

The Logos and Its Function in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria

Greek Interpretation of Hebrew Thought
and Foundations of Christianity

Part One

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The term Logos (λόγος) was widely used in the Greco-Roman culture and in Judaism. It has many meanings such as *word, speech, statement, discourse, refutation, ratio, account, explanation, and reason*.¹ But the meanings which have philosophical and religious implications are basically two: as an inward *thought* or *reason*, an intuitive conception, and as an outward *expression of thought* in speech. Therefore in any theistic system the word could refer to a revelation or be personified and designate a separate being. In most schools of Greek philosophy this term designated a rational, intelligent and thus vivifying principle of the universe. The Greeks deduced the existence of this principle from understanding the universe as a living reality, comparing it to a living creature. The ancient people did not have the dynamic concept of “function”; therefore every phenomenon had to have an underlying factor, agent, or principle responsible for its occurrence.

In the Septuagint version of the Old Testament the term *logos* (Hebrew *davar*) was used frequently to describe God’s utterances (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9; 3:9, 11; Ps. 32:9), God’s action (Zech. 5:1-4; Ps. 106:20; Ps. 147:15), and messages of prophets by which God communicated His will to His people (Jer. 1:4-19; 2:1-7; Ezek. 1:3; Amos 3:1). Logos is used here only as a figure of speech designating God’s activity or action. In Jewish wisdom

¹ *A Greek-English Lexicon*, compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

literature we find the concept of Wisdom (*hokhmah* and *sophia*)² which could to some degree be interpreted as a separate personification or individualization (hypostatization), but it is often contrasted with human stupidity. In the Hebrew culture this language was metaphorical and poetic, describing divine wisdom as God's attribute, and it clearly refers to a human characteristic in the context of human earthly existence.

The Greek, metaphysical concept of the Logos is in sharp contrast to the concept of a personal God described in anthropomorphic terms typical of Hebrew thought. It was only natural that some would try to develop speculative and philosophical justification for Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy. Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE-50 CE), a Hellenized Jew, produced a synthesis of the two traditions, developing concepts for the future Hellenistic interpretation of messianic Hebrew thought. In the process, he laid the foundations for the development of Christianity as we know it today.³

² Prov., 5th cent. BCE; 8:22-31; the *Wisdom of Solomon*, in the second century BCE; 7:22, 25-27; 9:1-2; 18:15; the *Wisdom of Ben Sirach*, also in the second century BCE; 24:1-22.

³ *The Works of Philo. Complete and Unabridged*, translated by C.D. Yonge, new updated edition, Hedrickson Publishers, 1995.

Philo of Alexandria, *The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections*, translation and introduction by David Winston, Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981, 36. The Greek texts of Philo's works: Philonis Judaei, *Opera Omnia*, textus editus ad fidem optimarum editionum, Lipsiae: Sumptibus E.B. Schwickerti, 1828-1829, Vol. 1-6. Philonis Alexandrini, *Opera Quae Supersunt*, ediderunt Leopoldus Cohn et Paulus Wendland, Berolini: Typis et impensis Georgii Reimeri/Walther de Gruyter & Co., 1896-1930, Vol. 1-7.

List of abbreviations to Philo's works:

<i>Abr.</i> De Abrahamo	<i>Her.</i> Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres
<i>Aet.</i> De Aeternitate Mundi	<i>Sit</i>
<i>Agr.</i> De Agricultura	<i>Hypoth.</i> Hypothesica
<i>Anim.</i> De Animalibus	<i>Jos.</i> De Josepho
<i>Cher.</i> De Cherubim	<i>LA</i> Legum Allegoriarum
<i>Conf.</i> De Confusione Linguarum	<i>Legat.</i> Legatio ad Gaium
<i>Cogr.</i> De Congressu Eruditionis	<i>Mig.</i> De Migratione Abrahami
Gratia	<i>Mut.</i> De Mutatione Nominum
<i>Cont.</i> De Vita Contemplative	<i>Op.</i> De Opificio Mundi
<i>Decal.</i> De Decalogo	<i>Plant.</i> De Plantatione
<i>Det.</i> Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari	<i>Post.</i> De Posteritate Caini
Soleat	<i>Proem.</i> De Proemiis et Poenis
<i>Deus</i> Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis	<i>Prob.</i> Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit
<i>Ebr.</i> De Ebrietate	<i>Provid.</i> De Providentia
<i>Flac.</i> In Flaccum	<i>QE</i> Quaestiones et Solutiones in
<i>Fug.</i> De Fuga et Inventione	Exodum
<i>Gig.</i> De Gigantibus	

The church preserved the Philonic writings because Eusebius of Caesarea⁴ labeled the monastic ascetic group of Therapeutae and Therapeutrides, described in Philo's *The Contemplative Life*, as Christians, which is highly unlikely.⁵ Eusebius also promoted the legend that Philo met Peter in Rome. Jerome (345-420 CE) even listed Philo as a Church Father.⁶

Jewish tradition was uninterested in philosophical speculation, and did not preserve Philo's thought. Philo's primary importance is in the development of the philosophical and theological foundations of Christianity.

Philo had a deep reverence for Plato and referred to him as "the most holy Plato."⁷ Philo's philosophy represented contemporary Platonism, which was a combination of Platonism and Pythagorean ideas. Clement of Alexandria called Philo "Philo the Pythagorean."⁸ But he put forward

QG Quaestiones et Solutiones in
Genesim
Sacr. De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini
Sobr. De Sobrietate

Somn. De Somniis
Spec. De Specialibus Legibus
Virt. De Virtutibus

⁴ Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, translated with introduction by G.A. Williamson, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984, 2.17.1.

⁵ The view that the Therapeutae were Christians survived until the Middle Ages when the Protestants began to consider them to be Jews. Today opinions differ on the Therapeutae, but all evidence indicates they were remnants of the Buddhist tradition (Theravadins) introduced by missionaries King Asoka sent in the third century B.C.E. to King Ptolemy II Philadelphos. (Elmar R. Gruber and Holger Kersten, *The Original Jesus. The Buddhist Sources of Christianity*, Shaftesbury: Elements, 1995, 176-186; Z. P. Thundy, *Buddha and Christ*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993.) The name Therapeutae is of Buddhist origin. It is the Hellenized form of the Sanskrit/Pali term Theravadins, who were members of the Buddhist missionary order Theravada (= teachings of the old ones). The order was founded during the reign of King Asoka (274-232 BCE) and its main center was at Gandhara. The members of this order called themselves Theraputta ("Sons of the Old Ones"). According to Asoka's edict, preserved by a rock inscription, they were also to provide medical assistance (this was a common occupation of Buddhist monks; Buddha was extolled as the King of Medicine). Thus Philo linked the name of the sect with two Greek terms *θεραπεύω* (therapeuo = I cure, I heal, I do service) and *θεραπειά* (therapeia = service, medical attendance, worship) as "healers of souls." Philo also calls them "suppliants" and "beggars"; these terms connect with the Sanskrit name of the monks — "bhikshu" (beggars).

⁶ Jerome Eusebius Hieronymus Stridensis Presbyter, *De viris illustribus*, ch. 11 in Migne PL Vol. XXIII.

⁷ *Prob.* 13.

⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, I.15.

the teachings of the Jewish prophet Moses as “the summit of philosophy”⁹ and considered Moses the teacher of Pythagoras (b. ca. 570 BCE). For Philo, Greek philosophy was a natural development of the revelatory teachings of Moses.

The key emphasis in Philo’s philosophy was contrasting the spiritual life, understood as intellectual contemplation, with the mundane preoccupation with earthly concerns. He disdained the material world and physical body.¹⁰ For Philo the body was, as for Plato,¹¹ “an evil and a dead thing,”¹² wicked by nature and a plotter against the soul.¹³ He believed that men should gradually steer themselves away from the physical aspect of things. Some people, like philosophers, may succeed in focusing their minds on the eternal realities. Philo believed that man’s final goal and ultimate bliss is in the “knowledge of the true and living God”¹⁴; “such knowledge is the boundary of happiness and blessedness.”¹⁵ Mystic vision allows our soul to see the Divine Logos¹⁶ and achieve a union with God (Deut. 30:19-20).¹⁷ In a desire to validate the Scripture as an inspired writing he often compares it with prophetic ecstasy.¹⁸ His praise of the contemplative life of the monastic Therapeutae in Alexandria attests to his preference of “bios theoreticos” over “bios practicos.” He adheres to the Platonic picture of souls descending into the material realm, with only the souls of philosophers being able to come to the surface and return to the realm of heaven.¹⁹

Philo attempted to bridge Greek “scientific” philosophy with the ideology of the Hebrew Scriptures. As a basis for the scientific approach he used the world view presented by Plato in *Timaeus* (which remained influential in Hellenistic times). *Timaeus* was available in Latin translation into the Middle Ages and beyond, until modern science gradually liberated itself from the limitations of Greek “scientific” philosophy. Those limitations consisted in having linked scientific inquiry with

⁹ *Op.* 8.

¹⁰ *Spec.* 3.1-6.

¹¹ Plato, *Rep.* 585 B; *Timaeus* 86 B; *Soph.* 228.

¹² *LA* 3:72-73; *Gig.* 15.

¹³ *LA* 3.69.

¹⁴ *Decal.* 81; *Abr.* 58; *Proem.* 14.

¹⁵ *Det.* 86.

¹⁶ *Ebr.* 152.

¹⁷ *Post.* 12.

¹⁸ *Her.* 69-70.

¹⁹ *Gig.* 12-15.

philosophical and religious speculation.²⁰ The characteristic feature of the Greek scientific approach was, as we have mentioned, the biological interpretation of the physical world in anthropocentric terms. Terms of purpose and function, which may apply to biological and psychological realities, do not apply to the physical world. Moreover, Philo operates often on two levels: Hebraic religious tradition and philosophical speculation in the Greek tradition. Nevertheless, he attempted to harmonize the Mosaic and Platonic accounts of the generation of the world by interpreting the biblical story using Greek scientific categories and concepts. He elaborated a religious-philosophical worldview that became the foundation for future Christian doctrine.

In the first century Philo introduced the Stoic concept of the Logos into Judaism. In the process the Logos changed from a metaphysical entity into an extension of the divine and transcendental anthropomorphic being and a mediator between God and men. Philo offered various descriptions of the Logos.

1. The Utterance of God

Following Jewish tradition, Philo represents the Logos as the utterance of God found in the Old Testament, since God's words do not differ from His actions.²¹

2. The Divine Mind

Philo accepted the Platonic intelligible Forms. Forms exist forever, though the impressions they make may perish with the substance on which they were made.²² They are not, however, beings existing separately; they exist in the mind of God as His thoughts and powers. Philo explicitly identifies Forms with God's powers. Those powers are His glory, as Philo portrayed God explaining to Moses:

The powers that you seek are invisible and intelligible, belonging to me who am [equally] invisible and intelligible, and by intelligible I speak not of those effectively apprehended by mind but mean that if these powers could be apprehended, it would not be by sense but by mind at its purest. But though inapprehensible in their essence they show a sort of impress and copy of their activity: like

²⁰ James Reston, Jr., *Galileo: A Life*, New York: Harper Collins, 1994.

²¹ *Sacr.* 8; *Somm.* 1.182; *Op.* 13.

²² *Det.* 75-77; *Mut.* 80, 122, 146; *Cher.* 51.

your seals, which when wax or similar material is brought into contact with them stamp on them innumerable impressions without suffering loss in any part, but remaining as they were. Such you must assume my powers to be procuring qualities for things qualityless and shapes for things shapeless, and neither altering nor lessening anything of their eternal nature. Some among you, without missing the mark call them forms . . .²³

Philo interpreted the Logos as the Divine Mind, the Form of Forms, the Idea of Ideas, or the sum total of Forms or Ideas.²⁴ The Logos is an indestructible Form of wisdom. Interpreting the garment of the high priest (Exod. 28:34, 36) Philo states: “But the seal is an Idea of Ideas, according to which God fashioned the world, being an incorporeal Idea, comprehensible only by the intellect.”²⁵

Philo reasoned that the visible world was created in the image of its archetype, which was present in the mind of God, analogous to man’s creation in God’s image. “It is manifest also, that that archetypal seal, which we call that world which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the Idea of Ideas, the Logos of God.”²⁶ The invisible intelligible world was created in the mind of God, and was used by the Logos as a model for creation (or rather formation) of the visible world from the (preexisting) unformed matter: “The incorporeal world then was already completed, having its seat in the Divine Logos, and the world, perceptible by the external senses, was made on the model of it.”²⁷ Describing Moses’ account of the creation of man, Philo stated: “And the invisible Divine Logos he [Moses] calls the Image of God”,²⁸ and “shadow of God is his Logos, which he used as like an instrument when he was making the world.”²⁹ Forms, though inapprehensible in essence, leave an impress and a copy and procure qualities and shapes for shapeless things, unorganized matter. Mind can grasp the Forms by longing for wisdom. “The desire of wisdom alone is continual and incessant, and it fills all its pupils and disciples with famous and most beautiful doctrines.”³⁰

²³ *Spec.* 1.45-50.

²⁴ *Det.* 75-76.

²⁵ *Mig.* 103.

²⁶ *Op.* 25.

²⁷ *Op.* 36.

²⁸ *Op.* 24; 31; *LA* 1.9.

²⁹ *LA* 3.96.

³⁰ *Spec.* 1.45-50.

Creation thus took place from the preexistent shapeless matter (Plato's Receptacle) which is "the nurse of all becoming and change"³¹ and for this creation God used the Forms, which are His powers. "For from the pre-elemental matter God created all things, without laying hold of it himself, since it was not lawful for the happy and blessed one to touch limitless chaotic matter. Instead he employed his incorporeal Forms, so that each genus assumed its fitting shape."³² Philo gives seemingly contradictory statements on whether the primordial matter was preexistent or was created *ex nihilo*. In some places Philo states, "nothing comes into being from the nonexistent and nothing is destroyed into the nonexistent."³³ Similarly, in his *De Specialibus Legibus*: "Being made of us [i.e. elements] when you were born, you will again be dissolved into us when you come to die; for it is not the nature of any thing to be destroyed so as to become nonexistent, but the end brings it back to those elements from which its beginnings come."³⁴ Philo's theory of eternal creation resolves this seeming conflict. The next section describes that theory, which connects with the Logos as the agent of creation. Philo, being a strict monist, could not accept the existence of independent and eternal preexistent matter (however disorganized and chaotic) as Plato did.

3. Agent of Creation

Philo believed that the Logos is "the man of God"³⁵ or the shadow of God that was an instrument of creation and a pattern of all creation.

Now, Bezalel [see Exod. 31:2] is being interpreted as man's God in his shadow. But the shadow of God is his Logos, which he used like an instrument when he was making the world. And this shadow, and, as it were, model, is the archetype of other things. For as God is himself the model of that image which he [Moses] has now called a shadow, so also that image is the model of other things, as he showed when he commenced giving the law to the Israelites, and said, "And God made man according to the image of God" (Gen. 1:26), as the image was modeled according to God, and as

³¹ Plato, *Timaeus*, 49-51.

³² *Spec.* 1.327-329.

³³ *Aet.* 5-6.

³⁴ *Spec.* 1.266.

³⁵ *Conf.* 41.

man was modeled according to the image, which thus received the power and character of the model.³⁶

Philo's model of creation comes from Plato's *Timaeus*, but with some differences. For Philo the direct agent of creation is not God Himself (described in Plato as Demiurge, Maker, Artificer), but the Logos. The Logos converted unqualified, unshaped preexistent matter, which Philo described as "destitute of arrangement, of quality, of animation, of distinctive character and full of disorder and confusion,"³⁷ into four primordial elements.

For it is out of that essence that God created everything, without indeed touching it himself, for it was not lawful for the all-wise and all-blessed God to touch materials which were all misshapen and confused, but he created them by the agency of his incorporeal powers, of which the proper name is Ideas, which he so exerted that every genus received its proper form.³⁸

According to Philo, Moses anticipated Plato by teaching that water, darkness, and chaos existed before the world came into existence.³⁹ Moses, having reached the summit of philosophy, recognized that there were two fundamental principles of being. One was "an active cause, the intellect of the universe." The other was passive, "inanimate and incapable of motion by any intrinsic power of its own,"⁴⁰ matter, lifeless and motionless. Philo is ambiguous, however, in such statements as these: "God brought into being that which did not exist before acting not only as artificer but also as creator";⁴¹ "God who created the whole universe out of things that had no previous existence."⁴² It seems that Philo does not refer here to God's creation of the visible world *ex nihilo* but to His creation of the intelligible Forms prior to the formation of the world.⁴³

Philo denies the Aristotelian conclusion coming, according to him, from the superficial observation that the world existed from eternity,

³⁶ *LA* 3.96.

³⁷ *Op.* 22.

³⁸ *LA* 1.329.

³⁹ *Op.* 22.

⁴⁰ *Op.* 8-9.

⁴¹ *Somn.* 1.76; *Op.* 81.

⁴² *LA* 3.10.

⁴³ *Spec.* 1.328.

independent of any creative act. "For some men, admiring the world itself rather than the Creator of the world, have represented it as existing without any maker, and eternal, and as impiously and falsely have represented God as existing in a state of complete inactivity."⁴⁴ He elaborated instead his theory of the eternal creation,⁴⁵ as did Proclus much later (410-485 CE) in interpreting Plato.⁴⁶ Proclus brilliantly demonstrated that even in the theistic system the world though generated must be eternal, because the "world is always fabricated . . . is always becoming to be."⁴⁷ Proclus believed, as did Philo, that the corporeal world is always coming into existence but never possesses real being.⁴⁸

Thus God, according to Philo, did not begin to create the world at a certain moment, but He is "eternally applying himself to its creation."⁴⁹

But God is the creator of time also, for he is the father of his father, and the father of time is the world, which made its own mother the creation of time, so that time stands towards God in the relation of a grandson; for this world is a younger son of God, inasmuch as it is perceptible by the outward sense, for the only son he speaks of as older than the world, is Idea, and this is not perceptible by the intellect, but having thought the other worthy of the rights of primogeniture, he has decided that it should remain with him; therefore, this younger son, perceptible by the external senses being set in motion, has caused the nature of time to shine forth, and to become conspicuous, so that there is nothing future to God, who has the very boundaries of time subject to him; for their life is not time, but the beautiful model of eternity; and in eternity nothing is past and nothing is future, but everything is present only.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ *Op.* 7.

⁴⁵ *Provid.* 1.6-9.

⁴⁶ Proclus, *Commentaire sur le Timée*, traduction et notes par A.J. Festugière, Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1966-1968, Vol. 1-5. Vol. 2, 290, 3-25.

⁴⁷ *In Defense of the Timaeus of Plato in Fragments of the Lost Writings of Proclus*, translated from the Greek by Thomas Taylor, Lawrence, KS: Selene Books, 1987, 4.

⁴⁸ *Arguments in Proof of the Eternity of the World*, in Taylor, 35-107. Proclus' main argument was that if God does not always make the world, he would be an imperfect Demiurge indigent of time. It is amazing that these arguments were never considered later by Christian philosophers who always argued instead for the biblical scheme of creation.

⁴⁹ *Provid.* 1.7; *Op.* 7; *Aet.* 83-84.

⁵⁰ *Deus* 31-32.

Philo contends that God thinks simultaneously with His acting or creating. “For God while he spake the word, did at the same moment create; nor did he allow anything to come between the Logos and the deed; and if one may advance a doctrine which is pretty nearly true, His Logos is his deed.”⁵¹

Thus any description of creation in temporal terms, e.g., by Moses, is not literal but rather is an accommodation to biblical language:⁵²

God is continuously ordering matter by his thought. His thinking was not anterior to his creating and there never was a time when he did not create, the Ideas themselves having been with him from the beginning. For God’s will is not posterior to him, but is always with him, for natural motions never give out. Thus ever thinking he creates, and furnishes to sensible things the principle of their existence, so that both should exist together: the ever-creating Divine Mind and the sense-perceptible things to which beginning of being is given.⁵³

Thus God Himself would first eternally create the intelligible world of Ideas as His thoughts, and on this model the Logos would then create matter, first unshaped and disordered and then as the sensible world:

Now we must form a somewhat similar opinion of God [Philo makes an analogy to a plan of the city in the mind of its builder], who, having determined to found a mighty state, first of all conceived its form in his mind, according to which form he made a world perceptible only by the intellect, and then completed one visible to the external senses, using the first one as a model.⁵⁴

Philo claimed scriptural support for these metaphysics, saying that the creation of the world was after the pattern of an intelligible world (Gen. 1:17) which served as its model. During the first day God created Ideas or Forms of heaven, earth, air (= darkness), empty space (= abyss), water, pneuma (= mind), light, the intelligible pattern of the sun and the stars.⁵⁵ There are, however, differences between Philo and Plato: according to

⁵¹ *Sacr.* 65; *Mos.* 1.283.

⁵² *Op.* 19; *Mut.* 27; *LA* 2.9-13.

⁵³ *Provid.* 1.7.

⁵⁴ *Op.* 19.

⁵⁵ *Op.* 29.

Plato, there was no form of space. In Plato space was not apprehended by reason; rather it had its own special status in the world. Also pneuma as a form of soul did not exist in the system of Plato.

Plato designated the primordial unorganized state of matter as a self-existing Receptacle; it was most stable and a permanent constituent. "It must be called always the same, for it never departs at all from its own character."⁵⁶ Philo, being a strict monist, could not allow even for a self-existing void so he makes its pattern an eternal idea in the divine mind.

Before Philo there was no explicit theory of creation *ex nihilo* ever postulated in Jewish or Greek traditions. Neither Philo nor Plato explain how the Forms made their impressions in the world of senses. They do not attribute the presence of the impressionable material to God or the Demiurge. To do so would have opposed their conception of God as "good" and "desiring that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself."⁵⁷ It seems then that the primordial unorganized matter spontaneously existed on the pattern of the Ideas. The Logos would shape the elements from this preexistent matter, first into heavy (or dense) and light (or rare) elements that differentiate properly into water and earth, air and fire.⁵⁸ As in Plato, certain geometrical descriptions characterize Philo's elements.⁵⁹ In Plato's theory too, one could envision a sort of automatic reflection of the Forms in the Receptacle due to the properties of Forms. God could not, according to Philo's philosophy, create the preexistent matter. "It was not the matter subjected to his creative activity, material inanimate, discordant, and dissoluble, and what is more in itself perishable, irregular and unequal, that God praised, but the works of his own art accomplished by a power unique, equal, and uniform, and through knowledge ever one and the same."⁶⁰ Logically, God is for Philo indirectly the source of preexistent matter but Philo would not ascribe to God even the shaping of matter directly.

Most philosophers in antiquity asserted that the world had a beginning, but that it was thereafter either everlasting (Plato) or subject to an eternal sequence of cyclic generations and destructions (Heraclitus, Empedocles, Stoics). Aristotle maintained that the Platonic view was untenable and

⁵⁶ Plato, *Timaeus*, 50.

⁵⁷ Plato, *Timaeus*, 29.

⁵⁸ *Her.* 134-140; 143.

⁵⁹ *QG* 3.49.

⁶⁰ *Her.* 160.

asserted that the universe was eternal.⁶¹ Some Platonists disagreed with the formulations of Platonic cosmogony. These philosophers asserted that though the world was uncreated it could be presented as continually created, for practical pedagogical reasons. In this system the world derives from the action of some principle (the One) on unorganized matter (the Indefinite Dyad).

4. Transcendent Power

The Logos which God begat eternally because he is the manifestation of God's thinking-acting⁶² is an agent who unites two powers of the transcendent God. Philo relates that in an inspiration his own soul told him:

that in the one living and true God there were two supreme and primary powers, Goodness [or Creative Power = ποιητικὴ δύναμις] and Authority [or Regent Power = βασιλικὴ δύναμις]; and that by his Goodness he had created every thing; and by his Authority he governed all that he had created; and that the third thing which was between the two, and had the effect of bringing them together was the Logos, for that it was owing to Logos that God was both a ruler and good.⁶³

Philo treats biblical cherubim as the symbols of the two powers of God and considers the flaming sword (Gen. 3:24) as the symbol of Logos. "For exceedingly swift and of glowing heat is Logos, and especially so the Logos of the primal cause, for this it was that preceded and outstripped all things, conceived before them all, and before all manifest."⁶⁴ Philo's description of the Logos (the Mind of God) corresponds to the Greek concept of mind as hot and fiery.⁶⁵ There are other powers in addition to these two main powers of the Father and His Logos, including the merciful and legislative.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *De Coelo*, 1.10 R79.

⁶² *Provid.* 1.7; *Sacr.* 65; *Mos.* 1.283.

⁶³ *Cher.* 1:27-28.

⁶⁴ *Cher.* 1.27-28. Cf. *Sacr.* 59; *Abr.* 124-125; *Her.* 166; *QE* 2.68.

⁶⁵ Aëtius IV.3.3-11 (Stoics); IV. 3.4 (Parmenides); IV.3.5 (Democritus); IV.3.6 (Heraclitus); IV.3.7 (Leucippus); IV.3.11 (Epicurus). In H. Diels, *Doxographi graeci*, Berolini: apud Walter de Gruyter et Socios, 1965, *SVF* 3.305; 2.446.

Perhaps we may say that the most ancient, and the strongest and the most excellent metropolis, for I may not call it merely a city, is the divine Logos, to flee to which first is the most advantageous course of all. But the other five, ebbing as it were colonies of that one, are the powers of him who utters the Word, the chief of which is his creative power, according to which the Creator made the world with a word; the second is his kingly power, according to which he who has created rules over what is created; the third is his merciful power, in respect to which the creator pities and shows mercy towards his own work; the fourth is his legislative power by which he forbids what may not be done . . . ⁶⁶

The Logos has an origin, but as God's thought he also has an eternal generation. He exists before everything else (all of which are secondary products of God's thought), and therefore he is the "first-born."

The Logos is thus more than a quality, power or characteristic of God; it is an entity eternally generated as an extension, to which Philo ascribes many names and functions. The Logos is the first-begotten Son of the Uncreated Father: "For the Father of the universe has caused him to spring up as the eldest son, whom, in another passage, he [Moses] calls the first-born; and he who is thus born, imitating the ways of his father, has formed such and such species, looking to his archetypal patterns."⁶⁷ This picture is somewhat confusing because we learn that in the final analysis we must identify the Creative Power with the Logos.

The Beneficent (Creative) and Regent (Authoritative) Powers are called God and Lord, respectively. Goodness is Boundless Power, Creative, God. The Regent Power is also Punitive Power and the Lord.⁶⁸ Creative Power, moreover, permeates the world; it is the power by which God made and ordered all things. Philo followed the ideas of the Stoics⁶⁹ that *nous* pervades every part of the universe as it does the soul in us. Therefore Philo asserts that the aspect of God which transcends His powers (which we have to understand to be the Logos) cannot be conceived of in terms of place but as pure being: "but that power of his by which he made and ordered all things, called God in accordance with the etymology of that name, enfolds the whole and passes through the

⁶⁶ *Fug.* 94-95.

⁶⁷ *Conf.* 63.

⁶⁸ *Her.* 166.

⁶⁹ *DL* 7.138-139.

parts of the universe.”⁷⁰ According to Philo, the two powers of God are separated by God “himself standing above in the midst of them, . . . the senior powers of the Existent.”⁷¹ Referring to Genesis 18:2, Philo claims that God and His two Powers are in reality one. To the human mind they appear as a Triad, with God above the powers that belong to Him. “For this cannot be so keen of spirit that it can see him who is above the powers that belong to him, (namely) God, distinct from everything else. For so soon as one sets eyes on God, there also appear together with his being, the ministering powers, so that in place of one he makes the appearance of a triad.”⁷²

At birth two powers enter every soul, the salutary (Beneficent) and the destructive (Unbounded). The world is created through these same powers. The creation is accomplished when “the salutary and beneficent (power) brings to an end the unbounded and destructive nature.” Similarly one or the other power may prevail in humans, but when the salutary power “brings to an end the unbounded and destructive nature” humans achieve immortality. Thus both the world and humans are a mixture of these powers, and the prevailing one has the moral determination. “For the souls of foolish men have the unbounded and destructive rather than the powerful and salutary [power], and it is full of misery when it dwells with earthly creatures. But the prudent and noble [soul] receives the powerful and salutary [power] and, on the contrary, possesses in itself good fortune and happiness.”⁷³

Philo evidently analyzes these two powers on two levels. One is the divine level in which the Unlimited or the Unbounded is a representation of God’s infinite and immeasurable goodness and creativity. The Logos keeps this in balance through the Limit. The other level is the human one, where the Unlimited or the Unbounded represents destruction and everything morally abhorrent. Human reason is able, however, to maintain in it some kind of balance.

Philo obviously refers in these powers to the Unlimited (ἄπειρον) and the Limit (πέρας) of Plato’s *Philebus* and earlier Pythagorean tradition.⁷⁴ Among the beings Plato differentiated one Unlimited, another the Limit, a third a mixture of these two, and a fourth the cause of mixing. When the

⁷⁰ *Conf.* 136-137.

⁷¹ *Her.* 166.

⁷² *QG* 4.2.

⁷³ *QE* 1.23.

⁷⁴ Plato, *Philebus*, 23C - 31A.

first two principles combine in one unity it is called a body. On the cosmic level this body is the universe, but such a body can also be a component of the world, or a human. The fourth principle is the cause (αἰτία *aitia*) which is producing the mixture and everything that emerges from that mixture. The cause that produces order is reason and wisdom. If it acts on the cosmic level it is the cosmic soul and if it acts in humans it is a human soul. The ideal life thus described by Plato, and later by Philo, is the one governed by reason.

In Plato those first two principles or powers operate at the metaphysical, cosmic and human levels. Philo considered those powers to be inherent in transcendental God, and that God Himself may be thought of as multiplicity in unity.

The Creative Power is logically prior to the Regent Power since it is conceptually older. Though the powers are of equal age, the creative is prior because one is king not of the nonexistent but of what has already come into being.⁷⁵ These two powers thus delimit the bounds of heaven and the world:

The Creative Power being concerned that things that come into being through it should not be dissolved, and the Regent Power that nothing either exceeds or is robbed of its due, all being arbitrated by the laws of equality through which things continue eternally. For excess and inequality are the incentives for war, the destroyers of existing things. But good order and equality are the seeds of peace, and the causes of preservation and perpetual survival.⁷⁶

The positive properties of God may be subdivided into these two polar forces; therefore, the expression of the One is the Logos that constitutes the manifestation of God's thinking-acting.⁷⁷

According to Philo people grasp these powers of the Logos at various levels. Those at the summit level grasp the powers as constituting an indivisible unity. At the two lower levels are, respectively, those who know the Logos as the Creative Power and, beneath them, those who know it as the Regent Power.⁷⁸ The next level down represents those

⁷⁵ *QE* 2.62.

⁷⁶ *QE* 2.64.

⁷⁷ *Provid.* 1.7; *Sacr.* 65; *Mos.* 1.283.

⁷⁸ *Fug.* 94-95; *Abr.* 124-125.

limited to the sensible world, unable to perceive the intelligible realities.⁷⁹ At each successively lower level of divine knowledge the image of God's essence is increasingly more obscured.

5. Universal Bond

The Logos is the bond holding together and administering the entire chain of creation:

For the Logos of the living God being the bond of every thing, as has been said before, holds all things together, and binds all the parts, and prevents them from being loosened or separated. And the particular soul, as far as it has received power, does not permit any of the parts of the body to be separated or cut off contrary to their nature; but as far as it depends upon itself, it preserves every thing entirely, and conducts the different parts to a harmony and indissoluble union with one another. But the mind of the wise man being thoroughly purified, preserves the virtues in an unbroken and unimpaired condition, having adapted their natural kindred and communion with a still more solid good will.⁸⁰

And

For all things are intrinsically and by their own nature unbound, and if there is any where any thing consolidated, that has been bound by the Logos of God, for this Logos is glue and a chain, filling all things with its essence. And the Logos, which connects together and fastens every thing, is peculiarly full itself of itself, having no need whatever of any thing beyond.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Gig.* 20.

⁸⁰ *Fug.* 112.

⁸¹ *Her.* 188.