<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Uusimäki, Elisa Katariina

Uusimäki, Elisa Katariina

2018-06

Uusimäki, E. K. 2018, 'A Mind in Training : Philo of Alexandria on Jacobine Exercises', Journal for the study of the pseudepigrapha, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 1-12.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/311199>

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0951820718786198>

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

A Mind in Training: Philo of Alexandria on Jacob's Spiritual Exercises*

Elisa Uusimäki

Abstract: How does Philo of Alexandria depict the formation of a wise person? This article pays attention to the centrality of spiritual training in Graeco-Roman philosophy, and argues that Philo likewise regards the process of seeking wisdom as entailing mental practice. The analysis focuses on two passages of *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* and *Legum allegoriarum* where Philo attributes lists of spiritual exercises to the figure of Jacob. As such, these accounts illustrate how Philo makes use of scriptural interpretation as he imagines the execution of a life dedicated to wisdom. The listed exercises are largely familiar from Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions, yet they coexist with and contribute to the performance of Philo's ancestral tradition. This mélange of cultural elements suggests that Philo discusses Jacob's inner cultivation in order to enable his audience to grasp (one prospect of) how to lead a Jewish philosophical life in the Roman Alexandria.

Keywords: Philo of Alexandria, philosophical training, spiritual exercises, the figure of Jacob, scriptural interpretation, Judaism as philosophy

How did Philo of Alexandria¹ imagine the practical performance of philosophical life, that is, the mental training considered to advance one's search for wisdom (σοφία)? In this article, I propose one answer to the question by demonstrating how Philo associates two narratives on Jacob, the eponymous and exemplary patriarch, with the practice (ἄσκησις) of diverse spiritual exercises (*Her.* 252–253, *Leg.* 3.18–19).² In the context of

* Previous versions of this article were presented in the OTSEM meeting in Uppsala (2015), in the Hellenistic Judaism section of the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Seoul (2016), and in the U.K. Philo Colloquium in Glasgow (2016). I wish to thank the participants of those sessions, as well as the anonymous reviewers of the journal, for their insightful feedback on my work.

¹ The quotations from Philo's texts are, with minor modifications, from *Philo with an English Translation* (trans. F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker and R. Marcus; LCL; London: Heinemann; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–1962). Other quotations from classical literature are also from the Loeb Classical Library, unless otherwise noted.

² The lists have been briefly observed by P. Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (ed. A.I. Davidson; trans. M. Chase; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 83–84; M. Sheridan, 'Jacob and Israel: A Contribution to the History of an Interpretation', in *idem, From Nile to the*

Graeco-Roman philosophy, such exercises were undertaken to shape the mind and attitude of the practising subject who pursued wisdom. Before the textual analysis, further elaboration on the ancient conception of philosophy and Philo's notion of the cultivation of a person towards being a philosopher (φιλόσοφος), or even a sage (σοφός) who possesses virtue (ἀρετή), is needed.

Lived Wisdom in the Context of Ancient Philosophy

Ancient philosophy from Socrates onwards, specifically in the Hellenistic and Roman eras, has been associated with phrases such as an art of living, lifestyle, and medicine for soul. The pioneering research of the French philosopher-historian Pierre Hadot has inspired modern scholars to explore this existential dimension of Graeco-Roman philosophy.³ As a result, several scholars have argued that philosophy constituted a way of life, commitment to a certain type of behaviour, and its purpose was to train for wisdom, which was regarded as a mode of being.⁴ Apart from acquiring a mind-set and discourse of theoretical reflection, philosophy was to provide the seekers of wisdom with 'a lived exercise (ἄσκησις)'.⁵ This act was situated on the level of self and of being rather than being limited to the cognitive level.⁶

Although the role of argument in Graeco-Roman philosophy should not be forgotten,⁷ the concrete practice of philosophy clearly was not limited to developing one's argumentative skills. Hadot highlighted the significance of undertaking 'spiritual

Rhone and beyond: Studies in Early Monastic Literature and Scriptural Interpretation (Studia Anselmiana, 156; Roma: Pontificio Ateneo Sant'Anselmo, 2012), pp. 316–334 at 321; and W.R.S. Lamb, *Scripture: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Guides for the Perplexed; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), pp. 178–79.

³ Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*; *idem*, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (trans. M. Chase; Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁴ See, e.g., J. Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Philosophy; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); J.M. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); X. Pavie, *Exercices spirituels: leçons de la philosophie antique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2012). Hadot's work also had major influence on the thought of Michel Foucault; see, e.g., T. Flynn, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life: Foucault and Hadot', *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 31 (2005), pp. 609–22.

⁵ Hadot, *Ancient Philosophy*, p. 220.

⁶ Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 83.

⁷ J. Sellars, 'Review of P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*', *Classical Review* 54/1 (2004), pp. 69–70.

exercises', considered to prepare a person to live and die well. Alternatively, this aspect of philosophy could be described as the mental training required for a philosophical life, as proposed by John Sellars.⁸ As Hadot emphasized, philosophical schools had different teachings and thus diverse physical, discursive, and intuitive exercises, but all such activities were performed, in essence, to modify the practising subject.⁹

The remaining evidence for the theory and techniques of ancient spiritual exercises is scattered but adequate to demonstrate the relevance of practice for philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman contexts. According to Diogenes Laertius, one founder of cynic philosophy, named Diogenes of Sinope, distinguished between mental and bodily exercises (6.70). Diogenes Laertius also reports that the early Stoics Herillus and Dionysus each wrote a work on ἄσκησις (7.166–67). While these are not preserved, the Roman Stoic sources, which come from the first century CE but draw on an earlier tradition of mental training, provide solid documentation for the phenomenon. The most important single piece of evidence is Musonius Rufus' *On Exercise*, and another treatise on exercises was composed by Epictetus (*Disc.* 3.12). Seneca tells about a daily exercise of self-examination which he learned from Quintus Sextius (*De Ira* 3.36.1–3) but which may be Pythagorean in origin (cf. *Carm. Aur.* 40–44), and he comments upon the cynic notion of daily meditation on 'wholesome maxims' (*Ben.* 7.2.1). In the next century, Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* represents 'an extended spiritual exercise'.¹⁰

Spiritual exercise demonstrates the lived and existential aspect of ancient – specifically Hellenistic and Roman imperial – philosophy. As such, it sheds light on the broader intellectual context of Philo's discussion on Jacob's spiritual exercises. I do not suggest that the paradigm first proposed by Hadot would be the only way to conceptualize ancient Mediterranean philosophy around the turn of the era, but I do argue that it is particularly illuminating with respect to the specific exercises listed by Philo. Before analysing those accounts, it is necessary, however, to pay further attention to Philo's general pedagogical ideals. This will be done in order to suitably locate Jacob's training in relation to Philo's general stand on educational aspirations.

⁸ See the critical response of J. Sellars, 'Review of J. Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*', *Mind* 123/492 (2014), pp. 1177–80.

⁹ Hadot, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 6, 175, 177, 188–211, 230.

¹⁰ Sellars, *Art of Living*, p. 148. Remarkably, Musonius Rufus (esp. *On Exercise* 1.12) argues that virtue involves both theory and practice, as well as making a distinction between training for soul alone and training for both soul and body.

The Place of Wisdom in Philo's Pedagogical Programme

For Philo, the general purpose of education is to produce good life. The rational nature of human beings inclines towards cultivation (*Somn.* 1.106–107; cf. *Fug.* 172), which enables people to have ‘not only life, but a good life’ (*Spec.* 2.229). The concept of παιδεία, designating both the process of education and its end result,¹¹ is described as ‘the light of the soul’ (*Leg.* 3.167). In practice, Philo promotes ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία which in Greek pedagogy denotes a cycle of subjects that prepare the pupil to take his or her place in society. In post-classical times, encyclical studies contained the literary arts of trivium and the four subjects of quadrivium.¹² Likewise, Philo mentions grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy.¹³ This is natural, for propaedeutic instruction was widely appreciated in the Hellenistic schools and Alexandria was a major cultural centre in Philo's time.¹⁴

Yet, elementary studies are only an initial step in the path to wisdom; Philo describes them as the simple, milky food of infancy (*Agr.* 9; *Congr.* 19), a sweet fragrance to the soul (*Sacr.* 44), and the beginning of virtue (*Fug.* 183).¹⁵ Some pupils continue to study φιλοσοφία which Philo, like the Stoics, presents as the pursuit of wisdom, involving the knowledge of things divine, human, and their causes.¹⁶ Philosophy can elevate one's mind to a higher level (*Spec.* 2.230) and produce noble courage (*Prob.* 24) and virtue (*Leg.* 1.57–58). A philosopher, concerned with not hurting his or her soul (*Leg.* 3.72),

¹¹ A. Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria* (HUCM, 7; Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1982), p. 1.

¹² Mendelson, *Secular Education*, p. xxiv. Quadrivium was first discussed by Plato, *Resp.* vii, 523a–c, 532c. Yet there was no fixed curriculum in the Graeco-Roman era; *pace* H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'Antiquité* (Paris: Seuil, 1948). For a critical evaluation, see Y. Lee Too, ‘Introduction: Writing the History of Ancient Education’, in Y. Lee Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 1–21.

¹³ See esp. *Congr.* 11, 15–18, 74–77; see also *Cher.* 105; *Agr.* 18; *Somn.* 1.205; *Mos.* 1.23; *QE* 2.103. Cf. Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.10.1.

¹⁴ The city had gymnasia as well as the mouseion and the library which gathered intelligentsia; see P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), pp. 1.312–35.

¹⁵ Nevertheless, encyclical studies have ‘inherent spiritual value’ for Philo. He tries to make them compatible with the divine, as argued by Mendelson, *Secular Education*, pp. xxiv, 83.

¹⁶ Cf. Cicero, *Off.* 2; Seneca, *Ep.* 89.5; Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 9.13 (SVF II 36); G.E. Sterling, ‘Philosophy as the Handmaid of Wisdom: Philosophy in the Exegetical Traditions of Alexandrian Jews’, in R. Hirsch-Luipold, H. Görgemanns and M. von Albrecht (eds.), *Religiöse Philosophie und philosophische Religion der frühen Kaiserzeit: Literaturgeschichtliche Perspektiven* (Ratio Religionis Studien, 1; Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum, 51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), pp. 67–98 at 95.

aims at becoming a sage (σοφός), though the states of seeking and having wisdom intermingle at times (e.g., *Ebr.* 49). Thus, the main distinction seems to concern προπαιδεία,¹⁷ the study of letters and literature, and παιδεία related to wisdom and virtue. In Philo's words, 'just as the school subjects contribute to ... philosophy, so does philosophy to the getting of wisdom' (*Congr.* 79).

Philo famously allegorizes this order in his treatment of the Hagar and Sarah story. His application echoes the allegorical readings of Homer: Penelope's suitors could not win her and had to contend themselves with her maids (*Od.* 12).¹⁸ In Philo's thought, Hagar symbolizes encyclical studies, while Sarah represents virtue (ἀρετή), wisdom (σοφία), and prudence (φρόνησις). Abraham had to take the foreign Hagar before he could conceive a child with his legitimate wife (*Congr.* 23–24). The claim is that Jews can attend encyclical training, presented by Hagar, since it ultimately serves the practice of true philosophy, the union with Sarah (*Congr.* 22, 74–76, 80). Like Penelope's suitors, those who cannot attain the higher goal, whether Penelope or philosophy, should still undertake ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, the time of pregnancy preceding proper philosophy (*Congr.* 145).¹⁹

In summary, Philo sees παιδεία as a kind of propaedeutic to philosophy. His vision of philosophy is not exhausted by Greek criteria, however, but remains firmly rooted in the Jewish tradition and ways of reflecting.²⁰ In particular, interpretation of ancestral writings holds a central place in the pursuit of philosophy as both imagined and

¹⁷ The term προπαιδεία was first used by Plato (*Resp.* vii, 536d) in the context of preparation for dialectics.

¹⁸ See esp. Gorgias of Leontini from the fifth century B.C.E.: 'Those who neglect philosophy and spend their time on ordinary studies are like the suitors who desired Penelope but slept with her maids.' From K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 139. Later on, see Plutarch, *De lib.* 7D: 'And it was a clever saying of Bion ... that, just as the suitors, not being able to approach Penelope, consorted with her maid-servants, so also do those who are not able to attain to philosophy wear themselves to a shadow over the other kinds of education which have no value.'

¹⁹ The basic training can be misleading, however, if the servants' charms lead into neglecting philosophy (*Congr.* 77–78), or if pursued for the sake of pleasure and influence (*Leg.* 3.167). See, e.g., Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for his Time* (NTSup, 86; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 163–64; J.M. Rogers, 'The Philonic and the Pauline: Hagar and Sarah in the Exegesis of Didymus the Blind', *SPhiloA* 26 (2014), pp. 57–77.

²⁰ On the Jewish content of Philo's παιδεία, see H. Najman, 'Text and Figure in Jewish *Paideia*', in Mladen Popović (ed.), *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (JSJSup, 141; Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 253–65. For discussion on ancient amalgamations of Jewish and Greek thought, see also D. Winston, 'Philo and the Hellenistic Jewish Encounter', *SPhiloA* 7 (1995), pp. 124–42.

undertaken by Philo himself.²¹ Indeed, commentary culture can be seen as one aspect of philosophical training and practice in the Roman era. Hadot also addresses this as he writes that the spreading of learning centres throughout the Mediterranean region changed the methods of instructing philosophy in the early imperial period. The change meant easier access to teachings of philosophical schools and enabled the blend of respective ideas. Meanwhile, ‘living continuity’ between many teachers and students as well as their ‘ancestors’ was lost along with the rise of such learning centres. The significance of textual sources increased and commentary on texts became a mode of philosophical practice, as well as a means to maintain the connection with the predecessors.²²

Philo on the Difficulty of Attaining Wisdom

The aforementioned pedagogical views of Philo, a member of a wealthy Alexandrian family, perhaps resulted from his participation in the institutions meant for the upper class youth.²³ Apart from Jewish scriptures and customs, Philo was learned in the Greek curriculum and acquainted with Homer, historians, poets, Attic law, mathematics, astronomy, rhetoric, and music.²⁴ He regarded himself as a seeker of wisdom and practiser of philosophy but barely as a σοφός, for he calls himself imperfect.²⁵

Philo’s modest self-assessment aligns with the difficulty of attaining wisdom in the Greek tradition; the philosopher is not a sage, but only tending towards wisdom.²⁶ Similarly, according to Philo, the highest wisdom is rarely attained and the wise, not even aware of their perfection (*Agr.* 161), ‘hardly to be found’ (*Mut.* 34–38).²⁷ Yet, those who proceed to a higher intellectual level represent ‘an ember of wisdom’ so that

²¹ Recently, see esp. Maren R. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). In this pioneering work, Niehoff explores Philo’s mixture of Aristotelian (literal) and Platonic (allegorizing) interpretative approaches.

²² Hadot, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 147–48.

²³ Whether *Congr.* 74–76 reflects Philo’s own education is debated; see Mendelson, *Secular Education*, pp. 25–26, 31–32.

²⁴ For Philo’s education, see, e.g., M. Alexander Jr., ‘Philo of Alexandria and Hellenic Paideia’, *Euphrosyne* 37 (2009), pp. 121–30; E. Koskenniemi, ‘Philo and Classical Education’, in T. Seland (ed.), *Reading Philo: A Handbook to Philo of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids, MA: Eerdmans, 2014), pp. 102–28.

²⁵ See *Leg.* 2.91, 3.207; *Her.* 275; cf. *Fug.* 128, *Mut.* 37.

²⁶ Hadot, *Ancient Philosophy*, p. 4.

²⁷ Yet, see the list of exemplary people in different parts of the world in *Prob.* 72–96.

‘virtue may not be altogether extinguished and lost to our race’ (*Spec.* 2.47). If all people became ‘lovers of prudence’, Philo claims, cities would be filled with happiness, ‘utterly free from all that causes grief and fears, and packed with what produces joys and states of well-being’ (*Spec.* 2.48). Thus, in spite of the difficulty of achieving wisdom, Philo maintains that wisdom never closes her school.²⁸

Meanwhile, the sage’s portrayal is highly idealized. His calm mind is being connected with God due to virtue and with other people due to humanity (*Somn.* 2.229–230), which resembles the Stoic emphasis on the sage’s emotional and ethical perfection.²⁹ The passage in *Sobr.* 56–57 indeed echoes the famous paradoxes attributed to the sage.³⁰ To summarize Philo’s other comments, closely read by David Winston, the sage embodies virtue (*Congr.* 69–70), behaves virtuously without being commanded to do so (*Leg.* 3.144), does nothing against his intention (*Prob.* 97), and is free due to right reason (*Prob.* 45–46). His mind embraces and investigates the cosmos (*Spec.* 2.45), but he is not attached to the mortal body (*QG* 4.74). The sage attains simplicity (*Migr.* 153), loves solitude (*Abr.* 23; *Spec.* 2.44), and shows harmony between words and deeds (*Post.* 88); any impression of false speech is only apparent (*QG* 4.204; cf. *Cher.* 15). In particular, the sage fulfils the Stoic ideal of ἀπάθεια, a state of serenity where the mind is not disturbed with passions. He avoids danger (*Somn.* 2.83–85) and is prepared for whatever fortune might bring (*Spec.* 2.46).³¹

²⁸ Philo’s statement ‘wisdom . . . never closes her school of thought (φροντιστήριον)’ in *Prob.* 13 contains a retort to Aristophanes who presents the door of Socrates’ ‘school of thought’ (φροντιστήριον) as locked (*Cl.* 132–183); S. Yli-Karjanmaa, ‘Philo of Alexandria’, in H. Tarrant et al. (eds.), *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity* (Brill’s Companions to Classical Reception, 13; Leiden: Brill), in press. I thank Sami Yli-Karjanmaa for making his article available.

²⁹ In the Stoic vocabulary, a person who strives towards virtue is called a προκόπτοντος as opposed to the σοφός. Philo has a somewhat similar typology of the classes of human beings: the god-born (sages by birth such as Isaac and Moses), the heaven-born (those in progress towards perfection), and the earth-born (hedonistic people); Mendelson, *Secular Education*, pp. 47, 51–59. See esp. *Gig.* 60–61, but also *Her.* 65, *Somn.* 1.151–152, *QG* 4.47.

³⁰ On the Stoic paradoxes, see SVF III 591, 594, 599; D. Winston, ‘Sage and Super-Sage in Philo of Alexandria’, in G.E. Sterling (ed.), *The Ancestral Philosophy: Hellenistic Philosophy in Second Temple Judaism. Essays of David Winston* (BJS, 331; SPhiloM, 4; Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2001), pp. 171–80 at 171.

³¹ Due to ἀπάθεια, the sage despises fear, pain, cowardice, and death (e.g., *Det.* 46; *Prob.* 21, 30; *Migr.* 67; *Congr.* 36). For further references to parallels in the writings of Epictetus, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius, see Winston, ‘Sage’, pp. 171–77. For the ἀπάθεια and freedom of a wise person in Stoicism, see Diog. Laert. 7.117 and the comments of M.R. Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 35, 81, 210.

Essentially, the sage pictured by Philo has attained perfection.³² This is particularly true of the figure of Moses who reached the summit of philosophy (*Opif.* 8) and manifests a *παραδειγμα* to be emulated (*Virt.* 51; *Mos.* 1.158–159).³³ Apart from him, the characters of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac are portrayed as examples to be followed.³⁴ Each of the patriarchs even illustrates a specific (Greek) method of acquiring virtue: instruction (Abraham), nature (Isaac), or practice (Jacob) (e.g., *Abr.* 52–54).³⁵

Only Philo's treatise on Abraham has been preserved, but if the claim in *Ios.* 1 is accurate, there was a treatise on Jacob as well.³⁶ Although it does not remain, several remaining passages in Philo's corpus associate Jacob with practice that leads to wisdom.³⁷ How does Philo make use of this figure as he constructs (one prospect of) Jewish *ἄσκησις* in the context of first-century Alexandria? In particular, what kinds of activities and forms of spiritual exercise does Jacob's philosophical training involve?

Wisdom Embodied: Jacob's Life Filled with Exercises

³² See *Fug.* 168, *Prob.* 43, *Migr.* 128–130. Nevertheless, Philo also notes that perfection belongs to God alone (*Her.* 121, *Fug.* 172, *Mut.* 181–185).

³³ Moses is capable of perfect rationality to the extent that his bodily sensations do not produce lower impulses and desires; here Philo even transcends the Stoic view, unfamiliar with the idea of the passion's complete absence. On Moses' perfection, see esp. *Leg.* 3.129; *Sacr.* 8; *Migr.* 67; *Mos.* 1.155–156, 158; Winston, 'Sage', pp. 177–80. See also W.A. Meeks, 'Moses as God and King', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (SHR, 14; Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 354–71; I.W. Scott, 'Is Philo's Moses a Divine Man?', *SPhiloA* 14 (2002), pp. 87–111.

³⁴ E.g., *Gig.* 62; *Mut.* 12; *Somn.* 1.168; *Abr.* 4, 52–54. For their imitation, see Mendelson, *Secular Education*, pp. 62–65.

³⁵ Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria*, p. 70, points out that '[h]ere Philo draws on a broad Greek tradition about education, in which instruction, nature and practice are discussed in relation to virtue'. Plutarch mentions how the triad is perfectly united in the souls of Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato (*De lib.* 2A–C).

³⁶ See *Ios.* 1: 'The factors which produce consummate excellence are three in number: learning, nature, practice. And these names are represented in three of the wise men to whom Moses gives the senior place. Since I have described the lives of these three, the life which results from teaching, the life of the self-taught and the life of practice, I will carry on the series by describing a fourth life, that of the statesman.'

³⁷ See, e.g., *Sobr.* 65; *Conf.* 69–70; *Congr.* 35–36; *Mut.* 12, 88; *Somn.* 1.120–126, 168–171; *Abr.* 52–53; *Ios.* 26. Jacob is called the 'practiser' in *Sacr.* 47, *Fug.* 39–40, *Mut.* 210. Sheridan, 'Jacob and Israel', p. 321, argues that Philo uses the term *ἄσκησις* 'primarily as an athletic metaphor', but as I hope to have shown above, its connotations are often highly philosophical. On the link between Jacob and athletics in Philo's works, see also L.H. Feldman, 'Josephus' Portrait of Jacob', *JQR* 79/2–3 (1988–1989), pp. 101–51 at 104–5n7.

According to Philo, true philosophers do not cease to look for virtue which requires exercise. Even sages need to consolidate it: like a plaster placed on the wall must become solid, ‘continual study and incessant practice’ should strengthen the souls of the perfect ones (*Agr.* 160). While countless references may shed some light on Philo’s conception of philosophy as a way of life which entails practice, I shall now highlight the particular contribution of two lists of exercises which display, in the words of Hadot, ‘a fairly comprehensive panorama of Stoico-Platonic inspired philosophical therapeutics’.³⁸

Philo’s tendency to examine philosophical ideas through scriptural exegesis of his ancestral writings applies to the accounts on Jacob’s spiritual training as well. The first one occurs in *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, within a context that discusses the characters of Jacob and Esau (*Her.* 252–253):

(252) Incidentally in the story of Jacob and Esau there are thoughts well worthy of our admiration. Esau, though he has the knowledge needed for the chase, is ever hunted and supplanted, because he has acquired his skill not to do good but harm, and moreover is never quick or zealous in his hunting. Jacob hunts passion not through learning, but moved to it by nature, and brings the game to the tester who will decide whether it will stand the test. For this purpose the tester will eat of all that he brings. (253) For all the elements of discipline (πάντα γὰρ τὰ τῆς ἀσκήσεως) are food fit for eating, investigation (ἡ ζήτησις), examination (ἡ σκέψις), reading (ἡ ἀνάγνωσις), listening (ἡ ἀκρόασις), attention (ἡ προσοχή), self-mastery (ἡ ἐγκράτεια), and indifference to indifferent things (ἡ ἐξαδιαφόρησις τῶν ἀδιαφόρων). Of all these the tester naturally eats samples only, not the whole. For the practiser must have his proper food left to him, like prizes for his efforts.

This is not the only place where Philo contrasts Jacob and Esau: Jacob represents practice that leads to wisdom, whereas Esau is presented as his antithesis, i.e., as a symbol for foolishness, wickedness, and passion.³⁹ The fact that Esau gave up his rights as the first-born (*Gen.* 25.29–34) shows that he lacked temperance and was a slave of the belly (*QG* 4.168). Here, Philo refers to the second incident when the younger brother received the rights of the firstborn: father Isaac, known to like game (*Gen.* 25.28), had asked Esau to go for a hunt and bring the game for him in order to receive the fatherly blessing (*Gen.* 27.1–4), but mother Rebecca prepared his favourite dish by

³⁸ Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 84.

³⁹ For Esau, see also *Leg.* 2.59; 3.2, 88; *Sacr.* 17, 81, 120, 135; *Det.* 45; *Ebr.* 9; *Sobr.* 26; *Migr.* 153; *Congr.* 54, 61, 175; *Fug.* 4, 23, 39, 42, 43; *Mut.* 230; *QG* 4.161, 163, 166, 169, 174, 206.

means of which Jacob was able to receive the blessing meant for Esau (Gen. 27.5–29).

In his treatment of the brothers, Philo implies Jacob's superior way of life and the consequent personal transformation as factors that explain the distribution of blessing. He juxtaposes Esau, who was a skilful hunter (cf. Gen. 25.27) but did not succeed because he had acquired his skill in order to harm, and peaceful Jacob (cf. Gen. 25.27) who hunted the undesirable passion (πάθος) itself.⁴⁰ The younger brother Jacob undertook various kinds of discipline and brought his 'game' to be examined by the 'tester', father Isaac who already had the wisdom to which Jacob aspired.⁴¹ This interaction occurred, and was needed, in order to know whether Jacob's 'game' in life can be eaten, i.e., whether his practice of exercises contributes to virtue and is worth granting a blessing. The motif of eating is intriguing since food and nourishment are often linked with education in early Jewish and Christian discourse.⁴²

The second account in *Legum allegoriarum* pertains to Jacob's time spent at his uncle's place where he had escaped because of Esau's resentment (Gen. 27.1–46). Philo states that it was appropriate for Jacob to secretly flee from Laban (cf. Gen. 31.20–21) since Laban – another figure characterized as Jacob's antithesis – was subject to thoughts that rise from outward senses, and one should rather escape than become a slave of such (*Leg.* 3.16–17).⁴³ Thereafter, Philo discusses how Jacob's mind could control passions and train itself to attain virtue by means of various exercises (*Leg.* 3.18–19):

(18) Now (let us ask) why, as though Jacob were not aware that Laban was a Syrian, does he [Moses] say, 'Jacob concealed (his departure from) Laban the Syrian' (cf. Gen 31:20⁴⁴)? In this likewise there is a point not without pertinence. For 'Syria' means 'Highlands'. Jacob, therefore, the mind in training (ὁ ἄσκητὴς

⁴⁰ Abraham (*Abr.* 256–257) and Moses (*Leg.* 3.131–135, *Migr.* 67) also resist the passions due to reason and training.

⁴¹ Cf. how the 'all-wise father Jacob' serves as a judge who condemns Simeon and Levi's mass murder in 4 Macc 2:19.

⁴² Elsewhere Philo discusses eating and drinking, e.g., in regard to the virtuous life of the Therapeutae described in *De vita contemplativa*. Philo also links self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια), mentioned in the two lists of exercises, with the control of appetites; see *Spec.* 2.195; 4.97, 99, 101; *Prov.* 2.70; *QE* 2.18. For food and education in early Christianity and the Roman world, see J.D. Penniman, 'Fed to Perfection: Mother's Milk, Roman Family Values, and the Transformation of the Soul in Gregory of Nyssa', *Church History* 84/3 (2015), pp. 495–530.

⁴³ For Philo, Laban represents a materialistic person lacking education (*Fug.* 8–9).

⁴⁴ The Hebrew text reads 'Jacob stole (גנב) the heart/mind of Laban the Aramean', which may mean misleading, while the Septuagint translates the verb 'concealed/kept something hidden' (ἐκρυψε) and replaces 'Aramean' with 'Syrian' (τὸν Σύρον). The phrase 'Jacob concealed Laban' must refer to the fact that Jacob concealed his departure from Laban, as is suggested by the preceding text in *Leg.* 3.16: 'And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled.'

οὖν Ἰακὼβ νοῦς), when he sees passion grovelling low before him, awaits its onset calculating that he will master it by force, but when it is seen to be lofty, stately, weighty, the first to run away is the mind in training, followed by all his belongings, beings portions of his discipline (τῆς ἀσκήσεως), readings (ἀναγνώσεις), meditative exercises (μελέται), therapies (θεραπείαι), remembrance of good things (τῶν καλῶν μνημαί), self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια), and accomplishments of duties (τῶν καθηκόντων ἐνέργειαι); he crosses the river of objects of sense, that swamps and drowns the soul under the flood of the passions, and, when he has crossed it, sets his face for the lofty high-land, the principle of perfect virtue: (19) ‘for he set his face towards the mountain of Gilead’. The meaning of this name is ‘migration of witness’; for God caused the soul to migrate from the passions that are represented by Laban, and bore witness to it how greatly to its advantage and benefit its removal was, and let it on away from the evil things that render the soul low and grovelling up to the height and greatness of virtue.

In Gen. 31.1–3, Jacob is said to escape from Laban due to a divine command after Laban and his sons were not favourable to him. Philo traces a philosophical motif behind this flight: Laban represents passions hostile to the soul, and the divine will is that the soul migrates from such (cf. *Leg.* 3.22).⁴⁵ Jacob, the mind in training, escaped Laban with ‘all his belongings’, i.e., his spiritual exercises. On his way to virtue, Jacob crossed the flood of passions and saw the mountain of Gilead (cf. Gen. 31.22–25). In Philo’s explanation, Moses referred to Laban specifically as the Syrian because Syria stands for highland, the lofty passion, whereas the heights of Gilead symbolize virtue, which Jacob was about to gain through his struggles.⁴⁶

Both of these accounts belong to the allegorical commentary, a series of exegetical works where Philo seeks to offer an allegorical reading of Genesis in the form of a more advanced, even somewhat esoteric teaching.⁴⁷ Genesis, according to Philo, embraces numerous matters, including the portrayal of people ‘some of whom lived a life of virtue, others of vice’ (*Abr.* 1). The sections on Jacob’s character formation are

⁴⁵ This is not Jacob’s first flight related to the avoidance of passions: Rebekkah advised Jacob to flee to Laban in the first place because of Esau’s anger, so that he would not need to confront it (*Fug.* 23–24; cf. Gen. 27.42).

⁴⁶ Cf. *Somn.* 1.151 where the wise are said to have reached the heights of Olympus.

⁴⁷ On the style and audience of the *Allegorical Commentary*, see J.R. Royse, ‘The Works of Philo’, in A. Kamesar (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 32–64 at 33, 38–45. While Philo is typically defined as an allegorical interpreter, the use of the literal methods of Homeric scholarship in the *Allegorical Commentary* has been addressed by Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis*, pp. 133–51.

examinations of such contrasting figures. The use of thesis and antithesis is powerful: the stories about Jacob are read as evidence for exercising wisdom and training one's character, while the figures of Esau and Laban provide negative counterparts by means of symbolizing mental laziness.⁴⁸ The exercises attributed to Jacob resonate with Greek philosophy, but Philo seems to adapt some of them so that the Jewish and Greek traditions eventually meet and merge in them, as I hope to show next.

The Curriculum of Spiritual Exercises

The term ἄσκησις, mentioned ahead of both lists, marks a life dedicated to wisdom. In the Greek sources, the concept typically refers to discipline, training, and practice associated with philosophy.⁴⁹ Plato states that ἄσκησις creates virtues (*Resp.* 518e), whereas Philo claims that it produces excellence (*Ios.* 1), serves as a means to attain wisdom, virtue, and perfection,⁵⁰ improves one's natural qualities (*Prov.* 2.16), and belongs to infants like wisdom belongs to full-grown people (*Migr.* 46). Moreover, ἄσκησις may manifest itself via virtuous characteristics such as temperance, self-restraint, frugality, abstinence, and avoidance of luxury (*Spec.* 4.99, 101; *Hypoth.* 7.11; *Contempl.* 28).

While the list form in which Jacob's exercises are presented suggests that Philo specifically gathered concepts that pertain to each other and constitute a type of ἄσκησις, it does not indicate *how* they are to be associated. The list form does not communicate any systematic categorization or a finite, all-encompassing treatment of the topic; the two lists of exercises, despite being attributed to Jacob, demonstrate variation and are only partially overlapping. Philo seems to argue that a good disposition is simply achieved by means of variegated pragmatic, contemplative, and intellectual practice; there is no standard set of exercises but instead varying approaches to the topic.

It is the reader, therefore, who interprets the list's meaning, and this interpretative task

⁴⁸ Cf. Hindy Najman, 'Cain and Abel as Character Traits: A Study in the Allegorical Typology of Philo of Alexandria', in G.P. Luttikhuisen (ed.), *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Themes in Biblical Narrative, 5; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 107–18.

⁴⁹ Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 82. For Greek conceptions of ἄσκησις, see *idem*, *Ancient Philosophy*, pp. 189–90.

⁵⁰ See *Praem.* 51 on wisdom; *Leg.* 3.135; *Det.* 10; *Congr.* 35; *Somn.* 1.167, 169; *Abr.* 52–54; *Ios.* 1 on virtue; and *Gig.* 26, *Conf.* 181, *Praem.* 65 on perfection.

can be done in different ways. Though it might be possible to trace sets of exercises within the lists,⁵¹ the two lists remain different and non-systematic in character. Like Philo, I do not attempt to construct any theory or classification of exercises on the basis of these accounts. Instead, I shall discuss Jacob's activities in three groups based on their likely intellectual context. Moving from more general to more specific, I begin with general learning methods, continue with exercises familiar from several philosophical traditions, and conclude with those exercises that have a Stoic flavour.

Finally, a remark on the multicultural intellectual context of Philo is needed. As discussed above, Philo draws on both Jewish and Greek traditions.⁵² Considering his variegated sources of influence, it is not surprising that the lists of spiritual exercises echo specifically Platonic and Stoic ideas, as well as containing certain practices with a probably Jewish flavour. While the influence of Stoic ideas seems most dominant, the present treatment will hopefully demonstrate that Jacob's exercises cannot be limited to any single philosophical school, either Greek or Jewish.

Learning Methods

The exercises of 'listening' (ἀκρόασις) and 'reading' (ἀνάγνωσις) are clearly intellectual but admittedly general in character: they may designate any type of listening and reading, or refer to such practices of Greek schools as attending courses, reading (philosophical) texts, and explaining those texts.⁵³ The terms ἀκρόασις and ἀνάγνωσις mostly appear in late antique writings. Meanwhile, they are not discussed as established exercises of philosophical schools in texts that predate, or are roughly contemporary to, Philo's texts, apart from Plutarch who links ἀνάγνωσις with the daily exercise of reading aloud (*De tuenda* 130c9).

⁵¹ The list in *Her.* 252–253 could be seen as starting with cognitive exercises (investigation, examination, reading, listening, attention) and ending with pragmatic exercises set to shape one's conduct (self-mastery, indifference). The list in *Leg.* 3.18–19, in turn, could consist of one cognitive exercise (reading), three exercises meant to have a positive impact on a person's inner psychology (meditative exercises, therapies, remembrance), and of another set of pragmatic exercises to influence one's conduct (self-mastery, duties).

⁵² For discussion on Philo's intellectual position, see, e.g., J.M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139–83; F. Alesse (ed.), *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy* (Studies in Philo of Alexandria, 5; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁵³ See Hadot, *Philosophy*, pp. 86, 113–14, for observations that mostly concern reading. Note that ἀκρόασις may also mean the audience of a philosopher, as in Epictetus, *Disc.* 3.28.38.

Philo mentions ἀνάγνωσις in these two accounts alone.⁵⁴ He could mean the act of reading scriptural texts, like ἀκρόασις may denote the exercise of listening to sacred scriptures (*Ebr.* 213) or holy words (*Mut.* 210).⁵⁵ The idea of philosophical training by means of reading and listening to sacred writings indeed seems convincing in the light of Philo's overall corpus. In particular, it reminds one of the Therapeutae who are dedicated to studying their ancestral tradition (e.g., *Contempl.* 25–32). While reading and listening can happen in several contexts of philosophical self-training, it is their likely object that may grant these exercises a specific Jewish flavour.⁵⁶

Generally Philosophical Exercises

Many of Jacob's exercises are not only generally intellectual, but clearly draw on various Greek philosophical traditions. These activities include investigation, examination, meditative exercises, and remembrance of good or beautiful things.

To begin, Jacob's mind inclines towards investigation (ζήτησις). This concept has been linked with, say, Socrates' inquiries (e.g., Plato, *Ap.* 29c; Diog. Laert. 2.5.21), Aristotle's concern for virtue (*Eth. Nic.* 1096a12, 1102a4), and the Stoics' study of the universe (Diog. Laert. 7.1.133). In line with the latter, Philo states that philosophy arises from inquiries into cosmos (*Opif.* 54). Some people investigate the nature of things out of desire to be nourished by the food of the soul (*Plant.* 79), while others, lacking desire for inquiry, debase their reason (*Fug.* 121). All inquiries are elegant and philosophical, but the investigation of God is particularly delightful (*Fug.* 141).

The concept of examination (σκέψις) may designate a related exercise: it could mean the attitude of accepting the human limitations in gaining knowledge, widely held by Hellenistic philosophers,⁵⁷ or philosophical exercises such as perception, study, and inquiry (e.g., Plato, *Grg.* 487e; Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1102a12). Philo probably refers to the latter since he remarks that σκέψις may concern God (*Fug.* 141) or Socrates'

⁵⁴ The verb ἀναγινώσκω also occurs only in *Legat.* 254 where the question is about general reading. Cf. Sirach, Prologue 13, where ἀνάγνωσις refers to the reading of Ben Sira's instruction.

⁵⁵ The one who desires knowledge is further depicted as hastening to listen (*QE* 2.13).

⁵⁶ Cf. M.L. Satlow, "And on the Earth You Shall Sleep": "Talmud Torah" and Rabbinic Asceticism', *JR* 83/2 (2003), pp. 204–25, who argues that the rabbis' torah study represents Graeco-Roman spirituality expressed in Jewish idiom; it is a form of ascetic practice meant to heal and perfect one's self.

⁵⁷ In the Graeco-Roman antiquity, scepticism represented an 'intellectual posture' and an attitude 'to be lived'; R. Bett, *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge Companions to Philosophy; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 2–3.

philosophical study (*Somn.* 1.58).⁵⁸

Jacob is further devoted to μελέται. The concept of μελέτη and its Latin equivalent *meditatio* often stand for ‘preparatory exercises’ in rhetoric, but the connection to ‘meditation’ is that μελέται aim at assimilating ‘an idea, notion, or principle’ and making it ‘come alive in the soul’.⁵⁹ I have translated μελέται as ‘meditative exercises’ to cover both the term’s semantic field and its transformative purpose: Plato stresses the philosophers’ need to contemplate death and documents Socrates telling that the acquisition of good requires μελέτη (*Phd.* 64–67, 80–81; *Grg.* 500d). In Plutarch’s view, meditation on ‘sickness, suffering, and exile’ makes the soul realize that there is much ‘false and empty and corrupt’ in these undesirable things (*De tranq.* 18).⁶⁰

Although Isaac is said to have received wisdom from heaven without undertaking μελέται (*Fug.* 166), Philo thinks, in general, that wisdom requires long μελέτη (*Cher.* 9, cf. *Ebr.* 21); apart from the passage analysed above, Jacob needed μελέτη on his way to the good according to *Somn.* 1.168. Like virtues, God planted these gifts of his grace (*Migr.* 31) into the human being together with insight, apprehension, accurate judgement, memory, scientific capacity, and ability to retain virtue (*Plant.* 31). The soul requires continual meditative exercise (*Sacr.* 85, *Congr.* 24) which destroys things that harm it (*Leg.* 3.22). Moreover, Philo mentions μελέτη on death (*Gig.* 13–14).⁶¹

Philo refers to τῶν καλῶν μνημαὶ only here, but devotes other attention to remembrance, the nourishing fruit of the soul (*Migr.* 205) and a means to keep good things alive (*Migr.* 16).⁶² The importance of memory for learning is obvious (e.g., Plutarch, *De lib.* 9E), while τῶν καλῶν, probably from the neuter τὰ καλά, could variably mean the beautiful, good, fine, or noble things. Philo uses τὰ καλά as a

⁵⁸ Once σκέψις is portrayed as a woman who instructs about the wicked and the virtuous (*Fug.* 55).

⁵⁹ Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 112n38. As such, they prepare one to more attentively engage with life events; A.I. Davidson, ‘Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot’, *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990), pp. 475–82 at 477. Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 85, argues that they control one’s inner discourse and its coherence.

⁶⁰ See also Epictetus, *Disc.* 2.9, who suggests that meditative exercise should be part of learning.

⁶¹ The souls who reach God are said to ‘study to die to the life in the body’ (μελετᾶσαι τὸν μετὰ σωματῶν ἀποθνήσκειν βίον); S. Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria* (SPhiloM, 7; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2015), pp. 96, 122–24. In the works of the desert fathers, μελέτη comes to signify meditation in the form of reciting sacred texts with either a speaking or a singing voice; J. Wortley, ‘How the Desert Fathers “Meditated”’, *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 46 (2006), pp. 315–28. Philo’s corpus does not attest to such an interpretation, though it is not entirely unthinkable that his references to the practice of virtue would include some sort of meditative exercises on sacred writings as well.

⁶² Furthermore, God’s remembrance is the beginning and the end of good things (*Migr.* 56). See also *Spec.* 4.161; *Virt.* 67.

synonym for virtues (*Leg.* 1.49),⁶³ but the concept might further echo Plato's notion of absolute beauty connected with good life since τὰ καλὰ and τὰ ἀγαθὰ are largely identical concepts for him.⁶⁴ The one who longs for τὰ καλὰ is equated with the one who desires τὰ ἀγαθὰ (*Meno* 77b).⁶⁵

Exercises with a Stoic Flavour

Finally, many of the exercises that constitute Jacob's ἄσκησις have a primarily Stoic flavour; these include attention, attitude of indifference, accomplishment of duties, self-mastery, and therapies.⁶⁶ Some of these are more interior exercises and others have a social function, orienting outwards from the subject, but each aims at creating habits in one way or the other. The Stoic impact is not surprising due to the ubiquity of Stoic ideas at the turn of the era and the Stoics' emphasis on lifestyle.⁶⁷ The comparison of Philo and Stoic thinkers is challenging, however, since no complete works of the founders of Stoicism (Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus) remain, while the Roman Stoics (Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius) may deviate from the earlier tradition.

Both attitude of indifference and attention represent interior exercises in that they involve self-examination and/or focus on one's inner world. As for ἡ ἐξαισθησις τῶν ἀδιαφόρων, Philo states that philosophers are 'schooled to hold things indifferent as indeed indifferent' (*Spec.* 2.46; also *Prob.* 83). A good person is free because he never, including 'matters indifferent', acts unwillingly or under compulsion (*Prob.* 60–61).

⁶³ Cf. *Ebr.* 21; *Spec.* 2.48. Philo also uses τὸ καλὸν as referring to the lack of union with 'the good/beautiful' (*Leg.* 3.38) and states that a good person acquires 'the good/beautiful for the sake of the good/beautiful alone' (*Leg.* 3.167).

⁶⁴ R. Barney, 'Plato on the Kalon and the Good', *Classical Philology* 105/4 (2010), pp. 363–77. In Plato's view, the beauty of the cosmos is formed in the image of eternal models (*Ti.* 28a–29a) and beauty makes τὰ καλὰ beautiful (*Phd.* 100d–e). Beauty also causes goodness (*Phlb.* 65a); G. Richardson Lear, 'Beauty (Kalon)', in G.A. Press (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Plato* (Continuum Companions to Philosophy; London: Continuum, 2012), pp. 139–41 at 139.

⁶⁵ Also, the desire for τὰ καλὰ is regarded as virtuous (*Meno* 77b6). It is difficult to learn τὰ καλὰ (*Cra.* 384b1), but those who possess them have reached the state of happiness (*Symp.* 202c10).

⁶⁶ This does not mean that the above-mentioned exercises could not apply to Stoicism. As pointed out by Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, pp. 224–25, the Stoic way of life requires study, discussion, and inquiry, even though these activities do not constitute its essence.

⁶⁷ The aspect of lifestyle was crucial to the extent that the Stoics, unlike Aristotle, made no distinction between the practical and theoretical parts of philosophy; the purpose of all philosophy was to live well and happily; Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, p. 218. For philosophy as 'the science of life', see Cicero, *Fin.* 3.2, 4.

These claims draw on the Stoic tradition: Zeno argues that virtues include goods (e.g., prudence, justice, courage, temperance) and vices respectively evils, whereas the ἀδιάφορα are morally neutral objects of pursuit (e.g., life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, fame, noble birth; as well as their opposites).⁶⁸

Attention (προσοχή) is another core component in the ‘Stoic spiritual attitude’, referring to the introspection of thoughts and actions, as well as the vigilance and presence of mind.⁶⁹ The concept barely occurs in texts that predate Philo, although it is linked with the early Stoic Chrysippus.⁷⁰ Instead, it is best known from Epictetus’ treatise *On Attention* and the Roman Stoics.⁷¹ Philo presents προσοχή as a virtue⁷² and argues that it can perfect the intellect (*Cher.* 102). The term προσοχή may also designate attention given to sacred precepts or divine signs (*Somn.* 1.193, 197).

The exercises of accomplishment of duties, self-mastery, and therapies have a more direct effect on the social behaviour of a person. Philo mentions τῶν καθήκοντων ἐνέργειαι only here, but refers to the philosophers’ notion of καθήκοντα in *Leg.* 1.56. Both the good and the wicked may perform duties (*QG* 4.211), yet their implementation must follow action that arises from a dutiful character (*Leg.* 3.210).⁷³ The term, linked with Zeno, marks proper behaviour in Stoic ethics. A person must act in accordance with nature and perform his or her befitting acts, the καθήκοντα.⁷⁴ These contain things that reason persuades people to do, e.g., honouring one’s parents and country, or social intercourse with friends, whilst those contrary to duty include, e.g., disregarding one’s family and the interests of one’s country, or disagreeing with friends.⁷⁵

Although self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια) was presented as a virtue in the classical period, the

⁶⁸ Diog. Laert. 7.102. Yet, the indifference is not absolute; Cooper, *Pursuits of Wisdom*, pp. 175–84. It is unclear what Philo includes in the ἀδιάφορα since he never lists them. Unlike Zeno, Philo admits that health, wealth, and fame are somewhat good things (*Leg.* 3.86) and accepts Aristotle’s idea of spiritual, corporeal, and external goods (*Eth. Nic.* 1098b) such as health, beauty, and strength (*QG* 3.16).

⁶⁹ See Hadot, *Philosophy*, pp. 84–85; R. Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 13, 252.

⁷⁰ See SVF III 111 and Plutarch, *De stoic.* 1045e6 = SVF III 174.

⁷¹ See esp. Epictetus, *Disc.* 4.12; also *Ench.* 33.6. For Marcus Aurelius and Seneca, see Hadot, *Philosophy*, pp. 226–28.

⁷² See *Sacr.* 27; *Her.* 10, 13; *Somn.* 2.37; *Spec.* 2.62. Some philosophers lack true attention (*Congr.* 66). See also Sir Prologue 13, 11:18; Wis 6:18, 12:20.

⁷³ See also *Cher.* 14–15. Philo further deploys the term πρακτέον as he refers to people who forgot their duties (*Leg.* 2.28); Yli-Karjanmaa, *Reincarnation*, p. 225.

⁷⁴ The sage, in turn, is capable of κατόρθωματα, the fully correct acts of a virtuous person; Graver, *Stoicism and Emotion*, p. 211.

⁷⁵ Diog. Laert. 7.108–109. Cicero also devotes much attention to duties, translated by him as *officia*.

Stoics emphasized it from Zeno onwards.⁷⁶ Philo describes ἐγκράτεια as the foundation on which the soul rests (*Contempl.* 34) and as a trait of the virtuous.⁷⁷ Self-mastery is beneficial for all affairs of life (*Ios.* 55), bringing health, strength, moderation, and simplicity.⁷⁸ It opposes desire (*Spec.* 1.149–150), tortures greediness (*Abr.* 104), and repels evils (*Agr.* 98). God shows favour to those with ἐγκράτεια (*Praem.* 116), and it belongs to a life led in accordance with the sacred law (*Virt.* 127). Since ἐγκράτεια is not possible if passion dwells in the soul (*Her.* 254), the wise emigrate from pleasure to it (*Abr.* 24; cf. *Virt.* 180, *Ios.* 153), the most wholesome sweetmeat (*Spec.* 1.175) to be attained via education (*Her.* 274, *Mut.* 229, *Congr.* 80). The path to ἐγκράτεια is up hill and laborious, but more advantageous than easier roads (*Spec.* 4.112).⁷⁹

Lastly, therapies (θεραπεῖαι) may relate to ἐγκράτεια. Philo uses the noun θεραπεία and the respective verb θεραπεύω in many senses such as service, worship, medical treatment, remedy, and care. The import of service or ministry to someone, gods, or God is typical in Philo's corpus.⁸⁰ Such a meaning remains possible here, yet θεραπεῖαι could denote the curing of the soul since Philo mentions θεραπεία in regard to healing passions or other spiritual distempers.⁸¹ He also refers to θεραπεία while speaking of philosophy as a healing art (*Her.* 298), and uses the respective verb of curing the spirit (*Leg.* 3.118; cf. 3.129). This reminds one of the Stoics who developed Socrates' analogy between medicine and philosophy, regarding the latter as 'the medicine of the soul'.⁸²

Conclusions

Philo's pedagogical programme begins with encyclical studies and continues with the

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1145b8; Diog. Laert. 7.92.

⁷⁷ *Mos.* 2.185, *QG* 4.172. See also the virtue lists in *Sacr.* 27 and *Mos.* 1.154.

⁷⁸ *Legat.* 14; *Opif.* 164, *Spec.* 1.173, *Praem.* 100.

⁷⁹ This echoes Hesiod's image of the long and demanding way to virtue (*Works and Days* 287, 289–292); see the quotation in *Ebr.* 149–150.

⁸⁰ See J.E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's 'Therapeutae' Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 55–68.

⁸¹ See *Virt.* 163; *Spec.* 1.191, 1.197, 2.17. So, Hadot, *Philosophy*, p. 111. Philo considers the passions to threaten the soul (*QG* 2.57) and the mind (*Her.* 267–270). The excellent can resist them due to reason and philosophical training (*Congr.* 80, *Migr.* 210–211, *Spec.* 2.46).

⁸² Esp. Chrysippus, SVF III 471, 474; Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.3, 6; M.C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Martin Classical Lectures, 2; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 13–14. On emotional therapy, see also Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind*; S. Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004).

pursuit of wisdom. To illustrate a philosophical lifestyle, Philo interprets two narratives from Genesis which focus on the figure of Jacob, the mind in training (*Her.* 252–253, *Leg.* 3.18–19). For Philo, Jacob symbolizes a mindful attitude and readiness to exercise, while Esau and Laban serve as his antitheses. Jacob was not born as a sage, but he proceeds towards wisdom through dedicated practice. The spiritual exercises projected onto him aim at cultivating the being and mind of this practising subject – or, indeed, anyone who wishes to emulate Jacob’s ἄσκησις in his or her path towards wisdom. Thus, the training pictured by Philo is transformative and presumed to have concrete outcomes such as a better quality of attention and a sense of moderation.

The references to the character of Jacob as an exemplar to be followed by other wisdom seekers are natural since Jacob seems to stand for an ideal combination of an esteemed ancestral figure and human nature: he is not a flawless sage and nearly superhuman being like Moses, yet as the paradigmatic patriarch Jacob may provide the audience with a model for an Israelite/Jewish person who strives to attain wisdom. This is specifically true of Jacob before the change of his name into Israel, which according to Philo created a positive transformation in his spiritual status.⁸³ Indeed, Philo seems to claim that even the patriarch who later came to designate the community of people, Israel, as the eponymous father of the twelve tribes,⁸⁴ needed serious practice before achieving perfection. Such portrayal of the figure reminds one the constant need for exercises in virtue, as well as of the ever-evolving nature of the human self.

The Jacob accounts analysed in this article suggest that Philo imagines a life dedicated to wisdom in a way that is inherently multicultural. He discusses the topic of spiritual

⁸³ See *Mut.* 81: ‘We shall also find that the change of Jacob’s name to Israel is much to the purpose. Why so? Because Jacob is the supplanter, and Israel he who sees God. It is the task of a supplanter in the practice of virtue to disturb and shake and upset the supports on which passion rests, and all the firmness and stability which they have. That is a work which cannot commonly be done without hard effort and the stains of the arena, but only when one maintains the contests of wisdom to the end, and drilled in the gymnastics of the soul wrestles with the thoughts which oppose and hold it fast in their grip. The task of him who sees God is not to leave the sacred arena uncrowned, but carry off the prizes of victory.’ The interpretation that the change of Jacob’s name transformed his spiritual life as well became common in early Christian writings, as has been shown by Sheridan, ‘Jacob and Israel’, pp. 316–34. On the importance of ‘seeing’ (linked with Israel above) in Philo’s thought, see S.D. Mackie, ‘Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism’, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012), pp. 147–79.

⁸⁴ See C.T.R. Hayward, *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings: From Victorious Athlete to Heavenly Champion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Regarding Jacob and the covenant in late Second Temple sources, note that the eschatological temple promised and imagined in the *Temple Scroll* (11QT^a 29.4–10) is linked with the covenant made with Jacob at Bethel.

exercise by means of scriptural interpretation centred on Jacob, which highlights his commitment to the Jewish ancestral tradition. Meanwhile, Philo draws on Greek philosophical traditions broadly speaking, including Platonic and Stoic ideas in particular.⁸⁵ As a result of this of this interpretative act, Philo ‘domesticates’ a number of Greek concepts and makes them part of the Hellenistic Jewish discourse in which he operates. This implies that the accounts on Jacob served the self-image of at least part of Alexandria’s Jewish community who understood their ancestral tradition as a form of philosophy. Philo’s claim is that the love for wisdom and virtue belongs to Jews, though they may adapt philosophy to meet their own needs, for example, regarding exercises such as reading and listening to scriptures, or attention to sacred precepts.⁸⁶

Apart from Philo, other authors of Second Temple Judaism revisit and continue traditions related to Jacob. The figure’s exemplarity is suggested, though in a more subtle way, already in Malachi where Jacob symbolizes the correct way of life.⁸⁷ In Jubilees he becomes specifically connected with education (19:14). Josephus’ portrayal of Jacob, in turn, enhances the figure’s virtuous qualities of wisdom, courage, temperance, justice, and piety on several occasions.⁸⁸ Despite the shared appreciation of the character, Philo’s approach to Jacob, which results from deep cultural collaboration, is singular in its focus on explicit spiritual exercise and related techniques.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ On Philo’s ‘double commitment’, see, e.g., D. Winston, ‘Judaism and Hellenism: Hidden Tensions in Philo’s thought’, *SPhiloA* 2 (1990), pp. 1–19.

⁸⁶ Meanwhile, Jacob’s training as delineated by Philo represents the Greek philosophical discourse in the Roman era. Indeed, T. Whitmarsh, *Beyond the Second Sophistic: Adventures in Greek Postclassicism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 2–7, strongly makes the case for including Hellenistic Jewish writings into our contemporary picture of ancient Greek literature.

⁸⁷ See L. Valve, ‘Typological Use of Traditions in the Jacob Cycle in the Book of Malachi’, in E. Koskeniemi and P. Lindqvist (eds.), *Rewritten Biblical Figures* (Studies in Rewritten Bible, 3; Åbo: Åbo Akademi University; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), pp. 27–46.

⁸⁸ Feldman, ‘Josephus’ Portrait of Jacob’, pp. 109–13, 148.

⁸⁹ Later on, Jacob’s life came to be used as a resource for spiritual lessons in Ambrosius’ *De Iacob et vita beata*.