

OSBLSanAntPhilTXT2016
Sunday, October 30, 2016
4,824 without notes.
ran through speller once.

Brenk fbrenk@jesuits.org

double spaces removed.
need to add, perhaps Jewish Encyclopedia, etc.

almost all special characters added. (F)// 03DD//(
need to see if Plutarch uses a name in both a good and bad sense, as Philo does for
Hebron.

Inserting Unicode characters

To insert a Unicode character, type the character code, press ALT, and then press X. For example, to type a dollar symbol (\$), type 0024, press ALT, and then press X. For more Unicode character codes, see [Unicode character code charts by script](#). Some of these, like s with an acute accent are in the symbols insert.

Can find character code by googling it, often.

Wednesday, November 02, 2016

2,009

A Name by Any Name? The Allegorizing Etymologies of Philo and Plutarch

Philo's *On the Change of Names* and Plutarch's *On Isis and Osiris* would not seem to have much in common. Philo treats a Biblical text which presents itself as historical and is perfectly well known to him, taking up the question of why the major protagonists of *Genesis* received new names or had alternate names. On the larger scale, however, the investigation of the names in *Genesis* lead to an inspiring allegorical interpretation heavily influenced by Greek philosophy, especially Middle Platonism.¹ Besides leading the reader to an exalted idea of God, the interpretations are meant to inspire the reader to virtue.² Very impressive and moving is the section toward the end (252-270), written in beautiful Greek, not unlike that of Plutarch, on the life according to the highest moral values.³ Equally moving is the crescendo toward the end on the one God, the God of Israel, the object of true knowledge. Plutarch in turn uses etymologies mostly from mythical accounts to explain the names involved in the Isis cult.⁴ Grabbe notes how Philo used the names as a kind of skeleton upon which to construct his work, and as the basis for his allegory, already knowing what the final product would look like.⁵ Plutarch's structure is much looser. However, through the major etymologies of the names Isis, Osiris, Typhon (Seth), and Horos, along with the myth, he has a framework for his exposition. Unlike Philo, he tends to introduce several etymologies and interpretations for the same subject, saving the best for the last.⁶

Plutarch asserts that "nothing irrational or purely mythical (μυθῶδες) or based on superstition as some believe, was embodied in religious services, but ideas which either had moral and necessary causes or were not devoid of historical or physical plausibility" (315E). At one point (374E) he claims that the myths are not wholly factual, but at another (355B) he suggests that some things are true.⁷ His statements that about plausibility, however, seem contradictory. Like Philo, he seems to be admitting at least in some cases, both the literal and allegorical meaning of a text.⁸ For Philo, if there are passages which seem even trivial or not sufficiently instructive, there must be a hidden meaning.⁹ Plutarch did not believe the the epics of Homer, much less Egyptian texts were inspired in this way, but for the most important questions, he gave the ultimate authority to Plato. As he says (378A-B), we should take as our guide into the mysteries the understanding which philosophy gives (λόγον ἐκ φιλοσοφίας).¹⁰

We find in Plutarch, as well as in Philo, an inspiring monotheistic interpretation of the divine. In Plutarch, one supreme, evidently Middle-Platonic, God has created the world and rules it through His providence, assisted by his subordinate powers (δυνάμεις ὑπουργοί) (371F-378A).¹¹ Unlike Philo, Plutarch was dealing with a religion and texts with which he had virtually no personal acquaintance, except for what appeared in the Graeco-Roman cult of Isis.¹² Plutarch was unable to read the Egyptian language or its hieroglyphs and personally had only book knowledge of real Egyptian

religion.¹³ This lack of knowledge should have been a tremendous handicap, but he turned it into a great advantage. Knowing nothing himself, he cast himself upon Manethon, an expert, as his principal source for *On Isis*.¹⁴

He begins with a long programmatic statement, like those of Philo, about what should be one's understanding and goal. This turns out to be at least a Platonic, if not Middle-Platonic understanding of God and the destiny of the soul.¹⁵ Devotion to Isis is a longing for truth which itself is a longing for divinity (351E). Among these, Plutarch transmits many Egyptian proper names.¹⁶ The etymologies are subordinate to this principle. He uses some Greek etymologies to explain Egyptian names.¹⁷ These Greek etymologies are, as in Philo, very limited.¹⁸ To some Egyptian etymologies he also adds Greek ones.¹⁹ Like Philo, he is interested in alternate names, and, as in Philo, the etymologies can lead to an allegory or even to an allegorical narrative.²⁰ As Hani notes, there was a belief that one could extract the hidden sense of a word from its root.²¹ Plutarch was influenced by his master Plato, who developed arguments for symbolic etymology in his *Kratylos* (*Cratylus*).²²

Unlike Philo, Plutarch dedicated only about 10 percent of his treatise to the etymologies, while about 10 percent was dedicated to the main allegorical interpretations. Most of the work is an exposition of Egyptian rites and myths. Contrary to the impression of his dictum "Isis is a Greek name.," Isis is a Greek name" (ἑλληνικὸν γὰρ ἡ Ἴσις ἐστίν [351E-F]), his Greek etymologies of Egyptian words are basically (and very unconvincingly) relegated to the names of Isis, Osiris, and Sarapis (e.g., 362C, 364D, 375C-E). Though he gives several etymologies for Osiris, including Egyptian ones, he only offers one for Isis, and on the flimsiest grounds by modern standards. Supposedly the name Isis is not Egyptian at all but comes from the etymological root for the Greek word for "knowledge," or "wisdom." Plutarch does not exactly explain this, but presumably it comes from the Greek word for knowing (οἶδα).²³ Plutarch's etymology, thus, seems to be entirely determined by his macro allegory of Isis as Plato's receptacle, which receives the *logos*, the soul longing for the Good and Beautiful, or the soul's quest for wisdom, or Isis as a conveyor of wisdom about God and (at least in one passage) close to Him (Osiris) in the heavens in the next life, enjoying the "blessed vision" (382E-383A). As in Philo, the greater symbolism overrides the weak link to the etymology.

Unlike studies on Philo, we have little information on Plutarch's theories of language, though judging by *On Isis*, he seems to believe at times in a natural connection between sounds and meaning, such as in the name "Isis." Regarding allegorical interpretation, here (363E-F) and in some other places, he rejects the Stoic type of physical and cosmological allegory.²⁴ He seems to condemn most types of allegorical interpretation, including cosmological allegory. Yet, this is exactly the type of allegory he uses in *On Isis and Osiris*.²⁵

Now for the etymologies in *On Isis*, mostly in the order in which they appear. As Hani notes, Plutarch offers both a scientific and more symbolic interpretation of the name of Osiris, either as an Egyptian misunderstanding of the Greek ὁ Σεΐσιος or “many eyed,” and the hieroglyph as “foresight.”²⁶ Oddly, neither has much to do with his allegory. At 359B, Memphis [*Mn-nfr* or *Mn-nfr-Ppi*] is “haven of the good” (ὄρμος ἀγαθῶν) though others say it means “the tomb of Osiris.”²⁷ Plutarch, like good linguists, may be indicating a certain skepticism about etymologies. At 367D, we learn that the name Seth means “oppressive and compulsive.”²⁸ This fits the myth, harmonious with both the Greek and Egyptian names, and Plutarch’s allegory. Osiris is the force of good and Typhon (Seth) the force of evil (371A-B).²⁹ A very interesting case is Plutarch’s etymological interpretation of Horos, the son of Isis and Osiris (374A-B), in which he uses the supposed Egyptian equivalent Min, to arrive at Horos as the cosmos: Min is perceptible. So is the cosmos.³⁰

Philo and Plutarch share the same basic principles on similar sounds, symbolic connections, and hidden symbolic meaning. First, the name of Abraham, which according to Philo was changed, with great importance (59-60).³¹ He castigates anyone (presumably modern scholars) who ridicules how simply adding an alpha or rho to the names of Abraham and Sarai (Sara in Greek [Σάρα]) could make much difference. According to Philo, the name Abram means “uplifted father” while Abraham means “elect father of sound” (πατήρ ἐκλεκτὸς ἤχου) (65-66).³² In terms of modern scholarship, there seems to be no difference between the two names (as the scoffer in Philo indicated).³³ Philo quickly turns to allegory, in which “uplifted” refers to Abraham rising from the earthly sphere to the super-terrestrial and as capable of engendering perfect offspring (65-68). But in a more complicated way, Philo begins to explain what is meant by “father,” “elect,” and “sound.”³⁴ Only the first etymology is persuasive, but he deduces the other two through God’s conduct toward Abraham. The interpretation is quite amazing: literally the name was changed, but actually Abraham changed from the study of nature (“physiology”) to that of ethical philosophy, abandoning the study of the world and turning to the study of its maker (76).³⁵

For the change from *Sarai* (or *Sara* in Greek) to *Sarah* (*Sarra* in Greek), Philo explains that *Sarai* means “my sovereignty” (which is not exactly true) and *Sarah* (*Sarra*) means “sovereign.” According to modern scholars, the Hebrew name *Sarah* indicates a woman of high rank and can be translated as “princess” or “noblewoman.”³⁶ However, normally we would think of the sovereign as the highest political authority. *Genesis* gives no explanation whatever of the change of name, and modern scholars seem to treat *Sarai* and *Sarah* as essentially the same name.³⁷ Yet, Philo makes a great deal out of *Sarai* indicating an individual of a species and *Sarah* indicating a genus, and that, thus, *Sarah* is a more distinguished name, indicating that individual wisdom will perish while generic wisdom will be ever imperishable (80).³⁸

The case of the name change of Jacob into Israel is a little more straightforward. According to Philo (81), Jacob is, in Greek, *πτερονιστής*. The Loeb translates the word as “the supplanter,” but according to LSJ it means “one who strikes on the heel or trips up” another person.³⁹ The LSJ definition concords with Philo’s own words: It is the task of the *πτερονιστής* to “disturb and shake up and upset the support on which the passions rests and all the firmness and stability they have.” Here the etymology agrees with the moral allegory on the large scale plan.^{40 41} [31]

Unlike Jacob, Isaac always keeps the same name (88). The reason, according to Philo, is that “what has no teacher or pupil but receives its virtues by nature rather than diligence, goes on its way from the first, equal and perfect. He is like an even number, with no other number needed as a complement.” It difficult to see the connection with the name Isaac. Introducing numbers into a series of allegorical interpretation may have been considered *de rigueur*. Plutarch has a rather long section (367E-369D) relating the Egyptian festivals to numbers in an extremely complicated way.⁴²

Joseph (88), like some of the figures in Plutarch’s *On Isis and Osiris*, has a name in more than one language, here both a Hebrew and an Egyptian name. This is not explicitly a name so much as a title Psonthompanech (Zaphenath-Paneah) (*Genesis* 41.45). According to Philo *Joseph* means “addition,” and that it relates to his superintendence of material goods. Modern scholars would disagree somewhat.⁴³ One can make out a case, though, that the name might have something to do with “provisions,” thus justifying Philo’s interpretation.⁴⁴ Since Philo was living in Egypt, he could have found an Egyptian to interpret the name for him, though it might have changed meaning by his day. As with Plutarch, we must usually give him the benefit of the doubt on Egyptian names, though not necessarily with Hebrew names.^{45 46}

We sometimes seem to see Philo paying little or no attention to the Biblical explanations.⁴⁷ However, with Isaac, he follows the real meaning of the word, Isaac means laughter.⁴⁸ Apparently Leah must mean “rejected,” to fit an allegory in which she represents one turning away from virtue, a topic which Philo develops at great length (157-250).⁴⁹ Philo ignores these allusions to concentrate on Sarah’s reaction to the birth of her son.

In conclusion, both Plutarch and Philo are mostly correct in their etymologies, at least for their age, but sometimes these are overridden by the force of their major allegories, the infrastructure of skeleton of their works. Both had an ultimate supreme authority, Plato or the Septuagint and Hebrew Bible, and both used etymological interpretation and allegory to convey the exalted nature of God, the highest ethical norms for a human, and the soul’s ultimate destiny in the next world.

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¹ Most (2010) 28, suggests that an impetus to allegorical interpretation in the Hellenistic period was the desire to make sense of the myths of so many micro-cultures within this cosmopolitan new world, that allegory was a way of decontextualizing them out of local situations and traditions and making them universally valid.

² On the historical part of the Pentateuch as constituting an allegorical portrayal of the ethical and spiritual progress of the individual, see Kamesar (2009) 85-86.

³ For allegorical interpretation as a “healing of myth,” see Kamesar (2009) 79, who believes it also applies to Philo’s interpretation of the Pentateuch. Philo, did, though, accept both an allegorical and a literal meaning (80).

⁴ By my count, there are at least 34 allegorical interpretations in the work. Exceptions in which allegories do not appear, are the narrative section on the myth of Isis and Osiris and within the major allegory, the interpretation of the Isis myth as a mythical account of creation in Plato’s *Timaios* and of the destiny of the soul. The major commentary in English is that of John Glynn Griffiths, an Egyptologist and Classical scholar, *Plutarch’s De Iside et Osiride* (Cardiff: University Press of Wales, 1970) 101-110.. He not only analyzed all the Egyptian words interpreted by Plutarch but also offered an analysis of the Egyptian used. He found over thirty linguistic references to Egyptian, translations or etymologies or comments on the mode of writing

⁵ Grabbe (1988) 29.

⁶ Grabbe notes that on Hebron, Philo offers both good and bad interpretations of the name [check to see if this is true in Plutarch. I cannot recall seeing this.]

⁷ Similarly at 374E he states that the myths are not wholly factual accounts (οὐκ ὡς λόγοις πάμπαν, οὐσίην), but rather we should take from them what accords with the principle of likeness to truth. At 355B, he holds that none of these things actually happened (355B). The myth, though, has deeper meaning, it is an image (or reflection) of an account (something intelligible?) (λόγος) which leads to other thoughts, unlike the empty fabrications of poets and prose writers (358F-359A).

⁸ Philo, who believed the Pentateuch, even in the Septuagint version, to be divinely inspired says much the same thing.

⁹ So Kamesar (2009) 80, citing the *Quaestiones*, and *Quod deterius potiori insidari solet* 13.

¹⁰ According to Whitman (1987) 61, the word of God is sacred. Thus, for Philo, interpretation can only be an inferior form of knowledge, not full knowledge. In the case of Plutarch, though, it is the Platonic interpretation, not the Egyptian text which has the most value.

¹¹ Here for the powers, he uses virtually the same terminology frequently employed by Philo, but here perhaps indicating gods and *daimones*.

¹² For the cult at his home town, Chaironeia, see Hani (1976) 11. See also Kamesar, 82, for scripture always having some value (ὠφελεία).

¹³ He had made a brief stay in Egypt when quite young, but probably only saw Alexandria. See C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 15.

¹⁴ Plutarch was also at a disadvantage, since he was working with an unfamiliar religion and language, mainly in Chaironeia, and less so in Athens, where it would have been difficult to consult books or living experts. Manethon, born at Sebennytis (modern Samanoud) and a priest at Heliopolis under the first two Ptolemies, apparently was an important figure in the development of the cult of Sarapis. He wrote an *Aigyptiaka* (a treatise on the history and civilization of Egypt) which he dedicated to Ptolemy Philadelphos. Among his other works were treatises entitled *The Sacred Book*, *On the Religious Festivals*, *On the Ancient Rites and the Religion of the Egyptians*, *On the Preparation of Kyphi*, *A Criticism of Herodotos*, and *A Summary of Physical Theories*, though some of these may be only parts of a larger work. He never mentions Herodotos. Perhaps influenced by Manethon's *Criticism of Herodotos*, Plutarch does not mention Herodotos once in the entire treatise, perhaps a sign of contempt. Under his name is an anti-Herodotos tractate, called *On the Malice of Herodotos*. Most scholars consider this to be genuine, but since it does not correspond well with what he says elsewhere, it might be spurious.

¹⁵ There have been many recent etymological studies of Philo, e.g. Winston (1991), Niehoff (1995), Long (1997), Runia (2004), Shaw (2015), and Attridge (forthcoming). In contrast, we find little on the Plutarchan side, except for treatment in the commentaries on *De Iside*, e.g., Gwyn-Griffiths (1970), Hani (1976), Froidefond (1988) and studies mainly interested in the implications of the etymologies, e.g., Richter (2001 and 2011) and Brenk (1999 [2008]).

¹⁶ Though demotic had long been in use, and Coptic had appeared a century before, Plutarch mentions only hieroglyphic as a form of writing. The etymologies and derivations seem to involve a much earlier phase of the language than his own day, and in the view of modern scholars they are extremely accurate and valuable, not surprising, since Manethon was his main source. In the Graeco-Roman period, however, hieroglyphic, hieratic, and demotic existed side by side, though demotic was replacing hieratic. Most of the Egyptian involved in *On Isis* appears to derive from the Ptolemaic period or the New Kingdom, and in at least two instances may be of earlier origin. An exception is one case, which can only be paralleled in Coptic. The Egyptian used also has a Lower Egyptian or Boharic coloring, as to be expected of Greeks, whose knowledge usually was of Lower Egypt.

¹⁷ Contrary to the impression of his dictum “Isis is a Greek name” (351E), his Greek etymologies of Egyptian names or words are basically (and very unconvincingly) relegated to the names of Isis, Osiris, and Sarapis (362C, 364D, 375C-E).

¹⁸ Grabbe (1988) 43-44. See also Shaw (2015 paper presented at Philo seminar SBL Atlanta/) e.g. note 120

¹⁹ He offers at least 16 Egyptian etymologies or interpretations of names, some of them taken from excellent Egyptian sources such as Manethon, or from Greek authorities. Plutarch unlike Philo uses a great variety of words, such as Αιγυπτία γλώττη (“in the Egyptian language”) to introduce his etymologies. He uses the word ἀλληγορεῖν (363D), but he seems to prefer the cluster “enigma:” αἴνιγμα (368D), αἰνιγματώδης (354C) and αἰνίττεσθαι (355C, 373B, and 373E). See Hani (1976) 125 To justify using Greek etymologies, he makes the preposterous claim that many Egyptian words were adopted by Egyptians in the ancient past from Greeks living in Egypt.

²⁰ For Plutarch and Philo on allegorical interpretation and Plutarch’s resistance to Stoic theories, including that of hidden “ancient wisdom” in poetry, see Maren R. Niehoff, “Philo and Plutarch on Homer,” in Maren R. Niehoff, ed., *Homer and the Bible in the Eyes of Ancient Interpreters* (Leiden 2012) 127–154, esp., 137. For other comparisons, see her “Philo and Plutarch as Biographers: Parallel Responses To Roman Stoicism,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 52 (2012) 361-392, esp. 371-372.

²¹ Jean, Hani, *Le religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1976) 121-130, esp. 127-128. A Greek author might claim that the roots came from another word (which in modern scholarship has no linguistic or semantic relationship to the first word). For the Greeks, however, the second word had a conceptual relationship to the first word. In this case similar sounding words were believed to have an intrinsic conceptual relationship.

²² Hani argues that Plato ridicules exaggerations of the theory, but not the theory itself (127). Underlying the question were two radically different theories about language. The first, held by Herakleitos and the Stoics, was that of a natural relationship between a word and its object. In Philo, this was especially so with sages and with Adam. See, e.g. Winston (1991) 111 and 113, citing *Mut.* 64 and *QG* 4.194. For Philo’s theory of language, see esp. 116-122. Adam is the source of all linguistic expression for the human race. God himself names certain things like light and darkness. Abraham was also a precise giver of names. A change in name would involve a change in the thing. For the contrast with Plutarch on Greek and foreign names for the same thing or person, see 120, note 30. Winston thinks that double etymologies were part of the exegetical art of the time. Unlike Plutarch, Philo was working with a text, the LXX, which he would have regarded as inspired (Winston, 121-122). He believes that though Philo at one point claims that the names Moses gave to things differ in no way from the objects that they name (*Cher.* 56), that in reality he was deeply distrustful of language, referring to *Her.* 72

and *Fug.* 91-92. Winston believes that this was due to the influence of Plato's thought, such as in the *Kratylos* (124). Underlying the question were two radically different theories about language. The first, held by Herakleitos and the Stoics, was that of a natural relationship between a word and its object. In Philo, this was especially so with sages and with Adam. The second theory, advocated by Demokritos, held that words were applied to objects solely by convention. Hani (1976) 121-130, esp. 128. (Unlike Philo, by my count Plutarch dedicates only about 10 percent of his treatise to the etymological; and about 12 percent to the allegorical interpretations.

²³ The root of the verb in its various forms is ἰδ-, εἰδ-ε, or οἶδ-, all originally with the digamma (Ϝ, cf. Lat. *uideo*). The closest form to the word *Isis*, would be ἴσμεν (We know.), εἴσομαι (I will know.), with the εἰ pronounced as “;” or ἴσασι (They know.) in which the stem ἰδ- apparently has coalesced with the sigma in ἴσσασι to form ἴσασι. See Griffiths (1970) 258.

²⁴ In *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* (*De audiendis poetis*) he gives certain rules for reading poetry. Among these is the use of what he says used to be called “deeper meanings (ὑπόνουαι) but which is now called allegorical interpretations (ἀλληγορία)” (19E-F).

²⁵ Also at 23A-F, regarding the gods, he argues that at times the poets use the name of a god for certain powers (δυνάμεις) of which the gods are givers or authors” (23A). So, in Plutarch's interpretation, in one case Hephaistos is fire, in another Zeus is fate, Ares is war. The idea is that one cannot attribute evil to the god (23D-E). One should replace “Zeus” with “fate” rather than imply that a god distributes evil to mankind. In the attempt to clean up Greek poetry, he actually seems to fall into a type of interpretation which he condemns.

²⁶ First one can begin with an interpretation of some hieroglyphic signs. At 371C, we learn that Egyptians write the name of Osiris with an eye and a scepter. “Some supposedly explain it as being “many-eyed” since *os* in Egyptian means “many” and *iri* means “eye.” The first letter is pronounced something like *sh*, preceded by a glottal stop, possibly like *ayin* in Arabic and ended by a glottal stop possibly like *alif* in Arabic, and conventionally written *asha*. These hieroglyphs for Osiris were used during the Graeco-Roman period rather than the earlier use of the throne sign with the eye. The interpretation is based on similar sounding words to those in Osiris: ‘š3 “many” and *irt* “eye.” Christian Froidefond, *Isis et Osiris. Plutarque. Oeuvres morales* V.2 (Budé) (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1988) 299. The epithet is also given by Diodoros Sikeliōs. 1.11.2. The facts here are Egyptian, as Froidefond notes, but the gloss is Greek. Much later, however, as though he had forgotten this explanation, in the manner of Athanasius Kircher and other early modern interpreters of the hieroglyphs, he gives a quite different, allegorical, explanation (371F). Here it is entirely Greek: the eye represents foresight, and the scepter, ruling power. This can hardly derive from Manethon or

others who could read hieroglyphs. Apparently the temptation was too great for Plutarch to limit himself to the Egyptian explanation. See Griffiths (1970) 493-494. Then, at 372D, he claims that some (Egyptians) say that Osiris is the sun (or Sun). Since the Greeks, who call the sun Seirios, use the article, the combination ὁ Σεῖριος (Oseirios) caused the name to become Osiris. This is rather strange, since elsewhere Seirios is the Sirius, the Dog-Star See Griffiths [1970] 500). Plutarch tells us that if the name Sarapis is Egyptian, it comes from *sairei* ("joy" or "gladness") (362D-E). He sees this suggested by the fact that the Egyptian festival which the Greeks call *Charmosyne* (Gladness), the Egyptians call Sairei. See Hani (1976) 128-129. Griffiths believes there is some confusion here, since no Egyptian word is satisfactory for such a festival, and Plutarch's words would seem to point to the festival of the finding and revivification of Osiris (Griffiths[1970] 405). Later, he derives the name from *hosios* (holy) and *hieros* (sacred), offering a totally Greek etymology (375D-E). The explanation seems to involve a conflict between his Egyptian source, probably Manethon, and his desire to offer his own interpretation, or perhaps to buttress his Greek etymology for Isis. In the background, however, may lie the fundamental notion of the natural origin of names, in which a Greek sounding name or word would somehow be symbolically meaningful See esp. Hani, 127, who speaks of the belief in a *connaturalité* between the words, or a relation of cause and effect. He notes in Plutarch and exceptional use of the symbolic etymologies, compared to other Greek authors. Froidefond takes Plutarch to be guilty of two fundamental errors. One is the Interpretation Graeca, and the other is that he cannot admit the "coincidence of opposites," something which ruins his thesis, and which is a fundamental ingredient of Egyptian religion. Unlike the Egyptians, too, he reduces things to moral allegory. Besides this, he failed to see how the Egyptians could unite without repugnance the human and animal spheres, anthropomorphism and the cosmological, without privileging religious anthropomorphism. Instead, Plutarch introduces different levels of interpretation, going from lower to higher, in a dialectical structure ([1976] 128-130).

²⁷ The etymology cited by Plutarch is not historically valid but is a possible translation of something similar *mnwt nfrw* "the harbor of the good." The name actually means "the beauty of Pepi remains," the name assigned to the pyramid and pyramid town of Pepi (or Phiops) I, and afterwards transferred to Memphis. Griffiths (1970) 364-365. However, Froidefond (278) claims that the name would be better rendered by *mn'w nfrw* [' round apostrophe on top of the i]. He thinks the second interpretation might simply be an explanation of the first. The second explanation is based on a similar sounding pair of words, or Plutarch could be interpreting the first as meaning "the tomb of Osiris," *mnw (Wnn) nfr* ("The Tombstone of Onnophris Osiris])," Griffiths (1970) 365. Griffiths prefers the first explanation. Griffiths (1970) 457

²⁸ Later at 371B we learn that the name Seth “denotes the overpowering and violent, frequent returns and “overleaping.” As in other cases, the name is written in different ways, in this case in at least four different but similar ways, *Stš*, *Stĥ*, *Swty*, and *Swth*, all with the consonants st or sth. [line under the h in sth, half circle under the h of swth]. Griffiths (457) believes the basis may be the verb *st3* [line under the t] meaning “draw” or “pull,” and that the verb is sometimes used for oppressive and compulsive actions, such as taking captives. This, can easily be treated allegorically to describe Seth’s role as the solar world, which “warms and withers everything,” in opposition to “moisture making light,” Osiris.

²⁹ This fits the allegory which Plutarch has just elaborated. Osiris is the leader of all the best beings, is the mind and reason; in the earth, the winds, the waters, the heaven, and the stars, while Typhon (Seth) is the efflux of Osiris and his manifest image that comprise the ordered, etc. . . Typhon (Seth) is the element of the soul which is passionate, subject to death, disease, and confusion, eclipses of the sun and disappearances of the moon, which are in the manner of sallies and rebellions of Typhon (371A-B). At 372A, Osiris is the sun, and Isis, the moon, something concords with the allegory surrounding Seth.

³⁰ He claims that Horos also goes by the name Min, and that this means “that which is seen; for the cosmos is perceptible.” In Plutarch’s allegorical interpretation of the myth, Isis is Plato’s receptacle, and Osiris is the *logos*, the intelligible principle of the universe, while the two together generate the world. At this point, he mentions that Isis is known as Muth, which means mother, Athyri, which means the cosmic house of Horos, and Methyer, which is a compound of “full” and “good.” 374B). Griffiths thinks the meaning “that which is seen” was probably extracted from the name Min (*Mnw*) by reading into it the verb *m33* (“I see.”), thus *m33. i. nw* means “I see it.”, *m33 .n.i*, “I saw.”, and *m33 n* “seen to.” Griffiths 511. Theodor Hopfner, *Plutarch über Isis und Osiris* (Prague, 1940 and 1941) II, 240, thought that “that which is seen” had something to do with the name Horos and the Greek ὁρώμενον (that which is seen, *horomenos*), but this is discounted by Griffiths, who sees the discussion as about the name Min. Froidefond (305, note 7), however, sides with Hopfner. Perhaps Plutarch had both Egyptian and Greek names in mind.

³¹ Philo sees the name as having deep symbolic value. It is “a symbol of nature which always loves to be concealed.”

³² Abraham's name is apparently very ancient, as the tradition found in *Genesis* no longer understands its original meaning, which was probably "Father is exalted.", while the meaning offered in *Genesis* 17:5, πατήρ πλήθους ἐθνῶν (“father of a multitude of nations”[“ancestor of many nations”(NETS); ancestor of a multitude of nations” NRSV]) seems to be a popular etymology. So Thomas L. Thompson, (2002) *The Historicity of the*

Patriarchal Narratives. The Quest for the Historical Abraham. (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International) pp. 23–24, 36.

³³ Speiser explains it in the following way: “Linguistically the medial *-ha-* in Abraham is a secondary extension in a manner common in Aramaic. The etymology is best explained as “The (not my) father is exalted.” Ephraim Avigdor Speiser, *Genesis*. (*Anchor Bible Commentaries* 1) (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964) 124.

³⁴ See Grabbe 126-127, no. 5., for Philo’s erroneous etymology. Philo evidently took it as *brr* or possibly *bhr* [dot under the h] (“choose”) plus *hāmōn* [line over the a] which was rendered in LXX Psalm 41:5 (= English 42:4) as “sound.” So: ἐν φωνῇ ἀγαλλιάσεως καὶ ἤχου ἐορτάζοντος (NETS: “with a sound [ἐν φωνῇ] of rejoicing and acknowledging, a noise [ἤχου] of one who is feasting”); NRSV: “I will acknowledge you with a lyre, O God, my God.” [the *bhr* with the dot under the h comes out in Times New Roman or Courier New, but cannot be changed into Palatino linotype]

³⁵ In Philo (16-17) we find an allegorical explanation of Abraham’s vision in terms of a noetic perception or vision of the divine. He says “The Lord [i. e, not the Existent] was seen of him.”, indicating that God was seen by Abraham through an intermediary. Also that at Mamre, it was the Lord, the *logos* that bears the name of God. Attridge (forthcoming) 279-280: Philo’s exegesis of Genesis 18:1, “The Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre,” in *Abr.* 70-1 and *Mut.* 7-17. Though this bears no relationship to Plutarch’s *On Isis and Osiris*, we do find something similar in Plutarch’s *On the Daimonion of Socrates*, in which one of the speakers, Simmias, suggests that the supernatural phenomenon (τὸ δαιμόνιον) of Socrates was “not a vision, but the perception of a voice or the mental apprehension of language (ἡ λόγου νόησις)” in which no sound is uttered (588C-D). “What reached him . . . was not spoken language, but the word (οὐ φθόγγον ἀλλὰ λόγον) of a *daimon* making contact with him through the revelation itself as he thought” (588D). We learn that we hear words by blows struck upon our ears, but the mind (νοῦς) of the higher power (ὁ κρείττων) guides the gifted soul by touching it with that which is thought (τῷ νοηθέντι)” (588E). We learn, too, that the *daimones* communicate with certain souls like Socrates without using words: “. . . so too, the better ones [οἱ βελτίονες] take the best of us as from a herd . . . guiding us by language expressed in symbols [λόγῳ διὰ συμβόλων] quite unknown to ordinary persons [οἱ πολλοί] (593B-C). Niehoff (1995) 224, suggests something similar in Philo at *Migr.* 47-48, where “the words of God are seen as light is seen.” She him suggesting a language “which is ideal in the Platonic sense of the word.” (224) cf. 226, though, where she thinks Philo did not have a Platonic model for divine language. See also 232, where she argues that divine language is the archetype for human language, and 238 where she relates it to the vision of the soul and the ascent to the intelligible world (*Opif.* 69-70). She also relates Philo’s concept of language as light to dreams, which can be “visual texts (242). Something similar appears in Lamprias’ speech in Plutarch’s *On the*

Obsolescence of the Oracles 4321-D, describing the natural ability of the soul to obtain the prophetic power in dreams or near the hour of death, when it is somewhat released from the body.

³⁶ E.g., Speiser, 123. Alternatively, according to some scholars, it might derive from a Chaldean name meaning “mistress” or “ruler” in Akkadian.

³⁷ See Grabbe 201, no. 128: Philo connects this with *śrr* [acute accent over the s.] “rule” taking the *yod* as the pronominal suffix “my.”

³⁸ Kamesar (2009) 90-91, sees this emphasis on the universal rather than the particular as a Platonic influence on Philo. How Philo arrived at this seems to be a mystery, but he draws another allegorical or symbolic meaning out of it. The specific arts (that is the skill of an individual), such of a geometrician, grammarian, or musician perish, but the generic arts such as geometry, grammar, and music are imperishable. Thus, the explanation leads into the macro scale in which Philo entices the reader into longing for imperishable wisdom about God. This step explains his concentration on the “exalted” part of Abraham’s name and not the “father” part.

³⁹ Grabbe 166, no. 73, supports the meaning “supplanter,” but as he notes, the Hebrew can also mean “assail.” The LXX uses the word ἐπτέρονικεν (Genesis 27:36), but there is no reason why pace *NETS* it could not mean “trip up,” rather than “supplant.” Grabbe also cites Latin authors, who use *supplantator*, but this, like the Greek, means “tripping up by kicking” or “stepping on the heel.”

⁴⁰ Jacob’s original name, *Ya’akov*, is sometimes explained as meaning “holder of the heel,” because he was born holding his twin brother Esau’s heel and eventually supplanted Esau in obtaining their father Isaac’s blessing[from the web] Philo apparently is not thinking of this, since he comes down so heavily on the literal interpretation of the name, while applying it to moral discourse.⁴⁰ Philo interprets the name Israel as “He who sees God.” This too goes against modern scholarship. According to *Genesis* 32:28, he was given the name Israel (Hebrew *Yisrael* [יִשְׂרָאֵל]) “Triumphant with God,” “who prevails with God”), after wrestling with the “man.” James P. Boyd, *Bible dictionary*, Ottenheimer Publishers, 1958 //pretty old ref.// from google (*Yisra`el*, meaning "one that struggled with the divine angel" (Josephus), "one who has prevailed with God" (Rashi), "a man seeing God" (Whiston), "he will rule as God" (Strong), or "a prince with God" (Morris), from [Hebrew](#): שָׂרָה, “prevail.” “have power as a prince”). The name already occurs in Eblaite and Ugaritic texts as a common name. See Michael G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance. Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant*, Brill, 1998 //note from wiki. no page no. given. Commentators differ on the original literal meaning. Some say the name comes from the verb *śarar* (“to rule, be strong, have authority over”), thereby making the name mean “God rules” or “God judges”.

⁴¹ [Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans) 334. Hamilton 1995, p. 334 //this is all given in wiki. perhaps can pick it up elsewhere

Also *The Jewish Study Bible*, Oxford. Commentators differ on the original literal meaning. Some say the name comes from the verb *śarar* ("to rule, be strong, have authority over"), thereby making the name mean "God rules" or "God judges." Another possible meaning is "El fights." or "struggles." *The Jewish Study Bible*, 68, is somewhat non-committal: "The scientific etymology of Israel is uncertain, a good guess being "The God [El] rules." [from wiki] Grabbe, 172-173, no. 84. He sees the etymology as transparent, but notes that other sources want to account for the first two letters of the name, so adding "mind seeing God," "man seeing God," and the like. Grabbe thinks Josephus may be more on track with *śrh* [acute accent over s] "strive with," or "against God" (*Ant.* 1. 20.2 [333])

⁴² See Griffiths (1970) 459-461, with three figures of grid plans for the numbers. In another place, Plutarch claims that the Egyptians divide the nature of the universe into the father (the intelligible form and pattern), the nurse (the material and seat of creation), and the offspring and creation (the world). He likens this to a supremely beautiful triangle which Plato mentions in the *Politeia* (*Republic*) 546B). The triangle described is based on certain numbers indicating the ratio of lengths on each side. See Griffiths (1970) 509-510.

⁴³ The name can be translated from Hebrew יהוה יהוסיף *YHWH Lhosif* as signifying "Yahweh will increase/add". Grabbe sees the explanation "add," or "addition" as an obvious deduction from the Hebrew and Greek texts. Thus Philo settles for an etymology from *ysp* ("add"). Here Philo has hewed close to the Biblical text. He claims that Joseph's Egyptian name means "mouth which judges in order." Modern scholars have proposed different interpretations: "He who is called Ankh;" "My provision is God, the living one.;" and "revealer of hidden things." In the *Septuagint* (41.45), we find: *Ψονθομφανηχ* (*Psonthomphanekh*), "the one who furnishes the nourishment of life" or "healer of the world" (Vulgate). Some scholars propose that in the Coptic language, it signifies a "revealer of secrets," "the man to whom secrets are revealed," or "The man who knows all things" (Vergote). This name may also mean "The Nourisher of the Two Lands, the Living One"; or possibly, "savior-of-the-world, or -land"; or "sustainer of life" (Albright)

⁴⁴ [from google or wiki: The meaning of this Egyptian name is remains unclear and the certainty of its meaning has eluded scholars since the time of the Septuagint and rabbinic tradition. For example, the some early exegetes think the name means, "revealer of secrets" [1]. More correctly, R. David Kimchi and Ibn Ezra (ca. 13th century) observe that *Zaphenath-paneah* is really an Egyptian name. Some suggest that the name *Zaphenath-paneah* is a Hebrew transcription of an Egyptian name meaning

“the god speaks and he lives.” [2] Professor Kenneth Kitchen, points out that *Zaphenath-paneah* was originally *Zat-en-aph*; for in ancient Egyptian it was pronounced *Djed(u)en-ef* (‘he who is called’). This point, he asserts, is a familiar phrase to all Egyptologists. Furthermore, it is an example of where the letters ‘t’ and ‘p,’ became reversed. Such orthography illustrates the common (but unintentional) practice whenever difficult words and names are transferred from one language into another. A Hebrew scribe most likely slipped into the use of a common Semitic root *zaphan* while writing *zaphenath*, for the unfamiliar vocalization of Joseph’s Egyptian name. The second part of the name, “Paneah,” may be derived from the Egyptian word, “aneah” *ankh* or *ankhu* (signifying ‘is alive’). The initial “Pa” or “Pi,” corresponds to the Egyptian word *Ipi* or *Ipu*. Therefore, “Zaphenath pa’aneah” means, “he who is called Anakh.” [3] Lastly, Yoshiyuki Muchiki proposes yet another possible rendering, “My provision is god, the living one.” [4]

[1] See Onkelos, Rashi, “Septuagint and Josephus,” *Antiquities* 2:6:1. Kimchi also suggests, “Revealtor Occuti” – “revealer of hidden things.”

[2] Other suggestions worthy of consideration: In the Septuagint, we find: $\Psi\omicron\nu\theta\omicron\mu\phi\alpha\nu\eta\chi$ (Psonthomphantech), “the one who furnishes the nourishment of life” or “healer of the world” (Vulgate). Some scholars propose that in the Coptic language, it signifies a “revealer of secrets,” or, “the man to whom secrets are revealed,” or, “The man who knows all things” (Vergote). This name may also mean “The Nourisher of the Two Lands, the Living One”; or possibly, “savior-of-the-world, or -land”; or “sustainer of life” (Albright) In any case, the name suggests that it was through Joseph life in Egypt had been preserved

[3] K.A. Kitchen, “On the Reliability of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 345-346.

[4] Yoshiyuki Muchiki, *Egyptian Proper Names and Loanwords in North West Semitic* (Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 173) Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999, pp. xxv, 326-327.]

⁴⁵ Philo also says that Benjamin means “Son of Days” (92). This is not supported by modern scholars, who claim it means “son of the right (side),” or “son of the south.” The latter might justify Philo’s “Son of Days,” since sunlight does appear in the south.⁴⁵ The confusion occurred because *yamîn* can mean either “days” or “right hand.” [macron over m, cannot find in unicode], However, “days” left Philo great opportunity to develop his theme of the greatness of God. Philo’s allegory here is very contorted. Supposedly (95-96), the light of the sun (day) can be likened to vainglory. There seems to be nothing in the Bible which connects Benjamin with vainglory, but Philo wants to arrive at Rachel dying in childbirth because she was “the mother of vainglory,” “for the conception and birth of vainglory, the creature of sense, is in reality the death of the

soul." Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, calling him Benoni "son of sorrow" which Jacob changed to Benjamin. Thus, according to the Hebrew Bible, Benjamin's name arose when Jacob deliberately corrupted the name *Benoni*, the original name of *Benjamin*, since *Benoni* was an allusion to Rachel's dying just after she had given birth, as it means "son of my pain" (Genesis 35:19).^[1] Textual scholars regard these two names as fragments of naming narratives coming from different sources, one being the [Jahwist](#) and the other being the Elohist.^[2] Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*

⁴⁶ At 254 we learn first that the oracles present Leah as "hated" or "rejected." Immediately after, however, Philo says the name means "rejected and weary." One suggestion is that it is probably derived from the Hebrew word לָאָה (le'ah) meaning "weary." In this case Philo would be at least half right. He needs the "rejected" part, however, to support his allegory. Another interpretation is that Leah had tender eyes (Hebrew: רכות לאה ועיני) (Genesis 29:17). It is debated as to whether the adjective "tender" (רכות) should be taken to mean "delicate and soft" or "weary." Some interpreters would say that Leah spent most of her time weeping and praying to God to change her destined mate, and that thus her eyes would be "soft" from weeping. The NRSV translates: "Leah's eyes were lovely.", with a note that the Hebrew is uncertain. The NETS gives: "Leah's eyes were weak.", translating the LXX ἀσθενεῖς. Philo, however, does not repeat the Greek word, but uses κοπιῶσα and κοπῶδη ("weary") which better fits his allegory of the soul turning away from virtue through repugnance and lack of effort, rather than just being "weak."

⁴⁷ Genesis 17:15–19 18:10–15. The two root-verbs are חק and שחק. The verb צחק (*sahaq*, as the common transliteration goes; would probably have sounded as *tzachaq*. This שחק (*sahaq* or rather *sachaq*) are obviously related and mean the same thing, to laugh.

⁴⁸ At 137-138, we are told that Isaac means "laughter." For when the child is born, Sarah says with pride, "'The Lord has made laughter for me.' For Isaac and laughter are the same." *Isaak* in Greek, is a transliteration of the Hebrew *Yishāq*, which literally means "He laughs/will laugh." Apparently Leah must mean "rejected," to fit an allegory in which she represents one turning away from virtue, a topic which Philo develops at great length (157-250).⁴⁸

⁴⁹ "Leah had tender eyes" (Hebrew: רכות לאה ועיני) (Genesis 29:17). It is debated as to whether the adjective "tender" (רכות) should be taken to mean "delicate and soft" or "weary." Some translations say that it may have meant blue or light colored eyes. Some say that Leah spent most of her time weeping and praying to God to change her destined mate. Thus the Torah describes her eyes as "soft" from weeping. He adds: "Therefore she says 'whoever who hears will rejoice with me.'" Philo draws the odd conclusion from this that few see the handiwork of God in bringing forth beautiful things τὰ καλά (Loeb: "the excellent"). This gets Philo back on track to extol the

goodness and power of God “for all that is good in the range of existing things or rather, the whole heaven and universe is in very truth God’s fruit, the inseparable growth, as it were, of the tree of His eternal and never-fading nature.” This fits Philo’s grand narrative, the allegorical revelation of God’s greatness, but does not hew very closely to the literal account. An odd corollary is Philo’s question: “How could they laugh, when laughter had not yet come into being?” (165-166), as though the correct etymology of the name creates the reality. Philo justifies it on the basis of something being anticipated (not very convincing, but neither was the proposition. This leads him into a very long exposition of the true joy which comes from God, versus false joy (157-180).

In conclusion, both Philo and Plutarch are generally accurate in the etymologies of foreign, and in the case of Plutarch, Greek etymologies. Yet their macro theme often overrides the correct etymology. Both have a supreme authority, for Philo the text of the Septuagint and Hebrew Bible, and for Plutarch, Plato. Both use even unseemly stories or myths to develop a deeply ethical and religious allegories, encompassing both the nature of God and the destiny of the soul.