

Barring Fear:  
Philo and the Hermeneutic Project



(Figure 1. A lunette mid 12<sup>th</sup> century *Chiesa di San Giusto* in Volterra)

Throughout his works Philo continued to draw a distinction between the literal and the symbolic: the symbolic opening the way to the allegorical.<sup>1</sup> Operative within his writings is a set of distinctions that work to displace the assumed centrality of the literal, the latter understood as the givenness of text and thus the mere givenness of the world of the senses. The act of displacement is itself far from abstract. The continuity of the move from the literal occurs both within and as the practice of interpretation. As such, it defines a certain version of the hermeneutic. The literal is that from which there is a continuity of migration. However, interpretations were no mere scholastic concerns. Interpretation for Philo is not just commentary. The contention here is that not only cannot be separated from the ethical, the connection opens up a possible transformative effect on the nature of the ethical. As a beginning the link to the ethical is clear from Philo's own discussion of Abraham's 'migrations'. Of the latter he writes the following in *On Abraham*:

The migrations as set forth by the literal text of the scriptures are made by a man of wisdom (ανδρός σοφοῦ) but according to the laws of allegory (κατά δέ τους ἐν ἀλληγορία νόμους) by a virtue loving soul in its search for the true God (υπό φιλαρέτου φυχῆς τον ἀληθῆ ζητούσης θεό).<sup>2</sup>

The project of this paper involves two interconnected elements. The first element involves tracing the way the ethical and the hermeneutic are linked. The second element involves indicating the ways that, with the emergence of the hermeneutic project, what also arises is a capacity to transform the way the attribution of meaning occurs. As will be suggested the latter needs to be understood as the move from allegory to allegoresis. Allegoresis is the process that allows for the continuity of allegorization and thus a distancing of the opposition between the allegorical and the literal as that which

delimits the setting of interpretation. Even though the conventional move between the literal and the allegorical elements continue to intersect within Philo's writings as a whole, specific emphasis here is to be given to his text *On The Migration of Abraham*. While it may be the case that in Philo allegorical interpretation becomes literalized in the process of meaning's attribution, such that the allegorical assumes a singular determination, what is inaugurated by the hermeneutic, understood here as integral to the move from the allegorical to allegoresis, when taken in conjunction with what might be considered as its preconditions, cannot be constrained by that possibility.<sup>3</sup> There are at least two reasons why this is the case. Firstly, it is due to the nature of the interconnection between the ethical and the hermeneutic and the implicit philosophical anthropology within that connection. The term 'philosophical anthropology' designates here the thinking of the being of being human that pluralizes any conception of propriety.<sup>4</sup> Hence what is at stake is how here in the context of Philo's writings the being of being human is thought.

The second element orientating this project stems from the argument that any attempted reintroduction of the literal, that reintroduction that would occur if the allegorical is literalized, will founder if the new sense of the literal is taken as an 'end' that closes the interpretive project. The impossibility of holding to the literal as an end and therefore as the singular end - occurs for a specific reason. Namely, the hermeneutic exercise, now understood in terms of the move from allegory to allegoresis, allows for the recovery of interpretive possibilities that are not held within the text's (or indeed any text's) own formulation of the literal/allegorical distinction. Openings are therefore maintained. In addition, the literal is retained. The words as they appear on the page, or indeed words as they are 'heard', continue in place. Bodies have an enduring presence. The literal perdures. Nonetheless, the response to the insistence of the literal has to be the same in every instance. The literal, whether it is taken as original or as a posited result, inevitably opens beyond itself. This is the movement of allegoresis. The key point here is that maintaining the literal does not entail that it is maintained as end in itself. The literal once incorporated within the hermeneutic sustains, by definition, its own capacity to open beyond itself. As a result the literal present within its own rearticulation becomes a possibility that, in the end, cannot be attributed any direct priority.

\*\*\*\*\*

A lunette dating from the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century and which once decorated the *Chiesa di San Giusto* in Volterra had a relatively straightforward project. (Figure 1) Demons devour a sinner. Necks, head and genitals are attacked. The sense of attack is both clear and overwhelming. Images of this kind continue to occur within medieval art, in psalters and perhaps as significantly as part of the 'decoration' on churches. They were viewed. They were objects of sight. They were not read. The force of such images, the image as that which is seen, is clear. It is an image of the future. It is an image displayed 'now' which is, at the same time, an image of the future. The space between any now and the future is effaced by the presence of

this image. The lunette aspires therefore to pure immediacy. (This aspirational quality is itself essential.) The formulation 'pure immediacy' has a specific meaning in this context. It is the attempt which, while conceding the presence of contingency and thus the structure of the decision, works to efface the possibility of contingency and thus a contestable decision, by the presentation of that which resists negotiation; hence the power of an already present and thus non-negotiable image of the future. (The lunette is clear; 'This is what it will be like!') Immediacy would have overturned the already present status of mediacy. On the other hand, however, holding to the originality of the contestable decision, its already present status, means that the temporality of the present - the time of possibility - contains an openness whose elimination occurs through and as a result of fear. The counter to which is that the present as a locus of both conflict and the decision entails a different but nonetheless specific conception of the interplay of time and occurrence. Within such a conception the temporality of the present is always charged with possibilities. Responsibility becomes the ordered response to such a set up. The assumption here is that this pure immediacy, as staged by the lunette, is that which attempts to strip the temporality of the present of that already present complexity that demands both the decision and responsibility. For this attempt to be effective, fear must overwhelm the present. The undertaking in question therefore has to rid the present both of contingency and the possibility of a decision.<sup>5</sup>

To make the claim specific; the project of the lunette is to instil fear. Fear is that which resists negotiation within the terms in which the need for the decision as well as a locus of possibility are themselves present. Resisting fear involves therefore the construction of a barrier to fear's immediacy.<sup>6</sup> The barrier is a space, more accurately a spacing. (Spacing as the locus of actual and potential activity.) As a result there cannot be a counter image. If fear operates by closing down the space between the 'now' and the future such that the now seen future determines immediately life in the now, then the question that emerges concerns the status of the barrier. The barrier cannot be literalized. It occurs therefore beyond the hold of the image. The barrier becomes the reintroduction, perhaps the affirmation of the temporality of that version of the present that resists pure immediacy and thus which continues to stage openings such that the barrier is the opening itself. One name for that resistance and thus one possibility to present that which is committed to resisting the claim that pure immediacy, understood as the identification of the literal with the real and thus the construction of an exclusive and excluding present, is the hermeneutic. The latter is premised both on the refusal of immediacy and thus on the inscription into the real of that which continues to open and thus define the real as a space of encounter, and thus more importantly, as a space of contingent action.<sup>7</sup> (Indeed part of the argument to come is that the hermeneutic once defined in relation to the process of continual allegorisation (i.e. allegoresis) functions as such a barrier in the precise sense that it opens the space of the decision.) Pure immediacy accepts that action is contingent. As a direct result fear becomes the attempt to close down the space between the now and the future. The project of the

instilling of fear is to overcome that conception of the future as one that is to be made and therefore which would be a future whose possibilities are always yet to have a determining image. Fear is that which reinforces the repetition of the Same, i.e. fated existence, by exerting a dominating hold on the image of the future. As a result what then happens is that the future's *yet-to-be quality* is the object of effacement.

There is a reversal of his position that is given within the precise same frame of reference. In other words, there is another position that occurs within a set up structured by the relationship between sight and fear. As certainly as there is a necessity for fear because of the immediacy of what is present, and the attendant certainty of an image that is without need of interpretation (or this is at the very least the image's projected force) and therefore which is also a form of pure immediacy, there is another modality of seeing whose force resides in the possibility of undoing the hold of fear. However, what is significant is that this occurs without that form of openness that is attended by responsibility. As a result it is not a barrier. It is simply fear's other side; and thus another structure of projected immediacy. This other seeing, and it is essential that what occurs is defined in terms of the temporality of seeing as an immediate act, is evident in Plato. The reference to Plato is important in this context precisely because of the significance of the link between Plato and Philo.

In the *Phaedo*, at a certain point in his exchange with Cebes, Socrates identifies one of the important components of the philosopher's soul. Of the range of defining elements the most significant in this context is the way the soul is disposed such that it is able to release itself from the hold of a specific conception of repetition. The continuity of the body's concerns which are unending, or rather which have their 'end' in both senses of the term in the bodies own 'ends', are linked to the continuity of Penelope and the weaving and then the undoing of the woven robe. Penelope names the structure of deliberate repetition. The philosopher's soul undoes this form of repetition; a repetition which in the context of the *Phaedo* is structured by the continuity of the body's own needs and ends. The interruption is occasioned by a shift in the form that looking takes on. It is essential that what occurs does so as the result of the presence of another modality of seeing. The visual provides the way ahead. Socrates sums up the position of the philosophical soul in the following terms;

No, his soul believes that it must gain peace from these emotions, must follow reason and abide always in it, beholding (θεωμενη) that which is true and divine and not a matter of opinion, and making that its only food; and in this way it believes it must live, while life endures, and then at death pass on to that which is akin to itself and of like nature, and be free from human ills. A soul which has been nurtured in this way, Simmias and Cebes, is not likely to fear (μη φοβηθη) that it will be torn asunder at its departure from the body and will vanish into nothingness, blown apart by the winds, and be no longer anywhere.<sup>8</sup> 84a-b

The overcoming of 'fear' (φοβος), here the fear that occurs with death, depends therefore upon a form of seeing, i.e. the immediacy of viewing.

The act of seeing has a transformative effect. Here, there is the counter positioning of pure immediacy by another conception of pure immediacy. There is another seeing, one whose immediacy, and its being immediate has an ineliminable necessity, is projected to dispel fear. Fear's opposite, what op-poses fear, in this context, is simply another form of pure immediacy. The other seeing is not a barrier to fear, it is simply there in op-position. The reinforcing of that which occurs with pure immediacy involves grounding the regulative within it. Again the structure of the contestable decision would have been obviated because once the regulative is ground in pure immediacy then the absence of contestability entails the move from power - where the latter is that which enable law to be operative - to violence. Power stands against violence.<sup>9</sup> The barrier stands against violence. And yet, of course, violence is that which can overthrow it. The barrier therefore, the space opened by then contestable decision, the place in which an interpretation that refused either the literal or the literalization of the allegorical and thus where allegoresis would emerge in the place of mere allegory, became a stand: standing, being, against violence. As such, it is violence's *counter-measure*. Allegoresis is the continual possibility of allegorization. As indicated it is the potential of allegorization (even of allegory) that cannot be close. What matters here however is the way this possibility arises in Philo's texts.

The triumph over fear as a form of pure immediacy is evident in one of frescoes by Andrea di Bonaiuto in *La Chiesa degli Spagnoli* in Florence. (Figure 2) The triumphant Christ greets the believers ('the brethren') having triumphed over the demons. One of the latter lies crushed beneath a door. The joined hands and the visual exchange, occurring in the now of its happening, emptying that now of the possibility of its being other, such that what appears is immediate completion. Taken together the lunette and the fresco are two differing modalities of pure immediacy. If it is possible to take up what can be called the *counter-measure*, specifically here the *counter-measure* to fear, then it cannot be positioned in terms of seeing when the latter is defined in terms of pure immediacy. In other words, there is no *counter-measure* in the affirming and negating of fear defined by the centrality of the eye if the latter is taken to act immediately. Rather, the argument is that the presence of a *counter-measure* has to be located in the suspension of that opposition. The argument to be advanced here is that not only does the hermeneutic take the form of a *counter-measure*, such a position can be recovered from Philo's conception of allegory opens towards the ineliminability of allegoresis. What that means is that it is recovered from what is already is at work within what allows for the interpretation of text and thus what is generated by the text's own interpretation. While the language of sight will be given centrality in Philo, the important point is that it is not sight as pure immediacy. On the contrary, it is a deliberative sense of sight. It is a form of seeing in which, in overcoming the immediacy of the literal, seeing takes on the quality of a deliberative decision.



(Figure 2. Andrea di Bonaiuto. Detail from *La Chiesa degli Spagnoli* in Florence)

Perhaps it should not be thought surprising that there was an attempt within Philo's thought that while recognizing the hold of fear seeks to displace it. What counters 'fear' is 'hope'. Hope, however, is there as an expectation and thus as an opening to the future. Hope cannot be separated from the hermeneutic. Hope is another name for the barrier to fear.

Holy, too, and praiseworthy is the hopeful man, just as on the contrary the despondent is unholy and blameworthy, since in all things he takes fear (φόβω) for his evil counsellor; for no two things are more at enmity with each other, men say, than fear (φόβον) and hope (ἐλπίδα), and surely that is natural, for each is an expectation, hope of good, fear on the other hand of evil, and their natures are irreconcilable and incapable of agreement.<sup>10</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

In *On the Migration of Abraham* there is an important evocation of seeing.<sup>11</sup> The affinity with Plato is fundamental. Nonetheless, and as has been intimated, it is the nature of its differentiation from the Platonic that opens up what might be described as the particularity of what the Philovian hermeneutic project allows. That this project betrays a certain fragility has, as will be suggested, an already present inevitability. It is inherent in the move from immediacy to mediacy. Philo writes the following:

If the senses are a hindrance to the exact sight (την ακριβη θεαν) of the spiritual object (του νοητου), those who find happiness in beholding (φιλοθεαμοσι) are at pains to crush their attack; they shut their eyes (ομμας) and stop their ears, and check the impulse bred by the other senses, and deem it well to spend their days in solitude and darkness, that no object of sense percept may dim the eye of the soul (το

φυκης ομμα), to which God has given the power of sight (βλεπειν) to see things spiritual (νοητα).<sup>12</sup>

It is essential to be clear here. This passage emerges just after a discussion of ‘sleep’ in which it suggested that during that period it becomes possible see into the future. While such a possibility is important, it is not central to the development of the position that leads to the seeing of ‘things spiritual’ (νοητα) except to the extent that there is a link between dreaming and withdrawal. The importance aspect of solitude as noted above is its deliberate and thus its intentional nature. Deliberation understood as a form of activity has to allow for the introduction of the question as to how it becomes possible to turn from ‘the mental pictures presented by the senses’ (τας αισθησεις φαντασιων) and then to move towards the possibility of an engagement with ‘things spiritual’ (νοητα). The move is not immediate. There has to be an intervening step. The question to be addressed therefore concerns how this is possible. For Plato such an engagement involves a form of ‘recollection’ (αναμνησις). Indeed, again in the *Phaedo*, though the position is also argued in the *Meno* (e.g. 85d6-7), Socrates makes an emphatic claim in this regard, ‘our learning is nothing else than recollection’ (ημιν η μαθησις ουκ αλλο τι η αναμνησις).<sup>13</sup> While there is a similarity of structure since there is an obvious affinity between the objects of engagement, the approach in Philo is fundamentally different. For Plato what is essential to the activity of the soul is that it moves, ‘into the realm of the pure, the always the same as itself, the immortal and the changeless’ (εις το καθαρον τε και αιει ον και αθανατοιν και ωσαθτως).<sup>14</sup> The argument in general terms is that any comparable sense of movement for Philo, the movement into domains of this nature, is fundamentally different. That movement is nothing other than interpretation and thus the project of allegory. (Hence it is emphatically *not* a form of ‘recollection’.) If there is access to the domain that the soul holds open then it occurs via an engagement with text. It does not occur as a result of seeing in any direct sense. And this is the case even if the end point is a return to the privileging of sight. As such at work here is the mediate, in the precise sense that, at its inception, this engagement is mediated in advance by the text, rather than the immediate. For Philo a transformation of the given occurs through an act of reading. While reading may not be thematised as such, it is precisely the ineliminability of the act that causes Philo’s texts to open up beyond themselves. The move from seeing to reading can never be bought to an end by a simple return to seeing and thus to the posited singularity of insight (in other words to the immediate as though it had simply displaced the process of mediation and were able to return as anything other than a pragmatic determination). The inevitability of the move from seeing to reading announces the move from allegory - where the latter is defined in terms of its opposition to the literal - to allegoresis.<sup>15</sup> The significant point is therefore that the move to the allegorical becomes itself an allegory whose own differential repetition occurs, thus its discontinuous continuity is staged, every time mediacy takes precedence over immediacy in the guise of finality. The return of the immediate, were it to be assumed to have occurred, or were it merely to be posited, is therefore the return to a structure in which fear predominates (and ensuing enforcement of the set

up it envisages necessitated). As will continue to be argued, the hermeneutic becomes the barrier to that possibility. This reconfiguration of the hermeneutic opens a different legislative procedure.

*On the Migration of Abraham* begins with an engagement with the opening line of *Genesis XII. 1-4*: 'Depart out of **the land**, out of thy **kindred** and out of thy **father's land**'.<sup>16</sup> Each of these elements is read allegorically insofar as what takes precedence is the symbolic register of each term. The presupposition being that none of these terms can be equated purely with their literal meaning. In other words, while immediacy is a possibility, it simply closes the space of meaning, and as such fails to let the meaning appear. As such what has to appear in its place is the other possibility that will always have been there and thus its actualization, which is, of course, the actualization of a potentiality, has to do with the status of the object; here what this means is the status of the word. And in the case of Philo what this entails is a transformed sense of 'word'. The project of Philo's own texts therefore is a recovery, from the initial set of meanings, of that other possibility. (The move beyond the opposition allegorical/literal is already gestured at here since the question that while suspended though which is nonetheless real is the extent that Philo's texts themselves allow themselves to be approached in exactly this way.) The identification of forms of recovery is not just an interpretive claim. That recovery, in the context of Philo's own writings, has the effect both of orientating behavior and allowing for the disclosure, at the same time, of that which is essential to human being. In other words, it is the move to the allegorical that allows for an interconnection between the ethical and a philosophical anthropology to be made clear. Wisdom is a component of human being. It is the activity that mediates the relation between text and meaning. Equally, again as a mediating act, it allows the text recast as the 'word' and thus recast as a form of *nomos*, to function as regulative. Part of the overall argument therefore is that 'wisdom' names a form of mediation. Wisdom, precisely because of its indispensable role in the hermeneutic, is integral to the construction of the barrier. Rather than try and trace the argumentation of the text as a whole, centrality will be attributed to a number of moments that indicates both the necessity of the hermeneutic thus construed including its link to a philosophical anthropology and also the way that any attempt to close the spaces of mediation, while real, also comes undone in the work of the text itself.

As noted above each of these terms - **the land**, **kindred** and **father's land**, is given a symbolic register. To take one: 'Land' is a symbol of the 'body'. Leaving the 'land' becomes the project. The line has to be understood. There is an interpretative exigency which, in this context has to begin with the recognition that the line in question occurs within a text and therefore the question of interpretation stems from an understanding of the text itself since it provides that in terms of which the text is itself to be understood. When the symbolic register is given priority over the literal a different of human being emerges. The identification of human being with the body's literal presence is displaced. Another conception of human being emerges with the move from the literal and therefore a different

philosophical anthropology is in play. Overcoming that position, i.e. overcoming that initial identification, allows for another form of identification. Namely, an identification that is of course only ever present as a contingent possibility. The additional point that contingency is itself present, as a necessity, also needs to be made. Its necessity is ground in its being a necessary possibility. Its contingency is located in the non-necessity of the identification of the being of being human with 'virtue'. A more general point can be made here, one that is opened up by a connection between the interpretive and the ethical where the ethical is defined in relation to decisions that are an inherent part of human life. The point is straightforward. The ethical inheres in life. It is a possibility that comes to be experienced as such. The ethical and thus a thinking of the good life come to the subject in terms of a form of recognition. Hence the ethical cannot be separated from the subject's own experiences of the world. As a result the ethical, in terms of the choice of 'virtue' is always contingent precisely because its opposite - 'vice' - can never precluded. Vice remains a decision. Note that in *On the Preliminary Studies*, Philo argues that with development and maturity,

there springs from a single root the twofold stalk, virtue and vice (αρετη και κακια) and we form an apprehension of both, but necessarily chose one or the other, the better natured (ευφυεις) choosing virtue, the opposite kind vice.<sup>17</sup>

There is always a twofold possibility. Fear is the attempt to close it down. Where the closure is immediate. The project of the immediate is that the processes, tied to training, and in which decisions are made, are rendered inoperative. Here, with this account of virtue, there is another possibility. Virtue is now present as a potentiality (dependent both upon a sense of movement that is itself dependent upon a specific reading or interpretation of the text). In other words, coming to be aware of virtue occurs as a result of reading and thus the process of interpretation. Involved here therefore is a form of transformation, which, in this exact context, is the movement to another sense of 'land'. Coming to 'virtue' is a result a form 'migration'. Of this movement Philo writes, in a complex and demanding passage:

..thou must change thine abode and betake thee to thy father's land, the land of the word that is holy (την πατρων γην την ιεπου λογου) and in some sense father of those that admit to training (ασκητων): and that land is wisdom (σοφια), abode most choice of virtue loving souls (των φιλαρετων ψυχων).<sup>18</sup>

What is opened up here is the need to begin to understand the sense of recognition or insight that is both afforded and demanded by such a passage. If there is a way of concentrating the issues at stake within it, then it is clear that they emerge from how the complex of relations between 'reading', 'insight' and 'hearing' are to be understood. It is essential to remember that terms 'hearing' and 'seeing' have both literal as well as non-literal determinations. (Again the unasked though essential questions are the following: how are these two forms of presence to be understood: How

is their relationship formulated?) It should be clear from the start that what is at stake is the relationship between 'reading' and 'insight'.

The way in is to approach that relationship as part of a net work of relations which, in general terms, brings considerations of understanding into play and in which what it means to understand (and of course to act on that understanding) has to allow for the copresence of the literal and the symbolic. In other words, again in general terms, the process of understanding is only ever allegorical. (Hence the question of what it means to ascribe any form of literal finality to understanding.) Understanding, as present here, is the realization and opening of the hermeneutic process. And significantly, it is the only understanding that is linked to 'virtue loving souls'. The distinction between 'seeing' and 'reading' is equally as fundamental. In regards to that relation, Philo cites *Genesis IX. 31*. 'God saw (εἶδεν) all that he had made'. However Philo is quick to draw a distinction between 'seeing and 'insight' (εἰδησιν). The work of language here is essential. Seeing cannot be reduced therefore to its literal presence. Seeing cannot be mere seeing. Seeing is not immediate. As a result what this means is that is that the complexity of seeing entails that all subsequent invocations of seeing will have been complicated in advance by the force of the distinction between 'seeing and 'insight'. The distinction between them plays a fundamental role in the way that Philo contrasts and then separates 'seeing' and 'hearing in sections 47-50. Hence the detail is worth pursuing.

This section of the text - sections 47-50 - is structured by an engagement with two particular lines from *Exodus*. In both instances the literal claim is clear. The first line is: 'all (πας) the people saw the voice' (*Exodus XX. 18*) and then, 'You have seen that I spoke to you out of heaven'. (*Exodus XX.22*). In both instance a voice was seen not heard. To argue that a voice is seen, were this to be taken as a straightforward assertion, is to make a claim that is false. Voices are not seen. How then are the lines to be understood? The possibility of meaning is ground in the impossibility of the literal. Therefore what sustains interpretation is the recognition that as a claim its truth does not reside in the line's literal content. What occasions the process of recovery is that what the line also announces is the presence of divisions within modes of seeing. There is both the literal act, the bodily eye that sees, and then the soul's seeing. In Philo's terms what the lines of text indicate is that: 'the words of God are interpreted by the power of sight residing in the soul'.<sup>19</sup> This is the mode of interpretation that the words demand, and it is essential to note that they are words of text. Hence what is at work from the start is the mediated process of reading. (Moreover, it is terms of the processes' ineliminability that allegory yields the move to allegoresis.) In this instance what the soul 'sees' is that which is to be distinguished from the categorization of the object that occurs with literal hearing (or indeed literal seeing). Now, while there is an unequivocal return to sight that return works, at the same time, to hold literal sight at a necessary distance from the sight of the soul. Indeed, the argument depends upon this possibility. Insisting on the distancing of the literal is not to eschew the possibility of virtue. Virtue is only impossible if the literal is

taken as an end itself. The suspension of immediacy occasions virtue. Recognizing of course that the move to virtue is itself the result of a decision the result of which could have been otherwise. 'Vice' remains a continual possibility.

Here it is worth pausing and noting that there are two paths that can be pursued at this point. The first is stay within the exact confines of the text and suggest that what is at work here has to be limited to investigations with an emergent Neo-Platonic universe. While such an undertaking has its own significance, it limits the allegorical to the content of the text and fails to allow for the allegorical to register allegorically, i.e. it fails to allow for the move from allegory to allegoresis. Hence, the second path involves a return to what has already been noted as at work in Philo namely the link between interpretation, the development of a philosophical anthropology and the ethical. (The latter announced specifically in the text in the various forms of reference to virtue and wisdom.) To insist on the link between the interpretive, a philosophical anthropology and the ethical opens the text by not allowing it to be equated with its position within a historical framework - which is of course also to allow for that possibility to be maintained without its being determining in the last instance - is to allow for the retention of the force of the allegorical. That force involves the move from the presence of allegory to the continuity of the latter's opening through the impossibility of constraining the potentiality inherent in the process of allegoresis.

\*\*\*\*\*

In order to take these considerations a stage further it is essential to stay with the detail of the text. At a later stage - indeed at 127 - Philo begins with the interpretation of *Genesis* XII.4 - 'Abraham journeyed even as the Lord spoke him'. Two elements are clear even from the most elementary engagement with the line. It is both the case that Abraham is travelling, and that God is speaking to him. This line is of course cited just after Philo has shown that virtue (*αρετη*) emerges in the process of its having been recovered. That recovery occurs within a particular setting. There is the preceding argument that 'virtue', while an attendant possibility, has to be recovered. Thus its presence is always contingent. (It need not have been recovered since the path to 'vice' (*κακια*) remains an always present possibility.) What is of particular interest is the way that recovery is understood and explained by the text. Philo refers to the passage of time that is marked by the seasons. Virtue, its recovery, it can be argued occurs as 'season' that interrupts this passage. Hence Sarah gives birth within a season that is not determined in advance, Rather she gave birth within a season that 'time does not determine.'<sup>20</sup> The latter is the '*achronic*' that interrupts the flow of *chronos*. Part of the argument to come is that the *achronic* as a figure of interruption can be repositioned as the barrier to fear precisely because the *achronic* is that which stems and interrupts the repetition of the always the same. It sustains an opening, and yet it does not provide a counter image. The *achronic* names a productive caesura.

This interruption of time, and thus the return to the way of God, is neither a chance event, nor a mere event. It occurs as a result of Sarah's 'wisdom'. She is 'wise'. Philo is explicit. Sarah is ἡ φρονησις. There is therefore an important relationship between time and wisdom. The latter allows for that shift in time in which virtue emerges. While this point is just noted as if it occurred in passing, it is precisely this conception of birth that already functions as an allegory. It becomes a way of thinking the Messianic. It is an allegorical presentation of that position. It has a less emphatic form in the argument that the affirmation of virtue - remembering that virtue is the result of a specific decision that is itself bound up with a specific form of recognition, and thus allows itself to be understood as that complex form of affirmation in which while there is the acknowledgment of the bodily nature of human being, a nature that is there in the move from 'the dust of the ground' (*adamah*) to a 'person' (*adam*), it is also the case that the presence of a founding irreducibility in which the material is co-present with the immaterial, means that the human becomes what it is in the process of the continuity of its negotiation with the unconditioned.<sup>21</sup> It is the presence of the unconditioned, which appears in the opening of the text in terms of the 'soul', incorporates its other within itself. The 'irrational' is there with the 'rational', 'sense-perception' is there with the understanding. This originally doubled point of departure is the copresence of the body and the soul as a form of *anoriginal* relation, but which allows, nonetheless, for a conception of seeing which is the soul's. The *anoriginal* is difference at the origin. It pertains to what is. As such, it locates and names a sense of irreducibility that is ontological in nature. Here the presence of that which is *anoriginal* allows the soul perceives this doubled presence and chooses its own path. The soul therefore becomes the site of a form of *anoriginal* mediation.<sup>22</sup> Namley, the presence of a division, and thus a relation, that pertains originally.

This is the position that is reiterated here. In terms of the use of time located in Philo's recasting of the story of Sarah giving birth, there is an affirmation of human being that allows both for the recognition of human being's own materiality - its bodily presence - but that the ethical (here located in the reiteration of the various forms of 'virtue') is located in a birth which when read as an allegory becomes the articulation of what might be described as the temporality of the Messianic. This is the case precisely because the Messianic involves a conception of time as that which is interrupted. If *chronos* is continuity then the Messianic, as a figure of thought, is inherently *achronic*. Hence within the allegory there is another allegory. There is a 'weakened' sense of the Messianic that is operative in every virtuous act that occurs as a result of wisdom precisely because it always could have been otherwise.<sup>23</sup> (As was suggested at the outset this is the possibility that insists within allegory once freed from the hold of its definition as the literal's other.) The explicit contains the implicit. In other words, it is only if the second path noted above is allowed does this other possibility emerge. There are important consequences of this reposition of allegory. Allegory is opening towards allegoresis. The latter as the actualization of a potentiality that was always inherent in the interdependent relation between the literal and the allegorical.

This is the setting in which the line, 'Abraham journeyed even as the Lord spoke him' needs to be understood. What is carried over is a still to be determined sense of doubled register or twofold possibility; a presence that showed itself in the above in terms of time. The 'telos' here, and it is one that is agreed to, for Philo, by both philosophy (the philosophers) and Moses, is for life to follow 'nature'.<sup>24</sup> The question is what does 'nature' (φύσις) mean here? Philo, in responding to such a question, draws an important interconnection between 'nature', 'virtue' and 'reason'. Nature is not opposed to them. Indeed, it is possible to go further and argue that their interconnection is the definition of 'nature'. 'Nature' does not stand on the outside. Life - and note that it is a life that would be there in its being lived and as such this is not a claim about biological life but what life can be for a human being - occurs for Philo, when,

the mind (ο νοῦς) having entered on virtue's path (τὴν ἀρετῆς ἀτραπὸν), walks in the track of right reason (ορθοῦ λόγου) and follows God.<sup>25</sup>

There is an important accord between what is identified here as 'right reason' as descriptive of nature in the first instance and then, in the second, the human response to 'right reason'. Again, 'nature' is not an outside. Rather, 'nature', as the term is present here is equally a locus of 'right reason'. And yet the difference between human being which has been accounted for in this context in terms of the emergent philosophical anthropology that is beginning to insist, and 'nature' has to occur at this precise moment. Following God, remembering that God will be of greater significance than either reason or *nomos* insofar as God created the 'law', necessitates a decision. Following God is that which occurs as a result of 'right reason', which can itself be understood as reason's recognition of the compelling nature of law and which is also to argue that it is a practice marked by the inevitability of contingency. (Deliberation is linked to reason). As has already been suggested contingency emerges since the necessity that attends 'law', precisely because, to follow the text closely, the 'law' is the 'divine word', and yet this description of the 'law' does not entail that 'all' will follow its path. While there cannot be an easy separation between 'law' and 'word', there has to be a space of contingency. It is that necessity of contingency that allows for both the discussion of God's word and the introduction of the term 'allegory' in section 131. Indeed, turning to section 131 allows for a clarification of the implicit structure of allegory within the text, noted above in terms of the presence of a messianic structure within the treatment of Sarah. The remains an important link between the messianic and natality insofar as the Messianic as a structure has a strong emphatic form, though it has a 'weakened' form in which the interruption of fate, in sum the affirmation of virtue, gestures towards the emphatic.<sup>26</sup> However prior to a direct engagement with section 131 the use of the formulation 'right reason' needs to be pursued.

There are many instances of the term in Plato - e.g. *Phaedo* (73a9-10). However there are complications within Plato in terms of mapping his version on to Philo. This might be true despite the fact that the connection between Philo and Plato is demonstrable on many levels. Equally the formulation places a decisive role in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. In that text, at 6.13, Aristotle advances the argument that not only is there a link between right reason and virtue, it is also the case that virtue demands the use of 'right reason'.<sup>27</sup> Philo is not Aristotle. However, a few lines later, at 134 - in what could be a blend of two Aristotelian terms Philo wrote of του φρονειν ορθος the *telos* of which becomes nothing less than the affirmation of human finitude in relation to God. Reason and wisdom understood in terms that are always mediated by the necessity that their use be correct work together to open up a sense of openness of calculation that is linked to the need to interpret. The unavailability of correct action as a given, mirrors the drive to allegory insofar as both involve deliberation and contingency.

The evocation of 'allegory' to which a turn will be made here occurs in the context of a discussion of 'law' (νομος). Wisdom involves activity that occurs in relation to the law. For Philo, 'God's words are the activities of the wise person'. (τους του θεου λογος πραξεις ειναι του σοφου).<sup>28</sup> What is opened up here is the general question of the relation to the law. Hence the question: What does it mean to live in relation to the law? Answering that question necessitates understanding that the 'law' is not an abstract or general proposition. Law is linked to the word and thus to the activity of interpretation. As a result, in order to open up a way to understand the import of the link between 'action' and law, Philo cites a line from *Torah*, specifically, *Deuteronomy* X.20: i.e. 'thou shalt go in the steps of the Lord they God'. In relation to this line he then adds that the response to it cannot be structured by its literal force. Rather, what the line states involves the recognition that it is an allegorical formulation concerning the soul's acting in relation to 'divine ordinances' (θεια δογματα). Philo's analysis of both language and levels of response to the text then continues. Nonetheless what is fundamental is that the line's meaning is only available in terms of its presence as allegory, the allegorical is itself the condition in terms of which it is possible to act in relation to the law. That action however is not immediate. There are two interrelated senses of mediacy at work here. The first is that the move from the literal to the allegorical is already a form of mediation. The second is that the nature of the connection between activity that has a determining relation to the law and the law as the 'word' is thought by Philo is terms of 'wisdom'. Wisdom names a relation to the law that is always already mediated. Wisdom names therefore what has already been identified as the 'barrier' to fear. Wisdom stands against immediacy. Following the law therefore is not the immediate response to the literal. Rather, it is the always already mediated response that wisdom affords. Following the law therefore, and here following needs to be understood as going 'in the steps of' is the possibility, and it is an interpretive possibility, that depends upon the allegorical and as a result the opening of the hermeneutic.

There is a complex play of terms, ‘allegory’, ‘wisdom’, ‘law’, ‘word’, ‘understanding’, etc. While it would be possible to give a definition of each it is clear from what has been argued thus far that they are interconnected in significant and important ways. What marks that interconnection, perhaps what defines it, is that what are staged are modes of activity. The word (incorporating *nomos*) and praxis can only be separated because the connection is contingent. What connects then - i.e. wisdom - entails that ‘vice’ while possible can be distanced in the name of ‘virtue’. This is what an engagement with the text involves when its words are not taken as ends in themselves. In Sections 22-3 there is an important position advanced by Philo in order to secure the strength of the literal and thus the related claim that were it to be excluded, and the text read simply figuratively, then the overall force of the text itself would have been lost. The passage from *On The Migration of Abraham* is the following:

Why, we shall be ignoring the sanctity of the Temple and a thousand other things, if we are going to pay heed to nothing except what is shown us by the inner meaning of things (υπονοιωv).<sup>29</sup>

The identification of an inner meaning’ has an important ubiquity in Philo. It is also used by Xenophon to identify that of which the poets were ignorant. In Xenophon’s *Symposium* Socrates says of the poets that they ‘ did not know the inner meaning of the poem’ (τας υπονοιας ουκ επιστανται).<sup>30</sup> It is important, the argument adduced by Philo runs, to be able to distinguish between differing ways in which words are used. The necessity that arises here, the necessity to be able to attribute meaning to the literal and thus to allow the literal to be linked to a conception of practice that is itself not distanced from the concerns of wisdom and the understanding, opens up a way of identifying what can be taken as fundamental aspects of Philo’s hermeneutics once the opposition between the literal and the allegorical is itself distanced.

If there is a limit to Philo’s interpretive project then rises from the fact that as those strategies at work within it develop it becomes clear that the allegorical meaning of a line of text becomes its meaning with the related consequence that the possible allegorization of allegory - what has already been identified by the use of the term *allegoresis* - has been precluded. It is possible to identify the ‘inner meaning’ or the symbolic meaning or the meaning that arises once the allegorical is taken as more important than the literal. Equally, it is possible to identify the literal as itself a locus of meaning. However, the mediation of the loci of meaning by wisdom and the understanding has a specific outcome that undoes in advance forms of possible finality. What is entailed is that action in relation to any locus of meaning is always mediated in advance. There is no pure site of meaning in the precise sense that there cannot be a response to that which calls on the practice of ‘understanding’ that is itself sustained by pure immediacy. This would be a contradictory state of affairs. Pure immediacy, moreover, is undone in advance by the intervention of what can be described more generally as processes of interpretation which are themselves to be understood in terms of potentiality. Hence processes are

not relative as though there was simply contestation on the level of meaning. The argument is always going to be that mediation becomes that in relation to which decisions are both made and contested. Hence, while it is right for Philo to argue that the both the literal and the figural, the statement and its presence as allegory are essential since both are at work within the complex formulations that link wisdom, understanding and action, it is also the case that the precise nature of the distinction and the precise implications of claims to meaning cannot be either formalized or foreclosed in advance. There is a barrier, which is a locus of negotiation. Undoing the site of negotiation means that the complex temporality of interruption, the productive caesura that is linked to acting with wisdom such that wisdom has an interruptive uniqueness to it that allows a connection between virtue and the interpretation to be thought, would itself have been circumvented. The text opens beyond its own immediate concerns. The hermeneutic therefore is not a form of continuity in which there is an unchecked proliferation of meaning. Rather, it is a continual opening in which what comes to the fore must be subject to processes of interpretation, transformation and deliberation and thus it is that within which the distinction between the literal and the allegorical is destabilized by the process of allegoresis. A process that has already figured - figuring without being named as such - as the interruption of chromos itself the figure of repetition that birth, in the text Sarah's giving birth, allows to figure.

<sup>1</sup> While allegory has an important role in Philo and it is accompanied by a systematic refusal of the literal, if the latter is taken as an end in itself, this is not a uniquely Judaic interpretive phenomenon. It is also there in, amongst others, in Gregory of Nyssa. See in regards to the latter: Ronald E. Heine. Gregory of Nyssa's Apology for Allegory. *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Dec., 1984), pp. 360-370. Philo's interpretation of the Septuagint needs to be understood within the context of a deep investigation occurring in Alexandria of the practice of interpretation. There is an important link to Homer scholarship which is occurring at the same time. In this regard see Maren R. Niehoff. *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria*, Cambridge University Press. Cambridge. 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Philo. *On Abraham*. (Translated by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. Pages. (68-69).

<sup>3</sup> I have tried to indicate how this occurs in my Hermeneutics and Judaic Thought. In *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*. (edited by Jeff Malpas, Hans-Helmuth Gander.) London. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Important in this regard is one of the descriptions given to Moses. Philo writes 'of the proofs of legislator's humanity and fellow feeling (της του νομοθετου φιλανθρωπιας και κοινωνιας) (Translated by F.H.) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 1968. Page 211. Inscribed therefore in the language that Philo is using is an attempt to sketch a relation between human being, law and life as a practice. This generates the affective ground of shared feeling. In other words, there is already a sustained and developed philosophical anthropology in Philo. For a contemporary reworking of the relation between the human and the divine in Philo that is also concerned with delimiting the specificity of human being see: Anca Vasiliu. *Penser Dieu. La condition de réciprocité. Noétique et théologie rationnelle à partir d'une page de Philon d'Alexandrie. Phantasia*. Volume 1. 2015.

<sup>5</sup> I have pursued this topic in detail elsewhere. See my Anonymity and Fear: The Refusal of Relationaity in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* in my *Towards a Relational Ontology*. SUNY Press. Albany. 2015. Pages 139-159.

<sup>6</sup> There are a number of formulations of the possibility of locating judgment as that which is a barrier to fear; a barrier because it distances the merely affective is distanced by that which stands apart from it. One example can be located in a fragment from Sophocles. In a line - Fragment 760 - that has thus far resisted attribution to any specific play - Sophocles wrote:

Be confident - You have in me a no greater barrier against this fear.  
(Θαρσει - μεγας σοι τουδ' εγω φοβου μοχλος).

(Sophocles. *Fragments*. (Translated by Hugh Lloyd-Jones) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 1996. Page 143.) While the detail cannot be presented it can nonetheless still be suggested that there is an important link between the 'barrier' (μοχλος) to fear and the presence of 'wisdom' in the opening lines of the final Choral Ode in the *Antigone*. 'Wisdom' is that which

occasions the good life and which allows for a pious relation to the Gods. The line itself reads:

Wisdom is provided as the chief part of happiness, (το φρωειν ευδαιμονιας) and our dealings with the gods must be in no way unholy. (1347)

If fear undoes the possibility of the 'good life' then the counter-measure can be located in wisdom. Wisdom's actualization, its worldly presence, is mediacy. Deliberation, time and the presence of contestable decisions stand against pure immediacy. This will be the case whether the pure immediacy of law is linked to the civil or to the divine.

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that a critical engagement with the use of sculptures and sculptured forms to inculcate specific religious doctrines is also evident in a number of Christian writers. See in particular the treatment of this topic in Bernard of Clairvaux. *Apologia*. 1125. For a sustained discussion of the effect of monsters and demons within the art of this period see: Thomas E. A. Dale. Monsters, Corporeal Deformities, and Phantasms in the Cloister of St-Michel-de-Cuxa. *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 83, No. 3 (Sep., 2001), pp. 402-436 and Bonnie Noble. "Law and Gospel": Scripture, Truth, and Pictorial Rhetoric. *Southeastern College Art Conference Review*. 2004, Vol. 14, Issue 4

<sup>8</sup> References to the *Phaedo* are to Plato *Phaedo*. (Translated by Harland North Fowler) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 1914.

<sup>9</sup> This is, of course, the argument developed famously by Hannah Arendt. See her *On Violence*. Harcourt Brace Javanovich. New York. 1970.

<sup>10</sup> *On Abraham*. Page 11. See in relation to this passage the following:

We may find a proof of this in the way in which it changes with the soul's phases. When the soul feels grief, the eyes are full of anxiety and depression. When on the other hand it feels joy, they smile and rejoice. When fear is supreme, they are full of turbulent confusion, and move and quiver and roll confusedly. *On Abraham*. Page 77

<sup>11</sup> The details of 'seeing' and its relation to *visio Dei* is a genuine interpretive question in Philo. The argument here is that 'seeing' while linked to the vision of God and thus to a conception of mystical and thus ecstatic experience is mediated by text and thus involves a relation to reading that complicates in advance the possibility of seeing as a purely immediate experience. For a detailed argument that interconnects seeing and the mystical and which leaves the question of reading to one side see: Scott D. Mackie. Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism. *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012) 147-179

<sup>12</sup> Philo. *On The Migration of Abraham*. (Translated by F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 1985. Page 243

<sup>13</sup> *Phaedo*. 72E. See in this regard Max Latona. The Tale is Not My Own (ουκ έμος ό μύθος): Myth and Recollection in Plato. *APEIRON a journal for ancient philosophy and science*.

<sup>14</sup> *Phaedo*. 79D.

<sup>15</sup> The primacy of seeing cannot be differentiated from the need to hold to the 'legitimacy of religious images'. For a detailed investigation of this position within the context of the Italian Counter Reformation see Andrew R. Casper. *Display and Devotion: Exhibiting Icons and Their Copies in Counter-Reformation Italy*. In Wieste de Boer and Christine Göttler. *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe*. Brill. Leiden. 2013. Page 43-63. Part of the significance of the argumentation adduced by Casper in relation to the Veronica is that that its substitutability and thus its repetition do not undo the centrality of vision and thus do not undo what will be developed here in terms of the relationship between vision and immediacy. Immediacy is not brought into question by substitution.

<sup>16</sup> The 'migration' of Abraham becomes a defining motif in the history of philosophy. It could be argued that it complicates the figure of Ulysses. As, for example, Levinas has argued the figure Abraham counters the nostalgia of Ulysses. See Emmanuel Levinas, 'La trace de l'autre' in *En découvrant de l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Vrin. Paris. 1967. Pages 187-202.

<sup>17</sup> Philo. *On The Preliminary Studies*. (Translated by F.H. Colson) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 1985. Page 82.

<sup>18</sup> *On The Migration of Abraham*. Page 149.

<sup>19</sup> *On The Migration of Abraham*. Page 161.

<sup>20</sup> *On The Migration of Abraham*. Page 205.

<sup>21</sup> The source here is of course *Genesis 2.8*:

Then *Adonai*, God, formed (*vayyitzer*) a person (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (*nimat hayyim*), so that he became a living being (*lenepes hayyah*).

<sup>22</sup> The term *anoriginal* has been central to the development of a relational ontology and the sense of the ethical it generates. See my: *Towards a Relational Ontology*. SUNY Press. Albany. 2015 and *Virtue in Being. Towards an Ethics of the Unconditioned*. SUNY Press. Albany. 2015

<sup>23</sup> Walter Benjamin uses the formulation of the 'weak messianic power' in his *On the Concept of History*. See Walter Benjamin *Selected Writings*. Volume 4. Harvard University Press. Cambridge. Page 390. (SW 4: 390). The most judicious discussion of this concept in Benjamin is Sami Kahtib. *The Messianic Without Messianism. Walter Benjamin's Materialist Theology*. In *Anthropology and Materialism*. Volume 1. 2013.

<sup>24</sup> On the general question of the conception of Moses in Philo see, Louis Feldman. *Philo's Portrayal of Moses in the Context of Ancient Judaism*. University of Notre Dame Press Notre Dame, Indiana 2007.

<sup>25</sup> *On The Migration of Abraham*. Page 149.

<sup>26</sup> The idea of birth as a form of beginning is evident in the work of Hannah Arendt. She writes, for example, that, 'the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting'. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chicago. 1958. Page 9. It is equally possible to argue that the temporal structure of *Babylon Talmud Sanhedrin 98a* allows for a similar position to be argued. The text in question concerns the possibility of the Messiah's arrival. At every moment

---

the question pertain to what 'listening to the voice' would be like. This is a recognition that every moment contains the possibility for actions that accord - as the result of a deliberative decision - with a life that is lived in relation to virtue. What the Tractate suggests is the presence of a link between the good life and the actions it entails and the more emphatic sense of the Messianic.

<sup>27</sup> See in this regard D.P. Dryer. Aristotle's Conception of the *Orthos Logos*. In *The Monist*. 66. Januaray. 1983.

<sup>28</sup> *On The Migration of Abraham*. Page 146.

<sup>29</sup> *On The Migration of Abraham*. Page 185

<sup>30</sup> Xenophon. *Symposium* III.6. (Translated by E.C. Marchant, O.J. Todd and Revised by Jeffery Henderson.) Harvard University Press. Cambridge. 2013.