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## THE INFLUENCE OF PHILO'S DE ABRAHAMO ON GREGORY OF NYSSA'S *DE VITA MOYSIS*

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### ABSTRACT

Although Gregory of Nyssa was familiar with the work of Philo of Alexandria and no doubt drew inspiration from him in many ways, the number of Philo's works Gregory actually knew is still not known. This article explores the possible influence of Philo's *De Abrahamo* on Gregory's later work *De vita Moysis*, an association that has yet to be examined in sufficient detail. The similarities between both works will be elucidated by means of three themes: first, the manner in which both writings combine the retelling and allegorical interpretation of a biblical text; second, the soul's insatiable pursuit of the good, by which the soul, in repeatedly reaching its limits, attains a kind of relative perfection, changing as a result; and third, the idea that the best inducement toward leading a good life is based on a desire for friendship with God.

### Key words

Philo of Alexandria; Gregory of Nyssa; De Abrahamo; De Vita Moysis; Perfection; Virtue

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Gregory of Nyssa's *De vita Moysis* (The Life of Moses)<sup>1</sup> refers to an earlier work of the same name by Philo of Alexandria, who was a first-century Hellenistic Jewish exegete.<sup>2</sup> The consensus

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vita Moysis*. H. Musurillo (ed). *Gregorii Nysseni opera* (hereinafter *GNO*) VII/1. Leiden: Brill 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De vita Moysis*. In: *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*. IV. L. Conh – P. Wendland (eds). Berlin: Georg Reimer 1902, pp. 119–268. The original titles are in fact not strictly identical since the titles of most of Gregory's manuscripts also include the perfection of virtue as a theme as well as, in some cases, the recipients of the works. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys. titulus* (*GNO* VII/1,4); A. C.

among researchers is that Gregory was familiar with Philo's work and drew inspiration from it.<sup>5</sup> Apart from its connection to Philo's writings on Moses, Gregory's *De vita Moysis* clearly demonstrates an understanding of Philo's allegorical interpretations,<sup>4</sup> which are contained in *Questions and Answers on Genesis and Exodus* and his allegorical commentaries.<sup>5</sup> The influence of the third large group of Philo's exegetic works – the Exposition of the Law – on Gregory's *De vita Moysis* is a less explored topic.<sup>6</sup> This article focuses on the second book of the Exposition of the Law – *De Abrahamo* – examining its influence on Gregory's *De vita Moysis*.

Although Philo in all probability authored similar writings dedicated to the two other patriarchs Isaac (*De Isaco*) and Jacob (*De Iacobo*),

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Geljon. *Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*. Providence: Brown Judaic Studies 2002, pp. 65–64.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Daniélou. Introduction. In: Grégoire de Nysse. *La vie de Moïse ou Traité de la perfection en matière de vertu*. SC 1ter. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf 19685, pp. 7–42, esp. pp. 16–21; A. C. Geljon. *Moses as Example: The Philonic Background of Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*. Leiden: Universit t Leiden 2000; the same, *Philonic Exegesis* (the first of which is the author's thesis and the second a revised version). On Philo's influence on Gregory's work in general, cf. esp. J. Dani lou. Philon et Gr goire de Nysse. In: *Philon d'Alexandrie. Lyon 11–15 Septembre 1966: colloques nationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique*. Paris:  ditions du Centre national de la Recherche scientifique 1967, pp. 333–345; D. T. Runia. *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*. Assen – Minneapolis: Van Gorcum – Fortress Press 1993, pp. 245–261. Gregory's reception of Philo was also strongly influenced by Origen, cf. I. L. E. Ramelli. Philosophical Allegoresis of Scripture in Philo and its Legacy in Gregory of Nyssa. *The Studia Philonica Annual* 20 (2008), pp. 55–99.

<sup>4</sup> The influence of Philo's allegories on Gregory's *De vita Moysis* was recently addressed by Albert Geljon (see comment above), who concludes that Gregory actually read many of Philo's writings. Geljon reveals how Gregory, instead of taking Philo's allegories in their original form, always modifies or changes them in some way; cf. Geljon. *Philonic Exegesis*, pp. 172–174.

<sup>5</sup> On the breakdown of Philo's work, cf. J. R. Royse. *The Works of Philo*. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 32–64.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. A. C. Geljon, who, in his *Philonic Exegesis* monograph, which studies the influence of Philo's work on Gregory's *De vita Moysis*, states that Gregory only used Philo's *De opificio mundi* from the so-called Exposition of the Law (in his other works) and did not use the two biographies of Abraham and Joseph in the Exposition; cf. Geljon. *Philonic Exegesis*, pp. 169–171. Similarly, I. Ramelli states that neither Origen nor Gregory of Nyssa were interested in Philo's non-allegorical works from the Exposition of the Law, with the exception of *De opif. mun.* However, her following breakdown of Philo's influence on Origen and Gregory of Nyssa occasionally mentions the *De Abrahamo* writings. She also assumes that Gregory linked Philo's concept of Abraham in Philo's *De Abr.* and *De migr. Abr.* with Philo's concept of Moses in his *De vita Moysis* although she does not expand upon the issue; cf. I. L. E. Ramelli. Philosophical Allegoresis, esp. pp. 62–63; 83; 87.

they have unfortunately not been preserved.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in attempting to assess Philo's retelling of the Founding Fathers of Israel, notwithstanding the references made to them in his allegorical commentaries, which follow the biblical texts verse by verse, our only remaining guide is his *De Abrahamo*.

This article presents the argument that there are three dominant motifs in Philo's *De Abrahamo* that may have had an influence on Gregory's work. The first relates to interpretation, namely the manner in which parts of the Bible are retold with specific reference to the story of one biblical character and then complemented with an allegorical commentary. The second is the concept of how certain biblical characters represent and map out the progressive development of a single human soul. Finally, the third relates to Philo's interpretation of Abraham's visit in *Gn* 18, which is linked to a three-fold motivation toward serving God. This article will reveal the role and place of these three motifs in both works.

### The Combination of Literal and Allegorical Commentaries

In whatever way Gregory's *De vita Moysis* links to Philo's work of the same name, one cannot overlook the significant differences between the two. The most striking of all lies in the contrast between Philo's almost exclusively literal interpretation of Moses' story, which contains only a limited amount of allegories,<sup>8</sup> and Gregory's work, which adds to the retelling of Moses' story a second, longer interpretive account of his life designed to guide the reader toward a state of perfect virtue.<sup>9</sup>

While allegories feature in many of Philo's exegetic writings, the Exposition of the Law is remarkable for how its allegorical commentary

<sup>7</sup> The fact that Philo authored writings on Isaac and Jacob is taken as read. For example, at the beginning of the *De Iosepho* writings, Philo writes of having already described the lives of three wise men, one giving rise to virtue from learning, the second from nature and the third from practice (cf. *De Ios.* 1), which is precisely how Philo interprets Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. *De Abr.* 52). However, only a preliminary interpretation of the three patriarchs is given in *De Abrahamo*, wherein Abraham's life is the only one described in detail. Cf. e.g. E. R. Goodenough. Philo's Exposition of the Law and His De Vita Moysis. *Harvard Theological Review* 26 (1933), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. esp. Philo of Alexandria. *De vit. Moys.* I,67–70; II,77–140.

<sup>9</sup> The differences between both writings are clearly summarised by Runia. *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 257.

complements a literal retelling.<sup>10</sup> In it, Philo introduces the five books of the Pentateuch, which he divides into three sections: the creation of the world, the destinies of men (to show that the good are rewarded and the bad punished) and the establishment of the law.<sup>11</sup> Each narrative is considered in the context of its application to the law. For example, the creation story shows that the Law of Moses is the law of the entire world and that whoever adheres to it may be considered a true citizen of the world.<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Philo uses *De Abrahamo* to show how the stories of various characters in the Book of Genesis reflect the Law of Moses.

Although the patriarchs, as predecessors of Moses, antedated the establishment of his Law, they nevertheless kept the commandments and laws of God (cf. *Gn* 26:5).<sup>13</sup> For, according to Philo, the patriarchs followed nature itself, the most venerable of all laws. They adhere to it not through the written word but through an intuitive understanding of the inherent rules of the natural world.<sup>14</sup> Philo places this sensory understanding of the natural laws in the context of how it informs obedience to any prescribed law, emphasising how this awareness is realised through sight, a more important and dependable sense than hearing, which he associates with written law.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, the patriarchs themselves can be seen as primary models of partial laws,<sup>16</sup> “laws endowed with life and reason” (ἐμψυχοὶ καὶ λογικοὶ νόμοι).<sup>17</sup> In Philo’s reckoning, “the enacted laws are nothing else

<sup>10</sup> Although “The Exposition of the Law” is not Philo’s term, it is commonly used today. On the body of Philo’s writings, cf. e.g. L. Cohn. *Einleitung und Chronologie der Schriften Philos. Philologus suppl.* 7 (1899), pp. 386–436, here pp. 404–414 (Cohn calls this group “Historisch-Exegetische Darstellung der Mosaischen Gesetze”); Goodenough. *Philo’s Exposition of the Law*, pp. 109–125, here p. 109; P. Borgen. *Philo of Alexandria*. In: M. E. Stone (ed.). *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*. Assen – Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984, pp. 253–282, here pp. 253–254; Roysse. *The Works of Philo*, pp. 32–64, here pp. 45–50.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De vit. Moys.* II,46–47; *De praem.* 1–2.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De opif. mun.* 1–3; cf. also *De vit. Moys.* II,48.

<sup>13</sup> Philo quotes this verse in *De Abr.* 275–276.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 6; 275–276.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 6; 57; 60. Regarding the superiority of sight over all senses, cf. e.g. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 160–164; Plato, *Tim.* 47a.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 5: “let us postpone consideration of particular laws, which are, so to speak, copies, and examine first those which are more general and may be called the originals of those copies”. (Philo’s *De Abrahamo* is quoted in the English translation of F. H. Colson, *LCL* 289.)

<sup>17</sup> Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 5. Cf. also *De Abr.* 276, where Abraham is labelled as an “unwritten statute” (θεσμὸς ἄγραφος). Philo also speaks similarly about Moses, cf. *De*

than memorials of the life of the ancients, preserving to a later generation their actual words and deeds".<sup>18</sup>

This also informs Philo's use of biography to reflect the Law of Moses and how the Scriptures record the virtues of these men "not merely to sound their praises but for the instruction of the reader and as an inducement to him to aspire to the same".<sup>19</sup> According to this understanding, the law is much more clearly evident in the lives of the forefathers than in the legislative sections of the Pentateuch.

As Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also reflect the eternal name of God,<sup>20</sup> Philo, rather than viewing them as mere historical figures, depicts them as incorruptible virtues, immortal symbols of an immortal God,<sup>21</sup> while also distinguishing between 'invisible' nature, which reveals the three different stages of the soul, and 'perceptive' nature, the less intuitive kind.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, the lives of these biblical figures can be seen, first, as stories about real people who lived in accordance with natural law, and, second, as allegorical reflections on the nature of the achievements of the "soul" (ψυχή) and "intellect" (νοῦς).<sup>23</sup> Taking Abraham's departure from his homeland as a leading example, Philo contends that, according to the literal text of the Scriptures, the decision to emigrate was made "by a man of wisdom, but according to the laws of allegory by a virtue-loving soul in its search for the true God".<sup>24</sup>

In *De Abrahamo*, Philo speaks generally about the generations preceding Abraham and, specifically, about the meanings given to the figures and patriarchs of the Bible.<sup>25</sup> With these foundations laid, he turns to Abraham himself, recounting his piety<sup>26</sup> and kind treatment of others.<sup>27</sup> Both features of Abraham's personality are explored with

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*vit. Moys.* I,158–162; II,4. On the origins of this idea in Pythagoreanism and Stoicism, cf. J. W. Martens. *One God, One Law. Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Greco-Roman Law*. Boston – Leiden: Brill 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 5.

<sup>19</sup> Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 4.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ex* 3:15 and Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 51.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 54–55.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 52–55.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. e.g. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 88; 147.

<sup>24</sup> Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 68.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 1–61.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 62–207.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 208–261; for the differentiation of both parts, cf. *De Abr.* 208; on the structure of *De Abrahamo*, cf. C. K. Reggiani. *De Abrahamo, Analisi del trattato*. In: Filone Alesandrino. *De Opificio Mundi, De Abrahamo, De Josepho*.

reference to several episodes from the patriarch's life. Complementing his colourful retelling of each episode, Philo accentuates some key details in order to demonstrate the greatness and virtue of the story's characters, be it Abraham<sup>28</sup> or God Himself.<sup>29</sup> This is followed by an allegorical interpretation of the given passages in which Abraham migrates from flesh-and-blood human being to soul. For example, the detailed reiteration of the sacrifice of Isaac<sup>30</sup> is followed by a literal explanation of the exceptional nature of Abraham's deed in order to refute the idea that his motive could have been anything other than obedience to God.<sup>31</sup> The allegorical interpretation also extends to the etymology of the name Isaac, meaning "laughter": as the person of wisdom offers up his joy to God, He, in His generosity, returns it.<sup>32</sup>

The literal and allegorical interpretations address different audiences. According to Philo, the first is 'apparent' (ἐν φανερωῖ) and meant for ordinary people (πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς), while the second is hidden (ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ) and meant only for the select few (πρὸς ὀλίγους).<sup>33</sup> Far from being exclusive, however, both forms of interpretation are of equal value. As described in the *Pentateuch*, Abraham is both human and soul, with both interpretations leading us to the same conclusion: that he is worthy of love.<sup>34</sup>

*De Abrahamo* is one record of how, through the merging of narration and allegory, the meaning and greatness of a biblical figure can be unveiled. While the events of Abraham's life are retold to reveal his virtues, they are interpreted to depict the protagonist's dual function as both human being and soul.

As we learn in the introduction to *De vita Moysis*<sup>35</sup>, Gregory's reason for retelling Moses' story is not to acquaint the reader with the *Pentateuch*, whether filtered through the Law of Moses or another

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Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri 1979, pp. 125–128; J. Gorez. Analyse du traité. In: Philon d'Alexandrie. *De Abrahamo*. Paris: Cerf 1966, pp. 17–20.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. e.g. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 66–67; 114–116.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 142–146.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 167–177.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 178–199.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 200–207.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 147.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 88.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,1–15 (*GNO* VII/1,1,1–7,5). This passage is described by Gregory himself as an introduction or prologue (προοίμιον); cf. *De vit. Moys.* II,48; 306 (*GNO* VII/1,47,2; 138,21).

perspective; rather, it is to define the perfect life.<sup>56</sup> According to Gregory, perfection knows no boundaries. The absolute virtue is God Himself, the Good without any limit. As an example of human perfection, Gregory introduces Paul the Apostle, whose perfection lies in a never-ending “straining ahead for what is still to come”.<sup>57</sup> Since perfect virtue has no limits, no definition of it can be given. It can only be shown in the life of a good person.<sup>58</sup>

Both Philo and Gregory share the conviction that the only true way of understanding anything of importance is to examine the life of a good person. According to Philo, since the patriarchs lived their lives based on the innate laws of nature, they can be considered living laws, embodying the law of nature better than any written code of law. For Gregory, if one is to understand perfect virtue, it is far better to learn from an exemplary life, such as the one led by Moses, than by definition.

Both authors also have a common appreciation for the sense of sight and its significance in living a good life. While Philo's readers are shown how biblical figures seek out guidance through observance of the innate laws of nature, Gregory's readers are urged to perceive all, follow from example and live their lives accordingly.

Just as Philo presents Abraham, Gregory's *De vita Moysis* is based on the retelling of the life of a biblical figure from the first book, ἱστορία.<sup>59</sup> While literal discussion is rather extensive in Philo's work, it features to a far lesser degree in Gregory's.<sup>40</sup> The central focus of Gregory's attentions is more on establishing a figurative meaning, a theme that features throughout his entire second book of writings, θεωρία, which is also one of Gregory's terms for interpretation. Gregory avoids a literal reading, which would otherwise deflect from the goal of attaining virtue through the example set by Moses, based on the principle that readers cannot imitate the actions of a biblical character in a literal sense simply because they live under completely different circumstances. Moreover, the literal meaning of these actions is not what is important

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,2-3; 320 (*GNO* VII/1,2,7-23; 144,15-17).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,5-7; II,225 (*GNO* VII/1,3,12-4,15; 112,16-21); cf. also *Phil* 3:13.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,5; 9-13 (*GNO* VII/1,3,6-12; 4,20-6,8).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,16-77 (*GNO* VII/1,7,4-33,10).

<sup>40</sup> Gregory highlights Moses' virtue, e.g. in *De vit. Moys.* I,19 (*GNO* VII/1,8,14-9,4); for a lesson ascribed a literal meaning, see *De vit. Moys.* II,205-206 (*GNO* VII/1,104,19-105,8).

when it comes to virtue.<sup>41</sup> In enabling imitation, this kind of goal also determines the nature of the interpretation, which feeds into Gregory's belief that the events in Moses' life are equally capable of occurring in the life of the reader. Just as in Philo's allegorical interpretation, the events in Gregory's *θεωρία* are often understood as natural mirroring the happenings that unfold within a person's soul.<sup>42</sup>

While the literal retelling, commentary and subsequent allegorical interpretation alternate regularly in *De Abrahamo*, Gregory first presents Moses' entire life before applying a systematic interpretation of it. Even in this second stage, he repeatedly returns to the original story, referring to the structure. Throughout the interpretation, he describes individual motifs in great detail and how they influence the wider context.

It is precisely in this combination of retelling and allegorical interpretation that a resemblance between Gregory's *Life of Moses* and Philo's *De Abrahamo* can be traced, especially when set against Philo's other writings.<sup>43</sup> As a technique, it is extremely important in setting out Gregory's aim, which is to stimulate a sense in the reader that the virtue of Moses' actions speaks to the presence of a soul. Thus, in modelling one's life on that of a biblical figure, one can be guided along the path toward perfection, mirroring the soul's state of constant progression.

## Biblical Characters and the Development of the Soul

Having presented Philo's and Gregory's general interpretive frameworks, let us now examine how the authors reveal their understanding of the stories of the lives of their biblical characters and what meanings of a virtuous life they disclose through their accounts.

In his interpretation of the narrative passages from the Pentateuch,<sup>44</sup> Philo cites examples of the human development toward virtue, the

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,14; II,48–49 (*GNO* VII/1,6,8–24; 46,26–47,20).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. e.g. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,14–16 (*GNO* VII/1,37,17–38,15).

<sup>43</sup> The merging of literal and figurative interpretations of Gregory's *De vita Moysis* more closely resembles Philo's *De Abrahamo* than his *De vita Moysis*, an observation noted by Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, p. 258.

<sup>44</sup> The original text of Philo's biblical exegesis was probably the *Septuagint*, whose undoubted origins and meticulous adherence to the original are described by Philo (cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De vit. Moys.* II,25–44). The *Septuagint* is also referred to in the following text. The etymology of Hebraic names, which Philo uses frequently, does not necessarily mean that he was familiar with Hebraic text. His source could have been a Greek-written list of etymologies for Hebraic names (cf. A. Kamesar. *Biblical*

renunciation of evil in the name of the Good, and progression toward the Good (or, in the case of evil characters, their failure to convert).<sup>45</sup> He shows how greatly these characteristics vary from person to person, how difficult they are to master and the results of these efforts.<sup>46</sup> But as we have learned, Philo's retelling of the historical passages from the Book of Genesis in *De Abrahamo* does not begin with the patriarchs.

Preceding their introduction, there are the three figures of Enos,<sup>47</sup> Enoch<sup>48</sup> and Noah.<sup>49</sup> The first, Enos, "man",<sup>50</sup> symbolises hope,<sup>51</sup> the doorman at the gate to royal virtue.<sup>52</sup> The second, Enoch, "the recipient of grace", symbolises betterment and the renunciation of sin.<sup>53</sup> The third, Noah, meaning "rest" or "just",<sup>54</sup> is, according to Moses, an example of the perfect human.<sup>55</sup>

While the story of Noah in the Scriptures is relatively extensive, only brief mention is afforded to the others. So, to fill the gaps in our knowledge, Philo sets about approaching these characters based on the etymologies of their names and their rankings among Adam's descendants.<sup>56</sup> The entire triumvirate is represented as a gradual escalation in virtue: the person filled with hope (Enos) sets himself toward the Good, but never achieves it; the convert (Enoch) is at the half-way mark because he has conducted the first part of his life in sin; and the "perfect" man (Noah) is complete from the very beginning.<sup>57</sup>

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are "types of souls" in the sense that each represents a different route toward virtue: Abraham is virtue gained

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Interpretation in Philo. In: *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, pp. 65–91, here pp. 65–72). The extent of Philo's knowledge of Hebrew, however, or the link to the exegesis of the Hebraic text, is not exactly known.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Kamesar. *Biblical Interpretation in Philo*, pp. 65–91, here pp. 85–91.

<sup>46</sup> For more details, cf. G. Roskam. *On the Path to Virtue: The Stoic Doctrine of Moral Progress and its Reception in (Middle-)Platonism*. Leuven: Leuven University Press 2005, pp. 146–219.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 7–16 and *Gn* 4:26; 5:6–11.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 17–26 and *Gn* 5:18–24.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 27–46 and *Gn* 5:28–32; 6:8–9:29.

<sup>50</sup> This is the "Chaldean" (i.e., Hebraic) etymology of the word "Enoch"; cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 7–8.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Gn* 4:26 according to the *Septuagint*.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 15.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 17–18.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 27. Philo offers these two etymologies of the name "Noah", both of which inform his interpretation.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Gn* 6:9 and Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 31.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. e.g., Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 12–14.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 47.

through learning, Isaac is virtue gained inherently and Jacob is virtue gained through practice.<sup>58</sup>

Philo likens the first trio to trained athletes, considering the chronologically older group mere pupils by comparison.<sup>59</sup> But if we are to apply a hierarchy to the less advanced trio, at the top stands Noah, a figure whom the *Book of Genesis* explicitly states to be perfect (τέλειος) albeit within his own generation (ἐν τῇ γενεᾷ αὐτοῦ).<sup>60</sup> Philo distinguishes between Noah, whose perfection is paradoxically measured in comparison with his contemporaries,<sup>61</sup> and the patriarchs, whose perfection is less relative.<sup>62</sup> Perfection is, therefore, not necessarily understood as an absolute category but rather as an incremental rise in qualities from generation to generation, a mobilisation of hierarchy among the perfect and imperfect alike. Stemming from this allegorical acceptance of individual characters as “types of souls” (τρόπους ψυχῆς),<sup>63</sup> any given soul can then be seen as undergoing a course of continuous development throughout the entire period of history described in the *Book of Genesis*. The soul moves forward by a process of degrees, as presented in the form of individual biblical characters. But while such a soul can reach a state of perfection in some respects (as with the figure of Noah), it is ultimately nothing more than a precursor to the generation that is to come.

Philo expresses a similar idea in his allegorical commentary to *Gn 4:25*, which concerns the birth of Seth, Enos’ father. In it, the idea present in *De Abrahamo* is expanded to include a history beginning with Seth and ending in Moses. Based on this cycle, each generation represents one stage of the soul’s development. In taking up where the preceding generation leaves off, the new guard are charged with

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 52.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 48.

<sup>60</sup> *Gn 6:9* according to the *Septuagint*.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 36; cf. also *De Abr.* 34: Human perfection relates, among other things, to the fact that a human being, far be it from having only one virtue, possesses them all. (The conviction that virtues are mutually intertwined and that to have one means to possess them all is attributed to the Stoics; cf. Diogenes Laertius. *Vitae VII*,125.)

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 37. From other writings, however, we know that Philo also understands patriarchs as precursors to the perfection attained by Moses; cf. *De poster.* 173–174.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 47; 52; 147; 217; cf. also *De Abr.* 54.

furthering the personal limits set by all those who have gone before. In this way, the soul never becomes satiated with Good.<sup>64</sup>

The representation of individual biblical characters as partial developmental phases of the one soul also feeds into Philo's understanding of the best laws,<sup>65</sup> which, apart from serving as testaments to the stories of individual people, are borne from the narratives of entire generations.

In similar fashion, Gregory expresses the belief that the fates of the biblical characters are synonymous with the progress of virtue, but that perfection lies in nothing other than development itself. In effect, to be perfect means to never cease in becoming better.<sup>66</sup>

Perfection, therefore, can also be seen as dependent on greed, given that a person can never be content with what he or she already has. Moses serves as an example of this: just when it seems that he has achieved everything he had ever hoped for – which is to speak with God “face to face”<sup>67</sup> – he asks for God to show Himself again as if never before granted such a Good.<sup>68</sup> However, this is not to say that, in so doing, Moses detracts from his own achievement or that everything gained until this point is immediately lost to leave a feeling of inner eagerness once again. In this manner, Gregory describes the human effort to find satisfaction through sensory goodness: the cycle of constant fulfilment,

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De poster.* 174: “Mark the advance to improvement made by the soul that has an insatiable desire to be filled with things that are beautiful, and the unlimited wealth of God, which has given as starting-points to others the goals reached by those before them. For the limit of the knowledge attained by Seth became the starting-point of righteous Noah; while Abraham begins his education with the consummation of Noah's; and the highest point of wisdom reached by Abraham is the initial course in Moses' training.” (English translation F. H. Colson – G. H. Whitaker, *LCL* 227, pp. 431–433.)

<sup>65</sup> Cf. e.g. Philo of Alexandria. *De vit. Moys.* II,12.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. esp. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* I,10; II,306 (*GNO* VII/1,5,2–4; 138,20–139,6). On Gregory's concept of virtue as a constant process (especially in *De vita Moysis*), cf. e.g. J. Daniélou. *Platonisme et théologie mystique: Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nyse.* Paris: Montaigne 1944, pp. 309–326; H. Heine. *Perfection in the Virtuous Life: A Study in the Relationship between Edification and Polemical Theology in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis.* Philadelphia: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation 1975, pp. 63–114; L. F. Mateo-Seco. Epektasis. In: *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa.* L. F. Mateo-Seco – G. Maspero (eds.). *VCS* 99, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010, pp. 263–268; L. Karfíková. *Řehoř z Nyssy: Boží a lidská nekonečnost.* Prague: Oikúmené 1999; C. W. Macleod. The Preface to Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Moses. *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982), pp. 183–191; E. Ferguson. Progress in Perfection: Gregory of Nyssa's Vita Moysis. *Studia Patristica* 14 (1976), pp. 307–314.

<sup>67</sup> *Ex* 33:11.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Ex* 33:13,18 and Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,219 (*GNO* VII/1,110,6–11); cf. also *In Cant. cant.* 31; 181 (*GNO* VI,31,8–32,1; 354,11–356,16).

which inevitably leads to emptiness, makes us just as keen as before.<sup>69</sup> The desire for true Good or beauty is also insatiable for another reason; for as we change as a result of our achievements so does desire itself, growing in proportion to the size of what it seeks. Here follows Gregory's description of the soul's rise toward God:

If nothing comes from above to hinder its upward thrust (for the nature of the Good attracts to itself those who look to it), the soul rises ever higher and will always make its flight yet higher – by its desire of the heavenly things *straining ahead for what is still to come*,<sup>70</sup> as the Apostle says.<sup>71</sup>

He later provides further context for such a rise in noting that “every desire for the Good which is attracted to that ascent constantly expands (συνεπεκτείνεται) as one progresses in pressing on to the Good.”<sup>72</sup> The soul, which constantly gains newer Good and rises in tow, not only transforms thanks to the achieved Good but the soul's desire grows as well. Every step the soul takes can be understood as success on the one hand, in that it is an achievement of what it strived for, and as an explanation for why it can never be sated on the other: whenever it achieves the Good and sees it as not the last step, it starts to long for something better. Its desire grows in proportion to what it has reached.<sup>73</sup>

It is therefore apparent that Gregory's perception of perfection as unceasing growth admits to the principle of constantly changing forms. This applies not only in the sense of a gradual improvement or an approach to fulfilling our goals but in the sense that, only by reaching each greater Good, are we capable of asking for an even greater Good for our own betterment.

It is on this point that a certain similarity between the authors emerges. Philo's association of biblical characters with some kind of soul also allows him to chart the progression of the human soul, not just through the prism of an individual's fate but in the context of a stretch of history encompassing several generations. This also implies that development of this kind is composed of a series of stages, wherein the soul reaches

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,59–61; II,141–142 (*GNO* VII/1,50,6–51,5; 78,15–22). Cf. also Ferguson. *Progress in Perfection*, pp. 307–314, here p. 310.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Phil* 3:15.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,225 (*GNO* VII/1,112,16–21), English translation A. J. Malherbe – E. Ferguson. In: Gregory of Nyssa. *The Life of Moses*. New York – Ramsey – Toronto: Paulist Press 1978, p. 113.

<sup>72</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,238 (*GNO* VII/1,116,15–17).

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *In Cant. cant.* 1 (*GNO* VI,31,8–32,5).

the boundaries of the Good it sought, which is a kind of relative perfection before acquiring new forms (represented by another biblical character).

Of course, in Gregory's case, the model of the soul is not representative of several generations but of one individual, the Israeli lawmaker Moses himself. But even in Gregory's case, there is an underlying conviction that the ascent of the soul, whose appetite can never be sated in its desire for true Good, involves repeated transformations.

In summary, Gregory points to the inherent difficulty of correlating boundless virtue with perfection (τελειότης) since the latter is delimited by a boundary (τέλος). Ironically, to attain virtuous perfection is to reach its limits. Virtue, however, is infinite, which is to say that anything that has boundaries cannot be considered true virtue.<sup>74</sup> Although Gregory does not state so explicitly, his teaching that a person's desire grows in alignment with increasing virtue offers a potential solution. If the progression toward the Good increases both our desire for the Good and our ability to contain it, it can be argued that we do in fact reach the boundaries of virtue, which we are told is infinite. In other words, we reach the boundaries of whatever we desire and can ever possibly contain, that is, our own relative and temporary perfection. Naturally, as soon as the given level of Good is reached, the desire for Good increases, which means that the Good attained can never be enough when compared with this new desire. In principle, this development of virtue continues forever: Because virtue is limitless, each subsequent boundary, which is truly such for the improving person, can never be the last.

Although we have detected a similarity between Philo's and Gregory's interpretations of virtue's perfection and progress, we have yet to prove that Gregory's *De vita Moysis* is directly influenced by Philo's *De Abrahamo*. It cannot be denied that the idea of improving the soul, through which its capacity also increases toward acceptance of the Good, is contained in some of Gregory's other writings,<sup>75</sup> not least non-exegetical ones.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, it is not certain that he drew from Philo even though strikingly similar motifs do appear in Philo's biblical exegesis.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* 1,5–6 (*GNO* VII/1,3,12–4,2).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *In Cant. cant.* 1 (*GNO* VI,31,8–32,5).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De an. et res.* (*GNO* III/3,78–79). On the wider context regarding the soul's increasing capacity, cf. Karfíková. *Řehoř z Nyssy*, pp. 219–224; 244–245.

The second objection is that Gregory need not have been overly familiar with *De Abrahamo* since the shared thematic concern also appears in Philo's allegorical commentaries, as exemplified in the passage from *De posteritate Caini*.<sup>77</sup> The similarity between Philo's allegorical interpretations and Gregory's thinking has been noted by Albert Geljon. Agreeing that Philo and Gregory both consider the soul's desire for beauty to be insatiable, Geljon compares the idea of the soul's progress in the works of both authors. For example, just as Gregory describes the soul's ascent toward God as one that proceeds step by step, with each stage reached representing the starting point for further progression, Philo in kind, in *De posteritate Caini*, refers to the level of understanding attained by Seth as laying the foundations for Abraham's perfection.<sup>78</sup>

Yet, we have already learned that the themes briefly presented in Philo's allegorical interpretation of *Gn* 4:26 feature in the description and interpretation of Adam's descendants in the Exposition of the Law, of which *De Abrahamo* is a part. Therein, Philo frames the characters in the *Book of Genesis* as successively progressive stages of human growth in pursuit of the Good. If these characters can be allegorically interpreted as various forms of soul, the idea, that the progress in biblical history also symbolises growth phases of a single soul can be more easily understood. Philo contends that there are more types of perfection than the one ascribed to Noah, not just in generational but absolute terms. For, although the first biblical triumvirate attains a sort of perfection in the figure of Noah, compared to the patriarchs they are mere children.

The perception of perfection is also fleshed out in Gregory's examination of virtue. To speak of bound perfection in the same breath as of infinite virtue, we have to look toward how this change becomes manifest in a person.

### The Lord's Visit to Abraham and the Theme of Friendship

As part of the allegorical interpretation in *De Abrahamo*, Philo distinguishes between different types of people according to their

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De poster.* 174.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. A. C. Geljon. Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria. *Vigiliae Christianae* 59 (2005), pp. 152–177, here pp. 175; 177. doi: 10.1163/1570072054068348.

motivations for serving God. A similar comparison can also be found at the end of Gregory's writings on Moses.<sup>79</sup> In Philo's case, it is an allegorical interpretation of the Lord's visit to Abraham.<sup>80</sup> As in other places, the starting point of Philo's allegory stems from whatever appears illogical, surprising or striking in the literal text of the Scripture. In this case, it surrounds the confusion arising from the questions of which and how many people actually visited Abraham.<sup>81</sup> Philo's interpretation begins with the idea that Abraham's visitor is the father of the entire world, God Himself. But we are told three people visit Abraham, which would seem to indicate two companions, creative and kingly "potencies" (δυνάμεις) to whom Philo assigns the biblical titles of "God" (θεός) and "Lord" (κύριος).<sup>82</sup> Abraham's visitor is ultimately one man and three people at the same time, though: there is only one God, but three ways He can be seen.

The three ways God presents Himself – as self-existent or as a creative or kingly potency – also correspond to the three levels in mankind. The best people take the middle route of "vision" (φαντασία): He shows Himself to them as truly being.<sup>83</sup> They serve Him for no other reason than Him alone.<sup>84</sup> Another way that God shows Himself is on the right hand. His name is "God"<sup>85</sup> and belongs to those that serve God in the hope of achieving Good. The lowest of these three groups of people is only able to perceive God as a ruling power called "Lord". People of the third kind serve God in the hope of escaping retribution.<sup>86</sup>

Although the distinction between these types is clearly hierarchical, Philo avoids consigning the lesser forms to condemnation. God

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 119 and Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,320 (*GNO* VII/1,144,20–145,4); cf. also H. Panczová. In: Sv. Gregor z Nyssy. *Život Mojžiša alebo O ceste k dokonalosti v cnosti*. Bratislava: Dobrá kniha 2012, p. 256, note 747.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. *Gn* 18:1–15.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. (in the *Septuagint*, to which Philo refers) the difference between "God" (θεός) in 18:1, "three men" (τρεις ἄνδρες) in 18:2 and Abraham's salutation "Lord" (Κύριε) in 18:5. Cf. also the variation in pronouns in the singular and plural in the following verses. Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 132.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 121.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 124.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 128.

<sup>85</sup> Philo uses the word "God" (θεός) for God Himself as well as for one of his potencies.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 124–125; 128. The distinction between attempting to reach something for the thing itself and for other reasons was drawn by the Stoics. According to Diogenes' testimony, Cleanthes was certain that virtue should be sought in the name of virtue itself, not on the basis of fear, hope or some external cause; cf. Diogenes Laertios. *Vitae*, VII,89.

willingly welcomes and appreciates all that serve Him albeit not for the most noble reasons.<sup>87</sup> And yet, only the perfect receive the highest reward, which is God’s “friendship” (φιλία).<sup>88</sup>

Philo repeatedly speaks about a friendship with God in *De Abrahamo*.<sup>89</sup> At the very end of the work, we are told that God, in awe of Abraham’s faith, rewards him by the acknowledgement of the gifts He promised by oath. He speaks to Abraham no longer as God to a man, but “as a friend to a familiar” (ὡς φίλος γνωρίμω).<sup>90</sup> According to Philo, the evidence of a friendship with Abraham is based on this oath (even though His word is promise enough), which provides Abraham with greater assurance.<sup>91</sup> Abraham in turn adheres to God’s ordinance,<sup>92</sup> guided by unwritten nature. By the very end of the work, Abraham becomes not only the embodiment of the unwritten law<sup>93</sup> but God’s friend.<sup>94</sup>

Similar ideas can be found in Gregory’s interpretation of *De vita Moysis*. He recounts the end of Moses, whose fate, in having led the Israelites to the border, is to perish within eyeshot of the Promised Land.<sup>95</sup> Because Gregory views Moses as a model of perfection, the fact that the failure to reach his goal of receiving the promised reward does not reduce his perfection needs to be explained. Gregory also compares the fates of Moses and the Israelites, his companions in the travel to the Promised Land. From the biblical account of the end of Moses’ life, Gregory refers to two titles held by Moses: the “Servant of God” (οἰκέτης θεοῦ) and the “Friend of God” (φίλος θεοῦ).<sup>96</sup> To be-

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 126–130.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 129.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. e.g. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 50; 89.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 275.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Gn* 22:16. Cf. also Philo of Alexandria. *De sobr.* 55 f., where Philo quotes *Gn* 18:17 (but his quotation differs from the wording of the *Septuagint*).

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 275; Philo makes reference to *Gn* 26:5.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Philo of Alexandria. *De Abr.* 276.

<sup>94</sup> For Abraham as a friend of God, cf. also *2 Chron.* 20:7; *Is* 41:8; *James* 2:25.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Dt* 34:1–5. The Pentateuch even describes it as a punishment for Moses’ lack of faith (cf. *Num* 20:12), a reading Gregory overlooks.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,514; 519 (*GNO* VII/1,141,11; 144,7). Moses is called a Servant of God in *Dt* 34:5. Although the word “friend” does not appear at the end of *Dt*, the proof of Moses’ uniqueness is cited in Moses’ face-to-face dialogue with God; cf. *Dt* 34:10. A similarly intimate dialogue (although phrased slightly differently) is found in *Ex* 33:11, where it is conceived of as a conversation with a friend. Gregory himself considers God’s eschewing of His anger toward the Israelites on account of Moses’ wish to share the fate of his people as a proof of their friendship; cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,519 (*GNO* VII/1,144,4–12) and *Ex* 32:9–14; 31–34.

come a Servant of God is the goal of a virtuous life,<sup>97</sup> a “goal” (τέλος) he defines as the reason for performing any action,<sup>98</sup> which enables the transfer of the action’s outcome to its motive. From this point of view, Gregory places the Israelites, who continue on to the Promised Land in pursuit of their promised goal,<sup>99</sup> in contrast with Moses, whose goal is friendship with God.<sup>100</sup> Similar to Philo’s distinction, he associates Moses’ conduct with perfection:<sup>101</sup>

This is true perfection: not to avoid a wicked life because like slaves we servilely fear punishment, nor to do good because we hope for rewards, as if cashing in on the virtuous life by some business-like and contractual arrangement. On the contrary, disregarding all those things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise, we regard falling from God’s friendship as the only thing dreadful and we consider becoming God’s friend the only thing worthy of honour and desire. This, as I have said, is the perfection of life.<sup>102</sup>

The fact that Moses does not enter the Promised Land is interpreted in such a way as to suggest that the perfect person need not seek any reward at all. The first motivation refused is, in the spirit of Philo, a fear of punishment, which is connected with slavery.<sup>103</sup> The second is the hope of a reward. In speaking of “things for which we hope and which have been reserved by promise”, Gregory evidently not only alludes to

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,314 (*GNO* VII/1,141,9–15).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,317 (*GNO* VII/1,143,2–5).

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,265; 269; 313 (*GNO* VII/1,124,19–25; 125,22–25; 140,24–26). On the promise of a land, cf. e.g. *Gn* 50:24; *Ex* 6:8; 33:1; *Dt* 6:23.

<sup>100</sup> At this point, Gregory casts all imperfect motives toward doing good in a negative light, a judgement stemming from his attempt to highlight perfection. In contrast, in *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, where he presents similar distinctions, he states that fear and desire of a reward can also lead to virtue; cf. Gregory of Nyssa. *In Cant. cant., Prol.* (*GNO* VI,15 f.). Gregory distinguishes between various motives somewhat differently in *In Cant. cant.* 15 (*GNO* VI,460,2–465,21).

<sup>101</sup> The distinction between the three human motives – fear of punishment, desire for a reward and desire to know God for Himself – can be found in Clement of Alexandria, who distinguishes between servants, faithful servants and friends of God based on reasons of good conduct; cf. e.g. Clement of Alexandria. *Strom.* I,173,6; IV,135–136; VII,5,6; 19,2; 72,5.

<sup>102</sup> Gregory of Nyssa. *De vit. Moys.* II,320 (*GNO* VII/1,144,20–145,4), English translation A. J. Malherbe – E. Ferguson, p. 137.

<sup>103</sup> For Gregory of Nyssa’s rejection of slavery, cf. I. L. E. Ramelli. *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity.* Oxford: OUP 2016, pp. 172–211.

the promise of territory,<sup>104</sup> but also to the hope and promises given to Israel as well as, according to the New Testament, the assurances offered to the Gentiles through Christ's sacrifice.<sup>105</sup> The New Testament usually associates this hope with resurrection,<sup>106</sup> eternal life,<sup>107</sup> glory,<sup>108</sup> salvation<sup>109</sup> and all that heaven holds.<sup>110</sup> Thus, the perfect person, according to Gregory, is not motivated by the desire of a reward, even an eschatological one.<sup>111</sup> The only thing worth pursuing is God's friendship, a relationship built over a lifetime. Setting any goal other than this inevitably results in dissatisfaction since all efforts to achieve Good must be rooted in an aspiration to know God better, which is a principle that, according to Gregory, reveals the perfection of life.

Echoing Philo's evaluation of Abraham at the end of *De Abrahamo*, Gregory concludes that Moses' greatness can only be attributed to one thing: becoming a Friend of God.

## Conclusion

Philo's *De Abrahamo* and Gregory's later work *De vita Moysis* bear similarities in relation to three motifs. Both writings work with biblical texts in a similar way, not only in terms of narrating the exemplary lives of biblical figures but also in terms of their interpretations of these stories. By offering figurative meanings, their biblical figures become symbols of the human soul.

Not solely concerned with Abraham as an individual but with the generations that came before him, Philo offers the idea of there being an association between an ascending human soul and progress throughout human history. According to this scheme, each person is linked to the last, building on the efforts of the predecessor to further extend the limits of virtue. This concept of the development of a human soul resembles Gregory's idea of a perfect life; that each step toward virtue

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. e.g. *Gn* 50:24; *Ex* 6:8; 33:1; *Dt* 6:23.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Eph.* 2:12.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Acts* 24:15,21; 26:6–8.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Ti* 1:2; 3:7.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Rom* 5:2; 8:18–25; *Ti* 2:13.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *1 Thes* 5:8.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. *Col* 1:5; *1 Pt* 1:3–5.

<sup>111</sup> Similarly, Clement of Alexandria claims that a perfect person longs to know God above all else, even eternal salvation; cf. Clement of Alexandria. *Strom.* IV,135–137; cf. also *Strom.* I,173,6; VII,19,2.

is one of many on the path toward perfection. Just as for Philo each new form of soul is symbolised by a different person from generation to generation, Gregory conceives of how a person can transform on the back of each fresh achievement. Only when one step along the path of virtue has been reached, is one capable of wanting something better.

The third shared motif is the distinction made between three types of people based on their motivations. The reward for the most exemplary person – the one who serves God alone – is friendship with God, the descriptions of which conclude both works.

Even though *De Abrahamo* was not in all probability Gregory's only source, the relationship between the two works must be given credence in light of the considerable overlap in common details and the likelihood that Gregory was just as acquainted with *De Abrahamo* as he was with Philo's other writings.<sup>112</sup>

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