

# An Education in Virtue: Philosophical Speculation and Religious Observance in the Thought of Philo of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>

Jennifer Otto

McGILL UNIVERSITY

From their earliest mention in Greek literature, Jews and their religious practice are depicted as having a philosophical character. Theophrastus describes the Jews as “philosophers by race” (φιλόσοφοι τὸ γένος ὄντες) in his treatise *De Pietate* because “they converse with each other about the deity” during their sacrifices.<sup>2</sup> Three and a half centuries after Theophrastus’ remarks, the Alexandrian Jewish expositor of the Torah, Philo, champions both philosophical contemplation and observance of Mosaic Law as pathways that lead to piety (εὐσεβεία). In this respect, Philo joins a tradition that draws parallels between following the prescriptions of Jewish Law and living a philosophical life already present in the fragments of his forbearer Aristobulus.<sup>3</sup> For Philo, however, the synonymy between living philosophically and living piously is especially pronounced. Counselling against Roman polytheism in *De Decalogo*, he affirms that the “one who is determined to follow a genuine philosophy *and* make a pure and guileless piety his own” learns the fundamental doctrine of monotheism, that God alone is uncreated

1. I am grateful to Professors Wayne Hankey and Michael Fournier for the invitation to contribute to the panel on Praying and Thinking at the 2011 Classical Association of Canada/Société Canadienne des Études Classiques Annual Meeting. I also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Vanier Fellowships of the research and writing of this essay.

2. Theophrastus, *De Pietate*, ed. W. Pötscher (Leiden, 1964), Fragment 2; cited in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976), 10.

3. The Fragments of Aristobulus, now generally agreed to date from 180–145 BCE, are preserved by Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius, who identify Aristobulus as a Peripatetic and echo his arguments that the Greek philosophers and poets borrowed from Moses. See especially fragment 4.8: “All philosophers agree that it is necessary to hold devout convictions about God, something which our school (αἵσθησις) prescribes particularly well. And the whole structure of our law has been drawn up with concern for piety, justice, self-control, and other qualities that are truly good.” Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors, Volume 3: Aristobulus* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995).

and omnipotent.<sup>4</sup> The pursuit of philosophy and the pursuit of piety appear, for Philo, to be components of the same quest.

Opinions differ, however, concerning Philo's understanding of the role of philosophical study within the framework of Jewish piety. The relationship between philosophical speculation and the pious observance of the Law in Philo's conception of Judaism (a term that he himself does not use) has been the subject of significant attention in recent years. Joan E. Taylor has suggested that, to an outsider, since "the cultic aspects of Judaism were visible only in Jerusalem, Jews in the Diaspora may well have seemed more like participants in a philosophical school than cultic practitioners."<sup>5</sup> Alan Mendelson argues that Philo's Alexandrian Judaism was not itself a philosophical school, but that Philo belonged to a circle committed to adapting that Judaism to make its practice compatible with elite Alexandrian culture. "What distinguished Philo's circle," Mendelson claims, "was not so much the purity of their theological utterances as a keen awareness of two complementary beliefs: first, that the Bible was written on the level of the philosophically unsophisticated and, second, that the truth of Scripture could be approached, if not reached, by allegory . . . As a consequence of the first belief, Philo adopted a two-tiered conception of his co-religionists. As a consequence of the second, he committed himself to the propagation of an allegorical interpretation of scripture."<sup>6</sup> In Mendelson's presentation, Philo's allegorical gloss on Jewish *praxis* renders it more palatable to the educated members of his community but is unnecessary for the average Jew, who is satisfied with the literal interpretation.

Mendelson depicts Philo as essentially a Platonist with a soft spot for his ancestral customs, whose Judaism is "a religion in which the state of one's soul had priority over mere formalities."<sup>7</sup> Mendelson's thesis that the Alexandrian Jewish community was two-tiered, consisting of allegorizing elites and simple literalists, is challenged by Philo's depictions of that community united in their legal observance. Consider Philo's glowing description in *De Legatione ad Gaium* of the Jews as a unified people: "One nation only standing apart" for whom adherence to the Law is no mere formality: the Jews revolt "to save them from submitting to the destruction of any of their ancestral traditions, even the smallest, because as with buildings if a single piece is taken from the base, the parts that up to then seemed firm are loosened and slip away and collapse into the void thus made."<sup>8</sup>

4. *Dec.* 58, emphasis mine. English translations are those of the Loeb Classical Library.

5. Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers: Philo's Therapeutae Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 113.

6. Alan Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity* (Brown Judaic Studies, 1988), 8.

7. *Ibid.*, 66.

8. *Leg.* 117.

Naomi G. Cohen also posits an ‘inner circle’ to which Philo belonged, consisting of “scholars, teachers, students and disciples who engaged in esoteric philosophical allegorization of the Pentateuch.”<sup>9</sup> However, she denies that this group is to be understood as a philosophical school, preferring instead to describe it as something like a *Beth-Midrash*, but one that has experienced a “transmutation of the original to accord in outward form with what was customary in the Hellenistic society in which it functioned.”<sup>10</sup> In her reading of Philo’s corpus, Cohen identifies the word combinations of ‘Moses + member, associate, or pupil’ (Μωσῆς + θιασώτης, ἑταῖρος or φοιτητής) as often introducing an interpretation originating in this exegetical inner circle.<sup>11</sup> Arguing that the preceding Greek descriptors are known in ancient literature as “technical terms for a member of a recognized group, a religious guild, a confraternity, and/or a school,” Cohen contends that these terms signal the existence of a small, elite group of allegorizers that stood apart from the broader community.<sup>12</sup> Positing a chronology for Philo’s treatises that roughly corresponds to their volume number in the Loeb edition, Cohen suggests that the enthusiasm Philo shows for esoteric interpretation in the *Allegorical Commentary*, which she assigns to an earlier period in Philo’s career, wanes in the later *Exposition of the Law* due to a falling out between Philo and other members of what she calls the “confraternity of Moses.” However, determining the chronology of Philo’s works has proven to be problematic and it is not possible to say with confidence that the *Exposition of the Law* dates from a late period in Philo’s career.<sup>13</sup> Particularly in these treatises, Philo emphasizes the importance of communal, anagogical (if not strictly allegorical) exegetical sessions for the entire Jewish community. For example, in his description of Sabbath observance at *De Specialibus Legibus* 2.62, Philo contends that “each seventh day there stand wide open in every city thousands of schools of good sense, temperance, courage, justice, and the other virtues, in which they sit in order quietly with ears alert and with full attention.” Here the entire community is portrayed as students, suggesting that Philo may have had more than just a small subset of the Jewish population in mind when he writes of the “members, associates, or pupils of Moses.”

In his treatment of the question, David T. Runia identifies descriptions, such as the one found at *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat* 86, where Philo

9. Naomi G. Cohen, *Philo’s Scriptures: Citations from the Prophets and Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 175.

10. Cohen, *Philo’s Scriptures*, 177.

11. *Ibid.*, 179.

12. *Ibid.*, 180.

13. See the discussion, with bibliography, in James R. Royse, “The Works of Philo,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59–60.

identifies himself as belonging to the pupils (γνώριμοι) of Moses who have been taught by him “to have a conception of the invisible God,” as echoing the vocabulary used by Hellenistic schools.<sup>14</sup> But although he adapts the language of the philosophical schools to describe the Jews in Alexandria, Runia notes that Philo explicitly describes Jews as belonging to a philosophical school (ἀρεσις) only once, at *De Vita Contemplativa* 29, and there the term is applied only to the founders of the Therapeutae.<sup>15</sup> Runia rightly cautions that “the ethnic and religious aspects of Judaism add a different dimension” that problematizes the simple identification of Alexandrian Judaism as being itself a philosophical school, or as being comprised of various philosophical schools.<sup>16</sup>

The brief review of scholarship above demonstrates the challenge of determining the degree to which Philo understands instruction and practice of the Mosaic Law to resemble that of the philosophical schools. Moreover, it raises the question of the importance, in Philo’s estimation, of philosophical understanding for the attainment of virtue. Certainly the influence of Philo’s substantial philosophical education informs all of his works. Moreover, he reckons philosophical insights as holy knowledge, believing Moses to be the ultimate source of all that is true in the philosophers.<sup>17</sup> And yet, Philo takes pains to demonstrate that all Jews, even those who have never set foot in a gymnasium, are indeed advanced in virtue, the fruit of philosophy. How are we to understand Philo’s claim in his treatise *De Virtutibus*, that through legal observance, rather than philosophical contemplation, the Jews as an *ethnos* learn the lessons of philosophy, “for what the disciples of the excellent philosophy gain from its teaching, the Jews gain from their customs and laws, that is to know the highest, the most ancient Cause of all things and reject the delusion of created gods”?<sup>18</sup>

In what follows, I contend that Philo presents the instruction and observance of Jewish Law as a curriculum superior to that of the philosophical schools in its ability to teach people to be virtuous. Both the Greek schools and the Law of Moses teach philosophical truths. Both also inculcate virtue

14. David T. Runia, “Philo of Alexandria and the Greek Hairesis Model,” *Vigilae Christianae* 53.2 (May 1999): 128.

15. *Ibid.*, 125.

16. *Ibid.*, 133.

17. The superiority of Moses’ philosophy to that of the Greeks is a prominent theme in Philo’s writing; see especially Philo’s summary of the faults of the philosophical schools as illuminated by the excellence of Moses’ account of creation in *De Opificio Mundi* 170–72.

18. *Virt.* 65. Except where noted, English translations of Philo’s works are based on those of the Loeb Classical Library, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929–43), with minor alterations.

via the classical triad of education, nature and practice.<sup>19</sup> However, in contrast to the exclusivity of Greek philosophical education, the Law of Moses teaches philosophical truths to the entire Jewish *ethnos*, so that they become philosophers by race. The Greek philosopher does not surpass the law-observant Jew in virtue; Jewish religious observance is not a preliminary stage on the path to virtue, nor is it reserved for those incapable of seeing the allegorical truths of the scriptures. Mature virtue, best exemplified in the life of Moses, is attained when philosophical principles inform and augment one's Torah instruction and observance.

#### PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEMPLATION AS A PATH LEADING TO VIRTUE

Philo is at home among the content and methods of the Hellenistic philosophical schools and strongly urges his fellow Jews to follow the course of Greek encyclical education.<sup>20</sup> Throughout his corpus, he draws freely from the conceptual worlds of the Platonists, the Pythagoreans, the Peripatetics and the Stoics without aligning himself dogmatically to any one position.<sup>21</sup> Philo's enthusiasm for Greek education and philosophical speculation is especially pronounced in his multi-treatise *Allegorical Commentary*. Ellen Birnbaum posits that this commentary was written with an implied audience of the well-educated members of the Alexandrian Jewish community, without suggesting that these elites formed a separate exegetical circle or club.<sup>22</sup> The *Allegorical Commentary* consists of a running commentary, with multiple gaps and many digressions, of Genesis 2–29. In the course of providing an exegesis of the lives of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Philo elaborates a continuous allegory of the soul's acquisition of virtue. The patriarchs each represent a particular kind of noble soul: Abraham, the soul that

19. Ellen Birnbaum traces the development of the education, nature and practice triad of virtue acquisition from the pre-Socratic Protagoras through Plato's dialogues *Protagoras* and *Meno*, to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and into the philosophical schools. See Birnbaum, "Exegetical building blocks in Philo's interpretation of the Patriarchs," in *From Judaism to Christianity: tradition and transition: a festschrift for Thomas H. Tobin*, ed. Patricia Walters (Boston: Brill, 2010), 93–112.

20. The validity of Greek *paideia* for Jews is a question that recurs in the *Allegorical Commentary* and is the central concern of his treatise *De Congressu quaerendae Eruditionis gratia*, which is devoted to Philo's exegesis of Sarah and Hagar as Philosophy and the Encyclical Studies, respectively.

21. Philo's familiarity, and ultimate dissatisfaction, with the various forms of Greek philosophical traditions is especially evident in *Opf.* 130 ff.

22. Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought: Israel, Jews and Proselytes* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992). Naomi G. Cohen agrees with Birnbaum's claim that the *Allegorical Commentary* is written for educated Jews but contends that *all* Philo's writings were written for the same philosophically adept inner circle and would not have been of interest to an outsider audience.

acquires virtue through education; Isaac, the very special class of soul that is virtuous by nature; and Jacob, the soul who obtains virtue through practice. Although in each patriarch one method of virtue acquisition dominates, all souls actually require a combination of the three.<sup>23</sup> As such, Philo exhorts his audience first to train themselves in the preliminary studies of the Greek paideutic system, and then to advance to the study of philosophy, which Philo defines as “nothing else than the earnest desire to see things exactly as they are.”<sup>24</sup> By means of philosophical vision, the soul acquires the virtues, among which piety (*eusebeia*) is queen. The virtuous soul becomes Israel, etymologically interpreted as ὁρῶν θεόν, one who sees God.<sup>25</sup> Since God is incorporeal and invisible, the vision of God is apprehended not with the eyes of the body, but with the eyes of soul.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, not all souls are capable of pursuing this path to virtue. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are introduced as the prototypes of noble souls, not of the whole variety of souls. In the treatise *De Somniis I*, Philo elucidates a tripartite hierarchy of natures of souls. The best souls are “born of God”; these, like Isaac and Moses, are virtuous by nature. Of second rank are the souls “born of heaven” who, “midway between those two extremes, are often stepping up and down as upon a stairway, either being drawn upwards by the better portion or dragged in the opposite direction by the worse.”<sup>27</sup> Last are the earth-born souls, described in *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 76 as the “multitude of common men,” the “blind race” who, unlike Israel, do not see God.<sup>28</sup> To these souls, philosophical education is either inaccessible or ineffective. It ought also to be noted that with the notable exceptions of the “aged virgin” *Therapeutrides*, described in his treatise *De Vita Contemplativa*, and Livia, wife of Caesar Augustus,<sup>29</sup> Philo generally considers women incapable of transcending their attachment to corporeality in order to attain a metaphysical vision of God, being “endowed by nature with little sense.”<sup>30</sup> Acquiring virtue through the practice of philosophical contempla-

23. *De Abrahamo* 52–53.

24. *De Confusione Linguarum* 97.

25. *Abr.* 56–57.

26. *Abr.* 57.

27. *De Somniis* 151.

28. See also *De Migratione Abrahami* 63 and *Her.* 42.

29. *Legat.* 320: “For the judgments of women as a rule are weaker and do not apprehend any mental conception apart from what the senses perceive. But she excelled her sex in this as in everything else, for the purity of the training she received supplementing nature and practice gave her virility to her reasoning power, which gained such clearness of vision that it apprehended the things of mind better than the things of sense and held the latter to be the shadows of the former.”

30. *Prob.* 117.

tion is lauded by Philo, but it is limited to a fortunate few who possess both the right kind of soul and the freedom and leisure to pursue it.<sup>31</sup> The Greek philosophical schools may make some men virtuous philosophers, but they cannot make a *genos* of philosophers that encompasses an entire nation.

#### JEWISH LEGAL OBSERVANCE AS A PATH LEADING TO VIRTUE

Through its superficially bizarre commandments and prohibitions, the Law of Moses serves, in Philo's presentation, as a means of philosophical instruction and practice that is accessible and beneficial to all, whether they be native-born Jews or foreign proselytes. The entire Jewish *ethnos*, consisting as it did of rich and poor, free and slave, male and female, is capable of participating in the life prescribed by Moses. In the *Hypothetica*, weekly synagogue meetings are described in terms reminiscent of descriptions of the philosophical schools: instruction is given by a teacher who "reads the sacred laws to [the people], and interprets each of them separately." As a result of their instruction, Philo states that "the people have gained some skill in the sacred laws and advanced to piety."<sup>32</sup> *De Legatione ad Gaium* emphasizes that all Jews receive an early, and lengthy, education in the sacred laws, which results in a correct understanding of God: the Jews are "trained even from the cradle, by parents and tutors and instructors and by the far higher authority of the sacred laws and also the unwritten customs, to acknowledge one God who is the Father and Maker of the world."<sup>33</sup> The goal of the Law is the inculcation of virtue and the acknowledgement and worship of the one God—the same God who is also discerned through the philosophies of the most holy and eminent Greeks, Plato and Pythagoras.<sup>34</sup>

31. Philo's own privileged background appears at times to blind him to the socio-economic factors that limit participation in the philosophical life. See also *Abr.*, 22–24: "the man of worth, on the other hand, having acquired a desire for a quiet life, withdraws from the public and loves solitude, and his choice is to be unnoticed by the many, not because he is misanthropical, for he is eminently a philanthropist, but because he has rejected vice which is welcomed by the multitude who rejoice at what calls for mourning and grieve where it is well to be glad. And therefore he mostly secludes himself at home and scarcely ever crosses his threshold, or else because of the frequency of his visitors he leaves town and spends his days in some lonely farm...." This depiction of the philosophical life takes for granted that the philosopher has the means not to work and owns a country farm to which he can retire. See also his rather optimistic disavowal of the possibility of extreme poverty at *Somn.* 97: "For no one is at a loss for the bare necessities of food, so long as springs gush forth, and rivers run down in winter, and earth yields her fruits in their seasons."

32. *Hyp.* 7.13

33. *Legat.* 115; see also 210 and 215.

34. For Philo's praise of the Pythagoreans, see *Prob.* 2. At *Prob.* 13, he approvingly cites "τὸν ἱερώτατον Πλάτωνα." Plato's *Theaetetus* is also cited approvingly, though anonymously, at *Fug.* 63, where its author is described as "a man highly esteemed, one of those admired for their wisdom."

Education in the Law is further developed through practice. Philo's *Exposition of the Law* mounts an extended defence on behalf of Jewish legal observance for the entire *ethnos*, illustrating the rationality that undergirds its injunctions.<sup>35</sup> Frequently, the commands—particularly those singled out by non-Jewish detractors as especially worthy of ridicule—are rationalized through allegorical interpretation. Crucially, however, the commands themselves are, as a rule, upheld.<sup>36</sup>

In the treatises on *De Specialibus Legibus* (*Spec.*) and *De Virtutibus* (*Virt.*), Philo demonstrates the pedagogical function of particular laws for the acquisition of virtues, particularly justice, courage, compassion, repentance, and nobility. The sub-treatise on the virtue *philanthropia*, compassion or pity, and the laws that Philo ascribes to its inculcation, provides a useful illustration of the function of Jewish legal observance as a means of instilling virtue. At *Virt.* 51, Philo calls *philanthropia* a “high road to holiness”; it is not only a goal to be obtained but, parallel to philosophical contemplation, its practice also renders one virtuous.<sup>37</sup> David Konstan points out that although *philanthropia* and related terms are rare in classical Greek texts—Aristotle uses the term literally in reference to animals who like humans—it was employed with increasing frequency in Hellenistic works to denote pity, kindness, and fellow-feeling. “Clearly,” Konstan concludes, “this is an established virtue term in Hellenistic literature (although I do not know of a passage in which it is explicitly included in a list of virtues), and it is no wonder that Philo gives it a special place in his treatise.”<sup>38</sup> Philo's inclusion of *philanthropia*

35. Ellen Birnbaum suggests that the *Exposition* is written for a different audience from the allegorical interpretation, noting that the narratives of the patriarchs are re-told in a way that suggests the audience may be unfamiliar with them, and the apologetic tone of the discourses on the Law suggest an audience that requires convincing of their validity. The *Exposition* also refrains from using the term *Israel*, which functions in the *allegory* to denote an elite category of individuals who “see God” through contemplation. The people about whom Philo speaks in these treatises are explicitly the Jews, defined as the people who keep the Laws of Moses. See Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism*, 12.

36. The only exception to this rule that I have found occurs in *De Somniis* 1.94, where Philo rejects the literal observance of the command in Exodus 22:26 to return before sunset a debtor's cloak given as a surety: “Does the creator and ruler of the universe speak of Himself as compassionate in regard to so trifling a matter, a garment not returned to a debtor by a lender of money? To entertain such ideas is a mark of me who have utterly failed to see the greatness of the excellence of the infinitely great God, and against every principle human or divine attribute human pettiness to the Being Who is unoriginate and incorruptible and full of all blessedness and happiness. What is there outrageous in money-lenders keeping the securities in their own hands, until they have to go back their own?”

37. On Philo's similarity here to Stoic doctrine, see Carlos Levy, “Philo's Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo of Alexandria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150.

38. David Konstan, “Philo's *De virtutibus* in the Perspective of Classical Greek Philosophy,” *Studia Philonica Annual* 18 (2006): 66.



among his list of virtues may not be out of step with the thinking of his contemporaries, but the place of pride he grants it is noteworthy. At *Virt.* 51, Philo dubs *philanthropia* the “twin sister” of *eusebeia*, which he elsewhere recognizes as the Queen of the Virtues.<sup>39</sup> By paragraph 95, *philanthropia* and *eusebeia* are spoken of jointly as the leading virtues. Philo’s emphasis of Jewish *philanthropia* has an apologetic edge. Among contemporary Roman commentators, notably Tacitus, the upholding of purity laws resulted in charges of misanthropy.<sup>40</sup> By demonstrating the correlation between specific Jewish laws and acts of *philanthropia*, Philo flips the criticism on its head: by conscientiously keeping the Law and performing its prescribed rites and prayers on behalf of the entire world, the Jews are the philanthropic nation *par excellence*.<sup>41</sup>

Philo associates *philanthropia* closely with Moses, who is described as her most ardent lover and as the paradigmatic philanthropic man. His *philanthropia*, as exemplified by his concern for the appointment of the most qualified successor to lead the Hebrew people, results in humility and piety. Philo is particularly impressed by Moses’ refusal to institute hereditary rule, even though he had sons and nephews of high repute (61). Moses’ great concern for his people is matched by his deference to God. By joyfully deferring to God’s choice of Joshua, Moses is shown to be unlike other rulers who are more concerned for the promotion of their family and connections than for the commonweal (53).

Moses teaches *philanthropia* through both example and law. The path of *philanthropia* that the Law promotes is portrayed as rather more populist than the education and contemplation that Philo prescribes for adept souls. Moses is here described as training “the whole nation” in the ways of virtue, even the women endowed with little sense and the men with earth-born souls. Philo openly acknowledges the coercive aspect of the law; through

39. *Dec.* 119, *Spec.* 4.142.

40. See Tacitus, *Historiae* V.5.1: “the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion (*miser cordia*), but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity (*hostile odium*). They sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and although as a race, they are prone to lust, they abstain from intercourse with foreign women.”

41. Philo addresses accusations of Jewish misanthropy directly at *Virt.* 1.141: “After this let those clever libellers continue, if they can, to accuse the nation of misanthropy and charge the laws with enjoining unsociable and unfriendly practices, when these laws so clearly extend their compassion to flocks and herds, and our people through the instruction of the law learn from their earliest years to correct any wilfulness of souls to gentle behaviour.” In *Spec.* 2.163, Philo argues that the Jews demonstrate their *philanthropia* through the performance of priestly functions on behalf of all humanity: “The Jewish nation is to the whole inhabited world what the priest is to the State. For the holy office in very truth belongs to the nation because it carries out all the rites of purification and both in body and soul obeys the injunctions of the divine laws....”

legal observance, he contends, even those who “have not out of their own free will laboured to get virtue,” are dealt with by Moses “against their will, admonishing and calling them to wisdom with holy laws which the good obey voluntarily and the bad unwillingly” (94). We find a similar sentiment at *Somm.* 130, where Philo argues that those who worship God and keep the Law purely out of self-interest are nevertheless on the path to virtue. He imagines God to accept their worship, saying “For I know well that they will not only not be worsened, but actually bettered, through the persistence of their worship and through practicing pure and undefiled piety.” Education in the philosophical schools runs the risk of making bad men into sophists; training in the law of Moses makes bad men act virtuously.

In the remainder of the treatise, Philo offers a number of examples of laws that train the Jews in the practice of the *philanthropia* towards not only their fellows but also foreigners and enemies. Through each example, Philo demonstrates the Law’s concern for the vulnerable: lenders are prohibited from charging interest (88); proselytes are to be treated equally to the native-born members of the community (103); female prisoners of war are to be given due time to grieve their lost husbands before being married to their captors, and once married are to be treated as lawful wives (112); runaway slaves are not to be surrendered to their masters (124); infants are not to be exposed (131). Compassion ought to extend even to animals; it is for this reason that the law prohibits the cooking of an animal in its mother’s milk and, contrary to his contemporary St. Paul in 1 Cor. 9:9–10, Philo asserts that the command not to muzzle the mouth of an ox is intended to teach compassion toward all creatures, including irrational animals. These are practical ordinances for farmers and for temple priests, for cooks and lower-class women as well as for slave owners and rulers. Through instruction in the laws from their earliest youth and their practice in daily life, the value of each other being created by God is imprinted on the souls of the people. The injunction to *philanthropia* also brings about piety through the awareness of God’s philanthropic character. Philo explains the relationship between *philanthropia* and piety in *Spec.* 2.63:

ἔστι δ’ ὡς ἔπος εἶπεν τῶν κατὰ μέρος ἀμυθῆτων λόγων καὶ δογμάτων δύο τὰ ἀνωτάτω κεφάλαια τὸ τε πρὸς θεὸν δι’ εὐσεβείας καὶ ὁσιότητος καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἀνθρώπους διὰ φιλανθρωπίας καὶ δικαιοσύνης ὧν ἑκότερον εἰς πολυσιδεῖς ἰδέας καὶ πάσας ἐπαινετὰς τέμνεται.

But there are among the practically untold number of particular principles and ordinances two particularly lofty heads: the duty to God through piety and holiness and the duty to men through *philanthropia* and justice, each of which is split into multiple forms, all laudable.

The end result of Jewish legal observance is the same as the ideal outcome of Greek *paideia*: love of God and love of Humanity.

#### THE BEST PATH

Our reading of Philo has revealed arguments in favour of both Greek philosophical education and observance of the Mosaic Law as effective means of acquiring virtue. Both the Jew and the well-educated Greek ultimately learn to love the one, unique, uncreated God and, in imitation of God, to love their fellows. The complementarity of Greek education and Jewish legal observance in Philo's thought is evident in his repeated affirmations of the philosophical commonplace that the virtuous life is comprised of two components, the contemplative (*theoretikon*) and the active (*praktikon*).<sup>42</sup> "Virtue," he asserts in the *Allegorical Interpretation* at *Leg.* 1.57, "is both theoretical and practical; for clearly it involves theory, since philosophy, the road that leads to it, involves it through its three parts, logic, ethics, physics; and it involves conduct, for virtue is the art of the whole of life, and life includes all kinds of conduct." The pursuit of virtue through philosophy is good; the combination of philosophy with the practical virtue engendered through obedience to the Law of Moses is better. One must be both a lover of God and a lover of mankind in order to be truly virtuous. Philo makes this point clearly at *Dec.* 108–110:

ἄκρατον γὰρ ἐμφορησάμενοι τὸν εὐσεβείας πόθον, πολλὰ χαίρειν φράσαντες ταῖς ἄλλαις πραγματείαις ὅλον ἀνέθεσαν τὸν οἰκείου βίον θεραπείᾳ θεοῦ. οἱ δ' οὐδὲν ἕξω τῶν πρὸς ἀνθρώπου δικαιομάτων ἀγαθὸν ὑποτοπήσαντες εἶναι μόνην τὴν πρὸς ἀνθρώπου ὀμιλίαν ἠσπάσαντο, τῶν τε ἀγαθῶν τὴν χρῆσιν ἐξ ἴσου πᾶσι παρέχοντες διὰ κοινωσίας ἡμερον καὶ τὰ δεινὰ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐπικουφίζειν ἀξιούντες. τούτους μὲν οὖν φιλανθρώπους, τοὺς δὲ προτέρους φιλοθέους ἐνδίκως ἂν εἴποι τις, ἡμιτελεῖς τὴν ἀρετὴν· ὀλόκληροι γὰρ οἱ παρ' ἀμφοτέροις εὐδοκιμοῦντες.

For those who are full of unmixed desire for piety, some, dismissing all other matters, dedicate their whole personal life to the service of God. Others surmising nothing to be good outside of doing justice to men, only welcome kindly companionship with men. They provide from their own belongings the use of good things to all from their desire for the commonweal and consider it their duty to alleviate sufferings according to their ability. These then one may call lovers of men, the previous kind lovers of God, but both are half-perfected in virtue; for the complete win honour in both.<sup>43</sup>

I have argued that although Philo praises the pursuit of virtue through philosophical education for the elite, he promotes instruction in the Jewish Law and the observance of its commands as a yet better means of acquiring

42. *Mos.* 1.48. The balance of the contemplative and the active lives in the pursuit of virtue is well-known from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, particularly Book 10.

43. Translation mine.

the same virtues, with *eusebeia* and *philanthropia* standing above the rest. Because its commandments and prohibitions fundamentally accord with the Law of Nature, the Law of Moses inscribes the same love for God and for humanity on the souls of its adherents that Greek education and contemplation inscribe on the souls of (good) philosophers. Ideally, the contemplative and the practical lives are to be lived in combination. Although Philo praises Plato and Pythagoras as men who “had taken no mere sip of philosophy but had feasted abundantly on its sound doctrines,” he urges his readers to take Moses, the philosopher and founder of the Law, as their model.

The eminence of the Law of Moses consists in its function as a teacher of philosophical truths and a guarantor of ethical conduct. Moreover, although those capable of a deeper, allegorical comprehension of the Law ought to strive for that knowledge, perception of the deeper truths of the Mosaic Law does not release a Jew from the need for legal observance. To the contrary, while non-contemplative Jews learn philosophical truths and are thus able to lead virtuous lives by following the Law alone, Philo denounces the elites who through contemplative philosophy recognize the true allegorical meanings lurking behind the scriptural symbols and attain a vision of God through contemplation, and yet forego the literal observation of the Law. Although Philo criticizes those who fail to penetrate beyond the literal interpretation of the Scriptures for their failure to grasp their deeper truth,<sup>44</sup> he consistently counsels that the literal instructions of the law are to be upheld.<sup>45</sup> Obedience to the Law is what renders all Jews philosophers by race.

44. For example, at *Gig.* 6 Philo cautions his reader against interpreting the narrative of the Nephalim in Genesis 6:2 literally and, as a result, dismissing it as a mere myth. See also *Somm.* 1.39 and 1.106.

45. See *Ebr.* 18: “the man who fails to make use of the holy rites and all else that is related to piety is disobedient to the commandments which law and custom regularly prescribe in these matters.”