

# The Concepts of Death and Life in the *Acts of John*: A Comparison with Philo of Alexandria

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**Abstract:** The article argues that the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ in the *Acts of John* are less ambiguous than some scholars assume, but that they often univocally refer to the death and the life of the soul. The second scholarly assumption I criticise is that these categories have a metaphorical meaning. Instead of metaphorically expressing the state of conversion of people, they denote the ontological status of the soul. ‘Dying’ refers to an ontological transformation of human beings into irrational beasts; the human soul changes into a beast’s soul. Finally, through a comparison with the writings of Philo of Alexandria, I explain particular characteristics of the concepts of death and life in the *Acts of John*. The author of the *Acts of John* is either directly dependent on Philo or stands in the same Alexandrian platonic tradition.

**Keywords:** Acts of John; Philo of Alexandria; Death; Life; The Death of the Soul

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## Introduction

The present article provides a historical-contextual study of the concepts of death and life in the *Acts of John* (abbr. *AJ*). The first section will briefly present the observations of previous scholars concerning the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ in the *AJ*. The second section will provide an analysis of the narratives in the *AJ* where the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ play an important role. The aim of this section is to elucidate the underlying concepts of death and life. As we will see, the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ are not so much ambiguous nor do they have a metaphorical meaning, as is commonly thought, but rather are often univocally used to refer to the ontological reality of the death and the life of the soul. Subsequently, the third section will look into the historical background of the concepts of the death and the life of the soul to explain the characteristics of these concepts in the *AJ*. Philo of Alexandria will be our main dialogue partner. The conclusion will summarise the main results of this study and formulate its implications for understanding the philosophical background of the *AJ*.

## 1. State of the Art

In a recent article, Janet Spittler argues that the *AJ* is ambiguous about whether Lykomedes, Kleopatra, the Ephesians at the Temple of Artemis, the father of the parricide, Drusiana, and Kallimachos are dead or alive before their resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Spittler considers this to be a consistent narrative strategy through which the *AJ* redefines the categories of living and dead. She thereby criticises scholars and translators who assume either that these characters are only euphemistically presented as alive but are actually dead or that their deaths must have taken place but are not narrated as such.<sup>2</sup> Simultaneously, she confirms the observations of previous scholars. Eugene Gallagher, for example, notes with reference to the story of Kleopatra and Lykomedes that “the lines between death and sickness blur” and that Kallimachos is wavering between dead and “merely temporarily out of commission”.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, János Bolyki sees Kleopatra and Lykomedes as “two (semi?-dead) persons” and Kallimachos as “semi-dead”.<sup>4</sup> Pieter Lalleman writes: “In the resurrections [...], it is often unclear whether those helped were only ill, apparently dead or really deceased”.<sup>5</sup> Judith Perkins observes the same for Kallimachos: “Although Callimachus is referred to at one point as a corpse (75.1), it is never clear whether he was actually dead.”<sup>6</sup> Given that Kleopatra, Lykomedes, and Kallimachos were not really dead, according to these scholars, they draw

- 1 The exception is the priest of Artemis, who according to Janet Spittler, “Νῦν ἀναστὰς οὐ ζῆς ὁντως: Resurrection in the Acts of John,” *Early Christianity* 14 (2023), 143–68, at 155, is “quite unambiguously dead”.
- 2 See Spittler, “Νῦν,” 148 with reference to Jan N. Bremmer, “Women in the Acts of John,” in *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity: Collected Essays I*, WUNT 379 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 99–114, at 102 n. 18. Another example would be Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, repr. 1972; 1st ed. 1924), 230 n. 1: “It is evident from what follows that Lycomedes died: but the text does not say so; some words may have fallen out.”
- 3 Eugene V. Gallagher, “Conversion and Salvation in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” *SecCent* 8/1 (1991), 13–29, at 19–20.
- 4 See János Bolyki, “Miracle Stories in the Acts of John,” in Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John*, Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles 1 (Pharos: Kampen, 1995), 15–35, at 18, 29.
- 5 Pieter J. Lalleman, *The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation into Johannine Gnosticism*, Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles 4 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 163.
- 6 Judith Perkins, “Resurrection and Social Perspectives in the Apocryphal Acts of Peter and Acts of John,” in Jo-Ann A. Brant, Charles W. Hedrick, and Chris Shea (eds.), *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*, SBL SymS 32 (Atlanta GA: SBL, 2005), 217–37, at 226.

the conclusion that the purpose of the resurrection stories in the *AJ* is not primarily a literal restoration to life, but a metaphorical conversion to the Christian faith of the resurrected person. The resurrections are primarily spiritual, meaning non-literal here, in terms of a conversion to the Christian faith.<sup>7</sup> Gallagher speaks of “an ideology of conversion whose dominant metaphor is death and resurrection”.<sup>8</sup> Perkins remarks that death in the *AJ* “is never more than a figure”. She adds that “physical death functions primarily as a symbol of the life before conversion”.<sup>9</sup> This has become the consensus among scholars as to the meaning of life and death in the *AJ*.

Spittler’s insight that the *AJ* attempts to redefine the meaning of the categories of living and dead provides the starting point of my analysis. Yet, the third section of this article will take an approach different from Spittler’s by viewing these categories through the lens of the ancient concept of the death of the soul. But first the next section will show that the language of death and life in the *AJ* is both less ambiguous and more meaningful than has been recognised.

## 2. The Concepts of Death and Life in the *Acts of John*

The *AJ* are part of the larger group of literary writings known as the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*, which also contain the *Acts of Andrew*, the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of Paul*, and the *Acts of Thomas*. Each of them was written by a separate author whose identity is unknown. The *AJ* are usually considered to be the oldest because the *Acts of Andrew* were most likely literary dependent on them.<sup>10</sup> The place of origin and the date of the *AJ* are highly debated:

7 See Paul G. Schneider, “‘A Perfect Fit’: The Major Interpolation in the Acts of John,” in E. H. Lovering (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta GA: SBL Press, 1991), 518–32, at 521, 527; Paul G. Schneider, *The Mystery of the Acts of John: An Interpretation of the Hymn and the Dance in Light of the Acts’ Theology* (San Francisco, Mellen Research University Press, 1991), 24–5; Bolyki, “Miracle Stories,” 23, 25, 32; Lalleman, *The Acts of John*, 164; Perkins, “Resurrection,” 224–26; Spittler, “Nūv,” 143–44, 149.

8 Gallagher, “Conversion,” 21.

9 Perkins, “Resurrection,” 226.

10 See Jean-Marc Prieur (ed.), *Acta Andreae: Textus*, CCSA 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), 394–400; Pieter J. Lalleman, “The Acts of Andrew and the Acts of John,” in Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Andrew*, Studies on the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles 5 (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 140–48; Jan N. Bremmer, “The Acts of John, the Acts of Andrew and the Greek Novel,” *Ancient Narrative* 17 (2021), 125–43.

Egypt, Syria, and Asia Minor (possibly Nicomedia) are possible candidates.<sup>11</sup> The proposed dates range from the early second century to the early third century CE.<sup>12</sup> My analysis of the *AJ* will focus on the narratives of (i) Lykomedes and Kleopatra (2.1), (ii) the picture of John (2.2), (iii) the Ephesians (2.3), (iv) the parricide and his father (2.4), (v) Kallimachos, Drusiana, and Fortunatus (2.5), and (vi) John's final speech (2.6).<sup>13</sup>

## 2.1 Lykomedes and Kleopatra (cc. 18–25)

The story pertains to a certain Lykomedes, a magistrate of Ephesus, who implores the apostle John to heal his wife Kleopatra since she “has been stricken down (παρὰ πλῆγῳ)<sup>14</sup> and lay uncured (ἀθερθεύτου) for seven days now” (19.5–6).<sup>15</sup> Although still alive, it is clear from Lykomedes' distress and the depiction of Kleopatra as “the woman having one breath” (τὴν πνοὴν μόνην ἔχουσιν γυναῖκα; 19.14) that she will soon be dead. Her death draws nearer in the next chapter, where Lykomedes calls her “the celebrated flower that is my suffering wife” (τὸ διαβόητον ἄνθος τῆς ταλαιπώρου μου γυναίκας; 20.3–4), a clear indication of her declining condition. In the next chapter, John speaks of Kleopatra as a “corpse” (πτῶμα; 21.23)—she is dead. Given that Kleopatra was breathing her last breath two chapters earlier, it is plausible

11 See Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apokryphe Apostelakten: Eine Einführung* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2005), 31–2. See also Harold W. Attridge, “Acts of John,” in J. Christopher Edwards (ed.), *Early New Testament Apocrypha*, Ancient Literature for New Testament Studies 9 (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2022), 216–33, at 216, and Tobias Nicklas, “Second Century Apocryphal Acts,” in M. Bird and S. Harrower (eds.), *Second Century Christianity: A Sourcebook* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2025), 387–416. For Nicomedia, see Bremmer, “Women,” 112–14.

12 For a short overview, see Attridge, “Acts of John”. The most extensive attempt to date the text is definitely Jan Bremmer, “Women,” 111–12, who argues for around 160–70. See also his “The Apocryphal Acts: Authors, Place, Time and Readership,” in *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity*, 219–34.

13 My study focuses on the earliest reconstructable form of the *AJ* and is based on the text-critical edition by Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli (eds.), *Acta Iohannis: Praefatio – Textus*, CCSA 1 (Turnhout, Brepols, 1983). The English translations are taken from Joey McCollum and Brent Niedergall (trans.), *Acts of John*, Brepols Library of Christian Sources 7 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022) with some adjustments. For my critical evaluation of this translation, see Thomas Tops, “J. McCollum and B. Niedergall (trans), Acts of John (Turnhout, 2022),” *RHE* 119 (2024), 295–96.

14 This is the only occurrence of παρὰ πλῆγῳ found in the TLG. It is either translated as “paralysée” (Junod – Kaestli) or “stricken down” (McCollum – Niedergall).

15 The term στρατιγός probably refers to a magistrate or “a member of the executive council of Ephesus”: see Bremmer, “Women,” 101 and Bremmer, “The Acts of John,” 129.

that she must have died by the end of c. 21. This is confirmed by John's later statement that she has breathed out her life (cf. τοὺς ἀποψύξαντες; 22.18). In this reading, there is no ambiguity in the use of the categories 'dead' and 'alive'. On the other hand, one cannot exclude that she was still alive in the biological sense. If this is the case, then John is speaking of her death in some other way.

That John probably speaks of Kleopatra being dead in a non-biological sense can be derived from what he says when he raises Kleopatra from the dead shortly after in cc. 22–23. In John's view, not her body but her soul was dead and in need of resurrection. He calls on Christ as a physician who restores her soul (22.14). The emphasis after her resurrection is not on her physical characteristics, but on the stability of her soul (cf. ἀκίνητον [...] τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἀμετάτρεπτον; 23.13–14), her emotional self-control (cf. μὴ ταρασση μὴδὲ κινῇ ἐπὶ τῷ γεγονότι; 23.15–16), and her faith in God (cf. πιστεύσασα ἐπὶ τῷ θεῷ μου; 23.16).<sup>16</sup> John and Lykomedes describe Kleopatra differently. While Kleopatra was dying, Lykomedes draws attention to her "faded beauty", her "youth", and her popularity among the Ephesians as "the celebrated flower" (20.3–5). After her resurrection, John puts the lens on her "self-control" (τὸ συνέχον), her "anguish" (τὴν ἀνάγκην), and "her crying out in the soul through the silence" after her resurrection (24.8–10).<sup>17</sup> This contrast in depiction emphasises that the concepts of life and death in the text do not so much pertain to the body, but rather to the soul. John further praises Kleopatra's emotional self-control and her faith that God will give her husband to her alive, despite her "intolerable anguish" (ἀφόρτην μανίαν; 24.10) caused by seeing her husband dead. The concept of life underlying this resurrection story is that life is dependent on the virtuous character of the soul. If the soul is not an unchanging and stable entity, that is, if one is not in control of one's emotions, one is considered 'dead'.<sup>18</sup> Faith in God is articulated as

16 Her emotional self-control is illustrated by her reaction when she saw her husband dead: "[...] she began to falter in her voice and grind her teeth and bite her tongue, and she closed her eyes, and her tears began to fall out in drops. And quietly, she turned to the apostle." (24.3–5)

17 As noted by McCollum and Niedergall, *Acts of John*, 27 n. 15, the threefold ὁρᾷς in 24.8–10 parallels the threefold ἴδε in 20.3–5. As a result, Lykomedes' depiction of Kleopatra is contrasted with John's.

18 Here and below, I use the term 'emotions' to refer to feelings as anger, fear, and shame. I will also sometimes use the term 'desires', when I refer to bodily appetites as for instance hunger, thirst, sexual desire. I derive this terminological distinction from Emma

an essential ingredient for retaining this stability of the soul. The concepts of life and death underlying the resurrection story imply that Kleopatra was dead all along, before her resurrection, despite the fact that she might not always have been dead in the biological sense.

Let us now turn to Lykomedes. As we have seen above, Lykomedes is the means by which the author of the *AJ* seems to relate physical aspects of Kleopatra, such that her illness leads to his desperation and contemplation of suicide (19.8–10). Although he is presented as having the reputation of being pious (εὐσεβής), he complains that he suffers more than the impious (δυσσεβοῦς; 20.9–11).<sup>19</sup> He thinks that he is unjustly treated by personified Δικῆ, a deity of justice. To escape this injustice, Lykomedes contemplates suicide and hopes that by doing so he will set himself free from life (cf. ἀπολύων ἑαυτὸν τοῦ βίου; 20.13), become “a phantom of life” (εἶδωλον βίου; 20.16) and have his revenge on Δικῆ. It is in this phantom life that Lykomedes anticipates he will be able to make a pronouncement to Δικῆ, as follows: “You forced out the light by snatching away Kleopatra; you made me become dead (νεκρόν) by rendering this to me; you have forced me to rage against providence and have cut off my παρρησία” (20.17–19).<sup>20</sup> The crux of my discussion is whether “dead” refers here to the physical death of Lykomedes as the result of his suicide. This is plausible because he is contemplating suicide. Another possibility would be that “dead” refers to his moral-psychological state as a result of his rage against providence. Having been mastered by his emotions, Lykomedes loses his rational capacities. His ability to speak without constraint, his παρρησία, is literally “cut off” (ἐκκόψασα). The association of losing one’s παρρησία with “dead” might not be coincidental, since the association of gaining παρρησία and obtaining eternal life is present in the *Acts of Thomas*.<sup>21</sup> Παρρησία is obviously a characteristic of human life, as it refers

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Wasserman, *The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology*, WUNT II/256 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 21.

19 The *AJ* depicts the virtue of piety as an ideal for Christ followers: see θεοσέβεια in 63.6 and 64.7 and θεοσεβής in 63.7 and 76.39.

20 The term παρρησία is difficult to translate here. It has both the connotations of ‘confidence’ and ‘free/unconstrained speech’ in this context.

21 *Acts of Thomas* 103: εἰσάξει δέ σε εἰς τὴν αἰωνίαν ζωὴν, παρέχων σοι τὴν παρρησίαν τὴν μὴ παρερχομένην μήτε ἀλλασσομένην. My translation: “He [Christ] will lead you into eternal life by providing you with the unrestrained and free speech that does not perish nor change.”

to unrestrained free speech.<sup>22</sup> The text seems to assume that without it, one cannot adequately be considered a human being anymore, but is actually “dead”. This second possible interpretation does not exclude the first. It is Lykomedes’ state of being mastered by his emotions that is responsible for his contemplation of suicide.

The second interpretation of Lykomedes’ death as depicting a moral-psychological state is favoured by what follows. Approaching Kleopatra in her bed, Lykomedes is crying and begins to wail. While exhorting him, John depicts Lykomedes as sleeping: “Wake yourself up and open your soul! Cast away this heavy sleep from you!” (διυπνίσθητι καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ ἀνοιξόν σου τὴν ψυχὴν. ἀπόβαλε τὸν πολὺν ὕπνον ἀπὸ σοῦ; 21.8–9). Sleep is a common euphemism for death elsewhere,<sup>23</sup> as it is here. John encourages Lykomedes to control his emotions and thereby come to life. To gain this control, Lykomedes has to obey Christ. John tears Lykomedes away from the bed and reproaches him: “It is not proper for you to disobey the one who appeared to you, for know that you are regaining your partner” (οὐ προσήκει ἀπειθῆσαι τῷ θεωμένῳ σοι. ἴσθι γὰρ ἀπολαμβάνων τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σύμβιον; 21.4–5). John is referring here to the person, probably Christ, who appears to Lykomedes (19.7–10) and tells him to “stop this oppressive thought battling against you”, by which he presumably means suicide. Lykomedes, however, continues to be overcome by his emotions: “But he, falling upon the floor, was wailing with all his soul (ὀλοψυχῶν)” (21.10–11).<sup>24</sup> In this respect and for our purposes, Lykomedes’ failure to obey the exhortations of John and his seemingly lifeless submission to wave after wave of emotions shows us that Lykomedes remains dead and is completely mastered by his emotions. This reading is confirmed by John’s depiction of Lykomedes as “lifeless/without breath” (ἄπνους; 21.18), one of “the two corpses” (cf. πτώματα δύο; 21.23), and one of “those who have

22 On *παρρησία* as a feature characteristic of free human existence, see the history of the word in Hartmut Leppin, *Paradoxe der Parrhesie: Eine antike Wortgeschichte*, Tria Corda 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

23 See e.g. John 11:11–14. θάνατος and ὕπνος are brothers in Greek mythology: see Hesiod, *Theog.* 758–760.

24 Although the verb ὀλοψυχέω is rare (cf. LSJ, s.v.), this reading offered by the manuscripts R and Z makes sense in the literary context and does not require emendation. James’ emendation to ὀλιγοψυχῶν is problematic because it assumes that Lykomedes was fainting while he was wailing (cf. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 230: “But he fell upon the floor and lamented, fainting”). The durative aspect of ἐθρήνει (“he was wailing”) suggests that Lykomedes was not fainting. Wailing requires consciousness.

breathed out their life” (τοὺς ἀποψύξαντες; 22.18). Not only John, but also the Ephesians consider Lykomedes as “having died” (τετελευτηκότος; 22.2). There is thus no ambiguity about whether Lykomedes is dead or alive. He has certainly died. The only ambiguity in the text is how to understand his death. For the Ephesians, Lykomedes seems to have died in the biological sense. For John, on the other hand, Lykomedes, like Kleopatra, is dead not in a physical sense, but in a moral-psychological sense, and he needs faith in God to master his emotions and bring him back to life.

We can conclude that the categories ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ are not so much ambiguous in the story about Lykomedes and Kleopatra, but that different concepts of death and life are at play in our text. For Lykomedes, Kleopatra is at the point of dying in a biological sense, whereas John is occupied with the state of her soul. Similarly, Lykomedes is certainly presented as dead, but this means different things for the Ephesians and John. The Ephesians consider Lykomedes to have died in a biological sense. John, on the other hand, univocally presents Lykomedes and Kleopatra as dead in a moral-psychological sense and therefore in need of resurrection in a similar sense. Since they are mastered by their emotions, Lykomedes and Kleopatra are considered dead. Only through faith in God will they be able to become alive and master their emotions. As illustrated by what John says about Kleopatra, being alive correlates with stability in the soul. The fact that Lykomedes suffers more than the impious further indicates that the virtue of piety plays an important role in obtaining life. Obedience to God, piety, and emotional self-control are essential to the concept of life underlying this presentation of Lykomedes and Kleopatra.

## 2.2 The Picture of John (cc. 26–29)

A similar conceptuality of life and death can also be found in the subsequent story of the picture of John. After being raised by John, Lykomedes and Kleopatra convince John of staying with them (25). Lykomedes orders a talented friend to make a portrait of John without John’s knowledge (26.2–5). The text particularly emphasises the material aspects of the painting: the “essential tools and paints” (26.6–7), the drawing of the outline, and the blending of the outline with the paints (27.1–3, 9–10). Lykomedes secretly worships the painting in his bedroom, encircling it with garlands and candles, and puts altars in front of it (27.3–4). When John finds out, he reproves him that he is “still living as a pagan” (ἔτι ἐθνικῶς ζῶντα; 27.12–13). Lykomedes, in his

defence, claims that his only God is the one who raised him and his wife from death (ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου), presumably physical death. Yet, he sees no problem in additionally honouring (σέβομαι) the people who are his benefactors as gods (27.14–18).<sup>25</sup> In this episode Lykomedes is portrayed as a pagan lacking authentic piety. When John sees the painting, he does not recognise himself in it but calls it similar to his fleshly form (cf. τῷ σαρκικῷ μου εἰδῶλω; 28.6–7), implying he sees in his physical image only a faint recognition of his carnal self. Later in the text, he calls it “childish and imperfect” and “a dead image of death” (νεκροῦ νεκρὰν εἰκόνα; 29.18–19). Thereby, he identifies his fleshly form with death, and the painting with a dead image of this fleshly form. John exhorts Lykomedes to “become a good portraitist” to him and paint with the colours that he has received from Jesus through him (29.1–4). “Colours” is used as a metaphor for the ideals and virtues of the soul, being “faith in God [...] chastity, calmness (ἀταραξία), fearlessness, peace [...]”, which allow Lykomedes’ soul to be raised from death (29.5–10).<sup>26</sup> Thanks to the practice of these virtues and the pursuit of these ideals, Lykomedes is able to control his emotions and desires, so that he can produce a good image of John’s soul.<sup>27</sup> If the painting of John’s fleshly form is a dead image of death, this new image of John’s soul that Lykomedes is to paint is implied to be a living image of life. This chorus of colours, John continues, or the practice of the above-mentioned virtues, purifies “the innards” (τὰ σπλάγχνα), hollows out “the belly” (τὴν γαστέρα), and cuts off “the base desires” (τὰ ὑπογάστρια) of Lykomedes (29.13–14). In short, it will render his soul “indelible and well-polished and of solid form in our Lord Jesus Christ” (29.15–17).

By way of summary, we see in this account of John’s painting a depiction of the concepts of death and life similar to those found in the story of Lykomedes and Kleopatra. Lykomedes continues thinking of death and life in the biological sense. John, on the other hand, associates life with the practice of virtue, faith in God, the control of emotions and desires, and a stable constitution of the soul. He views death as a description of the body and its emotions and desires that cause chaos and disorder in the constitution

25 On the underlying concept of patronage in this scene, see Travis W. Proctor, “Hospitality, not Honors: Portraits and Patronage in the *Acts of John*,” *HTR* 115/1 (2022), 69–89.

26 This use of “colours” (χρώματα) as a metaphor for virtues and ideals is to my knowledge unparalleled in Greco-Roman literature.

27 Cf. Éric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli (eds.), *Acta Iohannis: Textus Alii – Commentarius Indices*, CCSA 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), 454: “[...] l’action conjuguée de ces vertus a pour effet de permettre à l’âme d’assurer sa domination sur le corps”.

of the soul. Thus, the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ are not metaphors for conversion or symbols of any other kind but describe concrete constitutions of the soul. There is also no ambiguity in the use of these categories. As we have seen, Lykomedes has made “a dead image of death” by producing and worshipping the painting of John, whereas the practice of the virtues and qualities of his soul would result in the production of a living image of life.

### 2.3 The Ephesians (cc. 32–47)

The meaning of John’s concept of death is also beautifully illustrated by his depiction of the Ephesians, who play a major role in two different stories: John’s healing of the old women (cc. 32–36) and the destruction of the temple of Artemis (cc. 37–47).

In the first story, John depicts the Ephesians as being “ruled/conquered by faithlessness and sold to shameful lusts” (ἀπιστία κεκρατημένους καὶ ἐπιθυμίαις αἰσχαῖς πεπραμένους; 33.7–8). His main message to them is “the caretaking of souls” (τὸ τῶν ψυχῶν ἐπιμελεῖσθαι; 34.1–3). To take care of their souls, the Ephesians have to free themselves from their uncontrolled desire for wealth, which only causes them to feel grief and fear: grief, because they have to let go of their possessions sooner or later; fear, because when possessions are at hand, someone can steal them (34.3–12). Those who do not take care of their souls, but “are exalted on account of bodily beauty [...] gaze upon the tomb (ἐπὶ τοῦ μνήματος θέασαι)” for the certain end of their promise (35.1–3). The example of adultery that follows shows that John is not only concerned with the Ephesians’ desire for wealth, but also their sexual desires (35.3–5).<sup>28</sup> Although the Ephesians are not depicted as dead, John warns them that their destination is death if they do not control their desires. Death is their inevitable τέλος. The fact that John calls the “short-tempered and enraged” among the Ephesians “irrational animals” (cf. τοῖς ἀλόγοις ζῴοις; 35.9) suggests that the depiction of the Ephesians as destined for death is not a metaphorical expression, but has ontological status since it corresponds to their being reduced to beasts.<sup>29</sup> Due to their uncontrolled desires, they literally die as

28 On the ethical views of wealth management in the *AJ*, see further Thomas Tops, “Wealth and *Oikonomia* in the *Acts of John*: A Historical-Contextual Study,” in Peter Altmann, Frank Ueberschaer, and Nadine Ueberschaer (eds.), *Is It Good to Be Rich? Answers from Antiquity and the Bible*, WUNT 532 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 475–96.

29 The depiction of the Ephesians as irrational animals is highly contrasted with the depiction of the bed bugs in 60.10–13. John and his followers are troubled by bed bugs during the night. John exhorts them “to be reasonable” (εὐγνωμονέω) and “to keep

human beings and behave like irrational animals. In the textual world of the *AJ*, they are unambiguously destined for death.

The second story provides a similar image of the Ephesians. John warns the Ephesians that they “have been obstinate to this day concerning true piety (τὴν ὄντως εὐσέβειαν)”, being ruined by their “ancient religious practices” (cf. τοῖς παλαιοῖς ὑμῶν θρησκευμασι; 39.4–6).<sup>30</sup> Although they have seen John perform many miracles and healings, they have blinded their hearts and are unable to see again (39.6–8). John has come to the temple of Artemis to prove that they are “being most godless and dead concerning human reasoning” (ἄθεωτάτους ὄντας καὶ νεκροὺς τὸν ἀνθρώπινον λογισμόν; 39.10–11). The manuscripts R and Z read τῶν ἀνθρώπων λογισμῶν, which is non-sensical in this context. Junod and Kaestli propose to emend it to τὸν ἀνθρώπινον λογισμόν. In this reading, the phrase is an accusative of respect and an attribute to νεκροὺς (Interpretation One).<sup>31</sup> Another possibility, as proposed by Bonnet, is to read τῷ ἀνθρώπινῳ λογισμῷ. Then, the dative can be either interpreted as causal and an attribute to νεκροὺς (“dead because of their human reasoning”; Interpretation Two) or as instrumental and a prepositional phrase construed with διελέγξω (“I will prove through human reasoning”; Interpretation Three). Taking into consideration all three possible interpretations, the Ephesians are either presented as dead in general or dead concerning human reasoning. In Interpretation One and Two, the death of the Ephesians is associated with their lack of reasoning. Given the earlier characterisation of the Ephesians as lacking emotional self-control and as animals without reason (35.8–11), either one of these two interpretations is probable. Due to their lack of reasoning, they are unable to see John’s miracles and healings and are obstinate concerning true piety. Thus, the concept of death implied by this text assumes that being dead is a matter

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quiet (ἡσυχάζειν) in one place”. The fact that the bed bugs obey John shows that they have *logos*. They are characterised as human. The distinction between irrational animals and humans is fluid in the textual world of the *AJ*. Humans can be transformed into irrational animals, and *vice versa*. On animals in the *Apocryphal Acts*, see further Janet E. Spittler, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: The Wild Kingdom of Early Christian Literature*, WUNT II/247 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> The Christian neologism θρησκευμα (“religious practice”) only occurs in *AJ* 39–40 and *Acts of Andrew* 7. According to Bremmer (“The Acts of John,” 135 n. 38), it does not re-appear before Synesius, *Aegyptii sive de providentia* 1.18.

<sup>31</sup> For their arguments for this emendation, see Junod and Kaestli (eds.), *Acta Iohannis: Praefatio – Textus*, 218–19, n. 39.2.

of lacking virtue (*viz.*, piety) and human reasoning. The category of ‘dead’ is not a metaphor or a symbol, but denotes the ontological status of not being human, but an animal without reason.

The second story also mentions the death of the priest of Artemis, who “was killed with a single blow” (μονόπληγα ἀναιρεθῆναι) after John brought down the temple (42.6). He is depicted as “the dead priest of Artemis” (τὸν τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερέα [...] νεκρόν; 46.3–4), “a dead relative” (cf. τοῦ νεκροῦ μου συγγενοῦς [46.13]; τῷ νεκρῷ σου συγγενεῖ [46.22]), and “the dead man” (τὸν τεθνεῶτα; 47.5–6). At this point in the narrative, he is unambiguously dead in the biological sense. After his resurrection, the narrator depicts him as “alive” (ζῶντα; 47.9).<sup>32</sup> Yet, when John sees him, he clarifies that he does “not really live” nor is he “a partaker and heir of true life” (cf. οὐ ζῆς ὄντως οὐδὲ τῆς ἀληθινῆς ζωῆς κοινωνὸς καὶ κληρονόμος; 47.10–11). He lacks faith in God to have life (cf. καὶ νῦν πιστευσον, καὶ ζήσεις εἰς ἅπαντας αἰῶνας; 47.12–13). Although the priest appears alive, he is dead by virtue of his lack of faith in God which, according to the author of the *AJ*, is the only means by which one can have ‘life’.

We can conclude that John consistently presents the Ephesians as ‘dead’. They are dead because they are mastered by their desires and lack human reasoning, the virtue of piety, and faith in God. The category of ‘dead’ is not a metaphor for the life before conversion but depicts the ontological status of the Ephesians as irrational animals. Although they may have animation and the physical capacities one equates with biological existence, they are not ‘alive’ as the author of the *AJ* would have it. The latter is also the case for the priest of Artemis. Unlike the Ephesians, the priest did actually die in the biological sense and was raised afterwards. However, through John the author of the text attempts to persuade the reader that the priest never really lived because he lacked faith in God.

## 2.4 The Parricide and His Father (cc. 48–54)

Another story in the *AJ* makes this point about the true nature of ‘life’ and ‘death’. A young man is exhorted by his father to “not take his co-worker’s wife for himself” (48.3–5). The exhortation is motivated not only by

<sup>32</sup> On his resurrection, see further Almuth Peiper, “Bekehrung praktisch: Verwandtschaft mit Jesus (Totenaufweckung des Artemispriesters) – ActJoh 46f,” in Ruben Zimmermann (ed.), *Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen*, vol. 2, *Die Wunder der Apostel* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2017), 351–58.

moral concerns of the father, but also for his son's very life: the co-worker "was threatening to kill him" (48.5). The son, however, spurns his father's guidance with violence. "[N]ot bearing his father's admonition," the text reports, the son kicks him and renders him "speechless" (ἄφωνον; 48.5–7). Although initially it is unclear about whether the father is actually dead, a few verses later the narrator states that the son "was seeing the swiftness of death (τὸ ὄξυ τοῦ θανάτου)" (49.1).<sup>33</sup> He had murdered his father and, seemingly in desperation, attempts to kill himself, the co-worker, and the co-worker's wife. In doing so, the son explains to John that he killed his father by kicking him (cf. λακτίσας αὐτὸν ἀπέκτεινα) and that he has become "a father-killer" (πατὴρὸς [...] φονεύς) on behalf of the woman (49.6–15). The narrator later confirms that the father is dead (cf. ὁ πρεσβύτερος νεκρός; 51.2). The author has thus left no room for uncertainty or ambiguity about the condition of the father; he is dead. The only uncertainty appeared earlier, when the father was rendered "speechless", leaving it open that he perhaps might not have died immediately. But this question is subsequently and unambiguously resolved.

John raises the father from the dead (52.1–4). Yet the reader may be surprised to see the father preferred death to suffering his son's abuse, and so complains to John for raising him from the dead (52.5–7). John explains that if he were indeed raised to "these same things", the father would be correct; death would be preferable. Instead, though, John exhorts the father to "arise for something better" (52.9–10). In this process, the narrative makes clear, John proclaims "as good news the grace of God", and the father obtains faith (52.11–12). The story shows us that true life is dependent on faith in God. In his dreadful state of being insulted and unloved by his son, it is better for the father to die. Only the grace of God can enable him to obtain a life worth living. The text corroborates certain features of life and death encountered in previous passages. As we have seen before, a person, in this case the father, is completely overwhelmed by his emotions. He prefers death over a most dreadful life in which he is insulted and hated by his son. Only the grace of God can provide him with a peaceful life freed from the tyranny of his emotions. Similarly, the son, after repenting of his crime, learns that God can help him with all the needs of his soul (54.11–12). He devotes himself "to living calmly" (cf. ἡσυχάζων; 54.12). A worthwhile life is depicted as a state in

33 Other possible translation: "the sharpness of death" in the sense of painfulness.

which the emotions and desires are under control through the help of God. When they are ungovernable, it is better to be dead.

Like in our previous examples, the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ are not ambiguous but contextually defined. The father is dead, and for him, being subdued by his emotions, it is better to be dead. Only through faith in God can both he and his son obtain a life worth living, mastering their emotions and desires rather than being mastered by them, and in peaceful dedication to God.

## 2.5 Kallimachos, Drusiana, and Fortunatus (cc. 63–86)

The *AJ* narrate the resurrection of three additional people: Kallimachos, Drusiana, and Fortunatus. Kallimachos is introduced as “a messenger of Satan” (ἐπίπεμπτος τοῦ Σατανᾶ) who coveted Drusiana (63.2–3). His friends advise him to distance himself from “the insanity” (μανίας), which does not have rest in him (63.13–14). Unpersuaded by his friends, he sends Drusiana a message informing her about his desire (64.1–3). The message was assumably unanswered or rejected, since he gives up hope “so that he might not suffer more insults”. As a result, he lives his life “disheartened” (ἐν ἄθυμιά; 64.3–4). As a reaction to his despondency, Drusiana falls sick with a fever and wishes that she had not become an offence to “a man uninitiated in piety (θεοσέβειαν)” (64.7). By that she means that Kallimachos is not “stricken by words” (ὑπὸ λόγων πεπληγώς), presumably God’s words.<sup>34</sup> If he had been pious and stricken by God’s words, she reasons, “he would not have entered into such laxness (ῥαθυμίας)” (64.7–8).<sup>35</sup> She grieves over the destruction of his soul (cf. ἐκείνου ψυχικὴν θραύσιν; 64.13). Although the vocabulary of death is not used in this context, the destruction of the soul of Kallimachos is associated with characteristics of death that we have found in previous scenes. The madness, disheartened state, and laxness of Kallimachos indicate that he, too, is mastered by his emotions and desires. Since he is not stricken by God’s words, he lacks the virtue of piety needed to break free of the control of his emotions and desires. The destruction of his soul indicates that he is dead and needs resurrection. But his ‘death’ is neither metaphorical nor

<sup>34</sup> Like Junod and Kaestli (*Acta Iohannis: Praefatio – Textus*, 254 n. 64.3), I follow the reading offered by *M* πεπληγώς because of the parallels with the *Acts of Andrew*.

<sup>35</sup> Junod and Kaestli, *Acta Iohannis: Textus Alii – Commentarius Indices*, 541 paraphrase ῥαθυμία in the *AJ* as “cette tendance de l’homme à se laisser aller”.

symbolical, but ontological, corresponding to the status of his soul in which the emotions and the desires rule over reason.

Kallimachos' uncontrolled desire for Drusiana does not end with her death, as he attempts to have sex with her corpse. "[T]erribly kindled by lust and by the inner working of Satan", he buys of Fortunatus, the steward of Andronicus, the husband of Drusiana, to open up the tomb (70.3–7). He rushes in and prepares in his mind "the impious act" (ἀσέβειαν; 70.11–12). When about to commit the act, a snake kills (cf. ἀνέλεν) Fortunatus and wraps around the feet of Kallimachos. After Kallimachos falls, the snake sits upon him (71.1–5).<sup>36</sup> It is not clear whether Kallimachos is actually dead at this point. The narrator states that, on the next day, Andronicus sees that the two men are dead (cf. νεκρούς; 74.1) and that "they have died" (τεθνήκασιν) because they wanted to defile the corpse of Drusiana (74.11–12). Perhaps the moment of death is left unarticulated to suggest to the reader that Kallimachos has been dead all along due to the destruction of his soul. In any case, there is no ambiguity about whether Kallimachos is dead or alive.

When John draws his attention "to the corpse" (τῷ πτώματι) of Kallimachos, he scares away the snake "from the one about to be a slave (δουλεύειν) of Jesus Christ" (75.1–3).<sup>37</sup> After his resurrection, Kallimachos "was silent (ἡσύχαζεν) the whole hour" (75.9). When he regains his reasoning power or consciousness (cf. ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ λογισμῷ ἐγένετο; 76.1), Kallimachos speaks first of his previous μανία (76.9–10) and then about what destroyed him even more and rendered him dead (cf. τὸ μᾶλλον με ἀνελὸν καὶ νεκρὸν θέμενον; 76.12). The text seems to distinguish between different degrees of destruction and death suffered by Kallimachos. As explained above, his μανία caused the destruction of his soul. Now, Kallimachos is talking about an event that destroyed him even more and killed him:

When spiritual folly (ἡ ψυχικὴ [...] ἄνοια) was beside me and the unchecked sickness (ἡ ἀκατάσχετος νόσος) was vexing me, as I was tearing off the burial sheets in which she was wrapped, and then, as I was stepping away from the grave and putting them down, as you can clearly see, I went back again to the despicable deed, and I saw a handsome

36 On the ancient literary motif of a snake protecting the virginity of a young woman, see Vincent Giraudet, "Virginity at Stake: Greek Novels, Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, and the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus Panopolitanus," in Marília P. Futre Pinheiro et al. (ed.), *The Ancient Novel and Early Christian and Jewish Narrative: Fictional Intersections* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2012), 49–64, at 50–4.

37 For this 'slavery', see Jan N. Bremmer, "Slaves of God/Christ: Narrated Total Devotion in the Apocryphal Acts of Peter," *Religion* 53 (2023), 87–115.

young man covering her with his own cloak, from whose face brilliant rays of light leapt into her face, and who shouted to me, saying, ‘Kallimachos, die, that you may live! (ἀπόθανε ἵνα ζήσης)’ (76.13–20).

Kallimachos is convinced that this handsome young man is “a messenger of God” (76.21). The messenger tells Kallimachos that he must die (*sc.*, ἀπόθανε ἵνα ζήσης) to control his desires, and so live. He asks John for help to become good (καλόν), and this way become one of God’s own (θεοῦ; 76.31–32). From this point he is no longer mastered by his desire for Drusiana, but can think of nothing else than having παρρησία before God as “a true and legitimate son” (76.34–35). Putting his “hope upon Christ” (76.35–36), he declares that “the faithless, the disordered, and the godless one has died (ἀπέθανε [...] ὁ ἄπιστος, ὁ ἄτακτος, ὁ ἄθεος)” and that he has risen as “one who will be faithful (πιστός), who will be pious (θεοσεβής), and who knows truth” (76.38–40). According to John, God has put to shame Kallimachos’ “lack of self-control (ἀκрасίαν)” and has not “allowed it to lead him to its end” (77.9–10). God pitied “the deranged/counterfeit person” (τὸν παρακόψαντα ἄνθρωπον; 77.11–12). He has mercy on Kallimachos and sets him free from his “madness (μανίας) and drunkenness (μέθης)” (78.5) to call him to God’s “rest and renewal of life” (ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ ἀνακαίνωσιν βίου; 78.6).

In this resurrection story of Kallimachos, life is characterised by faith in Christ, the virtue of piety, and knowledge of truth. His desires are under control and he acquires παρρησία, the freedom to speak his mind instead of being enslaved by his desires. Death, on the other hand, is characterised by faithlessness, impiety, disorder, and godlessness. Being completely enslaved by desires, the soul is disordered and destroyed. The categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ are not ambiguous nor are they metaphors or symbols for conversion. Instead, as we have seen before, they correspond to the ontological status of the soul, which is either dead, when completely dominated by desires, or alive, when desires are under control.

Let us now turn to Drusiana, the second person in our story who will be resurrected. Drusiana was previously the wife of the magistrate Andronicus, “a first of the Ephesians” (πρῶτος [...] τῶν Ἐφεσίων; 31.5–7).<sup>38</sup> She has separated herself for a long time, “even from her husband”, “for the sake of piety

<sup>38</sup> On the phrase “first of the city” (πρῶτος τῆς πόλεως), see Jan N. Bremmer, “Magic, Martyrdom and Women’s Liberation in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*,” in *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity*, 149–65, at 153, 163–64.

(θεοσέβειαν)” (63.5–6). As the friends of Kallimachos predict, she does not agree with Kallimachos’ proposal to have sex with him. As a consequence of the “faintheartedness” (ἀθυμία) of Kallimachos, Drusiana lay down with a fever (64.4–5). As she considers herself to have become “the intercessor of a blow to an ignorant soul”, she asks the Lord to release her from “these bonds” and to transfer her to him quickly (64.9–11). Her requests reflect her will to commit suicide. While John was unaware of her suicidal intents, “Drusiana was released from life, not at all pleased, but rather, grieving (λυπούμενη) because of the destruction” of the soul of Kallimachos (64.12–13). As Andronicus is mourning, John silences him, claiming that “Drusiana went after a better hope, leaving behind this unrighteous life” (65.1–4). Andronicus agrees that “she departed this life in purity” (65.7–8). It is only after John saw her that he realises the cause (αἰτία) of her death and “mourned more than Andronicus”, “being at a loss over the abuses of the Adversary” (66.1–3). While John first thinks that Drusiana left this life in all purity, going after a better hope, he realises now that she actually committed suicide out of grief.

In the speech that follows, John addresses Drusiana in metaphors, clarifying that Drusiana did not maintain her faith “until just outside of life” (68.3).<sup>39</sup> John explains that it is so difficult to keep faith because “many obstacles creep in and make a commotion (θόρυβον) in human reasoning (τῷ ἀνθρωπίνῳ λογισμῷ)” (68.3–4): “worry, children, parents, glory, poverty, flattery, flourishing, beauty, arrogance, lust, wealth, anger, elation, laxness (ράθυμία), ill will, jealousy, indifference, insolence, sexual passion, deceit, possessions, pretence, and others which are like these obstacles” (68.5–8). Faith depends on emotional self-control. In the case of Drusiana, the grief over the destruction of the soul of Kallimachos triggered a commotion in her human reasoning, causing her to lose faith and take her own life. John continues that “what is needed before all else is for the faithful person to foresee his departure (ἔξοδον) and to consider it, how it will come upon him – whether vigorous and level-headed and having no obstacle, or thrown into commotion (τεθορυβημένη) and flattering the things here and tied down by desires” (69.1–5). Applied to Drusiana, it is clear that she is among those who were thrown into commotion at the time of their death. That is, like others we have seen before, she is mastered by her emotions.

39 E.g., “The one attempting to run in a race may be honoured only when he has won the prize. The one registering to spar may boast only when he has received the crowns” (67.7–9).

As we have also seen before, the categories of ‘dead’ and ‘alive’ recur in this story: the narrator speaks of her “dead body” (νεκρὸν σῶμα; 70.7) and her “body after death” (cf. μετὰ θάνατον τῷ σώματι; 70.8) and depicts her as a corpse (cf. τοῦ πτώματος; 70.13). Kallimachos addresses her as “being dead after death” (μετὰ θάνατον νεκράν [...] οὖσαν; 70.9–10). John speaks of Drusiana’s body as “the dead house” (τὸν νεκρὸν οἶκον; 77.8). All these sayings affirm that Drusiana is unambiguously dead. After the resurrection of Kallimachos, Andronicus begs John to raise Drusiana, too. He argues that, now Kallimachos has converted (cf. ἐπιστρέψαντος), Drusiana may find rest (79.18–20). After John resurrected Drusiana, she saw Kallimachos and rejoices exceedingly and glorifies God (80.1–7). Drusiana praises God for relieving her of her “hidden madness” (τῆς ἀποκρύφου μανίας; 82.13).

In the resurrection story of Drusiana, the meaning of death depends on how this ἔξοδος takes place. If one’s rationality is not disturbed, one leaves for a better place and there is no cause for grieving this departure. But if one’s rationality is disturbed by emotions and desires, one is truly dead and so requires resurrection. Drusiana’s departure from life is caused by her grief; her rationality is overcome by emotion and she cannot maintain her faith. She is depicted unambiguously as dead. Her death is not a metaphor for her unconverted state, but denotes a condition of her very rationality, which is overcome by her emotions. In this condition her body is depicted as merely a dead house for her soul. After she is raised from her death in resurrection and sees the converted Kallimachos, she is alive again because she is in a state of rest in which her reasoning is no longer disturbed by grief.

The resurrections of Kallimachos and Drusiana are highly contrasted with the resurrection of Fortunatus, which is unsuccessful. Fortunatus, “the steward of Andronicus, who was fond of money” (ὄντα φιλάργυρον), is paid by Kallimachos to open the grave of Drusiana (70.4–5). Though Fortunatus makes the “impious act” (ἀσέβειαν) possible, the idea is conceived in the mind of Kallimachos (70.11–12). When he enters the tomb, Fortunatus is immediately killed by a snake bite (71.2–3). He is unambiguously dead. Andronicus sees him and Kallimachos as “dead” (νεκρούς; 74.1) and as having died (τεθνήκασιν; 74.12), both terms we have seen before. Andronicus considers Fortunatus “unworthy of salvation” and so advises John not to raise him from the dead (74.18). But Drusiana, after her own resurrection, sees the dead Fortunatus, and asks John to raise him too (81.2–3). Kallimachos speaks against it because the voice that he heard of the previously mentioned messenger of God did

not mention Fortunatus (81.5–6). He presumes that Fortunatus was not raised by God (through John) because he, Fortunatus, was not good. And so, Fortunatus was allowed “to die a bad death” (κακῶς τεθνάναι; 81.7–9). John does not contest Kallimachos’ assessment of Fortunatus but does take issue with his theology: for God does “not exact retribution” nor push people away but suggests “repentance and abstaining from vices (κακῶν)” (81.15–18). But John still does not raise Fortunatus but instead proposes that Drusiana does so. When Fortunatus is raised, his appearance is completely different from the emotional self-control shown by Kallimachos and Drusiana after their resurrections. When he sees John and the other converted believers, he is completely filled with hate for them. He declares his preference for death over resurrection (and life), when resurrection entails life where the powers of “these terrible people” have reached so far (83.4–9). He flees from the tomb (83.10). The narrator states that the soul of Fortunatus is “unaltered towards good” (84.1–2). John bursts into a series of exclamations: “O nature unnatural to improvement! O fountain of the soul remaining in filth! [...] O death (θάνατε) dancing among your own! [...] O stump having a demon for reasoning (τὸν λόγον)! [...] O matter, cohabitant of materialism and neighbour of unbelief!” (84.2–7) Although resurrected, Fortunatus is identified with death. He cannot abstain from his vices and is unaltered towards good. He has a demon for reasoning and therefore cannot control his emotions and desires. As a result, his soul is polluted and he does not have faith in God, so John commands him to be set apart from those who do (84.10–20). Fortunatus cannot be reconciled with their “self-control” (ἐγκρατείας; 84.17). John predicts that Fortunatus will die from the venom of the snake’s bite, which happens almost immediately (86.5–9). When John hears this, he says with an open address: “You are receiving your child, Devil.” (86.10)

The story of Fortunatus illustrates that death is caused by a lack of emotional self-control. Unable to control his hate for those who believe in God, Fortunatus shows that his rationality is mastered by his emotions. He is unable to cultivate virtue and come to faith. As a result, he cannot be properly resurrected and instead dies a bad death.

## 2.6 John’s Final Speech (cc. 106–115)

In his final speech, John speaks explicitly about death. He calls the Lord “the root of immortality” (ἡ ρίζα τῆς ἀθανασίας; 109.12–13). He praises God as “the one who has made the wild and savage soul gentle and quiet (ὁ τὴν ἔρημον καὶ

ἀγρωθεῖσαν ψυχὴν ἡμερον καὶ ἡρεμον ποιήσας); [...] who appeared quickly to the one who was dying (νεκρουμένη; 112.5–8)". Thus, John depicts the soul as dying when it is wild and savage. Christ, as the root of immortality, has made the soul gentle and quiet. Later, John narrates how this applies to him. Christ kept him pure in the sense that, when John in his youth desired to marry a woman, he did not let him, prohibiting him from having intercourse. Christ separated him "from that filthy madness (μανίας) in the flesh", meaning sexuality, and took him away "from bitter death" (τοῦ πικροῦ θανάτου; 113.12–13). The Lord shut away "the secret sickness" (τὴν ἀπόκρυφον νόσον) of his soul "and cut off its outward practice" (113.14–16). The medical terms used express that Christ saves John from death by not allowing him to have sex with a woman. In control of his desire for women, his soul is gentle and quiet. As a result of his purity, John does not die in anguish or pain but is depicted as laying himself down in a trench in which he gives up the spirit rejoicing (cf. παρέδωκε τὸ πνεῦμα χαίρων; 115.4).

The concepts of death and life in this text apply to the soul. Whereas death is articulated as being overwhelmed by the desire for sex and corresponds to a wild and savage state of the soul, life is the control of this desire and denotes a corresponding peaceful state of the soul.

In conclusion of this section, let us summarise our findings: (1) The motif of *Scheintod* ("apparent death"), as we know it for instance from ancient Greek novels, plays no role at all in the *AJ*.<sup>40</sup> Characters are never depicted as having died only in appearance; (2) the categories of 'dead' and 'alive' in the *AJ* are less ambiguous than some scholars have previously assumed. On the contrary, the univocal use of these categories signals a conceptual clarity in the text regarding the concepts of death and life; (3) unlike some scholars assume, 'living' and 'dead' are not symbols or metaphors for the converted and non-converted state of a person, respectively. Instead, they have an ontological status corresponding to the ordered and disordered state of the soul of a person, respectively. A person is truly dead if his or her soul is disordered. In the anthropological mindset of the author of the *AJ*, this person is dead as

40 In connection with the scenes of the Greek novels, the term "Scheintod" was introduced by Erwin Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, 3rd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960, 1st ed. 1876), 287 n. 1. It was later also applied to early Christian literature: see Judith Perkins, "Fictive *Scheintod* and Christian Resurrection," *R&T* 13 (2006), 396–418, and Daniel B. Glover, "Left for Dead: *Scheintod* in the Greek Novels and Acts of the Apostles," *PRSt* 46 (2019), 285–305.

a human being and is transformed into an animal without rational capacities. A person is alive, on the other hand, if the soul is stable and steadfast; the emotions and desires are ruled by reason; and (4) the concepts of death and life underlying these narratives can be explained with reference to the death and life of the soul. When a person is mastered by emotions and desires, the soul is dead and entombed by these affections. Only by means of the help of Christ or God can the soul be saved from the rule of the emotions and desires, and be resurrected.<sup>41</sup> The apostle John mediates this saving activity of Christ.<sup>42</sup> The life of the soul is characterised by the virtue of the soul and its corresponding orderly state. Obedience to God, piety, and mastery of the emotions and desires are essential to the life of the soul.

To further explain the concepts of the life and death of the soul in the *AJ*, the next section will look at the history of these concepts in the Greco-Roman world in which the *AJ* was written.

### 3. The Death and Life of the Soul in Philo's Writings

The earliest author who developed the concepts of the death and life of the soul is Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE).<sup>43</sup> The concepts later occur

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41 On the identity of Jesus Christ and God in the *AJ*, see Lalleman, *The Acts of John*, 167–69; Boris Paschke, “Christomonism? A Narrative-Critical Analysis of Two Prayers to God the Father in the Apocryphal Acts of John,” *BN* 163 (2014), 121–34; Jonathan M. Potter, “Naked Divinity: The Transfiguration Transformed in the Acts of John,” in Vernon K. Robbins and Jonathan M. Potter (eds.), *Jesus and Mary Reimagined in Early Christian Literature*, SBL WGRWSup 6 (Atlanta GA: SBL Press, 2015), 181–222; Boris Paschke, “Speaking Names in the Apocryphal Acts of John,” *Apocrypha* 26 (2015), 119–49; Julia A. Snyder, “Acts of John, Acts of Peter, Acts of Thekla, Third Corinthians, and Martyrdom of Paul,” in Jens Schröter and Christine Jacobi (eds.), *The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries*, vol. 2, *From Thomas to Tertullian: Christian Literary Receptions of Jesus in the Second and Third Centuries CE* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 363–85, at 364–65. More in general, see Jan N. Bremmer, “God and Christ in the Early Martyr Acts”, in Matthew Novenson (ed.), *Monotheism and Christology in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, NovTSup 180 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 222–48.

42 On the depiction of the apostles as mediators of Christ in the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, see further Tobias Nicklas, *Spätantike Apostelerzählungen*, Tria Corda 17 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025), 13–52.

43 As we will see, Philo predominantly develops these concepts in his allegorical exegetical writings, which he probably wrote in Alexandria. For Philo's biography, see Maren R. Niehoff, *Philo of Alexandria: An Intellectual Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

in Plotinus (ca. 204/5–270 CE)<sup>44</sup> and Porphyry (c. 234 – c. 305 CE).<sup>45</sup> As the latter two authors are too late for the study of the *AJ*, my analysis will be limited to Philo.<sup>46</sup> It will focus on four aspects of Philo's thoughts on the death and the life of the soul: (i) the role of virtue and emotional self-control (3.1); (ii) the role of the divine *Logos* and the virtue of piety (3.2); (iii) Philo's idea that the death of the soul is self-inflicted (3.3); and (iv) Philo's understanding of the death of the soul as an ontological transformation (3.4). At the end of each subsection I will compare Philo to the *AJ*.

### 3.1 Virtue and Emotional Self-Control

As argued by Emma Wasserman, Philo's presentation of soul-death fits with other presentations of extreme immorality in the writings of Plato, Plutarch, and Galen. The latter authors predominantly depict the defeat of reason by the irrational parts of the soul in terms of slavery and mastery or political power and rule. They never used the image of the death of the soul because they probably were reluctant to suggest that the soul is mortal. Philo does not share their reluctance and is the first known author to use the language of dying or death to describe the rule of emotions and desires over reason. He considers 'death' to be the outcome of the perpetual battle in the soul between reason, on the one hand, and emotions and desires, on the other.<sup>47</sup>

Philo defines "the death of the soul" as "the decay of virtue and the bringing in of wickedness". This "special death" is "that of the soul becoming entombed in passions and wickedness of all kinds".<sup>48</sup> It is the antithesis of

<sup>44</sup> Plotinus 1.8.13.

<sup>45</sup> The passage by Porphyry is transmitted by Proclus, *In Tim.* 22D.

<sup>46</sup> Much more widespread was the concept of the 'living dead'. This concept can be found in the popular philosophy of ancient culture. Living people are depicted as dead for multiple reasons. Dieter Zeller distinguishes between "death through lack of education and knowledge", "death through lack of virtue", and the "Cynic-Stoic polemics against debauchery". In the latter, the living are depicted as dead because they are obsessed with their pleasures and passions. See Dieter Zeller, "The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria: The Use and Origin of a Metaphor," *SPhA* 7 (1995), 19–55, at 50–4. Yet, all the sources mentioned by Zeller do not talk about the death or life of the soul and are therefore unable to explain the conceptuality of the death and life of the soul in the *AJ*.

<sup>47</sup> See Wasserman, *The Death*, 60–76.

<sup>48</sup> Note that Philo claims here that not the body but the passions and vices are said to bury the soul. Later in *Leg.* 1.108, Philo however does use the image of the body as the tomb of the soul. This image is famously transmitted in Plato, *Crat.* 400C; *Gorg.* 493A.

the death that awaits us all: “the separation of the soul from the body”.<sup>49</sup> Whereas the general death is “a separation of combatants that had been pitted against one another”, the special death is “the unification (σύνωδος) of both, the worse, the body, overcoming the better, the soul”.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Philo articulates virtue as the practice of reason, allowing us to control our emotions and avoid wickedness. As Wasserman observes, “death” and “dying” refer to “the radical disempowerment of reason rather than its destruction”.<sup>51</sup> Without the practice of reason, the emotions and desires reign, resulting in the death of the soul: “For verily nothing so surely brings death upon a soul as immoderate indulgence in pleasures.”<sup>52</sup>

The opposite is also true for Philo. Virtuous people, who can control their emotions and desires live forever, even if they die in the biological sense of the word: “[...] good people, even if cut off from their partnership with the body, live forever, and are granted immortality.”<sup>53</sup> The life of the soul goes beyond the body: “[...] no good man is dead, but will live for ever, proof against old age, with a soul immortal in its nature no longer fettered by the restraints of the body”.<sup>54</sup> For Philo, the death of pious (or virtuous) people results in “undying life” (ἡ ἀθάνατος [...] ζωῇ), whereas those who live the life of the impious will know “eternal death” (ὁ αἰδῖος θάνατος).<sup>55</sup> The latter, as exemplified by Cain, “live for ever in a state of dying and so to speak suffer a death that is deathless and unending”.<sup>56</sup> This eternal death should be understood in the following way. Philo thinks that there are four passions in the soul; two that are concerned with the good: pleasure and desire; two that are concerned with the bad: grief and fear. God removes the first two so that impious people can never experience something pleasant. People who suffer an eternal death can only “groan and tremble” and experience anguish

49 The traditional definition of death as the separation of the soul from the body goes back to Plato, *Phaed.* 67D.

50 Philo, *Leg.* 1.105–106. For the Greek text of Philo and its English translation, I use the LCL editions with some adjustments to the translation. My translation of σύνωδος is taken from Zeller, “The Life,” 23 n. 13.

51 Emma Wasserman, “The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Revisiting Paul’s Anthropology in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology,” *JBL* 126 (2007), 793–816, at 808.

52 Philo, *Leg.* 2.78.

53 Philo, *Fug.* 55.

54 Philo, *Ios.* 264

55 Philo, *Post.* 39.

56 Philo, *Praem.* 70.

and distress. They do not know the hope that someone will comfort them and relieve them from their distress.<sup>57</sup>

The similarities of Philo's concepts of the death and the life of the soul with the *AJ* are numerous. As argued in the previous section, the life of the soul in the *AJ* is conditioned by virtue, the practice of reason, and emotional self-control. The soul is depicted as dead or dying if a person is unable to control one's emotions or desires through the practice of reason. Those who lack emotional self-control and virtue "gaze upon the tomb" as their certain τέλος and are in the process of dying.<sup>58</sup>

The analysis of Philo above suggests that we are further confronted with the question whether the *AJ* also conceives of the death of the soul as being eternal in the sense of exceeding natural death. In John's exhortation to the Ephesians, he says that those who lack emotional self-control "gaze upon the tomb" as the certain end of their promise. When these people are set free from their body and in need of mercy while they burn in fire, they will not have Christ to show them mercy (*AJ* 35.1–8).<sup>59</sup> Instead, they will descend into "unquenchable fire and great darkness and the torture pit and eternal threats" (36.8–10). This is exemplified in Fortunatus, who does not receive God's mercy and dies a bad death (81.7–9). In other words, these people are not only dead (in the moral-psychological sense) while still alive, they also remain dead after their natural death and suffer the consequences of their vices. They are eternally dead, and as the example of Fortunatus illustrates, cannot be properly resurrected. Their τέλος is the tomb. Thanks to their immoral behaviour during their lifetime, their souls are constantly dying and heading in the direction of death.

*Mutatis mutandis* we can ask whether the *AJ* conceptualise the life of the soul as eternal in the sense of going beyond natural death. The perfect example of virtue – Christ – remains alive after his natural death on the cross. In reality, he never truly dies. Christ was not really crucified on the cross, but can be seen above the cross, although he does not have an outward form. He can only speak to us through an unfamiliar truly divine voice (98.3–6). Those who hear him will no longer be what they are now (in their bodily state), but will become above themselves, as Christ is (100.8–10). They will have an "indestructible soul" (ἀκαθαίρετον [...] ψυχήν; 104.6–7). Similarly, John does

<sup>57</sup> Philo, *Praem.* 71–73.

<sup>58</sup> See *supra* 2.3.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Luke 16:19–31.

not really die but willingly lies down in a trench and joyfully gives his spirit (115.3–4). He is united with Christ: darkness is conquered, chaos exhausted, the furnace quenched, Gehenna extinguished (cf. 114.1–3). As in Philo, the life of the soul does not end with natural death.

### 3.2 The Divine Logos and the Virtue of Piety

Philo emphasises the importance of living according to the will of God to avoid the death of the soul: “What issue awaits him who does not live according to the will of God, save death of the soul? [...] yea soul-death, which is the change of soul under the impetus of irrational passion.”<sup>60</sup> He considers obedience to God to be a necessary condition for the life of the soul: “So then the true life is the life of him who walks in the judgements and ordinances of God, so that the practices of the godless must be death. And what the practices of the godless are we have been told. They are the practices of passions and vices [...]”<sup>61</sup> Obedience and disobedience to God are the necessary conditions of the life and the death of the soul, respectively. The most admirable definition of deathless life according to Philo is “to be possessed by a love of God and a friendship for God with which flesh and body have no concern”.<sup>62</sup>

As argued by Dieter Zeller, Philo considers the divine *Logos* to be responsible for people’s ability to obtain emotional self-control and live according to the will of God. From the λογισμός of the soul to the *Logos* “there is only a short step”.<sup>63</sup> The soul cannot die if the *Logos* is still in it: “Death of soul is a life in the company of vice, so that what is meant is that he [the *Logos*] is never to come in contact with any polluting object [...]”<sup>64</sup> The *Logos* will not enter into any dead soul (cf. Lev 21:11).<sup>65</sup> The basic point of Zeller’s argument can be found in *Fug.* 117: “For so long as this holiest Word is alive and is still present in the soul, it is out of question that an unintentional offence should come back into it [...] But if the Word die, not by being itself destroyed, but by being withdrawn out of our soul, the way is at once open for the return

60 Philo, *Post.* 73. Cf. Philo, *Leg.* 2.78–81.

61 Philo, *Congr.* 86.

62 Philo, *Fug.* 58. Cf. Philo, *Spec.* 1.345: “For in very truth the godless are dead in soul, but those who have taken service in the ranks of the God who only is, are alive, and that life can never die.”

63 Zeller, “The Life,” 21–22 with reference to Philo, *Fug.* 106–118.

64 Philo, *Fug.* 113.

65 For Philo, the high priest of Lev 21:11 allegorically represents the divine *Logos*.

of unintentional errors.” God’s *Logos* and the soul’s λογισμός are, functionally speaking, identical. Without them, emotions and desires cannot be controlled and unintentional errors (or sins) will be committed, resulting in a ‘life’ in the company of vice or the death of the soul.

The importance of God for the life of the soul is not only emphasised by the essential role of the divine *Logos*, but also by the importance of the virtue of piety in Philo’s writings: “[...] worthy and excellent men say that the tree of life is the best of the virtues in man, namely piety (εὐσέβεια), through which pre-eminently the mind becomes immortal.”<sup>66</sup> And: “[...] the tree of life [...] signifies piety towards God (θεοσέβειαν), the greatest of the virtues, by means of which the soul attains to immortality [...]”<sup>67</sup> Given that piety is the so-called leading virtue or “the queen of the virtues” for Philo, “piety” is the unquestioned condition for the immortality of the soul.<sup>68</sup> Philo even calls piety (εὐσέβειαν) “unquestioned and true immortality”.<sup>69</sup>

As we have seen in the previous section, a similar role is given to the virtue of piety in the *AJ*. Without this virtue, the soul is dead. The textual world of the *AJ* lives under the assumption that either one has a demon as one’s *logos* (84.5) or one obeys to Christ or God. For instance, if Kallimachos would have been pious and struck by God’s words, he would never have proposed Drusiana to have sex with him (64.7–8). At that point in the story, Kallimachos is counted as having a demon in his *logos*. He was not yet resurrected as a pious one, who was struck by God’s words.

### 3.3 The Death of the Soul as Self-Inflicted

In some passages, Philo articulates the death of the soul as a form of suicide. For instance, in his exegesis of Gen 4:8 Cain does not kill Abel but himself: “It must be read in this way, ‘Cain rose up and slew himself’, not someone else. And this is just what we should expect to befall him. For the soul that has extirpated from itself the principle of the love of virtue and the love of God,

<sup>66</sup> Philo, *QG* 1.10.

<sup>67</sup> Philo, *Opif.* 154. According to Nélida Naveros Córdova, *Philo of Alexandria’s Ethical Discourse: Living in the Power of Piety* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 101 n. 42, the terms εὐσέβεια and θεοσέβεια refer to the same virtue of giving service to God in Philo’s writings. They are interchangeably used in e.g. *Opif.* 155 and *Abr.* 144.

<sup>68</sup> See Gregory E. Sterling, “The Queen of the Virtues: Piety in Philo of Alexandria,” *SPhA* 18 (2006), 103–123.

<sup>69</sup> Philo, *QG* 1.55.

has died to the life of virtue.”<sup>70</sup> Forsaking the love of virtue and the love of God is articulated as an act of suicide. Cain is himself responsible for the death of his soul. Whoever commits voluntary sin is actually killing his own soul.<sup>71</sup>

A similar idea is probably at play in the *AJ*. Figures like Lykomedes, Drusiana, and the parricide contemplate suicide. Lykomedes and Drusiana can be said to have actually committed it. As argued in the previous section, all three figures are presented as dead before their resurrection. Their death can accurately be understood as a death of the soul. Is the literary motif of suicide used to convey to the reader the idea that this death of the soul is self-inflicted? I believe so. The *AJ* takes a negative stance towards suicide by depicting it as an irrational act, resulting from a troubled soul in which reason is overcome by emotions.<sup>72</sup> In all three stories, the persons who contemplate suicide are depicted as being already dead because they are mastered by their emotions. The literary motif of suicide is probably used to explain to the reader that their vices are responsible for the death of their souls. Their death is their own doing.

### 3.4 The Death of the Soul as an Ontological Transformation

As John Conroy convincingly argues, the “death of the soul” is not just a metaphor for Philo, but corresponds to an actual ontological transformation of the soul: “the soul experiences metempsychosis from a human soul into a beast’s soul”.<sup>73</sup> Conroy’s argument is essentially that Philo thinks that the loss of rationality transforms a human being into a lower form of animal, a “beast”.<sup>74</sup> An analogy between the body, the soul, and reason is fundamental: “[...] the body perishes if the soul quit it, and the soul if reason quit it, and reason if it be deprived of virtue.”<sup>75</sup> So, just as the body cannot exist

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<sup>70</sup> Philo, *Det.* 47–48.

<sup>71</sup> See further Philo, *Agr.* 171; *QG* 4.66.

<sup>72</sup> On suicide in early Christian, early Jewish, and Greco-Roman writings, see Kurt Erlemann, “Die fatalen Folgen eines Ehebruchs (Totenaufenerweckung des ermordeten Vaters) – ActJoh 48–54,” in Zimmermann (ed.), *Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen*, vol. 2, 359–68, at 364–65, and Janet E. Spittler, “Bargeld nicht akzeptiert (Die Heilung der Söhne des Antipatros) – ActJoh 56f,” in Zimmermann (ed.), *Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen*, vol. 2, 369–75, at 372–73.

<sup>73</sup> John T. Conroy, “Philo’s ‘Death of the Soul’: Is This Only a Metaphor?,” *SPhA* 23 (2011), 23–40, at 40.

<sup>74</sup> Conroy, “Philo’s Death,” 24.

<sup>75</sup> Philo, *Det.* 141. A similar idea can be found in Philo, *Agr.* 72–77.

without the soul, the soul cannot exist without reason. *Mutatis mutandis*, reason cannot exist without virtue.

What happens to a human being if his or her soul perishes? Philo clearly states that such a person is transformed into a wild beast: "For everyone who is left forsaken by reason, the better part of the soul, has been transformed into the nature of a beast, even though the outward characteristics of his body still retain their human form."<sup>76</sup> This idea can be found in a number of exegetical examples by Philo. For instance, in *Abr.* 32–33, Philo attempts to explain why Noah is called ἄνθρωπος δίκαιος in Gen 6:9:

But we must not fail to note that in this passage he gives the name of man not according to the common form of speech, to the mortal animal endowed with reason, but to the man who is man pre-eminently, who verifies the name by having expelled from the soul the untamed and frantic passions and the truly beast-like vices. Here is a proof. After 'man' (ἄνθρωπον) he adds 'just,' (δίκαιον) implying by the combination that the unjust is no man, or more properly speaking, a beast in human form (ἄνθρωπομόρφου θηρίου) and that the follower after righteousness alone is man.<sup>77</sup>

Those who lack virtue cannot properly be called human beings, since they are actually beasts in human form. Similarly, in *Decal.* 110, Philo claims that those who do not "cling to piety and holiness may be thought to have been transformed into the nature of wild beasts (μεταβεβληκέναι δόξαιεν ἄν εἰς θηρίων φύσιν)". As piety is the root of all other virtues for Philo, those who lack it, lack virtue in general.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, their soul is dead. This implies an ontological transformation, as the text states that they are transformed into the nature of wild beasts.

As argued in the previous section, a similar anthropology can be found in the *AJ*. If the rational capacity of a person is overwhelmed by emotions and desires, this person can no longer be called a human being, but is transformed into the nature of a wild animal without rationality.

To conclude the present section, let us summarise our findings. There are considerable similarities between Philo and the *AJ* concerning the death and life of the soul in some rather distinct ways: (i) Both consider virtue and emotional self-control to be essential conditions for the life of the soul. If a person lacks them, his or her soul is entombed by the emotions and desires and their corresponding vices; (ii) a person can only control his or

<sup>76</sup> Philo, *Spec.* 3.99.

<sup>77</sup> See also Philo, *Mos.* 1.43.

<sup>78</sup> See *supra* 3.2.

her emotions and desires if that person obeys God and lives according to the divine will. Both Philo and the author of the *AJ* consider the rational capacities of a person to be granted by God. Therefore, both authors consider piety to be the most important virtue. Without this virtue, the soul cannot live; without it, it is dead; (iii) due to the importance of virtue, both Philo and the author of the *AJ* consider the death of the soul to be a form of suicide. The death of the soul is caused by the practice of vice. If the soul dies, its death is always self-induced; and (iv) for both Philo and the author of the *AJ*, the death of the soul is not just a metaphor but indicates a real ontological transformation. When human beings are unable to live up to their rational capacities, their bodies are tombs for their souls. The absence of reason in their souls transforms them into beasts, although they keep their human shape. The death of the soul corresponds to a chaotic state of the soul in which reason has no place, whereas the life of the soul denotes its orderly state in which the emotions and desires are ruled by reason.

## Conclusion

From the above analyses of the *AJ*, and in comparison with Philo of Alexandria, four conclusions can be drawn concerning the concepts of death and life in the *AJ*:

(1) The categories of 'dead' and 'alive' are not as ambiguous as scholars have previously contended. Instead, they are often used univocally in the *AJ* in reference to the soul.

(2) Similarly, 'dead' and 'alive', respectively, are not metaphors or symbols for the unconverted and converted state of people but rather denote ontological realities. The dead soul is chaotic and without measure. People's rational capacities are overcome by their passions and desires. In the living soul, on the other hand, passions and desires are ruled by reason and there is order and stability. 'Dying' is not a metaphorical expression but an ontological transformation of human beings into wild animals without rational capacities.

(3) The soul of a person is dead if that person's rational capacities are mastered by his or her emotions and desires. Only faith in Christ and the corresponding virtue of piety enables this person to master his or her emotions and desires. Virtue is the practice of reason. The apostle John, as the mediator of Christ, teaches this virtue to enable people to control their emotions and desires so that they can fully dedicate themselves to Christ.

(4) The concepts of the life and the death of the soul in the *AJ* are strikingly similar to how Philo employs these concepts. In addition to the role of virtue and emotional self-control mentioned in the previous point, both Philo and the author of the *AJ* conceive of the death of the soul as a form of suicide. People are responsible for the care of their own soul, and neglect of one's soul leads to its death; its death is self-inflicted. Furthermore, both sources consider God to be the source of people's ability to practice virtue and control the emotions, enabling them to dedicate themselves to God.

These conceptual similarities between Philo and the *AJ* suggest that the author of the *AJ* adopted the concepts of the life and the death of the soul from Philo's writings. Another possibility is that the author of the *AJ* stands in the same Alexandrian platonic tradition as Philo does. As Istvan Czachesz convincingly argues, the author of the *AJ* undoubtedly knew some of Plato's writings, especially the *Symposium*.<sup>79</sup> He probably knew the slavery and mastery imagery that Plato uses to depict the defeat of reason by the irrational parts of the soul.<sup>80</sup> Just like Philo, he might have concluded from the bad outcome of the battle between reason, on the one hand, and the emotions and desires, on the other, that the soul actually died. The soul is killed by the passions and desires that dominate reason.<sup>81</sup>

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79 See Istvan Czachesz, "Eroticism and epistemology in the *Apocryphal Acts of John*," *NThT* 60 (2006), 59–72; István Czachesz, *Commission Narratives: A Comparative Study of the Canonical and Apocryphal Acts*, SECA 8 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 106–111, 115–119.

80 For this imagery, see Wasserman, *The Death*, 15–27.

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