

## The Place of Philo of Alexandria in the History of Philosophy

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### *Abstract*

Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E. -50 C.E.), or Philo Judaeus as he is also called, was a Jewish scholar, philosopher, politician, and author who lived in Alexandria and who has had a tremendous influence through his works (mostly on the Christian exegesis and theology). Today hardly any scholar of Second Temple Judaism, early Christianity, or Hellenistic philosophy sees any great imperative in arguing for his relevance. After the research (contribution) of V. Nikiprowetzky in the field of philonic studies, it seems that the prevailing view is that Philo should be regarded above all as an "exegete". Such an opinion in one way or another seems to neglect to some extent Philo's place in the History of philosophy. This article defends the position that Philo should be considered primarily as a "hermeneut". Emphasizing that the concept of hermeneutics has a broader meaning (especially in the context of antiquity) than the narrower and more specialized concept of exegesis.

**Keywords:** Philo of Alexandria, history of philosophy, history of hermeneutics, allegorical interpretation.

### 1. Introduction

It would be good to consider these words of S. Levy, when it comes to the place of Philo in the history of philosophy:

"When one evokes the relation of Philo to philosophy, it happens too often that one represents it as the confrontation of a perfectly determined reality, philosophy, and of an individual strange because it is difficult, even impossible to define. This is to forget that the questioning on Philo is also a questioning on philosophy and, more precisely, on its aptitude to transform itself by integrating other forms of aspiration to universality" (Levy, 1998: 8).

The writings of Philo of Alexandria show us that he had a really good knowledge of Hellenistic culture, as well as of various philosophers and their ideas. The influence of Plato's work, Pythagoreanism and Stoicism are especially evident in him (cf. Seland, 2014: 7). Wolfson, for example, lists twenty-three philosophers whom he finds cited in his works (cf. Wolfson, 1962: 93). Even in modern introductions to Philo's work, there is still ambiguity regarding the definition of Philo as a philosopher or exegete. For example, Torrey Seland, after stating that he was an important Hellenistic Jewish philosopher in the same introduction, further states that Philo was first and foremost an exegete, not a philosopher:

“Philo himself, however, should be considered as an eclectic thinker; he drew upon what he considered to be the best from several traditions and incorporated that into his thought. Hence he was deeply influenced by Platonism, Stoicism, Aristotle, the Peripatetics, Neopythagoreans, and other influential philosophers. However, as an expositor of the Jewish Scriptures Philo was primarily an exegete and not a philosopher” (Seland, 2014: 13).

- The general opinion in contemporary research is that Philo is first and foremost an exegete, not a philosopher.
- The bipolar paradigm in Philo’s definition is largely artificial
- Philo interprets not only The Bible, but also Hellenistic philosophy.
- The most accurate definition of Philo would be a hermeneut.

Gregory Sterling concludes that today there is a consensus on that “Philo was first and foremost exegete of Moses’ writings” (Sterling, 2014: 131). The first statement in the above quote, in itself, has a long tradition of Philo, and that is his definition of an eclectic thinker. Here immediately the question arises what sense was used in this concept and how it is perceived (Dillon & Long, 1988). Because, like many other Hellenistic and early Roman thinkers, Philo was eclectic in his use of philosophy (Sterling, 2014: 137). In the past, many critics have questioned the nature of his thought and its originality. The very nature of Philo’s approach and the methodology of theoretical development has prompted many scholars in the past to view his work as eclectic, in the sense of devoid of unity and consistency, a mixture of different ones devoid of logical connection (cf. Calabi, 2013: 14). But as Francesca Calabi concludes, “these are readings that do not realize the nature of Philo’s work, the complexity of his work, readings that are born of a mistake of perspective, overcome today after the fundamental work of Valentin Nikiprowetzky” (Calabi, 2013: 14). Sterling supports this already established *opinio communis* for the definition of Philo primarily as an exegete, adding to the name of Nikiprowetzky and that of Peder Borgen as those authors who are the two main authorities for affirming the above opinion (Sterling, 2014: 130, ref. 10; Nikiprowetzky, 1977; Borgen, 1997).

The change of perspective on Philo initiated by Nikiprowetzky means that his consistency (coherence) seems to be related to the line of commentary, to the exegetical study that makes up his skeleton. According to him, there is an exegetical compulsion in the Philo discourse, an obligation to continue to reconsider the passages in question, to reconsider the interpretation, to prepare new forms of explanation (cf. Calabi 2013: 15; Nikiprowetzky 1977: 239). In short, the unity or integrity of Philo’s work refers to the reference text (ie, biblical) rather than to his commentary (and its philosophical content, respectively) (cf. Calabi, 2013: 15; Radice, 1984; Runia, 1990: 126-9). From these considerations, the reader might imperceptibly impose a bipolarity of perspectives, ie. philosophical and exegetical, which, respectively, has already been overcome in favor of the latter. The latter conclusion, in turn, also raises serious questions, as this integrity in terms of the reference text could hardly be applied to all of Philo’s treatises. Something that can be found even on a superficial review of their content, as well as modern critical research on them. That is, this perspective in search of exegetical integrity and systematicity should also be called into question, like the other, which seeks philosophical integrity and systematicity.

In the present study, Philo’s integrity and systematicity will be assumed in neither of the two basic perspectives set out above, but in his approach to both the biblical text and philosophical commentary. This approach is fundamentally hermeneutic, as is the corresponding perspective offered here, which goes beyond the narrowly exegetical or narrowly philosophical ones. Sterling rightly states that Philo is not a philosopher in the same way as Philodemus in the Epicurean tradition, Eudoros in the Platonic tradition, or Seneca and Epictetus in the Stoic tradition (Sterling, 2014: 130-131). But with the definition of Philo as an exegete above all else, the

question could naturally arise as to why Porphyry and Proclus should not be defined in the same way, for example, in relation to Homer. Of course, in this case the problem of the nature of allegorical interpretation in general, and of Philo in particular, will be central.

In the context of this article, it would be impossible to analyze satisfactorily the conclusions of V. Nikiprovetsky and his followers, related to the definition of Philo as primarily “exegete”. This, as seen above, is the prevailing “general opinion” currently in the field of Philo’s research. Also, in contrast to the above, it would hardly be particularly useful to return to Wolfson’s well-known thesis about the role of Philo in the history of philosophy, which characterizes the whole philosophy of the three monotheistic religions from Philo to Spinoza as “Philo’s philosophy” (Wolfson, 1962, especially chapter 14, pp. 439-460). Or to cite, for example, the not-so-famous opinion of the most famous Russian philosopher of the late 19th century, Vladimir Solovyov, who considers Philo to be “the last and most significant thinker of the ancient world” (Соловьев, 1988: 271).

In the context of the history of ancient philosophy, it was considered appropriate to pay attention to the opinion of the authors of two fundamental courses in the history of ancient philosophy – that of Giovanni Reale in Italian and A. F. Losev in Russian. On the one hand, these are courses that are not written in the leading Western languages, and on the other hand, they pay considerable attention to Philo, even as a volume of pages they have no equivalent, as far as we know.

#### 1.1 *A correspondence dialogue with Giovanni Reale*

Hardly anyone can now disagree with Giovanni Reale’s words that the allegorical commentary on the Bible that Philo left us is “a masterpiece of Judeo-Alexandrian culture that has emerged as one of the inevitable starting points for understanding history of Western philosophical-theological thought” (Reale, 2011: XIV). But also in every approach to Philo of Alexandria it is not superfluous to keep in mind the words of the same author: “The monographs that I read presented me with so many different interpretations of our thinker that sometimes had the impression you are faced with a completely different philosophers” (Reale, 2011: IX). Naturally, as a result of the above finding, the question arises - how is such a thing possible? The initial answers that would come to the mind of the bystander would probably be in two directions. First, it is possible that scholars who approached Philo’s study looked at it only closely through their perspective (be it of ancient philosophy, of Judaic studies, of New Testament or patristic ones). Second, it is likely that Philo’s work itself is so broad-spectrum that it allows for such different (and sometimes opposite) assessments.

In this case, there is a need not only for the obvious use as a starting point of Giovanni Reale’s opinion, but also for a dialogue in absentia with him on some of his preconditions and definitions in the approach to Philo. Since, in any case, Reale is the author of a course on the history of ancient philosophy (*Storia della filosofia antica*), which has already become a classic, in which Philo devotes the most space – 60 pages (Reale, 1987: 247-308). It deserves to be brought fully some of Reale’s reasoning taken from his presentation of Philo in *Tutti i trattati del commentario allegorico alla Bibbia*<sup>1</sup>, as they seem good starting point in the approach to this author.

“The true propulsor and dynamic force of Philo is his “faith” in God. And this faith (whose ultimate message he finds in the Bible, in the spirit that inspires it and which inspires those who read it by believing in it) is presented with that allegorical method, which both among the

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<sup>1</sup> Filone di Alessandria (2005, 2011), *Tutti i trattati del commentario allegorico alla Bibbia* a cura di Radice, R., Bompiani – the bilingual edition gathered in one volume all allegorical treatises of Philo.

Greeks and the Hebrews, had already had authentic consecrations, but which the Alexandrian takes to its extreme consequences, making it the real method of his philosophizing-in-faith” (Reale, 2011: XIII).

I will allow myself a few brief critical remarks on the first introductory sentence of the passage. Since, on the other hand, a comprehensive argumentation on this issue would take us too far both in scope and volume – for example, it would border as tasks with a “Old Testament theology” or “history of the Jewish religion” to the time of Philo (and up to New Testament times at the same time). In his first sentence, it is no coincidence that Reale puts the term “faith” in quotation marks. Thus, it could be assumed that the use of this concept is conditional, but nevertheless it can be considered that the use of “faith” and “faith in God” in this context in relation to Philo subtly transfers to him some of the following preconditions of this same “Western philosophical-theological thought”. Here the reservations regarding this definition are related to the fact that the connotations and understanding of “faith” and “faith in God” in the subsequent Western philosophical-theological thought could be quite different from the Old Testament-biblical proper and from the Hellenistic Alexandrian Judaism. And the above to some extent make the use of the given definition somewhat anachronistic and inapplicable to Philo.

The next critical reflection is on the clarification in brackets, which provides Reale about “this faith”: “whose ultimate message he finds in the Bible, in the spirit that inspires it and which inspires those who read it by believing in it”. This seemingly familiar explanation for the reader who grew up in the Western tradition could easily be overlooked again without any attention. But the real problem could be less insignificant, especially here when it comes to Philo, as it could predetermine a certain understanding of him. The claim that Philo finds the “ultimate message” of his “faith” in the Bible could be misleading enough. For example, from here Philo could easily be reduced to a simple exeget, in the usual sense of the word. The second part of the clarification “in the spirit that inspires it and which inspires those who read it by believing in it” is also sufficiently abstract and hardly the most appropriate with regard to Philo. It would be much simpler to say, for example, “In the God of the Bible” than in a scripture inspired by a spirit that inspires those who read it when they believe in it. Let’s not forget that this is the “ultimate message”.

“Finally, above all, wrong those who does not realize that Philo’s philosophical Novum is in a one hermeneutic circle that anticipates (without saying it in those terms, but in essence) the principle that believing leads to understanding, and understanding converges with the belief. And, with this in mind from this point of view, all the alleged contradictions of Philo, the uncertainties, the insecurities, and so below so on, come to take on a completely different configuration...” (Reale, 2011: XIII).

Of these words Reale can therefore be concluded that Philo’s *Il Novum filosofico* is that he is neither simply an “exeget” nor simply a “philosopher”, but he is a “hermeneut” in the proper sense of the word. And here we return again to a statement from the quoted passage of Reale: “il principio che il credere porta al capire, e il capire converge con il credere”<sup>2</sup> (Reale, 2011: XIII). The thought that comes to mind here is that in relation to Philo it would be more accurate to say that it is not the opposition and merging of belief and understanding, but of one kind of understanding with another kind of understanding. That is, it could then be paraphrased that “one kind of understanding brings another kind of understanding, and both kinds of understanding coincide”. Here again, the aim is to consciously avoid *credere* similar to *fede*, based on the same premises.

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<sup>2</sup> Eng.: “the principle that believing leads to understanding, and understanding converges with the belief.”

### 2.1 A summary of Losev's opinion

A.F. Losev considers Philo (along with the Neo-Pythagoreans) in the plane of the universalist quests of the late Hellenistic period, which began in the period of early Hellenism. He defines the concepts of both Philo and the Neo-Pythagoreans as “too colorful and very difficult to expose” (Лосев, 2000: 7). Philo’s “aesthetics” is characterized as “a huge phenomenon that also leads ancient aesthetics to the final universalism” (p. 8). Naturally, both in this case and later in Losev’s work, the term “aesthetics” can easily be replaced by “philosophy”. Philo, according to Losev, struck Greek thought mostly with his “monotheism” (Лосев, 2000: 8, 103). The latter statement is expressed differently by C. Levy: “And yet, in an almost imperceptible manner, and in any case not perceived by the philosophers of that time, an event of extraordinary significance had just taken place within philosophy. Thanks to Philo /.../ the unique and transcendent God was henceforth installed at the center of philosophical reflection” (Levy, 1998: 8-9).

Thus, “the difficult-to-calculate multitude of Philo’s followers for the first time were confronted with the doctrine of absolute unity with all its systematic conclusions, including universal allegory and symbolism” (Лосев, 2000: 8). Next follows the noteworthy conclusion that it is this method of universal allegory and symbolism, which Philo persistently pursues on every page of his many works, “poses to Greek aesthetics a new and unprecedented task, in comparison with which the numerous and very profound doctrines of Plato and Aristotle proved to be only a hint of a developed antique aesthetics” (*Ibid.*). These words of the most famous Russian historian of philosophy give a serious reason for reflection.

Losev devotes to Philo about sixty pages in volume 6 of his History of Ancient Aesthetics, devoted to late Hellenism. In his introductory sentence he defines Philo as “a famous name whose philosophical, religious and cultural significance goes far beyond the boundaries not only of ancient aesthetics, but of antiquity in general” (Лосев, 2000: 102). Losev defines the philosophy that Philo uses in his interpretations of the Bible as “Stoic Platonism”. As for him, it is precisely “the system of Stoic Platonism” that appears to be the closest and most understandable to Philo (Лосев, 2000: 103).

Regarding the above doubt that the designation of Philo in modern research as primarily “exegete” is insufficient, and here the main problem we face concerns the nature of allegory in general and Philo in particular, can be given several important references to Losev. Thus, for him, Philo “appears to be the deepest and most principled allegorist only because all his activity is locked in the philosophical-aesthetic interpretation of the Bible” (Лосев, 2000: 133). Here it is particularly important to emphasize this “philosophical-aesthetic interpretation” and not just an “interpretation” to which the definition of “exegete” would correspond directly. On this basis, the definition of “hermeneut” is insisted on in the present case. Because otherwise there is a danger of skipping the complexity that distinguishes allegory in Philo, as well as philosophical allegory in general (cf. Лосев, 2000: 135). And the superficial and purely external understanding of allegory in Philo (Лосев, 2000: 140), in turn, can lead to a certain simplification in the characterization of Philo and his work from a philosophical point of view. Since with Philo it may turn out that this is not just an “allegory” in the usual sense, but for what they would currently call “a symbol, an emblem, a metaphor, a type, an artistic image, and even a myth” (*Ibid.*). The allegorical method is closely related to Philo’s philosophical thought since “Philo is not looking in the sacred texts for proper philosophical theory. Most often, he directly expounds his theories, relying on them” (*Ibid.*). And further, Losev concludes: “In the Bible, he is looking for not this or that truth, but a description of the relationship of the soul to God, its sinlessness, its sinfulness and repentance. Philo’s allegorical method proves nothing and does not want to prove anything” (*Ibid.*). If a person trusted Losev in the above considerations, then obviously the definition of simply “exegete” in relation to Philo does not correspond, it appears insufficient.

### 3. Some remarks on “The genesis and nature of the Mosaic philosophy”

It is worth paying attention to some of the observations presented here. The authors believe that in the interpretation of the impact of the two cultures or the two worlds – Greek and Hebrew, which for the first time in the history of thought takes place in Philo – in this problematic field is the key to the interpretation of the whole Philo corpus and its evaluation in one historical and cultural perspective (Radice & Reale, 2011: XVII). Seemingly an indisputably true statement, but perhaps its historical and cultural preconditions are not entirely accurate. In Philo's time, one could hardly speak of a simple “Greek” world or “Greek” culture in Alexandria. This would mean belittling the historical period of Hellenism itself, as well as Hellenistic culture. It is clear that the classical “Greek” world is seriously different from the Hellenistic one – the capital of which can easily be called Alexandria. On the other hand, the Jewish world of Alexandria is also very different from that of Jerusalem. So, as for Philo and his work, all these habitual refrains for a clash or encounter between “Athens and Jerusalem” are largely artificial and historically false. It is as if to say that the emergence of such a phenomenon as the Septuagint was simply the result of the meeting of “Athens and Jerusalem” or Greek and Jewish culture, when it is a product of the culture of Hellenism, whose capital is Alexandria. Then it is clear that if you are looking at Philo “hermeneutic paradigm based on the synthesis of biblical-Jewish theology and Hellenistic philosophy” (Radice & Reale, 2011: XVIII), then it would be the result of this centennial already in his time synthesis process carried out in Alexandria. Incidentally, Reale himself speaks above of a “Judeo-Alexandrian culture” (see Subsection. 1.1.). Perhaps Real and Radice are right when they say that the limitations of the various interpretive approaches to Philo consists in perceiving his personality and creativity as the result of a simple fusion of two cultures on external connections, when in fact it is a question of a real and in its own sense synthesis (Radice, Reale, 2011, pp. XXXV). Then, then it is a question of one culture, and it could probably be added that the synthesis of these two cultures takes place in a specific place – Alexandria, and in turn represents a single culture and it is Hellenistic-Jewish.

The synthetic process carried out by Philo “coincides with Philo's allegoresis, which is both an exegetical method and a philosophical thought” (Radice & Reale, 2011: XXX). In Philo's research, the most important discipline would be the search for the key to reading the entire Philonian work (Radice & Reale, 2011: XXXIII). That is, it would be basically a hermeneutic discipline. As finally appears itself the Mosaic philosophy: “The real novelty of “the Mosaic philosophy”, which is ultimately the element for which Philo is credited with his place in the history of Western thought, is in fact the one that allows him to use Greek philosophy in an organic way to interpret the Bible, and vice versa, to use the same Bible to deepen and supplement Greek philosophy”, or to reach this synthetic paradigm discussed above (Radice & Reale, 2011: XXXVI).

It is worth paying extra attention to the problem of “faith”, which is again addressed here. According to the authors, “the Greeks were not faced with the problem of “faith” in the proper sense of the word and its all-consuming omnipresence, which it carries in its relationship with the pure logos”. Unlike Philo, “who was in fact the first to interpret the existing relationship between philosophy (reason and human word) and revelation (divine word) and therefore between philosophy and belief in divine revelation in the sense of “submission” from the first of the second, formulating this doctrine, which with the Fathers of the Church and the thinkers of scholasticism, was destined to become canonical, or the theory of “ancillary attitude” (Radice & Reale, 2011: XXXVI-XXXVII). The problem with the introduction of the concept of “faith”, which we touched on above, arises here again with the citation of specific texts by Philo. For example, the following statement is attributed by the two authors of Philo: “philosophy is subservient to the wisdom of faith”, followed by a quotation from Congr. 79:

“And indeed just as the school subjects contribute to the acquirement of philosophy, so does philosophy to the getting of wisdom. For philosophy is the practice or study of wisdom, and wisdom is the knowledge of things divine and human and their

causes. And therefore just as the culture of the schools is the bondservant of philosophy, *so must philosophy be the servant of wisdom*" (Philo, vol. IV: 497).

As Philo's text shows, it is a matter of wisdom, not "wisdom of faith." As here, the summary of the authors would hardly be of much use "And that the true "wisdom" in Philo is dependent on faith and ends, therefore, by coinciding with revelation, results from the whole context of his writings" (Radice & Reale, 2011: XXXVII). However, the authors also try to find quotes from Philo that literally mention faith. Here is the quote from LA III228:

"So then it is best to trust God and not our dim reasonings and insecure conjectures: "Abraham believed God and was held to be righteous" (Gen. xv. 6); and the precedence which Moses takes is testified to by the words he is "faithful in all My house" (Numb. xii. 7). But if we repose our trust in our own reasonings, we shall construct and build up the city of Mind that corrupts the truth : for "Sihon" means "corrupting". Accordingly the dreamer finds on rising up that all the movements and exertions of the foolish man are dreams void of reality. Yea Mind itself turned out to be a dream. And this is so, because to trust God is a true teaching, but to trust our vain reasonings is a lie" (Philo, vol. I: 457).

As can be seen, even from the English translation, this is hardly a question of "faith" in this sense, which is later affirmed in Western culture. Another example from Philo is given to confirm the presumed meaning of "faith" by both authors. This is Abr. 268:

"Faith in God, then, is the one sure and infallible good, consolation of life, fulfilment of bright hopes, dearth of ills, harvest of goods, inacquaintance with misery, acquaintance with piety, heritage of happiness, all-round betterment of the soul which is firmly stayed on Him Who is the cause of all things and can do all things yet only wills the best" (Philo, vol. VI: 131).

In the quotation quoted, the expression "Faith in God" hardly corresponds in the sense of the Greek text, which could be supported by a quotation from the following verse: "so that we may say with all truth that belief in the former things is disbelief in God, and disbelief in them belief in God. But not only do the oracles attest his possession of the queen of virtues, faith in the existent" (Philo, vol. VI: 131-132). Where fidelity is more likely to be meant than faith. Of course, this is not the place for a detailed exegesis of the passages quoted by Philo, but the connotations of God's faithfulness are much more likely than faith in God, which would ultimately be in harmony with the biblical covenantal meaning of "faith."

#### 4. Conclusion

The conclusion of Reale and Radice that "The applied method of Philonian philosophy ultimately coincides with allegoresis" (Radice & Reale, 2011: XLI) is especially important in this case, as it means that the allegorical interpretation coincides with his way of making philosophy, not just the method of exegesis. Hence, Philo can rightly be defined as a hermeneut. It may be supplemented by the fact that "His attitude towards Greek philosophy is dependent on his position as an exegete, and his attitude towards the Bible is to a large degree dependent on his philosophical beliefs" (Mansfeld, 1988: 75). Hence the difficulty of defining Philo simply as either a philosopher or an exegete, which the concept proposed above, "hermeneut", would allow, albeit perhaps with a greater focus on the first definition.

The problems that could arise from certain bipolar formulations in the approach to Philo are probably greater than the solutions they offer us, because to one degree or another they seem to be imported from outside. Of course, they are to a large extent interconnected, and are rather formulated in different ways. For example, the "synthetic paradigm" postulated by Reale and Radice in the introductory monograph *Genesis and Nature of the Philosophy of Moses*, which serves as an interpretive key in reading Philo, suggests two different worlds, two different cultures

– Greek and Jewish, which he synthesizes. Several questions could arise here. First, to what extent does this correspond to the truth historically, i.e. to what extent in Alexandria at the time of Philo we have an impact of two such artificially determined cultures, and there is not a single Hellenistic culture. Second, the extent to which Philo himself did not perceive his culture as a whole culture, in the context of these universalist aspirations characterizing the epoch. And third, to what extent Philo himself performs some supposed “synthesis” between two different cultures, rather than simply choosing the unity that already exists between them. In this context, G. Sterling’s remark that Philo:

“From his perspective he did not need to read Platonism and Stoicism into Moses, but out of Moses. Philo did not create a synthesis between two different systems of thought as much as he grasped the unity that existed between different systems. Moses made the definitive articulation of the understanding of reality, but others saw the same reality” (Sterling, 2009: 70).

With regard to another bipolar statement, the approach to Philo, which is formulated as “revelation and philosophy” or “faith and reason,” also raises a number of important questions. For example, the extent to which Philo perceives the biblical narrative as a revelation rather than his own personal relationship with the biblical personal God. Or how essentially Philo’s approach to Scripture differs from that of the Hellenic philosophers to their own myths. Of course, this is where the basic question of the nature of the allegorical interpretation and its relation to myth arises.

Finally, with regard to the main bipolar paradigm suggested by Philo’s researchers, i.e. whether he is above all a philosopher or, on the other hand, an exegete. As can be seen, the generally accepted opinion is currently considered to be the second, originating from Nikiprowetzky. In short, Nikiprowetzky’s thesis is that in Philo philosophy serves the purpose of exegesis (Levy, 1998: 7) or, if a well-known formula is used, “it is the handmaid of exegesis.” What Carlos Levy (*Ibid.*) said more than two decades ago is still valid today: “research on the philosophies of Hellenism, Middle Platonism, and Philo’s work, on the other hand, continues to raise the key question of Philo’s attitude to philosophy”, or in other words the place of Philo in the history of philosophy. Jaap Mansfeld has every right when he states in relation to Philo: “On the other hand, his use of Scripture is not as invariably decisive as a modern consensus would want us to believe” (Mansfeld, 1988: 87). The conclusion regarding Nikiprowetzky’s statement that “it is now more difficult to rediscover in the Philonian universe the harmony that will result from a hierarchical relationship between the two components of Judeo-Alexandrian culture” remains valid (Levy, 1998: 7).

It is clear that Philo himself considered himself primarily an interpreter, and in particular an interpreter of Moses’ thought. This does not differ from other representatives of the middle Platonism, who are also considered interpreters (Lisi, 2010: 5). Here it is important to emphasize the definition of “interpreter of Moses’ thought” and not just an exegete of the Pentateuch, for example. Philo can be defined as first and foremost a “hermeneut” because he has it at the same time “Philo’s philosophical interpretations of Scripture and of his scriptural interpretations of Greek philosophy” (Mansfeld, 1988: 70, 74). Moreover, the very “history of Greek philosophy itself can be understood as one of (re-) interpretation” (Mansfeld, 1988: 85). And, also “The study of Greek philosophy when viewed from this angle, is, ultimately, a study of pagan interpretive tradition which itself, in the last resort, is nothing but an interpretation of Scripture, either directly or at one or more removes” (Mansfeld, 1988: 85-86).



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