

Albert Joosse

## Philo's *De migratione Abrahami*: The Soul's Journey of Self-Knowledge as Criticism of Stoic *oikeiôsis*

### Summary

This paper considers Philo of Alexandria's interpretation of Abraham's journey from Chaldaea to Palestine, foregrounding Philo's use of the journey as a metaphor to criticize the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*. The journey is a metaphor that helps Philo to advance his views about self-knowledge as an alternative to this Stoic theory of moral progress. In this implicit polemic, Philo suggests that the Stoic theory guides us in the wrong direction, remains too immanentist, and posits an end state to a process that has no end.

Keywords: Philo; self-knowledge; Stoics; *oikeiôsis*; polemic

In diesem Aufsatz soll gezeigt werden, dass die Interpretation der Reise des Abraham von Chaldaea nach Palästina im Werk Philons von Alexandrien implizit eine Kritik der stoischen Oikeiôsislehre darstellt. Das Bild der Reise ermöglicht es Philon, seine Vorstellungen über Selbsterkenntnis als Alternative zur stoischen Theorie der ethischen Entwicklung zu formulieren. Durch seine implizite Auseinandersetzung legt Philon nahe, dass die stoische Theorie sich in eine falsche Richtung entwickelt hat; zu immanent bleibt; und einen Endzustand eines Prozesses annimmt, der kein Ende haben kann.

Keywords: Philon; Selbsterkenntnis; Stoiker; *oikeiôsis*; Polemik

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The metaphor of a journey can play many different philosophical roles including, as this paper aims to show, that of criticism. In his treatise *De migratione Abrahami*, Philo of Alexandria interprets the biblical account of Abraham's journey from Chaldaea to Palestine as an allegorical description of the soul's development from attachment to the body and the sensible world, to a grasp of the transcendent deity.<sup>1</sup> An important aspect of Philo's interpretation is that he sees the soul's development as a process of getting to know oneself. This is remarkable considering that *Genesis* 12.1–6, the text of which Philo's treatise offers an exegesis, does not speak of self-knowledge. Why then does Philo choose to talk about self-knowledge in this context? First, because he thinks self-knowledge is an important part of what a soul must acquire to improve itself. Second, and this is what I hope to establish in this paper, the image of the journey, as described in this *Genesis* passage, offers Philo a useful vehicle to present his Platonizing ideas about self-knowledge as a criticism of the Stoic theory of *oikeiōsis* ('familiarization').

While there is much in Stoicism with which Philo agrees, he decidedly rejects their materialism, pantheism, and the positive view of nature in their ethics.<sup>2</sup> This rejection also shows in Philo's criticism of *oikeiōsis*, which is the theory the Stoics offer to account for moral development. Interestingly, Philo never makes his engagement with this theory explicit.<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of the journey is used as a useful vehicle for Philo to develop this criticism because it allows him to show, without having to say it explicitly, that the theory of *oikeiōsis* has been developed in the wrong direction, that true growth needs to surpass the boundaries that *oikeiōsis* sets us, and that self-knowledge is never achieved, only striven for.

1 Philo's concern is primarily exegetical: he believes that Scripture contains the highest wisdom and philosophical truth and tries to bring this out as much as he can. In his case, this has the remarkable implication that interpretations of different passages need not necessarily be philosophically consistent with one another. Moreover, events or people mentioned in the Bible do not necessarily receive the same interpretation in different treatises. For this reason, one ought to be very careful in explaining one Philonic text by means of another. In this paper I have, therefore, kept references to other works of Philo to a minimum, including references to texts that are close to *De migratione (Migr.)*, such as *De Abrahamo (Abr.)* 62–80 and *De somniis (Somn.)* 1.41–67: there are many parallels between these texts, but since Philo's concern in the other two texts is a different one, such parallels function within a different interpretative whole. (My references to Philo's works follow the standard abbreviations of

the *Studia Philonica Annual.*) On the issue of Philo's 'contrainte exégétique' and the relative nature of his thought (relative to a particular text of Scripture), see the emphatic position of Nikiprowetzky 1977, esp. 236–242. – Related to the theme of the journey is that of flight and exile, on which see Runia 2009.

2 See Hadas-Lebel 2003, 271–274, for a brief overview of Philo's attitude towards Stoicism (which emphasizes the continuities between Philo and the Stoics). For an inventory of passages in which Philo uses Platonic and Stoic ideas on the soul see Reydam-Schils 2008. For a corrective of the common view that Philo adheres to Stoicism on the issue of the passions see Lévy 2009, 156–161. Long 2008 urges caution about using Philo as evidence for Stoic views on physics.

3 He does not do so anywhere in his writings: see the important study of Lévy 1998 as well as Lévy 2009, 146–148.

In what follows, I will first briefly introduce three stages of self-knowledge that Philo distinguishes. I will review the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis* in section two, and provide evidence that Philo engages with this theory in section three. Sections four, five, and six discuss the three stages of self-knowledge in more detail in order to tease out the substance of Philo's criticism of the Stoics.

## I Philo's three stages of self-knowledge

From the various statements that Philo makes about self-knowledge in *De migratione*, it is possible, with some simplification, to distinguish three stages: ignorance, study of the senses, and the move towards knowledge of god.<sup>4</sup> There are some passages that complicate the picture, which I will discuss later. The first stage is that of the natural philosophers, which Philo associates with the Chaldaeans. It is a state of complete ignorance of oneself combined with the illusion that one has knowledge about the universe and about phenomena contained within it. The call to self-knowledge is meant to pull people away from this state and into the next stage of self-knowledge. The second stage of self-knowledge is the study of the body and the senses, which should lead to a discovery of the worth of the intellect. Philo locates it in Haran, the place where Abraham (and his father Terah) lived for a while. It is associated with the realisation that one lacks knowledge about many things, and that one would do best first to get to know oneself. In the final stage, self-knowledge is tied up with knowledge of god. It remains unclear, here as elsewhere in Philo, to what extent one can really have knowledge of god.<sup>5</sup> This third stage really consists in a transition from the previous form of self-knowledge. Philo mentions the idea that self-knowledge allows us to know god as the cause of everything, an ability that arises by analogy from our acquaintance with our intellect, which is the cause with respect to the rest of our soul and body. At other moments, Philo retracts such epistemic confidence.

4 These are based on the treatise as a whole, as discussed in this paper, but particularly the three stages Philo himself distinguishes in 194–195. Nazzaro 1969 proposed an alternative triad: self-knowledge as (i) an antidote to presumption, (ii) an awareness of human insignificance, and (iii) a route to knowing god. I choose to deviate from this in particular because it contains significant overlap between its second and third stages (and between all stages in Nazzaro's discussion). Cf. also Courcelle 1974, whose brief but sagacious treatment signals

key themes in Philo's corpus as a whole (39–43).

5 On this matter see among other publications Früchtel 1968, 147–163; and Runia 2002, especially 299–303, where he offers an analysis of *Spec.* 1.32–50 and *Praem.* 36–46. Mackie 2009 offers a careful account of Philo's statements about the possibility of seeing god, drawing out both the variance among the ideas found and the factors that may affect their presence (audience, focus of the exegesis, and spiritual advancement of the 'seer').

As we will explore below, Philo presents his thoughts on self-knowledge as part of an alternative view of moral development to the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*. However, the three stages of self-knowledge also relate to Plato's philosophical writings. In ways which I will discuss in sections four and five, Philo integrates disparate elements that he finds in the Platonic corpus, especially in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Alcibiades I*. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates famously comments that he cannot evaluate the truth of exegeses of the Boreas myth in naturalistic terms because he has not yet come to know himself. This move of epistemic modesty is clearly echoed in Philo's first stage. In the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates claims that self-knowledge is knowledge of oneself as a soul. He also, somewhat later, claims that one can know oneself most of all after having come to know everything divine. These comments are related to Philo's second and third stages. Philo's use of these Platonic texts makes clear that he conceives of his criticism of the Stoics as a Platonic criticism. Moreover, they also serve a more specific polemical purpose: like the Platonists, the Stoics also looked to Socrates as a moral example, and the *Phaedrus* and *Alcibiades I* are exactly the kind of texts that provided them with an understanding of Socrates.<sup>6</sup> Before we explore Philo's thoughts on self-knowledge and their Platonic background further, however, let us remind ourselves of the broad outlines of the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis* and the way it extends into the Stoic view of our place in the cosmos.

## 2 Stoic *oikeiôsis* and cosmo-theology

The classic account of *oikeiôsis* is given in Diogenes Laertius. The amount of references to Stoic texts that Diogenes provides inspires confidence that his account presents a more reliably Stoic version of the theory than some other accounts.<sup>7</sup>

They [the Stoics] say that an animal has self-preservation as the object of its first impulse, since nature from the beginning appropriates it (*oikeiousês*), as Chrysippus says in his *On ends* book 1. The first thing appropriate (*prôton oikeion*) to every animal, he says, is its own constitution and the consciousness of this. ... This is why the animal rejects what is harmful and accepts what is appropriate (*oikeion*). ...

And since reason, by way of a more perfect management [than in the case of animal impulse], has been bestowed on rational beings, to live correctly in accordance with reason comes to be natural for them. ... Therefore Zeno ... was

6 On Stoic use of the *Phdr.* as a Socratic text see Brouwer 2014. For the *Alcibiades I* compare Cic., *Tusc.* 1.52; Epict. *Diss.* 3.1.

7 Notably that of Cicero's character Cato in *Fini.* 3.16–

25, which could be orthodox but may well contain Peripatetic thought too: see Schmitz 2014 for an argument to that effect.

the first to say that living in agreement with nature is the end, which is living in accordance with virtue. ... Further, living in accordance with virtue is equivalent to living in accordance with experience of what happens by nature, as Chrysippus says[.]<sup>8</sup>

The key factors in this account are: a) nature; b) the process of 'familiarization', *oikeiôô*; c) constitution; and d) reason. Let us briefly review the theory by looking at each of these.

(a) The theory operates within a framework of naturalism. Nature takes care of its creatures by giving them the impulse to preserve themselves, and as such, the affective motivation to pursue that which helps them prosper and avoid that which threatens their existence. The Stoics provide an argument for this conclusion that means to show the absurdity of two alternative possibilities: that nature would alienate creatures from themselves or that it would leave them indifferent to themselves. The only way for nature's creative action not to be in vain, according to this argument, is if nature also subsequently gives its creatures the impulse to persist, and this happens when creatures identify with themselves.<sup>9</sup>

(b) What nature does is to familiarize (*oikeiôô*) a creature with things in its environment. The verb *oikeiôô* unites different meanings that all play a role in this theory (and I have used several in the last paragraph).<sup>10</sup> *Oikeios* can mean 'one's own', and it is this sense of identification (and of possession in a derivative way) that plays a major role in the initial stages of *oikeiôsis* described by Diogenes above, as well as in the ultimate stages of identifying with the rationality of nature and other rational agents. A related but different sense is 'intimate,' an affective sense that is prominent when Stoics talk about the care taken in choosing what promotes one's life and repelling that which harms it. Common too is the sense 'akin,' to which the description of the social component of *oikeiôsis* makes an appeal: we can imagine other human beings as located in ever wider concentric circles, centred around ourselves, which we are able to draw in, so that those in distant circles come to seem like close kin.<sup>11</sup> In this way, we come to assume a moral stance in which we treat other people's interests as our own, or in any case as equal in importance to our own.<sup>12</sup> All these meanings, hard to reproduce in any

8 Diog. Laert. 7.85–87; tr. Long and Sedley 1987.

9 On this argument see Inwood 2016. Philo himself expresses similar ideas in other works, when speaking about divine providence: see *Opif.* 1c; *Praem.* 42; *Spec. leg.* 3.189; *Prov.* 1.26.

10 On the word and the Stoics' use of it see especially Kerferd 1972; Görgemanns 1983, 181–187.

11 The core text here is from Hierocles, preserved in Stobaeus 4.671.7–673.11 (text 57G in the collection of Long and Sedley 1987). For discussion see

Inwood 1984; Konstan 2016.

12 Opinions differ on whether this stance should be described as one of impartiality (e.g. Annas 1993, 159–179, 262–276) or as identification (e.g. Algra 2003). The more 'social' aspect of *oikeiôsis* has sometimes been regarded as different from the initial, personal *oikeiôsis*. See Annas 1993, 265; Inwood 1983; cf. Inwood 1985, esp. 184–194; Inwood 1999. See also Engberg-Pedersen 1986. Lee 2002 and Algra 2003 persuasively argue for the unity of the theory.

particular modern translation, should be kept in mind when we interpret ancient texts about *oikeiōsis*.

(c) It is worth noting that when they describe the object to which one is familiarized, the Stoics do not simply speak of self-love, but of animals' identification or affinity with their *constitution*. It is the structure of one's being. Hence the emphasis we encounter in many Stoic accounts on the different kinds of beings that exist. In the account in Diogenes Laertius, we get a description divided into plants, animals, and reason (I have included only the latter in the citation above). Animals are distinguished from plants because they have impulses, which are necessary for them to reach for and move towards food that does not come to them of its own accord. This impulse is the leading aspect of their soul and, therefore, an important element in the constitution to which an animal feels *oikeios* (a plant has no *oikeiōsis* to impulse). Since this impulse to be *oikeios* with something (and act on it) comes from nature, it is the natural thing to do for an animal to live by its impulse. (In other texts the description is extended to particular *kinds* of animals, with their typical impulses towards and away from e.g. specific other animals like predators or prey.)<sup>13</sup> Human beings also start out in this way (children in fact have a constitution that is very comparable to that of animals).<sup>14</sup> As reason develops, however, human beings start to notice rational patterns: in the actions they naturally perform and in the workings of nature. When moral development is not stilted, a human being comes to act from a different motivation than before; it acts, not because it has particular impulses to do and avoid certain sets of things, but because acting on such natural impulses is the reasonable thing to do. They come, in other words, to understand themselves as rational beings. For them, reason has become paramount in their constitution, and it is to reason above all that they sense themselves to be *oikeios*. Living rationally, therefore, becomes the natural life for human beings.

(d) In one sense, then, the reasonable life for human beings is a life lived in accordance with the reason (*logos*) that they sense themselves to have or be. The Stoic theory is not, however, a subjectivist theory in which virtuous agents follow the decrees of their own particular reason. The human faculty of reason is essentially the same as the reason that pervades the universe.<sup>15</sup> A virtuous life can, therefore, also be described as a life lived in accordance with the commands of Zeus, the name the Stoics use to refer to cosmic rationality. Indeed, it is a major component of a rational being's understanding of its own constitution that it understands itself as of a piece with God. The fundamental

13 Particularly in Hierocles, *Elements of Ethics* II.19–III.54 (Bastianini and Long 1992); Sen. *Ep.* 121 (on this letter see Bees 2004, 16–45).

14 The focus on children in this kind of argument (there are comparable ones in the Epicurean tradition) has earned them the name 'cradle argument,'

coined in Brunschwig 1986.

15 For the debate about subjectivist readings of *oikeiōsis* (usually taking their bearings from Cicero's account in *Fin.* 3) cf. among others Engberg-Pedersen 1986; Lee 2002.

importance of this cosmic sense of reason also comes to the fore in the last sentence of the citation above, where Chrysippus fine-tunes Zeno's slogan that the best life is a life lived according to nature: it is specifically a life lived in accordance with the experience of what happens naturally. For Chrysippus, then, the rational life is a natural life in two senses: it is natural because nature produced the mechanism by which a human being comes to identify with their rational constitution and because living rationally involves an actual understanding of (and compliance with) the ways and means of the nature of the whole.

It turns out, then, that the theory of *oikeiōsis* flows smoothly into a cosmo-theology.<sup>16</sup> Stoic perfection consists fundamentally in regarding rationality, as expressed in the cosmos and in other rational beings, as one's own. At the same time, the Stoic sage is also very much situated in a particular environment, for which she takes responsibility. As studies in the last decades have shown, rationality requires social involvement and proper care for the body.<sup>17</sup> When the Roman Stoic Seneca addresses this theory in his letter 121, he even speaks of different constitutions that he says belong to different phases of a human life. These two perspectives – one socially embedded, the other cosmic-rational – may lead to theoretical tensions, but they are both central to Stoic ethics.

When we turn to Philo, it is worth stressing two aspects of the Stoic theory. First, there is a great deal of continuity here with the thinking of other ancient schools, particularly the Peripatetics and the Platonists. The differences should not be exaggerated, even if ancient polemic might suggest this. Second, the Stoic theory posits a fundamental continuity between nature and perfection. In terms of the metaphor of *oikeiōsis*, Stoic moral development is at bottom a process of coming to be (and feel) at home in the world; this is very different for Philo.

### 3 Philo targets *oikeiōsis*

Philo does not speak explicitly of '*oikeiōsis*.'<sup>18</sup> It is nevertheless plausible that he has this theory in view when we consider his use of related words: the root *oikos* (house) and the opposite term *allotriōsis* ('alienation'). Philo finds reason to speak of one's *oikos* in

16 See especially Lee 2002 for the profound connections between *oikeiōsis* and Stoic cosmo-theology.

17 See especially Reydams-Schils 2005; Graver 2007.

18 With one exception in a different context: in 47, Philo speaks of the theoretical life being *oikeiōmenos* (appropriate) to a rational being. Elsewhere in Philo, the term *oikeiōsis* and derivatives oc-

cur occasionally. For a markedly polemical use of it (and of *allotriōsis*) see *Post.* 135; *Gig.* 28–29; *Conf.* 82. As Lévy 1998 shows, Philo uses the term to describe the kinship between the mind and the divine, rather than the Stoic process, in an attempt to play down the significance of the Stoic theory: cf. Radice 2008, 142–143; Bonazzi 2008, 246–250.

the text of *Genesis* 12.1 itself: “And the Lord said unto Abraham, Depart out of your land (*gê*), and out of your kindred (*sungeneia*), and out of your father’s house (*oikos*)” (*Migr.* 1)<sup>19</sup> Of course, the presence of the word ‘house’ in a text does not immediately make it a response to *oikeiôsis*; but Philo uses the word in a specific way. He uses *oikos* to mean embodied existence and the human constitution in general, the very condition to which the Stoics say human beings have *oikeiôsis*. Initially, it is true, Philo interprets land, kindred, and paternal home – the three things which the text says Abraham should leave – as the body, the sense, and speech, respectively (paragraphs 2–6).<sup>20</sup> In this initial division, leaving the *oikos* is interpreted as a separation from the traps of rhetoric and language (12).<sup>21</sup> I shall return to this initial use of the word below. Elsewhere in the text, however, Philo employs a broader understanding of *oikos*, in the description of what I have called the second stage of self-knowledge. One should study one’s own *oikos*, Philo says repeatedly when referring to this second stage. In 185, for instance, which is part of a speech that Moses is imagined to have addressed to the Chaldaeans, we read:

Explore yourselves only and your own nature, and make your abode (*oikêsantes*) with yourselves and not elsewhere: ... observing the conditions prevailing in your own individual household (*kata ton idion oikon*), the element that is master in it and that which is in subjection, the living and the lifeless element, the rational and the irrational, the immortal and the mortal, the better and the worse.

This conception of what counts as one’s *oikos* includes the whole of human nature; in terms of the threefold division from the beginning of the text, it includes the body and the senses. The body is termed the *oikos* of the soul in 93. In 187, sense perception is described as the *oikos* of thought (*dianoia*). In 189, the study of the various sense organs and their functioning is called the investigation of one’s individual *oikos*. In 195, Philo makes this identification with the three initial factors explicit, when speaking about the mind’s “study of the features of its own abode (*idios oikos*), those that concern the body, sense-perception and speech”

The things Philo mentions in these various descriptions are the very things about which one can have self-awareness according to the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*. They are what make up the human constitution. When he exhorts his readers and the Chaldaeans to study their own *oikos*, then, he calls on them to perform an exercise of self-study that his readers will have recognised as very similar to the initial stages of Stoic *oikeiôsis*.

19 Here, and throughout the paper, I use the translation of Colson and Whitaker 1932, slightly modernized and with occasional modifications.

20 Philo calls the third item *ho kata prophoran logos* (2,

12), using a Stoic term.

21 Philo emphasizes the secondary importance of language by describing it in Platonic terms as only an imitation of the nature of things (12).



What Philo propagates is not Stoic *oikeiōsis*, however. As I mentioned previously, it is conspicuous that he avoids the Stoics' own term of art, *oikeiōsis*, and any form of the verb *oikeiōō*. This already signals his polemical intent.<sup>22</sup> Nor is the description above in 185 completely compatible with Stoic self-study: the strong dualism in the passage and the reference to immortality establish a distance from Stoic views.

A second aspect of Philo's treatment of the word *oikos* that makes an engagement with Stoic *oikeiōsis* plausible is the fact that he connects embodied existence with one's home, as the Stoics would do, rather than with some kind of exile. The latter option was certainly open to Philo: he makes this exact move in other treatises,<sup>23</sup> echoing the thought in Plato's *Timaeus* that the mind is a heavenly, not an earthly plant (90a4–7). It is, therefore, a choice on Philo's part that in *De migratione* he describes existence in the body and on this earth as home.

This brings us to the other term that establishes a link between *De migratione* and Stoic *oikeiōsis* plausible: *allotriōsis*, the opposite of *oikeiōsis*. It comes at a prominent moment in the text, when Philo turns to the meaning of the word 'depart' (*apelthe*). He has identified the domains from which one should depart as the body, the senses, and speech. What does it mean to depart from them, however? Philo starts with a warning reminiscent of Plato's *Phaedo*: this is not a call to pursue a real separation, for such a separation 'in being' (*kata tēn ousian*) would mean death. It is rather a call to acquire a mental distance from them. The decisive word here is *allotriōthēti*:

The words 'Depart out of these' are not equivalent to 'Sever yourself from them absolutely,' since to issue such a command as that would be to prescribe death. No, the words import 'Make yourself a stranger to them in judgement and purpose' (*tēn gnōmēn allotriōthēti*).<sup>24</sup>

Philo's choice of words is precise; through them he reminds his readers of Stoic *oikeiōsis* and makes clear that his moral ideal diverges from the Stoics' moral ideal. He exhorts his readers to de-familiarize themselves from their human constitution.

Terminology that reminds us of *oikeiōsis* recurs a little further on, when Philo discusses what it means specifically to depart from the senses. The mind, he says, has become someone else's property (*allotriion agathon*) in its attachment to the senses and has cast off what is its own (*idion*) (10). It should stop letting itself be alienated (*allotriōsas*)

22 Cf. the remarks about the whole of Philo's oeuvre in Lévy 1998, 156.

23 Philo, in places, treats Abraham's journey itself as a kind of exile. See for instance *Her.* 82: ἀποδημίαν ἡγοῦμενον ὄλον τὸν μετὰ σώματος βίον, ὅποτε δὲ

δύναιτο τῆ ψυχῆ μόνῃ ζῆν, ἐν πατρίδι καταμένειν ὑπολαμβάνοντα; *Conf.* 82; *Somm.* 1.45. Philo cites the passage from *Tim.* in *Plant.* 17 (I am grateful to Albert-Kees Geljon for this reference.)

24 *Migr.* 7.

and finally enjoy its own goods (*ouk othneiôn all' oikeiôn agathôn*) (11). In another variation, Philo expresses the mental distance one should maintain from speech as living separately from it (*dioikizomenon*, 12). So we see that Philo avoids strict *oikeiôsis* terminology but uses words that are very similar to it, including its direct opposite. Moreover, Philo urges the mind to estrange itself from the common objects of Stoic *oikeiôsis*; the way to reclaim that which is its own is by withdrawing from bodily existence.

#### 4 The first station

Referencing Philo's vocabulary has already shown us something of his polemical treatment of *oikeiôsis*. In order to see how Philo's criticism plays out in more detail, let us consider the three phases of self-knowledge in turn. Philo starts his treatise by talking about a departure from the body, the senses, and speech. In terms of the journey of the rational soul (represented by Abraham), however, the beginning is to be found somewhere else, in an attitude that Philo associates with the Chaldaeans. A number of different qualifications come together in Philo's descriptions of the Chaldaeans. They are astrologers, students of the stars and people who "walk on" and "talk air"<sup>25</sup> who claim to know the causes of each and every natural phenomenon, who think that good and bad result from particular stellar constellations, who emphasize the unity and harmony of the cosmos, who regard fate as a divinity, and who identify the cosmos with god.<sup>26</sup>

The Chaldaeans of Philo's text are commonly associated with the Stoics.<sup>27</sup> A number of Stoic positions support this connection. First, we saw that the Stoics identify the cosmic order with god and regard heavenly bodies, such as the stars, as gods. Second, they regard fate as identical with this god. Third, they think that moral perfection consists in a type of knowledge; we saw that Diogenes Laertius reports Chrysippus as describing the moral end as "living in accordance with experience of the actual course

25 *Aitherobateite* (184), *aeromytheite* (138) – the latter is an extremely rare word: this is the only occurrence in the corpus of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, with only four cognate forms (one of which is *aeromythos* in Philo's *De sacr.* 32). Both words are reminiscent of the word *aerobateô* – the charge that Socrates cloudwalked was levelled at him in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (225, cf. 1503; cf. *Pl. Ap.* 19c4) and in 184 Philo speaks of the Chaldaeans floating in the air, clearly alluding to the *Clouds*. Philo redirects the accusation: he has a use for Socrates in his call for self-knowledge and sees the Stoics as the cloudwalkers / air talkers. (*Pace* Nazzaro 1969, 68 n. 75, who denies any link with Aristophanes for the reason

that Philo uses it "mai parodistico.") The variation *aeromytheite* is likely an allusion to *Phdr.* 229d–230a, cited below. Cf. *ti huper nephelas pèdâis?*; in *Somm.* 1.54 and *meteôroleschôn* in *Somm.* 1.54 and 1.161.

26 Philo describes the Chaldaeans in 136, 138, 178–179, 184, 187, 194. He also presents Abraham as formerly being a Chaldaean. For discussion of the Chaldaeans in other Philonic works see the references in Borgen 1997, 217; Wong 1992.

27 Though rarely identified with them. See among others the discussion in Beckaert 1961, 28 n. 1; Ruhnica 2002, 290 cautions against identification (cf. Sandelin 1991, 132–133).

of nature".<sup>28</sup> Fourth, as treatises like Seneca's *Naturales Quaestiones* demonstrate, the Stoics put this conviction into practice by engaging in considerable detail with the study of natural philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Not all characteristics Philo ascribes to the Chaldaeans, however, are apposite descriptions of the Stoics. While the Stoics allocated an important role to the mantic art, it would be a misrepresentation to say that they thought that good and bad follow from particular stellar constellations. The idea that the Chaldaeans are astrologers also seems to have more to do with traditional ideas about the Chaldaeans than any specific Stoic convictions. To some extent, then, Philo's Chaldaeans are a mixture. They are, nevertheless, a useful textual instrument for Philo to criticize the Stoics.

Philo uses Platonic/Socratic weapons to develop this criticism. He and his Moses call the Chaldaeans back, down from heaven, towards themselves. He considers them and their claim to know the causes of everything as epistemically arrogant. What they should first do, Philo urges, is to study themselves. This is a call to a Socratic condition. As he puts it in 134, once the Chaldaeans engage in a serious study of themselves, they will discover that they did not know what they thought they knew. Indeed, the highest a human being will ever reach is an awareness of ignorance (more on this below, in section 6). Not only the condition is Socratic, but so is the very move. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates is asked what he thinks of naturalistic explanations of myths; the myth in question is about Boreas' abduction of a nymph, which some might explain as the North Wind's blowing a girl off a rock. Socrates responds:

I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend, is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that. This is why I do not concern myself with them. I accept what is generally believed, and, as I was just saying, I look not into them but into my own self[.]<sup>30</sup>

Socrates' direct concern in this passage is with demythologizing explanations, as they were apparently propagated by some sophists. The scope of his remarks, however, is broader, and they were interpreted in broader terms in antiquity. Socrates' stance here signals a turning away from natural philosophy to the study of oneself.<sup>31</sup> Philo appropriates Socrates' exhortation and addresses it to the Chaldaeans, thereby presenting a

28 ζῆν κατ' ἐμπειρίαν τῶν φύσει συμβαινόντων, Diog. Lart. 7.87; also Stobaeus 2.76.8.

29 For Stoic engagement with astronomy and astrology see Jones 2003, esp. 331–342.

30 *Phdr.* (229e4–230a3); tr. Nehamas/Woodruff.

31 Behind this broader interpretation of *Phdr.* 229e4–

230a3, we may also detect the influence of the *Apology*'s contrast between Socrates' behavior and that of the natural philosophers (18a7–19d7) and the so-called autobiography of Socrates in *Phd.* 97b8–99b6, in which the search for natural causes is exchanged for the search for the *good* of processes.

Socratic criticism of Stoic science.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, however, the condition to which Philo recalls the Chaldaeans is a Stoic condition just as well as a Socratic one. As we saw above, the study of one's own abode is not just any part of Stoic *oikeiōsis*, but is its beginning. Philo, in other words, recalls the Stoics to their own starting point, effectively urging them to travel in the opposite direction from the direction their *oikeiōsis* has taken. For Philo, studying oneself is a middle stage and constitutes progress with respect to the arrogant theorizing about natural phenomena with which he associates the Stoics. The Stoics have mistaken the route, however, treating the middle stage as the beginning of development and its initial stages as its culmination. In this way, the metaphor of the journey helps Philo to criticize the Stoic theory as leading people astray, away from the correct direction of human development.

What is wrong then with the Stoic view? First, as mentioned earlier, Philo criticises their epistemic optimism about discovering the causes of natural processes. All he thinks they have are deceitful opinions. This emerges most clearly in 136, where he addresses the Chaldaeans, and, via them, his readers:

Come forward now, you who are laden with vanity and gross stupidity and vast pretence, you that are wise in your own conceit and not only declare (in every case) that you perfectly know what each object is, but go so far as to venture in your audacity to add the reasons for its being what it is[.]

In order to criticise the Stoics here, Philo can and does appeal to the whole spectrum of Socratic language in its criticisms of sophistic and other false claims to knowledge. To be fair, the Stoics did not claim that they were sages, as Philo was well aware. Nevertheless, their philosophy is premised on the strong possibility that the human mind can achieve perfect knowledge of nature.

Second, the Stoics identify the cosmic order itself as the divine. In a passage in which he explicitly identifies the difference between the Chaldaeans and Moses, Philo presents this deification of the cosmos as a result of the Chaldaeans' being impressed with the harmony of the cosmos (179):

[T]hey have exhibited the universe as a perfect concord or symphony produced by a sympathetic affinity between its parts, separated indeed in space, but house-mates in kinship (*sungeneiai de ou diōikismenôn*). These men imagined that this visible universe was the only thing in existence, either being itself God or con-

32 Philo's charge that the Chaldaeans talk (hot) air (*aeromyteite*, 138) is a pun on Socrates' rejection of the Boreas myth; see note 22.

taining God in itself as the soul of the whole. And they made Fate and Necessity divine[.]

In the notion of sympathy (*sumpatheia*) and that of fate and necessity (*heimarmenê, anagkê*), we recognise core Stoic notions. Philo goes on to note Moses' agreement with the thought that the cosmos is a sympathetic unity, as well as his disagreement with the idea that the cosmos is the primary god (*ho prôtos theos*, 181). The bonds of the universe are not identical to god, but are his powers (*dunameis*): god is transcendent and prior to everything that comes to be (183).

This fundamental disagreement about the nature of god goes beyond Philo's criticism of the theory of *oikeiôsis*, but also constitutes part of it. Stoic *oikeiôsis* ought to lead to a rational being's identification with the divine rational order, to its knowledge of the natural order and its self-perception as a part of this divine whole. In Philo's view, the end stage of *oikeiôsis* is both an instance of epistemic *hybris* and a fundamental misconception of the nature of god and, therefore, of the ultimate end of humanity.

The metaphor of the journey and its different stages allows Philo to present this disagreement as not just a matter of different views. As I suggested above, we are looking at a process of self-awareness gone wrong, which has set its practitioners back. What the Stoics consider progress is actually a regression. Much seems to depend, then, on the way in which Philo's middle stage plays out. What goes wrong when the Stoics conduct self-study? How does Abraham, Philo's rational soul, do better? We will now turn to these questions.

## 5 Haran: studying one's own home

Philo calls on the Stoics to leave behind natural philosophical speculation and to concentrate on the study of their own homes, just as Abraham lived in Haran after his departure from Chaldea. As we have seen, this is a recall to the beginnings of Stoic *oikeiôsis*, a recall aimed at a better grasp of what one is.

The difference between Philo's proposal and Stoic self-perception is not immediately evident, however. When we look closely at Philo's descriptions of his middle stage of self-knowledge, at first sight it seems that the Stoics can agree with much of what he says. Take, for instance, Philo's exhortation in 137:

[T]ake knowledge of yourselves, and say clearly who you are, in body, in soul, in sense-perception, in reason and speech, in each single one, even the most minute, of the subdivisions of your being. Declare what sight is and how you see, what hearing is and how you hear, what taste, touch, smelling are, and how

you act in accordance with each of them, or what are the springs and sources of these, from which is derived their very being.

The strong emphasis in this passage on the workings of the senses (which we also find, e.g., in 189) may differ from what the Stoics would emphasize in one's self-perception, but they would not disagree with it either. When Philo raises the question of the origin of the senses, the Stoics can consider that to be a reference to the *hégemonikon*, the leading part of the soul from which the other parts – the senses, the faculty of speech, and the power of reproduction – spring. At the beginning of *De migratione*, Philo himself seems to cite this doctrine, when he speaks of the intellect “sowing in each of the parts of the body the faculties that issue from itself” (3).<sup>33</sup> What Philo writes about studying the senses, then, is not problematic for a Stoic.

Similarly, there is agreement between the Stoics and Philo when the latter speaks of the need to get to know what is good and bad in one's own home. Studying one's own home in 195 involves “com[ing] to know, as the phrase of the poet puts it: ‘All that exists of good and of ill in the halls of your homestead’”.<sup>34</sup> There are differences between Philo's and the Stoics' views on goods. The Stoics recognise only moral perfection and actions in accordance with it as good, while Philo would consider other things to be good as well. But these differences are hardly at stake here. The implicit contrast in this passage, rather, is with what Philo has called the Chaldaeans' conviction that good and bad follow from stellar constellations. Here the Stoics can wholeheartedly agree: goodness and evil must be sought in oneself, in one's knowledge or ignorance. With respect to this ethical aspect of self-knowledge, then, the Stoics can also go along with Philo's prescriptions.

In fact, the difference between Philo's middle stage of self-knowledge and the self-perception of Stoic *oikeiôsis* does not lie in the content of what is studied but in the direction in which this study leads. For the Stoics, self-perception leads to an identification with human nature and action in accordance with one's constitution. In a philosophically mature agent, this becomes an identification with the order of the world. For Philo, however, self-study should lead us to overcome the limits of *oikeiôsis*: The process is all about distinguishing the higher from the lower elements in one's constitution, in order to identify with the higher elements and alienate oneself from the lower elements. The natural condition of a human being ought not to be embraced, but to be left behind.

33 The Stoics would say *hégemonikon* or *dianoia* rather than *nous*, but the view is very similar. Note also that with the exception of the generative part, all other Stoic soul parts (the senses and speech) are cited throughout this treatise as elements of one's own home, together with the body.

34 A reference to *Od.* 4.392, a very popular phrase among philosophical writers. (Philo also cites it in the similar context of *Somm.* 1.57.) This ethical aspect of self-knowledge is also emphatically present in *Migr.* 219 and in 189.

The alienating effect of self-study can be clearly observed when Philo mentions the ruling structures in the soul. As we saw in 185, Philo's Moses calls on the Chaldeans to come to know the master and the servant in themselves (and cf. 219). Now, the Stoics too could speak of command in the soul, as is clear from their use of the term *bēgemonikon* to refer to the highest aspect of the soul. Once more, therefore, it is not necessarily the content of what is studied that makes the difference (although Philo perhaps makes a stronger case than a Stoic would be comfortable with). It is rather what the study should lead to (this passage continues the text from paragraph 7 cited above):

[L]et none of them [the body, senses, and speech] cling to you; rise superior to them all; they are your subjects, never treat them as sovereign lords; you are a king, school yourself once and for all to rule, not to be ruled; evermore be coming to know yourself, ... for in this way will you perceive those to whom it befits you to show obedience and those to whom it befits you to give commands.<sup>35</sup>

Studying the senses and speech, and realising that they are by nature such as to be commanded rather than to be obeyed, here goes hand-in-hand with a separation from them. It is instructive to see that cognitive and political verbs are put in coordinate position in this passage: 'rise superior,' 'treat as subjects,' 'school yourself,' 'be coming to know,' and 'perceive.' The cognitive verbs at the end are not intended to refer to a prior state, subsequent to which you might undertake a mental withdrawal from what you have come to know as subservient. The idea seems rather to be that the process is mutually reinforcing, and that a progressively better knowledge of yourself results from rising above subservient elements.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the recognition of ruler and ruled involves identification with the one and alienation from the other. The verbs in this passage are not only coordinate with each other but also with the verb that occurred just before: 'alienate yourself? As you get to know yourself, then, you also come to identify with your ruling element and to estrange yourself from whatever it is in yourself that does not rule.'<sup>37</sup>

As in the first stage of self-knowledge, Philo can draw on Platonic texts for this second stage as well. He signals this in a different treatise (*Somn.* 1.58) by likening Socrates, as the person who sought to know himself, to Terah, the father of Abraham who died

35 *Migr.* 7–8.

36 This does not prevent Philo from presenting the two aspects as different phases in the journey elsewhere, for instance in 189: "when you have surveyed all your individual dwelling with absolute exactitude, and have acquired an insight into the true nature of each of its parts, bestir yourselves and seek for your

departure hence, for it is a call not to death but to immortality."

37 On the occurrence of *gnōthi sauton* in 8 and, particularly, the connection Philo makes between it and the phrase *proseche seautōi* which occurs in the Septuagint, see Nazzaro 1970.

in Haran.<sup>38</sup> Particularly important, here, is the *Alcibiades I*.<sup>39</sup> In this dialogue, Socrates develops an argument for identifying with your soul rather than with your body. This argument hinges on the issue of use and rulership. On the basis of analogies with craftsmen like carpenters, Socrates argues that a human being is whatever it is that uses, not only tools, but body parts like hands and indeed the whole body. It turns out that there is no better candidate for this identification than the soul: it uses and rules the body (*Alc. I* 129b5–130c4). As in Philo, this Platonic text posits a strong discontinuity between soul and body. It is Philo, however, who turns this into an anti-Stoic point and emphasizes the need for alienation as a psychological process.

It is worth staying with the *Alcibiades I* for a moment because it contains a possible model of reference for Philo's connection between the second and third of his stages of self-knowledge. The Socrates in this dialogue continues the philosophical search for self-knowledge by asking how the soul may come to know itself. This is only possible when it focuses on the wisdom in a soul (Socrates implies that one soul needs another in order to understand itself). Moreover, since this wisdom and the divine are alike, understanding oneself involves knowing the divine:

Can we mention anything about the soul which is more divine than that where knowing and understanding are? – No, we can't. – Then that region in it resembles god, and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine (*pan to theion*), god and understanding, would in this way have the best grasp of himself as well (*houtô kai heauton an gnoiê malista*).<sup>40</sup>

In the model described here, the wisdom present in a soul is similar to the divine. Its similarity both allows you to come to know the divine and seems to be presented as a reason why knowing the divine is necessary for knowing yourself. This last claim is *prima facie* puzzling. Why should it be necessary to know something similar to you in order to know yourself? We must note, however, that the question of self-knowledge in this dialogue is driven by the desire for self-improvement. The most plausible explanation,

38 For discussion see Nazzaro 1969, 85–86; cf. Lévy 1992, 145–146.

39 In addition to the thematic connections, note that *logos* figures in *Alc. I* 129b5–c6, one of the rare passages in the Platonic corpus that expressly distinguish the human being from the *logos* he uses. Among verbal appropriations notice particularly *Migr.* 195, where various elements from the *Alc. I* are used: μαθῶν ἀκριβῶς ἑαυτὸν εἴσεται τάχα που καὶ θεόν, οὐκέτι μένων ἐν Χαρράν, τοῖς αἰσθήσεως ὀργανοῖς, ἀλλ' εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπιστραφεῖς. Socrates speaks of knowing oneself *akribôs* in implied ref-

erence to 132c–133c in 130c9; the aorists mirror those of 133c4–6; the phrase *tacha pou eisetai* recalls *tach' an gnoimen/an tach' beuromen* in 129a8–b2 (all of these passages concern self-knowledge). The argument from *Alc. I* that the body is an instrument for the soul was widely referred to by means of the terminology of *organa*; its central teaching that one needs to care for and know the soul was interpreted as Socrates' turning Alcibiades, and, by extension, every one of us, towards himself (*epistrophê*, see Albinus, *Procl.* 5.15–17; *Procl. in Alc.*, *passim*).

40 *Alc. I* 133c1–6.



therefore, is that the divine is the perfect example upon which the soul models itself. An understanding of the divine will also give you an understanding of what you really are, even if this is not *yet* what you are.

How does this Platonic dialogue help us understand the connection between the second and third stages of self-knowledge in *De migratione*? We can appreciate that Philo does not take himself to be saying something new when he connects self-knowledge to knowledge of god. We should focus on *what* he says about this connection (and here I anticipate what we will find in the next section). Philo turns out to engage in some implicit polemic with the Platonic tradition as well. As we shall see, he turns around the order of knowledge suggested by Socrates. In the *Alcibiades I*, knowledge of god is necessary in order to know yourself. Philo suggests that knowledge of yourself is the basis from which to investigate god as well. The effect of this is that knowledge of god comes to seem more and more difficult to reach. Although the Platonic dialogue does seem tentative, to some extent, about this cognitive process (the wording “in this way ... the best”, in combination with the massive condition of having to know *all* of the divine in order to know oneself), Philo’s epistemic caution is much more evident. The difficulty of obtaining knowledge of god is increased by the difficulty of getting to know yourself. Philo agrees with the suggestion in the *Alcibiades I* that self-knowledge can never be completed. So much the more is it difficult to come to know god. It is time to see how these ideas are developed in Philo’s text itself.

## 6 Beyond *oikeiôsis*

The process of identification with whatever it is that rules in you can be extended, and Philo does extend it, beyond the boundaries of *oikeiôsis*. In this final section, we will consider how he does so. We will also consider two alternative outcomes that Philo seems to present for the process of self-study: analogy and ignorance. Once we consider the way in which Philo presents these outcomes and the tension that exists between them, we will see that his concern was not to describe a specific end point for the process of self-knowledge, but to present it as an ongoing process. The metaphor of the journey once more proves to be very apposite to what Philo wants to communicate.

Let us then consider the ways in which Philo extends the identification of oneself with the ruling element in oneself. There are three telling elements in the text. The first element is the way in which he continues after paragraphs 7–12. In these, as we saw, Philo describes alienation from the body, the senses, and speech. In terms of the stages of the journey, Abraham has already left or is leaving Haran, the place in which the soul studies its own home. Nevertheless, paragraph 13 opens as follows: “So we find that when the

mind (*nous*) begins to know itself (*arxêtai gnôrisein heauton*) and to hold converse with the things of the mind (*noêta*), it will thrust away from it that part of the soul which inclines to the province of sense-perception". We notice, again, the combination of getting to know oneself and alienating oneself from the lower elements. The most striking thing about this passage, however, and relevant to the point I am making, is that the mind here is said to *begin* to know itself. Getting to know oneself has only just begun when one has been studying the constitution of the body, the workings of the senses, and the powers of speech. Even when the mind has moved beyond that and started to occupy itself with intelligible objects of study, it is still said to be beginning to know itself.

A second, minor, textual element that points us to the incremental nature of self-knowledge is the use of the word *oikos*. We saw above that Philo uses this word to indicate the whole of the body, the senses, and speech in the contexts in which he speaks of the need to get to know 'your *oikos*,' but that he has a stricter use of the word *oikos* in the opening paragraphs of the treatise (*Migr.* 2–12). We have now seen that, in terms of the progress of Abraham's journey, the opening paragraphs are posterior to many of the passages that speak of the need to study one's own home. The latter are about the need to go to or to dwell in Haran, whereas the beginning paragraphs are about one's departure from Haran. Against this background, Philo's restriction of *oikos* to speech in 2–12 can be interpreted as the result of self-study. The mind has progressively refined its understanding of what counts as 'itself'; just so, the word 'home' is also applied increasingly articulately and strictly, no longer to refer indistinctly to the whole compound of body and soul, but to speech as the immediate setting of the mind.<sup>41</sup>

Thirdly, Philo's text also supports the interpretation of a continuous and progressive process of self-knowledge by explicitly stating that when you obtain knowledge that goes beyond knowledge of your human constitution, you are turning towards yourself and obtaining knowledge of yourself. This comes out most clearly in paragraph 195, when Philo recapitulates the three stages of self-knowledge. After he has introduced the second as, "the [mind's] consideration of itself"; he says that in the third stage the mind "withdraw[s] into itself".<sup>42</sup> Key to understanding statements like this one is the realisation that Philo does not mean to refer to a static entity when he speaks of knowing 'oneself'. The reference of 'oneself' changes according to how far the mind has advanced in the process. On all three counts, then, it seems that the language with which Philo speaks of self-knowledge supports the idea that it is a continuous process.

41 Philo signals this aspect of restriction and articulation by distinguishing *oikos* from *oikia* (3).

42 The aorist denotes temporal priority with respect to knowing god (which Colson's translation does not bring out clearly), but what is termed 'turning

towards oneself' here is different from the study of body, senses, and speech, from which I infer that it also takes place after the departure from Haran (in that sense Colson's translation is justified).

Regarding self-knowledge as a process may also help us with a radical tension in Philo's account between two outcomes of the study of oneself in Haran. There are passages in *De migratione* in which Philo sounds a very confident note about the results of self-study. In 185, for instance, he writes that once you have distinguished the different roles played by different elements in yourself – the master, the servant, that which has soul and that which doesn't, the rational and the irrational, and the immortal and the mortal – you will “gain forthwith (*euthus*) a sure knowledge (*epistême saphê*) of god and of his works”. This is because knowledge of yourself allows you to construct an analogy (186):

Your reason will show you (*logieisthe*) that, as there is a mind (*nous*) in you, so is there in the universe, and that as your mind has taken upon itself sovereign control of all that is in you, and brought every part into subjection to itself, so too He that is endued with lordship over all guides and controls the universe by the law and right of an absolute sway.

In other words, study of yourself will allow you to realise that the structure of the cosmos is similar to the structure of the human being; both have an intelligence that rules the rest. Moses, who here addresses the Chaldaean, seems to be extremely hopeful that this will deliver “sure knowledge of god”<sup>43</sup>

In other passages, however, Philo presents a very different picture of what results from self-study. Consider what he says in 134:

What, then, is the end (*telos*) of right-mindedness (*phronein orthôs*)? To pronounce on himself and all created being the verdict of folly (*aphrosunê*); for the final aim of knowledge (*peras epistêmês*) is to hold that we know nothing, he alone being wise, who is also alone God.

This passage clearly states that the limit of human knowledge is the awareness of one's ignorance.

Let me briefly digress to highlight the partially polemical aspect of this description of the *telos*.<sup>44</sup> Philo speaks about it in the course of his exegesis of *Gen. 12.4* – his treatment of *Gen. 12.1–3* has taken up paragraphs 1–126 of the treatise, 127–175 are devoted to *Gen. 12.4*. The *Genesis* account here starts speaking about Abraham's response rather than God's promises: “and Abraham journeyed as the Lord had told him” (*Migr.* 127).

43 As Wolfson 1948, 2.78–80, points out, the letter of this argument is congruent with Stoic arguments for the existence of god; the difference is in the distance between the ruler and the ruled (cf. 80–81).

44 Note that Philo does not seem interested in select-

ing only one formula as his *telos* throughout his works: many different descriptions can in fact be found. For this see Besnier 1999; Runia 1986, 474–475; Bonazzi 2008, 246–250; Dillon 2016, 116–119.

Philo first interprets this journeying in accordance with the Lord's command as similar to "the aim (*telos*) extolled by the best philosophers, to live agreeably to nature" (128). In this description we recognise the Stoic end of life. This reference to the Stoic *telos* prepares us for Philo's own description of the *telos*, which he introduces in 134 (the passage cited above). To see to what extent Philo's alternative description is polemical, let us notice two things.<sup>45</sup>

First, Philo makes clear that he can agree with the Stoic *telos* to some extent. He connects it to the slogan 'to follow god', which we know as a Pythagorean description of the *telos*, and of which Philo says that this is the *telos* according to Moses (131). His alternative is, therefore, not a straightforward rejection of the formula as such. However, and this is the second thing to notice, Philo rejects, as before, the epistemically overconfident attitude of the Stoics. Following god is not the acquisition of perfect knowledge about nature, but the realisation that in comparison with god, human beings are ignorant. Not incidentally the paragraph following 134 is one of the texts in which Philo calls the Chaldaeans down from their heavenly studies to the investigation of themselves.

Again, then, Philo calls the Chaldaeans back from natural philosophy using a Socratic formula – that the limit of knowledge is awareness of our ignorance. How does this square with the optimistic analogy that Moses proposed to the same Chaldaeans? This is a tension that is not going to go away and that characterises Philo's work elsewhere too.<sup>46</sup> The tension, however, can be mitigated.

After the introduction of the idea of coming to know god through analogy in 185, this idea returns, but with greater caution and also with significant changes to the conception of god that is involved. In 192, Philo offers another explanation of how the analogy works. After a withdrawal from what is mortal about yourself, "you will go on to receive an education in your conceptions (*doxas*) regarding the Uncreate". On the basis of the mind's epistemic separability from the body, senses, and speech – its ability to understand things without these three – Philo's Moses argues that God must be ontologically separate from the world. Again, since the mind has not made the body, it can be contained in it; therefore God, who *has* made the cosmos, cannot be contained in *it*.<sup>47</sup> With the inference that God transcends the cosmos, these arguments lead to a stronger conclusion than in 185, where ontological separation was not yet (explicitly) at stake. With the stronger conclusion, however, the gap between the basis for the analogy (the mind) and its inference (god) also becomes conspicuously wider. In the second passage

45 As the expression 'the best philosophers' shows, Philo's appreciation of Stoic philosophy is beyond doubt; this makes the fundamental points of disagreement with them all the more pressing in this treatise.

46 It is expressed poignantly and indeed embraced in *Somm.* 1.60. See Früchtel 1968, 147–163; cf. Runia 1986, 436–437.

47 On Philo's view of creation see Runia 1986, esp. 438–446.

in which the analogy recurs, 195, the epistemic confidence in the analogy is very clearly muted:

The third stage is when, having opened up the road that leads from oneself (*aph' hautou*), in hope (*elpisas*) thereby to come to discern the Universal Father, so hard to trace and unriddle, and having come to know itself accurately (*mathôn akribôs*), it will perhaps (*taxa*) also know God.

Here the mind 'hopes' and will 'perhaps' know God. Finally, in the third passage in which the analogy recurs, we find a surprising absence of God. In 219–220, in the course of interpreting what it means that Abraham "travelled through" (216) the land, Philo exhorts the soul by means of an analogy between a human being and the cosmos, along the microcosm – macrocosm model (219–220):<sup>48</sup>

Travel through (*diodeuson*) man also, if you will, o my soul, bringing to examination each component part of him. For instance ... find out what the body is and what it must do or undergo to co-operate with the understanding [etc...]. [220] Travel again through the greatest and most perfect man (*ton megiston kai teleôtaton anthrôpon*),<sup>49</sup> this universe, and scan narrowly its parts, how far asunder they are in the positions which they occupy, how wholly made one by the powers which govern them, and what constitutes for them all this invisible bond of harmony and unity.

Here God has disappeared from view. The task of grasping him by means of analogy has turned out to be increasingly difficult as the narrative progresses. The point Philo is making is, again, directed against the Stoics. To see how, let us revisit 181, in which Philo explains the disagreement between Moses and the Chaldaeans (whose position he has described in 179, cited above on pages 122–123). The Chaldaeans thought that the cosmos is God or contains God as its soul. Moses disagrees strongly: that which holds the cosmos together is not God, but his invisible powers.<sup>50</sup> To avoid misunderstanding, Philo adds (182):

Wherefore, even though it be said somewhere in the Law-book: "God in heaven above and on the earth below", let no one suppose that He that is spoken of – since the existent Being can contain, but cannot be contained.

48 On this model in Philo see Borgen 1997, 218–219.

49 In *Her.* 155, Philo reports and ascribes to others the view that the cosmos is a large human being; this pair of human beings (micro- and macrocosmos) is distinct from the pair of 'heavenly man' and 'earthly man', the former of which is the intelli-

ble paradigm after which the latter is created (for discussion see Früchtel 1968, 29–36).

50 On the idea of the *desmos* ('bond') see Runia 1986, 238–241 (interpreting *Tim.* 41b1–6), 448–449 (identified with the *logos*).

This distinction between God in his real being and his powers underlies 219–220 as well. Though at first sight the analogy seems to function on the same level as those in 185 and 192, a closer look reveals that a different item has inserted itself between the mind and god to occupy the place of that to which the analogy leads: the cosmos, unified by the powers of the God who himself remains out of reach for analogical reasoning.

It is striking that Philo now supports cosmological study, when he has called the Chaldaeans down from it time and again. In narrative terms, the journey metaphor and its three stages help keep Philo's study of the cosmos separate from the Chaldaean enterprise. Substantively, the crucial difference is that Abraham has come a long way. He has taken a road on which he has learned to separate the mind and intelligible things from what is below them. His journey has prepared him methodologically, so to speak, for the proper study of the cosmos, since he will now not give in to the temptation to identify the cosmos and god.

I spoke above of two outcomes of self-study and of the tension between them. Over the course of his account, Philo nuances the epistemic optimism about analogical reasoning which he had Moses express in 185. Why then was Moses so optimistic? We might think of this paragraph, the opening section of Moses' address to the Chaldaeans, as tailored to their wishes: their study is undertaken to discover the first god, so Moses at first offers them hope of attaining such knowledge along *his* route. As we proceed in the treatise, and as Philo comes to address his readers, or his soul, a much more careful account comes to the fore, one which may not be as incompatible with the terminal ignorance described in 134 as the optimistic account of 185.

With a clear grasp of God receding behind the horizon, the emphasis of Philo's account returns to where it was at the beginning: to the journey, the process of getting to know yourself. In 7, Philo speaks of coming to know yourself all the time (*panta ton aiôna*). In 219–220, it is through the verb *diodeusai*, 'travel through,' that he expresses the long duration of the process of coming to know oneself.<sup>51</sup> In Philo's reference to the greatest man, even getting to know the cosmos is now conceptualized as part of self-knowledge. In the few remaining paragraphs of the treatise after that, he comments on the need to persist and not give up, even if matters are dark and difficult (*dustheôrêton*, 222). The soul never arrives in Philo's treatise, it journeys on in a process of progressive self-knowledge.

51 On this passage cf. Kotzia-Panteli 2002, 124–131, who rightly stresses the proreptic character of this text and argues that in 217–220 Philo uses Peri-

patetic material (Theophrastus, perhaps dialogues by Aristotle). Cf. *Abr.* 65–66.

## 7 Conclusion

The process of knowing oneself, as Philo envisages it, cannot be reduced to one epistemic state. It is a movement towards perfection that reaches beyond human nature. The Stoics have been well aware of the moral need to move beyond the concerns for one's own organism. Their theory of *oikeiōsis*, in Philo's view, is right to connect human identity with the order of the whole cosmos. Nevertheless, the Stoics' epistemic overreach blinds their view to the true, modest position of humankind. Had they stayed longer in Haran, i.e., had they better grasped their own nature, they would not have departed on the wrong footing and under false premises. They would have realised that the correct analogy from the position of *nous* in human beings leads not to a divine world soul but to positing a transcendent mind, a creator who is far superior to the cosmos. Indeed, Philo seems to point to a common mistake underlying both the Stoics' account of self-awareness and their cosmo-theology. In both cases, they assume too much of a continuity between the ruling mind and the elements over which it rules. In the initial stages of *oikeiōsis*, this leads to an identification with the body and the senses rather than an alienation from them; in their account of the cosmos, it leads to a failure to posit a radical break between the highest god and the cosmos which he has caused.

Philo employs Abraham's journey of migration as a metaphor to describe the trajectory of the soul. Its first role is to indicate the errors of the Stoics. We ought to come home, he urges, to come down from idle speculation, and to reside within ourselves. This is the true place of *oikeiōsis* and the correct form of familiarization. The second role of the journey metaphor is to emphasize the need to pass beyond Stoic *oikeiōsis*. Study of our home should lead us to move away from it again, to become alienated with respect to the body, senses, and speech, the things with which nature has endowed us. Our task is to see the limits of our home and to leave it behind. The process to which we are called, and this is the third role of the metaphor of the journey, is ongoing: in human epistemic terms, we will never complete self-knowledge, nor will we be able to reach beyond that to get to know the divine itself.<sup>52</sup>

52 It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the important idea in Philo of God's taking possession of the wise person's mind and of his gift of knowledge (as expressed for instance in *Her.* 265: ἐξοικίζεται μὲν γὰρ ἐν ἡμῖν ὁ νοῦς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πνεύματος ἀφίξιν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν μετανάστασιν αὐτοῦ πάλιν εἰσοικίζεται). See Runia 1986, 437, for a succinct statement of the issue. According to Cazeaux

1965, 18, *Migr.* is composed to lead up to, without ever mentioning, God's revelation of himself as described in *Gen.* 12.7; this may be (cf. *Abr.* 77–80). Perhaps Philo hints at knowledge as a gift in *Migr.* 140 (just after the description of terminal ignorance, the soul bears fruit, "it does not know how") and 35 (part of a section where Philo speaks about his own writing process).

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ALBERT JOOSSE

Dr. phil. Utrecht 2011 is an NWO-VENI post-doctoral researcher in ancient philosophy at the University of Utrecht and a Lecturer in the History of Philosophy at the University of Groningen. His research focuses on self-knowledge and the philosophy of education in ancient philosophy.

Dr. Albert Jooosse  
Faculty of Philosophy  
University of Groningen  
Oude Boteringestraat 52  
9712 GL Groningen, Netherlands  
E-Mail: L.A.Joosse@rug.nl