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Philo's Position on Reincarnation

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1. Introduction	1
2. The Indirect Evidence	3
3. The Direct Evidence.....	5
<i>Somn.</i> 1.138–139.....	5
<i>Cher.</i> 114.....	5
<i>QE</i> 2.40	6
Fragment 7.3 Harris	7
Conclusions.....	8
4. Examples of Enhanced Understanding	9
Settling vs. Sojourning in the Body	9
The Soul on the Stormy Sea.....	10
5. Concluding Reflections	14
Bibliography	15

1. Introduction

The question of Philo of Alexandria's position on the doctrine of reincarnation or *metempsychosis* has been discussed for centuries.¹ During the last one, very different answers have been given. The doctrine is not, however, one of the openly debated issues. Instead, those relatively few researchers who have taken it up have rarely even mentioned, let alone argued against, or in favor of, the views of their colleagues. In fact, with but a few exceptions, they have rarely argued at all but instead merely stated their view. In the cases where more space has been devoted to the matter, the scholar's main interest has lied elsewhere.²

But why talk about Philo Judaeus's position on the doctrine of reincarnation? After all, since the ancient Jews did not hold that doctrine, Philo could not do so, either. This kind of deductive logic has been applied, but it is, needless to say, of no value in attempts to establish Philo's genuine position.³

¹ By belief in reincarnation I mean the view that an incorporeal component of the human being, which may be called, e.g., the soul, incarnates repeatedly. The process involves several physical deaths and ordinary births (and is thus distinct from another form of re-embodiment, the resurrection of the body) and aims at purification or some other kind of perfection of the soul and its release to incorporeal existence.

² For a history of research in this area, see my *Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria*, *Studia Philonica Monographs* 7 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), 9–29.

³ For this kind of argumentation, see, e.g. Erwin R. Goodenough, "Philo on Immortality," *HThR* 39, no. 2 (1946): 106–7. Harry A. Wolfson, too, appeals to what he sees as universal differences between Platonic and Jewish views as grounds for Philo's inability to accept reincarnation; see his *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 408. The relation of the Jewish historian Josephus's to reincarnation is a significant point of comparison to Philo. Here too diametrically opposed views have been presented and research has suffered from an automatic labelling of the tenet as alien to Judaism. For one of the most recent contributions in this area, see Casey D. Elledge, "Resurrection

Conversely however, it also does not solve the case to say that when a Platonist talks about the soul, reincarnation is in the air—although *this* statement, which I think is accurate, well illustrates the fact that the question of Philo’s stance is worth answering.⁴

We can take it for granted that anyone with a Platonist world view and a fair knowledge of Plato’s major works, like Philo of Alexandria, is acquainted with the idea of reincarnation. Hence this established Platonist tenet has to be *somewhere* in Philo too, whether he rejected or accepted it, entirely or in part. Even if he nowhere in his writings reveals anything about his thoughts, thoughts he must have had. For to assume that our profoundly soul-oriented exegete did not regard reincarnation worth thinking anything about is not plausible. And unless he considered the idea wholly insignificant for his own project—an equally implausible option—, he will have wanted to *influence* his audience’s thoughts about it. If this holds, and if he did not reveal his thoughts in oral teaching only, we should be able to find at least traces of the position he held in his writings.

What I would call the *traditional* view of Philo’s position was that he accepted the tenet. This was the prevalent view among scholars in the 16th to 19th centuries. It was first, in the 1570s, voiced by the Jewish scholar Azariah de’ Rossi, and in the 17th century, apparently without awareness of de’ Rossi’s work, by the Christian theologians Denis Pétau and Johann Albertus Fabricius, followed in the ensuing centuries by, e.g., Thomas Mangey, Eduard Zeller, Emil Schürer, David Winston and Anita Méasson.

The most notable sceptic has been David T. Runia, who, while not focusing on the tenet itself in any of his studies, has not avoided discussing it. He will speak for himself in this session, but I might briefly summarize his position as focusing on the lack of full (and explicit) integration of reincarnation into Philo’s thought with the result that Philo should be seen as rejecting the doctrine.⁵ Various other kinds and different degrees of rejection of the possibility that Philo endorsed reincarnation have also been expressed by, e.g., Isaak Heinemann, Erwin R. Goodenough, Harry Wolfson and John Dillon. The largest group of scholars, however, is made up of those who have entirely ignored the question even when discussing closely related matters.

The passage usually referred to by those who have held that Philo accepted reincarnation, the *locus classicus Philonicus* on reincarnation, is found in the *De somniis* in one of Philo’s interpretations of the ascending and descending angels on the ladder which Jacob saw in his dream (Gen. 28:12). I quote just the key sentence now (more will follow below): “Of these [souls separated from the body at death] some, longing for the familiar and accustomed ways of mortal life, hurry back again” (*Somn.* 1.139).⁶

Although this one passage seems clear enough, we cannot simply adopt the traditional view of Philo’s endorsement of reincarnation, because it was not based on a systematic study of the entire Philonic corpus. With my research on this matter I aimed at such a systematic study, one that takes into account all available indirect and direct evidence. Under indirect evidence I dealt with Philo’s anthropology,

and Immortality in Hellenistic Judaism: Navigating the Conceptual Boundaries,” in *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 112–13.

⁴ In the dialogues *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic* the tenet is explained by Socrates. In the *Timaeus* it is brought forward by the title character (a leading Pythagorean according to later tradition), in the *Laws*, by the Athenian.

⁵ See, e.g., David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 347–48; “Theodicy in Philo of Alexandria,” in *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, ed. Antti Laato and Johannes De Moor (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 600.

⁶ All translations are from the Loeb Classical Library unless stated otherwise. Small amendments are not indicated.

soteriology and ethics, as well as his more general statements about the hereafter, his possible denial of reincarnation or the prerequisites thereof, and his use of Platonic reincarnational terminology and imagery. The goal was to discover whether or not there is a niche for reincarnation to thrive in in the soil of Philo's thought. My direct evidence consisted of four text: in addition to the passage in *Somn.*, I have analyzed *Cher.* 114 and *QE* 2.40 as well as the previously almost ignored fragment 7.3 in the collection of Harris.⁷

I found that both the indirect and direct evidence support the conclusion that reincarnation was indeed an important part of Philo's world view. At the end of my study I looked at many other Philonic texts in the light of my synthesis about Philo's views of the journey of the soul from the heavenly origins to embodiment, transgression, reincarnation and salvation—"incorporeal and immortal life in the presence of the Uncreated and Immortal" (*Gig.* 14).⁸ My conclusion was that a reincarnational reading of Philo's texts has the potential of leading to a fuller, more precise or more coherent understanding of what he wanted to say. In what follows, I very briefly and selectively summarize the results of my analysis of both the indirect and the direct evidence. Subsequently, I apply these results to a few examples of Philonic texts.

2. The Indirect Evidence

Philo's anthropology is highly dualistic. The body is corruptible and transitory, the soul—especially its highest part, the rational mind (νοῦς, διάνοια, λογισμός)—is immortal. This division corresponds to the basic dualism of the Platonic world view between the immutable, noetic world which truly *is* and the sense-perceptible, material world which is in a perpetual state of *becoming*.⁹ From this it follows that the soul's state of incarnation is a kind of anomaly and cannot be permanent. Thus Philo's anthropological dualism is closely associated with the notions of the *pre-* and *post-existence* of the soul. But why does the soul become incarnate in the first place? In spite of the anomalous nature of embodiment it seems to have been part of God's plan and nothing evil in itself in Philo's thought.¹⁰ His statements concerning incarnation as a punishment, prison term etc. are thus not easily interpreted as referring to the *original* incarnation. Instead, Philo seems to have thought that an original fall happened to the already incarnate soul and that it was directly related to its "corporealization," i.e., dedication to the earthly and bodily things. If this is accurate, Philo's references to incarnation as a punishment are references to reincarnation.

The clearest and most important of these is his characterization of the death of the soul as "almost" the opposite of the ordinary death (the separation of soul from body), as the *coming together* (σύννοδος) of soul and body—and also as a penalty in *Leg.* 1.105–108.¹¹ The death of the soul means the rejection of

⁷ J. Rendel Harris, *Fragments of Philo Judaeus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886), 7. printed already by Mangey in *Philonis Judaei Opera Quae Reperiri Potuerunt Omnia*, 3 vols. (London: Gulielmi Bowyer, 1742), 2.667.

⁸ Tr. David Winston, *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections: Translation and Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1981) for ἡ ἀσώματος καὶ ἀφθαρτος παρὰ τῷ ἀγενήτῳ καὶ ἀφθάρτῳ ζωῇ.

⁹ One fundamental text is the statement in *Timaeus* 27d–28a: "Now first of all we must, in my judgement, make the following distinction. What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming (τὸ ὄν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον)? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent (τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε)?"

¹⁰ See, e.g., *QG* 1.53, *Cher.* 58–60 and the discussion on why the mind incarnates in *Reincarnation in Philo*, 44–81.

¹¹ See also *Leg.* 2.77–78, 3.69–74; *Plant.* 46; *Congr.* 56–59; *Agr.* 89; *QG* 4.234. For an analysis of these, see *Ibid.*, 57–70. *Agr.* 88–89 is discussed below in section 4. According to Dieter Zeller, "The Life and Death of the Soul in

virtue and leads to the soul's corporealization, that is, its becoming earthly: "having forsaken the wisdom of heaven, is he not now ranked with things earthly (γεώδεσι) and incohesive (ἀσυστάτοις)?" (*Leg.* 3.252). I have argued elsewhere that the concept of corporealization also explains the character of the "earthly human/mind" in Philo's exegesis of Gen. 2 in *Leg.* 1.¹² Corporealization *transforms* the nature of the soul's embodiment into an involuntary state; it entails the love of body and pleasure, the key driving force of reincarnation in Philo's thought. The way out, in Philo and Plato alike, is through the exercise of reason, philosophy, wisdom and virtue.

A six-stage model of the soul's fall and rise can be delineated. This scheme, which Philo himself never explicitly and fully spells out, involves (1) the mind's incorporeal existence with God, (2) its descent to the body and the world, (3) its corporealization and (4) the consequent becoming bound to the mortal life in the cycle of reincarnation, (5) its release and (6) eternal incorporeal existence with God.¹³

It is ultimately the mind, rather than the entire soul with its irrational parts, whose incarnation we are dealing with, and there are passages in Philo that point to the mind's having to rid itself, not only of the body but also of the lower—irrational and mortal—parts of the soul upon salvation. I have chosen to call this process or event "monadization" based on Philo's account of Moses's death: God "resolved his twofold nature of body and soul into a monad (εἰς μονάδος ἀνεστοιχείου φύσιν), transforming his whole being into a most sun-like mind" (*Mos.* 2.288). There are Philonic texts indicating that if monadization is not complete enough by physical death, this state of affairs can constitute a driving force of reincarnation, e.g., *Cher.* 114 (see below).¹⁴

The assessment of passages that could be seen to contradict the tenet of reincarnation brought up no cases where such an interpretation could be considered the likeliest one. For example, when parents bring children "from non-existence to existence" (e.g., *Spec.* 2.2), this does not override the abundant evidence on Philo's endorsement of the pre-existence of the soul. Instead, we should take this as referring to the concrete fact of the emergence of a previously non-existing person—an unique combination of body and soul.

Despite claims by scholars that Philo rejected reincarnation, no explicit denial of the doctrine by Philo exists, which in itself is a significant fact when we are dealing with a Platonist who does not shy away from using Plato's reincarnational texts. It is fair to assume that such references to Plato's dialogues were not pointless. They are best understood as reflecting Philo's anticipation that at least part of his audience would take notice of them and identify the works and the reincarnational contexts they pointed to. Philo thus took a conscious risk of being suspected of endorsing the tenet.

My conclusions concerning the indirect evidence on Philo's position on reincarnation are clear. His anthropology would well be able to accommodate the doctrine, as would his soteriology as well as what can be inferred of his individual eschatology. In Philo's thought orientation away from God and philosophy towards the corporeal leads to consequences that are in agreement with rebirth. The totality

Philo of Alexandria: The Use and Origin of a Metaphor," *SPhiloA* 7 (1995): 23, σύννοδος is "[a] technical term for the union of soul and body in Platonic tradition."

¹² See my "'Call Him Earth': On Philo's Allegorization of Adam in the *Legum Allegoriae*," in *Adam and Eve Story in the Hebrew Bible and in Ancient Jewish Writings Including the New Testament*, ed. Antti Laato and Lotta Valve, *Studies in the Reception History of the Bible* 7 (Turku & Winona Lake: Åbo Akademi University & Eisenbrauns, 2016), 253–93.

¹³ The body and the world play a similar role as the venue of the soul's ethical battle. Philo sometimes applies the appellations of the mythical underworld to the former.

¹⁴ See *Reincarnation in Philo*, 85–90.

of the indirect evidence must be considered to be in notable harmony with the idea that souls are repeatedly born in this world to live in human bodies in order to labor towards achieving the purity which, together with God's vital grace, enables them to reach salvation.

3. The Direct Evidence

Only very brief comments can be offered on the main texts of the direct evidence.¹⁵ In what follows, each text is presented in English translation together with some observations of the most important elements that in my view make it evident that reincarnation is being discussed, and approved, by Philo.

Somn. 1.138–139

For so far is air from being alone of all things untenanted, that like a city it has a goodly population, its citizens being imperishable and immortal souls equal in number to the stars. Of these souls some, those that are closest to the earth and lovers of the body (φιλοσώματα), are descending to be fast bound in mortal bodies, while others are ascending, having again been separated (from the body) according to the numbers and periods determined by nature. Of these last some, longing for the familiar and accustomed ways of mortal life, hurry back again (παλινδρομοῦσιν αὐθις), while others, pronouncing that life great folly, call the body a prison and a tomb but escaping from it as though from a dungeon or a grave are lifted up on light wings to the ether and range the heights for ever. (*De somniis* 1.138–139)¹⁶

Besides reincarnation, no other interpretation has been seriously presented for this highly Platonic passage.¹⁷ What is particularly noteworthy about the scheme of incarnation, discarnation and reincarnation presented here (including the discussion on the cosmic elements and the creatures appropriate for each in *Somn.* 1.133–137 and the characterization of angels that follows in 1.140–142) is that clearly identifiable parts of it are reproduced in the allegorization of entirely different biblical passages: see *Gig.* 6–18 (ex. Gen. 6:2), *Plant.* 12–14 (Gen. 9:20) and the little more distant parallels in *Conf.* 174–177 (Gen. 11:7) and part of *QG* 4.188 (Gen. 26:8).¹⁸

Cher. 114

Do we at some time get [the soul] as our own?¹⁹ Before birth? But then we did not exist. After death? But we, individual compound beings who are with bodies shall then exist no longer. Instead we, individual compound beings who are with incorporeals, shall hasten to a regeneration (εἰς παλιγγενεσίαν ὁρμήσομεν).

In previous scholarship the word παλιγγενεσία has been interpreted as referring to an “absorption in the Divine.”²⁰ This is, however, completely untenable when the context is taken into account. Virtue-loving

¹⁵ For a full analysis, see *Ibid.*, 129–213.

¹⁶ I have chosen to translate διακριθεῖσαι πάλιν as “having again been separated (from the body)” rather than “selected for return” (PLCL). The μέν–δέ construction makes it inevitable that it stands in contrast to “fast bound in mortal bodies.” Philo uses the verb διακρίνω for the separation of the soul from the body also in *Leg.* 1.106, *Agr.* 164, *Plant.* 147 and *Conf.* 36.

¹⁷ In the space of c. 70 words Philo manages to include identifiable references to *Phaedo* 66c, 68b; *Phaedrus* 246c and *Timaeus* 41d, 44b and to other notions for which clear counterparts exist in these dialogues as well as the *Cratylus*, *Gorgias* and *Republic*.

¹⁸ See my “*Plant.* 1–27: The Significance of Reading Philonic Parallels” (presented at the SBL Annual Meeting, Philo Seminar session on the *De plantatione*, Atlanta, 2015).

¹⁹ I read here ποτέ instead of πότε; cf. Colson’s “When did we get it?” The *timing* of the reception of the soul as a possession is not the point here. See below.

²⁰ E.g., Colson in PLCL 2.485, Goodenough, “Philo on Immortality,” 101. It should be noted that Plato uses the combination of πάλιν and γένεσις to refer to reincarnation *Phaedo* 113a and has the combination of πάλιν and γίγνομαι in the same sense in *Phaedo* 70c, d; 72a and *Meno* 81b.

souls ripe for salvation are almost absent in *Cher.* The main figure of the bulk of the treatise (§§ 40–130) is Cain who represents the mind’s delusion that all that it perceives through its senses are its own “possession”—the meaning of the name Cain according to Philo (*Cher.* 52, 68). The train of thought that leads to §114 begins in §108 with the citation of Lev. 25:23, “all the land is mine,” as support for Philo’s argument concerning God’s monopoly on ownership. He allegorizes “all the land” as the particular, interdependent things of the cosmos (§§ 109–112), including the body and the soul with its constituent parts that make up the individual (§113).

In §§ 114–115 Philo discusses the soul in structural and universal but not ethical terms. There are no grounds for assuming Philo all of a sudden mentions the salvation of the virtuous souls. Instead, in §116, in the seamless continuation of the discussion begun in §113 concerning the various parts of the individual, he depicts a mind suffering from “false conjectures” and “delusion” which is “the very negation of mind (ἄνοους).” In §117 Philo turns to sense-perception which he says he follows like a slave. From the viewpoint of the possible role of monadization in the Philonic soteriology it is interesting to note that Philo seems to make it a point to refer to the reborn souls’ being “individual compound beings (σύγκριτοι ποιοί)” both before death and after it.²¹ Death does not free them from the lower parts of the soul.

QE 2.40

The Armenian version:²²

What is the meaning of the words, “Come up to Me to the mountain and be there”? ^aThis signifies that a holy soul is divinized by ascending not to the air or to the ether or to heaven (which is) higher than all but to (a region) above the heavens. ^bAnd beyond the world there is no place but God. ^cAnd He determines the stability of the removal by saying “be there,” (thus) demonstrating the placelessness and the unchanging habitation of the divine place. ^d*For those in whom the desire²³ (for God) is fickle ascend with the intellect for a short while upwards, (being) flying ones carried by God, (and) immediately return.* ^eThey do not fly so much as they are drawn downward, (as) *it is said,*²⁴ to the depths of Tartarus. ^fBut those who do not return from the holy and divine city, to which they have migrated, have God as their chief leader in the migration.

The Greek fragment:²⁵

^dIn some the intellect becomes fickle, in those who, after having been again carried by wings for a short while, descended right away, ^enot having flown upwards but rather having been dragged down to the extremes of Tartarus, as they say.²⁶ ^fHappy are those who do not return (οἱ μὴ παλινδρομοῦντες).

²¹ I follow the text of PCW and reject the conjectural emendation of the two last words into ἀσύγκριτοι ἄποιοι in PLCL.

²² I have added the letters a to f to indicate the sentences as they are punctuated by Marcus in PLCL. The parts of the text printed in italics are my translation.

²³ My conjecture. The Armenian word used here, ախտ (*axt*), corresponds to πάθος which is difficult to understand in this context where the word should be something positive since its fickleness is presented as negative. I consider it very likely that the original Greek word was not πάθος but πόθος. See *Reincarnation in Philo*, 260–64.

²⁴ Literally “(as) they say.” Based on my correction of the Greek, I read ασην (*asen*) instead of ασην (*asem*).

²⁵ My tr. We have only a single Greek witness, the eleventh-century Codex Berolinensis 46 containing the *Sacra Parallela* attributed to John of Damascus.

²⁶ I read φασίν instead of the MS. φησίν, based on the parallel at *Legat.* 103: “but shameful deeds, they say, need the depths of Tartarus” (tr. Smallwood for τὰ δὲ αἰσχρά φασιν ἐσχατιᾶς Ταρτάρου [δεΐται]).”

Here the most important thing to note is the existence, in Philo's universalizing allegory, of two groups of souls, one of which is saved while the other one returns.²⁷ The possibility of ascending to God and not returning is nothing short of salvation in Philo's thought, and the souls must thus be disembodied. Another thing to note is that Philo explicitly calls the body Tartarus in *QG* 4.234, and in *Congr.* 57, 59 says the real Hades is not the mythical underworld but the life of the wicked in the body.²⁸ That the context in *QE* 2.40 is the souls' fate in the afterlife is the easiest explanation. The Greek fragment has the same rare verb for returning, *παλινδρομέω*, as *Somn.* 1.139.²⁹ A key feature is also the importance of the steadiness of the soul's orientation away from the mundane and towards the divine.

Fragment 7.3 Harris

Those who have come to understand truth fitly declare sleep to be the practice of death and the shadow and outline of the revival which follows (*τῆς αὐθις ἐσομένης ἀναβιώσεως*) afterwards. For it carries images of both clear. *For it completely removes and sets beside the same one.*³⁰

Here the allusions to Plato's *Phaedo* are of key importance. First, the concept of practising death (*μελέτη θανάτου*) occurs many times in it as the label for Socrates's ascetic life ideal for the philosopher; Philo too uses the concept in different ways.³¹ Second, the juxtapositioning of sleep and death plays a role in the account of reincarnation in the dialogue (see, especially 71d). It is significant that the entire parallelism of sleep and death is in the Phaedonic context *based* on the notion of reincarnation, to which Plato refers using the verb *ἀναβιώσκομαι* four times in the dialogue.³² And so, since what the fragment contains is precisely the juxtaposition of sleep and death in a Phaedonic context, reincarnation is, without question, the *default* meaning of *ἀναβίωσις* here. It should be adopted if nothing points to some other solution.

The only other alternative worth considering is, I think, salvation. Moses's second birth at *QE* 2.46 has been referred to as a parallel to *Cher.* 114, where, however, the interpretation of *παλιγγενεσία* as salvation is untenable as discussed above. By contrast, in fr. 7.3 Harris we do not possess any

²⁷ By "universalizing" I mean that Philo's interpretation has nothing to do with the specific events on Mt. Sinai described in the Exodus verse being explained (24:12a). Instead he presents general statements about souls.

²⁸ See *Reincarnation in Philo*, 65–70. *QG* 4.234:

God "does not permit the mind to be emptied and bereft of an excellent and most divine form when it descends into an earthly body, to (the rivers of) desires, Acheron and Pyriphlegethon, for these are the true Tartarus, but he permits it to spread its wings sometimes and to behold heaven above and to taste that sight. For there are some who through gluttony, lechery and over-indulgence are always submerged and sunken, being drowned by passion.

Congr. 57, 59:

He banishes the unjust and godless soul from himself to the furthest bounds and disperses it to the place of pleasures and lusts and injustices (*εἰς τὸν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ ἀδικημάτων χώρον*). That place is most fitly called that of the impious, but it is not that mythical place in Hades. For the true Hades is the life of the bad, a life of damnation and blood-guiltiness, the victim of every curse. . . . The bodily nature is the concubine, and we see that through it passion is generated, for the body is the region of pleasures and lusts (*ἡδονῶν γὰρ καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν χώρα τὸ σῶμα*).

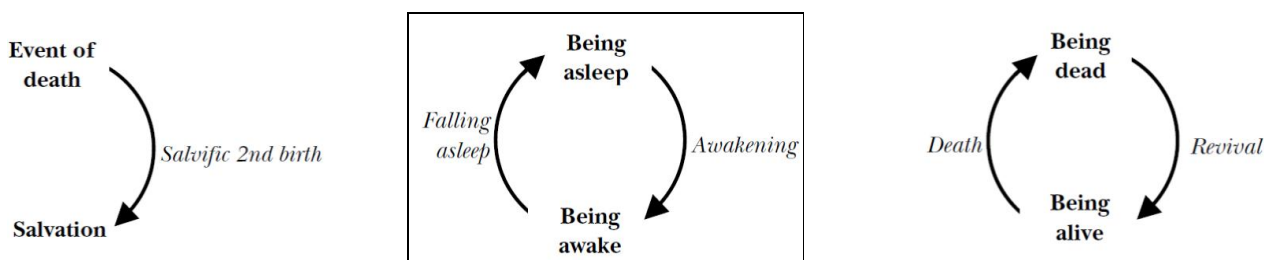
²⁹ As Jaap Mansfeld, "Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria," *VC* 39 (1985): 144, has noted, in Philo this verb refers almost exclusively to a return to the bodily sphere. For an analysis of all the occurrences, see *Reincarnation in Philo*, 251–54.

³⁰ My tr. The last sentence seems deficient: *μεριστᾶ γὰρ καὶ παριστᾶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐξ ὀλοκλήρου*. It is probably corrupt, something may be, e.g., missing. See *Reincarnation in Philo*, 188, 193.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 122–24.

³² 71e twice; 72a, d. In these, the verb is used more or less interchangeably with *πάλιν γίγνεσθαι*.

information of the kind of souls Philo is talking about.³³ However, comparing a one-time event to sleep would be less meaningful than comparing two cyclical phenomena:



Based on the Phaedonic coloring of the fragment, the better suitability of reincarnation to the simile presented and the fact that Philo elsewhere expresses his endorsement of reincarnation, I find the tenet the most effortless explanation of the fragment.

Conclusions

In all the text of direct evidence Philo is speaking of the idea of reincarnation with approval. The driving forces involved can be observed to coincide with the potential causes of reincarnation identified in the analysis of the indirect evidence: the mind's tendency to love the body and things corporeal are either mentioned in, or implied by the context of, all the passages.³⁴ A noteworthy feature with Platonic parallels is the role of the soul's being *accustomed* to the mortal life in the body (*Somn.* 1.139) as maintaining reincarnation.³⁵ This is reflective of the mind's corporealization. Another important aspect is that in order to be saved, souls must direct their love and desire correctly: steadily towards God (*QE* 2.40). The reincarnating souls desire the mortal life in the body and the objects of sense (*Somn.* 1.139, *Cher.* 117). Incomplete monadization seems to be implied in *Cher.* 114.

Plato's influence in Philo's reincarnational texts is decisive. The latter takes over individual words and concepts of more or less directly Platonic origin (being bound to a mortal body; φιλοσώματος, παλιγγενσία, ἀναβίωσις) and images (the body as a prison and grave,³⁶ the soul's lightness and wings, practising death). But Philo does not just copy, he also modifies: being born in an animal body is left out, and we have nothing corresponding to Plato's descriptions of the soul's inter-incarnational stay in Hades or Tartarus. Instead, Philo demythologizes these places and sees them referring to the life in the body.

³³ However, Philo's biblical basis in the lost fourth book of *Leg.* (which is where the fragment apparently comes from), Gen 3:20–23, deals with the aftermath of the transgression in Paradise, which could favor the assumption that Philo is dealing rather with wicked than virtuous souls.

³⁴ In the case of the fragment, we only have this implication, which I understand to be present through Philo's apparent wish to remind his audience of practising death, i.e., estranging oneself from the body and its needs. The purpose of this is to avoid any bodily "contamination" of the soul that would result in further incarnations (see, e.g., *Phaedo* 80e–82c). Practising dying to bodily life, together with genuine philosophy, leads to salvation (*Gig.* 13–14).

³⁵ Cf. *Republic* 620a; *Phaedo* 81e, 82a; *Timaeus* 42c; *Laws* 904c. In Philo, cf. *QG* 4.195, *Ebr.* 164, *Spec.* 1.281–282.

³⁶ For these there are also antecedents to Plato; see Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo*, 119–20. In the close parallel to *Somn.* 1.133–142 in *Gig.* 6–18 Philo utilizes Plato's metaphor of the body as a river (§13; from *Tim.* 42e–43b).

4. Examples of Enhanced Understanding

Settling vs. Sojourning in the Body

One idea repeatedly referred to by Philo in the better understanding of which a reincarnational interpretation of his thought helps us is the difference between the soul's settling in vs. temporarily visiting the physical world and the body. For example, in his reply to a hypothetical objection to the allegorization of certain verses of Gen. 46 and 47 Philo states,

Boldly it should be said to him, We came "to visit," (*παροικεῖν*, Gen. 47:4) not to live (*κατοικεῖν*). In reality every soul of a wise person has obtained heaven as its fatherland and the earth as a foreign land. The house of wisdom he regards as his own and the house of the body as foreign, to which in his opinion he is only paying a temporary visit (*παρεπιδημεῖν*). (*Agr.* 64–65)³⁷

In their commentary, Albert C. Geljon and David Runia note that Philo is "following Platonic tradition," but in their non-reincarnational reading the difference between living in and visiting the body remains modest.³⁸ Philo makes the same distinction also in *Conf.* 77–78 (ex. Gen. 11:2) as well as in his subsequent exegesis of an array of secondary biblical lemmas in §§ 79–81 (ex. Gen. 23:4, 47:9, 26:2–3). He similarly expounds God's words to Abram that his "offspring will be alien (*πάροικον*) in a land not its own":

God does not allow the lover of virtue to dwell (*κατοικεῖν*) in the body as in one's own land, but only permits him to sojourn (*παροικεῖν*) there, as in a foreign country But the district of the body is kin to every fool; he studies to dwell there, not sojourn. (*Her.* 267)

Philo does not need either of the two verbs to appear in the biblical text in order to be able to take up this theme. We find two further examples in *Somn.* In 1.41 he begins to inquire into why Jacob in Gen 28:10 arrives to Haran, the region of the senses in his interpretation. He identifies this with being swept from noetic to sense-perceptible things, and comments, in clear anticipation of his secondary lemma (Gen. 27:43–44), as follows:

But it is an excellent course even when you have fallen into this plight not to grow old and live your life (*μὴ καταγῆράσαι καὶ διαιωνίσει*) in it, but feeling that you are spending your days in a foreign country as sojourners to be ever seeking for removal and return to the land of your fathers. (*Somn.* 1.45)

Then, after quoting Rebecca's words from Gen. 27 exhorting Jacob to spend "some days" with Laban in Haran, Philo has this to say:

Do you mark, then, that the Practiser does not brook to spend a lifetime (*οὐχ ὑπομένει . . . καταβιῶναι*) in the territory of the senses, but a few "days" and a short time (*βραχὺν τινα χρόνον*) in compliance with the necessities of the body to which he is tied, but that it is in the city discerned by the intellect that a life-long enduring (*ὁ δὲ μακρὸς αἰὼν . . . καὶ βίος*) is in store for him? (*Somn.* 1.46)

That entering the territory of the senses in fact means becoming incarnate is made clear when Philo later in the same treatise refers back to these thoughts, now in his exegesis of God's words in Gen. 28:15, "I will bring you back to this land":

For excellent would it have been for the intellect to have remained in its own keeping and not have left its home for that of sense-perception; but, failing that, it is well that it should return to itself again. Perhaps, too, in these words he hints at the doctrine of the immortality of the soul: for, as was said a

³⁷ Tr. Albert C. Geljon and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On Cultivation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, PACS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.

little before, it forsook its heavenly abode and came into the body as into a foreign land. But the Father who gave it birth says that He will not permanently disregard it in its imprisonment, but will take pity on it and loose its chains, and escort it in freedom and safety to its mother-city, and will not stay his hand until the promises given by words have been made good by actual deed. (*Somn.* 1.180–181)

More variations on the theme could be cited.³⁹ It is, however, already clear that there is a phenomenon in these texts that merits some explanation: the idea that *the duration of the soul's embodiment should be minimized*. One part of the answer surely lies at the level of attitude: we should not, so Philo, consider the body is our real home but to view it as something alien to our real nature—the Platonic two-level scheme meets us again. Were we to exclude the possibility that Philo had appropriated the tenet of reincarnation, we would have to halt at the level of attitude—it goes without saying our exegete is not advocating suicide or any other means of shortening one's life—and explain (away) part of Philo's language as metaphorical. But if we add reincarnation in the picture, we get a clear interpretation: the wise soul minimizes the number of lives in the body.

This understanding also explains certain other kinds of references to the soul's relation with the body: not being able to become free of the body and being imprisoned in it. Both reflect the *involuntariness of the state of being embodied*.⁴⁰ When Philo says that our souls are “unable to strip off our bodies (οὐ δυνάμεναι ἐκδύναί τὰ σώματα)” (*Leg.* 2.80), what is he referring to, if we rule out both physical death and the release from reincarnation? Similar statements include “without divine grace it is impossible to leave the mortal things” (*Ebr.* 145) and “it is not possible for the one whose abode is in the body and the mortal race to attain to being with God; this is possible only for him whom God rescues out of the prison” (*Leg.* 3.42). It is true that Philo in *Migr.* 7 says that leaving one's body, sense-perception and speech (ex. Gen. 12:1–3 in *Migr.* 2) mean estrangement from and superiority over them and not concrete severance. However, rather than being the overall explanation to all of Philo's references to involuntary incarnation this is best seen as reflecting the attitude aspect of the matter discussed above.⁴¹ Some of the references of this type presuppose permanent discarnation (*Ebr.* 101–103, *Her.* 273–275, *Somn.* 1.138–139).

The Soul on the Stormy Sea

Our second and final example of a Philonic notion which we will understand better by taking account of Philo's appropriation of reincarnation is that of the soul sailing on a stormy sea. This imagery is based on the Platonic image of the body as a river, although the original version is more physiological in character.⁴² We begin with *Agr.* 88–89, where Philo is explaining his subsidiary biblical lemma Deut. 17:15b–16a which runs, “You will not be able to establish over yourself a foreign person, because he is not your brother. For he will not multiply for himself cavalry, nor will he return the people back to Egypt,” quoted at §84.⁴³ This is Philo's *explanandum*; let us see what his *explanationes* are. He, first of

³⁹ E.g., *Deus* 111–115, *Migr.* 27–28.

⁴⁰ Conversely, *voluntarily* staying in the prison of the body (μένων ἐν τῇ τοῦ σώματος εἰρκτῇ . . . καθ' ἐκούσιον γνώμην, *Her.* 68) too is difficult to understand in terms of physical death, but it fits the cycle of reincarnation to which Plato refers as voluntary imprisonment in *Phaedo* 82e–83a.

⁴¹ It is to be noted that what Philo means by concrete severance in *Migr.* 7 is seeking physical death.

⁴² See *Timaeus* 43a–d and cf. also *Republic* 611c–e. For the Philonic usage, see Anita Méasson, *Du Char Ailé de Zeus À l'Arche d'Alliance: Images et Mythes Platoniciens Chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 176–92; Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 260–62; *Reincarnation in Philo*, 114–17.

⁴³ Tr. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

all, takes the gist of the passage to be that “a horse-keeper” should not be appointed as ruler.⁴⁴ This would be unseemly, because interest in horses means being “crazy about pleasures and desires and uncontrollable love-affairs” (§84)⁴⁵ He then denies that military matters are at stake (§§ 86–88). The passage

is concerned instead with the irrational, uncontrolled and disobedient motion in the soul, which it will be advantageous to restrain, lest [that motion] “return” all its (i.e., the soul’s) “people back to Egypt,” the region of the body, and by force make it a lover of pleasure and passion rather than a lover of virtue and of God. For, as [Moses] himself has said, the one who acquires a “multitude of horses” must necessarily make his “way” (βαδίζειν ὁδόν) to “Egypt.” (*Agr.* 88)⁴⁶

Thus *horses* symbolize the **pleasures, desires and passions**, and *multiplying cavalry* stands for the related **uncontrolled motion** in the soul. This motion is dangerous because it may force the *people*, i.e., the **soul**, to **return** to *Egypt*, the **body**. Thus whereas Philo has an allegorical interpretation for all the other elements here, the notion of returning appears in both the biblical text and its explanation (ἀποστρέφω in both), although in the sequel Philo changes the return into “mak[ing] his way.”⁴⁷

Before moving on to *Agr.* 89 where the soul drowns in the body, it is warranted to take a look at the rest of Deut. 17:16—which Philo does not quote but surely knew, and knew his audience would know. The text runs, “but the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall never add to return that way.’”⁴⁸ Where does God say this? The referent is not obvious, but we can see that Deut. 28:68 has several words in common with 17:16: “And the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt by a way that I said: ‘You shall never see it again.’”⁴⁹ Here too, we may ask: which passage is referred to? I suggest that both Deut. verses refer to Ex. 14: a navigable “way” (ὁδός) that can no longer be seen would fit the Red Sea and its formerly dry bottom along which the Israelites escaped from Egypt and where the Egyptian

⁴⁴ I.e., “he will not multiply for himself cavalry” etc. is *not* said of the foreigner, who would do just this, but of the permissible kind of ruler (“your brother”).

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, the translations from *Agr.* are taken, with occasional small changes, from Geljon and Runia, *On Cultivation*.

⁴⁶ I have marked with quotations marks Philo’s use of the text of Deut. 17:16. All the other words thus marked indicate exact correspondence (cases may vary), but Philo’s “multitude of horses” (πλήθος ἵππων) stands for the biblical “multiply cavalry” (πληθυνεῖ ἵππων). “The one who acquires” corresponds to the present participle κτώμενον, which Geljon & Runia translate with the perfect tense. This makes the said acquirement anterior to going to Egypt and thus the former seem the cause of the latter. In the Greek, however, both verb forms are present tense, and Philo may have intended his allegorization to be taken to mean that strong dedication to passion and pleasure *requires* making one’s way to the body. Cf. the text of Deut. 17:16, “nor will he return the people to Egypt *in order to multiply cavalry for himself*,” where the italicized part is omitted by Philo in the quotation in §88.

⁴⁷ Why does Philo say that Moses says that multiplying cavalry means enforced migration to Egypt? Geljon and Runia, *On Cultivation*, 181, state that the text of Deut. does not say this and suggest Philo links these two “because he regards Egypt as the land of the passions and thus the natural place to be for passion-loving people.” I suggest there is more to it; see below. The comment quoted also does not make a clear distinction between what it is that Philo is explaining and what his explanation is. I do not think he wants to convey a message that deals with real-world geography, and the biblical “people” turns into the *soul* in Philo’s hands. Furthermore, I think Philo’s statement *is* based on Deut. 17:16—see the part of the verse he omits (above, n. 46). Cf. also *Agr.* 68: “wherever the animal goes, [the rider] is necessarily borne along (πάντως ἀναγκαῖον φέρεσθαι) there himself.”

⁴⁸ ὁ δὲ κύριος εἶπεν ὑμῖν, Ὁὐ προσθήσετε ἀποστρέψαι τῇ ὁδῷ ταύτῃ ἔτι.

⁴⁹ καὶ ἀποστρέψει σε κύριος εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἐν πλοίοις ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, ἣ εἶπα Ὁὐ προσθήσεσθε ἔτι ἰδεῖν αὐτήν.

forces drowned. While invisibility is not a property of the *way* in Ex., cf. Moses's words in 14:13, "For as you have seen the Egyptians today, you shall not ever again see them time without end."⁵⁰

That Philo had all these verses in mind cannot of course be proven, but the assumption that Philo connects the "way" to Egypt in Deut. 17:16 specifically to the passage through the Red Sea in Ex. 14 gains added credibility from his ensuing account of the plight of the passion-loving soul illustrating the taking of the way to Egypt. The description has many features in common with the fate of the Egyptian cavalry as described in the hymn of Ex. 15:⁵¹

For whenever a wave, by the force of the passions and evil deeds blowing against the unstable soul which is sailing off the right course, comes rising upon both sides of the soul—mind and sense-perception—as if of a ship, then in all likelihood the mind, becoming waterlogged, is submerged; and the bottom to which it is submerged and made to sink is nothing else than the body, of which Egypt is the figure. (*Agr.* 89)⁵²

Without explicitly acknowledging it, Philo here returns to his earlier lemma of Ex. 15. At the level of the *explanandum* these texts—the people's returning to Egypt and the Egyptian cavalry's drowning in the Red Sea—do not have that much in common.⁵³ But in Philo's reincarnational allegory they are *both* images of the soul's entrance to the body.⁵⁴ Repeating the allegorization of Egypt as the body at the end of §89 emphasizes that the passion-induced sorry state of the soul is the *same* as the one described in §88, i.e., "'return[ing]' all [the soul's] 'people back to Egypt,' the region of the body." Taking Philo's words about returning to the body metaphorically as referring to a mental event is no option, since such a wicked soul that is being discussed could not experience a contemplative flight from which to return to the bodily realm. Likewise, seeing the return as some kind of relapse in a moral sense requires reading *into* Philo's text things that he does not say, i.e., that some progress had been made by the soul that ends up back in the bodily sphere.⁵⁵ §§ 88–89 would also not make sense as descriptions of the

⁵⁰ ὃν τρόπον γὰρ ἐωράκατε τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους σήμερον, οὐ προσθήσεσθε ἔτι ἰδεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον. According to Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 224, Ex. 14:13 is considered the referent in Deut. 17:16 by D.E. Skweres, *Die Ruckverweise Im Buch Deuteronomium*, Analecta Biblica 79 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979), 193–94 (*non vidit*). Nelson, too, regards it possible that Deut. 17:16 is "a metaphorical reference to a reversal of the exodus." He also sees a link to Deut. 28:68; Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 224, 333.

⁵¹ I first became aware of these links from Yakir Paz, "Review of Philo of Alexandria: *On Cultivation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*," *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, 2013, bmc.brynmawr.edu/2013/2013-10-61.html. Paz refers to κατέδυσαν εἰς βυθόν ("sank into the deep") in Ex. 15:5. I would add that the words καταποντίζω/-τόω ('drown') and κύμα ('wave') appear in 15:4–8 as well as in *Agr.* 89. Cf. also the use of τεῖχος ('wall') as well as "the wind of your wrath (θυμοῦ)" in 15:8 vs. Philo's τοῖχος ('wall,' 'side') and "the force of the passions and evil deeds blowing against the unstable soul" in §89. Thus the background of Philo's nautical terminology in §89 is to be found in Ex. 14–15 rather than in Plato's *Phaedrus* ("steersman" in both). The latter is suggested by Geljon and Runia, *On Cultivation*, 181, referring to their comments on *Agr.* 69 (where the *Phaedrus* myth is clearly significant) on p. 166. Whether, as they propose (p. 182), Odysseus's nautical adventures and their allegorizations also play a role is an open question for me.

⁵² My tr. for ὅταν γὰρ καθ' ἑκάτερον τοῖχον τῆς ψυχῆς νεῶς τρόπον, τὸν τε νοῦ καὶ αἰσθήσεως, ὑπὸ βίας τῶν καταπνεόντων εἰς αὐτὴν παθῶν τε καὶ ἀδικημάτων ἀντιρρεπούσης καὶ κλινομένης ἐξαιρόμενον ἐπιβαίῃ τὸ κύμα, τὸθ' ὡς εἰκὸς ὑπέραντλος ὁ νοῦς γινόμενος καταποντοῦται. βυθὸς δέ ἐστιν, εἰς ὃν καταποντοῦται καὶ καταδύεται, σῶμα αὐτὸ τὸ ἀπεικασθὲν Αἰγύπτῳ.

⁵³ Directly, that is. An indirect link exists through *Deut.* 28:68.

⁵⁴ For a more thorough discussion of connections between *Agr.* 89, *QG* 2.61, *QG* 4.234 and *QE* 2.39–40, see *Reincarnation in Philo*, 83–85, 180–85.

⁵⁵ Cf. *QE* 2.40 and similar descriptions of return after progress: *QG* 1.85, 4.45; *QE* 1.7; *Agr.* 169, 174; *Ibid.*, 178–87.

original incarnation. Thus even if we ignore the reference to returning in §88, reincarnation is left as the most logical option.

Thus the conclusion is that Philo is describing the soul in the hereafter. This is the result of the elimination of other, less probable alternatives. Is any support forthcoming from elsewhere in his writings? Our exegete is extremely taciturn when it comes to the fate the wicked or imperfect souls after death. But there is one particularly relevant passage which we need to take a look at. The passage presents Philo's exegesis of Gen. 9:6, "As for the one who sheds a human's blood, in return for this blood shall he be shed." Philo states that the text

indicates that the souls of those who act impiously imitate the mortal body in being corrupted, in so far as each of them is wont to seem to suffer corruption. For the body is dissolved into those (parts) out of which it was mixed and compounded, and is again resolved into its original elements. But the cruel and wicked soul is tossed about (γυάβεαι [yaceal]) and sunken (ηεηεηωυεαι [helelateal]) by its intemperate way of life and by the evils with which it has grown up, (which are) in a certain sense its members and grow together with it. (QG 2.61)

Here a wicked soul, clearly after physical death, undergoes something quite similar to what is described in *Agr.* 89. We do not know which Greek verbs Philo originally used here, but based on the recorded equivalents drawn from the work of the so-called Hellenizing School of Armenian translators, the primary candidates for *yacem* are πλάζω, περιάγω and ἐμπεριπατέω, and for *helelatem*, κατακλύζω.⁵⁶ Philo is thus saying that *post mortem* the bad soul has to wander or go around and to face inundation caused by its intemperance. Worth noting are also the clear reference to something like corporealization (at the beginning of the quotation above) and the notion of evils growing together with the soul—cf. *Phaedo* 81c where the corporeal is said to become "part of [the body-oriented soul's] nature" (ξύμφυτον) with the result of that the soul is "dragged back to the visible world" and on to a new incarnation.

The image of the soul tossed like a boat on a stormy sea occurs several times in Philo. Let us have a brief look at one more example which also connects with the afterlife account in QG 2.61 and the minimization of the duration of the embodiment discussed above.⁵⁷ In *Migr.* 148 Philo explains Gen 12:4, which includes the words, "and Lot left with him." What does it mean for the Abraham type of soul to have a Lot-like companion? Philo begins with etymology: Lot means 'inclining away'—ἀπόκλισις. This leads to the symbolism of "inclining to either side like a boat tossed (διαφερόμενον) by contrary winds" etc.⁵⁸ "Lot's" coming along means a lot of trouble for "Abraham's" progress towards virtue (§§ 149–151). Philo invokes a secondary lemma and identifies Lot now with the "mixed crowd" escorting the Israelites as their exodus from Egypt, "all the bodily region," begins (Ex. 12:38; §§ 151–153).⁵⁹ In §154 he then describes the delay, caused by the Lot-crowd, which "befell the mind when it

⁵⁶ See G. Awatik'ean, X. Siwrmēlean, and M. Awgerean, *Նոր Բառգիրք Հայկազեան Լեզուի (Nor Baigirk' Haykazean Lezui) [New Dictionary of the Armenian Language]*, 2 vols. (Venice: Mechitarist Press, 1836). Available online at <http://www.nayiri.com/imagedDictionaryBrowser.jsp?dictionaryId=26>. The translators of the Hellenizing school (fl. ca. 570–730) were responsible for the Armenian translation of part of Philo's works as well as many others.

⁵⁷ For a more extensive discussion, see Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo*, 235–42.

⁵⁸ The passage has several close verbal connections to *Agr.* 89 as well as to, e.g., *Det.* 100, *Post.* 22, *Gig.* 13 and *Fug.* 22. Philo very clearly has a whole pool of nautical vocabulary on which he draws in these passages.

⁵⁹ As often in Philo, the same imagery functions both as the description of the wicked soul and of the negative forces within a good but not yet perfect soul. These are ultimately one and the same thing: a wicked soul is one in which those forces have gained the upper hand.

was escaping from Egypt, the country of the body”: instead of three days (a reference to Josh. 1:11, 15), the journey takes forty years of “wandering and going circle-wise (ἐν κύκλῳ περιάγων καὶ ἀλώμενος).”

Philo finds the image of a stormy sea apposite for illustrating the plight of the soul suffering from involuntary incarnation. One asset of the image is that it functions on many levels. If, as seems likely, reincarnation is an esoteric teaching for Philo, veiled references to the tenet are easily included.⁶⁰ The allusions to Plato’s descriptions of the engulfed soul are not just meant to show Philo’s erudition but have a (reincarnational) referent. Both the Greek mythical underworld and the biblical Egypt symbolize the body for Philo, and we have seen how he links both with the sailing soul. Reincarnation is in my view the explanation of least resistance for such accounts of a wicked soul entering the body.

5. Concluding Reflections

If I were to defend the view that Philo did *not* accept reincarnation, I would find very few ways open before me. I could not attempt to convince you that the afterlife was not an important issue for Philo and thus he had no particular opinion of what happens to the soul after death, because Philo does speak of the salvation of the virtuous souls, i.e., their return to God. But I could perhaps try to show that while entertaining ideas of what will happen to the good souls in the hereafter, Philo had no opinion as to the fate of the wicked and/or the imperfect and thus also no stance on reincarnation. I could feel encouraged to choose this alternative by the absence of an explicit declaration on Philo’s part concerning the doctrine of reincarnation. However, given the totality of the indirect and direct evidence this alternative would amount to seeing mere silence where clues are, in fact, provided.

Yet another option could be to maintain that Philo disapproved of the tenet but failed to state this. Again, the cumulative evidence would be very difficult to explain. And if we think of alternative scenarios for the *post-mortem* fate of the souls who do not meet the prerequisites of salvation, we have no substantial support for, e.g., the view that their souls simply perish with their bodies.⁶¹ I am at present unsure whether Philo believed all souls would eventually be saved or if he envisioned some kind of everlasting punishment for the incurable souls—and if he, like Plato, held that some souls really are so.

The question of why Philo does not *openly* endorse the doctrine of reincarnation is fair and warranted. The only scholar who, to my knowledge, has directly confronted this question is David Winston. He writes,

Philo’s sparse references to reincarnation reveal a reluctance on his part to give undue prominence to a Platonic conception that was essentially alien to Jewish tradition. Hence his failure to map out in any detail the projected life histories of the different types of souls and the undoubtedly deliberate vagueness which characterizes his utterances on this matter.⁶²

I entirely agree about Philo’s deliberate vagueness. However, the reference to reincarnation as “essentially alien to Jewish tradition” is problematic, because we know so little of pre-Philonic Hellenistic, especially Alexandrian, Jewish traditions concerning individual eschatology. Based on the fact that Philo’s view of reincarnation is so heavily dependent on Plato’s it is not very risky to assume

⁶⁰ Cf. the later adoption of reincarnation in the Kabbalah: in its first known literary exposition in the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (12th cent.) it is presented as a self-evident notion, and yet taught as a mystery to initiates only.

⁶¹ So Goodenough, “Philo on Immortality,” 106.—without any reference to Philo’s works.

⁶² David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 42.

that the tenet was imported from the Athenian philosopher's thought world. We may agree with Winston that *at some point* of history the doctrine had been novel to the Jews. Arguably it is just common sense to assume that a Jew wanting to introduce such an idea would do wisely to promulgate it cautiously.⁶³ Philo's entire allegorical enterprise has an esotericist flavor to it: there is a hidden message in the biblical text, one that not all can find. The masses are ignorant and stop at the literal level but the wise press on to the real meaning. Especially in the *Allegorical Commentary* Philo often refers to mysteries, initiates and forms of information control.⁶⁴

When I was finalizing this paper, I had the opportunity to read the one written by David T. Runia for this session. I want to thank David warmly for his words of appreciation. I have receive much from him, both through his splendid studies on Philo and personal correspondence. His paper raises several interesting questions. For example, if we rule out reincarnation, can we say *anything* concerning Philo's thoughts on (1) the post-mortem fate of the wicked and (2) the doctrine of reincarnation, and what then is the *message* of Philo's abundant use of Platonic reincarnational language?

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⁶³ This is the case notwithstanding the possible earlier Greek influences on Jewish individual eschatology, e.g., the idea that the while at death the body goes to the ground, the spirit goes to God; see Ecclesiastes 12:7; similarly Hebrew Sirach 40:11.

⁶⁴ See Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo*, 246–47.

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