RHETORICAL TEXTURE AND PATTERN IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA’S
DE DECALOGO

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According to Valentin Nikiprowetzky, this treatise is essentially an exegetical commentary on the Ten Commandments. Philo did not use lofty words and impressive thoughts to interpret them, but philosophy and rhetoric can nevertheless be felt in the background of *De Decalogo*; philosophy shapes the thoughts that give Philo’s commentaries substance, and rhetoric shapes the harmony and power of their expression. For Nikiprowetzky, Philo’s style in this treatise was often admirable. He knew how to treat the substance of the message he was expounding. “His real merit was to know... how to make an instrument of spiritual invention, and how to manage that instrument with an extreme ingenuity, an almost divinatory sense of analogy and symbol, a sort of visionary intensity that transfigures” every thing it touches. His commentary is remarkable. The rhetorical conventions that inform it are self-evident, and not just in terms of eloquence or style.

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Rhetorical categories of argumentation and interpretation were essential in the educational system of Philo’s Alexandria, as intrinsic parts of intermediate and higher education. And Philo used these conventions abundantly in this treatise.

As “Heir and trustee of the Jewish thought of Alexandria” and a distinguished voice of Antiquity in the interpretation of Scripture\(^4\), Philo creatively used the compositional devices of rhetoric – oral patterns provided by the tradition,\(^5\) as well as the strategies of argumentation he learned and practiced in the schools of paideia – to sharpen the interpretation of Scripture. These can help us not just to shed new light on interpretive difficulties, but also to better identify the line and focus of his arguments.\(^6\) “After all, rhetoric is just this: the mastering and use of literary techniques to communicate one’s ideas in various ways.”\(^7\)

Exploring the rhetorical texture of Philo’s *De Decalogo* in its consistent variety of logical and qualitative reasoning, I found coherence and effectiveness in the discourse as a whole, and in the particular units of the composition as well. My analysis brought to the surface types of argumentative topics, figures and elaborations which support my conviction that the essence of true rhetoric is pervasive in Philo; a learned process of argumentation that is more than taxonomy of linguistic devices and persuasive strategies.\(^8\) Philo used exegetical methods when expounding Scripture just

\(^4\) *Ibid.*, p. 34.
like the rhetoricians of the Greco-Roman world in the interpretation of ancient texts, seeing “themselves first and foremost as pedagogues” in the context of their own paideia.9

**Argumentative Texture and Pattern**

Philo’s many reflections on secular education leave us no doubt that his formative years provided him the best of classical paideia, both in philosophy and rhetoric. His massive work proves it. He was trained in a large variety of argumentative strategies. From the simple enthymeme or rhetorical syllogism to the most expanded levels of thematic elaboration, he was qualified to apply them to each situation, be it related with oratorical speech or not. For, as Aristotle defines it, “rhetoric is not concerned with any single kind of subject, but is like dialectic, a useful art”. It is rather “the power to detect the persuasive aspects of each matter and this is in line with all other skills.”10

The most complete patterns of argumentation taught in the schools of the time were: (1) two argumentative compositions, as illustrated in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* – “the most complete and perfect argument” (2.28-30), and an elaboration of a theme (4.55-58); also (2) the elaboration of a chreia or a maxim, as we find it in the *Progymnasmata*.11 Each one of these exercises is similarly structured and

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11 “The term *progymnasmata* (προγυμνάσματα) or preparatory exercises denotes two important things: first, rhetorical *forms* (the chreia for instance is a progymnasma); and second, *techniques* for modifying these forms” (Alex Damm, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Synoptic Problem: Clarifying Markan Priority*, Peeters: Leuven, 2013, p. 19). These graded lessons on preliminary rhetorical exercises provided learning through memorization, imitation and practice as an introduction to the whole system of rhetorical theory and technique, and elaborations in argumentation as well. The elaboration that supports a chreia is the most complete rhetorical exercise, anticipating the thematic elaboration of a full judicial or deliberative speech. The educators who specifically wrote on the *Progymnasmata* were:
developed, and what distinguishes them from the rhetorical syllogism or the five parts of Ciceronian ratiocination is the enrichment of the argument after the proof has been established. In this particular case, if the matter proves to be too meager for amplification, statements from analogy, example, authority and other means should, of necessity be added. Theon of Alexandria suggests an even larger diversity of topics for the development of a theme or the proof of a thesis, used with no specific order. In both cases, however, the argumentation should be elegantly and completely developed, and the specific arguments be soberly used.\textsuperscript{12}

These elaborations provided Philo with the keys for his writing as a rhetorical act, especially his exegetical commentaries. When he claims that “Rhetoric, sharpening the mind to the observation of facts and training and exercising thought to interpretation and explanation, will make the human being a true master of words and thoughts,” and that Dialectic is the sister and twin of rhetoric,\textsuperscript{13} Philo is apparently affirming that philosophy and rhetoric work together and complement each other in the task of interpreting and explaining the divine Logos. For him, rhetoric is then also a powerful tool to interpret Scripture and to direct the course of

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Ibid., pp. 30-80.
\textsuperscript{13} De Congressu 17-18. Philo is reflecting here on the branches of preliminary studies – the ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία – as a road, which leads to virtue. Comparing rhetoric with dialectic, he refers both as twin sisters and takes them as associates that lead man to the knowledge of the royal virtues. In other words, rhetoric and dialectic closely work together to reach the highest levels of consummate philosophy or wisdom, as it is well explained through the allegorical interpretation of the names of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and their wives, respectively representing virtue that comes through teaching, virtue that is perfected through practice, and self-learned virtue (Congr. 18-38).
an exegetical exposition; a meaning close to Perelman’s, when he says that “Hermeneutics is another kind of rhetoric because you do not go from the speaker to the audience, but from the text written to the audience... The idea of looking for meaning is done now through the rhetorical method”.  

As we know, Philo’s “world was a rhetorician’s world.” His rhetorical culture was characterized by a lively interaction between oral and written composition. And “Even many of the philosophers who condemned the Sophists for their manipulative use of rhetoric clearly understood the need to master persuasive speaking techniques.” Aristotle, for instance, maintains that, “it is not sufficient to know what one ought to say, but one must also know how to say it.” Even Plato had to admit that the philosopher “plants and sows in a fitting soul intelligent words which are not fruitless but yield seed from which there spring up in other minds other words capable of continuing the process forever.”

We also know that, like all well-educated people in Antiquity, Philo wrote his words to be heard. “All literature was written to be heard, and even when reading to himself a Greek read aloud.” In that predominantly oral world, authors “considered rhetorical techniques as important in persuading an audience as the evidence presented in their argument.” “There is an element of persuasiveness and

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14 The Greek text is clear: ῶτορικὴ δὲ καὶ τὸν νοῦν πρὸς θεωρῶν ἀκονήσαμένη καὶ πρὸς ἐρμηνευῶν γυμνάσασα τὸν λόγον καὶ συγκροτήσασα λογικὸν δύνασα ἀποδειξεῖ τὸν ἀνθρώπον...  
understanding available only through *listening* to the text in its original language.”

And we clearly see it in all his commentaries.

The Alexandrian interpreter of Scripture uses most of the argumentative patterns found in the rhetorical canons, as well as the topics or figures of argumentation that give these structures a logical or quasi-logical form. A significant number of these elaborations contain a combination of statement, rationale and restatement, with or without a conclusion. But many are more expanded, either cohesively developing the basic thematic structures with a variety of supporting arguments, or plainly amplifying them with four major argumentative topics “especially effective in confirmation and embellishment”: the arguments from opposite or contrary, from analogy, from example and from authority, namely the authority of Scripture. In perfect alignment with these patterns of argumentation, thematic elaborations like a *chreia* rhetorically incorporate a wide range of

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21 Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity*, Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1988, p. 5. “The contemporary norm of silent reading... One should take the time to listen to the Greek words as if an ancient oral culture, recognizing that the author... considered the success of his message to be largely dependent on the way it sounded to his audience... To experience this is to add a new dimension to understanding and responding to his words” (p. 91).

22 In a significant number of his exegetical commentaries the arguments are short and simple, having just a rationale that supports the proposition, theme or issue, as in Aristotle’s enthymeme, or adding to the rationale a supporting argument to confirm it, as in Quintilian’s *epichrema* and Cicero’s *ratiocinatio*. Quintilian’s *epichrema* is comprised of three parts, like the logical syllogism, but may present three or four premises (5.14.6): 1. *Propositio* (major premise); 2. *Assumptio* (minor premise); 3. *Conclusio* (conclusion). For Cicero’s *ratiocinatio*, see Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.67: Cicero divides the deductive argument (“argumentation per ratiocinationem”) in five parts: 1. *Propositio* (statement or thesis); 2. *Propositionis approbatio* (rationale); 3. *Assumptio* (restatement); 4. *Assumptionis approbatio* (rationale of the restatement); 5. *Complexio* (conclusion).

23 The amplification of a theme according to the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, includes: (1) a primary proof based on a list of eight argumentative topics; (2) a secondary proof accomplished with supporting arguments of analogy, example, contrary, citation of authority, etc. The amplified treatment of a theme according to [Cornificius], *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (4.55-58) contains seven parts: 1. *Res* (statement); 2. *Ratio* (rationale); 3. *Pronuntiatio* (restatement); 4. *Contrarium* (opposite, contrary); 5. *Simile* (comparison or analogy); 6. *Exemplum* (example); and 7. *Conclusio* (conclusion).

24 *Chreia* is a brief saying or action or both with a pointed meaning, usually for the sake of something useful. Its rhetorical elaboration emerges in the form of a theme or thesis, whose meanings and meaning-effects unfold through argumentation as the unit progresses. The major topics or figures for
argumentative resources from textual and cultural traditions, with or without embellishments, pointing to a concluding application or exhortation.\textsuperscript{25}

Philo’s *De Decalogo* reveals then a wide range of rhetorical techniques, including typical forms of oral patterning. Traditional rhetoric drew on a broad range of oral patterns that were introduced into the organized system of conceptual rhetoric. Compositional devices like chiasmus and other concentric structures were supposed to perform rhetorical functions of emphasis, comparison and contrast. But the argumentative texture of each unit mainly involves a variation of devices well aligned with the patterns mentioned above. Some of his reasonings are logical, supporting or clarifying assertions through opposites and contraries. Others are developed in a more persuasive manner, using argumentative topics like analogies, examples and citations.

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\textsuperscript{25} The two main references to this thematic elaboration are: (1) the most complete and perfect argument, according to [Cornificius], *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (2.28-30); and (2) the chreia elaboration, according to Hermogenes and his followers Aphthonius and Nicolaus (George A. Kennedy, Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003; “Preliminary Exercises attributed to Hermogenes”, pp. 76-77; “Preliminary Exercises of Aphthonius the Sophist”, pp. 97-99; “Preliminary Exercises of Nicolaus the Sophist”, pp. 139-142; “CommentaryAttributed to John of Sardis”, pp. 193-196).

**The most complete and perfect argument**, is comprised of five parts, but the fourth includes at least four argumentative figures: \textbf{1. Propositio} (proposition or thesis – what we intend to prove); \textbf{2. Ratio} (rationale, reason – a brief explanation or justification); \textbf{3. Confirmatio} (proof of the reason – corroborates the reason by means of additional arguments); \textbf{4. Exornatio} (embellishment – adorns and enriches the argument after the proof has been established); and \textbf{5. Complexio} (a brief conclusion). The basic argumentative topics in the exornatio are: \textbf{4.1. Simile} (an analogy); \textbf{4.2. Exemplum} (an example); \textbf{4.3. Amplificatio} (amplification of the argument); \textbf{4.4. Iudicatio} (a statement of authority).

**The elaboration of a chreia**, as mentioned in the previous note, is a complete argument consisting of eight argumentative topics on the whole: \textbf{1. Προοίμιον or Encomium} (introduction, praise for the author); \textbf{2. Χρεία} (chreia or paraphrase of the chreia/thesis); \textbf{3. Αλτίαι} (statement of the rationale); \textbf{4. Έναντιον} (statement of the contrary); \textbf{5. Παράβολη} (analogy); \textbf{6. Παράδειγμα} (example); \textbf{7. Κρίσις/Μαρτυρία} (a judgment or statement from authority); \textbf{8. Παράκλησις} (conclusion or exhortation). As Robbins observes, the major characteristic of a thematic elaboration “is to bring a thesis and its rationale to the beginning of a unit... and to create a flow of argumentation out from the enthymematic beginning” (Vernon K. ROBBINS, “Introduction: Using Rhetorical Discussions of the Chreia to Interpret Pronouncement Stories”, Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism. The Rhetoric of Pronouncement 64, 1993 p. ix).
of authority. Structure, elaboration and rhythm jointly concur to the harmony of their whole.

DE DECALOGO’S INTRODUCTION

This treatise is a harmonious whole in concentric structure [ABCB’A’]. (1) It opens with four questions (2-49) and closes with one (176-178). (2) The commentary of the Ten Commandments in the middle is developed in two sets of five (52-120 and 121-153); (3) surrounded by an introductory summary of their particular contents (50-51) and a concluding synopsis on the general character of each of them (154-175).

The introductory four questions – on the desert in general (the first one), and on the Mount Sinai in particular (the remaining three) – reason on: (1) why the Law was given in the desert (2-17); (2) why the commands were ten (18-31); (3) how did God deliver the Ten Commandments (32-35); and (4) why was the singular number used (36-49). The concluding question of the treatise explains why God expressed these Ten Commandments as simple commands or prohibitions without laying down any penalty or punishment (176-178).

Philo knew how to adapt the weapons of his rhetoric to the public he wished to reach, and De Decalogo’s proem is no exception. His arguments are varied and harmoniously woven together. And the didactic-dialogical strategies of argumentation used were surely the best way to prepare his audience for the commentary on the

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27 Figures like anaphora, asyndeton and polysyndeton, isocolon, rhetorical question, antithesis, etc.
28 They resemble the diatribe style used at the time, especially in a student-teacher relationship.
29 Based on the exegetical nature of De Decalogo, Nikiprowetsky is inclined to defend a Hellenistic Jewish public as the obvious addressee of this treatise; not omitting, however, the possibility of a universal audience due to the universal and absolute value of the Law being commented (Op. cit., pp.
subject. With varied degrees of development, the rationale that answers each question includes a variety of devices that rhetorically justify place, number and source of promulgation, as well as its mode of transmission. Their argumentative sequence moves from the desert in general to Sinai in particular in a variation of resources that involves sounds, vocabulary, rhythm, construction and persuasiveness.

To the first question, why was the Law given in the desert? Four reasons are suggested: (1) cities are full of untold evils, namely pride and idolatry, and the desert marks a return to the law of nature (§2-9); (2) solitude promotes repentance, and purification from those evils was the preparatory step needed to receive the sacred laws (§10-13); (3) the desert was a preparation to grow familiar with the Law before full practice in their new home (§14); (4) the miraculous supply of food in the barren wilderness attested the divine origin of the Law (§15-18a).

Each of these reasoned forms of argumentation is justified and developed to show that the ideal learning environment for living well in accordance with nature was the desert. The rationale of the first two propositions and the fourth one is carefully ordered in five parts according to the Ciceronian model of ratiocination. The third

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[30-31]. In the words of Perelman, “L’auditoire n’est pas nécessairement constitué par ceux que l’orateur interpelle expressément”, but “l’ensemble de ceux sur lesquels l’orateur veut influer par son argumentation”; what he qualifies “d’auditoire universel” (Chaim Perelman, L’Empire rhétorique: Rhétorique et argumentation, Paris: Vrim, 1977, p. 29). And it makes even more sense in the case of Philo, for writing his commentary as a philosopher: “le discours adressé à un auditoire particulier vise à persuader, alors que celui qui s’adresse à l’auditoire universel vise à convaincre... Un discours convaincant est celui dont les prémisses et les arguments son universalisables, c’est-à-dire acceptables, en principe, par tous les membres de l’auditoire universel” (p. 31).


[31] Cicero divides the deductive argument (“argumentation per ratiocinationem”) in five parts: (1) *Proposito* (Statement/Thesis); (2) *Propositionis approbatio* (Rationale); (3) *Assumptio* (Restatement); (4) *Assumptionis approbatio* (Rationale of the restatement); (5) *Complexio* (Conclusion).
proposition is a reasoned analogy that shows the importance of a thoughtful preparation for civic life “in harmony and fellowship of spirit”.32

To the second question on why the commandments given by God Himself were ten? (§18b-31), Philo descriptively justifies the excellences of the decad. Through enumerations in sequence, he shows that ‘ten’ is the most comprehensive of all numbers, contains within it every kind of number and progression of numbers, and comprehends every proportion, harmony and symphony; that it represents the whole universe as the sum of 1 for the non extended point, 2 for the line, 3 for the surface, and 4 for the solid. In his argument as a whole, omission ends enumeration on the “infinite” virtues of number ten, and climax justifies its finale with a major example of

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32 Philo’s first, second and fourth reasons are developed accordingly. The first reason, as follows: 1. 
Statement of thesis – “the lawgiver gave his laws not in cities but in deep desert” (§2); 2. 
Rationale – “for most of the cities are full of unspeakable evils, and of acts of impiety towards God” (§3); 3. 
Restatement – “Pride is the most insidious of foes” (4a); 4. 
Rationale of the restatement – “Pride is admired and worshipped by some who add dignity to vain ideas... is the cause of many other evils, such as insolence, arrogance and impiety... brings divine things into utter contempt...” (§4b-8); 5. 
Conclusion – “This was the primary consideration which made him prefer to legislate away from cities” (§9). The second reason: 1. 
Thesis – “He who is about to receive the holy laws must first be cleansed and purified from all stains... contracted in cities...” (§10); 2. 
Rationale – His purification cannot be attained unless by dwelling apart from cities till the marks of his transgressions have disappeared (§11); 3. 
Restatement – Good physicians preserve their patients from food until they have removed the causes of their maladies (§12a); 4. 
Rationale of restatement – for thinking it unadvisable and for knowing that food is useless, even harmful, while diseases remain (§12b); 5. 
Conclusion – Therefore, having led his people from cities into the desert, that he might purify their souls, he begun to bring them food to their minds, divine laws and words of God (§13). The fourth reason: 1. 
Thesis – “He led the nation a great distance away from cities into the depths of a desert” (§15b); 2. 
Rationale – For “it was necessary to establish a belief in their minds, that the laws were not the inventions of a man but quite clearly the oracles of God” (§15a); 3. 
Restatement – “they should no longer wonder whether the laws were actually the pronouncements of God... since they have been given the clearest evidence of the truth in the supplies which they had so unexpectedly received in their destitution (§16); 4. 
Rationale of statement – “For he who gave abundance of the means of life also bestowed the wherewithal of a good life...” (§17); 5. 
Conclusion – “These are the reasons suggested to answer the question under discussion” (§18a).

32 The third reason compares Moses to men who equip themselves for a long voyage while still remaining on land, providing with time everything that will grant them success. The symmetric parallelism is developed as follows: A – just as men who set out on a long voyage do not when they have embarked on board ship... B – but while still remaining on the land; A’ – so in the same manner Moses did not think it good that his people should just settle in cities and then go in quest of laws to regulate their civic life, B’ – but rather should first provide themselves with rules and be trained in them... and only then be settled down in their cities.
the ten so-called categories in nature. These oracles are general laws directly given by God as well as the heads of the particular laws promulgated by the agency of his prophet Moses (§18b-19). And the perfection of the decade is the divine signature that seals them (§20-31).

But how did God promulgate these laws? (§32-35). The answer to this question on the nature of the voice announcing the commandments is persuasively formulated as Ciceronian ratiocination. (1) **Thesis:** the ten laws were not delivered by the Father of all by his own utterance in the form of a voice (§32a); (2) **Rationale:** “for God is not as man needing mouth and tongue and windpipe” (§32b); (3) **Restatement:** “as it seems to me, God... wrought on this occasion a miracle of a truly holy kind, commanding an invisible sound to be created in the air, more marvelous than all instruments that ever existed... a rational soul full of clearness and distinctness which... sounded forth... an articulate voice so loud that it appeared to be equally audible to the farthest as well as to the nearest” (§33); (4) **Rationale of restatement:** “For the voices of men, if carried to a great distance, grow faint, so that those who are at a distance from them cannot arrive at a clear comprehension of them. But the miraculous voice was set in action and kept in flame by the power of God... which spread it abroad in every side and made it more illuminating in its ending than in its beginning...” (§34-35); (5) **Conclusion:** “This, then, may be enough to say about the divine voice” (§36a).

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33 These ten categories are substance, quality, quantity, relation, activity, passivity, situation, time, place and possession.
The reasons provided to answer, “Why was the singular number used when a multitude was present?” are three. First: The singular emphasizes the value of the individual soul (§36-38); Second: the personal appeal better secures obedience (§39); Third: not to despise the humblest is a real lesson to the powerful (§40-43).

These reasons are then amplified with references to the miraculous signs (44) and a visible voice from the midst of the fire flowing from heaven (§45-49). In the form of a most complete argument\(^{35}\) according to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2:28-30, this thematic elaboration is comprised in five parts, the fourth being embellished with several topics of argumentation: (1) what we intend to prove; (2) its rationale; (3) a confirmation by means of additional arguments; (4) the persuasive enrichment of these logical arguments with quasi-logical figures of argumentation, after the proof has been established – example, analogy, amplification, and a citation of authority –; and (5) a conclusion. This thematic elaboration is developed as follows:

1. **Thesis** (36b): Each of the Commandments was addressed in the singular number, not as to several persons but as to one, when so many thousands were present.

2. **Reason** (36-38): Each single person is equal in worth to a whole nation, or rather to all nations.

3. **Proof of the reason** (39): Commands and prohibitions are more impressive if addressed to each individual in the audience.

4. **Embellishment** in four topics: 4.1. **Amplification** (40-43): If God deigned to address himself to everyone of the mortals assembled before him, what right has the

\(^{35}\) The “*absolutissima et perfectissima argumentatio*".
human king and tyrant to despise any of his subjects, even the meanest? 4.2. Example (44-46): miraculous signs and works on earth, all moved together to do him service when the power of God came among them; the people had kept pure in obedience to the warning of Moses; and the voice from the midst of the fire became articulate speech in a language familiar to the audience; 4.3. Authority (47): “And the law testifies to the accuracy of my statement, where it is written” that the voice of God is truly visible: “All people saw the voice” (Ex. 20:18)... because whatever God says is not words but deeds”; 4.4. Analogy (48): “the voice proceeded from the fire, for the oracles of God have been refined and assayed as gold is by fire.”

5. Conclusion (49): “And God also intimates to us something of this kind by a figure: since it is the nature of fire both to give light and to burn, those who decide to be obedient to the sacred commandments will live forever as in unclouded light with the laws themselves as stars illuminating their souls... while all those who are rebellious will continue to be burnt by their inward lusts.”

**First and Fifth Commandments in De Decalogo**

The Ten Commandments are thematically configured or expanded according to the issues, social and historical phenomena entering the interactive world of the text. Their expository texture is always argumentative, even when Philo mixes narrative with persuasive patterns. With more or less elaboration, each commentary reflects the appropriate kind of inner reasoning exercised in a more logical or persuasive manner. Fully equipped with all strategies of the rhetorical code, Philo
easily adjusted its conventions to the exposition of his exegetical themes making the argument for each of them accordingly.

Close attention to the development of each commandment led me to the same conclusion: there is coherence and integrity in the whole work as well as in the argumentative texture of each unit, but the structures selectively vary to better serve the dynamic demands of each theme. The conjunction “reveals a studied and prepared display of rhetorical ability.”

The first and fifth commandments seemingly interact with each other, the arguments being chiastically arranged as parts of an integrative unit. The internal coherence of this concentric structure is marked by common ideas and word-chains in both commands, connecting the beginning of the first law to the end of the fifth, and the end of the first law to the beginning of the fifth.

This circular construction may seem a coincidence, but the two arguments that shape it are similarly arranged as thematic elaborations that coherently develop the same ideas in inverted order. The mediating and connecting element at the center is honor: honor to God alone, and honor due to parents. Of twenty-two occurrences in the whole treatise, “honor” is repeated sixteen times plus synonyms, as a linking keyword between the first five commands.

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37 This type of concentric symmetry, often labeled ‘extended chiasmus’, is a pattern that “involves multiple, inverse correspondences that extend over a considerable expanse of material and have a single element at the center” (John D. Harvey, Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters, Baker Books: Apollos, 1998, p. 104). This pattern is common in all sorts of ancient literature.

38 Synonyms like: ἀποσευμόνοντες, exalt, magnify (66); συμφονοῦσα, glorify, confer dignity, exalt (71);

39 Linking first and second commands: “acknowledge and honor God” (65); “undoubtedly err by magnifying the subjects above the ruler” (66). Linking second and third commands: “and called upon
A (52) – The transcendent source and the best of all things is God, and the source and the best of all virtues is piety.

B (53-57) – Some men have deified the four elements; others, the sun, moon, the stars fixed and the planets; others the heaven; others, the whole universe.

C (58-63) – This is to put the slave in the place of the Master, to honor the temporal as being the Eternal, the created in the place of the Creator.

D (64) – Let us reject all these follies and not worship those who are our brothers by nature, since the Father of them all is one, the Creator of the universe.

E (65) – Let us engrave deep in our hearts this commandment as the holiest of all, to acknowledge that there is but one God, and to honor him alone.

F – Honor to God alone, and honor due to parents

E’ (106) – Honor due to parents is the last of the sacred duties inculcated in the first table, in which the most sacred duties to the deity are enjoined.

D’ (107-112a) – Let those who disregard parents not fail to understand that in the courts of justice they are convicted, in the divine court of impiety and in the human court of inhumanity. “For whom else will they show kindness if they despise the closest of their kinsfolk who have bestowed upon them the greatest boons” and to whom we owe what we can never repay?

C’ (12b-13) – “The greatest indignation is justified if children refuse to make even the slightest (return) on behalf of their parents. “Wild beasts ought to become tame through association with them... for it is always good for the inferior to follow the superior in hope of improvement”.

B’ (14-19) – Men who disregard the natural obligation of honoring their parents should imitate the beasts who repay the services bestowed upon them, house-dogs who protect their masters and gratefully die for them, and storks who put to shame sons who honor not their parents.

A’ (120) – A man who is impious towards his immediate and visible parents, cannot be pious towards his invisible Father. God is the uncreated maker of the world, and it is impossible that the invisible God can be piously worshipped by those who behave with impiety towards those who are visible and near to them.

The most important meanings of honor are: (1) the worth one ascribes to a person, to an exalted personage, reverence, respect to parents, for instance; and above all (2) the honor due to God; in classical Greek literature, in Judaism as well, namely the Septuagint (Is. 29:13; Prov. 3:9) and Philo. “The task of men is to honor God (Eur. Ba 342; (Plato, Leg. 4.723e). In Philo, the two basic meanings are these: honor, praise, adoration due to God; and derived honor due to parents.
I – The First Commandment

Philo develops the first commandment on the supreme honor due to God, following the pattern of a thematic elaboration as instructed by the author of the Rhetorica ad Herennium in 4.55-58; an elaboration in seven parts: (1) the Theme or statement; (2) the Reason or rationale; (3) the Theme or restatement in another form, with or without reasons; 4. the Opposite or contrary; (5) an Analogy or comparison; (6) an Example; and finally (7) the Conclusion or exhortation.

1. Theme or statement, Propositio (52b)

After presenting the Ten Commandments as divided in two sets of five (50-51), Philo starts his commentary on the first Law with a thematic statement: God is the origin of all things as piety is the origin of all virtues. The best and the beginning of all things is God, and the best and the beginning of virtues is piety, but a grave error has taken possession of the majority of mankind.

... ἀρχὴ δ' ἀρίστη πάντων μὲν τῶν ὄντων θεός, ἀρετῶν δ' εὐσέβεια: περὶ δὲν ἀναγκαιότατον πρῶτον διεξελθεῖν πλάνος τις τις ὑπὲρ ὁ μόνον ἡ μάλιστα ἢν εἴκος ἀπλανέστατον ταῖς ἑκάστων διανοιαῖς ἐνιδρύσθαι.

2. Rationale: Ratio, contrarium and amplificatio (53-57)

In his reasoning on the follies of polytheism, namely the form of worship given to heavenly bodies, Philo develops his rationale with an amplified contrarium. He starts the argument and keeps it in balance tactfully composing two rhythmic periods

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41 “Now the best beginning of all living beings is God, and of all virtues, piety. And we must, therefore, speak of these two principles in the first place. There is an error of no small importance which has taken possession of the greater portion of mankind concerning a subject which was likely by itself, or, at least, above all other subjects, to have been fixed with the greatest correctness and truth in the mind of every one.”
to center the reader’s attention in this essential point of his commentary. The first rhythmic structure develops ratio enumerating those who have worshiped earth, water, air and fire, the sun, the stars and planets, and has six elements.

The second period is densely focused on the main theme of the command through an argument from the contrary, with seven elements integrated into the whole: a rhythmic period consisting of five longer parts called members or cola, and two shorter parts, each called a comma.

The rationale is then strategically amplified in a similar tone. The objects above mentioned are represented by Greek deities whose names were handed down by mythmakers, each of them in accordance with their own character.

(54) καλοῦσι γὰρ οἱ μὲν τὴν γῆν Κόρην, Δήμητραν, Πλούτωνα, τὴν δὲ θάλασσαν Ποσειδῶνα, δαίμονας ἐναλλόσ τοὺς ὑπάρχουσαν αὐτῷ προσαναπλάττοντες καὶ θεραπεύοντας ὑπάρχους, ἵνα δὲ τὸν ἄρχον τὸ μέγα λιπόλεος, τὸν στρατάρχην τῆς ἀνωτάτης στρατιᾶς, τὸν κυβερνήτην τῆς ἐπωνύμης αὐτῷ πλανήτας καὶ ἄστερας, οἱ δὲ μόνον τὸν οὐρανὸν, οἱ δὲ τὸν σύμπαντα κόσμον (53a).

“The form of the diction should be neither fully metrical nor completely without rhythm... The speech must have rhythm, but not meter; otherwise it would be a poem.” (Rhétoric 1408b [3.8]. And Philo also knows how and where to put it to the service of his commentary.

42 “For some have deified the four elements, earth, water, air and fire, others the sun, moon, planets and fixed stars/ others again the heaven by itself, others the whole world.”

43 “But the highest and the most august, the Ruler of the great city, the Commander-in-Chief of the invincible army, the Pilot who ever steers all things in safety, Him they have hidden from sight by the misleading titles assigned to their objects of worship.”
οὐδὲν ἐν σφαίρᾳ, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἡμετέραν σχέσιν αὐτὸ μόνον ἐκεῖθε λέγεσθαι τὸ μὲν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἄνω, κάτω δὲ τοῦναντίον.45

3. Confirmation of the rationale or restatement, Pronuntiatio (58)

God gives this admirable and holy commandment to one who is determined to follow genuine philosophy and is devoted to guiltless and pure piety, not confusing parts of the world with their own Creator and worshiping them instead of the omnipotent God. To speak of God as not existing from all eternity is profanity.

(58) τῷ δή φιλοσοφεῖν ἀνόθως ἐγνωκότι καὶ ἀδόλου καὶ καθαρᾶς εὐσεβείας µεταποιουµένῳ κάλλιστον καὶ ὁσιώτατον ὑφῆγεῖται παράγγελµα, µηδὲν τῶν τοῦ κόσµου µερῶν αὐτοκρατήθην τινὲς ὑπολαµβάνειν εἶναι καὶ γὰρ γέγονεν, γένεσις δὲ φθορᾶς ἀρχή, κἀγὼν προνοίᾳ τοῦ πεποιηκότος ἀθανατίζηται καὶ ἂν ποτέ χρόνος, ζητεὶν εἰκὸς γὰρ µηδὲν δὲ πρότερον εἰς τὸν πάντας γενόµενον καὶ µὴ διαπιστεύοντα λέγειν οὐ διεµυτὸν.46

4. Argument from the contrary with reasons, Contrarium (59-60)

Those whose views are affected with such folly regard not only the above-mentioned objects as gods, but also each of them as the greatest and primal God.

Either because of ignorance or indifference and no desire to learn, they persist in their

45 “For some nations have made divinities of the four elements, earth and water, and air and fire; Others, of the sun and moon, and of the other planets and fixed stars; Others, again, of the whole world. And they have all invented different appellations, all of them false, for these false gods put out of sight that most supreme and most ancient of all, the Creator, the ruler of the great city, the general of the invincible army, the pilot who always guides everything to its preservation; (54) for they call the earth Proserpine, and Ceres, and Pluto. And the sea they call Neptune, inventing besides a number of marine deities as subservient to him, and vast companies of attendants, both male and female. The air they call Juno; fire, Vulcan; and the sun, Apollo; the moon, Diana; and the evening star, Venus; Lucifer, they call Mercury; (55) and to every one of the stars they have affixed names and given them to the inventors of fables, who have woven together cleverly-contrived imaginations to deceive the ear, and have appeared to have been themselves the ingenious inventors of these names thus given. (56) Again, in their descriptions, they divided the heaven into two parts, each one hemisphere, the one being above the earth and the other under the earth, which they called the Dioscuri; inventing, besides, a marvelous story concerning their living on alternate days. (57) For, as the heaven is everlasting revolving, in a circle without any cessation or interruption, it follows of necessity that each of the hemispheres must every day be in a different position from that which it was in the day before, everything being turned upside down as far as appearance goes, at least; for, in point of fact, there is no such thing as any uppermost or undermost in a spherical figure. And this expression is only used with reference to our own formation and position; that which is over our head being called uppermost, and that which is in the opposite direction being called undermost.”

46 “Accordingly, to one who understands how to apply himself to philosophy in a genuine, honest spirit, and who lays claim to a guiltless and pure piety, God gives that most beautiful and holy commandment, that he shall not believe that any one of the parts of the world is its own master, for it has been created; and the fact of having been created implies a liability to destruction, even though the thing created may be made immortal by the providence of the Creator; and there was a time once when it had no existence, but it is impious to say that there was a previous time when God did not exist, and that he was born at some time, and that he does not endure for ever.
supposed idea that there is no invisible or intelligible cause outside what the senses perceive. Though living, planning and doing everything in life with their soul, they cannot see it with the eyes of the body; much less to apprehend the uncreated, the eternal, the invisible guide and ruler of the universe by themselves.

(59) ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἐνοι περὶ τὰς κρίσεις ἀπονοία τοσαυτή χέρχεται, ὡς οὐ μόνον τὰ εἰρημένα θεοὺς νομίζειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκαστὸν αὐτῶν μέγιστον καὶ πρῶτον θεόν, τὸν δὲν ὄντως ἢ οὐκ εἰσόδες ἀδιδάκτῳ τῇ φύσει ή οὐ σπουδάζοντες μαθεῖν, ἕνεκα τοῦ μηδὲν ἔχων τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἄρατον καὶ νοητὸν αὐτὸν ὑπολαμβάνειν εἰναι, καὶ τοιαύτη τῆς ἐγγύς παραχειμένης πίστεως. (60) ψυχὴ γὰρ ξύνες καὶ βουλευόμενοι καὶ πάνθ᾽ ὡς κατὰ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον ὅταν πρότετη ψυχὴν ὑφαλαμοί σώματος ἤγχουσαν βασισθαι, καὶ τοιού τὰς πεφημηθέντες ἄν πάσας φιλοτιμίας, εἰ πως ἠδείν ὅν τὸ ἄγαλμα τὸ πάντων ἱεροπρεπέστατον ἄφ᾽ οὐ κατὰ μετὰβασιν εἰκός ήν ἐννοια τῶν ἀγανήτων καὶ ἀδικώτατος, τὰ οῖς ἄπαντα τὸν κόσμον ήνοιχῶν σωτηρίως ἄφρατον ἵνα κατευθυνεῖν.47

5. Argument from analogy, Simile (61)

This is to put the slave in the place of the master, to honor the temporal as if it were the eternal, the created as the Creator; just as anyone who were to assign to the subordinate satraps the honors due to the Great King, appearing to be not only the most ignorant and senseless of men, but also the most foolhardy.

(61) καθάπερ οὖν τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως τὰς τιμὰς εἰ τις τὸς ὁπάρχως σατράπας ἀπένειμεν, ἔδοξεν ἢ οὐκ ἀγνωσκόντας μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ μυσκυναδούσας εἰναὶ χαριζόμενος τὰ δεσπότου δυνάμεις, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἰδεῖν τὸς αὐτὸς εἰ τῇ γεραίρει τῷς ἀνθρώπους πεποιηκότας ἢν καὶ ἀδικώτατος, ἢ πεποιηκότας τοῖς ταπεινοτέροις ἄλλ᾽ ἐπὶ καθαρίσει τοῦ κρειττονος.48

47 “But some persons indulge in such foolish notions respecting their judgments on these points, that they not only look upon the things which have been mentioned above as gods, but as each separate one of them as the greatest and first of gods, either because they are really ignorant of the true living God, from their nature being un instructed, or else because they have no desire to learn, because they believe that there is no cause of things invisible, and appreciable only by the intellect, apart from the objects of the external senses, and this too, though the most distinct possible proof is close at hand; (60) for though, as it is owing to the soul that they live, and form designs, and do everything which is done in human life, they nevertheless have never been able to behold their soul with their eyes, nor would they be able if they were to strive with all imaginable eagerness, wishing to see it as the most beautiful possible of all images or appearances, from a sight of which they might, by a sort of comparison, derive a notion of the uncreated and everlasting God, who rules and guides the whole world in such a way as to secure its preservation, being himself invisible.”

48 “As, therefore, if any one were to assign the honors of the great king to his satraps and viceroy, he would appear to be not only the most ignorant and senseless of men, but also the most fool-hardy, giving to slaves what belongs to the master; in the same manner, let the man who honors the Creator, with the same honors as those with which he regards the creature, know that he is of all men the most foolish and the most unjust, in giving equal things to unequal persons, and that too not in such a way as to do honor to the inferior, but only to take it from the superior.”
6. Argument from example with amplification, Exemplum (62-63)

There are some who exceed in impiety, not giving the Creator and the creature even equal honor, but assigning to the latter all honor and respect and reverence, and refusing to the former the commonest tribute of remembering Him. These men are so possessed with an insolent and free-spoken madness that they venture to blaspheme the Godhead and to vex the pious. This is the great engine of the unholy, by which alone they bridle those who love God.

(62) εἰς δὲ οἱ καὶ προσυπερβάλλουσιν ἁσεβεία μὴ δὲ τὸ ἱσόν ἀποδιδόντες, ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν τὰ πάντα τῶν ἀπί τιμὴ χαρίζομεν, τῷ δὲ οὐδὲν νέμοντες ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μνήμην, τὸ κοινότατον· ἐπιλήθονται γὰρ οὐ μόνον μεμνημένοι προσήκον ἦν, ἐπιτηδεύοντες οἱ βαρυδαίμονες ἐκούσιν λήθην. (63) ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ στομάργχω κατεχόμενοι λύττῃ τὰ δείγματα τῆς ἐνιδρυμένης ἁσεβείας εἰς μέσον προφέροντες βλασφημεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι τὸ θεῖον, ἀκονήσαμεν κακήγορον γλῶτταν, ἀλλ' ἁμα καὶ λυπεῖν ἐθέλοντες τοὺς εὐσεβοῦς, οἱ ἔλεγκτοι καὶ ἀπαργήγαργοι εὐθὺς εἰσδύεται πένθος τὴν ὅλην πυρπολοῦν ψυχὴν διὰ ὅτι οἱ τῶν ἀνοσίων ἑλέποι τούτ' ἐστίν, οὐ μόνος τοὺς φιλόθεους ἐπιστοίζουσι νομίζοντας ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ παροξύσειν ἐν τῷ παρόντι κάλλιστον Ἰσραήλ.49

7. Conclusion, Conclusio (64-66a)

Bringing his arguments to a close, Philo uses three times a similar exhorting expression in crescendo: Let us reject these follies of the impious and not worship those who are our brothers by nature, since the Father of them all is one, the creator of the universe; Let us gird ourselves to the service of that Being who is the uncreated and everlasting, and the maker of the universe; Let us deeply engrave in our hearts the first and holiest of the commandments to acknowledge and honor the one, the most high God.

49 “There are again some who exceed in impiety, not giving the Creator and the creature even equal honor, but assigning to the latter all honor, and respect, and reverence, and to the former nothing at all, not thinking him worthy of even the common respect of being recollected; for they forget him whom alone they should recollect, aiming, like demented and miserable men as they are, at attaining to an intentional forgetfulness. (63) Some men again are so possessed with an insolent and free-spoken madness, that they make an open display of the impiety which dwells in their hearts, and venture to blaspheme the Deity, whetting an evil-speaking tongue, and desiring, at the same time, to vex the pious, who immediately feel an indescribable and irreconcilable affliction, which enters in at their ears and pervades the whole soul; for this is the great engine of impious men, by which alone they bridle those who love God, as they think it better at the moment to preserve silence, for the sake of not provoking their wickedness further.”
This commandment forms a type of inclusion that involves the whole argument in a chiastic construction of four elements: ABB’A’:

A – The best and the beginning of all things is God, and of all virtues is piety;
B – But a great error has taken possession of the majority of mankind honoring the created instead of the Creator;
B’ – Let us reject these follies of the impious, and engrave in our hearts the first and holiest of the commandments;
A’ – Let us acknowledge and honor the most high God.  

A correspondence in wording frames the whole section, opening and closing the argument. The final expressions διαμαρτάνουσι and ἠττῶν δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ἀδικοῦσι (66) respond to the initial πλάνος τις οὐ μικρός (52). The repetition of τιμὴ honor, ten times in five paragraphs, is the expression of an important word-chain pattern in this commandment.

50 “Let us, therefore, reject all such impious dishonesty, and not worship those who are our brothers by nature, even though they may have received a purer and more immortal essence than ourselves (for all created things are brothers to one another, inasmuch as they are created; since the Father of them all is one, the Creator of the universe); but let us rather, with our mind and reason, and with all our strength, gird ourselves up vigorously and energetically to the service of that Being who is uncreated and everlasting, and the maker of the universe, never shrinking or turning aside from it, nor yielding to a desire of pleasing the multitude, by which even those who might be saved are often destroyed. (65) Let us, therefore, fix deeply in ourselves this first commandment as the most sacred of all commandments, to think that there is but one God, the most highest, and to honor him alone; and let not the polytheistic doctrine ever even touch the ears of any man who is accustomed to seek for the truth, with purity and sincerity of heart; (66) for those who are ministers and servants of the sun, and of the moon, and of all the host of heaven, or of it in all its integrity or of its principal parts, are in grievous error; how can they fail to be, when they honor the subjects instead of the prince?”

51 The difference between inclusio and ring-composition is as follows, according to Harvey: “inclusion is the use of the same word or words to begin and end a discussion, or the use of “a nominal form of a word in one place and a cognate verbal form in the other”; ring-composition “differs from inclusion in that the framing is done with sentences rather than single words” marking a correspondence between them (John D. Harvey, Op. cit., pp. 102-103). Cf. Aristotle, Rhetoric 1361a, 1376b.
II – The Fifth Commandment

The fifth commandment concerns the honor due to parents as the concluding law of the first table. Its commentary is developed in eight parts on the rhetorical form of a chreia elaboration, and the first words define the speech situation, placing honor due to parents in the center of its action. “Elaboration is not simply an expansion or amplification of a narrative. Rather, a theme or issue emerges in the form of a thesis or chreia near the beginning of a unit, and meanings or meaning-effects of this theme or issue unfold through argumentation as the unit progresses.”

Here, the thesis is immediately given and the rationale that follows logically converges to directly prove the initial thesis. The remaining argumentative topics of analogy, example and authority lead the elaboration to a better point of understanding and completion.

1. Theme/Praise, προοίμιον (106a)

Honor due to parents. This commandment is the borderline between the two sets of five, the concluding one on the first table, one in which the most sacred duties are enjoined. Procreation is akin to creation.

μετὰ δὲ τὰ περὶ τῆς ἀρπάσεως παραγγέλλει πέμπτον παράγγελμα τὸ περὶ γονέων τιμῆς τάξιν αὐτῷ δοῦσ τὴν μεθόριον τῶν δυοίν πεντάδων.”

2. Thesis/Chreia paraphrasis, χρεία (106b)

Because parenthood assimilates man to God, this command is the last of the first table in which the most sacred duties to the deity are given, and it adjoins the second table that contains the duties of man to man.

53 And after this commandment relating to the seventh day he gives the fifth, which concerns the honor to be paid to parents, giving it a position on the confines of the two tables of five commandments each.
3. Rationale with amplification, αἴτια (107-110a)

And the reason is as follows: Parents by their nature stand on the borderline between the mortal and the immortal side of existence; the mortal because of their kinship with men and other animals on account of the perishable nature of the body; the immortal because the act of generation assimilates them to God, the Father of the Universe. The rationale is then amplified to explain two associated aspects of neglect: those who devote their personal life wholly to the service of God, and those who conceive the idea that there is no good outside doing justice to men; both coming but halfway in virtue.

(107) αἴτιον δ’ ως οίμαι τόδε- τῶν γονέων ἡ φύσις ἀθανάτου καὶ ὑνητῆς σύσιας ἐσκεῖν εἶναι μεθόριος, ὑνητῆς μὲν διὰ τὴν πρὸς ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ζώα συγγένειαν κατὰ τὸ τοῦ σώματος ἐπίκηρον, ἀθανάτου δὲ διὰ τὴν τοῦ γεννῶν πρὸς θεὸν τὸν γεννήτην τῶν ἔλλων ἐξομοίωσαν, (108) ἢ δὲ μὲν οὖν τινες τῇ ἐτέρᾳ μερίδι προσκληρώσαντες ἑαυτοὺς ἐδοξαν τῆς ἑτέρας ὀλιγωρεῖν· ἄκρατον γὰρ ἐφορεῖν τοῖς εὐσεβείας πόθον, πολλὰ χαίρειν φράσαντες ταῖς ἄλλαις πραγματείαις, (109) οἱ δ’ οὐδὲν ἐξω τῶν πρὸς ἄνθρωπος δικαιωμάτων ἁγαθῶν ὑποτοπήσαντες εἶναι μόνον τὴν πρὸς ἄνθρωπος ὑμῖλιαν ἠσπάσαντο, τῶν τε ἁγαθῶν τὴν χρῆσιν εἴον πᾶσι παρέχοντες διὰ κοινωνίας ἵμαρον καὶ τὰ δεινὰ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐπικουφίζειν ἀξιοῦντες, (110) τούτως μὲν οὖν φιλαινόρωπος, τοὺς δὲ προτέρους φιλοθέους ἐνδίκως ἂν εἴποι τις, ἡμιτελεῖς τὴν ἀρετὴν· ὀλόκληροι γὰρ οἱ παρ’ ἀμφοτέροις εὐδοκιμοῦντες.55

54 “for being the concluding one of the first table, in which the most sacred duties to the Deity are enjoined, it has also some connection with the second table which comprehends the obligations towards our fellow creatures.”

55 “And the cause of this, I imagine, is as follows: The nature of one’s parents appears to be something on the confines between immortal and mortal essences. Of mortal essence, on account of their relationship to men and also to other animals, and likewise of the perishable nature of the body; And of immortal essence, by reason of the similarity of the act of generation to God the Father of the universe. But it has often happened that men have attached themselves to one of these divisions, and have seemed to neglect the other; for being filled with a sincere love for piety, they have renounced all other occupations and considerations, and have devoted the whole of their lives to the service of God. But they who have thought that beyond their duties to their fellow men there was no such thing as goodness, have clung solely to their fellowship with and to the society of men, and, being wholly occupied by a love of the society of men, have invited all men to an equal participation in all their good things, laboring at the same time to the best of their power to alleviate all their disasters. Now, one may properly call both these, these philanthropic men, and also the former class, the lovers of God, but half perfect in virtue; for those only are perfect who have a good reputation in both points.”
4. Argument from the contrary logically amplified, ἐναντίον (110b-114a)

In either case these men are convicted in one court of justice, human or divine. Some of them are content with performing their duties towards God, and others with accomplishing their duties towards men. But all who neither attend to their duties towards men nor cling to piety and holiness towards God may be thought to be transformed into the nature of wild beasts. They stand convicted in the two courts: in the divine court, of impiety; in the human court, of inhumanity.

This statement of the contrary56 works together with the previous rationale to support the initial thesis, and is amplified with two other forceful arguments in the form of an interrogatio57 to enhance the grievous effects of such ingratitude and justify the indignation it conveys. This expanded rationale on how much children owe to their own parents, closes with an incisive call to gratitude. “You men who disregard this natural obligation of honor and obedience towards your parents should imitate wild beasts that repay the services bestowed upon them.”

(110b) ὅσιοι δὲ μὴ ἐν τοῖς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἔξετάζονται, συνηδόμενοι μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς κοινοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, συναλγούντες δὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐναντίονις, μὴς ἐσπευβείς καὶ ὀσίτητος περιέχονται, μεταβεβληθέντα δόξαι εἰς θηρίων φῶς· ἃ ἀγαθότητος ἄδειον εἰς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἔκτερας μερίδος ἄλλης ἀθροίνη καὶ τῆς πρὸς ὁδών καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους (111) ἐν δυσί ὁ δυσί δικαστήριοι, ἂ δὴ μόνα ἑστιν ἐν τῇ φύσι, μὴ ἀνασκεπομεν ἡλικιώτες, ἀσεβείς μὲν ἐν τῷ θελό, διστὶ τούς ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὑκτὸς εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραχωγοντας καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο μοιχασμένοις δεν οὐ περιέπουσι, μεταναστευσάς δ’ ἐν τῷ κατ’ ἀνθρώπους (112) τίνα γὰρ ἐτερον εὖ ποίσιντιν οἱ τῶν συγγενεστάτων καὶ τὰς μεγίστας παρασχομένων δωρεάς ὁλιγοευντές, ἃν οὐκ ἐν’ ὑπερβολὴν οὖδ’ ἀρείβας ενδέχεται· πῶς γάρ ἂν τὸ γεγονός ἄντιγεννηθαι δύνατο τούς σπείραντας, κήρυγν ἐχαίρετον τῆς φύσεως φαρσαλομένης πρὸς παθὴς γνοεύσιν εἰς ἀντίδοσιν ἠλέειν οὐ δυνάμενοι; δεδὲ καὶ σφόδρα προσθέν ἄγανακτείν, εἰ μὴ πάντα ἔχοντες ἀντιχαρίζεσθαι μηδὲ τὰ κοινότατα ἔπεισον. (113) οἷς δὲν ἄν ἐποιήσας· τὰ δηλα πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἡμεροῦσαι δεί· καὶ πολλάκις ἄγων ἡμεροδίως λέοντας, ἀρκτοὺς, παράδειγμα, οὐ μόνον πρὸς τοὺς τρέφοντας διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀναγκαῖοι χάρων, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους, ἐνεκά μοι δοκώ τῆς πρὸς ἔκεινος ὁμοίωτης· καθὼς γὰρ οἷς τῷ κρείττον τὸ χειρὸν ἀκολούθειν διὰ

56 A statement of the contrary is used to test the validity of an argument, and is not easily refuted (Rhetorica ad Herennium, 4.18.25-26).
57 A double question is included in this speech as a device of pathos, as a means of sharpening the line of thought here flowing in crescendo. The answer is supposed to be self-evident, not expected, and the emotive couching of the statement is intended to humiliate such ungrateful children (cf. Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria 9.2.8).
5. Argument from analogy, παραβολή (114b-115a)

If house-dogs protect and die for their masters when any danger suddenly overtakes them, if sheep-dogs fight on behalf of the flocks and endure till they conquer or die in order to keep the herdsmen unscathed, how much a man, the most civilized of living creatures, ought to be grateful and obediently honor his parents?

(114b) χύνες οίκου τοῖς δεσπότοις και προσεπίζουσι καὶ προσπόθηκουσι τῶν δεσπότων, ἄταν χιλινός τις ἐξ ἐκείνων καταλάβη τῶν δ’ ἐν ταῖς ποίμνισι φαίνει προαγωνιζομένους τῶν δρεμάτων ἀρχή νίκης ἢ διατηρῆσαι ὑπὲρ τοῦ διατηρῆσαι τῶν ἁγελάρχων ἁγίων. (115) εἰς’ ὥς αἰχεχόν ἐστιν ἀιχεχόσι, ἐν χαρίσι ἀμοιβαῖς ἄνθρωπον ἠπνηθῆναι κυνός, τοῦ δηρίων βραστᾶτο τὸ ἡμερώτατον ζῶον?

6. Argument from example, παράδειγμα (115b-118)

The natural thing is for beasts to learn from men; but, in this case, men have to learn from beasts, namely the winged birds that range the air. Storks, for

58 “But those who do not attend to their duties towards men so as to rejoice with them at their common blessings, or to grieve with them at events of a contrary character, and who yet do not devote themselves to piety and holiness towards God, may be thought to have changed into the nature of wild beasts, the very preeminence among whom, in point of ferocity, those are entitled to who neglect their parents, being hostile to both the divisions of virtue above mentioned, namely, piety towards God, and their duty towards men. (111) Let them, then, not be ignorant that they are convicted before the two tribunals which are the only ones which exist in nature, of impiety as regards their duty towards God, as not worshipping those who have introduced beings who do not exist into existence, and who, in this respect, have imitated God; and as regards their duty towards men, of misanthropy and cruelty. (112) For to whom else will those men do good who neglect their nearest relations and those who have bestowed the greatest gifts upon them, some of which are of so great a character that they do not admit of any requital? For how can he who has been begotten by a parent, in requital again beget his parents, being hostile to both the divisions of virtue above mentioned, namely, piety towards God, and their duty towards men. (113) Is it not then the most shameful of all shameful things for a man, in respect of the requital of favors, to be left behind by a dog, for that being, which of all others is the most gentle, to be outrun by the most audacious of beasts?”

59 “Dogs who keep the house will defend their masters, and encounter death for their sakes when any danger suddenly overtakes them. And they say that the dogs employed among flocks of sheep will fight on behalf of the flocks, and endure till they either obtain the victory or meet with death, for the sake of protecting the herdsmen themselves from injury. (115) Is it not then the most shameful of all shameful things for a man, in respect of the requital of favors, to be left behind by a dog, for that being, which of all others is the most gentle, to be outrun by the most audacious of beasts?”

60 On filial affection of storks, “who are careful to nourish those who gave them nurture”, see: Aristotle, Historia Animalium 9.18; Aristophanes, Aves 1353 ff.; Sophocles, Elektra 1058.
instance, put to shame sons and daughters who do not honor their parents. The old birds stay in their nests when they are unable to fly, while their children fly gathering from every quarter provision for the needs of their parents. Moved by piety, the younger birds repay the debt, which they owe their parents since the first stage of their existence, knowing that in proper time they will receive what they are now bestowing.

The rhetorical questions are used here as dialogic devices to sharpen the argumentative line of thought being developed with the example. In a word, men who neglect their parents should cover their faces from shame, and reproach themselves for disregarding those things that they ought to have cared for alone. For the children have nothing of their own which does not belong to their parents.

61 Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.7, 8; 62 “But if we will not be taught by the land animals, let us go across to the nature of the winged birds which traverse the air, and learn what we have need of from them. (116) In the case of storks the old birds remain in their nests because they are unable to fly; but their children, I had very nearly said, traverse the whole of earth and sea, and from all quarters provide their parents with what is necessary for them. (117) And so they, living in a tranquility worthy of their time of life, enjoy all abundance, and pass their old age in luxury; while their children make light of all the hardships they undergo to furnish them with the means of support, under the influence both of piety and also of the expectation that they also in their old age will receive the same treatment from their descendants; and so they now discharge the indispensable debt which they owe their parents, knowing that in proper time, they will themselves receive what they are now bestowing. And there are also others who are unable to support themselves, for children are no more able to do so at the commencement of their existence, than their parents are at the end of their lives. On which account the children, having while young been fed in accordance with the spontaneous promptings of nature, now with joy do in return support the old age of their parents. (118) Is it not right, then, after these examples, that men who neglect their parents should cover their faces from shame, and reproach themselves for disregarding those things which they ought to have cared for alone, or in preference to anything else whatever? And this too, when they would not have
7. Argument from authority, κρίσις/μαρτυρίαι (119-120a)

Piety and holiness are the queens among the virtues. A man who is impious towards his immediate and visible parents cannot be pious towards his invisible Father. For parents are the servants of God for the task of begetting children, and he who dishonors the servant dishonors also the Lord. The truth of these values is confirmed by the argument of authority that climactically supports the thesis initially enunciated: “Some bolder spirits, glorifying the name of parenthood, say that a father and a mother are in fact gods revealed to sight who copy the Uncreated in their work as the Framer of life. He, they say, is the God or Maker of the world, but the others (human parents) only of those children whom they have begotten.”

(119) εὐσέβειαν δὲ καὶ ὁσιότητα, τὰς ἄρετων ἤγεμονίδας, ἃς γ’ ἐντὸς ὄρων ἔχουσι τῶν ψυχῶν; ὑπορεφίους μὲν οὖν ἀπεληλάκασι καὶ πεφυγαδύκασι· θεοὶ γὰρ ὑπηρέται πρὸς τέκνων σποράν οἱ γονεῖς. ὃ δ’ ὑπηρέτην ἀτιμάζων συνατιµαξάξας καὶ τὸν ἄρχοντα, (120a) τῶν δ’ εὐτολμητέρων ἀποσεποντόντες τὸ γονεόν ἐνομά φασί τινες, ὡς ἀρὰ πατήρ καὶ μήτηρ ἐμφανεῖς εἰσί τεθεί, μιμούμενοι τὸν ἄγεννον ἐν τῷ ἐορτοπλαστεῖν· ἄλλα τὸν μὲν εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου θεόν, τοὺς δὲ μόνον ὄν ἐγέννησαν. 64

8. Conclusion or exhortation, παράκλησις (120b-121a)

In repeating conceptual language of the two opening statements, and praising the table of the first five commandments, the rationale strengthens the conclusion with an implicit exhortation to worship God through honoring parents.

been so much conferring benefits as requiting them? For the children have nothing of their own which does not belong to the parents, who have either bestowed it upon them from their own substance, or have enabled them to acquire it by supplying them with the means.”

63 This form of argumentation shows that recognized authorities support the proposition being advanced, and that the expression “Bolder spirits”, sage or wise men, suggest that. Stoic sages are shown to be exemplary authorities. “One such is Hierocles, the Stoic quoted by Stobaeus (Meineke iii. p. 96), ...The ordinary Stoic view is given by Diogenes Laertius 7.120, that parents, brothers and sisters are to be reverenced next to the gods (F. C. Colson, Philo VII. LCL. “Appendices”, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, § 120, p. 612).

64 “And have then these men within the borders of their souls piety and holiness, the chiefs of all the virtues? No; rather they have driven them beyond their borders, and forced them into exile; for parents are the servants of God for the propagation of children, and he who dishonors the servant dishonors also the master. (120) But some persons, who are rather audacious, magnify the title of parents, saying that the father and mother are evident gods, inasmuch as they imitate the uncreated God in their production of living animals, limiting, however, their assertion in this way, that the one is the God of the whole world, but the others only of those children whom they have begotten.”
As said, it is with these wise words about the honor to be paid to parents that God/Moses closes the one and more divine table of the first five commandments. For a man who is impious towards his immediate and visible parents cannot be pious and piously worship God, his invisible Father.

(120b) ἀμήχανον δ’ εὐσεβεῖσθαι τὸν ἀόρατον ὑπὸ τῶν εἰς τοὺς ἐμφανεῖς καὶ ἐγγὺς ὄντας ἄσεβοντων.
(121a) τοσάτα καὶ περὶ γονέων τιμῆς φιλοσοφήσας τέλος ἐπιτίθησι τῇ ἑτέρᾳ καὶ θειοτέρᾳ πεντάδι.65

Rhetorical criticism is being recognized again as a necessary aid for the interpretation of specific texts of the past. And this essay may somehow suggest that rhetorical theory is a key to the interpretation of Philo’s commentaries of Scripture.

My analysis of De Decalogo brought to the surface a variety of rhetorical strategies in its argumentative texture; strategies that show the pervasiveness of true rhetoric in Philo, and integrate a learned process of argumentation that is more than a taxonomy of linguistic devices and persuasive strategies.

Seen together, this commentary is in fact a nice display of rhetorical elaboration. Argumentative structures are modeled according to the conventions of the time, as well as its coherence and effectiveness. The introduction and commands analyzed help us to better see how rhetorical form and content determine meaning, and how much these patterns reflect the rhetorical codes found elsewhere in Hellenistic culture.

As we know, Philo did not write his treatises to be read as literature. But they are rich in thought and elaboration. The thread of his discourse varies from simplicity

65“And it is impossible that the invisible God can be piously worshipped by those people who behave with impiety towards those who are visible and near to them. Having then now philosophized in this manner about the honor to be paid to parents, he closes the one and more divine table of the first five commandments.”
to complexity. Like a piece of tapestry, it may look sometimes redundantly complex, though unified enough in its diversity to be minimally understood. Ring-composition, inclusion and concentric structures are rhetorical devices he subtly and cleverly uses to enclose the elaboration of his themes or sets of ideas in the diverse typologies of his commentary. But persuasive argumentation and thematic elaboration were the exegetical techniques he most used according to the rhetorical conventions of the time; neither as slavish imitator nor as groundbreaking pioneer, but rather as an effective user of the features he found most adequate to each unit of the commentary, be it allegorical or literal.66

Not to get lost in reading his treatises, we need then to take into account those patterning features, as well as to understand each particular piece as part of an integrative whole, with its teleological horizon in perspective. Once the biblical text is mentioned and the theme announced, the arguments flow with their diversity and density adjusted to each exegetical case, sometimes in clusters, the conclusion of one being the thesis of the other, and usually with impeccable coherence in between.

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* Most of the texts in translation are from C. D. Yonge. Some of them are from Colson or a compromise between the two.
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ABSTRACT

Philo didn’t use lofty words and impressive thoughts to comment De Decalogo. But, as Nikiprowetzky asserts, philosophy and rhetoric can be remotely felt in its background. Philosophy shapes the thoughts that give his commentaries substance, and rhetoric shapes the harmony and power of their expression. For him, Philo’s style was often admirable. And it wasn’t just a question of eloquence or style. As I will show in this paper, Philo creatively used the conventions of rhetoric in his commentary, mainly the rhetorical argumentation structures according to the Preparatory Exercises of Rhetoric.

Exploring the argumentative texture of De Decalogo in its multiple kinds of logical and qualitative reasoning, I found rhetorical coherence and effectiveness in the discourse as a whole and in the particular units that compose it. My critical analysis brought to the surface types of argumentative topics and structures which sustain my conviction, that the essence of true rhetoric is pervasive in Philo; a learned process of argumentation that is more than a taxonomy of linguistic devices and persuasive strategies.

KEYWORDS
Philo of Alexandria, De Decalogo, Rhetoric, Rhetorical analysis