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The Man of Politics Can’t Be Seduced: A Twice-Told Biblical Episode in Philo’s *On Joseph* Reveals the Author’s Political Theory

In his political treatise *On Joseph*, the first-century C.E. Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria elaborates the biblical episode of the Egyptian woman’s failed seduction of Joseph as told in Genesis 39. He uses the episode twice: first, to extol the resistance of a future vice-regent of Egypt to sexual seduction; and second, to portray the political leader of a democratic polis as a man of virtue and principles who cannot be bribed or corrupted. Ethical discourse, according to Philo, must be adapted to the specific institutional context to which it relates.

Keywords: Philo of Alexandria, De Iosepho, Genesis 39, ancient democracy, Hellenistic Judaism

I. Introduction

Philo, to whose name we usually add his birthplace of Alexandria in Egypt, lived from approximately 15 B.C.E. to 50 C.E. As a wealthy member of the Jewish elite, he became well known as an intellectual and philosopher writing in Greek. His extensive work makes him the most important representative of Alexandrian Judaism. It remains unknown whether he knew Hebrew and, if so, how much; at any rate, he wrote impeccable Greek in the form known as Koine Greek. This was his mother tongue, the language used for communication throughout the Eastern Mediterranean, and also the language used by the literary elite. Philo’s literary legacy is impressive. According to the brilliant insight of Maren Niehoff, Philo’s work falls into two groups: an early one dedicated mainly to biblical exposition and intended for an Alexandrian Jewish readership, and a later one consisting mainly of biographies, meant for a non-Jewish, essentially Roman rather than Greek public.[1] The shift from the first to the second group came with Philo’s

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[1] M. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (ABRL; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 245–246.

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prolonged residence in the city of Rome in the years 38 to 41 C.E., when Philo led an Alexandrian Jewish delegation that approached the emperor to protest against anti-Jewish riots. In Rome, things progressed only slowly, so the delegation stayed longer than originally planned. The visit to Rome was a unique cultural experience for Philo, explored by Niehoff for the first time in Philonic scholarship. Philo became acquainted and indeed fascinated with Roman life and letters, though presumably he did not read Latin. He must have been impressed with what he heard about the biographies Cornelius Nepos had written about famous Romans, Greeks, and a few barbarian leaders such as the Punic military commander Hannibal. He must have been equally impressed with the Roman Stoic philosophy of which Cicero and Seneca were the leading authors. The Romans revised the Greek ideal of the Stoic sage's ethical and pacific credentials by adding a second ideal – that of the virtuous man of politics, who aims at furthering the welfare of the state.

Inspired by these ideas, Philo wrote a series of biographies of biblical characters, possibly beginning during his stay in Rome. The first in the series was the biography of Moses, and later came works on Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. The work on Joseph is entitled *De Iosepho* or, in Greek, *The Life of the Man of Politics or On Joseph*. It cannot be dated exactly; one may think of it as being written some time in the 40s of the first century C.E.

The most remarkable feature of *On Joseph* is that this work actually includes two pieces of writing: a philosophical-political retelling of the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt, based on the book of Genesis, and an almost independent political treatise. The first deals with Joseph as someone whom the hidden hand of God has prepared for a political career at the royal court of Egypt, where ultimately he became a leader with almost royal authority; the second portrays the character of the man of politics in a different political setting, namely, a city-state or *polis* in which he functioned as an elected leader answerable to the popular assembly. The two are only loosely connected through several allegorical bridges. In both settings – the Egyptian court and the Hellenistic *polis* – the hero is subjected to the philandering attentions of a woman whose advances he valiantly resists. In the following consideration of the two seduction episodes, we look in particular at the hero's two speeches, and the would-be seductress's single speech.

II. The Egyptian Seduction Episode

This episode is well known from the Bible. The slave Joseph manages an Egyptian household. His master trusts him, and Joseph, for his part, does everything to deserve being trusted. So when his master's wife seeks to seduce the handsome young man, he resists (Genesis 39). Here is a paraphrase[2] of Philo's text:

> (40) While the young man did a good job in managing his master's household, his master's wife, prompted by unbridled passion, made him the object of her desires. Madly aroused by the young man's beauty, she addressed him with flattering words, inviting him to a rendez-vous. He resisted stoutly, and repelled her advances, being by disposition and practice chaste and self-controlled. (41) Inflamed as she was by uncontrolled lust, she tried again and again, but without success. Finally, in her passion, she resorted to violence: grabbing his garment, she tried to drag him onto her bed. Passion strengthens even the weakest, enabling them to draw the bow.
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> (42) Despite the difficulty of the situation, he stayed in control. Committed as he was to honesty and true to the dignity of his race, he burst into speech:
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> "Why this violence?," he began. "We, descendants of the Hebrews, follow our own laws and customs. (43) With other nations, things are as follows: Once you are fourteen, you go, without feeling any guilt, to prostitutes and whores – all those who offer their bodies for cash. But with us, courtesans are not even permitted to live, for their trade is forbidden under penalty of death. Before a lawful marriage, no intercourse with a woman is permitted. As virginal young men we marry pure virgins, and when we approach them, then it is not because of lust, but with the exclusive aim of begetting offspring. (44) To this day, I have kept my purity, and I will not begin to violate the law by committing adultery, the greatest of crimes. Had I lived a lawless life, drawn by the appetites of youth, like the people in this country [i. e., Egypt], even then I should refrain from making someone else's wife my prey. Who would not kill the one who does such things? People have various opinions on the consequences of other crimes, but in this case, everyone agrees on what the punishment should be – a thousand-fold death. Without needing a judge's sentence, anyone who catches the guilty parties in the very act may carry out the death penalty. (45) You, however, go even beyond this, because you demand of me a threefold crime: You invite me to commit an act of adultery, an act of defiling my mistress, and an unfaithful act toward my lord.
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> Have I entered this house merely to infringe a servant's obligations by indulging in drinking, by frustrating the expectations of my master, by putting at risk his marriage, his household, his family? (46) I honour him as both my master and my benefactor, given the fact that he has charged me with overseeing all he owns, with the mere exception of you, his wife. And, in due acknowledgement of all of this, am I now asked to comply with your wishes? That would be a fine present for him, indeed a suitable service in return, exactly matching the favours I have received! (47) To the best of his abilities, my master has made of me, a prisoner and a stranger, a free man and a citizen.

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[2] For standard English translations, see Philo, "On Joseph," in *The Works of Philo* (trans. C. D. Yonge; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 435–458; idem, "On Joseph," in *Philo with an English Translation* (LCL; trans. F. H. Colson; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 6:140–271. Both the older Yonge translation and the more recent one by Colson are now somewhat dated, and they are actually weak when it comes to rendering the vividness of the speeches Philo so often puts into the mouths of his literary figures. A new translation is actually called for, but to offer a new version is beyond the scope of the present essay.

And now I, the servant, am expected to deal with him as with a stranger and a prisoner? What perverse state of mind would I have to be in to agree to this sort of thing! [And afterwards –] would I ever be able to look him in the eyes? As if I had a heart of iron? Even if the matter could be concealed, my conscience would be stricken, and I could not face up to him. Moreover, it could not be kept secret, because there would be too many witnesses, and it would be unlawful for them to stay silent. (48) Further: Even if there were no witness, or a witness who would stay silent, then I would betray myself – through the colour of my face, through my way of looking and my voice, because, as I said, I would be afflicted by a guilty conscience. But don't we have to fear and honour Dike, even if no one denounces us? Dike, the assessor of Zeus who sees all our doings!" (Philo, *De Iosepho* 40–48)

Some of Philo's expressions require explanation. The simple exegetical glosses below are offered because, to date, there has been no extensive scholarly commentary on *De Iosepho* (with the exception of the author's own brief notes in his recent German version of this book[3]).

(40) The "young man": this is how Philo generally refers to Joseph, whose (Hebrew) name is mentioned only once in *De Iosepho*. In this particular sentence, Philo has only "he," but the above paraphrase takes the "young man" from the next sentence. The expression "young man" (νεανίσκος) is not very specific, for it refers to a man in his best years – up to the age of 45 or even 50. – "His master's wife": it may well be that the seductive Egyptian woman made contemporary readers think of Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt during the first century B.C.E. Cleopatra successfully seduced two Roman leaders: Caesar and Mark Antony, whereas the Jew Herod (the Great) and the Roman Octavius (Augustus) resisted.

(42) According to the narrative context, Joseph gave the speech that follows while the woman kept a firm grasp of his garment.

(43) "Death penalty" for the prostitute: this is not exactly what the Torah prescribes in Deuteronomy 23:18; the punishment is rendered in a more severe fashion, possibly on the basis of Genesis 38:24. – Sexual intercourse is meant exclusively for procreation, and not for satisfying lust, an idea Philo also promotes in his portraits of Abraham and Moses, see *De Abrahamo* 249 and *De vita Mosis* I 28.[4] The Essenes taught the same tenet (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.161), as did Stoic teachers such as Seneca (4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) and Musonius Rufus (ca. 30–100 C.E.). This teaching goes back to the Pythagoreans, see Iamblichus, *De vita Pythagorica* 210.[5]

(44) Killing the adulterers when caught in the act: this could be deduced from the bloody deed of Phinehas reported in Numbers 25:6–8.

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[3] Philo of Alexandria, *Das Leben des Politikers oder Über Joseph. Eine philosophische Erzählung* (transl. B. Lang; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017). The new interpretation of Philo's *De Iosepho* that I offer in the introduction to this translation is taken up in the present paper.

[4] W. Loader, *Philo, Josephus, and the Testaments on Sexuality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 61–65 discusses "sex only for procreation" in Philo.

[5] Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* (SBLTT 29; ed. and transl. J. Dillon and J. Hershbell; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 210–211.

(45) The reference to drinking and sexual interests are topical. According to Xenophon (*Oeconomicus* 12.11 and 12.13; cf. also *Memorabilia* 1.2,22), the love of alcohol and excessive sexual desire make a man unfit for the office of household manager.

(48) Dike, the Greek goddess of justice, known from Hesiod's *Work and Days* 255–261 and *Theogony* 902–903, is mentioned here as a final flourish for the speech. The reference to a pagan goddess is certainly included for Philo's intended pagan audience. Interestingly, Philo refers to Dike as Zeus's πάρεδρος, "assessor," literally: the one who sits next to him. In Hesiod, Dike "sits beside her father, Zeus the son of Cronos, and tells him of men's wicked hearts" (*Works and Days* 259–260). To end a speech with a reference to the deity is not unusual in antiquity; it generally makes a good and powerful conclusion. As an example, we may refer to Socrates' speech to his judges, which ends as follows: "And to you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined as is best for you and me" (Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 35d).

Philo has Joseph present himself as a paragon of traditional Jewish virtue. Jews, he insists, are different from other people in that they respect the sexual code advocated by the Pythagoreans and the Stoics. While these philosophical schools shape the life only of individual sages with a philosophical bent of mind, the Jews practice the virtue of chastity collectively. From the perspective of Philo, they are a people of sages, perhaps the only philosophical people of the world, which is a proud and daring claim. Within the overall story of *De Iosepho*, the "failed seduction" episode serves as one of the tests in the education or "initiation" of a young man who is eventually to be the quasi ruler of Egypt, a man wearing Pharaoh's ring. This is how Philo refers to the protagonist's eventual status: "So he," Pharaoh, "made the young man his representative (διάδοχος) in the state, or rather, to tell the truth, he made him king (βασιλεύς). Although he kept the title of ruler for himself, he nevertheless left to him the work of governing (the state)" (*De Iosepho* 119). In modern parlance: the king rules, but he does not govern. The king's office would be very much like that of the queen of present-day Britain or Denmark, and Joseph's position like that of the prime minister of these countries. Philo insists on Joseph's closeness to the king for a reason subtly suggested at the very beginning of *De Iosepho*: he wishes to retell the biblical story in order to produce a Jewish counterpart of Xenophon's famous *Education of Cyrus*.[6]

Interestingly, Philo's virtuous young Joseph has a counterpart in the Greek dramatic tradition, where the virtuous character is a young man by the name of Hippolytus. He resists the advances of his stepmother Phaedra who is passionately in love with him. As a result, Phaedra speaks to her husband Theseus, accusing Hippolytus of having raped her. Theseus curses his son who dies in battle with a sea monster. When Phaedra learns of Hippolytus' death, she admits her crime and commits suicide. This is how the Roman dramatist and philosopher Seneca presents the myth in his stage play *Phaedra*, and it includes a few interesting lines that parallel Philo's reference to the notion of bad conscience. In Philo's *De Iosepho* 47–48, the titular hero argues that were he to indulge in adultery, he would be plagued by a bad conscience, and he describes this in detail. The use of the word for conscience is noteworthy, since the word was not yet firmly established in the days of Philo (the substantival participle τὸ συνειδός, "that which is co-aware"). Noteworthy again is the description of a bad conscience in Seneca's *Phaedra* (ca. 50 C.E.). In this case, it is not Hippolytus who refers to it, but Phaedra's nurse who seeks to dissuade her mistress from her designs on Hippolytus. Phaedra's nurse argues that illicit sex may be kept secret, but "there's still something to penalise you which won't be dislodged. I mean the mind, the terror of knowing, the soul teeming with guilt and frightened even of itself. How do you deal with that? Some women have stayed safe though they have sinned, but none has kept anxiety at bay" (Seneca, *Phaedra* 163–169[7]). "Illicit sex produces a bad conscience" seems to be a common *topos*, but it has also been suggested that Philo may be indebted to the same lost source that was used by Seneca.[8]

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[6] See Philo, *Das Leben des Politikers*, 19–22 and 45 n. 15.

III. The Polis Seduction Episode

Several times, Philo interrupts his philosophical retelling of the biblical Joseph story to include longer passages dealing with the same subject matter, though from a different angle. He gives several of the Joseph episodes an urban Hellenistic setting, and models his protagonist on an elected representative of a polis. That elective popular assembly is described in negative terms, because, as Philo assumes, the masses don't follow the ethical standards required of their elect. This opposition is visualised in the exchange between Epithymia, the female personification of unbridled desire, and the man of politics who stands for virtue and political reason. In order to make his allegory consistent, Epithymia's husband, here named Ochlos ("the masses", meaning the popular assembly), is portrayed (by his wife, to be sure) as being in complete agreement with Epithymia, and thus as a negative, problematic character unlike Joseph's master in Philo's retelling of the biblical episode.

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[7] Seneca, *Phaedra* (transl. F. Ahl; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 52–53.

[8] See *Philo with an English Translation*, 6:600–601.

Here is a paraphrase of Epithymia's speech:

> (64) Like a lustful woman, Epithymia, the lust of the multitude, desires (to make love to) the man of politics, and she speaks to him as follows:
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> "Hey you, who have come to Ochlos (Multitude), who is my husband: forget all the customs and manners, all the ways of thinking and acting you were brought up with! Listen to me, serve me, and do all that gives me pleasure. (65) I just cannot stand a grumpy and stubborn man, fanatical for the truth, who uncompromisingly thinks of justice, who never gives in, who clings to that which is beneficial only, and fails to pay court to his audience. (66) I, Epithymia, will assemble a thousand charges against you to lay before Ochlos, my husband and your master. Clearly: you are taking too many liberties. Remember: You are nothing but the servant of a tyrannical master – don't you understand? Acting freely befits only the free, not the slave. Would you but realise this, you would give up your stubborn independence, and you would look to me, Epithymia, the wife of your master! For a long time already you would have obeyed my wishes – and thus satisfy your master." (Philo, *De Iosepho* 64–66)

An abstract noun presented as a person who speaks belongs to the standard repertoire of ancient rhetoric. As a poetic device, personification is also used in the Bible, where Epithymia has a counterpart in Lady Folly who addresses the young, inexperienced student of wisdom, whom she seeks to seduce (Proverbs 9). Among the ancient Hebrew texts found in the Judaean Desert is a fragment that the first editor had dubbed "The Wiles of the Wicked Woman," and to this day scholars debate whether the text should be understood as a warning against real-life women or as a warning against pagan culture personified as a seductress.[9] In classical literature, the most famous personifications were the couple Arete (Virtue) and Kakia (Vice) in the story of Heracles at the Crossroads, famously transmitted by Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2.1,21–34). In this fable, the two personifications address the young man Heracles. In other words: the scene imagined by Philo resonates with ancient texts and therefore would have been easily understood. Epithymia's speech is immediately answered by the man of politics whom she seeks to seduce. Here is the man's speech, again in paraphrase:

> (67) The true man of politics is well aware of the despotic power of the people. He does not consider himself a slave, but regards himself as a free man fulfilling his own ambitions. Therefore he answers unhesitatingly:
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> "To cringe before the people – this I have never learned nor will I strive to practise it. Since as leader I have charge of the state, I will hold office as a good guardian and

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[9] See the discussion about "The Evil Suductress (4Q184)" in J. Kampen, *Wisdom Literature* (Eerdmans Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 233–249. According to Tal Ilan, it is "quite likely" that the evil seductress of the Qumran text is "not a warning against real women"; see T. Ilan, "Women in Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. T. H. Lim and J. J. Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123–147, here 130.

an affectionate father – guilelessly, sincerely, without the dissimulation that I hate. (68) I will discharge my duties in this spirit. I do not have any secret thoughts that I would hide like a thief; instead, my clear conscience is visible like the light of the sun. Truth is light. I am not afraid of any power that could rise against me, threatening to kill me. For me, dissimulation is the most terrible evil, worse even than death – (69) so why should I indulge in it?

While the people may be despotic, I'm not their slave. If I had to choose a name for myself, I would call myself a nobleman who aspires to be enrolled among the citizens of the largest and best state – that of the entire world. (70) Now that neither bribes nor threats, nor aspiration to honour and power and fame, nor boasting, excess, cowardice and injustice – anything based upon passion and vice – will ever be able to subdue me: what despotic power is still left for me to fear? (71) The power of the people? Others may rule over my body, but they cannot rule over my inner self. There is a stronger force that manages the affairs of the state – the reason that resides within me. I am determined to live according to it, with little thought for my mortal body. It has the form of a shell: it may be maltreated outwardly, but the inside remains untouched by the rule of evil masters and mistresses. Thus I can escape from the most cruel tyranny and will never be discouraged.

(72) When it comes to the administration of justice, I will do it honourably. I will not favour the man of wealth because of his wealth, nor the poor man through pity for his misfortune. I will consider neither the reputation nor the social status of anyone. I will in all honesty award what will appear just. (73) At the council I will introduce proposals for the common good, even if they are not met with approval. At popular assemblies I leave all rhetoric of flattery to others. My word is meant to be salutary and beneficial. I will reprove, warn, and call to prudence in all soberness and frankness, without permitting myself any presumption. (74) Those who resent being advised to improve should also reproach parents, guardians, teachers and all superiors for reprimanding and occasionally beating their own children, or orphans or pupils out of love and affection, and not out of a wish to curse and maltreat them. (75) And, as for public welfare: for me as a man of politics, to whom are entrusted all matters pertaining to the people, it would be beneath my dignity to act less carefully than any medical practitioner. (76) The physician shows no respect for the high social standing of a patient and the advantages that this may bring him. The patient may be high-born, wealthy, rank as the currently most famous king or tyrant – for the physician, all of this is utterly meaningless. His only aim is this: to do everything necessary for the restoration of his patient's health, which may involve surgery and burning, so that a simple subject, someone called a slave, applies knife and fire to his master and lord. (77) What, then, am I to do, I as someone who has not just an individual for a patient, but an entire state (polis)? One that suffers from severe illnesses, from inbred desires? Shall I disregard the good for all, in order to act like a slave who spoils now this one, and now that one, with flattering speech, unworthy of a free man? I'd rather die than utter flattering words and keep silent on that which is truly beneficial – (78) as the poet says:

> So then let fire come, let swords advance!
> Roast and consume my flesh, drink my dark blood,
> take your fill of me – for sooner shall the stars
> go 'neath the earth, and earth rise to the sky,
> than thou from these lips shalt hear fawning words."
> (Philo, *De Iosepho* 67–78)

Some details merit or require commentary:

(67) In ancient political theory, the rule of the masses was considered an "ochlocracy," a perverted form of democracy: "It is not enough to constitute a democracy that the whole crowd of citizens should have the right to do whatever they wish or propose" (Polybius, *History* 6.4,4). For a similar statement, see Cicero, *De re publica* 1.69. – "Father": "A good ruler differs in no respect from a good father, because a father takes thought that blessings may never fail his children" (Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* 8.1,1).

(69) The speaker wants to be a "cosmopolitan", i. e. a citizen of the world. The term "cosmopolitan" does not appear in the present text, but Philo uses it elsewhere, see Philo, *De confusione linguarum* 106.

(70) "Threats": for this meaning of παρακλήσεις, see Philo, *De vita Mosis* 1.44.

(71) The distinction between "power over someone's body" and "power over someone's soul" is common in ancient literature; for examples, see 4 Maccabees 13:14 and Matthew 10:28. – "Evil mistresses": the reference is to the Greek household in which the wife is in charge, while her husband pursues his business outside the household proper; see Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 7.22.

(72) The office of judge is among the most important tasks of the politically active Athenian citizen. Two further important tasks are referred to in (73): the business of being a counselor and attending the popular assembly. Philo's man of politics is a politically active citizen and elected officeholder, not a statesman in high office.

(73) The making of relevant suggestions despite their prior rejection is documented at least once: in the year 406 B.C.E., Socrates, then a member of the Athenian board of counselors, was the only one to speak up against the illegal decision of the popular assembly to execute several generals; nevertheless, the generals were killed. See Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1,18; Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 32b / c.

(77) Socrates, too, prefers death to using flattering words, see Plato, *Gorgias* 522d / e.

(78) This poetic passage forms an excellent pathetic conclusion to the speech, similar to the reference to goddess Dike at the end of the hero's earlier speech (see no. 48 above). The exact source of the quotation is unknown; specialists attribute it to a lost drama by Euripides (fragment 687). Philo liked the quotation and used it several times in other works, for instance in Philo, *Every Good Man is Free* 25 and 99. F. H. Colson annotates the passage in his Loeb edition by identifying the quotation's first line as coming from Euripides, *Phoenissae* 521. In this case, we would have a composite quotation – one that unites parts of one or more passages. Ancient literature, including the New Testament, has many composite quotations; for examples, see Romans 3:10–18 and Mark 1:2–3. In his paper on composite quotations in Philo, James Royse does not refer to our Euripides quotation.[10] My guess would be that the entire quotation comes from a single, lost source. – So much for the details.

What the speaker offers here is a self-portrait in which the man of politics insists on his absolute commitment to the general welfare of the city, independence, and incorruptibility. He claims to be free of any personal ambition and immune to partisan pressure. In the case of conflict, he is ready to endure even physical aggression rather than compromise his independence. All of this is summed up in the notion that the virtuous man of politics identifies himself as a citizen of the world, which implies that he is committed to universal values,[11] and not just to local ones or to those that fulfil the wishes of a particular party or pressure group. Interestingly, Philo returns to the subject "the masses and the political leader" in a later passage in *De Iosepho*, revealing how the populace might actually deal with their leader. As an allegorical aside in his retelling of how Pharaoh gave Joseph a golden chain to wear round his neck (Gen 41:42), Philo writes:

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[10] J. R. Royse, "Composite Quotations in Philo of Alexandria," in *Composite Citations in Antiquity*, *Volume One* (ed. S. A. Adams and S. M. Ehorn; LNTS 525; London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 74–91.

> (150) The golden chain seems to refer to glory and punishment at the same time: as long as the affairs of the state fare well, the man of politics can be proud and will be honoured by the masses; but when anything goes wrong – even without his responsibility, but by mere coincidence – then this may be pardonable, but people do catch him by the chain and drag him down.

This way of dealing with political leaders is not uncommon even in modern times. Max Weber recommended it after the First World War to the leaders of Germany's Weimar Republic: "In a democracy," he explained, "the people elect a leader whom they trust. Then the chosen man says: Now shut up and obey. The people and the parties are no longer free to interfere in the leader's business. But later, the people have the right to sit in judgment. If the leader has made mistakes – to the gallows with him!"[12] Weber's comment echoes the old problem of democratic government that always includes two components – the people and the elected leader, and it is not easy to define their relationship. Weber would certainly have appreciated Philo's discussion of the matter – and no doubt also would have pointed out the essential difference between the spirit of Philo's ancient democracy and the spirit of its modern equivalent: for the modern theorist, democratic control secures political success, while for the ancient theorist, political success depends exclusively upon the individual leader who, according to Philo, controls his own passions. Ultimately, the difference can be defined as that between ancient idealism and modern pragmatism.

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[11] For more on this, see E. Brown, "The Emergence of Natural Law and the Cosmopolis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought* (ed. S. Salkever; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 331–363.

[12] Reported by Marianne Weber, *Max Weber: Ein Lebensbild* (Munich: Piper, 1989), 665 (my translation).

IV. Conclusion

In his biographical treatise *On Joseph*, the first-century C.E. Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria elaborates the biblical episode of the Egyptian woman's failed seduction of Joseph as told in Genesis 39. He considers it an important episode that merits being used twice. Philo's first retelling of the episode permits Joseph to give a long speech in which he extols the ideal of sexual purity among the Jewish people in general, and to show himself qualified for the position of a vizier of the kingdom of Egypt. The second retelling of the episode culminates in another long speech of the protagonist who portrays himself as the democratically elected leader of a Hellenistic polis where the authority rests with the popular assembly. Once elected, the man of politics stays true to his commitment to the welfare of the city and to justice, and he resists the temptations of bribery and corruption. He is a man of virtue and strong principles. Ethical discourse, according to Philo, must be adapted to the specific institutional context in which it is to be relevant. By juxtaposing the two portraits of the political leader (i.e., the autocratic and the democratic leader), Philo unites in a literary diptych the two forms of political leadership current in his day. To the best of my knowledge, other ancient political treatises lack this comprehensive treatment.[13] Be that as it may, Philo clearly made a significant contribution to the political philosophy, and in particular to the political ethics, of his day.

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[13] Most ancient political treatises deal with the ideal (Hellenistic) king; the only treatise about the democratic leader of an ancient republic seems to be Cicero, *De re publica*. For a survey of relevant ancient texts, see the introductory chapter in Philo, *Das Leben des Politikers*, 19–28. Ancient sources in translation can be found in *Sources in Greek Political Thought: From Homer to Polybius* (ed. D. Kagan; New York: Free Press, 1965).