings. A philosopher is fixated upon seeing the divine Forms, which will enable him to ascent. Philo also uses this aspect of the metaphor, but implemented the Laws of Moses as its prime source of wisdom.

Philo shares the goal of becoming like God with Plato. *Tht*. 176a-177b is part of digression that illustrates the differences between a practical man and a philosopher, an opposition that Philo also observes. In *Tht*. 176a-177b it becomes clear that the pursuit of heavenly matters is sufficient to successfully attain true righteousness and, as a consequence become like God. In Philo, however, philosophers pursue God to retrieve the kinship between God's mind and the human mind. Becoming like God does not necessarily imply becoming righteous, rather it must be understood as maintaining the kinship between God and man. For that reason, owing to God's transcendence, Philo cannot achieve his goal of becoming like God, because he is limited by his human body.

Chapter three has shown that Philo is deeply indebted to Plato's thought and terminology. *Tht*. 176a-177b already has attested to a difference between a practical man and a philosopher. However, a clearer understanding is possible, if Philo's struggle between public life and private life is compared to the Roman politician Cicero.

Chapter four – Personal struggle of public and private affairs

Chapter four aimed to elucidate Philo's portrayal of his public life and private life in *Spec*. 3.1-6. This was achieved by comparing Philo to Cicero, a near-contemporary politician, who experienced a turbulent political career in Rome.

Cicero fully devotes himself to the *res publica*, but was excluded from public life by his political opponents and, especially, the rise of dictator Ceasar. The prologues of *De Re Publica* and *De Officiis* Cicero are characterised as lamentations of the current state of affairs, as Philo did in *Spec.* 3.1-6. Cicero, however, did not lament his *negotium*, but his abundance of *otium*. Cicero argues that idle otium must be avoided at all costs and that ideally otium is also devoted to the service of the state.

Cicero explores the reasons for this attitude in his *Somnium Scipionis*. Cicero describes in *Somnium Scipionis* Scipio's heavenly ascent to illustrate how a statesman is obligated to answer his duty to serve the patria. Cicero relates that the Supreme God has endowed the statesman with virtue, which can only truly be applied to the state. Intellectual considerations of virtue, namely the activities of philosophers are a surrogate to true virtuous conduct.

Philo maintains a radically different opinion. Cicero and Philo underline, on a fundamental level, the same ideals concerning virtue, but do not share the execution of virtuous conduct. Philo considers *otium* as a prerequisite to becoming virtuous. Cicero, however, demonstrates that *otium* is the root of all evil.

Cicero vehemently refutes the Epicureans, who aspire to a life full of idle *otium*. Although both Philo and Cicero condemn the hedonism of Epicurean thought, a slight nuance must be introduced concerning Philo's views on public life.

Philo's denouncement of public life closely resembles the Epicurean maxim "live unnoticed". Philo and Epicurus share the same motivation to avoid public life, namely the futility of personal fame and glory and the harm that comes from other people. Although Philo and Epicurus do not share the same goals of an ideal life, they do, however, share the same route to achieving their respective ideals.

Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, fixation on Philo as a philosopher is not the only perspective to understand Philo and his thought. Surprisingly, philosophy is not the only portal to Philo's thought. Rather the implementation of the politician Cicero has shed new light on Philo's persona and philosophy. Philo has shown in *Spec*. 3.1-6 that he operates in the same elite circles as Cicero did, and that he is aware of the Roman debates that Cicero addresses in his writings. It is, however, too demanding of the evidence to locate the literal use of Cicero in Philo.

In that regard, Niehoff's demarcation becomes an attractive framework for *Spec*. 3.1-6, seeing that Philo was aware of the intellectual discourse in Rome and that *Spec*. 3.1-6 was written in Philo's later intellectual development. However, chapter two and particularly chapter three mitigate the probability of her approach in this text passage, as Philo remains heavily indebted to Plato in *Spec*. 3.1-6, while his emphasis of Stoicism is not prominently perceptible as one should expect from her approach.

Spec. 3.1-6 primarily shows that Philo effortlessly combines and synthesizes prevailing intellectual discourse in the Greco-Roman world, with his prime objective to place to Laws of Moses on centre stage. Philo has shown that heavenly ascent is a harmonious interplay of God and human beings that it confirms and consolidates the interrelation of God's mind and the human mind, which is achieved by a continual engagement with the Laws of Moses.

Bibliography

Babbitt, F.C., *Plutarch's Moralia vol. I* (London: Heinemann 1927).

Berner, U., *Ei kalōs eirētai to lathe biōsas = Ist "Lebe im Verborgenen" eine gute Lebensregel?* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2001).

Borgen, P.J., Seland, T., *Illuminations by Philo of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill 2021).

Borgen, P.J., Fuglseth, K. & Skarsten, R., *The Philo Index: a Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria Lemmatised & ccomputer-generated* (Trondheim: Religionsvitenskapelig Institutt, Norges Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet 1997).

Burnyeat, M., *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett 1990).

Calabi, F., *God's Acting, Man's Acting: Tradition and Philosophy in Philo of Alexandria* (Leiden: Brill 2008).

Colson, F.H., *Philo vol. VII* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press 1937).

De Jonge, C.C., 'Ps.-Longinus on Ecstasy: Author, Audience and Text', in: Grethlein J., Huitink L. & Tagliabue A., *Experience, Narrative and Criticism in Ancient Greece. Under the Spell of Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020) 148-171.

Dorschel, A., *Ideengeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2010).

Dyck, A.R., *A Commentary on Cicero, De Officiis* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1996).

Gildenhard, I., *Paideia Romana: Cicero's "Tusculan Disputations"* (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society 2007).

Goodenough, E.R., *By Light, Light: the Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (Amsterdam: Philo Press 1969).

Jowett, B., Campbell, L., *Plato's Republic: Notes* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1894).

Kamesar, A., *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009).

Keyes, C.W., *De Re Publica; De Legibus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1928).

Lease, G., 'Jewish Mystery Cults since Goodenough' in: *ANRW* 20/2 (Berlin: De Gruyter 1987) 858-880.

Lévy, C., 'Philo's Ethics' in: Kamesar, A., *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009).

Liddell, H.G., Scott, R. & Jones, H.S., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1968).

Luck, G., 'Studia Divina in Vita Humana. On Cicero's "Dream of Scipio" and its Place in Graeco-Roman Philosophy', *The Harvard theological review* (1956) 207–218.

Mackie, S.D, 'Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria', *The Studia Philonica Annual* (2009) 25–47.

Mackie, S.D, 'Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism', *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period* (2012) 147–179.

Méasson, A., *Du char ailé de Zeus à l'Arche d'alliance: images et mythes platoniciens chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes 1986).

McFarland, O., *God and Grace in Philo and Paul* (Leiden: Brill 2015).

McGinn, B., *The foundations of mysticism: origins to the fifth century* (New York: Crossroad 1992).

Najman, H., *Past Renewals: Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill 2010).

Najman, H., '*Imitatio Dei* and the Formation of the Subject in Ancient Judaism', *Journal of Biblical Literature* (2021) 309–23.

Niehoff, M.R., 'What is in a Name? Philo's Mystical Philosophy of Language', *Jewish studies quarterly* 2 (1995) 220–252.

Niehoff, M.R., *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001).

Niehoff, M.R., *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011).

Niehoff, M.R., *Philo of Alexandria: an Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2018).

Powell, J.G.F., *Laelius: On Friendship; The Dream of Scipio* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1990).

Rüggermeier, J., 'Introduction' in: Schliesser, B., Rüggemeier, J., Kraus, T.J., Frey, J., & Herrmann, D., *Alexandria: Hub of the Hellenistic World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2021).

Roskam, G., *A commentary on Plutarch's De Latenter Vivendo* (Leuven: Leuven University Press 2007a).

Roskam, G., *Live unnoticed* = (*Lathe Biōsas*)*: on the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine* (Leiden: Brill 2007b).

Royce, J.A., 'The works of Philo' in: Kamesar, A., *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009).

Runia, D.T., *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill 1986).

Runia, D.T., *On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses* (Leiden: Brill 2001).

Sauer, J., 'Als Senator philosophieren. Ciceros philosophische Dialoge im Kontext des senatorischen Rollenmusters und der rhetorischen Bildungstradition der ausgehenden Republik' in: Kuhlmann, P., Marchetti, V., *Cicero im Rahmen der römischen Bildungskultur* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2020) 21-44.

Schäfer, P., *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009).

Schofield, M., 'Cicero and Plato' in: Atkins, J., Bénatouïl T., *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero's Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021) 88-102.

Segal, A.F., 'Heavenly Ascent in Hellenistic Judaism, Early Christianity and their Environment' in *ANRW* 23/2 (Berlin: De Gruyter 1980) 1333-1394.

Sly, D., *Philo's Alexandria* (London: Routledge 1996).

Steel, C., *The Cambridge Companion to Cicero* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013).

Tatum, W.J., 'The Final Crisis' in: Rosenstein, N., Morstein-Marx, R., *A Companion to the Roman Republic* (Malden, MA: Blackwell 2006) 190-211.

Timmers, F.J., *Philo of Alexandria on Divine Forgiveness* (dissertation: University Leiden 2022).

Winston, D., *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinatti: Hebrew Union College Press 1985).

Yunis, H., *Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011).

Zambon M., 'Middle Platonism' in: Gill, M. L., & Pellegrin, P., *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Malden: Blackwell 2006).

Zetzel, J.E.G., *De Re Publica: Selections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995).

Zurawski, J.M, 'Mosaic Paideia: The Law of Moses within Philo of Alexandria's Model of Jewish Education', *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman period* (2017) 480–505.