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PHILO'S *DE DECALOGO*: EDUCATING TO RESPECT THE SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED

ABSTRACT

Respect and care for the disadvantaged are firmly embedded in Philo's interpretation of the Decalogue. In order to understand Philo's teaching on this point within its proper perspective, this study highlights the following aspects of his interpretation of the Decalogue. The Ten Commandments are intended as a means of education, healing and transformation of people and their communities; they guide people to live in harmony with nature, reason and one another; in practice, this means to learn how to turn away from foolish pride and to live in gentleness, fellowship, simplicity, and equality. Such education will render people sensitive to the needs of those affected by bad fortune and inspire them to reach out to them.

1. INTRODUCTION

In his work *De Decalogo,*[1] Philo points out that the Ten Commandments, given directly by God, are not merely laws but also the principles whereby to interpret the particular laws, those given through Moses (*Decal.* 19).[2] Furthermore, Philo emphasises that both God and Moses, in their legislation, are not so much imposing laws as using these to heal and educate people so that they may knowingly and willingly consent and rise to a state in

1 Nikiprowetzky (1965) offers an excellent introduction and guide to *De Decalogo.* Cf. also Pearce (2013).

2 "Two key traits set the Ten Commandments apart. First, God delivered them personally to the Israelites without a human mediator. Second, each of the Ten Commandments has a unique dual significance: like any law, it stands on its own as a distinct ethical imperative, but it also functions as the 'head' ... or 'summary' of an entire category of particular laws ... " (Svebakken 2012:4).

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which they are living in harmony with reason and with nature, and therefore also in harmony with one another. Education towards respect and care for the socially disadvantaged is an integral part of the general education towards piety (εὐσεβεία), which has as twin sister humanity (φιλανθρωπία); this humanity requires a humble sensitivity and readiness to reach out to those afflicted by "bad fortune".[3]

This study will first show how Philo presents the giving of the laws as part of a process of therapy and transformation of both the person and the community. A second section will show how, by living according to these laws, people increasingly become in harmony with nature and reason, and live a virtuous life. A third section will show how, for Philo, the laws are meant to move people away from foolish pride towards gentleness, fellowship, simplicity, and equality. In the process, their lives are interiorised as well as opened up to the whole universe.

Only to the extent that persons in society and, therefore, society itself are "educated" in the sense of being "transformed" will the scourge of socially disadvantaged persons in society be taken seriously in such a way as to lead to effective action. Philo does not focus on the transformation of the structures of society, but rather on the personal transformation of its members.

2. THE THERAPY AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE PEOPLE BY MEANS OF THE GIVING OF THE DECALOGUE

The divine law was given to Israel not in a city, but in the desert. This move away from the cities into the desert is part of a divine strategy of healing and re-education. Philo considers four aspects (*Decal.* 2-15).

2.1 Analysing the disease: The cities represent the degeneration of humanity (*Decal*. 1-9)

The giving of the Decalogue is a response to the miserable quality of life "in the cities". The book begins by pointing out that the Decalogue was not given in the context of a city, but in the remote desert. This gives Philo the opportunity to evoke the deplorable human situation, summarised as

3 Cf. the extensive treatment of the virtue of φιλανθρωπία in *Virt.* 51-174. "Philo redefines holiness as an intrinsically social virtue. He is on his guard against the seductions of an escapist anti-social cult of pure transcendence" (O'Leary 2003:253).

"impiety" towards God and "wrongdoing" towards fellow human beings (*Decal.* 2). One of the most treacherous diseases is identified as τῦφος,[4]

> from whence also that most treacherous of all things, namely pride [τῦφος], is implanted, which some persons admire and worship, dignifying and making much of vain opinions, with golden crowns and purple robes, and numbers of servants and chariots, on which those men who are looked upon as fortunate and happy are borne aloft, sometimes harnessing mules or horses to their chariots, and sometimes even men, who bear their burdens on their necks, through the excess of the insolence [ὕβρις] of their masters, weighed down in soul even before they faint in body (*Decal.* 4).

Joseph, whose name means "addition", is a model of such foolish pride; it leads to self-exaltation and abuse of, instead of respect for one's fellow human beings:

> Moreover, his deliberate choice of life, and the life which he admires, is testified to in no slight degree by his name; for Joseph, being interpreted, means "addition"; and vain opinion is always adding what is spurious to what is genuine, and what is the property of others to what is one's own, and what is false to what is true, and what is superfluous to what is adequate, and luxury to what is sufficient to support existence, and pride to life (*Somn.* 2:47).

Joseph is, therefore, the very embodiment of such pride: "So that the sacred scripture has very appropriately named 'addition' the enemy of simplicity and the companion of pride; τὸν ἀτυφίας μὲν ἐχθρόν, τύφου δ' ἑταῖρον ὠνόμασεν ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος" (*Somn*. 2:63). Philo interprets the wicked beast of Genesis 37:33 as the pride that devoured Joseph:

> "A wicked beast has seized and devoured Joseph." But does not that most ferocious beast, the various pride which springs up in the life of men living in irregularity and confusion, whose chief workmen are covetousness and unscrupulous cunning, devour everyone who comes within his reach? Therefore grief will be added to them, even while they are alive, as though they were dead, since they have a life worthy of lamentation and mourning, since Jacob mourns for Joseph, even while he is alive (*Somn*. 2:65-66).

4 Nikiprowetzky (1965:40, n. 2) explains the term as including error, being delirious, being stupefied, living in illusion. The life of the Therapeutae in *De Vita Contemplativa* 39 can be summarised as follows: συνόλως γὰρ ἀσκοῦσιν ἀτυφίαν, εἰδότες τῦφον μὲν τοῦ ψεύδους ἀρχήν, ἀτυφίαν δὲ ἀληθείας.

Tyrants, in particular, are the embodiment of such foolish pride and desire for "addition". Philo comments on the third commandment of the second group of five, on theft, as follows:

> For he who keeps continually gaping after the property of others is the common enemy of the city, since, as far as his inclination goes, he would deprive all men of their property; and in respect of his power he actually does deprive some. … Therefore as many robbers as have the strength to do so plunder whole cities, paying no attention to the punishments with which they are threatened, because they appear to themselves to be superior to the laws. These are those men who are oligarchical in their natures, who have set their hearts on tyrannies and absolute power, who commit enormous thefts, concealing their robbery, as it is in reality, under the specious and imposing names of authority and supremacy (*Decal.* 135-136).

This foolish pride is further blamed as the cause of inequality and marginalisation of individuals: "Pride is also the cause of many other evils, such as insolence, arrogance, and inequality [ἀνισότητος]" (*Decal.* 5). Clearly, for Philo, this pride is a dangerous source of disrespect; it disturbs society and pushes its victims to the margins of society.

2.2 Leaving the cities as a process of purification (*Decal.* 10-13)

The Ten Commandments were given not in the cities, but in the desert as part of God's strategy to gradually heal the people from the diseases of the cities:

> … and this is impossible to be effected unless the man dwells apart; and even then it cannot be done in a moment, but only at a much later period, when the impressions of ancient transgressions, originally deeply imprinted, have become by little and little fainter, and gradually become more and more dim, and at last totally effaced (*Decal.* 11).

Like a good medical doctor who orders the patient to abstain from food and drink for a while, God empties their souls from the culture prevailing in the cities and feeds them by means of divine teachings:

> Very naturally therefore, having led his people from the injurious associations prevailing in the cities, into the desert, that he might purify their souls from their offenses he begun to bring them food for their minds; and what could this food be but divine laws and reasonings [νόμοι καὶ λόγοι θεῖοι] (*Decal.* 13).

2.3 Before settling in the new cities: They receive the laws and are trained to keep them (*Decal.* 14)[5]

The move out of the cities of Egypt and the entry into the cities of the Promised Land were well planned: they first prepared rules for a political regime and were trained to adhere to them so that they could be governed in such a way that the issue of having "socially disadvantaged" persons would be taken care of:

> … but that, having previously prepared laws and constitutions, and being trained [ἐνασκηθέντας] in those regulations, by which nations can be governed with safety, they should then be settled in their cities, being prepared at once to use the just regulations which were already prepared for them, in unanimity [ὁμονοίᾳ] and a complete participation [κοινωνίᾳ] in and proper distribution [διανομῇ] of those things which were fitting for each person (*Decal.* 14).

2.4 Letting the people experience these laws not as human inventions, but as divine oracles (*Decal.* 15-17)

In this remote desert, where there was neither food nor drink, they received in a wonderful way all that they needed to live, not merely to survive, but also to live well. In this way, God intended to make it clear that these Laws were divine gifts,

> … for they would see that he, who had given them a sufficiency of the means of life was now also giving them a means which should contribute to their living well; accordingly, to live at all required meat and drink which they found, though they had never prepared them; and towards living well, and in accordance with nature and decorum, they required laws and enactments, by which they were likely to be improved in their minds (*Decal.* 17).

The crucial issue for the ideal city is the transformation of people's souls or minds.

5 In this instance, Philo is contrasting the cities as they are commonly experienced with the ideal, which the laws of Moses aim to establish. On the complexity of Philo's views on the city, cf. Runia (2000).

3. FOLLOWING THE LAWS BRINGS ABOUT UNION WITH GOD AND HARMONY WITH NATURE AND REASON

From the opening lines of the *De Decalogo*, Philo recalls how, in his previous writings, he presented the lives of the wise founders of the nation in whom the laws were visible in *unwritten* form. In this work, he addresses these same laws in their *written* form.[6] Philo draws on a Middle Platonic version of the law of nature:

> To summarize how Antiochus [of Ascalon], Cicero, and Philo conceive of a transcendent grounding for the law of nature: (1) they connected political affairs closely with the more contemplative quest for higher, divine truth and honors; (2) they viewed the true, universal reason or law as the mind of the divine Creator and Lawgiver – a divine mind which transcended the sense-perceptible creation and worldly affairs; and (3) they understood the human mind, divinely given and partaking in the divine essence, as the means of ascending to knowledge of this transcendent truth (Horsley 1978:57).

Therefore, Philo presented obedience to the Ten Commandments and to the Law of Moses as living in harmony with reason and created reality (*Opif.* 3). Philo relates the Greek conceptions of reason with Jewish ones:

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6 According to Nikiprowetzky (1965:133),

> dans Platon, *Politique* 292 s., le portrait de l'homme royal qui, en possession de la prudence et de la sagesse, est une incarnation vivante de la Loi et n'a, pour gouverner, besoin de s'appuyer sur aucun code écrit. Le vrai Politique est en effet le Sage. Philon pense que l'Écriture enseigne la même doctrine à propos des patriarches.

Cf., for instance, *Abr.* 5:

> So that a man may very properly say, that the written laws are nothing more than a memorial of the life of the ancients, tracing back in an antiquarian spirit, the actions and reasonings which they adopted. It is nature which teaches these laws which lead to a virtuous life: … but he who, without any recommendation and without being enjoined to be so, is nevertheless hopeful, has acquired this virtue by an unwritten, self-taught law, which nature has implanted in him (*Abr.* 16).
>
> τοιοῦτος ὁ βίος τοῦ πρώτου καὶ ἀρχηγέτου τοῦ ἔθνους ἐστίν, ὡς μὲν ἔνιοι φήσουσι, νόμιμος, ὡς δ' ὁ παρ' ἐμοῦ λόγος ἔδειξε, νόμος αὐτὸς ὢν καὶ θεσμὸς ἄγραφος (*Abr.* 276).

Cf. also Martens (1994:325-326) who argues that "Philo creates two levels of *nomoi empsychoi,* those of king [Moses] and of sage [Patriarchs]."

> … and reason is a very short word, but a most perfect and admirable thing, a fragment of the soul of the universe, or, as it is more pious to say for those who study philosophy according to Moses, a very faithful copy of the divine image (*Mut.* 223).[7]

This identification of the Decalogue and the laws proclaimed by Moses with the law taught by nature to the patriarchs explains Philo's comments on how to celebrate the Sabbath (96-101). Like God on the seventh day, they should contemplate what God had beautifully created. It is striking how in *De Decalogo* 98 they are encouraged to examine both nature and their own behaviour. Considering nature means contemplating the world guided by the opening chapters of Genesis; examining their behaviour means to bring their conduct of the previous six days of the week before the judgement seat of the soul that will be guided by the laws as "assessors and joint inquirers". Celebrating the Sabbath is a "philosophical" exercise of self-examination in light of the laws of Moses (ethics) and of the universe as created by God (physics).

The study of nature (physics) and the self-examination (ethics) are the two activities that are required on the Sabbath. Furthermore, Philo qualifies this activity as philosophising. This twofold activity is repeated a few paragraphs later:

> Moreover, the seventh day is also an example from which you may learn the propriety of studying philosophy; as on that day, it is said, God beheld the works which he had made; so that you also may yourself contemplate the works of nature and whatever concerns you towards happiness [ὅπως καὶ αὐτὸς ἐπιθεωρῇς τὰ φύσεως καὶ τὰ ἴδια ὅσα συντείνει πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν] (*Decal.* 100).[8]

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7 Cf. *Opif.* 146: "Every man in regard of his intellect is connected with divine reason, being an impression of, or a fragment or a ray of that blessed nature."

8 Cf. *Opif.* 128:

> It was also greatly honored by Moses, a man much attached to excellence of all sorts, who described its beauty on the most holy pillars of the law, and wrote it in the hearts of all those who were subject to him, commanding them at the end of each period of six days to keep the seventh holy; abstaining from all other works which are done in the seeking after and providing the means of life, devoting that day to the single object of philosophizing with a view to the improvement of their morals, and the examination of their consciences: for conscience being seated in the soul as a judge, is not afraid to reprove men, sometimes employing pretty vehement threats; at other times by milder admonitions, using threats in regard to matters where men appear to be disobedient, of deliberate purpose, and admonitions when their offenses seem

With regard to the study of nature, it should be clear that this has nothing to do with modern physics. As Nikiprowetzky (1965:150) points out, we have to understand this study of nature as a kind of midrashic activity linked to the first chapters of Genesis. The interest in the universe focuses on the created world as a mirror of God, as a memorial of the Law; physical truths are simply entrances into theological teaching.[9] In particular, physics must lead to ethics, as noted in the linking of the two in the above passage. By doing so, Philo shows that he is well aware that the main components of Greek philosophy are logic, physics and ethics, but he makes the first two clearly subordinate to ethics:

> ... and leaving the logical part of philosophy, as in no respect necessary for the acquisition of virtue, to the word-catchers, and the natural part, as being too sublime for human nature to master, to those who love to converse about high objects (except indeed so far as such a study takes in the contemplation of the existence of God and of the creation of the universe), they [the Essenes] devote all their attention to the moral part of philosophy, using as instructors the laws of their country which it would have been impossible for the human mind to devise without divine inspiration (*Prob*. 80).

The importance of ethics over physics is explained in terms of the image of the tree and its fruits:

> For as there is no advantage in trees unless they are productive of fruit, so in the same way there is no use in the study of natural philosophy unless it is likely to confer upon a man the acquisition of virtue, for that is its proper fruit (*Mut.* 73).[10]

However, this is not individualistic moralism; the issue is not simply a question of behaving, but more comprehensively of living. It is about living in harmony with God, the source of all life. Living in harmony with God

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involuntary, through want of foresight, in order to prevent their hereafter offending in a similar manner.

9 "Nous pensons qu'avec le *De Opificio Mundi* pour la cosmologie proprement dite, et le *Legum Allegoriae* pour la cosmologie appliquée au composé humain, nous avons sous sa forme la plus systématique un spécimen de ce genre de spéculations, ... " (Nikiprowetzky 1965:150).

10 "Encore, la physique est-elle étroitement confinée dans la sphère de la théologie cosmologique ou mystique, tandis que l'investigation physique, telle que nous la concevons aujourd'hui, est répudiée avec un dédain socratique (cf. Platon, *Phèdon* 96 s; *Cher.* 4; *Gig.* 62; *Migr.* 138; *Mutat.* 67-76: textes qui montrent bien par leur accord avec *Prob.* 80 que la définition de la physique qu'on lit dans le dernier passage n'est pas, dans le judaïsme, une particularité exclusive des Esséniens)" (Nikiprowetzky 1965:150-151).

means to observe the whole of the created world with the eyes of God and in this way to imitate God. According to Genesis 1, God saw that it was good. However, appreciating the created world for what it is in the eyes of God means both appreciating and relativising it, beginning by recognising one's own nothingness. Abraham serves as an example. According to *Her.* 30, when Abraham recognised his own nothingness (Gen. 18:27), he, a creature, was given an opportunity to approach the Creator:

> Of the number of these men is Abraham, who attained to great progress and improvement in the comprehension of complete knowledge; for when he knew most, then he most completely renounced himself in order to attain to the accurate knowledge of him who was the truly living God. And, indeed, this is a very natural course of events; for he who completely understands himself does also very much, because of his thorough appreciation of it, renounce the universal nothingness of the creature; and he who renounces himself learns to comprehend the living God (*Somn.* 1:60).[11]

As noted earlier, the laws are meant as part of a process of healing and education of individuals. It is a process in which individuals are to be involved knowingly and willingly. This process requires exercise and effort (*Her.* 48), of which Jacob is the symbol (*Sacr.* 120). Philo views this process as symbolised in the image of "coming out of oneself" (based on the image of giving birth; Gen. 15:4), which Philo interprets as a form of "ecstasy" or a form of transcending oneself. In *Her.* 74, he points to God's command to Abraham to "emigrate" and this is interpreted as not attributing the faculties of perceiving, thinking and comprehending to oneself, but to God who is the cause of accurate thinking and sound comprehension. The driving force behind this "ecstasy" is the self-transcending eros:

> Therefore if any desire comes upon thee, O soul, to be the inheritor of the good things of God, leave not only thy country, [Genesis 12:1] the body, and thy kindred, the outward senses, and thy father's

11 Cf. also *Somn.* 1:119:

> … for as long as the mind thinks that it attains to a firm comprehension of the objects of intellect, and the outward sense conceives that it has a similar understanding of its appropriate objects, and that it dwells amid sublime objects, the divine word stands aloof at a distance; but when each of these comes to confess its own weakness, and sets in a manner while availing itself of concealment, then immediately the right reason of a soul well-practised in virtue comes in a welcome manner to their assistance, when they have begun to despair of their own strength, and await the aid which is invisibly coming to them from without.

> house, that is speech; but also flee from thyself, and depart out of thyself, like the Corybantes, or those possessed with demons, being driven to frenzy, and inspired by some prophetic inspiration. For while the mind is in a state of enthusiastic inspiration, and while it is no longer mistress of itself, but is agitated and drawn into frenzy by heavenly love [ἔρωτι οὐρανίῳ], and drawn upwards to that object, truth removing all impediments out of its way, and making everything before it plain, that so it may advance by a level and easy road, its destiny is to become an inheritor of the things of God (*Her.* 69-70).[12]

The experience of ecstasy presupposes the abandonment of foolish pride, τῦφος. It presupposes the abandonment of reliance on the body, sense experience and uttered speech, as all are inadequate to know God. To depart from our very selves presupposes not only this threefold "exodus", but even more; it requires total receptivity before God who alone is truly active and before whom the creature is passive.[13] The highest "activity" for a human being is, therefore, to reach that state of total receptivity, which also corresponds to contemplation. The heavenly eros is the energy that draws an individual to open up to God.

This consent to utter passivity is one of the aspects of "remaining within the boundaries of the nature of a human being" (*Decal.* 43). Abandoning pride is accepting these boundaries and opening oneself to be educated and healed by God. Learning to respect all people, and particularly

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12 The whole of *Her.* 68-85 is most relevant for the topic of the "ecstasy"; cf. the discussion by Harl (1966:27-30, 39-40, 103-150). Cf. the similar passage in *Migr.* 34-35:

> What we have here is a coupling of elements of corybantic ecstasy, an unconsciousness, a receding of the objects of sense experience, place, persons, body, conversation that is replaced with an insight into the invisible realm which Philo himself describes in terms of ideas and language (Torjesen 2003:297).

13 Cf. *Cg.* 77:

> Who, then, could be a more determined enemy to the soul than he who out of arrogance appropriates the especial attributes of the Deity to himself? Now it is an especial attribute of God to create [τὸ ποιεῖν], and this faculty it is impious to ascribe to any created being. But the special property of the created being is to suffer [τὸ πάσχειν].

Winston (2001:145) quotes from a fragment of Philo's lost fourth book of his *Legum Allegoriae*:

> But when he affirms the first and better principle, namely, that God acts not as man, he ascribes the powers and causes of all things to God, leaving no work for a created being but showing it to be inactive and passive.

the "unfortunate", the socially disadvantaged, is linked with the more comprehensive exercise of knowing oneself.

4. THE EQUAL VALUE OF EACH AND EVERY PERSON

Philo reflects on the reasons why the Ten Commandments, which were addressed to an immense crowd, are formulated in the second person singular (*Decal.* 36). The first reason he gives is that this is an expression of the magnificent doctrine that each person who obeys God is of an equal value with the whole universe and so all should receive equal acceptance and honour (*Decal.* 37-38).

The second reason given is that it stresses individual responsibility:

> … for the man who receives an admonition as if addressed to himself personally is more inclined to obey it; but he who hears it as if it were only directed to him in common with others is, to a certain degree, rendered deaf to it, making the multitude a kind of veil and excuse for his obstinacy (*Decal.* 39).

The third reason is particularly relevant to our specific topic. Kings and tyrants, and all those in high places, should learn from God, the eternal and highest being, who does not even despise the most humble. In this instance, it is the theme of imitation of God (as also in *Opific.* 144):

> … as if he [God] were about to give him [the most humble] a love-feast, and to prepare for him alone a banquet for the refreshing and expanding of his soul instructed in the divine will and in the manner in which the great ceremonies ought to be performed, how can it be right for me, who am a mere mortal, to hold my head up high and to allow myself to be puffed up, behaving with insolence to my equals whose fortunes [τύχαις] may, perhaps, not be equal to mine, but whose relationship to me is equal and complete, inasmuch as they are set down as the children of one mother, the common nature of all men? (*Decal.* 41).

"Fortune", as the only difference, is unforeseeable. Even if good fortune were to be unaltered and unshaken, a human being should remember who he is and he will say:

> … for, inasmuch as I myself am human, I will not think it right to cherish a pompous and tragedian-like dignity of manner, but I will keep myself within my nature, not transgressing its boundaries, but accustoming my mind to bear human events with complacency and equanimity (*Decal.* 43).

Remembering that one is human; not transgressing one's boundaries means to learn to relate in a humane way to all people:

> … and especially to those who are in the greatest difficulties and of the least reputation, and who are destitute of all assistance from kindred of their own, to those who are orphaned of either or of both their parents, to women who have experienced widowhood, and to old men who have either never had any children at all, or who have lost at an early age those who have been born to them (*Decal.* 42).

In terms of the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year, Philo points out that these admirable laws are "conducing to the production of gentleness [ἡμερότητα] and fellowship [κοινωνίαν] among men, and inviting them to simplicity [ἀτυφίαν] and equality [ἰσότητα]" (*Decal.* 162).[14]

Philo relates the issue of relationships between slaves and masters to the commandment of obedience to parents. In this instance, he again points to the need to overcome inequality. Servants are encouraged to provide "an affectionate service towards their masters" and masters are expected to be gentle and mild towards their slaves in such a way that "the inequality of their respective conditions is in some degree equalized [δι' ὧν ἐξισοῦται τὸ ἄνισον]" (*Decal.* 167).[15]

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14 This description of the attitude of the Essenes makes very explicit what Philo himself thinks:

> [T]hey are all free, aiding one another with a reciprocal interchange of good offices; and they condemn masters, not only as unjust, inasmuch as they corrupt the very principle of equality, but likewise as impious, because they destroy the ordinances of nature, which generated them all equally, and brought them up like a mother, as if they were all legitimate brethren, not in name only, but in reality and truth. But in their view this natural relationship of all men to one another has been thrown into disorder by designing covetousness, continually wishing to surpass others in good fortune, and which has therefore engendered alienation instead of affection, and hatred instead of friendship (*Prob*. 79).

On equality, cf. Harl (1966:67-71).

15 See similar reflections on the Sabbath:

> But it seems likely that it was on account of those who were less obedient, and who were the least inclined to attend to what was done, that Moses gave additional laws, besides, thinking it right, not only that those who were free should abstain from all works on the seventh day, but also that their servants and handmaids should have a respite from their tasks, proclaiming a day of freedom to them also after every space of six days, in order to teach both

God's commandments aim to move individuals to commit themselves freely to work for a society in which gentleness, fellowship, simplicity, and equality flourish.[16] God's approach is not like that of lawgivers who establish laws and then force people to obey these for fear of punishment. Philo points out how the Ten Commandments do not provide for sanctions and punishments. Fear of punishment is a motivation that is foolish and, therefore, unworthy of God. The Decalogue approaches the divine teaching in such a way "that no one yielding to that foolish counsellor, which is fear, might unwillingly choose what is best, but might do so from wise consideration and of his own deliberate purpose" (*Decal.* 177).[17] The way towards a more humane society is not by means of social structures and the enforcement of laws, but must be the result of human openness

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> classes this most admirable lesson; so that the masters should be accustomed to do some things with their own hands, not waiting for the services and ministrations of their servants, in order that if any unforeseen necessities came upon them, according to the changes which take place in human affairs, they might not, from being wholly unaccustomed to do anything for themselves, faint at what they had to do; but, finding the different parts of the body active and handy, might work with ease and cheerfulness; and teaching the servants not to despair of better prospects, but having a relaxation every six days as a kind of spark and kindling of freedom, to look forward to a complete relaxation hereafter, if they continued faithful and attached to their masters (*Spec*. 2:67).

16 The idea of progress towards the goal of equality is also expressed in the following text:

> And from the occurrence of the free men at times submitting to the tasks of servants, and of the servants enjoying a respite and holiday, it will arise that the life of mankind advances in improvement towards perfect virtue, from their being thus reminded of the principles of equality, and repaying each other with necessary services, both those of high and those of obscure (*Spec.* 2:68; cf. *Virt.* 119).

17 Cf. *Spec.* 4:150:

> For the man who obeys the written laws is not justly entitled to any praise, inasmuch as he is influenced by compulsion and the fear of punishment. But he who abides by the unwritten laws is worthy of praise, as exhibiting a spontaneous and unconstrained virtue.

The same is said about the approach of Moses:

> For both in his commandments and also in his prohibitions he suggests and recommends rather than commands, endeavoring with many prefaces and perorations to suggest the greater part of the precepts that he desires to enforce, desiring rather to allure men to virtue than to drive them to it, ... (*Mos.* 2:51).

to God's healing and transforming education whereby human beings gradually learn how to behave in a God-like manner.

The aim of education is to become freely bound to God as the fruit of the "medical philosophy" of the divine laws whereby people are "charmed with salutary and saving words" and are released from the addiction of evil actions and hunger and thirst for good deeds (cf. *Conf.* 166; *Her.* 297).

5. CONCLUSION

Philo does not turn to social structures and coercive laws in order to move society to a more humane level and to counter the scourge of exploitation, abuse and marginalisation of fellow human beings.

What is striking in Philo's approach is the emphasis on education and formation into the image and likeness of God. The giving of the laws is meant to motivate people to shape their lives intelligently and willingly in accordance with God's law, which is the law intrinsic in their nature and in the whole of creation. Pride is a false and illusory understanding of the self; true self-knowledge leads people to understand themselves as "nothing" apart from God.[18] Recognising that truth about the self should prevent people from looking down on those who are less fortunate than themselves. The laws, therefore, direct individuals to imitate God and so contribute to a society characterised by gentleness, fellowship, simplicity, and equality. However, Philo has no illusions about the likelihood of reaching perfection on earth. The earth will go on without ever reaching perfection (Thümmel 2003:279-280). The earth is the realm of "fortune", which at one time strikes some people and will strike others at some other time. The challenge is to respond to these situations by relating humanely and by responding as much as possible to those in need at the present time. What Philo has in mind is not to try to control fortune and manage the world, which although in God's hand remains imperfect.[19] Philo's answer is

18 "When is it then that you do not forget God? When you do not forget yourself; for if you remember your own nothingness in every particular, you will also be sure to remember the exceeding greatness of God in everything" (*Sacr.* 55). On the theme of "self-knowledge" in Philo, cf. Courcelle (1974:39-43).

19 "For the divine Word brings round its operations in a circle, which the common multitude of men call fortune. And then, as it continually flows on among cities, and nations, and countries, it overturns existing arrangements and gives to one person what has previously belonged to another, changing the affairs of individuals only in point of time, in order that the whole world may become, as it were, one city, and enjoy the most excellent of constitutions, a democracy" (*Deus* 176).

to seek God above all else.[20] It may sound like fatalism and escapism, but for Philo piety (εὐσεβεία) has as twin sister, humanity (φιλανθρωπία), which requires humble sensitivity and readiness to reach out to those afflicted by "bad fortune". For Philo, respect and care for the socially disadvantaged are very much part of God's educational design.

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20 For Philo, in our present condition peace can only be found in an escape from this present disorder into contemplation of God and in managing one's soul according to reason.

> For the only thing which is really nourishing and really enjoyable is rest in God; which confers the greatest good, undisturbed peace. Peace, therefore, among cities is mixed up with civil war; but the peace of the soul is not mixed up with anything else (*Fug.* 1:174).
>
> Know, then, O excellent man, that God alone is the truest, and most real, and genuine peace, and that every created and perishable essence is continual war. For God is something voluntary, and mortal essence is necessity. Whoever, therefore, is able to forsake war, and necessity, and creation, and destruction, and to pass over to the uncreated being, to the immortal God, to the voluntary principle, and to peace, may justly be called the abode and city of God (*Somn.* 2:253).

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