

**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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup>. 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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<sup>1</sup> "Les disciplines scolaires, et la philosophie grecque elle-même, ne fournissent à sa pensée qu'une langue conceptuelle très générale, dont il use précisément comme d'un langage, avec une franchise et une liberté telles qu'on a cru voir en lui un éclectique ou un professeur faisant 'sa classe de philosophie'" (Philon d'Alexandrie, *De Decalogo*, introduction, traduction et notes, par Valentin Nikiprowetzky, Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1965, pp. 16, 32-33).

<sup>2</sup> There was a time when opinions were divided on this matter. For W. Herriot (*Philon le Juif. Essai sur l'École juive d'Alexandrie*, Paris, 1898, p. 144) "Philon ne pratique pas l'art de composer... se soucie peu de la vraie logique, de la vraie méthode et de la rigueur dans les deductions". For G. Trotti (*Filone Alessandrino*, Rome, 1932, p. 10), « la manque d'ordre et de méthode dans l'exposition des commentaires... les longues et oiseuses digressions, les diverses contradictions et confusions » are more than evident. W. Völker censures his heavy style inclined to an excess of rhetorical symmetries, profuse images, capricious pieces of composition and unclearness (*Fortschritt und Volendung bei Philo von Alexandrien. Eine Studie zur Geschichte der Frömmigkeit*, Leipzig, 1938, p. 5). But, with time, Philo's scholars like F. H. Colson, ("Philo's Quotations from the Old Testament", *Journal of Theological Studies* 41, 1940, p. 250; *Philo with an English Translation I*, Loeb Classical Library, London/Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. ix-xxii), L. Massebieau, "Le Classement des oeuvres de Philon, Bibliothèque de l'École des Autes Études, Sciences Religieuses, Paris, 1889, p. 3) and many others have underlined the extraordinary articulation of his thought, and the art of his composition.

<sup>3</sup> Nikiprowetzky, *Op. cit.*, p. 33-34.

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<sup>4</sup>, Philo creatively used the compositional devices of rhetoric – oral patterns provided by the tradition,<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> "After all, rhetoric is just this: the mastering and use of literary techniques to communicate one's ideas in various ways."<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> Philo used exegetical methods when expounding Scripture just

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup> Eight categories of oral patterning are referred and analyzed by John D. Harvey (*Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books / Leicestee, UK: Apollos, 1998, pp. 97-118): chiasmus, inversion, alternation, inclusion, ring-composition, word-chain, refrain, and concentric symmetry or extended chiasmus.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books / Leicestee, UK: Apollos, 1998, pp. 301-302.

<sup>7</sup> Hagit Amirav, *Rhetoric and Tradition: John Chrysostom on Noah and the Flood*, *Traditio Exegetica Graeca*, Leuven: Peeters, 2003, p.33.

<sup>8</sup> Richards, J., *Rhetoric, The New Critical Idiom*, London: Routledge, 2008, p. 13.

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*.<sup>9</sup>

#### 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.”<sup>10</sup>

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*.<sup>11</sup> Each one of these exercises is similarly structured and

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<sup>9</sup> Hagit Amirav, *Op. cit.*, pp. 221-223.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1355b.

<sup>11</sup> “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.<sup>12</sup>

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,<sup>13</sup> 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

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Theon of Alexandria, in the first century A.D.; Hermogenes, in the second/third centuries; Aphthonius in the fourth century; and Nicolaus in the fifth century. “Although Quintilian does not author a treatise of progymnasmata, he recommends that pupils undertake progymnasmata like the chreia as part of their rhetorical education” (Alex Damm, *Op. cit.*, p. 32).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-80.

<sup>13</sup> *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;<sup>14</sup> 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".<sup>15</sup>

As we know, Philo's "world was a rhetorician's world."<sup>16</sup> 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."<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup>

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."<sup>19</sup> In that predominantly oral world, authors "considered rhetorical techniques as important in persuading an audience as the evidence presented in their argument."<sup>20</sup> "There is an element of persuasiveness and

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<sup>14</sup> The Greek text is clear: ῥητορικὴ δὲ καὶ τὸν νοῦν πρὸς θεωρίαν ἀκονησαμένη καὶ πρὸς ἐρμηνείαν γυμνάσασα τὸν λόγον καὶ συγκροτήσασα λογικὸν ὄντως ἀποδείξει τὸν ἄνθρωπον...

<sup>15</sup> Chaïm Perelman, "Address at Ohio State University", in *Practical Reasoning in Human Affairs: Studies in Honor of Chaïm Perelman*, edited by J. L. Golden and J. J. Pilotta, Dordrecht, 1986, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1403b (trans. J. H. Freese, LCL, New York: Putnam's Sons, 1926).

<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 276e-277a (trans. H. N. Fowler, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

<sup>19</sup> George A. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, Princeton, University Press, 1963, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetoric*, Chapel Hill, NC and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984, p. 3.

understanding available only through *listening* to the text in its original language.”<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> In perfect alignment with these patterns of argumentation, thematic elaborations like a *chreia*<sup>24</sup> rhetorically incorporate a wide range of

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<sup>21</sup> 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).

<sup>22</sup> 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,<sup>22</sup> or adding to the rationale a supporting argument to confirm it, as in Quintilian’s *epichirema* and Cicero’s *rationatio*. Quintilian’s epichirema 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 *rationatio*, 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).

<sup>23</sup> 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).

<sup>24</sup> *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.<sup>25</sup>

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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the elaboration of this theme or issue are rationale, argument from the opposite, analogy, example, and authoritative testimony.

<sup>25</sup> 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; "Commentary Attributed 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: **1. Propositio** (proposition or thesis – what we intend to prove); **2. Ratio** (rationale, reason – a brief explanation or justification); **3. Confirmatio** (proof of the reason – corroborates the reason by means of additional arguments); **4. Exornatio** (embellishment – adorns and enriches the argument after the proof has been established); and **5. Complexio** (a brief conclusion). The basic argumentative topics in the *exornatio* are: **4.1. Simile** (an analogy); **4.2. Exemplum** (an example); **4.3. Amplificatio** (amplification of the argument); **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: **1. Προοίμιον or Encomium** (introduction, praise for the author); **2. Χρεία** (chreia or paraphrase of the chreia/thesis); **3. Αιτίαι** (statement of the rationale); **4. Έναντίον** (statement of the contrary); **5. Παραβολή** (analogy); **6. Παράδειγμα** (example); **7. Κρίσις/Μαρτυρία** (a judgment or statement from authority); **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.<sup>26</sup> Structure, elaboration and rhythm jointly concur to the harmony of their whole.<sup>27</sup>

### ***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<sup>28</sup> were surely the best way to prepare his audience<sup>29</sup> for the commentary on the

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<sup>26</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Semeia*, 1996: 21. See Burton L. Mack, and Vernon K. Robbins, "Elaboration of the Chreia in the Hellenistic Scholl," in *Patterns of Persuasion in the Gospels*, Sonoma, 1989, p. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Figures like anaphora, asyndeton and polysyndeton, isocolon, rhetorical question, antithesis, etc.

<sup>28</sup> They resemble the diatribe style used at the time, especially in a student-teacher relationship.

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> 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 influencer par son argumentation”; what he qualifies “d’auditoire universel” (Chaïm Perelman, *L’Empire rhétorique: Rhétorique et argumentation*, Paris: Vrin, 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 sont universalisables, c’est-à-dire acceptables, en principe, par tous les membres de l’auditoire universel” (p. 31).

<sup>30</sup> For Philo, “*De Decalogo* est, non une relation plus ou moins pittoresque de la Révélation des Dix Commandements, mais essentiellement un commentaire exégétique des textes de l’Écriture qui concernent l’une et les autres. La Loi était considérée comme la vérité absolue”. Alexandrian Judaism installed “la Loi à la place de la philosophie. “Philosophe, c’est étudier la Loi de Moïse et la mettre en pratique” (V. Nikiprowetzky, *Op. cit.*, pp. 16-17).

<sup>31</sup> Cicero divides the deductive argument (“argumentation per ratiocinationem”) in five parts: (1) *Propositio* (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”.<sup>32</sup>

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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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).

<sup>32</sup> **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.<sup>33</sup> 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).<sup>34</sup>

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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<sup>33</sup> These ten categories are substance, quality, quantity, relation, activity, passivity, situation, time, place and possession.

<sup>34</sup> Nikiprowetzky, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

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<sup>35</sup> 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

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<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup>

The first and fifth commandments seemingly interact with each other, the arguments being chiastically<sup>37</sup> 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,<sup>38</sup> as a linking keyword between the first five commands.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> John R. Levison, “Did the Spirit Inspire Rhetoric? An Exploration of George Kennedy’s Definition of Early Christian Rhetoric,” in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991, pp. 37-38.

<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> Synonyms like: ἀποσεμνύνοντες, *exalt, magnify* (66); σεμνοποιέω, *glorify, confer dignity, exalt* (71);

<sup>39</sup> 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<sup>40</sup>**
- 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.

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them *to honor* Him that truly is, not because He needed *that honor* should be paid to Him...” (81); “*honor* due to Him as such” (83). Linking fourth and fifth commands: “For these reasons and many others beside, *Seven is held in honor*” (105); “He gives the fifth commandment on *the honor due to parents*” (106).

<sup>40</sup> 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 ὧν ἀναγκαιότατον πρῶτον διεξελθεῖν πλάνος τις οὐ μικρὸς τὸ πλείστον τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος κατέσχηκε περὶ πράγματος, ὅπερ ἢ μόνον ἢ μάλιστα ἦν εἰκὸς ἀπλανέστατον ταῖς ἐκάστων διανοίαις ἐνιδρῦσθαι.<sup>41</sup>

### 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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<sup>41</sup> “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.<sup>42</sup> The first rhythmic structure develops *ratio* enumerating those who have worshiped earth, water, air and fire, the sun, the moon, the stars and planets, and has six elements.

ἐκτεθειώκασι γὰρ οἱ μὲν τὰς τέσσαρας ἀρχάς,/ γῆν καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ ἀέρα καὶ πῦρ,/ οἱ δ' ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην/ καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους πλανήτας καὶ ἀπλανεῖς ἀστέρας,/ οἱ δὲ μόνον τὸν οὐρανόν,/ οἱ δὲ τὸν σύμπαντα κόσμον (53a).<sup>43</sup>

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 one called a *comma*.

τὸν δ' ἀνωτάτω καὶ πρεσβύτατον,/ τὸν γεννητήν,/ τὸν ἄρχοντα τῆς μεγαλοπόλεως,/ τὸν στρατάρχη τῆς ἀηττήτου στρατιάς,/ τὸν κυβερνήτην ὃς οἰκονομεῖ σωτηρίως αἰεὶ τὰ σύμπαντα,/ παρεκαλύψαντο// ψευδωνύμους προσήσεις ἐκείνοις ἐπιφημίσαντες ἑτέρας ἕτεροι (53b).<sup>44</sup>

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 θάλατταν Ποσειδῶνα, δαίμονας ἐναλίους ὑπάρχους αὐτῶ προσαναπλάττοντες καὶ θεραπείας ὀμίλους μεγάλους ἀρρένων τε καὶ θηλειῶν, Ἴηραν δὲ τὸν ἀέρα καὶ τὸ πῦρ Ἡφαιστον καὶ ἥλιον Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ σελήνην Ἄρτεμιν καὶ ἑωσφόρον Ἀφροδίτην καὶ στίλβοντα Ἑρμῆν. (55) καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀστέρων ἐκάστου τὰς ἐπωνυμίας μυθογράφοι παρέδοσαν, οἱ πρὸς ἀπάτην ἀκοῆς εὖ τετεχνασμένα πλάσματα συνυφάναντες ἔδοξαν περὶ τὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων θέσιν κεκομψεῦσθαι. (56) τὸν τε οὐρανὸν εἰς ἡμισφαίρια τῶ λόγῳ διχῆ διανείμαντες, τὸ μὲν ὑπὲρ γῆς, τὸ δ' ὑπὸ γῆς, Διοσκόρους ἐκάλεσαν τὸ περὶ τῆς ἑτερημέρου ζῆς αὐτῶν προστερατευσάμενοις διήγημα. (57) τοῦ γὰρ οὐρανοῦ συνεχῶς καὶ ἀπαύστως αἰεὶ κύκλῳ περιπολοῦντος, ἀνάγκη τῶν ἡμισφαιρίων ἐκάτερον ἀντιμεθίστασθαι παρ' ἡμέραν ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω γινόμενον ὅσα τῶ δοκεῖν. ἄνω γὰρ καὶ κάτω πρὸς ἀλήθειαν

<sup>42</sup> The choice of vocabulary and sentence structure is decisive in a rhetorical speech. But the rhythmic flow of the chosen words also has a notable effect on the persuasiveness and charm of what is being said. According to Aristotle, "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." (*Rhetoric* 1408b [3.8]. And Philo also knows how and where to put it to the service of his commentary.

<sup>43</sup> "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."

<sup>44</sup> "But the highest and the most august,/ the Begetter,/ 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 εἴωθε λέγεσθαι τὸ μὲν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς ἄνω, κάτω δὲ τούναντίον.<sup>45</sup>

### 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 δὴ φιλοσοφεῖν ἀνόθως ἐγνωκότι καὶ ἀδόλου καὶ καθαρᾶς εὐσεβείας μεταποιουμένῳ κάλλιστον καὶ ὀσιώτατον ὑψηγείται παράγγελμα, μηδὲν τῶν τοῦ κόσμου μερῶν αὐτοκρατῆ θεὸν ὑπολαμβάνειν εἶναι· καὶ γὰρ γέγονε, γένεσις δὲ φθορᾶς ἀρχή, κὰν προνοία τοῦ πεποιηκότος ἀθανατίζεται, καὶ ἦν ποτε χρόνος, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν· θεὸν δὲ πρότερον οὐκ ὄντα καὶ ἀπὸ τινος χρόνου γενόμενον καὶ μὴ διαιωνίζοντα λέγειν οὐ θεμιτόν.<sup>46</sup>

### 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

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<sup>45</sup> “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.”

<sup>46</sup> “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 impiety 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 ἔνιοι περὶ τὰς κρίσεις ἀπονοία τοσαύτη κέχρηται, ὡς οὐ μόνον τὰ εἰρημένα θεοὺς νομίζειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἕκαστον αὐτῶν μέγιστον καὶ πρῶτον θεόν, τὸν ὄντα ὄντως ἢ οὐκ εἰδότες ἀδιδάκτω τῇ φύσει ἢ οὐ σπουδάζοντες μαθεῖν, ἕνεκα τοῦ μηδὲν ἔξω τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀόρατον καὶ νοητὸν αἴτιον ὑπολαμβάνειν εἶναι, καίτοι σαφειστάτης ἐγγύς παρακειμένης πίστεως. (60) ψυχῇ γὰρ ζῶντες καὶ βουλευόμενοι καὶ πάνθ' ὅσα κατὰ τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον δρῶντες οὐδέποτε ψυχὴν ὀφθαλμοῖς σώματος ἴσχυσαν θεάσασθαι, καίτοι φιλοτιμηθέντες ἂν πάσας φιλοτιμίας, εἴ πως ἰδεῖν οἶόν τε ἦν τὸ ἄγαλμα τὸ πάντων ἱεροπρεπέστατ ἀφ' οὗ κατὰ μετάβασιν εἰκὸς ἦν ἔννοιαν τοῦ ἀγενήτου καὶ αἰδίου λαβεῖν, ὃς ἅπαντα τὸν κόσμον ἠνιοχῶν σωτηρίως ἀόρατος ὦν κατευθύνει.<sup>47</sup>

## 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 εἴ τις τοῖς ὑπάρχοις σατράπαις ἀπένειμεν, ἔδοξεν ἂν οὐκ ἀγνωμονέστατος μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ῥιψοκινδυνότατος εἶναι χαριζόμενος τὰ δεσπότου δούλοις, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον ἂν τοῖς αὐτοῖς εἴ τις γεραίρει τὸν πεπονηκότα τοῖς γεγυρόσιν, ἴστω πάντων ἀβουλότατος ὦν καὶ ἀδικώτατος, ἴσα διδοὺς ἀνίσιοις οὐκ ἐπὶ τιμῇ τῶν ταπεινοτέρων ἀλλ' ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει τοῦ κρείττονος.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> “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 uninstructed, *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.”

<sup>48</sup> “As, therefore, if any one were to assign the honors of the great king to his satraps and viceroys, 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) εἰσὶ δ' οἱ καὶ προσυπερβάλλουσιν ἀσεβείᾳ μὴδὲ τὸ ἴσον ἀποδιδόντες, ἀλλὰ τοῖς μὲν τὰ πάντα τῶν ἐπὶ τιμῇ χαριζόμενοι, τῷ δ' οὐδὲν νέμοντες ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μνήμην, τὸ κοινότατον· ἐπιλήθονται γὰρ οὗ μόνον μεμνησθαι προσήκον ἦν, ἐπιτηδεύοντες οἱ βαρυδαίμονες ἐκούσιον λήθην. (63) ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ στομάργω κατεχόμενοι λύττη τὰ δείγματα τῆς ἐνιδρυμένης ἀσεβείας εἰς μέσον προφέροντες βλασφημεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι τὸ θεῖον, ἀκονησάμενοι κακῆγορον γλώτταν, ἅμα καὶ λυπεῖν ἐθέλοντες τοὺς εὐσεβοῦντας, οἷς ἄλεκτον καὶ ἀπαρηγόρητον εὐθύς εἰσδύεται πένθος τὴν ὅλην πυρπολοῦν ψυχὴν δι' ὠτων· ἢ γὰρ τῶν ἀνοσίων ἐλέπολις τοῦτ' ἐστίν, ᾧ μόνω τοὺς φιλοθέους ἐπιστομίζουσι νομίζοντας ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ παροξύνειν ἐν τῷ παρόντι κάλλιστον ἡσυχίαν.<sup>49</sup>

## 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.

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<sup>49</sup> “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.”

(64) πᾶσαν οὖν τὴν τοιαύτην τερθρείαν ἀπώσαμενοι τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς φύσει μὴ προσκυνῶμεν, εἰ καὶ καθαρωτέρας καὶ ἀθανατωτέρας οὐσίας ἔλαχον ἀδελφὰ δ' ἀλλήλων τὰ γενόμενα καθὸ γέγονεν, ἐπεὶ καὶ πατὴρ ἀπάντων εἷς ὁ ποιητὴς τῶν ὄλων ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διανοία καὶ λόγῳ καὶ πάσῃ δυνάμει τῇ τοῦ ἀγενήτου καὶ αἰδίου καὶ τῶν ὄλων αἰτίου θεραπείᾳ σφόδρα εὐτόνως καὶ ἐρρωμένως ἐπαποδύομεθα, μὴ ὑποκατακλινόμενοι μηδ' ὑπεύκοντες ταῖς τῶν πολλῶν ἀρεσκείαις, ὑφ' ὧν καὶ οἱ δυνάμενοι σφῶζεσθαι διαφθείρονται. (65) πρῶτον μὲν οὖν παράγγελμα καὶ παραγγελμάτων ἱερώτατον στηλιτεύσωμεν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, ἕνα τὸν ἀνωτάτω νομίζειν τε καὶ τιμᾶν θεόν· δόξα δ' ἢ πολύθεος μηδ' ὧτων ψαυέτω καθαρῶς καὶ ἀδόλως ἀνδρὸς εἰωθότος ζητεῖν ἀλήθειαν (66) ἀλλ' ὅσοι μὲν ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης καὶ τοῦ σύμπαντος οὐρανοῦ τε καὶ κόσμου καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς ὀλοσχερεστάτων μερῶν ὡς θεῶν πρόπολοι τε καὶ θεραπευταί, διαμαρτάνουσι μὲν πῶς γὰρ οὐ;<sup>50</sup>

This commandment forms a type of inclusion that involves the whole argument in a chiasmic 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 *ἤττων δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ἀδικοῦσι* (66) respond to the initial *πλάνος τις οὐ μικρός* (52).<sup>51</sup> The repetition of *τιμὴ honor*, ten times in five paragraphs, is the expression of an important word-chain pattern in this commandment.

<sup>50</sup> “*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?*”

<sup>51</sup> 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.”<sup>52</sup> 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 ἐβδόμης παραγγέλλει πέμπτον παράγγελμα τὸ περὶ γονέων τιμῆς τάξιν αὐτῶν δοῦς τὴν μεθόριον τῶν δυοῖν πεντάδων.<sup>53</sup>

### 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.

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<sup>52</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation*, Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996, p. 52.

<sup>53</sup> 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.

τελευταῖον γὰρ ὃν τῆς προτέρας, ἐν ᾗ τὰ ἱερώτατα προστάττεται, συνάπτει καὶ τῇ δευτέρᾳ περιεχούσῃ τὰ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους δίκαια.<sup>54</sup>

### 3. Rationale with amplification, αἰτίαι (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' ὡς οἴμαι τόδε· τῶν γονέων ἢ φύσις ἀθανάτου καὶ θνητῆς οὐσίας ἔοικεν εἶναι μεθόριος, θνητῆς μὲν διὰ τὴν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ζῶα συγγένειαν κατὰ τὸ τοῦ σώματος ἐπίκνηρον, ἀθανάτου δὲ διὰ τὴν τοῦ γεννᾶν πρὸς θεὸν τὸν γεννητὴν τῶν ὄλων ἐξομοίωσιν, (108) ἤδη μὲν οὖν τινες τῇ ἑτέρᾳ μερίδι προσκληρώσαντες ἑαυτοὺς ἔδοξαν τῆς ἑτέρας ὀλιγωρεῖν· ἀκρατον γὰρ ἐμφορησάμενοι τὸν εὐσεβείας πόθον, πολλὰ χαίρειν φράσαντες ταῖς ἄλλαις πραγματείαις ὄλον ἀνέθεσαν τὸν οἰκεῖον βίον θεραπείᾳ θεοῦ, (109) οἱ δ' οὐδὲν ἔξω τῶν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους δικαιωμάτων ἀγαθὸν ὑποτοπήσαντες εἶναι μόνην τὴν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ὁμιλίαν ἡσπᾶσαντο, τῶν τε ἀγαθῶν τὴν χρῆσιν ἐξ ἴσου πᾶσι παρέχοντες διὰ κοινωνίας ἴμερον καὶ τὰ δεινὰ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐπικουφίζειν ἀξιοῦντες, (110) τούτους μὲν οὖν φιλανθρώπους, τοὺς δὲ προτέρους φιλοθέους ἐνδίκως ἂν εἴποι τις, ἡμιτελεῖς τὴν ἀρετὴν· ὀλόκληροι γὰρ οἱ παρ' ἀμφοτέροις εὐδοκιμοῦντες.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> “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.”

<sup>55</sup> “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. (108) 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. (109) 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. (110) Now, one may properly call both these latter, 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 contrary<sup>56</sup> works together with the previous rationale to support the initial thesis, and is amplified with two other forceful arguments in the form of an *interrogatio*<sup>57</sup> 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) ὅσοι δὲ μήτ' ἐν τοῖς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἐξετάζονται, συνηθόμενοι μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς κοινοῖς ἀγαθοῖς, συναλοῦντες δ' ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐναντίοις, μήτ' εὐσεβείας καὶ ὁσιότητος περιέχονται, μεταβεβληκέναι δόξαιεν ἂν εἰς θηρίων φύσιν· ὧν τῆς ἀγριότητος οἴσονται τὰ πρωτεῖα οἱ γονέων ἀλογοῦντες, ἑκατέρας μερίδος ὄντες ἐχθροὶ καὶ τῆς πρὸς θεὸν καὶ τῆς πρὸς ἀνθρώπους (111) ἐν δυσὶν οὖν δικαστηρίοις, ἃ δὴ μόνα ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ φύσει, μὴ ἀγνοεῖτωσαν ἐαλωκότες, ἀσεβείας μὲν ἐν τῷ θεῷ, διότι τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι παραγαγόντας καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο μιμησαμένους θεὸν οὐ περιέπουσι, μισανθρωπίας δ' ἐν τῷ κατ' ἀνθρώπους (112) τίνα γὰρ ἕτερον εὖ ποιήσουσιν οἱ τῶν συγγενεστάτων καὶ τὰς μεγίστας παρασχομένων δωρεὰς ὀλιγωροῦντες, ὧν ἔναι δι' ὑπερβολὴν οὐδ' ἀμοιβὰς ἐνδέχονται; πῶς γὰρ ἂν ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἀντιγεννησάμενος δύναίτο τοὺς σπείραντας, κληῖρον ἐξαιρετὸν τῆς φύσεως χαρισσαμένης πρὸς παῖδας γονεῦσιν εἰς ἀντίδοσιν ἔλθεῖν οὐ δυνάμενον; ὅθεν καὶ σφόδρα προσῆκεν ἀγανακτεῖν, εἰ μὴ πάντα ἔχοντες ἀντιχαρίζεσθαι μηδὲ τὰ κουφότατα ἐθελήσουσιν. (113) οἷς δεόντως ἂν εἴποιμι· τὰ θηρία πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἡμεροῦσθαι δεῖ· καὶ πολλάκις ἔγνω ἡμερωθέντας λέοντας, ἄρκτους, παρδάλεις, οὐ μόνον πρὸς τοὺς τρέφοντας διὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀναγκαίοις χάριν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους, ἔνεκά μοι δοκῶ τῆς πρὸς ἐκείνους ὁμοιότητος· καλὸν γὰρ αἰεὶ τῷ κρείττονι τὸ χεῖρον ἀκολουθεῖν διὰ

<sup>56</sup> 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).

<sup>57</sup> 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).

βελτιώσεως ἐλπίδα. (114a) νυνὶ δ' ἀναγκασθήσομαι τάναντία λέγειν· μιμηταὶ θηρίων ἐνίων, ἄνθρωποι, γίνεσθε. τοὺς ὠφέληκτότας ἀντωφελεῖν ἐκεῖνα οἶδε καὶ πεπαίδευται.<sup>58</sup>

## 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) κύνες οἰκουροὶ προασπίζουσι καὶ προαποθνήσκουσι τῶν δεσποτῶν, ὅταν κίνδυνός τις ἐξαπιναίως καταλάβῃ· τοὺς δ' ἐν ταῖς ποιμναῖς φασι προαγωνιζομένους τῶν θρεμμάτων ἄχρι νίκης ἢ θανάτου παραμένειν ὑπὲρ τοῦ διατηρῆσαι τοὺς ἀγελάρχας ἀζημίους. (115) εἴτ' οὐκ αἰσχυρῶν ἐστὶν αἰσχιστον, ἐν χαρίτων ἀμοιβαῖς ἄνθρωπον ἡττηθῆναι κυνός, τοῦ θηρίων θρασύτατου τὸ ἡμερώτατον ζῶον;<sup>59</sup>

## 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<sup>60</sup>, for

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<sup>58</sup> “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, since nature has bestowed on parents this especial endowment in respect of their children, which can never be requited or recompensed? On which account it is becoming to a man to feel exceeding indignation when people, because they are unable to make a full return for the benefits which they have received, do not choose to make the very slightest; (113) to whom I might say, with perfect propriety, that wild beasts even must be made tame towards men; and, indeed, I have frequently known instances of lions being domesticated, and bears and leopards, and made gentle, not only to those who feed them, by reason of their gratitude for necessaries, but also to others, on account, in my opinion, of their resemblance to their feeders. For it is always well that what is worse should follow what is better, from a hope of deriving improvement; (114) but in this case I shall be constrained to use an entirely opposite language. You who are men, are imitators of some wild beasts. Even the beasts have learnt and know how to requite with service those who have done them service.”

<sup>59</sup> “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 shepherds 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?”

<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.

ἀλλ' εἰ μὴ τοῖς χερσαίοις ἀναδιδασκόμεθα πρὸς τὴν πτηνὴν καὶ ἀεροπόρον μετώμεν φύσιν ἃ χρὴ παρ' αὐτῆς μαθησόμενοι. (116) τῶν πελαργῶν οἱ μὲν γηραιοὶ καταμένουσιν ἐν ταῖς νεοττιαῖς ἀδυνατοῦντες ἵπτασθαι, οἱ δὲ τούτων παῖδες ὀλίγου δέω φάναι γῆν καὶ θάλατταν ἐπιποτώμενοι πανταχόθεν ἐκπορίζουσι τοῖς γονεῦσι τὰ ἐπιτήδεια· (117) καὶ οἱ μὲν ἀξίως τῆς ἡλικίας ἡρεμοῦντες ἐν ἀφθονίᾳ διατελοῦσι τῇ πάσῃ τρυφῶντες, οἱ δὲ τὰς εἰς τὸν πορισμὸν κακοπαθείας ἐπελαφρίζομεν τῷ εὐσεβεῖν καὶ τῷ προσδοκᾶν ἐν γῆρᾳ τὰ αὐτὰ πείσσεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἐγγόνων ἀναγκαῖον ὄφλημα ἀντεκτίνουσιν ἐν καιρῷ καὶ λαβόντες αὐτὸ καὶ ἀνταποδιδόντες ὅτ' οὐδέτεροι τρέφειν αὐτοὺς δύνανται, παῖδες μὲν ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς γενέσεως, γονεῖς δ' ἐπὶ τελευτῇ τοῦ βίου· ὅθεν αὐτοδιδάκτῳ τῇ φύσει νεοττοτροφηθέντες γηροτροφοῦσι χαίροντες. (118) ἄρ' οὐκ ἀξίον ἐπὶ τούτοις ἀνθρώπους, ὅσοι γονέων ἀμελοῦσιν, ἐγκαλύπτεσθαι καὶ κακίζειν ἑαυτοὺς, ὀλιγωρηκότας ὧν ἢ μόνων ἢ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἀναγκαῖον ἦν πεφροντικέαι, καὶ ταῦτ' οὐ διδόντας μᾶλλον ἢ ἀποδιδόντας; παιδῶν γὰρ ἴδιον οὐδέν, ὃ μὴ γονέων ἐστίν, ἢ οἴκοθεν ἐπιδεδωκότων ἢ τὰς αἰτίας τῆς κτήσεως παρασχομένων.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 9.2.7, 8;

<sup>62</sup> "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 any thing else whatever? And this too, when they would not have

## 7. Argument from authority, κρίσις/μαρτυρίαί (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 his 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.”<sup>63</sup>

(119) εὐσέβειαν δὲ καὶ ὀσιότητα, τὰς ἀρετῶν ἡγεμονίδας, ἄρα γ' ἐντὸς ὄρων ἔχουσι τῶν ψυχῶν; ὑπερορίου μὲν οὖν ἀπεληλάκασι καὶ πεφυγαδεύκασι· θεοῦ γὰρ ὑπηρεταί πρὸς τέκνων σποράν οἱ γονεῖς· ὁ δ' ὑπηρετήν ἀτιμάζων συνατιμάζει καὶ τὸν ἄρχοντα, (120a) τῶν δ' εὐτολμοτέρων ἀποσεμνύοντες τὸ γονέων ὄνομα φασί τινες, ὡς ἄρα πατὴρ καὶ μήτηρ ἐμφανεῖς εἰσι θεοί, μιμούμενοι τὸν ἀγέννητον ἐν τῷ ζῶπλαστεῖν· ἀλλὰ τὸν μὲν εἶναι τοῦ κόσμου θεόν, τοὺς δὲ μόνων ὧν ἐγέννησαν.<sup>64</sup>

## 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.

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been so much conferring benefits as requiring 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.”

<sup>63</sup> 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 revered next to the gods (F. C. Colson, *Philo VII*. LCL. “Appendices”, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, § 120, p. 612).

<sup>64</sup> “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 ἐγγύς ὄντας ἀσεβούντων.  
(121a) τοσαῦτα καὶ περὶ γονέων τιμῆς φιλοσοφήσας τέλος ἐπιτίθησι τῇ ἐτέρᾳ καὶ θειοτέρᾳ πεντάδι.<sup>65</sup>

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

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<sup>65</sup> "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.<sup>66</sup>

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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<sup>66</sup> John D. Harvey, *Listening to The Text: Oral Patterning in Paul's Letters*, Grand Rapids MI, 1998, p. 292. What Harvey says about Paul's letters can be said even better about the writings of Philo.

\* 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