

‘To Be and Not to Be: Philo on the Difference between Philosophers and Sophists’

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the different ways that Philo depicts sophists and sophistry in his writings with particular attention to how he contrasts this group with philosophers and wisdom. I will begin by tracing the history of this comparison in Greek authors (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus), the findings of which will be weighed against those of Philo to determine the similarities and differences between his characterisations and those of the wider literary tradition. Particular attention will be paid to *Cher.* 8-10 and Philo’s association of sophists with rhetorical training in the wider education system and the unique importance Philo places on the role of Wisdom.

‘It is no small or easy task to define clearly the nature of a sophist’ (Plato, *Soph.* 217b). That statement by Plato rings equally true for scholars today. Indeed, the definition of a sophist in antiquity appears to change and differ depending on the author and with regard to the topic. This paper investigates the different ways that Philo depicts sophists and sophistry in his writings with particular attention to how he contrasts this group with philosophers and wisdom. We will begin by providing a close reading of *Cher.* 3-10, looking to understand Philo’s arguments through connections to his wider corpus. The second half of the paper will draw upon the history of the comparison between philosophy and sophistry in Greek philosophical authors, especially Plato, the findings of which will be weighed against those of Philo to identify similarities and differences between his characterisations and those of the wider literary tradition. Overall, I will suggest that reading Philo’s use of sophistic imagery through the lens of Plato (esp. *Sophist*, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras*) allows us to see important differences between his and subsequent authors and the way that Philo tailors his discussion of sophistry to speak to specific concerns (e.g., legislation, wisdom, etc.).

Sophists in *Cherubim* 3-10

Before evaluating the similarities and differences between Plato and Philo’s discussions of sophists, we focus our attention on the way that Philo broaches this topic in *Cherubim*. First, we look at how Philo develops his argument in *Cher.* 3-10, specifically how the sophist Ishmael is associated with school education and the corresponding issue of geographic location and exile. Second, we will explore how Philo develops the motif of conflict between philosophers and sophists. These themes are not exclusively found in *Cherubim*, but will be the focus of this paper as they bring a unique configuration of elements into view.

Sophists, Education, and Location

Philo opens *Cherubim* in his typical manner, providing a lemma from Genesis that will be the focus of his treatise (here Gen 3:24). However, immediately after setting the stage for his discussion of Adam’s expulsion from the garden, Philo introduces the character of Hagar and shifts the readers’ attention to the Abrahamic narrative (*Cher.* 3-10). This transition is not

accidental, but allows Philo to establish a divine pattern by looking at the more concrete example of Hagar and Ishmael in Gen 16:4-16 and 21:9-14, who are allegorically interpreted as ‘preliminary studies’ and ‘sophistry’.

The dependency of sophists on literary and rhetorical education is emphasised and embodied in Ishmael’s derivation from Hagar, which highlights the genetic relationship between these two characters and how the former derives his nature from the latter. In Plato’s *Symposium* 203d, Socrates tells a story of the origin of Love (Ἔρως), who is said to be a son of Resource and Poverty (Πόρου καὶ Πενίας) and, as such, has elements of both parents. In addition to other characteristics given by his mother, Love is also imbued with characteristics from his father, Resource. Of interest here is the joint association of philosophy and sophistry as characteristics of Love, who is said to love wisdom throughout his life (φρονήσεως ἐπιθυμητῆς καὶ πόριμος, φιλοσοφῶν διὰ παντὸς τοῦ βίου) and to be a skillful juggler, sorcerer, and sophist (δεινὸς γόγης καὶ φαρμακεὺς καὶ σοφιστῆς).¹ This blending of what appears to be opposite traits within a singular entity (i.e., Love and Resource) blurs strict boundaries between the two positions, making Love caught between two opposites: wisdom and ignorance (σοφίας τε αὖ καὶ ἀμαθίας ἐν μέσῳ ἐστίν, *Symp.* 203e).²

Although not identical, a similar metaphor of inheriting parental traits is applied to Ishmael and Isaac by Philo. The contrast between these two characters is important for Philo’s differentiation between wisdom and sophistic learning, not only in *Cherubim*, but throughout the *Allegorical Commentary*.³ In particular, the maternal source of Ishmael and Isaac dictates the nature of each child.⁴ Hagar, the handmaiden and one who conceives according to human principles, bears a child skilled in the human sphere of knowledge. In contrast, Sarah, the lawful wife (*Congr.* 23, 77) and one who conceives according to divine promise, brings forth a child who has self-taught wisdom (i.e., Isaac, *Praem.* 58). More importantly for *Cher.* 8-10 is the allegorical association of Hagar with preliminary studies (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία) and Sarah with generic virtue (γενικὴν καὶ ἄφθαρτον) (i.e., wisdom).⁵ Indeed, their incompatibility in the physical world is representative of their fundamental opposition in the mental sphere; wisdom has no kinship with sophistic culture (ὅτι σοφία σοφιστείας ἀλλότριον, *Cher.* 9; cf. *Opif.* 45).⁶ Ishmael, therefore, although being trained and so is not ἀμαθίας, lacks wisdom, being caught somewhere between both.⁷ In contrast, those produced by embodied virtue will not only have a full education (which would include training in rhetoric), but will, more importantly, submit these to their training in wisdom (*Congr.* 6-7, 79).

The offspring of Hagar is declared by angel to be ‘rude’ (ἄγροικος, *Fug.* 209). By this, Philo argues, the angel does not mean that Ishmael will be ‘uncultivated’ or of the country, because as a sophist he will have a substantial education. Rather, Philo asserts that the sophist will be wise

¹ Cf. Demosthenes, *Cor.* 276

² A similar discussion of Wisdom, as the offspring of experience and knowledge, is found in Gellius, *Noct. att.* 13.8.1, in which elements of rhetorical and literary education are mentioned.

³ For example, see *Fug.* 209-211, in which Philo contrasts Isaac and Ishmael by identifying them as righteous and sophist, respectively. Cf. Aristotle, *Soph. elench.* 165a22-25.

⁴ On children inheriting characteristics from their parents, see *Congr.* 23.

⁵ This is more fully articulated in *Congr.* 1-19, 71-80. For a recent discussion of the latter passage, see P. Borgen, ‘Alternative Aims and Choices in Education’, *SPhA* 28 (2016): 257-71, esp. 259-64.

⁶ Philo also claims that magical sophistry (μαγικὴν σοφιστείαν) cannot live together with the Holiest (*Mos.* 1.277). On the dichotomy that is Balaam’s speech and the likely platonising of Balaam’s positive words to increase their distinction from his sophistic utterances, see van Kooten, ‘Balaam as the Sophist’, 140.

⁷ In *Prob.* 1-5 Philo groups together the uneducated and the sophist (one who is educated but has twisted the beauty of wisdom to sophistry), claiming that both are ‘unclean’ (μὴ καθαρῶ).

about ἄγροικος matters and ignorant about divine virtue. Philo also claims that attainment of virtue and wisdom is not within the power of the human individual, but is a divine gift of the λόγος to those who are obedient (χαρίζεται δὲ ὁ θεὸς τοῖς ὑπηκόοις) and have attained mastery in expression and noble conceptions (*Migr.* 73).⁸ This emphasis on divine gift is a notable departure from previous philosophic discussions. This is not to claim that Plato and others did not have a concept of divine revelation,⁹ but that it was not described in terms of obedience (ὀπήκοος).¹⁰

Philo's association of Hagar with preliminary studies leads him to view Ishmael as the inevitable outcome of one who is weaned on schooling and separated from true wisdom: namely, a sophist (σοφιστής).¹¹ According to *Cher.* 9, the sophist is the son of preliminary studies (καὶ ὁ σοφιστὴς αὐτῶν υἱὸς ἐπὶ κλησιν Ἰσμαήλ), with the plurality of progenitors highlighted by Philo's use of the plural: αὐτῶν and ἐπὶ κλησιν.¹² This diversity of inputs leads the sophist to lack stability, ultimately resulting in his perpetual conflict with others (*Fug.* 211), even other sophists (cf. *Her.* 246; Plato, *Prot.* 318e), as well as within themselves (*Det.* 72).

This conflict results in the separation of Hagar from Abraham and Sarah. Her first departure was voluntary and before Abraham and Sarah's change names (*Cher.* 4-5). Here, Hagar is said to chafe at the harsh and sad life of the virtue-lover (τὸν ἀσστηρὸν καὶ σκυθρωπὸν τῶν φιλαρέτων, *Cher.* 6) and her departure is a sign of both her immaturity and that of her son.¹³ As a result, Hagar was told by the angel to return to her mistress (Gen 16:9). However, in time, Abraham is told by Sarah to dismiss Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:10). Although initially hesitant, Abraham is said to listen to the voice of wisdom (*Congr.* 68) and expel them.¹⁴ Similarly, in *Cher.* 10, Adam, who is 'mind', is cast out of the garden because he is sick with incurable folly (τὸν νοῦν ἀφροσύνην ἀνίατον νόσον κτησάμενον) and so cannot reside in the presence of wisdom and the wise (ἀπὸ σοφίας καὶ σοφοῦ, *Cher.* 10). The fundamental incompatibility of these two entities is highlighted by Plato in which ἀφροσύνη is said to be the opposite of σωφροσύνη and σοφία (*Prot.* 332e; 333b). Interestingly, Jewish authors have been the most interested in forging an explicit antithesis between ἀφροσύνη and σοφία (especially in wisdom literature),¹⁵ with the connection between ἀφροσύνη and σωφροσύνη being the preferred pairing by Greek authors.¹⁶

The expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael by Abraham does not mean that Ishmael is cursed; Ishmael, as Abraham's son, will be blessed by God, even if he is not the inheritor of the covenant (διαθήκη, Gen 17:21). Rather, Ishmael is said to be the father of twelve nations (Gen 17:20), which Philo interprets as the full training of sophistic education (τὸν κύκλον καὶ τὸν χορὸν ἅπαντα τῶν σοφιστικῶν προπαιδευμάτων, *Mut.* 263).¹⁷ This knowledge is for the betterment of

⁸ Cf. K.O. Sandnes, *The Challenge of Homer: School, Pagan Poets and Early Christianity* (LNTS 400; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 77-78.

⁹ E.g., Plato, *Apol.* 31d; Aristotle, *De an.* 3.5 (430a17-23); Apuleius, *De deo Soc.* 17-19.

¹⁰ Cf. *Conf.* 39-40; *Her.* 205-207.

¹¹ van Kooten argues that Balaam is the quintessential sophist, though he is only explicitly called it once (*Det.* 71). In contrast, Ishmael is regularly given the title of sophist and is presented as the offspring of preliminary education.

¹² Although, see also the use of the singular in *Cher.* 10: ὁπότε καὶ <κατὰ> πάντα σοφιστὴν καὶ μητέρα αὐτοῦ, τὴν τῶν προπαιδευμάτων διδασκαλίαν.

¹³ A sophist to a wise man is likened to a child to an adult or encyclopaedic training to knowledge in virtue (τὰ ἐγκύκλια τῶν μαθημάτων πρὸς τὰς ἐν ἀρεταῖς ἐπιστήμας, *Sob.* 9).

¹⁴ This story has a possible parallel in Plato, *Gorg.* 482a, in which Socrates, speaking against rhetoric (and sophistry), claims that these are not his words, but those of philosophy and that he must do as she bids.

¹⁵ E.g., Prov 18:2; Eccl 2:12-13; 10:1; Wis 10:8-9; Philo, *Leg.* 1.288; cf. Democritus, *Frag.* 115.6.

¹⁶ E.g., Plato, *Leg.* 906a-b; Zeno, *Frag.* 190; Plutarch, *Mor.* 32b; Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 7.102. Cf. Philo, *Opif.* 73

¹⁷ A list of the twelve tribes is given in Gen 25:12-16 (cf. 1 Chr 1:29-33 LXX): 'And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: The firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth, and Kedar, and

humanity, but is of lesser value and the ‘weaker virtue’ to that offered through Isaac (*Mut.* 263). As a result, Ishmael’s descendents, aided by their close proximity (Gen 25:18; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.213), wage war on their ‘brothers’ and are a source of conflict (*Somn.* 1.209-211).

The contrast between wisdom and sophistry in Philo gains greater nuance when one understands how sophistry is characterised as a vice by Plato. As further discussed below, Plato identifies sophistry as a branch of flattery (κολακεία, *Gorg.* 463a-b).¹⁸ However, he specifically claims that sophistry undermines legislation (νομοθετικήν) like rhetoric undermines justice (δικαιοσύνη, *Gorg.* 465c).¹⁹ According to Philo, legislation is one of the powers attributed to the divine word (*Fug.* 95) and is akin to four important virtues: love of humanity, love of justice, love of goodness, and hatred of evil (τὸ φιλόανθρωπον, τὸ φιλοδίκαιον, τὸ φιλάγαθον, τὸ μισοπόνηρον, *Mos.* 2.9). Moses, the purest mind (ὁ καθαρῶτατος νοῦς), received, by inspiration and divinely possessed wisdom, legislation together with the gift of prophecy (ὁ νομοθετικήν ὁμοῦ καὶ προφητείαν ἐνθουσιώσῃ καὶ θεοφορήτῳ σοφία λαβῶν, *Congr.* 132) and these are imbued within his writings. Thus sophistry, as presented by Plato, stands in fundamental opposition to Moses and the Law (*Ebr.* 91; *Mos.* 1.334; *Praem.* 1-2), reinforcing its depraved nature and representing a fundamental threat to law-abiding individuals.

The Image of Conflict between Sophists and Philosophers

Although Sophists are at times discussed and described on their own, they are regularly compared with another category of people: philosophers.²⁰ This contrast is found in philosophical works (see below); however, it is prominent in Philo’s corpus. In particular, Philo is not content to identify elements of difference, which he adopts from other authors, but emphasises the nature of conflict and the role that the philosopher must take in actively resisting sophistry and rhetorical grandstanding.

Plato sets up philosophers and sophists to be ideologically opposed to each other. Although both are teachers, they teach differently and instil different characteristics within their pupils (*Resp.* 6.492a-c). The former, through reason, devote themselves to ‘being’ (τοῦ ὄντος) and are associated with ‘light’ (λαμπρόν). In contrast, sophists find refuge in ‘non-being’ (τοῦ μὴ ὄντος)

Adbeel, and Mibsam, and Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, Hadad and Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedmah’. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.220.

¹⁸ Philo does not explicitly pair κολακεία and sophists in his corpus, although there are some semantic overlaps with related terms as viewed in his vice lists (e.g., *Sacr.* 32; *Conf.* 48; *Her.* 302).

¹⁹ Philo also pairs δικαιοσύνης and νομοθετικῆς in *Congr.* 179. A similar pairing is also found in Iamblichus, *Vit. Pyth.* 172, which also picks up on Plato’s comparison of the two ideas and use of medical/training imagery (*Gorg.* 520b).

²⁰ The quintessential work from antiquity in this regard is Plato’s *Sophist*, which seeks to differentiate the sophist, statesman, and philosopher from each other (e.g., *Soph.* 217a). For Plato’s differentiation between sophists and philosophers, see *Theat.* 172b-177c. The competition between philosophy and rhetoric is also prominent in Plato’s *Gorgias*. See M. McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 85-110. McCoy (pp. 2-7) rightly notes the interconnected nature of philosophy and rhetoric and that the exact relationship among philosophers, sophists, and rhetoric is complex, and does not allow for a simple definition.

Some previous authors used the terms ‘sophist’ and ‘philosopher’ as synonyms (e.g., Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.29; Isocrates, *Antid.* 235; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp.* 25; Strabo, *Geogr.* 4.1.5; Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 1.12); cf. Alexandre, ‘The Alexandria of Philo’, 202-203. See also Josephus, *BJ* 2.118-119 and Gellius, *Noct. att.* 13.8.1-5, for explicit contrasts of sophists and philosophers. Aristophanes, in his *Clouds*, creates ‘Socrates’ as a composite character of different sophists. Cf. A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes III: Clouds* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1991), 196.

and hide themselves in ‘darkness’ (σκοτεινόν, *Soph.* 254a; cf. Philo, *Agr.* 144; Aristotle, *Meta.* 6.2.3, 1026b15-16). More specifically, sophists are described in opposition to philosophers and statesmen (φιλοσόφων καὶ πολιτικῶν), with whom they are at war in word and deed (*Tim.* 19e).²¹

One of the reasons why there is inherent conflict between sophists and philosophers is because they are competing for similar space.²² This is not only because sophists are imitators (μιμητής) of philosophy (*Soph.* 268c), but primarily because sophists are perpetual roamers and do not have a fixed abode. Ironically, they are not welcomed in their home city and are forced to keep traveling because they have been exiled from the places they have gone (*Euthyd.* 271c).²³ As a result, they are potentially dangerous to the welfare of society as they bring ideas and concepts that are not native and have been judged to be wanting by others.²⁴

The theme of perpetual exile for the sophist finds its fullest expression in *Cher.* 8 as the sophist (i.e., Ishmael) is cast out by virtue and by God and forced to be a wander in alternate communities (cf. *QG* 3.19). Not all exiles are equal; there is a fundamental difference between those that are voluntary and those that are not. The expulsions of Cain and Adam are forced, implying for Philo the individual’s inability to return (*Cher.* 2).²⁵ However, this rigidity is not found in Hagar’s first departure, which is deemed voluntary, allowing her to return. Of importance for Philo is the fact that Abraham and Sarah had not yet received their new names, and so Hagar’s distancing was not again generic virtue (γενικὴν καὶ ἄφθαρτον), but specific virtue (εἰδικῆς καὶ φθαρτῆς ἀρετῆς, *Cher.* 7-8).²⁶ Indeed, prior to his name change, Abraham was engaged with the study of air (ἀέρα) and space (μετέωρον) (*Cher.* 4), the latter of which has ties with sophistry.²⁷ Furthermore, according to Philo, Abraham was a sophist before becoming wise through teaching. However, once he had achieved wisdom he needed to send his other children away in order that Isaac would gain all of Abraham’s possessions as his inheritance (*Praem.* 58). The variation in timing, as well as Abraham’s movement from sophist to sage, reinforces the idea that preliminary studies is not inherently problematic. Rather, it becomes so over time when it refuses to submit to Sarah (i.e., wisdom).

The intersection of place and education is important for Philo, not only for the acquisition of and preservation in virtue, but also for how it determines the nature and type of conflict.

²¹ However, neither sophists nor statesmen are worthy of emulation, according to Philo, *Somn.* 1.220-22. On the other hand, Plato’s Socrates claims that philosophers can sometimes appear as statesmen, sophists, or as being crazy (*Soph.* 216c).

²² In this regard, Philo employs the image of trees and plants competing for space and the need to uproot those that are undesirable (*Plant.* 104-106).

²³ This aligns with the Stoic argument that the sage is the true citizen and that the depraved person is destined for exile, despite their abode. Cf. *Prob.* 6-10; Cicero, *Parad.* 27-32; *Tusc.* 5.105-109.

²⁴ On the redefinition of citizenship by Philo, see *Cher.* 126. On exile and flight as important exegetical themes in Philo, see D.T. Runia, ‘The Theme of Flight and Exile in the Allegorical Thought-World of Philo of Alexandria’, *SPhA* 21 (2009): 1-24, 10-22.

²⁵ Also banished are eunuchs, prostitutes, and soothsayers (e.g., *Spec.* 1.319-345; *Ebr.* 224).

²⁶ On the importance of the name as representative of the inner character of the person/object, see *Cher.* 56.

²⁷ E.g., Plato, *Pol.* 299b. Philo’s use of μετεωρολέσχης is varied. In *Mut.* 70 and *Ebr.* 92 it is associated with the one who loves learning (φιλομαθής); whereas in *Prob.* 80 it is collocated with ‘word-catchers’ (λογοθήρας), and in *Somn.* 1.161 it is negatively associated with Chaldean science and what Abraham left behind. Cf. J.E. Taylor and D. Hay, ‘Astrology in Philo of Alexandria’s *De Vita Contemplativa*’, forthcoming***.

For example, location is an important concept for Philo's differentiation between urban and rural settings.²⁸ This is seen most pointedly in the nature of education and of sophistry. For example, Abel, though superior to Cain in virtue, was bested in their contest because he was not trained in speaking (*Migr.* 74).²⁹ On the contrary, Cain, the one trained in town, was able to easily beat his brother, the village sage (ἄγρικοσόφων, *Migr.* 75). Here the educational opportunities and the inherent conflict found within the urban space better prepares its residents for verbal sparring. According to Philo, it is for this reason that Moses, the man of all wisdom (πάνσοφος), studied well-worded and specious arguments (τὴν εὐλόγων καὶ πιθανῶν ἐπίσκεψιν, *Migr.* 76), especially during his rural education, in order to successfully engage with the sophists in Egypt.³⁰ Philo seems to imply, therefore, that in order to successfully combat sophists, one must either fully ignore them (*Migr.* 75), namely avoid conflict if one is not ready, which Abel failed to do, or beat them at their own craft (*Migr.* 76, 82), which Moses achieved with distinction.³¹

Location as an indicator of character formation is also found in the opening of *Cherubim*. Here, however, the focus is not on the urban-rural divide, but on one's relationship to others. In particular, Philo claims that the person's proximity to virtue (or vice) is essential for determining how the individual will develop. For example, Cain's dwelling in Nod (*Cher.* 12-13) and Adam's removal from paradise (*Cher.* 10) are indicative of their nature and, ultimately, their behaviour. Ishmael's separation from Sarah (i.e., wisdom and generic virtue) deprives him of needed, virtuous inputs, which ultimately results in his development as a sophist.

Philo also uses geography language to talk about the pursuit of virtue. The path that God provides to the soul is straight, and it is the mind's task not to deviate from it, either to the left or to the right (*Migr.* 146).³² Ultimately, if one successfully remains on the path she/he will reach the celebrated τέλος: to live in accordance with nature (*Migr.* 128).³³ The discussion of staying to the centre of the road finds its fullest articulation in *Deus* 162-165, but fundamental to the

²⁸ On the changing importance of the boundary between city and countryside, see R. Osborne, *Classical Landscape with Figures: The Ancient Greek City and its Countryside* (London: George Philip, 1987), and the collection of essays by R. Rosen and I. Sluiter (eds.), *City, Countryside, and the Spatial Organisation of Value in Classical Antiquity* (Mnemosyne Sup 279; Leiden: Brill, 2006). For a detailed discussion of space and geography in *Migration*, see S.A. Adams, 'Movement and Travel in Philo's *Migration of Abraham*: The Adaptation of Genesis and the Introduction of Metaphor', forthcoming.

²⁹ A similar image of conflict is developed in *Agr.* 162, but here the one who has only recently reached the summit of virtue is encouraged not to engage in battle with the sophist until he has dispelled entirely the cloud of ignorance. One could also call on the only wise Being to be your defender in unavoidable situations (*Conf.* 39).

³⁰ On sophists in Egypt, see van Kooten, 'Balaam as the Sophist', 148-51.

³¹ Cf. *Fug.* 23-24; *Somn.* 2.80-92. The association of education with urban settings is also found in the characterisation of Ishmael as ἄγρικός in *Fug.* 209. The preservation of the individual's character by not engaging in contests he or she might lose is also advised by Epictetus (*Ench.* 19).

This depiction of Moses fits with Philo's larger argument that the ideal person is one who has thorough training in both virtue and education (*Det.* 35) and that without some educational training one is liable to be bested by sophists and lose one's position to their sophisticated arts (*Det.* 42). True, the other type of virtuous person, namely the one who solely focuses on virtue, pursues the noble path. However, he is unable to defend himself and will inevitably lose in any contest (*Det.* 36-37).

³² On the imagery of right and left, but regarding the principles of sameness and variability, respectively, see *Cher.* 21-22 (cf. Plato, *Tim.* 36c).

³³ On the role of τέλος in *Migration*, see B. Besnier, 'Migration et Telos d'après le *De Migratione Abrahami*', *SPhA* 11 (1999): 74-103, 100-103; J. Cazeaux, *La Trame et la Chaîne: Ou les Structures littéraires et l'Exégèse dans cinq des Traités de Philon d'Alexandrie* (ALGHJ 15; Leiden: Brill, 1983), 112-14. See most recently, J. Dillon, 'Philo and the Telos: Some Reflections', *SPhA* 28 (2016): 111-19.

narrative of *Cherubim* is the individual's relationship to virtue/God and their voluntary movements toward or away from it/him. This is modelled best by Abraham and his desire to be close to God and stands in sharp distinction to the actions of Hagar and Cain (*Cher.* 12-13). By drawing closer to God, Abraham shows his inner character (*Cher.* 18-19).³⁴ Furthermore, as God is not variable and does not turn or deviate (*Cher.* 19), Abraham's ability to stand steadfastly displays his love of virtue and knowledge.³⁵ In contrast, Balaam, the sophist, is neither able to fight nor maintain his position in formation (*Cher.* 32), and so displays his lack of virtue and nature as a false prophet (*Cher.* 33-34). Once again we see the implicit contrast between sophists and divinely-inspired lawmakers (i.e., Moses).

Ultimately, Philo strongly differentiates between the seen and unseen worlds. This dichotomy is first encountered in Abram's studying of and education in the physical world (earthly and heavenly things), but not yet in things divine (*Cher.* 4). However, it has its fullest expression in middle section of *Cherubim* through Philo's subordination of the physical world to that of the unseen; as the incorporeal God does not dwell in physical houses, but only properly dwells in incorporeal souls (*Cher.* 98-100). The ornamentation of the soul finds its roots in education, as the introductory material (τῶν ἐγκυκλίων προπαιδευμάτων) forms characteristics within the individual that allow for the cultivation of virtue (*Cher.* 101-105). The problem arises when those that pursue education refuse to submit to higher virtue and begin to think that, through their study, they now possess something (*Cher.* 83-85). These individuals subsequently sell what they have acquired, but this fundamental misunderstanding is contrary to the nature of God, who freely gives out of his abundance (*Cher.* 122-23), as well as to the essence of the philosophers (*Cher.* 85), who know that the worst evil of the soul is vanity of thought (κακῶν ψυχῆς τὸ μέγιστον, οἷσιν, *Cher.* 57; cf. *Congr.* 107).

Ultimately, sophists, like Ishmael their forbearer, will be perpetually at war (τὴν ἀντιπρόσωπον διαμάχην καὶ ἀντίστασιν αἰώνιον, *Fug.* 211), fulfilling the prophecy made about him in Gen 16:12: 'His hand shall be against every man, and every man's hand against him'. It is possible, however, that the warring nature of the sophists is not entirely their fault. Rather, the complex and uncertain (ἀδηλότης) nature of the soul results in a myriad of sophistic arguments (*Mut.* 10). Sophists, although grouped together by their common pursuit, are not united, but have substantial quarrels with each other (*Her.* 246). The same may also be said about the different philosophical sects (κατὰ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν), especially the Academics and Sceptics (*QG* 3.33),³⁶ in so much as some move away from truth to investigate 'possibilities' (πιθανός, *Her.* 248) and are word-mongers and hunters, arguing over trifles (τριβόμενοι καὶ γλισχρολογούμενοι, *Congr.* 52-53). Here we find potential overlap between these two groups, although in this case it is the fault of the philosophers who become like the sophists in their thinking.³⁷ However, those who pursue true philosophy (ἀλλὰ τῷ τῷ ὄντι φιλοσοφεῖν), and are

³⁴ Philo recasts the idea of closeness and departure in the form of sacred teaching that is only for the initiated (*Cher.* 42).

³⁵ Philo depicts deviations to the right as the opposite extreme as falling to the extravagances (ὑπερβολή) of the left, namely shortcomings or deficiencies (ἐλλείψει καὶ ἐνδείαις, *Migr.* 146). Ultimately, the core of Philo's discussion is about maintaining one's place on the 'king's road'. Here it is clear that Philo is drawing from Aristotelian philosophy and its doctrine of the 'golden mean' or 'middle way' (μέσην ὁδὸν, *Eth. Nic.* 2.6-7). Philo not only applies Aristotle's ideas to underpin Abraham's travelogue, but also imposes an additional layer of interpretation, identifying the middle way as philosophy and deviance from it as sophistic excess (*Opif.* 164; *Post.* 101-102).

³⁶ A similar comment is made by Plutarch (*Mor.* 1059a-b), though he contrasts stoics and academics.

³⁷ This overlap was not viewed as fully detrimental by other ancient authors (e.g., Philostratus, *VS* 492, 507; *Suda* I 543).

able to develop unity in thought, word, and deed (βουλευμάτων καὶ λόγων καὶ πράξεων), will attain happiness (*Mos.* 2.212; *Cher.* 32-33; *Spec.* 4.69).³⁸

In adopting this view of sophists, Philo emphasises that they are symbols of rivalry and contention (σημεῖον ἀμίλλης καὶ διαμάχης).³⁹ Those properly trained in wisdom must not let sophistic arguments go unchecked, lest those with too little experience and knowledge be turned away by their complicated rhetoric (*Aet.* 132; cf. Epictetus, *Dis.* 2.20.23).⁴⁰ Similarly, a philosopher must act in a certain way so as not to discredit his profession (see Diogenes Laertius, *Vit.* 4.47). Accordingly, one who wishes to pursue virtue must, out of necessity, develop tactics for when one battles sophists, and this would include, nay even necessitate, training in rhetoric (*Congr.* 17, 24, 69).⁴¹ Not only does one need sufficient mastery of words to be superior in both skill and strength (τέχνη τε καὶ δυνάμει) to a sophists, but one must rightly apply divine wisdom to sophistic trickery: sophistry is always defeated by wisdom and the divine skilfulness of nature (*Migr.* 82-85) and the fate of sophists is to be shipwrecked as impostors (*Migr.* 171).⁴²

What is a Sophist?

Having outlined a range of sophistic characteristics in Philo's work, with a particular focus on *Cherubim*, we now turn our attention to the way that sophists were discussed by previous authors, especially Plato. Here we seek to identify possible platonic influence in Philo's depictions as well as places where Philo actively challenges Plato's assumptions.

Our most comprehensive understanding of sophists by Plato, and one that has had significant influence of subsequent depictions, undoubtedly comes from his *Sophist*, a treatise which continues the discussion begun in his *Theaetetus*.⁴³ In this work, an Eleatic Stranger, with the help of Theaetetus, attempts to provide a definition of a sophist through a series of categorisations. This task turns out to be more difficult than it first appeared due to the elusive and shifting nature of the sophist (e.g., *Euthyd.* 288b-c), but the characters finally come to a comprehensive definition: a sophist is one who peddles the imitative art of opinion and contradiction, who belongs to the fantastic class of image-making art that is not divine, but human, and is, ultimately, an imitator (μιμητής) of philosophy (*Soph.* 268c-d). However, along the way, the Stranger provides some characteristics of the sophist that are important for subsequent discussions. For example, a sophist is: 1) a paid hunter after the young and wealthy (νέων καὶ πλουσίων); 2) a kind of merchant (ἔμπορος) and dealer (κάπηλος) of articles of knowledge for the soul (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς μαθήματα); 3) a seller of his own productions (αὐτοπώλης) of knowledge; 4) an athlete in the contest of words, whose art is that of disputation (τὴν ἐριστικὴν τέχνην ἀφωρισμένος); and 5) a purger of souls (περὶ ψυχὴν καθαρτήν), who removes opinions that obstruct learning (*Soph.* 231d-e).

Although Plato and his characters might have had difficulty defining the nature of a sophist, this reservation was not held by many successive authors in antiquity, who freely referenced and

³⁸ Gellius (*Noct. att.* 1.2.3-4) makes a similar differentiation when he uses sophistic/rhetorical terms to describe a (want to be) philosopher.

³⁹ *Det.* 1, although in this case sophists are represented by Cain.

⁴⁰ This is the premise of Aristotle's *Soph. elench.* esp. 183a29-184b9.

⁴¹ Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 95-108; Alexandre, 'The Alexandria of Philo', 205. A position also held by Socrates, so McCoy, *Plato*, 3-5.

⁴² Cf. *Opif.* 45, in which sophistry and wisdom are presented as fundamental opposites.

⁴³ On the distinction of (sometimes overlapping) terms, particularly, sophistry and rhetoric, see McCoy, *Plato*, 7-20.

made categorical statements regarding sophists.⁴⁴ In the follow section we will look at three particular aspects of sophists (money, attributes, and possible positive qualities), tracing their reception from Plato and determining how they are adopted/adapted by Philo.⁴⁵

Sophists and Monetary Gain

One prominent aspect of sophistry is its association with fees and money.⁴⁶ Protagoras is said to be the first to adopt this practice (Plato, *Prot.* 310d; 311e; 349a), but he was by no means the last.⁴⁷ Indeed, a sophist is essentially defined by the practice of charging for lessons: he is one who 'is paid in cash, claims to give education, and who hunts after rich and promising youth' (*Soph.* 223b). These sophists offer the possibility of becoming clever, acquiring influence, and gaining the ability to persuade people to do what you want. This means of securing power and control, however, does not come without a price (*Euthyd.* 272a-b). This need for paying clients naturally leads to predatory tendencies amongst the teachers of sophistry. Plato likens sophists to anglers as both hunt for susceptible prey (*Soph.* 221d). The hunting ground, however, is not limited to the general population who are unattached to a school. Rather, greed for money leads to politics of steeling and luring pupils from other teachers (*Prot.* 316c-d).

The charging for lessons makes the sophist part of the larger economy of knowledge. One could consider *μουσική* as a commodity: someone buys knowledge and goes to another city to sell it for money (*Soph.* 224a-b). For Plato and others, this is distasteful and undermines the purpose of education and the pursuit of truth, putting barriers between an individual and the provisions on which a soul is nourished (*Prot.* 313c). This art of trafficking leads to Plato to label sophists as 'soul-merchandising' (*ψυχεμπορικῆς*), those who deal in words and knowledge and trade in virtue (*Soph.* 224d).

Although the association of sophists with money is not prominent in Philo's work, there are a few passages that suggest that Philo held a similar view of sophists as that depicted above.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ On the fluidity of the term 'sophist' and its development in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, see G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ch. 4.

⁴⁵ For previous studies, see É. Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1950), 288-92.

⁴⁶ E.g., Plato, *Apol.* 19d-20c; *Lach.* 186c; *Prot.* 310d.

⁴⁷ Plato's Socrates highlights the absurdity of sophists, who claim to teach virtue, that complain about their students cheating them of their fees. If this is the case, then they must have been poor teachers (Plato, *Gorg.* 519c).

⁴⁸ Although I do not deny that Philo is speaking against and may have even recognised the future importance of rhetoric and oratory, I am not fully convinced by the claims of Winter and van Kooten that Philo provides earlier evidence of the 'Second Sophistic' movement. According to Philostratus the second sophistic started in the middle of the first century CE with Nicetes of Smyrna, as there was nobody of merit between him and Aeschines (*VS* 511). Indeed, even if we do not adopt this framework (and most modern scholars do not), there is substantial difficulty in determining its origins and members as there was no formal school or doctrine. *Contra* B.W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 7; G.H. van Kooten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity* (WUNT 232; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 220-23. For further discussion on the second sophistic, see G. Anderson, *Philostratus: Biography and Belles Lettres in the Third Century A.D.* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 8; T. Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic* (NSC 35; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 6-10; D. Karadimas, 'Alexandria and the Second Sophistic', *Electryone* 2 (2014): 14-36. For specific challenges to Winter and van Kooten, see E. Koskenniemi, 'Philo and Sophists', in L.R. Lanzillotta and I.M. Gallarte (eds.), *Greeks, Jews, and Christians: Historical, Religious and Philological Studies in Honor of Jesús Peláez del Rosal* (EFN 10; Cordoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 2013), 253-79,

According to Philo, sophists prey on those who are easily persuaded and led astray (ἐνπαράγωγος, *Agr.* 96). They also take money for their explanations (*Jos.* 125) and for training others in their systems of thought (*Mos.* 2.212; *Post.* 150; *Congr.* 127). The quintessential example of this negative behaviour is Balaam, a sophist who perjured his soul and sold his words (*Det.* 71-72; cf. *Mos.* 1.263-93).⁴⁹ Despite the fact that he had visions of Israel's future and was able to craft hymns that accurately described God, Balaam corrupted his mind and hardened himself in order to formulate curses for material gain (*Migr.* 113-115; *Conf.* 159).⁵⁰ This use of sophist language not only allows Philo to reclassify Balaam (and other adversaries of Israel) in terms that were understandable to his contemporary readers, but also frames the people of Israel as philosophical; the opposite to the sophist Balaam.⁵¹

Sophistic Attributes

Sophists are best known as wordsmiths. Friend and enemy alike regularly (and sometimes begrudgingly) praise the sophist's ability to craft intricate sayings and to explore the detailed elements of language.⁵² This close study of language and words was not solely the purview of the sophists, but was also an element of rhetorical, grammatical, and philosophical inquiry.⁵³ Nevertheless, it was a dominant trait of a sophist's profession.

This mastery of words naturally led to strong critiques from those who did not approve of their linguistic tricks. As a result, sophists are regularly described as 'jugglers' (γοητεία) and imitators of reality (Plato, *Soph.* 235a), those who eulogise trifling things (e.g., salt; *Symp.* 177b) and not true virtue.⁵⁴ More problematically, their ability to bend words and meanings in order to create contradictions (*Soph.* 239d; Aristotle, *Int.* 6.17a34-37) was thought to be duplicitous, similar to the way that a magician or conjurer (θαυματοποιῶν) tricks his audience; one knows

255-61; G.E. Sterling, '“The Jewish Philosophy”: Reading Moses via Hellenistic Philosophy according to Philo', in T. Seland (ed.), *Reading Philo: A Handbook to Philo of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 129-54, 147.

⁴⁹ For studies of Balaam and Philo's characterisation of him, see H. Remus, 'Moses and the Thaumaturges: Philo's *De Vita Mosis* as a Rescue Operation', *Laval theologique et philosophique* 52 (1996): 665-80; L.H. Feldman, 'Philo's Version of Balaam', *Henoah* 25 (2003): 301-19; T. Seland, 'Philo, Magic and Balaam: Neglected Aspects of Philo's Exposition of the Balaam Story', in J. Fotopoulos (ed.), *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* (NovTSup 122; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 333-46. Surprisingly, the sophistic nature of Balaam is not prominent in these studies. This perspective is found more prominently in T. Seland, 'The Expository Use of the Balaam Figure in Philo's *De Vita Mosis*', *SPhA* 28 (2016): 321-48, 335-39.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, Philo states that Balaam had a true vision of God (*Mos.* 1.289) and so was, ironically, imbued with the character of Israel, the one who he was attempting to curse. C.T.R. Hayward, 'Balaam's Prophecies as Interpreted by Philo and the Aramaic Targums of the Pentateuch', in: P.J. Harland and C.T.R. Hayward (eds.), *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium. Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston* (VTSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 19-36, 22-24. For the possible parallel to Plato's allegory of the cave (*Resp.* 7.514a-520a), see van Kooten, 'Balaam as the Sophist', 144.

⁵¹ G.H. van Kooten, 'Balaam as the Sophist par excellence in Philo of Alexandria: Philo's projection of an urgent contemporary debate onto Moses' Pentateuchal Narratives', in G.H. van Kooten and J. van Ruiten (eds.), *The Prestige of the Pagan Prophet Balaam in Judaism, Early Christianity and Islam* (TBN 11; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 131-61, 131-32.

⁵² E.g., Plato, *Gorg.* 449d; *Soph.* 253a; *Prot.* 312d.

⁵³ E.g., Lucian, *Anach.* 22. The tendency towards erudition by some philosophers was criticised as it sometimes resulted in the blurring of the line between philosophy and philology. Seneca, *Ep.* 108.23-24, 35. Cf. Suetonius, *Gramm.* 11.

⁵⁴ Gellius (*Noct. att.* 17.12.1), however, claims that both sophists and philosophers were known to take up 'ignoble subjects' (*inopinabiles/ἄδοξους ὑποθέσεις*).

that it is an illusion, but is not able to refute or explain it (Plato, *Soph.* 235b). Indeed, if one is able to defeat one of their arguments another one immediately replaces it; like Hydra and its many snake heads, their arguments are nearly impossible to kill fully (*Euthyd.* 297c).

More serious is the way that sophists influence their listeners, bending others to their will. Presenting their teachings as ‘wisdom’ (σοφία), they deceive the masses by spouting popular beliefs (*Resp.* 6.493a-b).⁵⁵ Moreover, they can win arguments even if their position is (morally) weaker (*Apol.* 19b; cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.24.11, 1402a).⁵⁶ As a result, they have a reputation for being wise (*Prot.* 310d; 312c), which they exploit in their public engagements by wielding words as weapons and confuting any argument readily, whether it be true or false (*Euthyd.* 272a).⁵⁷ This power is so great that, according to Plato, only a philosopher can resist the sophist’s imprisonment as their perfect understanding allows him to make informed decisions (*Crat.* 493e-404a).⁵⁸

This ability to win arguments and the resulting control over people produces deep-seated hubris within the sophist. According to Plato, men of virtue felt compelled to avoid even the appearance of pride, which led to important and influential men being ashamed to write speeches and leave writings (αἰσχύνονται λόγους το γράφειν) for posterity lest they be called ‘sophists’ (σοφισταί, *Phaed.* 257d).⁵⁹ For Plato, this is a travesty as the taint of sophistry restricts positive and virtuous works from being created. Similarly, the grasping nature of the sophist pushes them to attempt to hold an office for which they are unqualified, robbing worthy candidates of their rightful position (*Pol.* 299b).⁶⁰ As a result, Epictetus differentiates between training for life (philosophy) and training in speech (sophistry).⁶¹ This ‘little art’ (τεκνίον) is primarily aimed at young men, who need to be able to speak cunningly in order to rise in politics (*Dis.* 3.23.25-26; cf. Plato, *Resp.* 495d).

Many of these themes are found in Philo’s works. For example, sophists are lovers of words (λογοφίλην) and thought to be clever by the masses because of their skill in explaining their thoughts (δεινὸν ἐρμηνεύσαι τὸ νοηθέν).⁶² However, despite their accuracy of speech, they lack prudence (φρόνησις) and understanding (φρόνιμον δὲ οὐδαμῶς), a fault that is apparent in their actions (*Leg.* 1.74; *Det.* 43, 74). Furthermore, the sophist and his adherents are beguiled by beautiful phrasings, but these are only a shadow or copy of the essential matters conveyed by the truth of the words (*Migr.* 12).⁶³

⁵⁵ On the difference between real and sophistic wisdom, see Aristotle, *Soph. elench.* 165a22-25.

⁵⁶ The collocation of themes (cleaver, fees, overcoming superior arguments, etc.) is found in the example of Protagoras, a sophist who is contrasted to philosophers (see Gellius, *Noct. att.* 5.3.7; 13.24.2).

⁵⁷ For the fallacy of sophistic refutations, see Aristotle, *Soph. elench.* 164a20-23. On the sophist’s love of homonyms and synonyms to win arguments, see Aristotle, *Rhet.* 3.2.7 (1404b38-39). On the difference between rhetoric and dialectic with regards to sophistry (including the moral purpose of the individual), see *Rhet.* 1.1.14 (1355b15-22); 1.4.5-6 (1359b8-17).

⁵⁸ ‘In calling the sophists ‘inspired’ and ‘wise’, he showed that he is infertile with their kind of wisdom’. *Anon. Comm. Theaet.* 58.

⁵⁹ Plutarch (*Mor.* 328b) also laments that philosophers, despite having leisure for composition, left the writing of philosophy to sophists.

⁶⁰ See *Gorg.* 456c for how a sophist could get any position they desired, even if they are not qualified for the post (e.g., doctor).

⁶¹ Epictetus, *Dis.* 3.23.17; 3.24.78-79.

⁶² Philo also refers to them as ‘jugglers’ (γοητεία) (*Ebr.* 71; *Praem.* 8; *Somn.* 2.40).

⁶³ These are the people who attend philosophical lectures, but who only carry away an echo of what was said (*Congr.* 67; cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 48d; 80a).

The undermining of a people because of sophistry is highlighted by the inhabitants of Moab, who, like sophists, have an arrogant and self-loving mind (αὐθάδη καὶ φίλαυτον νοῦν) and give attention to riddles (αἰνίγμασι) that come from what is probable (κατὰ τὴν τῶν εἰκότων ἐπιβολήν) and so destroy the truth (*Leg.* 3.231).⁶⁴ Similarly, the desire for sophists to have manipulative control over people of power is, according to Philo, modelled by the influence that Egyptian sophists had with Pharaoh. These ‘magicians’ (φαρμακείας) trick and deceive Pharaoh and the onlookers through their arts, despite the manifest display of divine power by Moses and Aaron (*Det.* 38-40; *Mos.* 1.90-96).⁶⁵ As a result, the mind needs to be freed from sophistry and sophistic arguments (*Leg.* 3.41) in order to pursue the proper object of the intellect (*Ebr.* 71).

This last statement highlights what is most important for Philo with regard to sophists: they transgress the boundary of truth (οἱ τὸν ὅρον τῆς ἀληθείας ὑπερβαίνοντες, *Leg.* 3.232; *Conf.* 159). This is seen most clearly in Philo’s critique of the probable and the plausible, because what is probable and plausible does not have knowledge of truth (τὰ γὰρ εἰκότα καὶ πιθανὰ οὐκ ἔχει περὶ ἀληθείας ἐπιστήμην), but finds its home in disputes, contests, and competition (ἀλλὰ δίκην καὶ ἀμφισβήτησιν καὶ ἐριστικὴν ἄμιλλαν καὶ φιλονεικίαν, *Leg.* 3.233; *Anim.* 84). This preference by humanity for forming conjectures and probabilities was foreseen by God in the creation of the world (*Opif.* 45; cf. §72), used against Eve in the garden by the serpent (*Agr.* 96), was first witnessed in Cain (*Post.* 52) (which led to his exile, so *Cherubim*), and, for Philo, is still prevalent within the world.⁶⁶

For example, Philo adopts the story of Babel (*Gen* 11:6) to apply to his current situation, promising that God will actively confuse the sophistic arts in order to bring their work to naught (ταῖς σοφιστικαῖς αὐτῶν τέχναις ἀθρόαν καὶ μεγάλην ἐργάσεται σύγχυσιν, *Post.* 53). In this instance, the opponents of God are not building a physical tower, but a metaphorical tower of doctrines and premises that seek to undermine the centrality of God within the universe. This prideful action by sophists (ἀλαζονείας) has been repeated throughout history as they continue to ignore factual evidence (οὐ πραγμάτων ἀληθεστάτην πίστιν, *Migr.* 171).⁶⁷ Indeed, if one desires to be a competent rhetorician, one must put off truth and focus solely on probability (πιθανός).⁶⁸ Even more than this, one must avoid what was likely (ἔοικα), both in accusation and defense, in order to attain to the fullness of the art (τέχνη, *Phaedr.* 272d).⁶⁹ This fits with Plato’s characterisation of Gorgias and his accusation of Socrates of not accepting any likely or probable argument (οὐτ’ εἰκὸς ἂν καὶ πιθανὸν ἂν λάβοις, Plato, *Gorg.* 486a), which in Gorgias’ eyes is a

⁶⁴ Other locations are also associated with sophistic arts, such as Heshbon, which is interpreted as ‘sophistic riddle’ (τὰ αἰνίγματα τὰ σοφιστικά, *Leg.* 3.233). The description of the Amorites as Sophists is almost certainly based on Balaam and Philo’s reading of *Num* 22:4–5 (*Leg.* 3.232; *Her.* 300–305; cf. *Mos.* 1.263–299).

⁶⁵ For Joseph’s ability to interpret a dream that the sophists were not able to do, and Pharaoh’s proper respect and promotion of him, see *Jos.* 103–21.

⁶⁶ See *Det.* 41 and the current need to disentangle oneself from the grip of sophistic wrestlers (cf. *Her.* 304–306). For a history of scholarship for who the sophists might be, see Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 59–79. For a recent discussion of Philo’s day, see van Kooten, ‘Balaam as the Sophist’, 153–58.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Det.* 44 and the sophist’s habit of indulging an unbridled tongue with presumption and boldness (ἀχαλίνω κεχρημένους γλώττη μετ’ αὐθαδείας θρασύνεσθαι παράδοξον).

⁶⁸ Theon (*Prog.* 59) claims that some previous rhetoricians argued that one must learn philosophy prior to studying rhetoric. However, in his day, people rushed into public speaking without having a knowledge of general studies (ἐγκυκλίων μαθημάτων).

⁶⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.23.22 (1400a8–12).

negative fault, but for Plato and his readers, it is something to be emulated in the search for truth.⁷⁰

The issue, according to Philo, is that plausible arguments continue to exert power and influence over humanity so long as they are left un-refuted (*Her.* 304).⁷¹ And, because sophists adulterate the truth, cause confusion in order to win arguments (*Spec.* 3.53), undermine peace, and create conflict (*Agr.* 159),⁷² it is necessary for philosophers, who have attained the summit of wisdom, to do battle with them.⁷³ Furthermore, as sophists make claims on their own authority (*Leg.* 3.206) they actively hinder those desiring to climb the upward road to virtue, as they encourage others to abandon correct sources of truth (*Deus* 180-81). Because the sophist, like Balaam, also takes divinely inspired prophecies and falsely imbues them with soothsayer sophistry (σοφιστεία μαντικῆ τὴν θεοφόρητον προφητείαν παρεχάραξε, *Mut.* 203; cf. *Det.* 71),⁷⁴ the need for properly educated individuals is even more pressing.⁷⁵ In one instance, Philo himself answers his call by explicitly challenging the view held by the sophist Protagoras that man (and his intellect) is the measure of all things, claiming that such individuals follow in the way of Cain (*Post.* 35-36).⁷⁶ In this way he fulfills his claim that only when falsehoods are utterly refuted is it possible for a person to reject and flee evil (*Her.* 305-306).⁷⁷

Finally, the method and function of teaching is of fundamental importance for the development of the individual, because learning is not just an intellectual exercise, but affects the soul of the pupil (e.g., Plato, *Prot.* 312c; 326b; Philo, *Cher.* 9; *Congr.* 66). Such is the perspective of Plato in *Prot.* 312c, the character of Hippocrates, in paying money for tutelage, is submitting his soul (ψυχὴν) to a sophist. The issue for Plato is that these teachers make students ‘wicked’ (ἀφικόμενος μοχθηρὸς γένοιτο), and are not fit for purpose if one wanted to acquire virtue (ἀρετήν) (*Resp.* 6.492d-e; *Meno* 92d).⁷⁸ Sophists call their teaching ‘wisdom’ (σοφία), but really they spout the popular beliefs of the masses (*Resp.* 6.493a-b). Furthermore, when considering Plato’s ranking of souls, it is difficult to see why someone would put their trust in a sophist as, unlike the philosopher who is ranked first, the sophist or demagogue (σοφιστικὸς ἢ δημοτικὸς) is second from last (the lowest spot is reserved for the tyrant, *Phaedr.* 248d-e). Therefore, if in the act of learning one submits their soul to their teacher, it is vital to know the quality of that teacher’s soul in order to know such an action is prudent. According to Plato,

⁷⁰ Gorgias’ exasperation at Socrates may represent part of the historical struggle between sophists and philosophers. For Plato’s perception of the popular ridicule of philosophers in practical affairs, see *Theaet.* 172c-175b.

⁷¹ On the endurance of ideas beyond the lifetime of an individual, see *Det.* 75-76.

⁷² Cf. Plato, *Leg.* 10.908d, who claims that Tyrants, demagogues, and generals all employ sophistry through twisting mystic rites in order to achieve their own ends.

⁷³ Interestingly, Philo also associates poets with sophists as those who take pleasure in invented myths (μύθου πλάσματα, οἷς τὸ ποιητικὸν καὶ σοφιστικὸν χαίρει γένος) and do not properly treat the allegorical meaning of texts (cf. *Opif.* 157; *Somn.* 1.102; *Praem.* 8). On the intersection of the philosophical discussion of the elements and the development of myth by the poets, see *Contempl.* 3-4.

⁷⁴ For the positive association of sophists with prophetic oracles, see Philostratus, *VS* 481.

⁷⁵ Balaam is often used as an example of faulty epistemology (cf. *Det.* 71; *Deus* 181; *Conf.* 159; *Mut.* 202–203) and become a representative of the everyman and their obliviousness in *Cher.* 32-39.

⁷⁶ Cf. Plato, *Theaet.* 152a; *Crat.* 385e; Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.60; cf. D. Lincicum, ‘A Preliminary Index to Philo’s Non-Biblical Citations and Allusions’, *SPhilo* 25 (2013): 139-67. On Philo and Protagoras, see H.A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 168-71.

⁷⁷ cf. A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (HUCM 7; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1982), 7-10.

⁷⁸ A similar claim is made by rhetoricians against philosophy: Philosophy is a ruin to any man, so must be put away when young (Plato, *Gorg.* 484c).

sophists are bereft of positive soul characteristics (unlike the philosopher) and so submitting to their teachings is foolish if one is seeking to develop wisdom and virtue; they are poor models and so are not worth emulating (*Prot.* 325e-326a).

This perspective is also adopted by Philo and is one of the main reasons why he dislikes the practices of the sophists. For example, in *Post.* 150, Philo contrasts the teaching practices of Rebecca, who empties her entire pitcher of wisdom (i.e., her entire store of knowledge) into the soul of the one learning (εις τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ μανθάνοντος), with the practice of the sophist, who, out of a desire for continual revenue, represses the natural character (κολούοντες φύσει) of his pupils and withholds knowledge so that the student does not reach their full potential. This stifling of virtuous learning undermines any credibility that a sophist might have and so disqualifies them from the right to teach.

In Praise of Sophists?

Although generally criticised by Philo and other authors, sophists are not presented as categorically bad.⁷⁹ Indeed, there is one area in which sophists appear to be worthy of praise: their use of words.⁸⁰ As mentioned above, sophists are well known for their linguistic ability and the artistry with which they craft arguments. This skill comes from a lifetime of rhetorical study and is considered by many ancients as an Art (τέχνη).⁸¹ Although Plato's Socrates would not disagree that skill in rhetoric and sophistry require a substantial investment of time and energy, he would deny the position that rhetoric is an art. Rather, rhetoric and sophistry are part of a business that has nothing fine about it, forming two of the four branches of flattery (κολακεία, *Gorg.* 463a-b).⁸²

Nevertheless, their skill allows them to engage in a noble practice that is at the heart of philosophical inquiry: challenging ignorance. Not only does the sophist undermine the position of the ignorant person and faulty argument, their use of cross questioning and education are similar to the approach adopted by Socrates and other philosophers. Like a doctor in the physical world, the sophist attempts to purge his patient's soul (ψυχή) of problematic entities, which in this case are false positions. By cross-questioning his opponent, the sophist challenges presuppositions and 'empty wisdom' (δοξοσοφίαν), removing faulty constructs until only foundational truth remains (Plato, *Soph.* 230b-231b). Sophists are also thought to be able to instill a desire for the good within their listeners (*Theaet.* 167c). This similarity in approach and purpose creates strong parallels between the image of the sophist and that of the philosopher and it is clear to the characters in Plato's narrative that they are uncomfortable with this positive interpretation of the sophist's work (*Soph.* 231a-c). This cognitive conflict leads them to downplay this parallel by maligning the nature of the sophist, calling him elusive, and that he is only an imitator of philosophy (*Soph.* 268c-d; cf. *QG* 3.27).

⁷⁹ The term sophist is not always pejorative both in antiquity and also for Plato, although it predominantly is (cf. M. Narcy, 'Sophistik', *DNP* 11 [2001]: 723-26). For example, a σοφιστής is occasionally used as a title for a teacher (e.g., *Lys.* 204a; *Meno* 85b; Perfect teacher, οἱ τέλει σοφισταί, *Symp.* 208c). Plato (*Crat.* 398e) asserts that the heroic race was an age of orators and sophists. For some examples of continuing positive use of sophist vocabulary, see Koskeniemi, 'Philo and Sophists', 259-60.

⁸⁰ For the definition of a sophist as 'a virtuous rhetor with a big public reputation', see G.W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 13.

⁸¹ For example, Aristotle labels his treatise *Τέχνη ῥητορική*. Zeus, according to Homer, is a σοφιστής and sophistry is a highly honorable art (ἡ τέχνη αὕτη παγκάλη ἐστι, Ps.-Plato, *Min.* 319c). In contrast,

⁸² The other two branches of flattery are cooking (ὄψοποιική) and personal adornment (κομμωτική).

Philo also recognises that sophists have skills and abilities, particularly in their capability to craft words.⁸³ For instance, sophists are able to discuss issues with minute accuracy and to distinguish letters and parts of speech (*Agr.* 136).⁸⁴ Their words are also full of music (πάμμουσος) and pleasing to hear (*Migr.* 72). However, in this arena, the primary issue with sophists is that these skills do not lead to the acquisition of virtue (*Agr.* 135) and their words are at variance with their thoughts (*Det.* 72; *Migr.* 111) and intentions (*Migr.* 113); they are fundamentally deceitful (*Congr.* 18).⁸⁵ More importantly, their words, though often correct and deserving praise, differ from their conduct (*Congr.* 67; *Post.* 86; *Mut.* 208). This dissonance between words and deeds represents the fundamental flaw of the sophist and leads to their inevitable censor by the person of true character. This disapproval parallels the views of Plato, Epictetus, and other philosophers, all of whom view this type of sophistry as undermining the best qualities of education.⁸⁶

However, it is notable that Philo does not openly adopt Plato's suggestion that sophists challenge ignorance. Rather, according to Philo in *Cherubim*, sophists sow the seeds of persuasion that produce false opinion (ψευδοῦς δόξης), which ultimately reaps a harvest of destruction for the soul (λυμαίνεται ψυχὴν, *Cher.* 9). This destruction, however, is not limited to the sophist, but injures all those exposed to their actions and their effects (*Post.* 87). Philo goes so far as to claim that it is not praiseworthy to do what is right if the person lacks intention corresponding to his/her action (*Post.* 87-88). This lack of intentionality is prominent within the sophist, but is also transferred to those who listen to them and adopt their teachings. This is the true problem with sophists, namely that the incongruity of their words and actions causes those around them to stumble and to be ignorant of the true reason for right actions.

Indeed, Philo seems to invert the physician image used by Plato above (*Soph.* 230b-231b), claiming that sophists are actually bad doctors, who do not desire to cure their patients (i.e., listeners) of their maladies. Rather, they falsely prescribe linguistic criticism as the means of happiness and not properly employ the medicine of philosophy and virtue (*Congr.* 53; *Leg.* 3.206).⁸⁷ This differentiation of sophists from the sphere of philosophers fits with the growing specialisation of the profession in the Roman era and the necessary distinction of these groups by Philo and those in Alexandria.⁸⁸

⁸³ In *Post.* 131, Philo identifies one who has complete training as a sophist and likens him to an archer (τοξότης) who hits whatever target he aims at (cf. Gen 21:20; for arrows as a negative sophistic image, see *Congr.* 129; *Fug.* 210). Sophists are also clever in the investigating arts (δαινὸς λόγων ἀνερευνῶν τέχνας, *Leg.* 3.232).

⁸⁴ A similar characterisation is given to the head of the Therapeutae community in *Contempl.* 31. However, here, the speaker is contrasted with rhetors of old and current sophists (οἱ ῥήτορες ἢ οἱ νῦν σοφισταί). For a discussion of female philosophers, see J.E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's 'Therapeutae' Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 173-226.

⁸⁵ Philo also claims that, despite their abilities and their fame, they are equally enslaved to their passions as the common person is. It is in this field of evaluation that they are found wanting and likened to swine (σῶν): confused, disordered, and base (*Agr.* 143-44).

⁸⁶ For the difference in strands of rhetoric at this time, see M. Alexandre, Jr. 'The Alexandria of Philo in Philo of Alexandria', in R. Sousa (ed.), *Alexandria ad Aegyptum: The Legacy of Multiculturalism in Antiquity* (Coimbra, 2013), 196-210, 203-205.

⁸⁷ Plutarch (*Mor.* 613c-e) comments that the discussing linguistic minutiae by select, learned individuals at dinner parties deprives the rest of the attendees their opportunity to speak about more beneficial, philosophical ideas.

⁸⁸ Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 78-79. For the interesting finding of the lack of references to sophists in Egyptian papyri, although may references to teachers, see P. Schubert, 'L'activité des sophistes grecs en Égypte d'après le témoignage des papyrus', in B. Wyss, R. Hirsch-Luipold, and S.-J. Hirschi (eds.), *Sophisten in Hellenismus und Kaiserzeit: Orte, Methoden und Personen der Bildungsvermittlung* (STAC 101; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 71-82.

Conclusion

Philo, like Plato, is not fundamentally against rhetorical education, which has an important role in shaping the philosopher's mind. Rather, he is primarily concerned with its abuse and the omission of philosophical wisdom in the individual's training. This oversight, according to Philo, determines the nature of the individual, his habits, practices, and whether he will become an Ishmael or an Isaac.

I have argued in this essay that our understanding of sophist imagery in Philo's works is deepened by reading it through a Platonic lens. For example, Plato's contrast of sophistry with legislation provides a nuanced understanding of why the sophist is particularly dangerous for Philo and his community, as sophistry stands in fundamental opposition to the purpose and nature of νομοθετικός. Similarly, the way that Plato characterises sophist and philosopher as conflicting opposites is also adopted by Philo. This acceptance is particularly true of the association with wisdom and philosophy; however, we find that it is much more prominent in Philo's discussions.

Equally important are elements of Plato's thought that are not fully adopted by Philo. For example, there is little explicit correlation between sophists and flatters in Philo. Likewise, the positive role of the sophist in challenging false presuppositions that is offered by Plato is noticeably minimised. Rather, according to Philo, the sophist is one who sows misinformation and false opinions (*Cher.* 9), which ultimately lead to the destruction of the one who listens. One of the most important differences between Philo and Plato is the way that they situate their discussions. Both see the clash of sophistry and philosophy as being a contemporary issue. However, for Plato's characters, this is something of a novelty as they can question Protagoras, who is said to be the first to charge for teaching. Philo, in contrast, places this conflict at the beginning of creation and traces it through the history of Israel.⁸⁹ The allegorical reading of scriptural characters (i.e., Hagar and Sarah) as representing preliminary studies and wisdom is also distinctive and allows Philo significantly more space to craft his characterisations; whereas Plato's dialectical development offers an alternate approach for understanding definitions and natures. In this way the reader is exposed to two levels of interpretation: the conversation/debate and the narrative interaction between the characters (i.e., Socrates and the sophist/rhetor).

Overall, the depictions of sophists in Plato and Philo have a number of similarities, although their differences speak to their authors' individual contexts and their perspectives on the issues they were facing. In particular, reading this aspect of Philo in light of Plato's texts, especially the works of *Sophist*, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras*, has provided important insights and warrants the adoption of this approach in future studies.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ On the use of Jewish Scriptures as the container for Philo's arguments, see F.H. Colson, 'Philo on Education', *JTS* 18 (1917): 151-62. See also the recent critique of Winter, who, according to van Kooten, does not adequately incorporate this perspective in his discussion. van Kooten, 'Balaam as the Sophist', 133-35.

⁹⁰ Many thanks to Ronald Cox for his comments on drafts of this paper.