Philo’s Perception of Women

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

WOMEN OF PHILO’S WORLD

Introduction

We have observed that Philo employs sexual distinctions both philosophically and practically. Throughout this study I have defended the position that these two modes of sexual distinction are inextricably intertwined: Philo presupposes that there is a natural difference between the sexes, and that this difference should and does permeate all aspects of being. I have described the pattern by which he views reality as a particular version of the Great Chain of Being—that pattern which presents the cosmos as a hierarchy in which each inferior member is drawn in eros and service to those above, and each superior member accepts the deference of the lower, at the same time supporting them in an attitude of noblesse oblige.¹ Philo equates masculine with the qualities that are superior, active and more spiritual, and feminine with their opposites.

Philo’s treatment of the women of the Biblical stories reflects this world view. He bends Scripture to fit the pattern, all the while professing loyalty to its unchanging power.² We have seen that in presenting the women of Scripture he achieves his ends by liberal

¹ See my discussion of the Great Chain in chapter six.

² "So whether what he [Moses] told them [the Israelites] came from his own reasoning powers or was learnt from some supernatural source they held it all to come from God and after the lapse of many years, how many I cannot say exactly, but at any rate for more than two thousand, they have not changed a single word of what he wrote but would even endure to die a thousand deaths sooner than accept anything contrary to the laws and customs which he had ordained." Hyp.6.9. Cf. Mos.2.14.
use of allegory, by omission, by emphasis, and even by alteration of the text.

Under his hand the most admirable of the Biblical women are for the most part allegorized into virgins, and thus freed from the inferiority which womanhood entails. On the occasions when he allows them to emerge as real women, their virtues always pale beside their husbands', and discordant wills are harmonized.

Those persons who are presented as women fall into two groups, depending upon whether they are useful or dangerous to good men. The groups are designated by the terms astai and pornai, or figuratively identified with those included in or excluded from Miriam's chorus. Good women, astai, know and accept their place in the system, whereas bad women, pornai, do not.

Having seen how Philo fits the female figures of the Bible into his Weltanschauung, we turn now to his perception of the women round about him. Here again, we shall see that the same world-view predominates. Philo views contemporary women from virtually the same perspective.

Sources

Most of the statements that deal directly with women of Philo's day appear in the large section of his work called the Exposition. This section presupposes less familiarity with scripture than the other large section, the Allegory. It is generally held, therefore, to be directed towards a wider readership--perhaps to disaffected Jews, or even to the Gentile public. For our purposes it does not

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3 See ch.3, n.14, for the basic distinction between the Allegory and the Exposition.

4 The former position is held by Sandmel. The latter had been proposed earlier by Goodenough. Sandmel, Philo, p.47, argues, in reaction to Goodenough, "that there is no evidence that Gentiles (as distinct from Christians) read any Jewish writings, whether the Septuagint or Philo." He continues: "Yet an obliquely related missionary purpose is tenable, especially if we conceive of the presence in Alexandria of Jews nearly on the verge of leaving the Jewish community, as did Philo's
really matter how far afield Philo was directing his work; the important observation is that in the *Exposition* he is thinking of a readership beyond his inner circle, and consequently adopts an apologetic stance. It is clearly his purpose to present the regulations of Scripture as the finest and most reasonable representations of the natural law.

The treatises in which he undertakes this task most explicitly are *De Decalogo* and the four books of *De Specialibus Legibus*. The first of these covers the ten commandments, and the succeeding four examine specific laws, which Philo groups under the heading of one or other of the ten in turn. Philo introduces the enterprise as follows:

Having related in the preceding treatises the lives of those whom Moses judged to be men of wisdom, who are set before us in the Sacred Books as founders of our nation and in themselves unwritten laws, I shall now proceed in due course to give full descriptions of the written laws. And if some allegorical interpretation should appear to underlie them, I shall not fail to state it. For knowledge loves to learn and advance to full understanding and its way is to seek the hidden meaning rather than the obvious (*Dec.1*).

Part way through the last book of *Special Laws*, having come to the end of his ten categories, Philo changes his approach. In the remainder of the book, as well as in the following two, *De Virtutibus* and *De Praemiis et Poenis*, he presents more laws under a different set of headings, and makes general observations about the law.

Most of the material relating the law to women occurs in the four books of *Special Laws*. Although Philo promised to employ allegory (*Dec.1*, quoted above), he limits its use to his discussion of certain topics. In fact, his treatment of social and civic law is almost

nephew. *The Exposition* might well have been addressed to them."

Regarding the assertion that Jewish works were unknown to pagans, however, see D. A. Russell, *'Longinus' On the Sublime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp.93ff. Russell says that *On the Sublime* 9.9 makes specific reference to the Genesis story, and that there are noteworthy similarities in thought between Philo and Longinus.
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allegory-free, leaving the reader usually with only one level of meaning to grasp.\(^5\) Thus we should be able to find in these treatises a clear and unambiguous picture of Philo's perception of contemporary women.

Another treatise in the *Exposition, On the Contemplative Life*, provides a description of an ascetic group, the *Therapeutae*, which has women members.

A third source of material relevant to this study is the treatise *Apology for the Jews*, or *Hypothetica*, which contains Philo's account of the Essenes and their relation to women.

Tendencies

A question that has exercised some scholarly minds is whether or not in the *Special Laws* Philo is describing actual legal practice. Interesting as it is, this question is not immediately relevant to the topic at hand. Let me explain with an example. In several instances Philo calls for the death penalty, sometimes even "without bringing the offender before jury or council or any kind of magistrate at all" (*Spec.1.55; cf. 3.51). For the present purpose it is enough to know that Philo considered certain crimes to be such a threat to the Jewish community that the transgressors must be eliminated. Demands for the death penalty primarily reveal something about Philo's thought. Although it would be interesting to know whether anyone followed the suggestions with action, that knowledge would not alter the perception underlying the words. And the present study is concerned with perceptions.

At the same time, we should take into account the possibility that Philo is deliberately, or even subconsciously, creating an effect

\(^5\) "... allegory is almost entirely absent from the *De Dec.* itself and only appears occasionally in the civil or social laws of the *Spec. Leg.* though many of these have been allegorized at length in the Commentary . . . . On the other hand, when he is dealing with the sacrifices in Book I and the feasts in Book II allegory or rather symbolism is almost universal. Naturally enough. For both sacrifices and feasts have little meaning for him except the spiritual." *PLCL*, vol.7, xiii.
because of the need to write apologetically. We have already noted that in most of the source material we are discussing in this chapter he is writing for a readership that may be skeptical if not hostile, and that therefore it may legitimately be expected that his work will have an apologetic note.

With regard to women, the possibility of two tendencies should be considered.

The first is the desire to present female sexuality with a low profile. This would accord with Philo's proclivity, mentioned elsewhere, to outdo Scripture in portraying the Jews as a sexually restrained people. A similar tendency is evident in certain passages in the New Testament, where the motive for restraining women is openly declared. In each case the writer is aiming to guard the group's reputation in the larger community. Since home-centred women were universally admired by men of ancient culture—pagan, Jew and Christian alike—a group that kept its women bound to the home would gain general respect.

The second tendency is, in a sense, opposite to the first: to present Jewish law as being in tune with the times. In the survey in chapter two we observed that in the gentile society of Alexandria—Roman, Egyptian or Greek—women had more rights than their forebears had enjoyed a few centuries earlier. Philo could not fail to observe the increased independence of women, whether he "was intimately in touch with all aspects of the teeming life of Alexandria," as Goodenough believed, or travelled only in the more

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6 Titus 2:4f.: "[The older women should] train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited" (RSV, emphasis mine).

1 Tim.5:13f.: "[Young widows] learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us" (RSV, emphasis mine).

Philoteknia and philandria were womanly virtues generally praised in pagan culture. See Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, The Pastoral Epistles (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), p.140 for references to authors, particularly Plutarch, and inscriptions.
privileged circles of society, as seems more likely.\textsuperscript{7} Since he believed that the Mosaic law could never be outmoded, he may have genuinely believed that it could acknowledge certain societal trends while still remaining true to itself. His \textit{Weltanschauung}, as we have observed, leads him to be less concerned with absolutes than with relative positions. Lower forms (designated as feminine, passive, inferior) need not be eliminated or crushed, but, rather, controlled. On the interpersonal level, woman need not be degraded or even ostentatiously put in her place. She need simply be subject to male command and male interest.\textsuperscript{8} A passage from \textit{De Migratione Abrahami} expresses very clearly how Philo expects the elements in a hierarchy to interact. In this passage Philo uses "earth" and "kindred" to represent body and sense-perception; we are more accustomed to his using "woman" in that sense.

We have now shewn how Moses uses "earth" to represent the body, "kindred" to represent sense-perception, "thy father's house" to represent speech. The words "Depart out of these" are not equivalent to "Sever thyself from them absolutely," since to issue such a command as that would be to prescribe death. No, the words import "Make thyself a stranger to them in judgement and purpose; let none of them cling to thee; rise superior to them all; they are thy subjects, never treat them as sovereign lords; thou art a king, school thyself once and for all to rule, not to be ruled; evermore be coming to know thyself, as Moses teaches thee in many places, saying "Give heed to thyself" (Ex.xxiv.12), for \textit{in this way shalt thou perceive those to whom it befits thee to shew obedience and those to whom it befits thee to give commands} (7f.; emphasis mine).

\textsuperscript{7} Goodenough's statement is from \textit{Jurisprudence}, p.2. Later in this chapter I raise the possibility that Philo's observations of women excluded a large class that fell between the two extremes that he termed "ladies" and "harlots."

\textsuperscript{8} Once the proper relationship of dominance and submission is established, Philo then speaks as though equality exists: "... reflection ... should lead both husbands and wives to cherish temperance and domesticity and unanimity, and by mutual sympathy shewn in word and deed to make the name of partnership a reality securely founded on truth" (Spec.1.138).
It is possible, then, for Philo to perceive the law as condoning, indeed foreshadowing, a situation in which women play an increasingly active role, as long as they remain within the limits of his view of what is right, viz., "for the better to rule always and everywhere, and for the worse to be ruled" *(LA* 1.72).

As we look at Philo's remarks about contemporary women, it is probable that we will find, then, two apologetic tendencies: on the one hand, to present Jewish women as sexually restrained, and, on the other, to show them enjoying freedom comparable to that of their gentile sisters. We can acknowledge the existence of these tendencies without resorting to Goodenough's claim that Philo is actually describing current practice under the guise of interpreting Scripture. 9

*The Decalogue and the Special Laws*

Starting with Philo's introduction to the laws in his treatise *On the Decalogue*, I shall draw the reader's attention to apparent concessions to women's importance, which illustrate the second tendency just mentioned. Twice in this treatise Philo adds to the Septuagint wording an expression that might be construed in this way. It is my conclusion, however, that these two concessions, and others like them, are only superficial. As I explained in introducing this tendency, Philo will not allow any real disturbance of the fundamental subordination of female to male.

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9 What I would observe as a "tendency," Goodenough interprets as evidence that Philo was reporting the laws as they had been adapted to Alexandrian Jewish society: "... he always has a definite purpose in what he is writing, the purpose of squaring the letter of the Scriptures with the Alexandrine thought of his generation. Usually it is Alexandrine idealism which he is reading back into the Written Word, but often it is Alexandrine ethics, or just plain common sense" *(Jurisprudence*, p.2). "The influence of Egyptian legal equality of womanhood is everywhere apparent in a way a philosopher in his study would not have introduced it, but as social pressure of generations would have made itself felt" (ibid., p.99). See Appendix A.
One instance is simply an additional phrase; Philo comments on the fifth commandment, "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex.20:12), that it enjoins "the duty of honouring parents, each separately and both in common" (Dec.51). He stresses this commandment and distinguishes it from the others on the ground that it embodies two kinds of virtue: both piety towards God, like the first four, and love towards humanity, like the last five. His reasoning is that parents, through their powers of generation, act in the place of God to their offspring:

... we see that parents by their nature stand on the borderline between the mortal and the immortal side of existence, the mortal because of their kinship with men and other animals through the perishableness of the body; the immortal because the act of generation assimilates them to God, the generator of the All (Dec.107).

For parents are the servants of God for the task of begetting children, and he who dishonours the servant dishonours also the Lord (Dec.119).

In emphasizing this commandment as he does, Philo is not actually departing from Scripture, but the reasons he offers are drawn from the wider world.\(^{10}\) I believe, then, that these statements about the importance of parents are demonstrations that Torah complies with what is generally recognized as good. Philo reveals here a tendency to appeal to the family ideals which he shares with concerned gentiles, i.e. an emphasis on general family stability.\(^{11}\) It would be a

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\(^{10}\) Goodenough, *Jurisprudence*, p.67f., building on the work of Heinemann and Treitel, claims that it is "on the grounds of gentile conceptions alone that Philo has justified the commandment to honour one's parents." Although he says that the Torah commonly speaks of parents together, he still attributes Philo's insistence on parental agreement to the influence of Egyptian law, "which tended in Egypt till late Roman times to give the woman coordinate legal rights with the man" (p.74).

\(^{11}\) Like the perceived female virtues of *philoteknia* and *philandria*, honour of parents was a commonplace virtue. Cf. the work attributed to Perictone, which
mistake to interpret "honouring parents each separately and both in common (peri goneon timēs kai idia hekaterou kai amphoterōn koinē)" as advocating equal power for men and women within the family. The larger context of Philo's writing simply does not bear such an interpretation.

This is demonstrated by the fact that although Philo occasionally raises the mother to equal prestige with the father, his inconsistency on the matter is noteworthy. Philo's philosophical denigration of motherhood was discussed in chapter three, above. In the following passage he begins by making a point about parents together, but concludes with an example about father and son:

For parents have little thought for their own personal interests and find the consummation of happiness in the high excellence of their children, and to gain this the children will be willing to hearken to their commands and to obey them in everything that is just and profitable; for the true father will give no instruction to his son that is foreign to virtue (Spec.2.236, emphasis mine).

One will not find anywhere in Philo a similar statement about the teaching of the mother.\(^\text{13}\)

states that a woman must "honor and reverence" her parents, "for parents are in all respects equivalent to gods and they act in the interest of their grandchildren" (Thesleff, Pythagorean Texts, pp.142-145 = Stob. 4.28.10, translated by Flora R. Levin, quoted by Pomeroy, Egypt, pp.68-70).

\(^{12}\) In another commentary on the fifth commandment, Det.52ff., male dominance, rather than parental equality, is the theme. "Now honour is shown to the mind when it is cared for . . . . To sense honour is shown when it is . . . reined in by the mind, which has skill to direct the irrational powers within us like a pilot or a charioteer . . . . If you accord a father's honour to Him who created the world, and a mother's honour to Wisdom, by whose agency the universe was brought to completion, you will yourself be the gainer."

\(^{13}\) Cf. Spec.4.68: "Now the principal cause of such misdeeds is familiarity with falsehood which grows up with the children right from their birth and from the cradle, the work of nurses and mothers and the rest of the company, slaves and free, who belong to the household." See also Virt.178; QG 1.92.
An even clearer indication of the superficiality of Philo's elevating women to equal consideration with men lies in the manner of his repeated use of the expression "men together with women, andres homou kai gynaikes." In describing God's giving of the decalogue to the people (ho laos) Philo adds the expression "men and women alike, andrōn homou kai gynaikōn" (Dec.32).  

The expression is not, however, integrated into the context. According to the Septuagint, the commandments were given to the assembled "people" (Ex.19:25) who had prepared themselves for the experience in a number of ways; one was by not going near a woman for three days (Ex.19:15).

The Biblical context shows, then, that this was an assembly of men (or that the women's presence was not acknowledged). Philo changes the account to read as follows:

The ten words or oracles, in reality laws and statutes, were delivered by the Father of All when the nation, men and women alike, were assembled together (Dec.32).

But he does not amend the context, so that ensuing verses clarify that he is still thinking in terms of men only:

Near by stood the people. They had kept pure from intercourse with women and abstained from all pleasures save those which are necessary for the sustenance of life (Dec.45).

Let us, then, engrave deep in our hearts this as the first and most sacred of commandments, to acknowledge and honour one God Who is above all, and let the idea that gods are many never even reach the ears of the man (andros) whose rule of life is to seek for truth in purity and guilelessness (Dec.65).

From reading these three passages of De Decalogo together, I conclude that there are contradictory influences at work here. Philo

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14 This expression occurs in the following places in the Special Laws: 1.144; 2.43, 146; 3.48, 51; 4.218.
acknowledges the participation of women, yet does not carry his thought to any significant conclusion.

Generally speaking, as I suggested above, I suspect that Philo's lip-service to women in the *Exposition* is indicative of a desire to portray Judaism as relevant to the age. That he is not entirely consistent can be seen by comparing two references to the Exodus:

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\ldots \text{the festival is a reminder and thank-offering for that great migration from Egypt which was made by more than two millions of men and women in obedience to the oracles vouchsafed to them (Spec.2.146, emphasis mine).}
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The departing emigrants had among them over six thousand men of military age (*hoi men andros echontes helikian*), while the rest of the multitude, consisting of old men, women-folk and children, could not easily be counted . . . . [Others followed] reverencing the divine favour shewn to the people (*andrôn*) . . . (Mos.1.147).

These are Philo's only two commentaries on Ex.12:37f., which, in the *LXX* text, does not mention women, but names men (*andres*), baggage (*aposkeue*) and a mixed company (*epimiktos polus*). The second passage, in relegating the women to a lesser position, is closer to the Biblical text; the first appears to be making a deliberate concession to societal expectations.

Philo's reasoning about adultery in *De Decalogo* shows, as we have come to expect, his deep conviction of the irresponsibility of women. The husband is the victim of the crime perpetrated by the other man (*Dec.129*); the adulterer's relation to the adulteress is that of teacher to pupil; the crime corrupts not her body, but her soul, which is taught to feel an aversion to and hatred for her husband (*Dec.124*; cf. *Spec.4.203*, where Philo says that adultery ruins the morals of wives). This line of reasoning conforms to what we have observed about Philo's thought. The burden of sexual morality has to be borne by men. The male adulterer is responsible for the crime, and the female is relegated to the role of junior accomplice.
Philo's reduction of wife to the status of child reaches its extremity when he discusses the need for priests to marry virgins: "by mating with souls entirely innocent and unperverted they [priests] may find it easy to mould the characters and dispositions of their wives, for the minds of virgins are easily influenced and attracted to virtue and very ready to be taught" (Spec.1.105).^{15}

Special Examples: Phineas and the Levites.

Close to the beginning of the first book of *Special Laws* Philo sets up Phineas, the Biblical hero whose action thwarted the wholesale apostasy of the young men of Israel, as the model of piety. I believe this story must be considered the backdrop for Philo's subsequent cries for capital punishment against those who threaten the community from within, including those he calls harlots.^{16} Phineas is the model of zeal who takes the law into his own hands. Speaking of the crime of apostasy, Philo says,

And it is well that all who have a zeal for virtue should be permitted to exact the penalties offhand and with no delay, without bringing the offender before jury or council or any kind of magistrate at all, and give full scope to the feelings which possess them, that hatred of evil and love of God which urges them to inflict punishment without mercy on the impious. They should think that the occasion has made them councillors, jurymen, high sheriffs, members of assembly, accusers, witnesses, laws, people, everything in fact, so that

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^{15} Note the similarity to the description of the wife in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. Ischomachos says to Socrates: "How . . . could she have known anything when I took her, since she came to me when she was not yet fifteen, and had lived previously under diligent supervision in order that she might see and hear as little as possible and ask the fewest possible questions?" (excerpts quoted on pp. 100f., Lefkowitz and Fant, *Women's Life*).

^{16} Philo explicitly calls for the death penalty for the recalcitrant child (*Spec.2.232*), the adulterer (*Spec.3.11*), the man who takes back an adulterous wife, along with the wife (*Spec.3.31*), the male prostitute and his partner (*Spec.3.38*), the harlot (*Spec.3.51*), the poisoner (*Spec.3.102*), the murderer (*Spec.3.106,108*).
without fear or hindrance they may champion religion in full security (Spec.1.55).

He goes on to praise the one who shows this admirable courage (to kalon touto tolmēma), Phineas, and to describe his action as piety (Spec.1.57).

Shortly thereafter, Philo refers to the example of the Levites of Exodus 32, who countered apostasy by slaying their own kin. Although Scripture records that their action came at the instigation of Moses (vv.27f.), Philo says that they acted "at no bidding but their own" (Spec.1.79). He lauds them for "championship of piety" and "a truly religious deed."

Philo's call for immediate and independent action (Spec.1.55, quoted above, and, by implication, in his recollection of the deeds of the Levites) goes beyond the demands of Scripture. The following verses from Deuteronomy, all dealing with suspected apostasy, imply that there should be some community consensus before the death penalty is inflicted.

. . . thou shalt surely report concerning him, and thy hands shall be upon him among the first to slay him, and the hands of all the people at the last (Deut.13:9).

. . . then thou shalt enquire and ask, and search diligently (Deut.13:14).
He shall die on the testimony of two or three witnesses; a man who is put to death shall not be put to death for one witness (Deut.17:6).

\[17\] Philo refers to this incident on several occasions. In Spec.3.126, he speaks of the zeal that caused the men to take arms "as if at one signal." Similarly, in the account in Mos.2.171, he says that the Levites' zeal causes them to speed "like troops for whom one signal is enough." In Sac.130 they rushed "with one accord." In Fug.90 they act "under the impulse of righteous anger accompanied by an inspiration from above and a God-sent possession." Only in Ebr.66-71 does Philo temper the impulsiveness of their action by mentioning that they acted under Moses' command.

Phineas and the Levites are similar in that they exemplify the principle that all human bonds must give way in the face of apostasy.
Rather than advocate inquiry and community action against offenders at this point, Philo sets the tone of the *Special Laws* by using Phineas, the man who took the law into his own hands, as the model of piety. A few sections later he brings in the action of the Levites. Furthermore, he appears to allude to this same type of impulsiveness several times subsequently. Twice, in calling for the death penalty, he demands that the culprit not be allowed to live "for a day or even an hour" (*Spec.*3.38, 94). When the apostate is discovered,

we must send round a report of his proposals to all the lovers of piety, who will rush with a speed which brooks no delay to take vengeance on the unholy man, and deem it a religious duty to seek his death (*Spec.*1.316).

He appears to condone homicide done in the interest of the law:

. . . not every kind of homicide is culpable but only that which entails injustice, and . . . as for the other kinds if it is caused by an ardent yearning for virtue it is laudable . . . (*Spec.*3.128).

It may be a misinterpretation, however, to view these passages as though they advocate lynching. Heinemann points out two instances where Philo insists on the importance of following legal procedure. In *Spec.*3.141 he says that the man accused of killing his slave must be "brought before the court, there to be examined under strict investigators of the truth." In *Mos.*2.214, Philo emphasizes the need for legal procedure by adding psychological detail to the text of Num.15:34: "And they placed him [the man gathering sticks on the Sabbath] in custody, for they did not determine what they should do to him."

. . . hardly able to control themselves, they were minded to slay him. Reflection, however, caused them to restrain the fierceness of their anger. They did not wish to make it

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appear that they who were but private citizens took upon themselves the ruler's duty of punishment, and that too without a trial, however clear was the offence in other ways \ldots (Mos.2.214).

One could add to Heinemann's examples the high value Philo places on order, \textit{taxis}. It is "the most excellent and valuable thing which life possesses" (Spec.1.120). Probably, then, the real lesson to be drawn from Philo's cries for blood is that apostasy--or any action that would result in apostasy--is the most heinous of crimes.

The Levites and Phineas both exemplify the right attitude to apostasy. By referring to their example at the beginning of the books of \textit{Special Laws}, Philo establishes a point of focus for the succeeding material. The goals of the community are to promote piety and to prevent apostasy.

The story of Phineas has an added twist, namely, that women can instigate apostasy. The crime of the Israelite men was triggered by lust for women. We have noted how repeatedly Philo expresses worry about lust as the most dangerous and slippery of the vices. The following is just one example:

\[\ldots\text{prudence and courage are able to construct an enclosing wall against the opposite vices, folly and cowardice, and capture them \ldots self-mastery on the contrary is powerless to encircle desire and pleasure; for they are hard to wrestle with and difficult to overthrow \ldots So we must be content to face and fight lust (\textit{epithymia}) as a principle (LA 1.86; cf. Spec.1.9, where sex is called the most imperious pleasure).}\]

Not surprisingly, he uses the language of magic to describe the lure of sex; it connotes both danger and unfair tactics: pleasures "bewitch" the mind, and sex is the most powerful of the "love-lures" of pleasure (Spec.1.9). The Midianite women used such "love-lures" (\textit{philtra}, Spec.1.56). Philo employs Ex.22:18 ("Ye shall not save the lives of sorcerers; \textit{pharmakous ou peripoiésete}") to call for immediate death for those who practise magic. In his interpretation of the text Philo adds the detail about magicians producing love potions and their opposites:
... a perversion of art, pursued by charlatan mendicants and parasites and the basest of the women and slave population, who make it their profession to deal in purifications and disenchantments and promise with some sort of charms (philtros) and incantations to turn men's love into deadly enmity and their hatred into profound affection (Spec.3.101).

It is interesting that Philo never wavers from his position that sexual allure is wrong, in fact an evil power. In Spec.3.9 he warns against an excess of "natural pleasure" even with one's own wife.19 Whereas Ben Sira, who generally fears and despises women, can at least praise the wife who reserves her charms for her husband (26:13-18), Philo suspects the attractive woman even within marriage. He disapproves of Rachel, who uses phitra on Jacob (Ebr.50); he advocates as a model wife Leah, the unattractive "hated" wife, who is "rough, ungentle, crabbed and our bitter enemy" (Sac.20).

I believe that in his charges against women--which generally imply sexual looseness--Philo shows influence of the Phineas story with its depiction of dangerous female sexuality. Dealing in love charms, a charge he made against the Midianite women, is an activity of "the basest (phaulotata) of the women," who are likened to vipers and scorpions (Spec.3.101-103). Women who join other religions are "abominable and licentious."20 Philo has a number of terms to designate a woman he judges to be immoral: pornē, hetaira, chamaitype. He uses them interchangeably, without apparent concern over exactness of meaning (see, e.g., Jos.43, where he uses all three), and never defines any of them. They are general terms

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19 Cf. Legat.39f.: "A wife has great power to paralyse and seduce her husband and particularly if she is a wanton, for her guilty conscience increases her wheedling. The husband, unaware of the corruption of his marriage and household, and thinking that her wheedling is benevolence pure and simple, is deceived and little knows that her artifices are leading him to take his worst enemies to be his dearest friends."

20 "Associations of abominable and licentious women" bribe their way into the mysteries (Spec.1.323); i.e., apostasy on the part of a woman denotes sexual looseness.
employed to express disgust with women who fall outside proper male control.

The child of the harlot figures prominently in Philo's allegory as the polytheist--in other words, one who has no real father, but a number of possible fathers (Mig.69; Dec.8; Conf.144; Spec.1.332). This insult is directed against all who do not recognize the one God.

The charge of harlotry is made even to cover the victim of rape. This is seen in Philo's implication (Mig.224) that the rape of Dinah would have contravened the law that there be no pornē among the daughters of Israel (Deut.23:17). The Greek term in the Septuagint is a translation of the Scriptural q'dēsāh, which means cult prostitute, but Philo either is unaware of the specific meaning, or else deliberately ignores it.21

When we examine the terms with which Philo contrasts "harlot," we discover that it becomes a blanket term for the woman who is not one of two things: a lady (astē), or a wife. In Spec.3.80 Philo rails against men who treat their "gentlewomen" wives as though they were harlots; again, in Praem.139, he speaks of a wife being outraged as though she were a harlot. If we can comprehend Philo's ideal "lady" or "wife," then by elimination we may understand what he means by "harlot."

First, then, what is a "lady"? Astos means, technically, a citizen of Alexandria.22 Philo uses it in a nontechnical sense to mean a person in good standing in the Jewish community. The stranger is excluded: "He [Moses] bids them also write and set them forth in front of the door posts of each house and the gates in their

21 In Spec.1.103 Philo does mention the possibility of becoming a harlot by "necessity," as opposed to "free and deliberate choice." He does not specify his meaning, but his discussion of the example of Dinah suggests that "necessity" would apply to the rape victim. According to Philo, such a one is not blameless, for even in her case "the scars and prints of old misdeeds (adikēmatōn) remain."

walls, so that those who leave or remain at home, citizens (astoi) and strangers alike, may read the inscriptions" (Spec.4.142). Neither is the slave included among the astoi. On the contrary, Philo frequently juxtaposes the term eleutheros with astos. For example, in Spec.3.136 he says: "What has been said applies to freeborn persons of citizen rank (ep' eleutherois kai astois); the enactments which follow deal with slaves . . . ."

The feminine form, astē, appears to denote the kind of woman who would be the wife or daughter of such a man. In the three occurrences of the feminine form astē in the Special Laws, Colson recognizes that the word has connotations like those of the word "lady." He translates accordingly: "damsel of gentle birth" (Spec.3.66); "gentlewomen" (Spec.3.80); "like a free-born lady worthy of the name" (Spec.3.136; here Philo adds eleutheras). Other uses of both noun and adjective imply that the term depicts a good wife.23

Let us turn, then, to Philo's picture of an ideal wife. In his longest continuous passage on wives or women (gynaikes), Philo prescribes the following:

The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maidens as their boundary, and the outer door by those who have reached full womanhood . . . . A woman, then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matters outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion. She should not shew herself off like a vagrant in the streets before the eyes of other men, except when she has to go to the temple (hieron), and even then she should take pains to go, not when the market is full, but when most people have gone home, and so like a free-born lady worthy of the name, with everything quiet around her, make her oblations and offer her prayers to avert the evil and to gain

23 In Mig.99 Philo praises certain women as astai te kai asteiai, which Colson translates as "citizen women and worthy of their citizenship." In Cong.63 Philo speaks allegorically of two kinds of learning faculties, astas kai pallakidas, "the faculties both of the lawful and the concubine type." In Cong.76f. he uses the term simply to mean "lawful wife."
the good . . . . Should she not when she hears bad language stop her ears and run away? (Spec.3.171-174).24

Clearly, this prescription could be followed only in families wealthy enough to afford household help that would free the wife from running ordinary errands. We are faced then with a problem. Where are the women who contribute to the family economy in a respectable manner?25 One simply cannot find such a middle category in Philo. His neglect of this group, which must have been sizable, prompts some reflection.

Philo may simply be unaware of the way ordinary people live. In other places he drops hints that he is familiar only with a very pampered, privileged sort of woman. He says that women are naturally weak (Spec.4.223) and their life "is naturally peaceful and domestic" (Spec.4.225). In Praem.146 he speaks of wives as "women who have lived in ease and comfort, the dainty product of the luxury that has grown up with them from their earliest years." Philo appears to perceive only two sorts of women: those of his own wealthy class, and the others who most obviously fail to meet his standards. The depiction of a society where all respectable women can afford to stay home in seclusion hardly fits with Baron's picture of first century Alexandria where "the masses lived in dark, congested and

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24 Both Goodenough and Heinemann remark on the similarity of this passage to Neopythagorean material. See ch.1, n.27 and text, above.

That at least some women, probably of the richest class, did live the life of seclusion he prescribes is seen in Flac.89. When the Romans searched the homes of some Jews, the men were indignant "that their women kept in seclusion, never even approaching the outer doors, and their maidens confined to the inner chambers, who for modesty's sake avoided the sight of men, even of their closest relations, were displayed to eyes, not merely unfamiliar, but terrorizing . . . ."

25 As I indicated in the survey in chapter two, there is very little evidence for or against the participation of Alexandrian Jewish women in the economy. Two Alexandrian papyrological documents from the period of Augustus are contracts for the engagement of wet-nurses (Tcherikover, Corpus, p.34). Apart from using this scant primary evidence, one can only look at the situation of contemporary gentile women, which is one of considerable freedom of movement and participation in business, and speculate as to the degree the lives of Jewish women resembled those of their gentile sisters. For a good discussion of the matter see Heinemann, Bildung, p.233.
unhealthy quarters," and, as in the rest of the Diaspora, Jews were known for poverty rather than wealth.\textsuperscript{26} It may well be, then, that Philo writes from very limited observation. He simply does not see the mass of ordinary women.

Another possibility is that in his depiction of the good woman Philo is straining for an ideal that never existed except in the minds of a few men. Certainly the picture is not derived from the Biblical record of the age of the Patriarchs. Women in that society moved fairly freely and engaged in tasks that took them into the public sphere. Is it drawn from the Greek tradition? There, as we observed in chapter one, women were excluded from public affairs. But Philo had never observed that society. His view of it was derived from the literature, which itself may have presented an idealized picture.\textsuperscript{27}

No matter which explanation is closer to Philo's case, clearly he perceives women from a distance, with a strong degree of unreality. Contemporary women appear in his writing as elements in the backdrop of life. The players on the stage are men. Women matter only as they impinge on men's actions, giving help, irritation or resistance to men's causes. This is a view which objectifies, indeed reifies women. Despite his many words about them, Philo fails to perceive them in and of themselves. Heinemann's observation is well put:

\begin{quote}
. . . es verdient nur Beachtung, dass sein Rationalismus, sein Glaube an die Unentbehrllichkeit der Philosophie für die
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} History, p.265f.

\textsuperscript{27} Euripides' \textit{Electra} illustrates the clash between the real and the ideal even in fifth century Athens. Electra has been sent from home and married to a peasant. She is required to work hard to stay alive. As she says, "I carry home on my head water from the brook." Her husband, however, complains in these words when he finds her conversing with strangers: "'tis unseemly for a woman to stand talking to young men." His ideal simply does not correspond to reality.
When we read Philo's statements directed against harlots we must bear in mind this lack of correlation between reality and his perception of it. The amount of material on the subject gives more indication of Philo's revulsion against harlotry than of the actual numbers of women practising it.

Philo demands punishment for harlots that goes beyond anything in Scripture. "A pest, a scourge, a plague-spot to the public, let her be stoned to death--she who has corrupted the graces bestowed by nature, instead of making them, as she should, the ornament of noble conduct" (Spec.3.51). "... with us a courtesan is not even permitted to live, and death is the penalty appointed for women who ply this trade" (Jos.43). "And it [the law] banishes not only harlots, but also the children of harlots ..." (Spec.1.326).

The reason for Philo's alteration of Scripture here can only be surmised. It could be an instance of his attempting to show that the Mosaic law could match any other in its moral stringency. Through the Lex Julia of 18 B.C.E., Augustus forbade the marriage of persons of senatorial families to prostitutes, casting the latter in the category of probrosi, "morally reprehensible persons." Although this law did not explicitly punish prostitutes, it officially held them

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28 Bildung, p.236.

29 Encyclopedia Judaica s.v. "sexual offences": "But however much prostitution may be condemned (cf. e.g. Jer.3:1-3) it appears in biblical times to have been widespread (cf. Gen.34:31; 38:15; Judg.11:1; 16:1; Isa. 23:15-16; Prov.7:9-22; et al) and not punishable ..."

Philo appears to base his statements on Deut.23:2: "one born of a harlot shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord," and on the verse prohibiting cult prostitutes.
in disdain. Philo may, then, be attempting here to match the ethics of the governing class.

Another possible way to account for Philo's insistence on a law that is not made explicit anywhere in Scripture is to realize that in his static view of society there is no need for a harlot to exist. Parents care for their daughters, and keep them virgin till marriage. All girls marry, and their husbands have the right to expect virgin brides (Spec.3.81). Scripture calls for the stoning of a bride who is found not to be a virgin (Deut.22:21). Orphan girls are looked after by the chief magistrate (Spec.2.25), and the law requires charity for widows (Spec.1.310). Since Moses has established a social justice system that is all-inclusive, only a wanton would repudiate her place in the system. She is a rebel and a threat to the community.

Philo's description of the harlot is a caricature:

But a shameless look and an elevated neck and a continuous movement of the eyebrows and a womanish walk and not blushing at, or being ashamed of, any evil at all is the sign of a lewd soul . . . (QG 4.99).

. . . that stranger to decency and modesty and temperance and the other virtues . . . . . She flings herself at the disposal

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30 The purpose of these laws was to protect the purity of the higher social classes. See Jane F. Gardner, Women in Roman Law and Society (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986), p.32. Justinian's account of the law, dating from the sixth century, does interpret the law as punishing prostitutes: "The Laws punish the detestable wickedness of women who prostitute their chastity to the lusts of others . . . " (quoted in Lefkowitz and Fant, Women's Life, p.183).

31 Philo does not comment explicitly on this verse, although in Spec.3.79ff. he goes into some detail about the case where the bridegroom accuses his bride falsely. It is unfortunate that we cannot be sure of Philo's reasoning here. It is certainly interesting that the LXX uses the verb ekporneusai of the girl who loses her virginity while still under the care of her father. It might have justified Philo's very broad understanding of harlotry, and also given us the reason why Philo can say that a harlot is not allowed to live.

32 Philo's claims for the all-inclusive philanthropia of the Mosaic law are found in Virt.51-174.
of chance comers, and sells her bloom like some ware to be purchased in the market . . . A pest, a scourge, a plague-spot to the public . . . she who has corrupted the graces bestowed by nature, instead of making them, as she should, the ornament of noble conduct (Spec.3.51).

Philo’s remarks on the repentance of the reformed harlot again reveal the revulsion he feels against such a woman. Commenting on the requirement that the priest should marry a virgin, Philo volunteers a number of reasons (Spec.1.102-107). He cannot marry a repentant harlot because "in the souls of the repentant there remain, in spite of all, the scars and prints of their old misdeeds" (Spec.1.103). This contradicts his position elsewhere in the same treatise, viz., that God "has given to repentance the same honour as to innocence from sin" (Spec.1.187; cf. Virt.175-186, Praem.164).33 We had occasion in chapter ten to note that the scars of her former life also remained with Rachel after she had repented, and caused difficulty for her son Joseph. It appears, then, that, in contrast to other repentant sinners, the repentant woman is never freed of her past.

Shame and Modesty

Self-control, sōphrosynē, is one of the four cardinal Greek virtues which Philo, in his eagerness to unite the best of the two cultures, attributes to the Torah. In the following passage he is describing the synagogue:

So each seventh day there stand wide open in every city thousands of schools of good sense, temperance, courage, justice and the other virtues . . . (Spec.2.62).

33 Cf. the view expressed in an extant Neopythagorean text about the adulterous woman: "She should also consider the following: that there is no means of atoning for this sin; no way she can approach the shrines or the altars of the gods as a pure woman, beloved of god . . . ." (quoted in Lefkowitz and Fant, Women’s Life, pp.104ff.)
Thus he states explicitly that the synagogue, in teaching Torah, imparts the Greek virtues.

The particular quality of sôphrosynê is difficult to define. It is the subject of the Platonic dialogue Charmides, and its amorphous quality is expressed in an introduction to the dialogue by Benjamin Jowett, as follows:

We have lost the conception of it. Enough is said about it in Greek literature for us to be able to describe it in some fashion, but we cannot give it a name. It was the spirit behind the two great Delphic sayings, "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess." Arrogance, insolent self-assertion, was the quality most detested by the Greeks. Sôphrosynê was the exact opposite. It meant accepting the bounds which excellence lays down for human nature, restraining impulses to unrestricted freedom, to all excess, obeying the inner laws of harmony and proportion.34

It was associated in the Greek mind with aidôs, a term sometimes translated "modesty" or "shame," but similarly difficult to capture in words. "Aidôs is what you feel about your own actions: the honour that compels you and the shame that deters you, the truth or remorse that haunts you."35 The overlapping in meaning of the two terms is illustrated by a quotation from Thucydides 1.84: "aidôs sôphrosynês pleiston metechei."

These are not Jewish conceptions. They occur in Jewish literature only in later works which evince strong Greek influence (Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Third Maccabees).

But Philo uses these terms, frequently in his interpretation of Biblical stories. The Septuagint terms from which he appears to infer them are tapeinoun (to humiliate, or, in the passive sense, to sub-


mit), and its cognates. *Tapeinoun* is used of the Egyptian treatment of the Israelites (Gen.15:13; Ex.1:12), of the Jewish attitude on the day of atonement (Lev.16:29, 23:27,29,32--humbling their souls), or of forced intercourse with a woman (Gen.32:2, Deut.21:14, 22:24, 22:29). Evidence of Philo's association of the terms is the wording of *Fug*.4f:

Hagar's motive for departing is shame. A sign of this is the fact that an angel, a Divine Word, meets her to advise the right course, and to suggest return to the house of her mistress. The angel addresses her in the encouraging words, "The Lord hath hearkened to thy humiliation" (Gen.16:11), a humiliation prompted neither by fear nor by hatred, the one the feeling of an ignoble, the other of a quarrelsome soul, but by shame, the outward expression of inward modesty.

The *LXX* term translated "humiliation" is *tapeinōsis*; but it, and the words related to it in the Bible story, indicate action, and not feeling. In Gen.16:6 we read that Sarah "afflicted" (*ekakōsen*) Hagar, causing her to flee. In verse nine the angel advises that Hagar should "submit", or humble herself before Sarah. Hagar's affliction and humiliation, according to the Septuagint, are *actions* on the part of Sarah. Hagar's submission will be another *action* on her part. Philo adds a psychological dimension which is not present in the Biblical text. The interesting point for our study is that he attributes to Hagar an awareness that she has been engaged in something for which she ought to feel remorse. He does not clarify Hagar's guilt. It appears to stem from her having usurped the position of her mistress, even though she has been forced to do so by circumstances, i.e., by the plan Abraham and Sarah devise. The passage remains problematic.36

Philo also tries to interpret Num.12:14 as conveying the Greek concept of shame. The text occurs in reference to Miriam: "If her father had but spat in her face, should she not feel shame seven days?" Philo quotes it in *LA* 2.66f., in a discussion of shame. The

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36 It was noted earlier that the wording of the *LXX* precludes the interpretation that Hagar flaunted her pregnancy before Sarah. See ch.7, n.25, above.
verb, *entrapēsetai*, could be translated to mean either that she will be ashamed or that she will be put to shame. The former fits Philo's interpretation, since it conveys the idea of self-imposed shame. The time limit of "seven days," however, runs counter to that interpretation, and conforms to the interpretation that the person is in a state of reproach imposed externally for a specific length of time. His use of this text, then, is another instance of his attempt to see Greek concepts in the Septuagint.


In Philo's *Weltanschauung*, as we have been observing, women occupy a position quite different from men's. They are inferior, passive, submissive, more easily ruled by the passions. It follows, then, that the terms *aidōs* and *sōphrosynē*, since they denote, among other things, "keeping one's place," will have a different meaning when applied to women than when applied to men.

Indeed, it is interesting that of the four traditional Greek virtues, *sōphrosynē*, with its sister virtue *aidōs*, is the only one Philo explicitly expects of women. This is evident from his description of the harlot: "that stranger to decency (*kosmiotētos*) and modesty (*aidous*) and temperance (*sōphrosynēs*) and the other virtues"

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37 The Hebrew original, from the root *klm*, can be translated in either way. The RSV makes the choice I favour, rendering the term "be shamed." In similar vein, the NEB says "remain in disgrace." I am indebted to Chris Kachur for the observations in this paragraph.

38 Pomeroy (*Egypt*, p.70) indicates that women had accepted *sōphrosynē* as the ideal for them: "Sophrosyne was the preeminent virtue of Greek women; it is mentioned more frequently than any other quality on women's tombstones."
Women of Philo's World

(Spec.3.51), with which we can compare the virtues taught to boys and men: "good sense (phronēseōs), temperance (sōphrosynēs), courage (andreias), justice (dikaiosynēs) and the other virtues . . ." (Spec.2.62).

On three occasions Philo adds aidōs to the Biblical account.

On their first meeting (when they are still in the state of innocence) Eve greets Adam "met' aidous" (Op.152). Colson translates the Greek words with the quaint term "shamefastly." This is not the shame of awareness of good and evil (Gen.2:35; cf. LA 3.65f.), for it occurs before the temptation. What then is Eve's attitude? The only translation which would make sense in the context would be "appropriately" or "as a woman ought." Eve meets her master, she greets him as a woman ought, i.e. deferentially, they fall in love, this leads to desire for pleasure, and only then does the trouble begin. Because the expression occurs here gratuitously, Philo clearly is making a statement about woman's place.

The second occasion where he adds to Scripture is in his treatment of the trial of the woman accused by her husband of adultery. Where Num.5:18 states simply that "the priest . . . shall uncover the head of the woman," Philo says, "the priest . . . removes her kerchief, in order that she may be judged with her head bared and stripped of the symbol of modesty (aidous), regularly worn by women who are wholly innocent" (Spec.3.56).39

Besides requiring aidōs of women, this second passage indicates another point: that modesty, although in Greek thought an inward quality, is not within the woman's control: it is the standard imposed by man on woman and symbolically removed at his will, not hers. Without pressing the point, I suggest a similarity here to the aidōs Philo insists on attributing to Hagar, although she has done nothing to warrant it.

According to their humble position in the greater scheme of things, the Great Chain, women ought to experience an inward aidōs,

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39 The third example is the "modesty of veneration" which Philo attributes to Rebecca when she first sees Isaac (QG 4.142). This has no Biblical warrant. Unfortunately, we do not have the Greek text.
which will manifest itself in outward *sophrosynē*. This is a peculiar adaptation of a classical masculine virtue of the Greeks (for they said little in their philosophy about women) in such a way as to justify and perpetuate the subject position of women of another culture. Here are some examples of Philo's application of the term *aidōs*, modesty, to women: the maiden Virtue possesses modesty, and it also follows in her train (*Sac.*26f.); the blushes of the Hebrew midwife indicate her modesty (*Heres* 128); despite her outward appearance, Tamar has inward chastity and modesty (*Cong.*124); the daughters of Zelophedad approached the ruler "in the modesty appropriate to maidens" (*Mos.*2.234); brothers should not insult the modesty of maidens: "maidens must blush, why drive the hue from their cheeks?" (*Spec.*3.25); it "debases the sterling coin of modesty" for women to be present in the gymnasium (*Spec.*3.176); the women of the Therapeutae are separated from the men by a chest-high wall, so that "the modesty becoming to the female sex is preserved" (*Cont.*33); for modesty's sake Jewish maidens avoid the sight of men (*Flac.*89; cf. *3.Macc.* 1.19).

Related to Philo's understanding of the virtues of self-control and modesty to justify the sequestering of women is his reliance on arguments about what is fitting and suitable: *harmottein, prepein.* Such verbs imply that justification is unnecessary, and serve to preclude discussion. Whereas he devotes an entire treatise, *De Congressu*, to a reasoned account of male education, he says--giving no details--that girls should have "education as befits maidens," before entering a "suitable marriage" (*Spec.*2.125). Men "are suited" to business, government, war and action, whereas women "are suited" to life behind closed doors (*Spec.*3.169). The harlot is at fault for not using her femininity "as befits her" (*Spec.*3.51). Women should wear "fitting" adornments (*Virt.*21). Modesty "befits" women (*Cont.*33). Women do not enter wars or even fights, because of "the fitness of things (to *prepon*), which it was resolved to keep unshaken always and everywhere and considered to be in itself more valuable than victory or liberty or success of any kind" (*Spec.*3.172).
I conclude that Philo's zeal to return to an idealized past reaches its apogee in the demands he makes upon women. Upon the outward male-domination of the Jewish heritage, he would impose an internalized humility which he derives, somewhat circuitously, from the Greek philosophical tradition. Added to that are a view of the unchanging adequacy of the Law as he interpreted it and apparent blindness to the actual position of women outside his own privileged circle.

The Essenes

Furthermore they [the Essenes] eschew marriage because they clearly discern it to be the sole or the principal danger to the maintenance of the communal life, as well as because they particularly practise continence. For no Essene takes a wife, because a wife is a selfish creature, excessively jealous and an adept at beguiling the morals of her husband and seducing him by her continued impostures . . . . For he who is either fast bound in the love lures of his wife or under the stress of nature makes his children his first care ceases to be the same to others and unconsciously has become a different man and has passed from freedom into slavery (Hyp.11.14-17).

This is Philo's celebrated passage on the Essenes, a Jewish sect of his day. The question that has repeatedly arisen is whether this passage reveals Philo's own assessment of "wives," or, by implied indirect discourse, tells what might (as Colson says in a footnote to the text) "be plausibly argued by the Essenes." I have two reasons for holding that this is Philo's own assessment. The first is that this argument has a number of elements in common with Philo's other remarks about women. The second is that other, quite different reasons can be advanced for the Essenes' observed celibacy.

Philo views jealousy as a female characteristic.40 Even in attributing it to a man, he calls it "the feminine proclivity to

40 Cf. Aristotle, History of Animals, 608a-b, quoted in ch.6, above.
jealousy" (Spec. 1.108). Jealousy frequently occurs between the wives when the older one is superseded by a newer (Virt. 115). In Cong. 180 again he speaks of "women's jealousy." Thus it is in character for him to raise jealousy here as a problem in marriage. Similarly, as we have observed, he frequently implies that women use unfair tactics in attracting men: trapping, ensnaring, employing love potions. The words "ensnares", "cajoles" and "love lures" in the passage just quoted are of this genre. The expression "the fawning talk which she practises" (Hyp. 11.15) reminds one of Philo's words in Legat. 39: "A wife has great power to paralyse and seduce her husband . . . . ." These are all indications that the reasons he gives for the Essenes' celibacy come from Philo's own speculation, based on his understanding of women.

In A History of the Mishnaic Law of Women Neusner cites with approbation Isaksson's reasoning that the Essenes allowed marriage for the purpose of procreation in early manhood, but then turned to a life of celibacy as preparation for the Holy War. Since

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41 This is the reason Philo gives for a man's being required to grant full freedom to a captive wife of whom he has grown tired. The full passage is an interpretation of Deut. 21:10-14, but the introduction of the idea of jealousy is Philo's own contribution.

42 Vol. 5, p. 250. The passage to which Neusner refers is on pp. 63-65 of Isaksson, Marriage. It reads in part: "[Contrary to explanations in Philo and Josephus], the whole view of sexual questions and marriage which is expressed in these writings has proved to have originated in the Old Testament and especially in the Old Testament laws relating to the holy war . . . . The young man has a right to take a wife and live with her for a period of five years . . . . The husband does not need to divorce his wife when he reaches the age of twenty-five but it is likely that such divorces occurred, sometimes on the plea that the husband wished to avoid all suspicion that he had sexual intercourse with his wife even after the age of twenty-five, when under the laws of the holy war he was no longer allowed to have it . . . the Qumran community's view of marriage must not be interpreted as an isolated detail in its ethical system. Its moral principles on the subject of marriage are indissolubly linked with its eschatology."

Cf. Vermes, Jesus the Jew (London, 1973) pp. 99ff.: " . . . the sect of the Essenes, despite the fact that the Qumran texts do not expressly enjoin the renunciation of marriage . . . appears to have made an institution of celibacy, probably in order to be always in a condition to take part in worship, even if Philo and Josephus prefer to attribute the cause to misogyny."

Hyp. 11.3 can be interpreted to mean that Philo knew only older Essenes who had been married but had divorced their wives: "Thus no Essene is a mere
that argument undermines the probability that Philo is giving an opinion he himself heard from members of the sect, it adds to the likelihood that the reasons he does give are his own. Thus the passage about the Essenes only confirms perceptions of women to which Philo has given expression elsewhere.

The Therapeutae

We have already spoken of the women members of the contemplative group Philo claims to have known in Egypt. A discussion of these women will round out our picture of Philo's perception of contemporary women. Philo calls these women virgins:

The feast is shared by women also, most of them aged virgins, who have kept their chastity not under compulsion, like some of the Greek priestesses, but of their own free will in their ardent yearning for wisdom (Cont.68).

It would be surprising, in Jewish society as he depicts it, for a woman to avoid marriage. One wonders who these virgins are and where they came from. How did they manage to reach old age as virgins in Jewish society? Possibly Philo means by the term "virgins" women who are not sexually active, a meaning we have encountered already (cf. Spec.1.129). In introducing his account of the men of the order, before he mentions that there are women as well, he states that these men are older people who have left their property to their children, abandoning "their brothers, their children, their wives, their parents" (Cont.13,18). Perhaps he intended this description to extend, with adaptations, to the women members of the order as well. In any case, in this passage we have the only place where Philo speaks of child nor even a stripling or newly bearded . . . but full grown and already verging on old age, no longer carried under by the tide of the body nor led by the passions, but enjoying the veritable, the only true freedom."
actual women who are "virgins." Having seen in earlier chapters that on the allegorical level virginity surpasses womanhood, we find in this treatise a comparable depiction of virginity in real life:

"... they have spurned the pleasures of the body and desire no mortal offspring but those immortal children which only the soul that is dear to God can bring to the birth unaided because the Father has sown in her spiritual rays enabling her to behold the verities of wisdom" (Cont.68).

His wording demonstrates that in real life, as well as in the Bible, the function of bearing children--women's inevitable function--is of less value than that of producing mental progeny. It elevates a mode of life which, from all the evidence we have garnered, appears to have been an improbable option for women of Philo's society.

Another observation made earlier in the study of Biblical figures is that Philo tends to postulate equality between certain male and female groups, all the while subtly implying male dominance. This is apparent here too, in his description of the common worship of the Therapeutae, where women participate as listeners, while representatives of the men speak: "Then the senior among them who also has the fullest knowledge of the doctrines which they profess comes forward and with visage and voice alike quiet and composed gives a well-reasoned and wise discourse... women too regularly make part of the audience..." (Cont.31f.). The women are actually behind a partial wall: "This arrangement serves two purposes; the modesty becoming to the female sex is preserved, while the women sitting within ear-shot can easily follow what is said since there is nothing to obstruct the voice of the speaker" (Cont.33). Only in their singing does Philo indicate equality; they resemble the choirs at the

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43 In Som.2.185 Philo says "but the high priest is blameless, perfect, the husband of a virgin who, strange paradox, never becomes a woman, but rather has forsaken that womanhood through the company of her husband." Clearly Philo does not intend this passage to be taken literally (cf. Spec.1.101). The passage is significant, however, in showing that Philo's preference of virginity over womanhood was not limited to the allegorical plane.
Red Sea, "the men led by the prophet Moses and the women by the prophetess Miriam" (Cont.87).  

**Homosexuality**

It would be a mistake to leave the study of Philo's perception of contemporary women without considering the implications of the language he uses to describe homosexual men. In one instance Philo says that the passive partner in the homosexual relationship is "sick with the disease of femaleness" (Spec.1.325). In the same description he uses the term *androgyynos*, which occurs in similar context in Spec.3.38. He uses the same term to depict the priests of Demeter, some of whom "have desired to be completely changed into women and gone on to mutilate their genital organs" (Spec.3.38). A similar term, *gynaikomorphos*, is found in Spec.2.50, where Philo accuses the active homosexual of forcing his partner to change into woman's form. In Spec.3.39 the verb used to denote the pederast's action against his partner is *ekthelynon*, "turning into a woman"; in the same passage the pederast is accused of "becoming a tutor and instructor" in *anandrias*, "unmanliness." All such application of female terms to men who do not perform sexually as men indicate a negative perception of womanliness.

Homosexuality evokes some of Philo's most scathing condemnations (See, for example, Spec.3.38). His equating of hom-
sexual males with women needs to be considered at least as background material in assessing his view of women.

Conclusion

Because of the apologetic nature of the treatises from which most of the material in this chapter has been drawn, I have considered two possible tendencies that might create discrepancy between Philo’s perception and his depiction of women. The first was the tendency to present the Jewish people of his community as sexually restrained. Philo might be expected to exaggerate in this regard for two reasons: one would be to counter general charges of lasciviousness; the other to appeal to general admiration of high moral standards.\(^{46}\) I found no reason to discount this tendency in Philo. Nevertheless, it would serve only to mitigate the position he takes towards female sexuality. The demands for severe constraints on women and their activity would still remain the dominant note.

The second tendency, that of presenting the law regarding women as if it were in step with the times, proved upon examination to be merely superficial.

There is a correspondence between Philo’s perceptions of Biblical and contemporary women. In both cases the good and bad are clearly differentiated and designated by the terms \(astai\) and \(pornai\). Good women contribute to the common good in a male-regulated world. Bad women elude male control. The Biblical virgins have no real counterpart in Philo’s world. Only the Therapeutrides bear some resemblance to them in their ability to abandon womanhood and to bear spiritual offspring.

Philo presents unrealistic ideals. For women who remain in the mainstream of society, the life of pampered seclusion could be attained only by the privileged. The other, and higher, ideal, pre-

\(^{46}\) In making these points I drew on the argument and evidence presented by Alan Mendelson in his forthcoming book, \textit{Philo’s Jewish Identity}. 
sented in the persons of the women Therapeutae, belongs only on the fringes of a society where early marriage and child-bearing is the norm. Philo seems not to consider the exigencies of life for the vast majority. Yet he condemns as deserving death any women who do not meet his standards of proper conduct.