Philo of Alexandria has only very recently received attention in respect of the emerging field of the history of ‘sexuality’. Of course, occasional, yet insightful, comments have been made in the context of studies of early Christianity or Rabbinic Judaism, or in studies on Philonic issues closely related to this matter, such as gender issues. But it is only with the recent essays of Gaca and Winston that Philonic studies have begun to focus more specifically on Philo in the context of the study of the history of ‘sexuality’. The present article is intended as a small contribution to this ensuing debate. More specifically, the purpose of this article

1 Where possible, references to Contempl. in this article only cite the paragraph. Philo’s works are cited from the Loeb Classical Library edition, and so are the English translations, although I have frequently been forced to amend them: like many other of the older LCL translations, Colson and Whitaker are somewhat imprecise when it comes to matters sexual.


3 For instance, B.J. Brooten, Love between Women: Early Christian Reponses to Female Homoeroticism (Chicago 1996); D. Boyarin, Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture (Berkeley 1993); idem, A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity (Berkeley 1994).


6 I ought to point out that I work with a social constructionist perspective on human sexuality in history. See ‘The Essentialist – Social Constructionist Debate and Biblical Research’, in P. Germond, S. de Gruchy (edd), Aliens in the Household of God:

The Studia Philonica Annual 10 (1998) 87-107
is to outline a specific feature of Philo’s moral problematisation of sexual matters in Philo’s De Vita Contemplativa, namely Philo’s fulminations against the sexual use of slave boys and the ‘female disease’ he ascribes to them. To do this fruitfully in this brief contribution, I need to begin by outlining what I regard as basic criteria for legitimate sexual intercourse and desire which underlie Philo’s writings. It is necessary to mention this now because not all of these criteria are immediately apparent in Contempl., even though they provide the foundation for his perspective on ‘pretty slave boys’.

*Philonic Criteria for Legitimate Sexual Intercourse*

In a perceptive article, Gaca recently argued that two basic ‘sexual principles’ undergird Philo’s work, that is, ‘criteria by which he distinguishes impermissible from permissible sexual activity’: the procreationist principle, and the principle of sexual apostasy. Firstly, a sexual act is legitimate only if it is for the purpose of procreation and not merely for pleasure. Gaca argues that, in its philosophical foundations, this view is ultimately derived from Pythagorean thought. In fact, Philo transforms the procreationist principle into a *duty*: in *Praem.* 108, for instance, Philo subtly transforms the scriptural *promise* that ‘there shall be no childless [man] nor infertile [woman]’ (οὐκ ἐστι ἄγονος οὐδὲ στεῖρα; Exod 23:26 LXX) in the promised land, into an *exhortation* to perform a *duty*, by concluding from the divine promise that ‘all the true servants of God will fulfil the law of nature for the procreation of children’ (see also QG 4.86).

Secondly, Gaca suggests that a related, second criterion to identify legitimate sexual intercourse lies in the notion of ‘sexual apostasy’: ‘If, in his [Philo’s] estimation, a sex act constitutes sexual apostasy from the Lord, it is absolutely forbidden and its agents must be put to death...’ I think that a somewhat more general rule must be envisaged here,

7 Gaca *art.cit.* (n. 5) 22. The importance of procreation as legitimating sexual intercourse in Philo has been observed before; see S. Belkin, *Philo and the Oral Law: the Philonic Interpretation of Biblical Law in Relation to the Palestinian Halakah* (Cambridge, MA 1940) 219–20; I. Heinemann, *Philons Griechische und Jüdische Bildung: Kulturvergleichende Untersuchungen zu Philons Darstellung der jüdischen Gesetze* (Hildesheim 1962) 267–268; R. A. Baer, *Philo’s Use of the Categories Male and Female* (Leiden 1970) 94–95. Gaca’s contribution on this matter lies in her argument that Philo’s procreationist principle, in its philosophical foundation, derives from Pythagorean thought, and not simply from a general Hellenistic tendency which stresses procreation as the central function of marriage.
8 Gaca *art.cit.* (n. 5) 28.
namely obedience to the Torah (as interpreted in Philo’s reading of the Septuagint). Philo mentions the notion of apostasy in general (for instance in Spec. 1.54) but I do not see anything which could properly be called ‘sexual’ apostasy in Philo’s writings. Philo does not suggest that all ‘sexual’ offenders ought to be removed from ‘the people’. Most importantly, Philo explicitly discusses the transgression of what he regards as proscriptions in the divine law which do not carry the death penalty even in his own view (such as intercourse with an infertile woman; Spec. 3.34–36).

In addition to the criteria of procreation and obedience to the Torah, I would like to suggest a third criterion: strict adherence to gender characterisation. We will see later that such a criterion is closely linked to Philo’s harsh objection to certain sexual practices. Sexual acts that are associated with the transgression of gender boundaries are most sharply condemned. Of course, these three criteria are neither spelled out as such by Philo, nor are they independent from each other; indeed, they are necessarily closely interlinked since Philo identifies the Torah with his perception of what the higher laws demand.

De Vita Contemplativa

I can now turn to Philo’s comparison of the ‘banquets’ of the community at Lake Mareotis with ancient συμπόσια in Contempl. The community of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides are described as the best example of those who follow the contemplative life (19–22). Much of the treatise of Contempl. is evidently designed to compare the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides—favourably, of course—with what (according to Philo) ‘others’ consider worthwhile. Like the Essenes (Contempl. 1; Hypoth. 11.1–18; Prob. 75–91), the Therapeutae/Therapeutrides are a Jewish group (Contempl. 64), but we know nothing about them from any other source except those clearly dependent on Philo.

---

9 Gaca’s suggestion that the septuagintal βδέλλαγμα (e.g. Lev 18) is understood by Philo as ‘apostasy’ is therefore unconvincing; art.cit. (n. 5) 31n32.
Philo is particularly concerned to point out that what he says is the truth, ‘unlike what poets and historians do’ (1), but such rhetoric has not detracted scholars from analysing how Philo selectively highlights what he considers particularly worthy in the community’s life, and hence shapes his description to suit his own perspective. Such analysis also shows that Philo and the community at Lake Mareotis may not have shared the same viewpoint on every matter Philo mentions. However, for the purpose of this paper, what matters is what Philo himself thought; reconstructing the practices and beliefs of the Therapeutae and Therapeutrides is not my concern.

The community consists of men and women who, according to Philo, have placed self-control (ἐγκροτεία) at the foundation of their existence (34). Their frugal lives are lived mostly in solitude, in simple, separate houses for individual community members; they only meet for prayer and philosophical discourse on the seventh day of the week, which presumably refers to the Sabbath. Mention is also made of a special festival meeting ‘after seven weeks’, probably Shavuot, or Pentecost. It is those meetings and their comparison with symposia which make up the chief part of the treatise, and this is also where Philo’s moral problematisation of matters sexual is reflected.

Pretty Boys

It should be remembered that in the Graeco-Roman context, Philo stood out quite starkly with his very broad and vitriolic attack on the sexual use of slave boys (although some of Philo’s arguments are common in contemporary ‘pagan’ literature). The practice and perception of sex between males during the Hellenistic and early Roman period is a matter of an ongoing scholarly debate; however, I think most scholars in the field would agree that Philo stands out as one of the harshest critics of such relations, condemning them unreservedly, and without any differentiation. It is only in a few roughly contemporary Jewish and

(14) See Kraemer, art. cit. (n. 13) 345; cf. Colson in PLCL vol. 9.152, 523.
Christian writings that Philo finds his match. Philo reserves his harshest words on matters sexual for issues which are related to male same-sex acts. In the process, a number of moral issues emerge which have a bearing on his general understanding of matters sexual.

It has been noted for a long time that Philo’s references to Xenophon’s and Plato’s Symposium in Contempl. are unusually inadequate. In fact, rather than an accurate description of Plato’s and Xenophon’s account, parts of Philo’s Contempl. read more like a reflection on the Italian countryside dinner described in Petronius’ Cena Trimalchionis, with its extravagant and luxurious food, drink, perfume, costly apparel, excessive eating and drinking, its dancers and entertainers; its beautiful slave boys, some even imported (including ‘Alexandrian boys’); its descriptions of the favourite boy of the master; kisses raining upon the most beautiful among the boys serving at the table, and so on. In a writer like Philo, who clearly had first-hand experience in reading Plato as well as other philosophers, such inaccuracy seems odd.

Philo talks about contemporary σωματικεία in three basic sections: in Contempl. 40–47, he berates gluttony and drunkenness, which result in injury and outrage to fellow citizens. This is followed by condemnation of the luxurious tastes involved in such gatherings (48–56), spreading from Italy, and now appreciated by ‘Greeks and barbarians alike’ (48). Finally, Philo uses the written records of Xenophon and Plato to focus specifically on the ills of the love of boys (57–63). This connection between gluttony and outrage, as well as sexual excess, is a common one in Graeco-Roman antiquity (which is one reason why dietetics and sexual regimen are closely related), and Philo makes that connection as

---


17 So already Colson in PLCL vol. 9.149, 521–522.

18 Luxurious food, drink, etc. (Petron. passim); slave boys (ibid. 27.2; 31.3; 34.4; 35.6; 41.6; 68.3; 74.8); masters’ favourite boys (ibid. 28.4; 63.3; 64.5; 67.127; 75.11); male kissing (ibid. 41.8; 64.11; 74.8). In a sense, reading Petronius together with Contempl. is at least as appropriate as reading Plato and Xenophon.

19 See especially D. T. Runia’s seminal study Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato (Leiden 1986).

20 An interesting reversal, incidentally, of the constant complaint of some Roman moral philosophers and conservatives who blamed ‘the Greeks’ for similar importations; see R. MacMullen, ‘Roman Attitudes to Greek Love’, Historia 31 (1982) 484–502; Williams art. cit. (n. 15).
well.\textsuperscript{21} Boys are first mentioned in the second section, among the luxuries ‘nowadays’ so common. Not only are there expensive couches at these symposia, luxurious drinking cups, and so on, but also pretty (slave) boys who serve at these symposia (διακονικὰ ἀνδράποδα εὐμορ-φότατα καὶ περικαλλέστατα ...). In fact, says Philo, these boys exhibit such youthful beauty that one gets the impression ‘that they have come not so much to render service as to give pleasure to the eyes of the beholders by appearing on the scene’ (50). The description of these ‘pretty boys’ begins the theme which is continued in the third section, namely, the use of these slave boys by the guests at the συμπόσιον. Philo notes how these boys are dressed up, how they use cosmetics and elaborate hair-styles associated with girls / women to enhance their beauty.\textsuperscript{22} There is no open reference to sexual services at this point,\textsuperscript{23} apart from one group of older boys, ‘the first beard just blooming’ on their cheeks (a sign of their transition to manhood: a much debated—and lamented—topic in erotic love poetry),\textsuperscript{24} who were ‘until recently playthings of the paederasts’ (ἀθώριατα πρὸ μικρὸ παιδεραστῶν; 52). Explicit reference to sexual services is perhaps not necessary here because any ancient reader would have understood what was required of some of these boys.\textsuperscript{25}

After a further description of how the guests at such συμπόσια succumb to gluttony induced by luxurious dishes (53–56), Philo reaches the climax of his comparison between Greek συμπόσια and the banquets

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[23] Unless the ‘heavier services’ (βαρύτεραι ὑπηρεσίαι) for which ‘the recent playthings of pederasts’ have been (over)dressed, imply sexual services (52). However, if the kinds of foodstuffs mentioned in Petronius’ Satyricon are anything to go by, physically strong older boys would indeed have been necessary for service at the table.
\item[24] On the significance of first beards and down on the cheeks of boys and adolescents during the Roman era, see Richlin op. cit. (n. 15) 35–38,44, art. cit. (n. 15) 547–548; cf. Petron. Satyricon 29.8, 73.6.
\item[25] Strangely enough, Philo never mentions the visual display of naked bodies or sexual scenes, which one would expect to see at the kind of ‘dinners’ he has in mind; cf. J. R. Clark, ‘The decor of the House of Jupiter and Ganymede at Ostia Antica: Private Residence Turned Gay Hotel?’, in E. K. Gazdo (ed.) Roman Art in the Private Sphere: New Perspectives on the Architecture and Decor of the Domus, Villa and Insula (Ann Arbor 1991) 89–104; D. Fredrick, ‘Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne: Erotic Painting and Visual Pleasure in the Roman House’, Classical Antiquity 14 (1995) 266–87. Philo condemns the open display of the naked body in front of the opposite sex (Spec. 3.176), but I have not yet encountered any condemnation of such artistic displays in his writings.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of the Therapeutae (57–63): even those σωμάτωσια which are widely celebrated and recorded by Xenophon and Plato—praised by Philo himself as ‘men whose character and discourses showed them to be philosophers’—turn out to be a laughing matter (γελώς) when compared to the banquets of ‘our people’ (57). The opening argument is brief and harsh: both have ἡδονή as a theme (whereas the Therapeutae and Therapeutides will have nothing to do with pleasure; 68–69). Read in the context of Philo’s generally hostile attitude to pleasure, this is a damning claim. Philo’s attitude to pleasure is, as has been observed before, complex.\(^{26}\) In most cases, Philo appears to suggest the complete avoidance of pleasure; yet in some instances, he seems to regard pleasure more as a necessary evil, unavoidable in life. In cases of sexual pleasure, however, Philo is so negative that he seems to be calling for a complete eradication of such pleasures (eg. Leg. 3.68; Spec. 1.8). It is only the duty of procreation that makes it necessary to control such sexual pleasure, as opposed to eradicating it completely (eg. Mos. 1.28–29).\(^{27}\)

Xenophon’s Symposium is dealt with in a few lines: his banquet ‘is more at a human level’ (ἀνθρωπικότερος): Philo picks out that Xenophon mentions ‘flute-girls’, dancers, jugglers, jesters, not to mention ‘other accompaniments of more unrestrained merrymaking’ (τῶν ἐν ταῖς ἱλαρωτέραις ἀνέσεστι), which may well refer to the guests’ sexual pleasures usually also associated with such gatherings. Next, Plato’s record is quickly disqualified as being ‘almost entirely about love’ (ὅλον σχεδὸν ἑστὶ περὶ ἔρωτος). In fact, according to Philo, it is the ‘common, vulgar love’ (ὁ κοινὸς καὶ πάνθημος ἔρως) which constitutes the chief part of Plato’s Symposium: it deals not just with the love of men who are madly after women, or women after men (after all, at least such desire pays its dues to nature): no, worst of all, this mad desire is of men for other males (59).

Philo explicitly distinguishes between the different kinds of the sexual passion he has in mind here as steps on a ladder of excessive pleasure: it begins with the lust which men have for their wives; the next step is a man committing adultery with another man’s wife; then a man’s


\(^{27}\) Winston has demonstrated that Philo’s attitude to the body is ambiguous (art. cit. (n. 5)). After all, the body is part of the created world, and therefore good (Cher. 109–112). However, Philo’s soul-body dichotomy, where the soul is clearly superior, results in some extremely negative perceptions of the body.
‘consorting’ with a prostitute; and finally male same-sex intercourse (cf. Anim. 49; Abr. 135; Spec. 2.50). As has been pointed out before, this staggered sense of increasing excessive lust is not unusual among ancient moral philosophers, except perhaps Philo’s stress on this excessive lust beginning with men’s own wives.28

It is with the ‘mad love’ of men for other males, and with the effects of such relations, that Philo deals in the next three paragraphs (60–62). It must be noted here that Philo makes a clear distinction between active (that is, penetrating) and passive (that is, penetrated) partners in male same-sex intercourse.29 At the same time, it is well worth noting that Philo condemns both the ‘active’ and the ‘passive’ participant. The active partner is led by desire and lust in excess; he is not really any different from a man who is driven to adultery or sex with female prostitutes: it is still the excessive desire for pleasure that causes him to do this. The passive partner, however, is doing something which is somewhat more serious: he is changing nature by becoming womanish, denigrating that which is good, i.e. being male. Therefore, it is he who can be recognised outwardly as the ‘deviant’, since he takes on female gender characteristics (it is not the active partner who ‘sticks out’ in a crowd; Spec. 3.40). Since he performs the ‘female’ (passive) role, he must by definition be somehow ‘female’. Nevertheless, in Spec. 3.38 (though not explicitly in Contempl.), Philo condemns both to death. This is probably not only because it is prescribed in the Pentateuch, but also because both are participating in the same act which turns one of them into a female, whereas the other is inflicting this upon him, a fellow ‘natural’ male.

28 Even that is not quite unparalleled, considering the moral philosophical advice given to husbands not to treat their wives as concubines. For an overview, see M. Foucault, The Use of Pleasure: Vol. 2 of the History of Sexuality (New York 1985) 166–184; idem, The Care of the Self: Vol. 3 of the History of Sexuality (New York 1986) 145–185.
29 Perhaps most explicitly in Spec. 3.37 (and, similarly, in Abr. 135), where he complains that ‘these days’ παιδεραστείν ‘is a matter of boasting not only to the active, but also the passive partner’ (νυνὶ δ’ ἐστιν αὐχέμα οὐ τοῖς δρώσι μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς πάσχουσιν). —Philo’s use of παιδεραστείν is sometimes understood as an indication that his understanding, in line with the general attitude to sex between men in antiquity, is to be sharply distinguished from ‘modern homosexuality’ (defined as one which is characterised by adult mutuality); cf. R. Scroggs, The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for a Contemporary Debate (Philadelphia 1983); H. Patzer, Die Griechische Knabenliebe, 2nd. ed. (Wiesbaden 1983). However, to focus on the age of the participants alone is to ignore other crucial social aspects of such relationships and, therefore, ultimately misleading (see Halperin’s review of Patzer in Halperin, op. cit. [n. 2]). A large factor in this focus on age alone is the unacknowledged essentialist perspective which Scroggs and Patzer employ; cf. Szesnat, art. cit. (n. 6).
However, like his ‘pagan’ contemporaries, Philo does not seem to think that there is anything particularly odd about the object choice of the active partners: yes, they are to be condemned, *inter alia* for not controlling ἡδονή, but Philo tacitly acknowledges that the beauty of boys attracts male sexual desire (cf. 50):³⁰ that is why the slave boys have been dressed up, for it enhances their beauty—albeit, in Philo’s view, unnaturally so. Furthermore, the ‘passive’ state of these boys means that things *happen* to them: although they are harshly condemned, they are the object of other men’s passions. Philo does not seem to presuppose much reciprocity of affection between the active and passive partners. In this and other respects, Philo participates in the rhetoric of the active / passive dichotomy of sexual relations, widespread in antiquity, which revolves around the act of penetration.³¹ This also means, as has been observed before, that Philo always looks at sexual intercourse from the (older) man’s point of view. It is the man, too, ‘who has intercourse with’ his wife, another man’s wife, a prostitute, or a boy (whereas desire is described as working both ways). A typical phrase which expresses this perspective is: ἡ συνουσία ἀνδρός πρὸς γυναῖκα (e.g. Spec. 1.9; Leg. 2.74; Virt. 36). This ties in with Philo’s general perspective as stated by D. Sly: ‘in his generalizations about humanity, Philo writes from a man’s point of view, about men, for men’.³²

Philo condemns the ‘mad love’ of men for younger males (that is, the active, penetrating partner) for a number of reasons. The lover of boys wastes away in body, soul and property (61), a classical argument of the dangers of being an ἐραστής.³³ Not that this is a problem specific to the love of boys: Philo himself uses it in the context of the condemnation of adultery, where it is specifically linked to the root evil of the love of pleasure (φιληδονία; Dec. 121–122).

Furthermore, Philo emphasises (Contempl. 62):

Cities are desolated, the best kind of men become scarce, sterility and childlessness (σπάνιν τοῦ ἀρίστου γένους ἀνθρώπων καὶ στείρωσις καὶ ἁγονία) ensue through the devices of these who imitate men who have no knowledge of husbandry, by sowing not

---

³⁰ As does Josephus, incidentally, who reports matter-of-fact that Quintus Dellius ‘fell in love’ with the sixteen-year old Aristobulos III, who was, as Josephus emphasises, κάλλιστος (AJ 15.23–29). Of course, Josephus was enraged by this, but he nevertheless took it for granted that all men will be attracted to beauty, including male beauty. In contrast to the stereotype of the modern West, acknowledging male beauty was not in itself an issue for these men who vigorously opposed sexual relations among men.

³¹ See, for instance: Dover, *op. cit.* (n. 15); Richlin, *op. cit.* (n. 15), Halperin, *op. cit.* (n. 2), Winkler, *op. cit.* (n. 15); M. B. Skinner, ‘Parasites and Strange Bedfellows: a Study in Catullus’ Political Imagery’, *Ramus* 8 (1979) 137–52.

³² Sly, *op. cit.* (n. 4) 71.

³³ See Dover, *op. cit.* (n. 15); Foucault, *op. cit.* (n. 28).
in the deep soil of the lowland but in the briny fields and stony and stubborn places, which not only give no possibility for anything to grow but even destroy the seed deposited within them.

Two issues are of interest here: the farmland imagery, and sterility as a consequence. Farm-land imagery in discussions of sexual morality is common in Graeco-Roman literature and is used several times by Philo himself, in the context of sex between males as well as sex between a husband and his infertile wife (Spec. 3.32–33, 39). Linked to this farmland imagery is Philo’s fear that male sterility and therefore childlessness will ensue (στείρωσις καὶ ἁγνότης). This is most clearly stated in Abr. 135–136, where the men of Sodom, when they tried to beget children, were discovered to be incapable of any but sterile seed ... Certainly, had Greeks and barbarians joined together in affecting such unions, city after city would have become a desert, as though depopulated by a pestilential sickness.

In Spec. 3.39, Philo links rendering cities desolate and destroying ‘the means of procreation’ (διαφθείρων τῶς γονάτικ). Philo may well be primarily thinking of the urban elite, rather than the population as a whole, as Rouselle pointed out (‘the best kind of men become scarce’). The underlying fear is that excessive expenditure of semen will lead to a situation where, when it counts, no fertile seed will be left: the active partner (the passive partner is not in view here), just like the man who has sex with his infertile wife, will eventually run out of the means of reproduction. There is no indication, however, that Philo regarded male sperm as something not to be wasted because of the nature of the

35 The transformation of the ‘sin of the Sodomites’ from one of breaking the basic law of hospitality in a particular outrageous way, to the exclusive focus on the men of Sodom to penetrate Lot’s guests begins with Philo and other Hellenistic Jewish writers, such as Josephus. Yet even in Philo himself, Sodom’s excesses of luxury are still highlighted, as in the classical Biblical prophets: the assault on Lot’s guests is but one of their sins. See Scroggs, op. cit. (n. 29); G. R. Edwards, Gay/Lesbian Liberation: A Biblical Perspective (New York 1984); D. Boyarin, ‘Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality’?’, Journal of the History of Sexuality 5 (1995) 333–55.
37 Pace J. Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century (Chicago 1980) 53.
substance itself. Sperm is not valued as such: it is of a very low order (φανλότατος), resembling foam (ἐνυκος ἁφρο), and only acquires movement (κινησις), the all-important life-force, once deposited in the womb (Opif. 67). Even when, with regard to his condemnation of a husband’s sexual intercourse with his infertile wife, he charges that ‘these persons who make an art of exhausting the seed as it drops (τῇ καταβολῇ σβέσιν τοις σπέρμασι), stand confessed as enemies of nature’ (Spec. 3.36), the issue is wasting for the sake of pleasure, not any particular significance of semen itself. ‘Waste of semen’ is, as such, not an issue for Philo.

Boys with the Female Disease

An intriguing concept in Contempl. is the ‘female disease’ (θηλεια νοσος) which, according to Philo, is ‘set up’ in the passive partners in male same-sex intercourse (60). As far as I am aware, the phrase occurs only in two other ancient Greek sources, namely Herodotus and Herodianus. Due to the relative paucity of the phrase in non-Philonic literature, the Philonic connotations of θηλεια νοσος must first be teased out of five passages where it occurs in Philo (Contempl. 60, Abr. 136, Spec. 1.325, 3.37, Prob. 124).

In Contempl. 60, Philo claims that pederastic love robs the boys of the manly courage (ἀνδρεία) which is the virtue most valuable for the life both of peace and war, sets up the female disease (θηλεια νοσος) in their souls and turns them into a man-woman (ἀνδρόγυνος).

As also in Spec. 1.325 and 3.38–40, the phrase θηλεια νοσος is therefore closely associated with the term ἀνδρόγυνος. The latter term was often

38 In other words, Philo generally follows the haematogenetic type of ancient spermato-genetic theories. See E. Lesky, Die Zeugungs- und Vererbungslehre der Antike und ihr Nachwirkung, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur: Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse 19 (Mainz 1950); P. W. van der Horst, ‘Sarah’s Seminal Emission: Hebrews 11:11 in the Light of Ancient Embryology’, in D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, W. A. Meeks (edd.) Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe (Minneapolis 1990) 287–302. Other Philonic passages reflecting the haematogenetic view are Opif. 132, QG 3.47, and Spec. 3.10 (the last passage may have elements of a panspermatic theory as well, but such mixing of theories was not unusual).


40 I am extremely grateful to Mr. Michael Lambert who helped me with the computer search facilities of the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae at the Department of Classics, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, which I used to find these classical passages, and who also discussed these references with me.
used to refer to hermaphrodites. Rousselle has suggested that this is what Philo had in mind when he called the death penalty upon the ἀνδρόγυνος (Spec. 3.37–38):

What he has in mind is not Jewish law, nor the fact that Jewish law condemned homosexuals to death; what all this is all about is the existence of hermaphrodites in Rome and the defilement thereby brought upon the city.

I see no indication in Philo’s texts that he was in fact thinking of physical hermaphrodites. After all, ἀνδρόγυνος was frequently used not only to denote a hermaphrodite but also a man who transgressed gender boundaries, though not necessarily sexually. In contrast, κύστιδος (which is never used by Philo) originally tended to be applied more specifically to men who performed the ‘passive’, ‘female’ role in intercourse with other men. However, as Gleason notes, already during the period of the early principate, the terms became indistinguishable, so much so that Pollux declares the two to be synonyms. Similarly, the Latin mollis and cinaedus tended to be used as synonyms. Philo seems to use ἀνδρόγυνος as closely related to terms such as ἐκθηλόν (cf. Spec. 3.39, Cher. 52) or θηλυκόν (cf. Gig. 4; Sacr. 32). For Philo, the connotations are, then, both gender-transgression in the form of dress, hairstyles, cosmetics, gait, and the passive role in sexual intercourse. As we will see in the passages discussed below, Philo’s link of the degeneration of soul and body makes the assimilation of these terms inevitable.

---

41 This is also the sense in which this Greek word is used in Rabbinic literature; see M. Satlow, ‘‘They Abused Him Like a Woman’: Homoeroticism, Gender Blurring, and the Rabbis in Late Antiquity’, Journal of the History of Sexuality 5 (1994) 1–25, here: 17–18.
42 Rousselle, art. cit. (n. 36) 320. Her argument would fit D. Dawson’s suggestion that Philo’s allegorical interpretation was an act of ‘cultural revision’, or perhaps even subversive resistance (Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria [Berkeley 1992]). Nevertheless, I wonder to what extent Philo’s blanket condemnation of sexual relations among men as such ought not to be considered an implicit attack on Rome’s right to rule, comparable to similar hints in rabbinic literature; see Satlow, art. cit. (n. 41) 14–15.
45 Interesting is also Philo’s use of the term γυναίδρος (Sacr. 100, Her. 274, Virt. 21), which is even rarer than θηλεία νόσος. In Philo, this term refers to women who transgress gender roles (H. Szesnat, ‘Philo and Sex among Women: the Use of γυναίδρος in Philo of Alexandria’, Unpublished Paper). Cf. B. J. Brooten’s work on tribades in antiquity (op. cit. [n. 3]).
What else can be associated with the 'female disease'? In Contempl., Philo charges that the 'mad love' for boys robs the boys (not their lovers) of ἀνδρεία, manliness,\(^{46}\) that virtue which is 'most valuable for the life both of peace and war': it robs boys who ought to have been trained 'in all the practices which make for valour' (60). Interestingly, Philo here (as in Spec. 3.37ff.) worries about slave boys. In the classical Athenian context, moral philosophical discussion had already focussed on the problem of the passive role of a citizen boy, who, after all, would one day turn into a man (and for whom such passive contact would then certainly be disgraceful).\(^{47}\) In late republican and early imperial Rome, citizen fathers worried about their freeborn sons: their sons' status as freeborn males would taint such a passive role as disgraceful. Slave boys, however, were not a problem in either of those contexts: they were the (sexual) property of their owners, to be used as their owners pleased.\(^{48}\) As Petronius has the parvenu libertus Trimalchio say about his own past in the Satyricon:\(^{49}\)

When I came [as a young slave boy] from Asia [Minor], I was as tall as this candle stick. In short, I always measured myself against it, and, to get a beard on the mouth more quickly, smeared the lips [with oil] from the lamp. Still, I was the darling (delicia) of my master for fourteen years. It is not a disgrace what the master commands. Nevertheless, I gave satisfaction to my mistress [as well]. You know what I mean: I pass over this in silence, because I am not one of the braggarts.

Moral philosophers like Plutarch or Musonius might argue that the master ought not to make use of those rights, but they did not worry very much about the social effects such intercourse had on the slave boys. Philo's concern is all the more remarkable because he accepts the institution of slavery. Perhaps it is the fact that Philo ascribes a common nature to master and slave that allows him to regard the gender status of the boy as more important than his social status (cf. Spec. 2.90–91; 3.136–143).

The 'female disease' is something inflicted upon the passive partner in sexual intercourse, as we have already seen in Contempl. 60 and Spec. 3.37. Similarly, in his use of the Sodom narrative in Abr. 135–136, Philo

\(^{46}\) Colson (PLCL) here translates ἀνδρεία as 'courage', but that is only one aspect of this virtue of 'being male'.

\(^{47}\) See Dover, op. cit. (n. 15); Foucault, op. cit. (n. 28); Halperin, op. cit. (n. 2); Winkler, op. cit. (n. 15).

\(^{48}\) See Williams, art. cit. (n. 15), Foucault, op. cit. (n. 28); Richlin, art. cit. (n. 15), Taylor, art. cit. (n. 15). —According to Foucault, the moral philosophical discussion whether one should make use of one's right as a freeborn citizen male to use all possible outlets for sexual pleasures increased during the early principate.

\(^{49}\) Petron. Satyricon 75.10–11; my translation.
states that ‘as little by little they accustomed those who were born as men to submit to the part of women’, the passive partners were

furnished with the female disease, an unconquerable evil: not only did the bodies become womanish in softness and weakness, but also produced low-minded souls (σῶμα μαλαικότητι καὶ θρόψει γυναικοῦντες, ἄλλα καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἄγεννεστέρας ἀπεργαζόμενοι).

In other words, body and soul are affected by the female disease, as Spec. 3.37 underlines: ‘they let both body and soul run to waste’. The female disease affects both soul and body with specifically female characteristics, namely soft (therefore: womanish) bodies and low-minded souls (also characteristic for women).

In Spec. 1.325, Philo discusses the Septuagintal exclusion of certain people from the ‘assembly’ (ἐκκλησία; Deut 23:11), and in the process associates ἀνδρογύνοι, who have acquired the ‘female disease’, with castrated males (ὕνωοι):

Beginning with those who are ill with the female disease of the female men (ἀπὸ τῶν νοσοῦντων τὴν θῆλειαν νόσον ἀνδρογύνων), who forget the sterling coin of nature and force their way into unchasteful women’s (ἀκολόουσαν γυναικῶν) passions and outward form (πάθη καὶ μορφὰς). For it expels those whose generative organs are fractured or mutilated, who regulate the flower of the prime of life, lest it should easily die away, and restamp the masculine cast (τὸν ἀρρενα τοῦ ἐπαχράττοντας) into a female-shaped form (εἰς θηλύμορφον ἰδέαν).

Yet again there is an explicit link of the female disease with the ἀνδρογύνοι, who change and debase nature by assuming women’s passions and appearance. Philo then links ἀνδρογύνοι, who have acquired the ‘female disease’, with castrated males (ὕνωοι): a man who has the female disease, who has acquired female passions and appearance, is functionally equivalent to a man who has lost the generative organs which make him a man (Somn. 2.184), regardless of whether he is actually castrated or not. This connection is also made in Spec. 3.41, where Philo decries the common practice of castrating boys as a way of ‘heightening still further their youthful beauty’. Philo’s link between the ἀνδρόγυνος and the ἕνωος tallies with one strand in contemporary ‘pagan’ opinion which expects eunuchs to desire anal penetration.

The last passage in which Philo uses the term is in Prob. 123–124. Here Philo tells a story about Diogenes the Cynic, who has been captured and

---

50 On the practice of castrating boys to prolong their youthful boyish beauty, see Rousselle, art. cit. (n. 36) 313, and Richlin, art. cit. (n. 15) 552.
is being sold into slavery. Philo’s Diogenes, true to form, shows boldness, wit and true freedom in the face of physical hardship. This is expressed particularly starkly in the following episode (Prob. 123–124):

It is said .. that he [Diogenes] looked at one of the purchasers—one who had the female disease (διν θήλεια νόσος εξεχειν), and out of whose face (eye?) came nothing male (ακ τις δσεως ουξ ύπρενα)—and, in approaching him, he [Diogenes] said: ‘You should buy me, for you seem to me have a need for a husband (ανηρ’), upon which he, shamed upon his conscience, disappeared.52

Philo’s use of θηλεια νόσος here is clearly designed to describe someone who, while recognisable as a (biological) man, is also, apparently by public recognition, ‘female’ in appearance. Philo explicitly mentions that Diogenes could see this in his face (or eye). As Gleason has demonstrated, physiognomy was a widespread practice in antiquity, and not simply restricted to fending off danger, such as the evil eye: ‘physiognomy also specialised in spotting males who were not real men at all’, developing complex ways of recognising certain sets of characteristics for the ‘effeminate man’.53 The purchaser’s eye or face, just like the elaborate dress, hairstyles, cosmetics, and gait (Spec. 3.40) of the slave boys are recognised signs of the man / boy who performs, by choice or by force, the passive (penetrated) role in intercourse.

The term ἀνδρόγυνος (and its loaned Latin equivalent, androgynus), incidentally, which Philo connects with the ‘female disease’, appears frequently in classical literature in connection with physiognomic practices. The fact that these terms are used in an abusive context suggests furthermore that we will have to expect some exaggeration and lack of precision. As Gleason notes, Athenaios charges that

men who groom themselves cheaply and roughly to advertise their own philosophical austerity ‘call other men cinaedi if they wear perfume or dress a bit daintily.54

which is exactly what Antoninus’ insult to Macrinus (see Herodianus 4.12, cited below) was designed to do.55 It also reminds one of Philo’s

52 Colson (PLCL vol. 9.79n.b) notes that a similar episode is told by Diogenes Laertius (6.74), where the protagonist tells the auctioneer: ‘sell me to him, for he needs a master.’ It is likely that stories about the sages, like Diogenes, circulated freely and in quite different forms; Philo might well have heard or read the very anecdote he tells here. Clement of Alexandria, incidentally, also mentions this episode (Paed. 3.3.15).
55 The line between insult and the legal accusation of infamia or δοξωμασία is not sharply defined. On the legal basis of these concepts in Rome and Athens, see Richlin, art. cit. (n. 15) 555–561, and Winkler, op. cit. (n. 15) 54–64.
frequent statements on the evil of luxuries which we encountered in
texts cited above. Of course, Philo does not primarily use the term to
insult a particular person or group of people (although the abusive
connotation is always implied), except in Prob. 124: to tell a man that he
needed a husband was outrageous—it degraded him to the status of a
woman. This is also what Philo in our passage in Contempl. 61 expressed:
the lovers of boys have ‘wrought havoc with the years of boyhood and
reduced the boy to the order (τάξις) and disposition (διάθεσις) of a female
beloved (ἔρωμένη)’.

In my view, the key to Philo’s use of θήλεια νόσος lies in his
association of ‘disease’ with ‘being female’.56 In QG 4.15, Philo presents
the following ‘deeper meaning’ of Gen 18:11 LXX (‘there ceased to be to
Sarah the way of women’):

for the men there is a place where properly dwell the masculine thoughts (that are)
wise, sound, just, prudent, pious, filled with freedom and boldness, and kin to wisdom.
And the women’s quarters are a place where womanly opinions go about and dwell,
being followers [emulators]57 of the female kind.58 And the female kind is irrational
[ἀλογον] and akin to bestial [or: ‘irrational’] passions, fear, sorrow, pleasure and desire,
from which issue incurable weaknesses and indescribable diseases.’ (Emphasis added)

Philo links disease with being female: according to his logic, the
category ‘female’ is associated with the passions and desires, which in
turn lead to disease. What happens here in QG 4.15 is described at the
allegorical level; what happens with the ἀνδρόγυνος occurs at the
human, social level. In Leg. 2.97, Jacob’s prayer for Dan is that ‘he may
become a lover of self-restraint’ (γενέσθαι σωφροσύνης ἔραστήν). The
word ‘road’ in Jacob’s prayer is then interpreted as follows:

The soul is our road; for as in roads, it is possible to see the distinction of existences:
lifeless, living; irrational, rational: good, bad; slave, free; young, or older; male,
female (θηλεια); foreign, or native, sickly (νοσει), healthy; maimed, entire. So in the
soul, too, there are: lifeless, incomplete, diseased (νοσοῦς), enslaved, female (θηλεια),
and countless other movements full of disabilities; and on the other hand, movements
living, entire, male, free, sound, elder, good, genuine, and in a real sense, of the
fatherland.

56 Initially I also considered the possibility that Philo might connote menstruation
with the term ‘female disease’, a possibility which Dr. J. E. Taylor also kindly discussed
with me. However, not only is it unclear to me how Philo could have connected these boys
with menstruation, but Philo, to my knowledge, also never uses νόσος to refer to
menstruation itself.
57 Marcus (PLCL Suppl. I, 288 n.i) indicates that the Greek Vorlage of the Armenian MSS
would have had ζηλεωταί: ‘emulators’ may be a better English translation, as in Sacr. 100.
58 Marcus (PLCL) translates ‘female sex’. According to Professor J. J. S. Weitenberg, the
Armenian text reads azg, which most likely translates γένος (I owe this information to
Professor D. T. Runia, personal communication, April 4, 1998).
Read in the light of QG 4.15, this passage could also be understood as associating disease with being female, as Philo, in a characteristic move, allocates the terms to the negative side of a dualistically conceived series of oppositions. Furthermore, we can read Praem. 159 in this context, which calls the soul ‘sick’ (νοσεῖν) when full of passions and vices, which are, after all, female in character.

One should note in this context that in Spec. 3.10–11, Philo blames the body for most cases of immoderate craving for pleasures which are at least in accordance with nature: as examples, Philo cites gluttony (involving permissible foodstuffs), and desire for women, though explicitly not in an adulterous fashion: it is men’s desire for sexual intercourse with their own wives. Philo reasons that the body contains a great amount both of fire (φλόξ) and moisture (ιχμάς); the fire as it consumes the material set before it quickly demands a second supply; the moisture is sluiced in a stream through the genital organs (διὰ τῶν γεννητικῶν), and creates in them irritations and itchings and unceasing tickling. (Spec. 3.10)

On the other hand, it is the soul which is incurably diseased (ἀνίατον νόσον ψυχῆς νοσοῦντας) when men crave sexual intercourse with the wives of others. For Philo, then, adultery is (on the part of the man) an ‘unmanly’ act: in Philo’s discussion of the complex Biblical case of the prohibition of remarriage of a couple which had previously divorced, Philo regards the man involved in this case as an adulterer and a pimp, and hopes that he will be branded with the reputation of μαλακία (‘womanish softness’) and ἀνανδρία (‘unmanliness’). As an adulterer, as one who has succumbed to ἡδονή, he has lost his maleness (Spec. 3.31). For Philo, manliness is something to be achieved, a virtue constantly under threat. Women are always closely related to ‘the female’, but men are constantly in danger of losing their connection with ‘manliness’: men will slip down that slippery slope towards ‘the female’ if they are not vigilant.60

Interestingly, according to Philo, it is precisely the diseases of the soul and body (such as the ‘female disease’) which the Therapeutae / Therapeutrides have learned to cure (Contempl. 2):

they profess an art of healing better than that current in the cities which cures only the bodies, while theirs treats also souls oppressed with grievous and well-nigh

---


60 On this ‘gender gradient’, more specifically on the philosophical plane, see also Mattila, art. cit. (n. 4).
incurable diseases, inflicted by pleasures and desires and grieves and fears, by acts of covetousness, folly and injustice and the countless host of the other passions and vices.

In Virt. 13–14, Philo says that bodily diseases do not affect a healthy soul much, and a healthy soul is characterised by self-restraint. By definition, the ἄνδρογυνός does not live in such a state. What lies at the root of this is the close relationship between soul and body in relation to health and illness: if the soul is diseased, the body will be too.

Philo’s basically Aristotelian conviction that a woman is a lesser man also has something to do with the term θηλεία νόσος (cf. Spec. 1.200; QE 1.7): for a disease could be seen as being behind a man’s ‘being female’ in this sense: for a man to become ‘like a female’ could be conceived of as a disease. As Philo says about the lovers of boys in Contempl. 61:

having mutilated the years of boyhood and led the boy to the order (τὰξις) and condition (διαθέσις) of the (female) beloved (ἐρωμένη) ...

Indeed, the connection between a man’s passive role in sexual intercourse and ‘disease’ is fairly widespread in contemporary sources. The female disease implies that what is regarded as characteristically female (passion, pleasure, and disease, which is, in turn, characteristically bad) is attached to a man, who therefore deliberately denigrates what is good: maleness.

It has been suggested to me that a potential flaw in my argument lies in the fact that Philo never attributes the ‘female disease’ to women. In my view, one reason for this fact lies in the sheer horror which Philo expresses at the sight of men or boys who ‘appear like women’, both in outward form and in sexual behaviour. Another, more important reason is that for Philo, behaving ‘like a female’ is ‘natural’ for a

---

64 As Boswell noted (op. cit. (n. 42) 53), the Pseudo-Aristotelian Problems (Pr. 4.24–26) already speculated on physical reasons for a man’s desire to be penetrated. Caelius Aurelianus regarded it as a congenital mental disease (Tardarum passionum 4.9). Richlin (art. cit. (n. 16) 549–50) furthermore cites similar evidence from Catullus, Seneca, Martial, Pompeius Festus and others.
65 I am grateful to Professor D. M. Hay for his request for clarification of this point at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.
woman: it only becomes a ‘disease proper’ when a man or boy exhibits signs of ‘being female’. For a woman, it is not degrading to be penetrated (by her husband)—she is degraded, as Philo would have it, already by the very fact that she is female.

Boyarin recently argued that both the Biblical and the rabbinic opposition to anal sexual intercourse among men is based on the prohibition of the mixing of categories, that is, purity considerations. In that regard, he refers to Douglas’ work on purity in Leviticus. The problem, then, ‘is one of hybrids, not of hubris’, and concerns violations of a symbolic realm. Using a male as if he were female confuses categories, much like cross-fertilisation: anal male same-sex intercourse is understood as a kind of cross-dressing. This, Boyarin argues, explains why social status (excluding gender) does not play a role in Biblical and Rabbinic prohibitions of male same-sex intercourse, in contrast to the evidence from classical Greece and the Roman era: absolute gender dimorphism supercedes status consideration.

If Boyarin is right, the question arises to what extent Philo, living at the intersection of the Biblical and the Graeco-Roman world, so to speak, still participates in the Biblical and Rabbinic model. Philo knows of the prohibition of cross-dressing as well as cross-fertilisation of species, and uses it precisely in the context of illicit sexual acts (male same-sex intercourse, Virt. 18–21). The presupposed resulting hybrid-offspring in animal-human intercourse is as abhorrent to him as it is to the rabbis (Spec. 3.44–49). But then, the expression of horror at such ‘monstrous offspring’ is not unknown in the Graeco-Roman world either. However, it does not seem as if this mixing of categories is the guiding principle underlying the opposition to male same-sex intercourse in Philo.

The result of my analysis of Philo’s use of the phrase θηλεία νόσος corresponds, as far as that can be established, with the few instances in which the term occurs in classical literature. To begin with, in his description of the emperor Antoninus (138–161 CE), Herodianus, writing in the early third century CE, mentions that a military prefect, one Macrinus (Oclatinius Adventus), was ridiculed by the emperor for his lack of military experience and bravery, carrying this to the point of rank abuse. When he found out that Macrinus led an extravagant life and intensely disliked the rough scraps of food and drink which he, Antoninus, professed to enjoy as

---

66 Boyarin, art. cit. (n. 35).
68 Cf. Richlin, art. cit. (n. 15) 553–554.
a military man, and that he wore a long flowing cloak and other clothes which were more elegant, he accused the prefect of unmanliness and the female disease (ἀνεσκηπες ο θηλεον νοσον διπλωλεν) and continually threatened to execute him.\textsuperscript{69} Macrinus resented these accusations and was deeply offended. (4.12)

Whittaker, in his \textit{LCL} translation, renders θηλεια νόσος as ‘effeminacy’. A footnote states that the phrase literally means ‘a womanly disease’, and he adds: ‘but it probably means no more than muliebria, the disease of acting like a woman’.\textsuperscript{70} However, \textit{muliebria} itself is not a direct equivalent of θηλεια νόσος; the Latin word does not carry the ‘disease’ aspect of the Greek but rather signifies that something is ‘of women/female’, similar to the Greek τι γυναικεια,\textsuperscript{71} as in the attack on Hadrian, when he was criticised for crying in a ‘womanish fashion’ (\textit{muliebritert}).\textsuperscript{72} Hence, while it is clear that the intention of the insult is to accuse a man of being ‘more like a woman’, not ‘being manly’, the reasons in particular for the disease aspect of the phrase remain unclear.

Much earlier, Herodotus (\textit{Hist.} 1.105) narrates how Scythian soldiers looted the ancient temple of Aphrodite in Ascalon. The goddess punished the robbers by inflicting an apparently hereditary ‘female disease’ upon them:

> But the Scythians who pillaged the temple, and all their descendants after them, were afflicted by the god with the female disease (ἐνεσκηπες ο θεος θηλεον νοσον): insomuch that the Scythians say that this is the cause of their disease, and that those who come to Scythia can see there the plight of the men who they call ‘Enareis’ (Ἐναρέες).

Godley notes in respect of the phrase ‘female disease’ that ‘the derivation of this word is uncertain; it is agreed that the disease was a loss of virility’, and refers to Hdt. \textit{Hist.} 4.67 where the ἐνορής is described as ἀνδρόγυνος: ‘The Enareis, who are female men (ἀνδρόγυνοι), say that Aphrodite gave them the art of divination.’ Apart from the now familiar connection with ἀνδρόγυνοι, this does not help us any further.\textsuperscript{73} Certainly, however, my interpretation of the phrase in Philo is not contradicted by its use in Herodotus and Herodianus.\textsuperscript{74}

---

\textsuperscript{69} This is presumably a threat to invoke the charge of \textit{infamia} against Macrinus; cf. Richlin, \textit{art. cit.} (n. 15) 555–561.

\textsuperscript{70} Whittaker (1969, 442n1). The translation of the passage in Herodianus is based on Whittaker’s.

\textsuperscript{71} Cf. OLD s.v., LSJ s.v.

\textsuperscript{72} Spartan, SHA \textit{Hadrian} 14.5.

\textsuperscript{73} The above translations of Hdt. are based on those provided by A. D. Godley in the \textit{Loeb} edition of the \textit{Hist.} The quote from Godley also stems from this edition.

\textsuperscript{74} Although the Hippocratic corpus does not use the phrase ‘female disease’, it instructive to note one passage in which the Scythians are also discussed (\textit{Aer.} 22): those
Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have explored one aspect of Philo’s place in a history of ‘sexuality’, taking Philo’s De Vita Contemplativa as its starting point. I position Philo at the extreme end of the Graeco-Roman valorisation of the ‘male’, the denigration of the ‘female’, and the emerging rejection of erotic same-gender relations. Contempl. offered the opportunity to discuss Philo’s views on the presence of pretty slave boys at ancient συμπόσια. In this regard, I discussed Philo’s condemnation of both the ‘active’ and the ‘passive’ participant in such sexual intercourse, focusing in particular on the unusual notion of the ‘female disease’ ascribed to these boys. I argued that the concept is based on the Philonic association of disease and ‘being female’, which links up with the denigration of the passions, which are quintessentially female. The use of slave boys for sexual purposes is seen as changing their souls and (at least potentially) their bodies into a female form, which (for Philo, but not necessarily his Greek or Roman contemporaries) is extremely degrading to these boys. Philo’s violent opposition to any same-sex sexual acts between males, based on a rigid conception of gender stereotypes, the transgression of which is regarded with extreme hostility, eventually leads Philo to an uncharacteristically careless discussion of the Platonic and Xenophonic texts.75

University of the North, Mankweng (South Africa)

who rode horses frequently became impotent and subsequently changed to female dress. The author refers to this entire phenomenon as an affliction (τὸ πάθος). At the same time, he explains this by the Scythians’ frequent horse-riding which causes swellings at the joints and hence pain and stiffness; this he refers to as a νοῦς. The Scythians’ attempt to cure this by cutting the veins behind the ears, in the view of the author, destroys the source for semen: as a result, the inability to produce semen is seen as leading to the change from male to female. The use of ‘disease terminology’ is hence not clear here; the exact term ἡλεῖα νοῦς is absent anyway. Nevertheless, the Hippocratic association of ‘disease terminology’ with gender changes is interesting.

75 An earlier and longer version of this article was presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (San Francisco, USA, November 21–25). In this regard, the financial support of the University of the North as well as the Centre for Science Development of the Human Sciences Research Council (Pretoria, South Africa) is gratefully acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development or the University of the North. —I would like to thank the participants at the second session of the Philo of Alexandria Group at the SBL Meeting for their constructive criticism, in particular the respondent, Prof. D. M. Hay, and my co-presenters (especially Prof. T. Engberg-Pedersen and Dr. J. E. Taylor). I am also indebted to Prof. J. A. Draper, Prof. D. Sly, Dr. N. H. Taylor, and especially Mr. M. Lambert for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this article, as well as the Editor and the reviewers of the Studia Philonica Annual, for their critical remarks.