

ROMULUS D. STEFANUT

# The Therapeutae as the Best Paradigm for the Contemplative Life

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

659

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Romulus D. Stefanut

# The Therapeutae as the Best Paradigm for the Contemplative Life

A Contextual Reading of  
Philo of Alexandria's *De Vita Contemplativa*

Mohr Siebeck

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mentor,  
the late Dr. Hans-Josef Klauck.

Αιωνία ή μνήμη



## Acknowledgements

I came to the University of Chicago as a graduate student to pursue research in the history of religions, inspired by some of my Romanian compatriots who taught there, most notably Mircea Eliade and Ioan-Petru Culianu. My initial interests centered on teleology—the study of the “meaning of life”—in both philosophy and world religions. As I took classes and gradually narrowed my research focus to Ancient Judaism and Christianity for my PhD major, and to the Philosophy of Religion for my minor, I found myself increasingly fascinated by the work of Philo Judaeus of Alexandria, the eminent Jewish exegete and philosopher of the first century CE. At the encouragement and suggestion of my Doktorvater, Dr. Hans-Josef Klauck, I began working on the teleology and theology of Philo of Alexandria, a project that proved to be both extraordinarily rich and deeply rewarding.

First of all, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor and mentor, Professor Hans-Josef Klauck, to whom this book is dedicated, for his gentle guidance, unwavering support, and encouragement throughout my studies, especially during my examinations and the writing of my dissertation. I could not have hoped for a better advisor, one who so perfectly embodied the delicate balance between accountability and academic freedom. My readers, Dean Gregory E. Sterling of Yale University and Professor David G. Martinez of the University of Chicago’s Classics Department, deserve equal thanks for holding me to high scholarly standards and for offering invaluable expertise and constructive criticism whenever I needed it. Professor Sterling’s breadth and depth in Philonic studies have been tremendously helpful, while Dr. Martinez’s mastery of Greek literature and philosophy, as well as the original sources, has always been illuminating and formative.

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Sewanee, Tennessee  
January 2026

*Romulus Daniel Stefanut*

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## Abbreviations

AArch	Acta Archaeologica
ABC	Anchor Bible Commentary
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BI	Biblical Interpretation
BJS	Biblical Judaic Studies
BR	Bible Research
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICS	Illinois Classical Studies
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBPR</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTsup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSQ</i>	<i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , 9th ed.
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NT	New Testament
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OT	Old Testament

Rhet	Rhetorica
RLAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SPh	<i>Studia Philonica</i>
SPhA	Studia Philonica Annual
SPhM	Studia Philonica Monographs
StPatr	Studia Patristica
Teubner	Bibliotheca scriptorum graecorum et romanorum teubneriana
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZPE	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

## Chapter I

# Introduction

## A. Working Hypothesis

### 1. Thesis

The subject of this study is a contextual reading of Philo's *De vita contemplativa* (*Contempl.*)<sup>1</sup> exploring its background, genre, composition, and function beyond the so-called apologetic and historical works of Philo.<sup>2</sup> Often, scholars – both ancient and modern – have lost the hermeneutical focus of the treatise itself and have concentrated their attention solely on the historical existence of the Mareotic community described in the treatise, advancing arguments related to its historicity or lack thereof.<sup>3</sup> My hypothesis is that the purpose of Philo's *De vita contemplativa*, as the surviving second half of a treatise on Jewish βίαι<sup>4</sup>, is meant to offer the best Jewish Alexandrian expression of a way of life, well-known from ancient Greek philosophy as the theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> For citing particular passages from Philo's *De vita contemplativa* I used the abbreviations system developed by the Society for Biblical Literature and published in *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 2nd ed., Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014 and *Studia Philonica Annual (SPhA)*, the premier journal of Philonic studies. An overview of this system can be found in any of the latest editions of the *SPhA*, for instance *SPhA* 25 (2013): 251–54.

<sup>2</sup> Most of the Philonic scholars include Philo's *De vita contemplativa* among the apologetic and historical writings. For instance, in one of the latest introductions to Philo, James Royce follows the traditional taxonomy of placing *Contempl.* among the “Apologetic and Historical Works.” See Adam Kamesar, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 50–55.

<sup>3</sup> An ancient example would be Eusebius of Caesarea who saw the Therapeutae as the historical community behind the Gospel of Mark (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.16–17). A contemporary example would be Troels Engberg-Pedersen who dismisses the historical value of Philo's treatise based on narrow historical methodological presuppositions (e.g., an ancient treatise is either historical or fictional, no middle ground being considered), thus trying to put an end to any future historical scholarship on *Contempl.* See Troels Engberg-Pedersen, “Philo's *De Vita Contemplativa* as a Philosopher's Dream,” *JSJ* 1 (1999): 40–64.

<sup>4</sup> Philo notes in *Contempl.* 21 that this kind of contemplative people, or philosophers, existed in many parts of the inhabited world (πολλαχού μὲν οὖν τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐστὶ τὸ γένος) but particularly around Alexandria (μάλιστα περὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν). This point refers to any contemplative groups among the Jewish diaspora, as well as to any contemplative group regardless of their ethnicity.

or contemplative life (θεωρητικὸς βίος). *Contempl.* is composed in relation, rather than opposition, to the lost first half of the treatise, dedicated to and exemplified by the practical or active life (πρακτικὸς βίος) of the Essenes.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, I would like to suggest that there might be a friendly polemic<sup>8</sup> between Philo's description of the Therapeutae versus the Essenes, making the point that the Alexandrian Jewish diaspora is by no means inferior to the establishment in Jerusalem and Judea.<sup>9</sup>

If one takes Philo's programmatic intentions at face value,<sup>10</sup> the Therapeutic group is the best *exemplum* and paradigm<sup>11</sup> for what a Hellenistic Jewish θεωρητικὸς βίος would look like in the first-century CE Alexandria. In constructing the θεωρητικὸς βίος of the Therapeutae as a later stage in life, immediately following the πρακτικὸς βίος,<sup>12</sup> Philo brings together, critically

<sup>5</sup> The *LSJ* Dictionary gives a limited semantic range of possibilities for the adjective θεωρητικὸς including perceptible, speculative, and contemplative. See Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), θεωρητικὸς 1.673. When the adjective accompanies the noun βίος it always refers to the venerable way of life known as the contemplative life.

<sup>6</sup> According to *LSJ*, the term πρακτικὸς can have a wide range of meanings, from fit or concerned with action, to effective, effectual, vigorous, strong, cf. "πρακτικὸς," *LSJ* 1.1263. All these semantic facets are very fitting to describe the Essenes community, as we know it from Philo's work.

<sup>7</sup> The Essenes were members of a Jewish religious group that flourished in Palestine from about the 2nd century BCE to the end of the 1st century CE. Scholars think that the Essenes were responsible for the creation and preservation of the famous Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. Josephus Flavius offers a compelling description of the Essenes in *War.* 2.119–61; and in *Ant.* 15.371–3; 18.18–22. Philo himself talks about the Essenes in *Prob.* 75–91 and in *Hypoth.* 11.1–18, a text preserved by Eusebius in his *Praep. ev.* 8.11.1–18.1. For an ample discussion on the presentation of the Essenes in Philo as well as in other sources, cf. Joan E. Taylor, "Philo of Alexandria on the Essenes: A Case Study on the Use of Classical Sources in Discussions of the Qumran-Essene Hypothesis," *SPhA* 19 (2007): 1–28.

<sup>8</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this polemical aspect has not been identified in scholarship, and therefore needs more elaboration. I will return to this point in the last chapter.

<sup>9</sup> The culmination of this friendly polemic, in my view, is Philo's claim that the translation of the Bible in Greek, the Septuagint, is equal if not superior to the Hebrew text itself. Cf. *Mos.* 2.25–45.

<sup>10</sup> The programmatic intentions are expressed in the first chapter of the treatise: *περὶ τῶν θεωριᾶν βίον ... λέξω, μηδὲν οἰκοθεν ἔνεκα τοῦ βελτιώσαι προστιθείς, ὃ δρᾶν ἔθος ἐν σπάνει καλῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἅπασιν τοῖς ποιηταῖς καὶ λογογράφοις, ἀλλ' ἀτεχνῶς αὐτῆς περιεχόμενος τῆς ἀληθείας*, "to speak of those who have embraced the contemplative life ... adding nothing of my own for the sake of improving the account, as is the custom of all poets and as speech writers do, for lack of good habits, but simply embracing the truth itself" (*Contempl.* 1).

<sup>11</sup> I take that an *exemplum* has only limited descriptive value, whereas a paradigm is not only descriptive but also prescriptive.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Praem.* 1.51 where the contemplative life comes in sequence after the practical life and as a crowning stage of one's life: *τῷ δὲ δι' ἀσκήσεως περιποιησαμένῳ φρόνησιν ὄρασις· μετὰ γὰρ τὸν ἐν ἐνόητι πρακτικὸν βίον ὁ ἐν γήρᾳ θεωρητικὸς βίος ἀριστος καὶ ἱερώτατος*,

and creatively, various insights from Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and religion. This process of adaptation is an instance of “soft eclecticism.”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the description of the Therapeutic community itself is constructed on a clear and distinct Hellenized Jewish foundation. For instance, the τέλος of men and women exemplified by the Therapeutae exhibits the (Hellenistic) trope of philosophy as a “therapy of the soul” (θεραπείη ψυχᾶς) to address the (Jewish) theological solution of humanity experiencing sin as an incurable (ἀθεράπευτος νόσος) disease (cf. *Contempl.* 2 and *Opif.* 155) caused by the fall of humanity.<sup>14</sup>

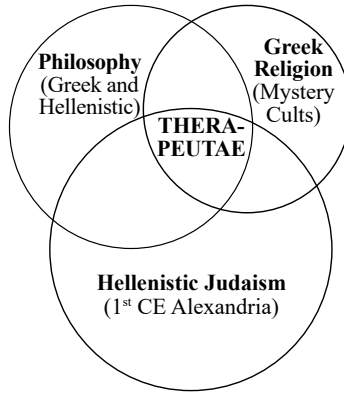


Figure 1 – Influences in the Makeup of Therapeutae <sup>15</sup>

“But to him who has acquired wisdom by meditation and practice, sight is given. For after the practical life of youth comes the contemplative life of old age, which is the most excellent and the most sacred” (*Praem.* 1.51). He presents the practical life of youth as being devoted to social causes such as raising a family, but the most excellent life comes at the sunset of adulthood, being devoted to meditation and the acquisition of wisdom.

<sup>13</sup> For the idea of Philo’s eclecticism, I am indebted to Dillon’s study on Philo’s religious and philosophical thought. Cf. John M. Dillon and A. A. Long, *The Question of “Eclecticism”*: *Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 70–102.

<sup>14</sup> ἐφυγάδευσεν ἐκ τοῦ παραδείσου, μηδ’ ἐπίδα τῆς εἰσαυθις ἐπανόδου δυσίατα καὶ ἀθεράπευτα πλημμελοῦση ψυχῇ παρασχόν, “[God] banished him [man] from paradise, giving no hope of any subsequent restoration to his soul which had erred in such a hard to heal and incurable way” (*Opif.* 155). The same idea of an almost δυσίατος (incurable) disease appears in *Contempl.* 2. Elsewhere, the sinful disease of humanity is attributed not to God’s direct creation of man but to delegating the work of creation to a lower, less competent deity (cf. *Conf.* 179).

<sup>15</sup> The intersection of the unequal three circles suggests that Philo’s presentation of the Therapeutae draws on incongruent source material. The largest circle represents influences coming from the Hellenistic Jewish tradition, the middle circle influences from Greek Philosophy, and the smallest circle influences from the Graeco-Roman and Egyptian mystery cults.

Philo's treatise composed as a προτρεπτικός λόγος has important exhortatory and protreptic dimensions. He possibly aimed it at his own Jewish compatriots who were in danger of losing the foundation of their ancestral faith, having been surrounded by competing cultural models and currently living in hostile political circumstances.<sup>16</sup> Scholars have suggested that a likely *Sitz im Leben* for the initial composition of *De vita contemplativa* might be a draft of an apologetic oration associated with Philo's embassy to Gaius. We know for a fact that Philo interrupted his own contemplative life in the years of 39–40 CE in order to lead the Jewish delegation before the Roman emperor Gaius Caligula. Unfortunately, Philo and his compatriots were not granted a fair hearing by the emperor himself or by his staff.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately, after the death of Gaius, the new emperor Claudius de-escalated the conflict and adopted what seems to be a more favorable position in support for the Jewish cause.<sup>18</sup>

Upon returning home, Philo not only resumed his contemplative life, but he also decided to champion this way of life as a means to win his compatriots who were in danger of losing their Jewish heritage. In order to persuade his brothers and sisters, Philo composed a protreptic discourse appealing to a Jewish audience living in a hostile Hellenistic world. Philo's rhetorical arsenal included the use of philosophical concepts (e.g., the Platonic-Aristotelian language of the classical virtues,<sup>19</sup> critique of Epicurean pleasure,<sup>20</sup> and endorsement of some Stoic virtues<sup>21</sup>) and language reminiscent of the mystery cults (e.g., *sobria ebrietas*), alongside Jewish allegorical exegesis<sup>22</sup> to capture

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<sup>16</sup> The 38 CE riots against the Jews in Alexandria are well documented by Philo in two of his historical-apologetic works: *In Flaccum* (Against Flaccus) and *Legatio ad Gaium* (Embassy to Gaius). Thus, it makes sense that Philo dedicated the latter part of his life defending his compatriots before the Roman emperor Caligula. For a substantial treatment of the Jewish pogrom, see Sandra Gambetti, *The Alexandrian Riots of 38 C.E. and the Persecution of the Jews: A Historical Reconstruction*. Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Legat.* 28–31.

<sup>18</sup> This conclusion can be drawn from Claudius's famous letter, though this letter is very harsh on Alexandrian Jews in some of its passages (cf. *CPJ II no. 153*).

<sup>19</sup> Not only do they pursue εὐδαιμονία (happiness), but the classical virtues are attributed to the members of the Mareotic community: φρόνησις (prudence) in *Contempl.* 14, 31; δικαιοσύνη (justice) in *Contempl.* 17; ἐγκράτεια (self-control) in *Contempl.* 34 and ἀνδρεία (courage) in *Contempl.* 60.

<sup>20</sup> For a critique of the life devoted to ἡδονή (pleasure), cf. *Contempl.* 2, 58–59, 68, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Although Philo was influenced by several philosophers and schools of thought including Stoic ethics, Plato remains the “greatest of all” and the “most holy,” cf. *Prov.* 2.42 and *Prob.* 13.

<sup>22</sup> According to John Collins, Philo was the finest exponent of the allegorical tradition in Hellenistic Judaism, but he sits on the shoulders of other giants, such as Aristobulos. “There was always a tradition in Hellenistic Judaism which attempted to provide a deeper philosophical basis for its teachings. Philo was the supreme example, but he had his predecessors, even if they were less systematic in their approach.” John J. Collins, *Between Athens and*

the attention of and to deliver a therapeutic effect upon his Hellenized Jewish audience.

The heart of the θεωρητικὸς βίος as a therapy of the soul is captured by Philo in the simplicity of spiritual exercises practiced by the Therapeutae. It is remarkable that according to Pierre Hadot the only two surviving ancient lists of spiritual exercises come from Philo of Alexandria.<sup>23</sup> This suggests that Philo was not only familiar with spiritual exercises but that he made extensive use of them in his own life and also in composing *De vita contemplativa*. For this reason, one wonders to what extent *Contempl.* is a self-projection of Philo's own contemplative life.

<i>Her. 253</i>	<i>Leg. 3.18</i>	<i>Contempl.</i>
Research (ζήτησις)		
Thorough investigation (σκέψις)		
Reading (ἀνάγνωσις)	Reading (ἀνάγνωσις)	<i>Contempl.</i> 28
Attention/hearing (ἀκρόασις)		<i>Contempl.</i> 79
Listening (προσοχή)		<i>Contempl.</i> 31
Self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια)	Self-mastery (ἐγκράτεια)	<i>Contempl.</i> 34
Indifference to indifferent things		<i>Contempl.</i> 13
	Meditation (μελέτη)	<i>Contempl.</i> 64
	Remembrance (μνήμη)	<i>Contempl.</i> 26, 56
	Accomplishment of duties	<i>Contempl.</i> 13
		Other spiritual exercises: Simplicity ( <i>Contempl.</i> 29, 39) Abstinence ( <i>Contempl.</i> 35–37), etc.

Figure 2 – Comparative Table of Spiritual Exercises in Philo<sup>24</sup>

Given Philo's popularity in Christian circles,<sup>25</sup> I would like to propose that Philo indeed paved the way for integrating spiritual exercises pertaining to

*Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 186.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold Davidson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 84.

<sup>24</sup> This table includes a compilation of the two ancient surviving sources of spiritual exercises alongside my own proposal of a spiritual exercises list from *De vita contemplativa*.

<sup>25</sup> For the Christian reception of Philo, cf. David Runia, "Philo and the Early Christian Fathers," in Kamesar, *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, 210–30 and especially the standard reference work by David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*, *Compendia*

θεωρητικός βίος into a religious tradition (not yet monasticism per se because Philo was just a precursor to this movement). In doing so, not only did Philo offer a model of how Judaism could be understood as a contemplative philosophy, but he also illustrated how concrete spiritual practices taken from various philosophical schools could be adopted and adapted to a Jewish framework. The result was a marvelous treatise with a rich impact on the Christian tradition.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. Structure of the Argument

In this *first chapter*, I present my hypothesis. This includes the general structure of the argument, together with the methodological toolbox, comprised of literary, rhetorical and historical criticism. Briefly stated, having fulfilled their active life including mandatory family and community duties during their youth and middle-age years, the Therapeutae represented a Hellenized Jewish community of allegorical interpreters of the Septuagint (LXX), totally devoted to the contemplative life in their sabbatical years.

In the *second chapter*, I investigate the idea of θεωρητικός βίος in Greek philosophy and in various Hellenistic philosophical schools. The most extensive treatment of the contemplative life in Greek philosophy belongs to Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, books I.5 and X.6–8, but the manner of life itself was introduced much earlier, arguably by Democritus. Aristotle portrays the contemplative life as the highest way of life and the most desirable type of existence for anyone in pursuit of happiness. In total juxtaposition to the contemplative life are the life devoted to pleasure or financial gain, and also, surprisingly for Aristotle, the life of politics.

In the *third chapter*, I trace the ideas of θεωρητικός βίος and its correlatives in Philo's corpus. It is not surprising to learn that Philo wove a rich thread of thoughts about "best lives" throughout his works. While the texture of his ideas is informed by the Greek philosophical tradition, Philo filters this tradition through the teachings of the Torah. His major insight is to connect the active life with the contemplative life, making the latter the final and best stage.

The *fourth chapter* unpacks the specifics of how Philo constructed the Therapeutae as the best candidates for βίος θεωρητικός. Using the rhetorical figure of σύγκρισις (comparison), Philo compared and contrasted various individuals or groups, carefully selected for their contemplative practices. The result

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Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3, Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature 3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> The enthusiastic reception of Philo among Christian Church Fathers is well documented. Not so with Philo's reception in Judaism. For instance, David Winston noted in his study devoted to the Rabbinic reception of Philo the following state of affairs: "One looks in vain for an explicit reference to him [Philo] in that vast corpus of [Rabbinic] writings." See David Winston, "Philo and Rabbinic Literature," in Kamesar, *Cambridge Companion to Philo*, 231.

of this comparison is an elevation of the Therapeutae as the best of the best contemplative people. The values of the Therapeutae are seen through their ascetic<sup>27</sup> spiritual exercises, a medicine most conducive to their healing of the soul. Both individual and communal spiritual exercises, centered on the allegorical interpretation of the Torah, occupy the Therapeutae's daily and weekly rhythms of life. The spiritual exercises of the Mareotic community<sup>28</sup> are sharply contrasted with the excesses taking place at pagan banquets.

The *fifth chapter* deals with exploring the protreptic genre of *Contempl.* In the first part of this chapter, I critique and make an inventory of various genre proposals, starting with biography and ending with encomium. The second part of the chapter focuses on Philo's own genre claims and clues, taken first at face value, and then evaluated critically. According to *Contempl.* 1 Philo's work sets itself against myth, claiming instead to be a historical treatise. The third part offers my own proposal on the genre of *Contempl.* as a λόγος προτροπτικός. Instead of being an overt protreptic treatise, I suggest that we are witnessing a subtle protreptic composition well fitted for achieving Philo's ends.

In the *sixth chapter*, the focus turns to Philo's audience based on internal and external clues. I analyze four possible audience scenarios starting with a Roman, Greek, Egyptian, and Jewish Alexandrian audience. While the Roman-friendly features seem to point toward a Roman audience,<sup>29</sup> I defend a more nuanced target group of a primarily Jewish Alexandrian and diaspora audience. Philo's own people, alienated from the values and the "philosophical" way of life called Judaism, are the audience of Philo's treatise. My *seventh and last chapter* concludes the study, followed by an appendix.

Although the book concludes at this point, more work can be done to uncover the history of effects of Philo's treatise. Without doubt, Philo's model of βίος θεωρητικός has been adopted and adapted by what in later church fathers came to be known as Christian monasticism. Starting with Eusebius's "baptism" of the Therapeutae into the first community of Christian monks, we could look at other patristic figures beginning with Philo's hometown of Alexandria: Clement of Alexandria and Origen. The influence of Origen on the topic of βίος θεωρητικός made its way to the Cappadocians such as Gregory of Nyssa and slowly to the monks of Egypt, in particular Evagrius of Ponticus and Cassian in the East. Augustine of Hippo was the most influential proponent of *vita contemplativa* in the West. All these later interpreters demonstrate how

<sup>27</sup> The term ἄσκησις was conventionally used during the first century for the scholarly study of books (cf. Dionys. Hal., *De compositione verborum* 1.6). This meaning expanded to incorporate mortification of the flesh only later in the work of various church fathers. This aspect of the mortification of the flesh might be captured by Philo in the concept of ἐγκράτεια (self-control).

<sup>28</sup> The Therapeutae are sometimes referred to as the Mareotic community, due to their residence being located in the vicinity of Lake Mareotis (cf. Philo, *Contempl.* 22).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Marren R. Niehoff, "The Symposium of Philo's Therapeutae: Displaying Jewish Identity in an Increasingly Roman World," *GRBS* 50, no. 1 (2010): 95–116.

instrumental Philo's *Contempl.* was as an *exemplum* of applying the modes of contemplative life to a religious system.

### 3. Contribution

I see the contextual reading and interpretation of the contemplative life (βίος θεωρητικός) within the Philonic corpus and culminating in *De vita contemplativa* as my main contribution. This type of analysis on Philo's contemplative life has not been done in scholarship as far as I know. Through their mode of life, the Therapeutae provide a therapy to the diseases of the soul, generated by the Edenic fall of men and women. The healing process comes progressively and with age, the age of intellectual maturity, by returning to an Edenic carefree life, understood as a life of contemplation. Neither Conybeare's now outdated commentary on the Therapeutae, nor Taylor's more recent study, nor any other article that I consulted follow this course of investigation.

Another contribution that I hope to make is to provide a complete analysis of the *syncretic tableau* used by Philo in the construction of the βίος θεωρητικός. Some articles emphasize one or another mystery cult, or one or another philosophical school, especially Middle-Platonism and Stoicism. They thus fail to account for the entirety of influences and areas of convergence and overlapping between the various groups involved in the σύγκρισις. A result of this analysis, I anticipate, would call for a revision from predominantly Middle-Platonic influence on Philo's thought to a broader Aristotelian and Hellenistic philosophical influence.

The literary genre<sup>30</sup> of *Contempl.* has been debated for many years and various proposals have been articulated and even defended at length. No scholar, as far as I have researched, has argued for the genre of *logos protreptikos* in interpreting *De vita contemplativa*. I will suggest that this important genre (λόγος προτρεπτικός), which has several precursors before Philo, is the best available option for interpreting Philo's *Contempl.*

Finally, as a later research project I hope to explore the history of effects (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) by tracing back the literary history trajectories generated by Philo's *De vita contemplativa*. Without doubt, Philo's Therapeutae were used as a model for βίος θεωρητικός. The treatise was widely read, misinterpreted as a Christian work, and became instrumental in the development of what later came to be known as Christian mysticism and monasticism.

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<sup>30</sup> An impetus for investigating the genre of *Contempl.* comes from Gregory Sterling's proposal that the summaries of the Jerusalem community in the Acts of the Apostles are based on descriptions of religious-philosophical groups, rather than on ideal communities living in imaginary times and places: "One of the literary traditions that emerged in the Hellenistic world was the description of religious or philosophical groups. These descriptions stem from the ethnographic practice of describing the society and customs of a particular ethnos." See Gregory E. Sterling, "'Athletes of Virtue': An Analysis of the Summaries in Acts (2:41–47; 4:32–35; 5:12–16)," *JBL* 113, no. 4 (1994): 679–96, especially 678–80.

## B. Methodology

As far as the methodology is concerned, we will employ literary, rhetorical, and historical criticism in various degrees. Even though in theory one might separate these methodological tools for pedagogical purposes, in reality the literary, rhetorical, and historical layers are organically intertwined and combined in what I would like to call a contextual reading. This is, as we will seek to demonstrate, the case with this study on *De vita contemplativa* examined not only in the context of Philo's oeuvre but also in the larger philosophical and exegetical milieu.

1. In order to capture the various layers of the text (literary, allegorical, historical, etc.) our methodology needs to be diverse in its scope. By *literary criticism* I designate a contextual analysis of related literary texts. This involves both inner-textual connections and correlations such as paying attention to key concepts and ideas as they appear throughout *De vita contemplativa* but also outer-textual literary parallels from the Philonic corpus and beyond it. Some of these parallels are marked as direct or indirect quotations, others are just echoes or allusions to external texts. A close reading and exegesis of the Greek text of Philo's *De vita contemplativa* is the first and most important stage. Next comes the reading of *Contempl.* in Philo's larger oeuvre to account for the rich and intricate textual connections in light of the larger thematic concerns developed in Philo's thought. Finally, one needs to integrate Philo's ideas into the philosophical and exegetical tradition to which Philo rightly belonged, in order to appreciate the elements of continuity and discontinuity with Philo's forerunners and contemporaries.

A recent example in the field of biblical studies of theorizing and applying contextual readings is offered by papers presented at the 2005 conference on Biblical Intertextuality and its accompanying volume *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice*, edited by Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis R. MacDonald and Stanley E. Porter. As the editors observe, "the study of intertextuality, despite its potential, is quite undeveloped."<sup>31</sup> Although this conference was focused on the New Testament (NT) epistles, the methodology explored and exposed in some of the essays can be easily transferable to biblical studies and to other ancient texts.

Related to contextuality, and covering similar ground, is the term intertextuality,<sup>32</sup> understood as a literary phenomenon of reintroducing and recy-

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas L. Brodie, Dennis R. MacDonald, and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *The Intertextuality of the Epistles: Explorations of Theory and Practice* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 1.

<sup>32</sup> The meaning of the term "intertextuality" can be traced to Kristeva's essay "Word, Dialogue, Novel." The closest statement that comes to a definition of intertextuality is her view of the text as a newly constructed mosaic: "[intertextuality is] a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality

cling old concepts, motifs, and fragments of texts into new texts. As a literary phenomenon this practice is certainly traceable from the first written epics of humanity. For instance, in Greek literary culture, the *Odyssey* builds upon the *Iliad* and expands some of its themes related to the birth of Greek culture. Later on in a Roman context, the *Aeneid* retells the story of origins from a Roman point of view. Milton's *Paradise Lost* reworks the story of origins from a universal perspective, aspiring to include the whole birth of humanity. In our case, Philo's project in *Contempl.* draws on his Graeco-Roman and Jewish literary and historical experience to describe and prescribe the contemplative lifestyle to a "secularized" Jewish audience. Thus, in applying the contextual method, the researched text becomes a performative site of engagement with other texts.<sup>33</sup> The most important of these texts are brought together because of their influence and possibility of literary dependence. Therefore, our methodology will involve at least three steps, as follows:

i. *Selecting the web of texts that are relevant for the examined text (contextual influence)*. In examining the topic of the contemplative life, I will begin with a topical study of ancient philosophical texts such as Anaxagoras, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle etc. and reconstruct the complex history of ideas that preceded the thought of Philo of Alexandria.

ii. *Finding and categorizing the possible relations between the text and its predecessors*. This interaction can take place in different forms through imitation, allusion, echo, parody, irony, citation, etc.<sup>34</sup> For example, in treating the

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*replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double.*" Cf. Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 37. To come to this complex understanding of the interrelations between texts, Kristeva applied Bakhtin's notion of dialogue, beyond novel, to all texts including poetry. As a characteristic of every text, intertextuality assumes an *open* text as opposed to the structuralist perception of a *closed* text. To a certain extent, authors and readers disappear in the intertextual anonymity of the general text. This last point seems to be a little bit overstated in post-structuralist hermeneutics. Still, the insight of reconstructing the new text both synchronically and diachronically through the interplay of other texts is extremely valuable.

<sup>33</sup> In exploring the dialogical dimension of texts, Mikhail Bakhtin notes that every text involves an act of communication between an addresser and an addressee: "A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, the other end depends on my addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986], 86).

<sup>34</sup> According to The Westminster Dictionary of Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric, citations, allusions and echoes are frequent literary parallels. Citation is a quasi-verbatim reproduction of a text from a particular source (e.g., a quote from Homer in *Contempl.* 17). The citation is often prefaced with some sort of an introductory formula: "this is what Homer ...". In an allusion the writer does not reproduce a source verbatim but will use one or more words that are sufficiently distinctive to be traced by the reader to a known text (e.g., the solution for the healing of humanity represented by the Therapeutae project; cf. *Opif.* 155). An echo is subtler than an allusion and consists in a faint reference to a text. The rea-

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