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Immortality in Philo of Alexandria

Sami Yli-Karjanmaa

1 Introduction

For the first-century CE Jewish exegete Philo of Alexandria the soul's quest for God is a topic of supreme importance. For the Platonist Philo – best known for his philosophically oriented allegories of the Pentateuch – God's immortality is a given, and the soul's too seems to have been such a self-evident notion that he nowhere engages in any real argumentation to defend it, as Plato does in the *Phaedo*.¹ He also did not consider it necessary to keep reminding his audience of this key attribute when discussing the soul. This much is clear in general terms. Yet on closer inspection it turns out that neither the concept of immortality nor that of the soul is as straightforward as the foregoing implies. To get an accurate picture of Philo's views of immortality we need to be clear about his anthropology, soteriology (doctrine of salvation) and individual eschatology. This has not always been the case in scholarship, and there are some common misconceptions.

Before we proceed further, a preliminary point about Philo's wording. For Philo, the terms 'immortal' (ἀθάνατος) and 'imperishable' (ἄφθαρτος) are interchangeable.² Thus, for example, he allegorizes the 'release' prescribed for the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10) as the reception by a virtuous soul of 'an immortal (ἀθάνατον) heritage, its place in the order of the imperishable (ἄφθαρτον)' (*Congr.* 108). Similarly, 'those who have been well-pleasing to God, and whom God has transferred

¹ For Philo's relation to Plato, see, e.g., Runia 1986; Méasson 1986; Dillon 1996: 139–83, 438–41; Yli-Karjanmaa 2018. The surviving literary corpora of Philo and Plato are of the same order of magnitude, over 500,000 words of Greek (including my estimate of those works of Philo's that only survive in a 6th-century Armenian translation). Throughout this chapter Philo's works are cited with abbreviated titles; a full list of titles and abbreviations is provided at the end of the chapter.

² This is similar to Alcinous, who in *Didaskalikos* (*Did.*) 25.1 uses these words, as well as 'indestructible' (ἀνώλεθρος) about the soul, but different from the Stoic usage where immortality does not guarantee that the entity in question will not face some other kind of destruction (see Long's chapter in this volume). Already Plato, *Phaedo* 106d–e, describes the soul as immortal (ἀθάνατος) and, as a consequence, imperishable (ἀδιάφθορος) and indestructible (ἀνώλεθρος). See Sedley 2009: 148–49 for the entirely uncontroversial nature of the two latter properties, once the immortality of the soul has been established in 105c–e.

and removed from perishable to immortal races (ἐκ φθαρτῶν εἰς ἀθάνατα γένη), are no more found among the multitude’³ (*Post.* 43; cf. also *Plant.* 44 and *Opif.* 134.)

2 The Different Kinds of Death, Mortality and Immortality in Philo

Two questions serve as my starting point in this discussion of the concept of immortality in the writings of Philo: first, what is the *subject* that is exempted from death through immortality? Second, what does the event, or state, of *death* mean? Philo has several answers to both questions, and thus several distinct ways of speaking of mortality and immortality.

As for the first question, in Philo the three things whose relationship to death and immortality need to be discussed are the higher and the lower part of the soul and the body. Philo employs different ways of dividing the soul into parts.⁴ In the present context, it is sufficient to note that what remains constant is the existence of a higher and a lower part. Philo’s usual terms for the former, a rational and always unitary element, are νοῦς (‘mind’), λογισμός (‘intellect’) and διάνοια (‘understanding’). The terminology for the latter varies according to the division used, but, whether or not a substructure is involved, the part in question is irrational and mortal (see below). With regard to the second question, it is important to note that in Philo’s thought ‘death’ can concern either the *existence* or the *moral state* of an entity. Hence, I will speak of ontological and ethical death, respectively.⁵ It is worth noting that ‘immortality’ as such is a term employed by Philo in the ontological sense only. On the ethical side, the terminology is that of life and death, both of which are, of course, also used in a concrete, everyday sense: people live, and then they die.

When we relate the two basic kinds of death to the three entities discussed under the first question, namely the body and the two soul-parts, we must first of all note that not all of the combinations occur in Philo’s thought. Irrespective of some passing references to myths involving physical immortality (like that of the Dioscuri), Philo does not regard the human body as potentially

³ All translations from Philo’s works are, unless indicated otherwise, from the Loeb Classical Library edition, Colson, Whitaker, and Marcus 1929–62, henceforth PLCL, with minor changes.

⁴ For a concise summary with references to a host of Philonic passages, see Grabbe 2000: 166.

⁵ In this simple classification, ordinary physical death means the loss of existence for the physical body *qua* body, regardless of the fact that its disintegration will usually not be complete for a considerable period.

immortal, and the idea of the resurrection of the body is entirely alien to him.⁶ Nor does he regard the body as dead in the moral sense, despite sometimes calling it ‘evil’ (e.g., *Leg.* 3.69). This language occurs when Philo imposes the ethical dichotomy of good and bad on the simplified anthropology of soul vs. body and ignores the internal structure of the former. I have called this phenomenon ‘double dichotomy’.⁷ When Philo takes a more nuanced approach, it is the soul’s lower, irrational part that is the point of entrance and the primary locus of evil in the human being. The body, in distinction, is a *venue* of the soul’s ethical struggle, much like the world at large.

In what follows, I discuss three separate types of Philonic discourse where death, life, mortality and immortality play their part: human mortality caused by the physical body, the soul’s moral corruption that Philo calls its death and the ontological immortality of the mind.

I. Human Mortality as Caused by the Body

The human being, as the combination of a mortal body and an immortal soul, is ‘mortal by nature’ (*Opif.* 134).⁸ Indeed, it seems to be the very definition of the human being for Philo that she is ‘that living being whose nature is a mixture of the mortal and immortal’ (*Praem.* 13; similarly *Ebr.* 101). Of the adjacent classes of beings animals lack the rational (and immortal) element (*Anim.* 85), angels, the irrational (and mortal) one (*Spec.* 1.66).

The lower part of the soul, for its part, can be characterized both in ontological and ethical terms as far as its life, death and (im)mortality are concerned. Ontologically, following Plato, Philo tells us that God allowed his subsidiary powers ‘to fashion the mortal portion of our soul (τὸ θνητὸν ἡμῶν τῆς ψυχῆς μέρος) by imitating the skill shown by Him when He was forming that in us which is

⁶ For various views concerning resurrection in the Jewish tradition compare the chapter by Wright in this volume and Yli-Karjanmaa 2017. For Castor and Pollux, see, e.g., *Somn.* 1.150–151. There is a consensus in scholarship that there is no room for the idea of the resurrection of the body in Philo’s sharp dualism, in which the soul strives to attain freedom from the body very much in the same way as in Platonic and Platonist philosophy. As for non-human bodies, Philo envisages the universe as a whole ‘by the providence of God to be immortal (ἀθανατίζεται)’ (*Decal.* 58), and co-eternal (the verb is συνδιαίωνίζω) with the human race (*Spec.* 1.76). This thus also applies to the stars, which Philo can sometimes in a ‘surprisingly unpuritanical’ way call ‘gods’ (see *Opif.* 27 and the comments in Runia 2001, 160) but which, nevertheless, ‘have no unconditional powers but are lieutenants of the one Father of All’ (*Spec.* 1.14).

⁷ See Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 39–40.

⁸ Similarly Plato *Phaedrus* 245c, 246b–d. Compare Alcinous, who says that human beings belong among mortal beings (*Did.* 16.1) but is explicitly uncertain about the mortality of the ‘irrational soul’ (*Did.* 25.5), by which he probably means the irrational part (and not a separate irrational soul; see Dillon 1993: 154–55).

rational' (*Fug.* 69). Here Philo is drawing on the similar division of labour between the demiurge and the created gods Plato presents in *Timaeus* 69c–e.⁹

II. The Death of the Soul: Moral Corruption

Morally, the soul can be made to die by vice: 'the death of the human being is the separation of the soul from the body, but the death of the soul is the decay of virtue and the bringing in of wickedness' (*Leg.* 1.105; see also 1.106–108, 2.78 etc.).¹⁰ Philo can even say the soul is 'killed': 'for he who does not honour the One who IS kills his (κτείνει) own soul' (*Agr.* 171).¹¹ The death of the soul is a concept central for both Philo's ethics and his soteriology. That it is about moral corruption is clear, but the concept is less lucid in the following respect. Philo states explicitly that the word ψυχή has a double meaning, but that using it for the dominant part of the soul is not entirely appropriate:¹²

for 'soul' is spoken of in two senses, both for the whole soul and also for its dominant part (ψυχή διχῶς λέγεται, ἢ τε ὅλη καὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν αὐτῆς μέρος), which properly speaking is the soul's soul, just as the eye can mean either the whole orb, or the most important part by which we see. (*Her.* 55)

Which dies in the death of the soul? That Philo nowhere mentions 'the death of the mind' (νοῦς), as an ethical concept, makes it seem likely that this is not the death of the leading part only, although he in *Her.* 52 implies that the senses effect the mind's 'death'.¹³ Given the comprehensive effect the death of the soul has on human judgement, it can also not be restricted to the mortal soul-part – even if we find Philo declaring:

⁹ Like Philo, Alcinous, who follows the *Timaeus* much more closely than Philo, in *Did.* 23.1 changes Plato's εἶδος (mortal 'form') to μέρος ('part'). For the mortality of the soul's lower part in Philo, see also *Ebr.* 70, *Migr.* 18; cf. *Deus* 46, *Her.* 52.

¹⁰ For a list of c. 50 references to the death of the soul in Philo, see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 119. Although Philo repeatedly defines physical death in Platonic terms (e.g., *Phaedo* 67d, 88b) as the separation of the soul from the body, he does not, unlike the Stoics, allow this definition to restrict his freedom of using the term 'death' to mean other kinds of destruction and corruption as well (see Long's contribution in this volume). For various views of the death of the soul in Philo, see Zeller 1995; Conroy 2011; Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 57–70.

¹¹ Trans. Geljon and Runia 2013. Their comment (p. 256), that the question is of one who 'kills the (rational) soul', is ambiguous. For the question of which parts of the soul are affected, see below. Conroy 2011: 26 is mistaken when he says that in the death of the soul only the lower part of the soul continues to exist.

¹² Pace Colson in PLCL 4.135, note c.

¹³ See Colson's note *ad loc.* in PLCL 4.568. Cf. below for the concept of the corporealization of the mind. Philo does on one occasion squarely say the mind 'dies' (*Plant.* 147), but the issue here is its *incapacitation* through intoxication, not (primarily) its moral degradation. This dying is also referred to as 'going out of one's senses' (ἐκστασις) and mental 'derangement' (παράφροσύνη), terms which Philo also uses in connection with the mind's displacement by mental illness (*Spec.* 3.99) whereby it 'makes its home elsewhere'.

For verily nothing so surely brings death upon a soul as immoderate indulgence in pleasures. That which dies is not the ruling part in us, but the part that is under rule, the part that is like the vulgar herd (τὸ λαῶδες). And so long will it incur death (θάνατον ἐνδέξεται), as it fails to repent and acknowledge its fall. (*Leg.* 2.78)

This passage, relevant in many ways to our concerns here, is a good example of how important it is to be aware of Philo's exegetical technique in order to know when to press a statement. Here his emphasis on the mob-like part of the soul stems from his secondary biblical lemma, Numbers 21:6, 'And the Lord sent among the people (τὸν λαόν) deadly snakes, and they would bite the people; many people of the sons of Israel died.'¹⁴ Philo quotes and allegorizes this verse in order to expand his interpretation of his primary lemma, Genesis 3:1a, 'now the snake was the most sagacious of all the wild animals that were upon the earth, which the Lord God had made', the main gist of which is the allegorical interpretation of the snake as pleasure.¹⁵ Philo, alluding to the people's (λαός) complaints to Moses about having brought them to the wilderness to die (Numbers 21:5), says in *Leg.* 2.77 that when 'the part of us that corresponds to the turbulent mob of a city' craves for Egypt (which is a leading symbol for the body in Philo), it encounters pleasures which lead to the death of the soul. Thus, having taken up the verses in Numbers, Philo has an exegetical incentive to say it is the lower part of the soul that dies.¹⁶ In the light of his overall thinking, we should not press this.

Leg. 2.78 itself, in fact, points to the whole soul as the subject of death. Philo says this death is a *reversible* state lasting until the soul acknowledges its state and repents, or (in *Leg.* 1.108), until it dies again, now to the life of vice, and becomes truly alive. We may wonder if the lower part of the soul alone really is capable of repentance or giving up vice without the leading part. Indeed, there is ample evidence that in Philo's thought the latter too is severely affected when the soul dies. That death affects the soul in its entirety, to the point of the mind (νοῦς) becoming such that it 'loves the body and the passions and has been sold in slavery to that chief cateress of our compound nature, Pleasure' (*Deus* 111). Then it needs to be purified from vice, passions and the desire for sensual pleasure.¹⁷

¹⁴ Trans. from Pietersma and Wright 2007 (henceforth NETS), as are all citations from the Septuagint.

¹⁵ The connection between the verses is verbal (ὅρις). For Philo's exegetical technique, see Runia 1984: 1987 and for a recent application of his findings, Geljon and Runia 2013: 10–20 and *passim*.

¹⁶ Cf. Wasserman 2008: 65, who sees in the background of the mob language Plato's *Republic*; she does not mention Numbers. These need not exclude one another. Wasserman aptly notes 'the text first conveys the corruption of the whole soul'.

¹⁷ See Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 37–38.

What exactly is the kind of *change* that Philo thought mind undergoes upon the soul's death and revivification is not so easy to say, because the mind is akin to things noetic (see, e.g., *Leg.* 2.31, *Migr.* 209), the chief characteristic of which, in the Platonic worldview, is their immutability. There is room for further research here, and the same applies to the exact meaning of the 'complete corruption' (παντελής φθορά) Philo sometimes envisions as the ultimate threat for the mind or soul, without any reference to reversibility (*Det.* 168, *Leg.* 2.33). He also speaks of, e.g., folly as an 'incurable disease' of the mind (*Cher.* 10) or soul (*Ebr.* 140). However, unlike Plato (*Phaedo* 113e, *Republic* 615e), he refrains from explicitly stating that some souls are beyond remedy.

The 'death of the soul' is not the only metaphor Philo uses for describing the morally corrupt state of the soul. In terms of the biblical basis, it stems from Genesis 2:17b: 'on the day that you eat of it, you shall *die by death*', allegorized as the primary biblical lemma in *Leg.* 1.105–108. When it comes to the punishment as it was actually meted out in Genesis 3 – e.g., 'by the sweat of your face you will eat your bread until you return to the earth from which you were taken, for you are earth and to earth you will depart' (3:19) – Philo uses different imagery, asking, for example, of the fool that 'having forsaken the wisdom of heaven is he not now ranked with things earthly and incohesive?' (*Leg.* 3.252; similarly *QG* 1.51). I have called this transformation 'the corporealization of the mind'; in essence, however, it is the same as the death of the soul.¹⁸

III. The Mind's Ontological Immortality

Finally, the highest part of the soul alone is, in Philo's view, ontologically immortal. Philo writes about the creation of the human being:

What [God] 'breathed in' was nothing else then the divine 'spirit' which has emigrated here from that blessed and flourishing nature for the assistance of our kind, in order that, even if it is mortal (θνητὸν ἐστὶ) with regard to its visible part, at least with regard to its invisible part it be immortal (ἀθανατίζηται). For this reason it would be correct to say that the human being stands on the borderline (εἶναι μεθόριον) between mortal and immortal (ἀθανάτου) nature. Sharing in both to the extent it is necessary (ἐκατέρας ὅσον ἀναγκαῖον ἐστὶ μετέχοντα), he has come into existence

¹⁸ The choice of the word 'mind' here is based on Philo's own terminology in *Leg.* 3.252 ('the foolish mind', ὁ ἄφρων νοῦς). It does not imply that the lower parts are not affected; they most certainly are. On the death of the soul and the corporealization of the mind, see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 57–81. In *Leg.* 1.32 Philo speaks of an 'earthy', 'earthlike' and 'corruptible' mind. These are genuinely Philonic terms for the corporealized mind and do not, (*pace* Zeller 1995, 24) contradict the ontological immortality of the mind (for which see below).

(γεννησθαι) as a creature (which is) mortal and at the same time immortal (ἀθάνατος), mortal in respect of the body, immortal in respect of the understanding (κατὰ τὴν διάνοιαν) (*Opif.* 135).¹⁹

In Philo's view, the biblical text speaks of the human likeness to God's image (i.e. to the Logos) exclusively 'with regard to the director of the soul, the mind' (*Opif.* 69; exegesis of Genesis 1:26–27). This is the ultimate cause of the fact that 'the understanding (διάνοια) alone in all that makes us what we are is imperishable (ἄφθαρτον)' (*Deus* 46).²⁰ In an illuminating anthropological statement Philo says, 'the mind . . . can truly be called the human within the human, the better in the worse, the immortal within the mortal' (*Congr.* 97).

At this point we must recognize a tension related to mortality in Philo's thought. On the one hand, the human being, taken as a whole, is mortal because of her mortal bodily component. On the other hand, Philo characterizes souls – without qualification, thus including morally dead ones – as (ontologically) immortal (e.g., *Somn.* 1.137), although the soul too is composed of both mortal and immortal elements. The explanation I offer is that in the ontological dualism of the Platonic worldview these cases are dissimilar. The difference between the physical body and the invisible soul is much greater than that between the components of the latter. When the body made out of matter dies, the soul moves from the sense-perceptible sphere to the intelligible one, to be 'with the incorporeal things' (*Cher.* 114). This is a radical change, and physical death is itself a phenomenon mentioned often in Philo. By contrast, although the lower part of the soul is mortal for Philo (see above), he never discusses its 'death' as ontological extinction in so many words. Perhaps the closest he comes is in describing the death of Moses. He says that God 'resolved his twofold nature of body and soul into a monad, transforming his whole being into a most sun-like mind (νοῦν)' (*Mos.* 2.288); if only the mind is left, the irrational part of the soul must have been eliminated. Philo

¹⁹ Trans. Runia 2001 who, however, translates ἀθανατίζεται 'would be immortalized'. In the light of logic of the entire passage – note especially the present- and perfect-tense expressions given in Greek – it is, however, evident in my view that the original ontological immortality of the soul's highest part is being discussed, and my translation makes this clearer. LSJ gives this passage as an example of the meaning of ἀθανατίζω, in passive, 'to become or be immortal'. The latter meaning appears in *QG* 4.166 as well, probably also in *Decal.* 58 (above, n. 6) and possibly in *Mos.* 2.108. The compound ἀπαθανατίζω lacks the sense 'be immortal', at least in Philo.

²⁰ Cf. *Spec.* 4.14, where Philo emphasizes the 'participation in reason' (ἡ πρὸς λόγον κοινωνία) as both the basis of the human kinship with God and that 'which gives him immortality, mortal though he seems to be'. The mind's ontological immortality in Philo is thus different from what Sedley (2009: 146–53) calls the soul's 'essential immortality' in Plato for whom the soul's ontological death would (in the *Phaedo*) be a contradiction in terms and a metaphysical impossibility (pp. 150, 152). Nor is the mind's immortality in Philo like the other kind of ontological immortality of the rational part of the soul that Sedley (2009: 153–56) discerns in Plato, the 'conferred' variety, which (formally) results from the demiurge's causal power and (pragmatically) from his will.

implies elsewhere that something quite similar may happen to advanced individuals more generally (e.g., *QE* 2.29), and it may thus be that this ‘monadization’ (my term for the phenomenon) is a prerequisite of salvation in Philo’s thought.²¹

A further concept that should be explained in this connection is *mortal life*. This is best understood as life lived in the body on earth. For example in *Somn.* 1.138–39 the body-loving souls’ incarnation and physical death are followed by their reincarnation, which is caused by their having become used to mortal life.²² Unlike the death of the soul, mortal life is not an ethical concept. It reflects the mortality of the compound human being and concerns not only the body-lovers just mentioned but also the most perfect human being, Moses, who upon death left ‘this mortal life for immortality’ (τὸν θνητὸν ἀπολιπὼν βίον ἀπαθανατίζεσθαι, *Mos.* 2.288; also *Virt.* 67). Moses, like all human beings, was a mortal (*Mos.* 2.6), i.e., subject to physical death. Hence, we can speak of his *becoming* immortal upon death, although the ontological immortality of his mind had never been lost. On his death, only the immortal mind was left.²³ The soul’s final freedom from mortal life means immortality also in the very concrete sense of not having to be born and die again.²⁴ This can

²¹ See Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 85–90. There are some hints in Philo that an incomplete monadization may lead to a new incarnation (see the next footnote). In *Cher.* 114 the compacted nature of the soul headed for a ‘rebirth’ (παλιγγενεσία) is emphasized (for a detailed analysis of this passage, see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 150–67). Cf. also *Det.* 27 where Philo says that those who have permanently quitted the earthly region carry ‘in their train no bodily deficiencies’ – a thought reminiscent of the way in which Socrates in Plato’s *Phaedo* (81c) talks about bodily contamination that draws the soul to a new embodiment. In any case, however, monadization is tightly connected to the soul’s moral development, not something to be separately sought. I find it to be similar to the ‘double death’ found in Plutarch’s account, possibly drawn from Xenocrates, in the *De facie quae in orbe lunae apparet* (*Moralia* 943A ff.): the soul is first freed from the body, and the mind then of the soul. See further Schibli 1993: 156–61; Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 40–41, 85–90. In Philo, the death of the lower part of the soul should not be too tightly connected to the demise of the body (*pace* Dillon 1996: 177).

²² I have argued that Philo endorsed the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of reincarnation, not only in this passage but as a fundamental part of his worldview; see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015. For the connection between mortal life and incarnation, cf., e.g., *Ebr.* 101: when ‘the mind pure and unalloyed’ is ‘cooped up in the city of the body and mortal life, it is cabined and cribbed and like a prisoner in the gaol’.

²³ This is similar to what Sedley (2009: 161), referring to the immortalizing power of virtue at the end of Plato’s *Symposium* 212a, calls ‘leav[ing] our mortal nature behind’ through ‘intellectual progress’, although he speaks of ‘acquiring’ an immortal nature instead. He leaves open the question if this type of ‘earned immortality’ (clearly the most relevant type of those he discusses on pp. 156–61) can be ‘accommodated to Plato’s notion of either essential or conferred immortality’ (see n. 20 above). I think it can, precisely because it is *not* a matter of *acquiring* immortality but of ridding oneself of mortality.

²⁴ It is from this perspective that I propose we read such passages as *QG* 1.33, where Philo says of the serpent in Paradise, ‘in order that they may be, in effect, mortal, he deceives by trickery and artfulness.’ The transgression and the death of the soul lead to pronounced mortality in the cycle of reincarnation. In the translation, I have substituted ‘in effect’ for Marcus’s ‘potentially’ based on his literal retranslation from Armenian (the only language the passage survives in), δυνάμει, and taken this to imply an opposition between the outcome for embodied life and people’s underlying nature; the soul itself remains immortal.

also be understood from the viewpoint of what was noted above about human mortality (and with the caveat regarding the soul's mortal part): human mortality is the *body's* mortality, and, once the bodily sphere is permanently left behind, immortality – based on the mind's ontological indestructibility – results.

3 The Loss of Original Immortality and Its Consequences

In addition to a purely universal allegorization of the Paradise story, Philo also several times interprets the fall of the first couple from a protological perspective, as referring to the loss of original immortality.²⁵ For example, in *QG* 1.45 he speaks of 'giving up immortality and a blessed life, [and going] over to death and unhappiness', in *Opif.* 152 of 'exchang[ing] the life of immortality (ἀθανάτου) and well-being for the life of mortality and misfortune,' and in *Virt.* 205 'exchang[ing] an immortal (ἀθανάτου) life for a mortal one'.²⁶ Does Philo thus envision a singular transgression event to have taken place at some point of time? This is doubtful.²⁷ The anthropomorphic descriptions of God make it impossible for Philo to take the Paradise story literally, and so he allegorizes it. For example, God does not plant gardens but instead sows virtue in humans (Genesis 2:8, *Leg.* 1.43–47); God is immobile and does not walk, but instead souls become unstable and mobile and so believe that God moves (Genesis 3:8, *QG* 1.42). Compare also Philo's elaboration of God's question to Adam, 'Where are you?' (Genesis 3:9):

When He had provided for your enjoyment the tree of life, that is of wisdom whereby you should have power to live, did you gorge yourself with ignorance and corruption, preferring misery, the soul's death, to happiness, the true life? (*Leg.* 3.52)

The Paradise story as a whole is not history, nor is the transgression. Rather, the latter seems for Philo to be something that an individual soul undergoes. Paradoxically, although immortality is

²⁵ For different interpretations of Philo's allegorization of the first chapters of Genesis, see, e.g., Tobin 1983; Yli-Karjanmaa 2016.

²⁶ The passage in *Virt.* has especially many verbal links to *Timaeus* 42b-c which, like the Paradise narrative, describes in a protological setting the undesirable effects of life wrongly lived (see Yli-Karjanmaa 2018: 125–26).

²⁷ I agree here with Runia (2001: 24) who says that for Philo the transgression 'is not primarily a historical event'.

really an ontological concept in Philo, the loss of the pre-lapsarian immortality also means the onset of the death of the soul and the corporealization of the mind: these lead to repeated embodiment – and mortality, because of the body. This is why Philo can present both mortal life and the death of the soul as consequences of the soul's wrong choice, even though these are not the same thing. While the latter refers to the loss of the soul's own or real life in the ethical sense (see *Leg.* 1.105–108), the former means its losing its immortality in the sense of ending up in a union with a mortal body. That the soul's death is the cause of its mortal life is the best explanation of Philo's statements like the following:²⁸

Those who strive after low and base and earthly things shall die in respect of true life – the soul, wandering about in the manner of the dead. But those who desire heavenly things and are borne on high shall be saved alone, exchanging mortal for immortal life. (*QG* 4.46)

It can be inferred that the enticements of the sense-perceptible world lead to a negative transformation in the soul, its death and corporealization. Through this transformation, incarnation changes from the originally ethically neutral and unavoidable will of God to a semi-voluntary, vicious cycle. Through this transformation, the nature of incarnation changes from originally ethically neutral and unavoidable to involuntary and recurring. Philo seems to have held that at first this the state of embodiment may be exactly what the desire-driven soul wants (*Somn.* 1.138–39) but that later it, while willing, is *unable* (*Leg.* 2.80) to exit the cycle of reincarnation until it has made enough progress; then God's grace enables it to do so (*QE* 2.40).²⁹

Somewhat anomalously, Philo's comments on the fall in Paradise cited at the beginning of this ~~sub~~ section seem to suggest that without a transgression the soul would *not* have lost its immortality, despite being, apparently, incarnate. We may speculate that if the soul lived a virtuous life in the body, resisting bodily cravings, there would be only one embodiment, and such a soul would remain so close to immortal life – never leaving the road that leads to it – that it had not, in effect, lost it.

²⁸ Whether the soul of *Moses* was still in the grip of the death of the soul at the outset of its incarnation as *Moses* is the kind of question Philo never discusses. He may have held that the souls of the sages become incarnate also voluntarily; at least they 'are used to (εἰώθασιν) leaving home [i.e., heaven] for the terrestrial nature on account of their love of seeing and learning' (*Conf.* 77–78).

²⁹ For the passages in *Somn.* and *QE*, see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 129–50, 167–86.

For Philo, becoming embodied is not evil in itself but part of God's plan.³⁰ Incarnation seems to precede transgression in the history of an individual soul.³¹ This, at least, is the implication of Philo's statement in *Leg.* 1.105 that while 'there are two kinds of death', the 'dying by death' foreseen as the consequence of the fall does not mean physical death but that of the soul – why specify this if both were not possible? We should also note that Philo's comments on God making the 'tunics of skin' for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21) – i.e. the embodiment of the mind and sense-perception – contain no reference to their transgression; incarnation is instead presented as a necessity (*QG* 1.53).

4 Achieving Immortality

The discussion above enables us to understand how Philo can speak of immortality as something to be *achieved* in spite of the ontological immortality of the mind. The paradox is solved when we note that the ontological status of the parties involved does not change. Rather, the subject changes: the soul-body combination is mortal, the mind, immortal. For the good (enough) souls, physical death, which severs their union with the body, suffices for reaching immortality in the sense of an immortal life – that is, permanent disembodiment and an escape from reincarnation. Moses is not an isolated case; Philo mentions a similar change several times in the case of advanced individuals. 'In the case of the patriarchs, giving up is said to be adding, for when they give up mortal life, they are added to the immortal life', he writes in *QG* 4.169. Likewise, in *Migr.* 189 the salvific 'migration from here' of the virtuous is 'not death but immortality', and in *Praem.* 110 the last stage of life is

³⁰ This is similar to Plato *Timaeus* 41d–42a (on which see Broadie 2012: 88, 107): the mortal creatures were, from the beginning, meant and designed for incarnation; their coming into existence was, according to Broadie, 'written into the basic nature of the cosmos' (p. 90). This implies that the requirement that mortal creatures be created in order to perfect the universe (41b) means that *bodily* creatures were necessary. However, *pace* Broadie (n. 47 on p. 105), I do not think we can press the myth to imply that 'there can never be a time when all rational souls have passed beyond reincarnation' (and thus mortality) on the grounds that mortal creatures are necessary. I also do not think that the mortal embodiment is 'a fulfilment' (p. 107) for the soul; instead, this is surely constituted by the reward for successful living: freedom from reincarnation and the return 'to the semblance of its first and best state' (42b–d). – For an extensive discussion of the reasons for the soul's incarnation in Philo, see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 44–81.

³¹ This too is similar to the *Timaeus*, where souls are first implanted in bodies (42a) following which they live their first life either justly or unjustly (42b).

called ‘the neighbour of death or rather of immortality.’³² Release from life in the body is not always explicitly mentioned; see, e.g., *Spec.* 1.345: ‘for in very truth the godless are dead in soul, but those who have taken service in the ranks of the Sole Existent are alive, and that life can never die.’

In distinction to the sages, wicked souls have something quite different to expect in the hereafter. When discussing the ‘human thought’ that Cain should have been given the capital punishment for the murder of Abel, Philo comments: ‘for people think that death is the consummation of punishment, but in the divine court it is hardly the beginning’ (*Praem.* 69).³³ Cain-like souls still in the grip of death need to fulfil two criteria in order to reach the immortality of salvation: (1) to become really, i.e., in ethical terms, alive, and (2) to be liberated from the body at death. Condition (1) is the prerequisite for condition (2) to be fulfilled permanently. If it is not met, a new embodiment ensues.

We are now in a position to address a few scholarly misunderstandings. In different ways, researchers have seen Philo restricting immortality to some souls only. The basic idea is that immortality is not inherent but only acquired by virtue.³⁴ If a soul is not virtuous at the moment of physical death, it will perish with the body.³⁵ The problem with this latter view is that Philo nowhere says this. As for the former, although it is certainly clear that Philo would not admit a wicked soul to immortal life, the key question is as follows: what will happen to such souls? Can they not repent, develop and attain virtue and, thereby – through God’s vital grace – immortality?

³² This juxtapositioning occurs already in the ps.-Platonic treatise *Axiochus* (on which see Warren’s chapter in this volume): ‘thus, Axiochus, you change not into death but into immortality’ (370c, trans. Hershbell 1981). Cf. 4 Maccabees 14:4–5, where the martyrs ‘hastened to meet death through the tortures as though running on the path to immortality’. Cf. also Philo *Legat.* 117 and 369 for the Jewish willingness to accept death – and reach immortality – in the face of Roman oppression, and *Prob.* 115–117 where too death is, now in examples from Greek literature, connected to immortality and considered better than hideous life.

³³ Philo seems to deny this in *Abr.* 64 when, comparing deportation with the death penalty, he writes, ‘death ends our troubles but banishment is not the end but the beginning of other new misfortunes’. Goodenough (1946: 87) exaggerates when, while admitting that these are not Philo’s ‘usual thoughts about death’, he takes them as an expression of the Epicurean way of thinking that death cannot hurt us, because when it comes, we cease to exist. In the second passage he appeals to, *Abr.* 230, Philo says death ‘is the end of everything in life (κατὰ τὸν βίον), and particularly of its ills, while the troubles which lie in wait for the living are numberless’. Philo is thus saying that the hardships of life end when life ends. Goodenough ignores the context of the first passage, Abraham’s valiantly executing God’s harsh command to leave his country. Philo is engaged in extolling Abraham’s ‘superior merits’ (§60) which gives him an incentive to belittle death in comparison with exile.

³⁴ Zeller 1995: 24; Termini 2009: 108–9; Siegert 2009: 202.

³⁵ Goodenough 1946: 106; Burnett 1984: 465, 470 and, with some hesitation, Dillon 1996: 177–78.

Segal soundly allows for punishment as an alternative to the annihilation of the wicked.³⁶ He does not specify the kind of punishment, but I think an answer is readily available. There is no disagreement in scholarship about the most important source of Philo's thinking about the soul: Plato. Not seeing that Philo followed Plato also with regard to the doctrine of reincarnation is, in my view, a major explanation for the inexact descriptions of Philo's views of immortality in scholarship. Wicked souls face not annihilation but reincarnation until they realize their error, turn to God, change their orientation and become pure enough. As Philo writes about the edible 'winged creeping things' (tr. NRSV) of Leviticus 11:21 in *Her.* 239: 'these are symbols of the souls which though rooted like reptiles to the earthly body have been purified and have strength to soar on high, exchanging earth for heaven, and corruption (φθορᾶς) for immortality (ἀθανασίαν).'

In the quest for this immortalizing purity, the overarching theme in Philo is the salvific power of reason, virtue and philosophy. Hence in his thought the question of attaining immortality differs little from asking how *salvation* can be reached, as this quotation demonstrates: 'these, then, are the souls of the genuine philosophers, who from first to last practice dying to the life in the body in order to obtain the portion of incorporeal and imperishable life (ἡ ἀφθαρτος ζωή) in the presence of the Uncreated and Imperishable (τῷ ἀφθάρτῳ)' (*Gig.* 14).³⁷ Other examples of the means to reach immortality can be given. Those who have successfully practised endurance and self-control are traversing the uphill road which 'makes immortal (ἀθανατίζουσα) and leads heavenwards those who have not fainted on the way' (*Spec.* 4.112). Moreover, 'the pursuit of philosophy ... enabl[es] humankind, though mortal, to achieve immortality (ἀπαθανατίζεται)' (*Opif.* 77); here the context is the contemplation of the heavenly realm. Ultimately, this will lead to a *visio Dei* that is 'the food of the soul, and true partaking is the cause of a life of immortality' (*QE* 2.39).³⁸ Later in *Opif.* the tree of life symbolizes 'the most important of the virtues, namely reverence for God, through which the soul is immortalized (ἀθανατίζεται)' (§154). That these practical and theoretical means form one whole is shown by such passages as the following: 'the glory of the philosophers rests upon achievements of virtue, freely willed by themselves, and these being what they are, immortalize

³⁶ Segal 2004: 372.

³⁷ Translation Winston 1981 with slight modifications. For Philo's use of the Platonic notions of philosophizing genuinely and practising death, see Yli-Karjanmaa 2015: 122–24, and, for the prerequisites of salvation in Plato and Philo, pp. 90–101.

³⁸ For the Platonic background (*Timaeus* 47a–c) of *Opif.* 77–78, see (Runia 2001: 201) The *QE* passage reflects the *Phaedrus* (248a, 251b) where, however, there is no explicit link between the nourishing vision of the supercelestial realm and immortality.

(ἀθανατίζειν) those who practise them in sincerity' (*Prob.* 109).³⁹ In *Conf.* 149 he says the essential lineage is that of 'souls immortalized (ἀπαθανατιζομένων) by virtues', not the one of ancestors of flesh and blood.⁴⁰

Generally speaking, we can thus say that for Philo the single most important prerequisite of reaching immortality in the sense of becoming liberated from mortal life is *virtue*. Which aspects of virtue he chooses to emphasize is a matter of his context, exegetical or other, and of the specific point he is making. For example, the context of the statement concerning the immortalizing power of *pleasing God* in *Post.* 43, cited above in the Introduction, is Genesis 5:24: 'And Enoch was well pleasing to God, and he was not found, because God transferred him'. On the other hand, despite the importance of virtue we should note that to speak of 'achieving' or 'reaching' immortality does not imply that this is simply a solitary feat for the soul to perform. In Philo's thought, the soul cannot see itself through to salvation on its own, without the aid of God: 'for without divine grace it is impossible either to leave the mortal things (τὰ θνητά), or to stay forever among the imperishable (ἀφθάρτοις)' (*Ebr.* 145; cf. *QE* 2.40). Philo's soteriology is synergistic: the soul has to do its utmost, but even that will not be enough for it to be saved.

I will conclude with a brief comment on the function of 'immortality' discourse in Philo. Philo hardly ever invokes the hope of immortality as a consolation at death.⁴¹ For Philo immortality is a theological concept. He would not discuss an anthropological topic purely for its own sake and without a theological point to make. Human ontological immortality is founded on God's immortality, and the main import of (re)gaining it lies in the ethical and soteriological dimensions involved in the soul's recovery from its death and the permanent liberation from mortal life and the cycle of reincarnation.

Thus reaching immortality can also be characterized as the ultimate stage of assimilation to God, which is an ideal Philo endorses, most clearly in the context of an explicit quotation from

³⁹ For Philo's view of philosophy as a way of life, see Uusimäki 2018.

⁴⁰ On the almost synonymous use of the two verbs occurring in the last two quotations, see above, n. 19.

⁴¹ However, this is implied in his explanation for Abraham's restrained – so Philo sees it – conduct after Sarah had died (Genesis 23:3): he refers to Abraham's having learnt that 'death is not the extinction of the soul but its separation and detachment from the body and its return to the place whence it came; and it came . . . from God' (*Abr.* 258–59).

Theaetetus 176a–b in *Fug.* 63. Plato’s description of this assimilation – ‘fly[ing] away from earth to heaven (ἐνθὲνδε ἐκεῖσε)’ and ‘becoming holy, just, and wise’ – does not explicitly deal with immortality, but in the Philonic perspective these attributes are among its key prerequisites. When these are fulfilled, the divine *nous* returns to its divine home for good.

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Abbreviations, Latin titles and English titles (as used in the Loeb Classical Library) of Philo's works cited above

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>	<i>On Abraham</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De agricultura</i>	<i>On Husbandry</i>
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>De animalibus</i>	<i>On Whether Dumb Animals Possess Reason</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De Cherubim</i>	<i>On the Cherubim, The Flaming Sword, and Cain</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De confusione linguarum</i>	<i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i>
<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia</i>	<i>On Mating with the Preliminary Studies</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De Decalogo</i>	<i>On the Decalogue</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat</i>	<i>That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i>	<i>On the Unchangeableness of God</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i>	<i>On Drunkenness</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et invectione</i>	<i>On Flight and Finding</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De gigantibus</i>	<i>On the Giants</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>	<i>Who is the Heir of Divine Things</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae</i>	<i>Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2, 3</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>	<i>On the Embassy to Gaius</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami</i>	<i>On the Migration of Abraham</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Moysis</i>	<i>Moses 1 and 2</i>
<i>Opif.</i> <i>Moses</i>	<i>De opificio mundi</i>	<i>On the Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione</i>	<i>Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De posteritate Caini</i>	<i>On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis</i>	<i>On Rewards and Punishments</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i>	<i>Every Good Man Is Free</i>
<i>QE</i>	<i>Quaestiones (et solutiones) in Exodum</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Exodus</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones (et solutiones) in Genesim</i>	<i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis</i>	<i>On Dreams</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus</i>	<i>On the Special Laws</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De virtutibus</i>	<i>On the Virtues</i>