In the writings of Philo of Alexandria, we witness a major turn in the history of the concept of the law of nature.\(^1\) The law of nature becomes intimately linked to the written law revealed by God, the law of Moses.\(^2\) Philo’s recasting of both Greek philosophy and Jewish tradition sets the scene for centuries of development, not only within Judaism, but also within Christianity and Islam.

As with any conceptual revolution, it is all but impossible to bring the Philonic turn clearly into view. To those who inherit Philo’s sense

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of God as creator, lawgiver and source of revelation, the unity of natural law and revealed law\(^3\) can seem obvious. But, if one tries to think oneself into the position of Philo’s Hellenistic predecessors and contemporaries, such a unity not only fails to be obvious, it seems incoherent, paradoxical. As I will explain, the revolutionary character of Philo’s move seems to me to be one factor underlying the debate between Phillip Mitsis and Paul Vander Waerdt.\(^4\) If Philo’s move is revolutionary, as I am suggesting, how is it possible, not merely to think in post-revolutionary or in pre-revolutionary terms, but to clarify Philo’s move, to render it intelligible? I want first to explain more precisely why Philo’s position seems paradoxical. Then I will seek, not to remove the paradox—for that, I believe, cannot be done—but rather to exhibit some of the inner logic of Philo’s thinking.

Philo writes within the context of what is now called Middle Platonism,\(^5\) and his conception of the law of nature seems indebted to both Platonism and Stoicism.\(^6\) To see the paradoxical character of Philo’s linkage of the law of nature with the written law revealed by God, we need to recall a presupposition that Philo’s philosophically educated readers would very likely have made. The presupposition is that the law of nature, in accordance with which we should live, is necessarily an unwritten law, which transcends the written laws of any

\(^3\) In the case of Philo of Alexandria, revealed law is synonymous with the law of Moses.

