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**The Logos and Its Function  
in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria:  
Greek Interpretation of the Hebrew Myth  
and Foundations of Christianity**

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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, reason*. 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. In any theistic system it could therefore easily be used to account for a revelation or to be personified and designate a separate being. Through most schools of Greek philosophy, this term was used to designate a rational, intelligent and thus vivifying principle of the universe. This principle was deduced from the understanding of the universe as the living reality and by comparing it to the 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 (Zach. 5:1-4; Ps. 106:20; Ps. 147:15), and messages of prophets by means of 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 the so-called Jewish wisdom literature we find the concept of Wisdom (*hokhmah* and *sophia*) which could be to some degree interpreted as a separate personification or individualization (hypostatization), but it is contrasted often with human stupidity. In the Hebrew culture it was a part of metaphorical and poetic language 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. Thus when Hebrew mythical thought met the Greek philosophical 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 both 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.

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

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." Philo's philosophy represented contemporary Platonism which was a combination of Platonism and Pythagorean ideas. Clement of Alexandria called Philo "Philo the Pythagorean." But he put forward the teachings of the Jewish prophet, Moses, as "the summit of philosophy" 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. The body was for Philo as for Plato, "an evil and a dead thing," wicked by nature and a plotter against the soul. He believed that men should steer themselves away from the physical aspect of things gradually. 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;" "such knowledge is the boundary of happiness and blessedness." Mystic vision allows our soul to see the Divine Logos and achieve a union with God (*Deut.* 30:19-20). In a desire to validate the scripture as an inspired writing he often compares it with prophetic ecstasy. 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 the souls descending into the material realm and only the souls of philosophers are able to come to the surface and return back to their realm of heaven where they came from.

Philo attempted to bridge the Greek "scientific" philosophy with the strictly mythical 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. It was available in the Latin translation into the Middle Ages and beyond until modern science gradually liberated itself from the limitations of the Greek "scientific" philosophy. Those limitations consisted in having linked scientific inquiry with philosophical and religious speculation, the separation of which was illustrated by the case of Galileo. The characteristic feature of the Greek scientific approach was, as we have mentioned, the biological interpretation of the physical world in anthropocentric terms, in terms of purpose and function that may apply to biological and psychological realities but may not be applied to the physical world. Moreover, Philo operates often on two levels: the level of mythical Hebraic religious tradition and the level of philosophical speculation in the Greek tradition. Nevertheless, Philo 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 which became the foundation for the future Christian doctrine.

In the first century Philo introduced the Stoic concept of the Logos into Judaism. In the process the Logos became transformed 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.

## The Utterance of God

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

## 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. They are not, however, beings existing separately, but 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 and Philo portrayed God as 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 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 ....

Philo interpreted the Logos which is the Divine Mind as the Form of Forms, the Idea of Ideas or the sum total of Forms or Ideas. 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."

Philo reasoned that by analogy to the biblical version of the creation of man in the image of God, so the visible world as such must have been created in the image of its archetype present in the mind of God. "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." The invisible intelligible world which was used by the Logos as a model for creation or rather formation of the visible world from the (preexisting) unformed matter was created in the mind of God: "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." Describing Moses' account of the creation of man, Philo states also: "And the invisible Divine Logos he [Moses] calls the Image of God;" also, "shadow of God is his Logos, which he used as like an instrument when he was making the world." Forms, though inapprehensible in essence, leave an impress and a copy and procure qualities and shapes to 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."

Creation thus took place from the preexistent shapeless matter (Plato's Receptacle) which is "the nurse of all becoming and change" 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 assume its fitting shape." This may seem a controversial point whether the primordial matter was preexistent or was created *ex nihilo*. Philo's view is not clearly stated and there are seemingly contradictory statements. In some places Philo states, "nothing comes into being from the nonexistent and nothing is destroyed into the nonexistent." The same is repeated 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." The resolution of this seeming controversy is to be found in Philo's theory of eternal creation which is described next in connection 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.

### Agent of Creation

Philo believed that the Logos is "the man of God" or the shadow of God which was used as an instrument of creation and a pattern of all creation: when talking about Bezabel (*Exod.* 31:2), Philo says:

Now, Bezabel 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 modelled according to God, and as man was modelled according to the image, which thus received the power and character of the model.

Philo's model of creation comes from Plato's *Timaeus*, but 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," 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.

According to Philo, Moses anticipated Plato by teaching that water, darkness, and chaos existed before the world came into existence. Moses having reached the philosophy summit recognized that there were two fundamental principles of being, one, "an active cause, the intellect of the universe." The other was passive, "inanimate and incapable of motion by any intrinsic power of its own," matter, lifeless and motionless. But Philo is ambiguous in such statements as these: "God brought into being that which did not exist before acting not only as artificer but also as creator;" "God who created the whole universe out of things that had no previous existence." 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.

Philo denies the Aristotelian conclusion coming, according to him, from the superficial observation that the world existed from eternity, 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." He elaborated instead his theory of the eternal creation, as did Proclus (410-485 CE) much later in interpreting Plato. 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." Proclus believed, as Philo, that the corporeal world is always coming into existence but never possesses real being.

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."

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.

Philo contended 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."

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

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.

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 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.

Philo claimed a 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. There are, however, differences between Philo and Plato: according to 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 this primordial unorganized state of matter 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." 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. Both Philo and Plato do not explain how the impressions of Forms are made in the world of senses. They do not attribute them to God or the Demiurge because it would be contrary to their conception of God as "good" and "desiring that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself." It seems then that the primordial unorganized matter was spontaneously produced 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 which were differentiated properly into water and earth, and air and fire. As in Plato certain geometrical descriptions characterize Philo's elements. 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." Logically, God is for Philo indirectly the source of preexistent matter but Philo would not ascribe to God even the shaping of matter directly.

In antiquity most philosophers asserted that the world had a beginning and either having begun it was everlasting

(like Plato) or was subject to eternal sequence of cyclic generations and destructions (like Heraclitus, Empedocles, Stoics). Aristotle maintained that the Platonic view was untenable and asserted that the universe was eternal. Some Platonists disagreed with the formulations of Platonic cosmogony and asserted that the world was really uncreated but for the practical pedagogical reason it could be presented as continually created and derived from the action of some principle (the One) on unorganized matter (the Indefinite Dyad).

## Transcendent Power

The Logos which God begat eternally because he is manifestation of God's thinking-acting, 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 = ποιητικη δυναμις] and Authority [or Regent Power = βασιλικη δυναμις]; 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.

And further Philo continues that biblical cherubim are the symbols of the two powers of God but the flaming sword (Gen. 3.24) is 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." Philo's description of the Logos (the Mind of God) corresponds to the Greek concept of mind as hot and fiery. In addition to these two main powers, there are other powers of the Father and his Logos, including merciful and legislative:

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 ...

Also the Logos has an origin, but as God's thought it also has eternal generation. It exists as such before everything else all of which are secondary products of God's thought and therefore it is called 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 ascribed 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." This picture is somewhat confusing because we learn that in the final analysis the Creative Power is also identified 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. Creative Power, moreover, permeates the world, the power by which God made and ordered all things. Philo followed the ideas of the Stoics 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 parts of the universe." 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." Referring to *Gen. 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."

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 the both 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."

Philo evidently analyzes these two powers on two levels. One is the divine level in which the Unlimited or the Unbound is a representation of God's infinite and immeasurable goodness and creativity. The Logos keeps it 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 ( $\alpha\pi\epsilon\iota\rho\upsilon\nu$ ) and the Limit ( $\pi\epsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma$ ) of Plato's Philebus and earlier Pythagorean tradition. Among the beings Plato differentiated one Unlimited, the other the Limit, a third one a mixture of these two, and a fourth, the cause of mixing. When the first two principles combined in one unity it is called a body (a component of the world or a human, and on the cosmic level the universe). The fourth principle is the cause ( $\alpha\tau\tau\alpha$ ) which is producing the mixture and everything that becomes from that mixture. The cause that produces order is a 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, just as later by Philo, is the one governed by reason.

In Plato these two principles or powers operate at the metaphysical, cosmic and human levels. Philo considered these powers to be inherent in transcendental God, and that God himself may be thought 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. 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.

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

According to Philo these powers of the Logos can be grasped at various levels. Those at the summit level they are grasped as constituting an indivisible unity. At the two lower levels, respectively, are those who know the Logos as the Creative Power and beneath them those who know it as the Regent Power. The next level down represents those limited to the sensible world, unable to perceive the intelligible realities. At each successively lower level of divine knowledge the image of God's essence is increasingly more obscured.

## 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.

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.

### **Immanent Reason**

The reasoning capacity of a human mind a portion of the all-pervading Divine Logos. "It is the mind alone which the Father who begat it deemed worthy of freedom, and, loosening the bonds of necessity, allowed it to range free, and of that power of volition which constitutes His most intimate and fitting possession [God] presented it [the mind] with such a portion as it was capable of receiving." Philo emphasizes that man "has received this one extraordinary gift, intellect, which is accustomed to comprehend the nature of all bodies and of all things at the same time." Humanity resembles God in the sense of having free volition:

For in the case of other plants and other animals, we cannot call either the good that is caused by them deserving of praise, or the evil that they do deserving of blame; for all their motives in either direction, and all their changes, have no design about them, but are involuntary. But the soul of man, being the only one which has received from God the power of voluntary motion, and which in this respect has been made to resemble God, and being as far as possible emancipated from the authority of that grievous and severe mistress necessity, may rightly be visited with reproach if she does not pay the honour to the being who has emancipated her.

This concept, that it is chiefly in intellect and free volition that humans differ from other life forms, has a long history which can be traced to Anaxagoras and Aristotle. Philo called "men of God" those people who made God-inspired intellectual life their dominant issue. Such men "have entirely transcended the sensible sphere, and migrated to the intelligible world, and dwell there enrolled as citizens of the Commonwealth of Ideas, which are imperishable, and incorporeal ... those who are born of God are priests and prophets who have not thought fit to mix themselves up in the constitutions of this world ...." Philo wrote the following in reference to the Old Testament expression that God "breathed into" (equivalent of "inspired" or "gave life to") inanimate things:

For there must be three things: that which breathes in is God, that which receives what is breathed in, and that which is breathed in. Now, that which breathes is God, that which receives what is breathed in is the mind, and that which is breathed in is the spirit. What then is collected from these three things? A union of the three takes place, through God extending the power, which proceeds from himself through the spirit, which is the middle term, as far as the subject.

Though the spirit is distributed among men it is not diminished:



But now, the spirit which is upon him is the wise, the divine, the individual, the undistributable, the good spirit, the spirit which is everywhere diffused, so as to fill the universe, which, while it benefits others, it is not injured by having a participation in it given to another, and if added to something else, either as to its understanding, or its knowledge, or its wisdom.

The nature of the reasoning power in men is indivisible from the Divine Logos, but "though they are indivisible themselves, they divide an innumerable multitude of other things." Just as the Divine Logos divided and distributed everything in nature (i.e. it gave qualities to undifferentiated, primordial matter), so the human mind by exertion of its intellect is able to divide everything and everybody into an infinite number of parts. And this is possible because it resembles the Logos of the Creator and Father of the universe: "So that, very naturally, the two things which thus resemble each other, both the mind which is in us and that which is above us, being without parts and invisible, will still be able in a powerful manner to divide and distribute all existing things."

How, then, is it natural that the human intellect, being as scanty as it is, and enclosed in no very ample space, in some membrane, or in the heart (truly very narrow bounds), should be able to embrace the vastness of the heaven and of the world, great as it is, if there were not in it some portion of a divine and happy soul, which cannot be separated from it? For nothing which belongs to the divinity can be cut off from it so as to be separated from it, but it is only extended. On which account the Being which has had imparted to it a share of the perfection which is in the universe, when it arrives at a proper comprehension of the world, is extended in width simultaneously with the boundaries of the universe, and is incapable of being divided; for its power is ductile and capable of extension.

Uninitiated minds are unable to apprehend the Existent by itself; they only perceive it through its actions. To them God appears as a Triad -- Himself and His two Powers: creative and ruling. To the "purified soul," however, God appears as One.

When, therefore, the soul is shone upon by God as if at noonday, and when it is wholly and entirely filled with that light which is appreciable only by the intellect, and by being wholly surrounded with its brilliancy is free from all shackle or darkness, it then perceives a threefold image of one subject, one image of the living God, and others of the other two, as if they were shadows irradiated by it .... but he claims that the term shadow is just a more vivid representation of the matter intended to be intimated. Since this is not the actual truth, but in order that one may when speaking keep as close to the truth as possible, the one in the middle is the Father of the universe, who in the sacred scripture is called by his proper name, I am that I am; and the beings on each side are those most ancient powers which are always close to the living God, one of which is called his Creative Power, and the other his Royal Power. And the Creative Power is God, for it is by this that he made and arranged the universe; and the Royal Power is the Lord, for it is fitting that the Creator should lord it over and govern the creature. Therefore, the middle person of the three, being attended by each of his powers as by body-guard, presents to the mind, which is endowed with the faculty of sight, a vision at one time of one being, and at another time of three; of one when the soul being completely purified, and having surmounted not only the multitude of numbers, but also the number two, which is the neighbour of the unit, hastens onward to that idea which is devoid of mixture, free from all combination, and by itself in need of nothing else whatever; and of three, when, not being as yet made perfect as to the important virtues, it is still seeking for initiation in those of less consequence, and is not able to attain to a comprehension of the living God by its own unassisted faculties without the aid of something else, but can only do so by judging of his deeds, whether as creator or as governor. This then, as they say, is the second best thing; and it no less partakes in the opinion which is dear to and devoted to God. But the first-mentioned disposition has no such share, but is

itself the very God-loving and God-beloved opinion itself, or rather it is truth which is older than opinion, and more valuable than any seeming.

So the one category of enlightened people is able to comprehend God through a vision beyond the physical universe. It is as though they advanced on a heavenly ladder and conjectured the existence of God through an inference. The other category apprehends Him through Himself, as light is seen by light. For God gave man such a perception "as should prove to him that God exists, and not to show him what God is." Philo believed that even the *existence* of God "cannot possibly be contemplated by any other being; because, in fact, it is not possible for God to be comprehended by any being but himself." Philo adds, "Only men who have raised themselves upward from below, so as, through the contemplation of his works, to form a conjectural conception of the Creator by a probable train of reasoning" are holy, and are his servants.

Next Philo explains how such men have an impression of God's existence as revealed by God Himself, by the similitude of the sun (Philo borrowed this analogy from Plato). As the light is seen in consequence of its own presence so, "In the same manner God, being his own light, is perceived by himself alone, nothing and no other being co-operating with or assisting him, a being at all able to contribute to pure comprehension of his existence; But these men have arrived at the real truth, who form their ideas of God from God, of light from light."

As Plato and Philo had done, Plotinus later used this image of the sun: "The illumination which is diffused from Him who remains immobile, is as light in the sun which illuminates everything else around." Philo differentiated two modes for perceiving God, an inferential mode and a direct mode without mediation: "As long therefore as our mind still shines around and hovers around, pouring as it were a noontide light into the whole soul, we, being masters of ourselves, are not possessed by any extraneous influence." Thus this direct mode is not in any way a type of inspiration or inspired prophecy; it is unlike "inspiration" when a "trance" or a "heaven-inflicted madness" seizes us and divine light sets as it happens "to the race of prophets."

Thus the Logos, eternally created (begotten), is an expression of the immanent powers of God and at the same time it emanates into everything in the world.

### **Immanent Mediator of the Physical Universe**

In certain places in his writings Philo accepted the Stoic theory of the immanent Logos as the power or Law binding the opposites in the universe and mediating between them, and directing the world. For example, Philo envisions that the world is suspended in a vacuum and asks, how is it that the world does not fall down since it is not held by any solid thing. Philo then gives the answer:

The Logos extending himself from the center to its furthest bounds and from its extremities to the center again, runs nature's unvanquished course joining and binding fast all its parts. For the Father when he begat him constituted him an unbreakable bond of the universe. It is therefore reasonable that all the earth will not be dissolved by all the water contained within its bosom-like hollows; nor fire be quenched by air; nor, on the other hand, air be rekindled by fire. The Divine Logos marshals himself between, like a vowel amid consonants, that the universe may produce a harmony like that of literary art, for he mediates the threatenings of the opponents through conciliatory persuasion.

Thus Philo saw God as only indirectly the Creator of the world: God is the author of the invisible, intelligible world which served as a model for the Logos. Philo says Moses called this archetypal heavenly power by various names: "the beginning, the image, and the sight of God." Following the views of Plato and the Stoics, Philo believed that

in all existing things there must be an active cause, and a passive subject; and that the active cause is the Logos of the universe, thoroughly unadulterated and thoroughly unmixed, superior to virtue and superior to science, superior even to abstract good and abstract beauty, while the passive subject is something

inanimate and incapable of motion by any intrinsic power of its own, but having been set in motion, and fashioned, and endowed with life by the intellect, became transformed into that most perfect work, this world.

He gives the impression that he believed that the Logos functions like the Platonic "Soul of the World."

### **The Angel of the Lord, Revealer of God**

Philo describes the Logos as the revealer of God symbolized in the Scripture by an angel of the Lord:

But to those souls which are still in the body He [God] must appear in the resemblance of the angels, though without changing His nature (for He is unchangeable), but merely implanting in those who behold Him an idea of His having another form, so that they fancy that it is His image, not an imitation of him, but the very archetypal appearance itself.

Referring to *Gen.* 31:13, Philo states: "We must understand this, that He [God] on that occasion took the place of an angel, as far as appearance went, without changing His own real nature." Philo claims that the angel who appeared to Hagar in *Gen.* 16:8 was "the word (Logos) of God." The Logos is the first-born and the eldest and chief of the angels:

And even if there be not as yet any one who is worthy to be called a son of God, nevertheless let him labor earnestly to be adorned according to his first-born Logos, the eldest of his angels, as the great archangel of many names, for he is called the Authority, and the name of God, and the Logos, and man according to God's image, and he who sees Israel. For which reason I was induced a little while ago to praise the principles of those who said, "We are all one man's sons." (*Gen.* 42:11). For even if we are not yet suitable to be called the sons of God, still we may deserve to be called the children of his eternal image, of his most sacred Logos; for the image of God is his most ancient Logos.

According to Philo, man's highest union with God is limited to the Deity's manifestation as the Logos. God's transcendence prevents our having access to God's essence. The notion of God's transcendence could be found in Plato's concept of the Good as One above the Being, but the credit for the concept goes to Speusippus (408-339 BCE), Plato's successor as the head of the Academy. The idea was also developed by Neopythagoreans Eudorus of Alexandria (fl. 30 BCE) and Moderatus of Gades (fl. second half of the first century CE). Anaximander (d. ca 546 BCE) postulated *apeiron* (***apeiron***), the Unlimited, as the first principle, not a natural substance, from which many worlds are becoming. The neo-Platonists postulated this first principle supranoeitic above a pair of the opposites, Monad representing the Form and the Dyad representing Matter

Somewhat like that neo-Platonist doctrine, Philo emphatically insisted on a doctrine of God's transcendence which held to a distinction between God's essence and God's existence, and which taught our complete inability of cognizing the former. This position is rather alien to biblical and rabbinical traditions. In the Bible, God is represented in a "material" and "physical" way: "God breathed into man's face both physically and morally." And, "The mind is vivified by God, and the irrational part of the soul by the mind; for the mind is as it were a god to the irrational part of the soul, for which reason Moses did not hesitate to call it the god of Pharaoh (*Exodus* 7:1)." But Philo asserts that we may not know the exact nature of God:

None of those things which are capable of entertaining belief, can entertain a firm belief respecting God. For He has not displayed his nature to any one; but keeps it invisible to every kind of creature. Who can venture to affirm of Him who is the cause of all things either that He is a body, or that He is incorporeal, or that He has such and such distinctive qualities, or that He has no such qualities? Or who, in short, can venture to affirm any thing positively about his essence, or His character, or His movements? But He alone can utter a positive assertion respecting Himself, since he alone has an accurate knowledge of His own nature,

without the possibility of mistake.

God's qualities are most generic and there can be no distinction in Him between genus and species since God "exists according to the indivisible unit." God belongs to no class; He has properties, but they are not shared with others. His essence is, therefore, one and single. "Now there is an especial attribute of God to create, and this faculty it is impious to ascribe to any created being. But the special property of the created being is to suffer."

God's essence, though concealed, is made manifest on two secondary levels. One is the level of the intelligible universe of the Logos which is God's image: "For as those who are not able to look upon the sun itself, look upon the reflected rays of the sun as the sun itself, and upon the halo around the moon itself; so also do those who are unable to bear the sight of God, look upon His image, His angel Logos, as Himself,"

For which reason I was induced a little while ago to praise the principles of those who said, "We are all one man's sons (*Gen. 42:11*). For even if we are not yet suitable to be called the soul of God, still we may deserve to be called the children of his eternal image, of his most sacred Logos, for the image of God is his most ancient Logos.

The second level is the level of the sensible universe which is an image of the Logos: "It is manifest also that the 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 Reason of God."

The essence of God remains forever undisclosed; only its effect, images or shadows may be perceived. Since the essence of God is forever beyond any possibility of human experience or cognition, including the mystic experience of vision, the only attributes that may be applied to God in His supreme state are those of the *via negativa* or of the *via eminentiae*. But there is also a third way which consists of depriving the object of knowledge of any sensible attribute:

For of men some are attached to the service of the soul, and others to that of the body; now the companions of the soul, being able to associate with incorporeal natures, appreciable only by the intellect, do not compare the living God to any species of created beings; but, dissociating it with any idea of distinctive qualities (for this is what most especially contributes to his happiness and to his consummate felicity, to comprehend his naked existence without any connection with figure or character), they, I say, are content with the bare conception of his existence, and do not attempt to invest him with any form.

He is beyond being, like Plato's Good. It may be inferred, however, from the fact that God alone is (ὄντως ὄν = one that is), that His being is at an order altogether different from anything else: "For of virtues, the virtues of God are founded in truth, existing according to his essence: since God alone exists in essence, on account of which fact, he speaks of necessity about himself, saying, 'I am that I am,' (*Exodus 3:14*) as if those who were with him did not exist according to essence, but only appeared to exist in opinion."

### **Multi-Named Archetype**

Philo's Logos has many names: "And even if there be not as yet any one who is worthy to be called a son of God, nevertheless let him labour earnestly to be adorned according to his first-born Logos, the eldest of his angels, as the great archangel of many names; for he is called, the Authority, and the name of God, and the Logos, and man according to God's image, and he who sees Israel." He is also called Wisdom:

Accordingly Wisdom is represented by some one of the beings of the divine company as speaking of herself in this manner: "God created me as the first of his works, and before the beginning of time did he establish me" (*Prov. 8:22*). For it was necessary that all the things which come under the head of the creation must be younger than the mother and nurse of the whole universe.

He is "Beginning," "Image," "Sight of God":

For he [Moses] called that divine and heavenly wisdom by many names, and he made it manifest that it had many appellations; for he called it the beginning, and the image, and the sight of God. And he exhibits the wisdom which is conversant about the things of the earth (as being an imitation of this archetypal wisdom), in the plantation of the Paradise ....

"Earthly wisdom is also the copy of this as an archetype." Moreover, terrestrial virtue of the human race is "a copy and representation of the heavenly."

Man was created as perceptible to the sense, and in the similitude of a Being appreciable only by the intellect, but he who in respect of his form is intellectual and incorporeal, is the similitude of the archetypal model as to appearance, and he is the form of the principal character; but this is the Logos of God, the first beginning of all things, the original species or the archetypal idea, the first measure of the universe.

### **Soul-Nourishing Manna**

God sends "the stream" from His Wisdom which irrigates God-loving souls; consequently they become filled with "manna." Manna is described by Philo as a "generic thing" coming from God. It does not come from God directly, however: "the most generic is God, and next is the Logos of God, the other things subsist in word (Logos) only." According to Philo, Moses called manna "the most ancient Logos of God."

And God also causes us hunger, not that which proceeds from virtue, but that which is engendered by passion and vice. And the proof of this is, that he nourishes us with his own Word (Logos), which is the most universal of all things, for manna being interpreted, means "what?" and "what" is the most universal of all things; for the Logos of God is over all the world, and is the most ancient, and the most universal of all things that are created.

Next Philo explains that men are "nourished by the whole word (Logos) of God, and by every portion of it ... Accordingly, the soul of the more perfect man is nourished by the whole word (Logos); but we must be contented if we are nourished by a portion of it." And "the Wisdom of God, which is the nurse and foster-mother and educator of those who desire incorruptible food; ... immediately supplies food to those which are brought forth by Her ... but the fountain of divine wisdom is borne along, at one time in a more gentle and moderate stream, and at another with greater rapidity and a more exceeding violence and impetuosity ...." This Wisdom as the Daughter of God is "a true-born and ever virgin daughter" and "has obtained a nature intact and undefiled both because of her own propriety and the dignity of him who begot her." Having identified the Logos with Wisdom, Philo runs into a grammatical problem: in Greek language "wisdom" (*sophia*) is feminine and "word" (logos) is masculine; moreover, Philo saw Wisdom's function as masculine. So he explained that Wisdom's *name* is feminine, but her *nature* is masculine:

Indeed all the virtues have women's designations, but powers and activities of truly perfect men. For that which comes after God, even if it were the most venerable of all other things, holds second place, and was called feminine in contrast to the Creator of the universe, who is masculine, and in accordance with its resemblance to everything else. For the feminine always falls short and is inferior to the masculine, which has priority. Let us then pay no attention to the discrepancy in the terms, and say that the daughter of God, Wisdom, is both masculine and the father, inseminating and engendering in souls a desire to learn discipline, knowledge, practical insight, notable and laudable actions.

## Intermediary Power

The fundamental doctrine propounded by Philo is that of Logos as an intermediary power, a messenger and mediator between God and the world.

To his chief messenger and most venerable Logos, the Father who engendered the universe has granted the singular gift, to stand between and separate the creature from the Creator. This same Logos is both suppliant of ever anxiety-ridden mortality before the immortal and ambassador of the ruler to the subject. He glories in his gift and proudly describes it in these words: "And I stood between the Lord and you" (Deut. 5:5), neither unbegotten as God, nor begotten as you, but midway between the two extremes, serving as a pledge for both; to the Creator as assurance that the creature should never completely shake off the reins and rebel, choosing disorder rather than order, to the creature warranting his hopefulness that the gracious God will never disregard his own work. For I am an ambassador of peace to creation from the God who has determined to put down wars, who is ever the guardian of peace. Therefore the sacred Logos, having given us instruction respecting the division into equal parts, leads us also to the knowledge of opposites, saying that God placed the divisions "opposite to one another" (*Gen. 15:10*); for in fact nearly all the things that exist in the world, are by nature opposite to one another. And we must begin with the first .... God is the cause, not the instrument, and what was born was created indeed through the agency of some instrument, but was by all means called into existence by the great first cause.

And Logos is the suppliant for men, God's ambassador sent to men:

And the Father who created the universe has given to his archangelic and most ancient Logos a pre-eminent gift, to stand on the confines of both and separated that which had been created from the Creator. And this same Logos is continually a suppliant to the immortal God on behalf of the mortal race, which is exposed to affliction and misery; and is also the ambassador, sent by the Ruler of all, to the subject race. And the Logos rejoices in the gift, and, exulting in it, announces it and boasts of it, saying, "And I stood in the midst, between the Lord and you" (*Numb. 16:48*); neither being uncreated as God, nor yet created as you, but being in the midst between these two extremities, like a hostage, as it were, to both parties: a hostage to the Creator, as a pledge and security that the whole race would never fly off and revolt entirely choosing disorder rather than order; and to the creature, to lead it to entertain a confident hope that the merciful God would not overlook his own work. For I will proclaim peaceful intelligence to the creation from him who has determined to destroy wars, namely God, who is ever the guardian of peace.

When speaking of the high priest Philo describes the Logos as God's son, a perfect being procuring forgiveness of sins and blessings: "For it was indispensable that the man who was consecrated to the Father of the world [the high priest] should have as a paraclete, his son, the being most perfect in all virtue, to procure forgiveness of sins, and a supply of unlimited blessings."

Philo transformed the Stoic impersonal and immanent Logos into a being who was neither eternal like God nor created like creatures, but begotten from eternity. This being was a mediator giving hope to men and who "was sent down to earth" (*π\_γ\_ν καταπεμπτος*). God, according to Philo, sends "the stream of his own wisdom" to men "and causes the changed soul to drink of unchangeable health; for the abrupt rock is the wisdom of God, which being both sublime and the first of things he quarried out of his own powers." After the souls are watered they are filled with the manna which "is called something which is the primary genus of everything. But the most universal of all things is God; and in the second place is the Logos of God." Through the Logos of God men learn all kinds of instruction and everlasting wisdom. The Logos is the "cupbearer (*οινοχοος*) of God ... being itself in an unmixed state, the pure delight and sweetness, and pouring forth and joy, and ambrosial medicine of pleasure and happiness." This wisdom was represented by the tabernacle of the Old Testament

which was "a thing made after the model and in imitation of Wisdom" and sent down to earth "in the midst of our impurity in order that we may have something whereby we may be purified, washing off and cleansing all those things which dirty and defile our miserable life, full of all evil reputation as it is." "God therefore sows and implants terrestrial virtue in the human race, being an imitation and representation of the heavenly virtue."

## "God"

In three passages Philo describes the Logos even as God:

a.) Commenting on *Genesis 22:16* Philo explains that God could only swear by Himself since

He alone has any knowledge concerning His actions; ... which is not possible for any one else to do ... For no man can rightly swear by himself, because he is not able to have any certain knowledge respecting his own nature, but we must be content if we are able to understand even His name, that is to say His Logos, which is the interpreter of His will. For that must be God to us imperfect beings, but the first mentioned, or true God is so only to wise and perfect man.

b.) What then ought we to say? There is one true God only: but they who are called Gods, by an abuse of language, are numerous, on which account the holy Scripture on the present occasion indicates that it is the true God that is meant by the use of the article, the expression being "I am the God (*ho theos*)," but when the word is used incorrectly, it is put without the article, the expression being, "He who was seen by thee in the place, not of the God (*ton theon*), but simply of God" (*theon*); and what he here calls God is His most ancient Logos, not having any superstitious regard to the position of the names, but only proposing one end to himself, namely to give a true account of the matter; for in other passages the sacred historian, when he considered whether there really was any name belonging to the living God, showed that he knew that there was none properly belonging to Him, but that whatever appellation any one may give Him, will be an abuse of terms; for the living God is not of a nature to be described, but only to be.

c.) Commenting on *Genesis 9:6* Philo states:

Why is it that he speaks as if of some other god, saying that he made man after the image of God, and not that he made him after His own image? Very appropriately and without any falsehood was this oracular sentence uttered by God, for no mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe but only after the pattern of the second deity, who is the Logos of the supreme Being; since it is fitting that the rational soul of man should bear it the type of the Divine Logos; since in His first Word God is superior to the most rational possible nature. But He who is superior to the Logos holds His rank in a better and most singular pre-eminence, and how could the creature possibly exhibit a likeness of Him in himself?"

Philo himself, however, explains that to call the Logos "God" is not a correct appellation. Also, through this Logos, which men share with God, men know God and are able to perceive Him.

## Summary of Philo's Concept of the Logos

Philo's doctrine of the Logos is blurred by his mystical and religious vision, but his Logos is clearly the second individual in one God as hypostatization of God's Creative Power - Wisdom. The supreme is God and next is Wisdom or Logos of God. Logos has many names as did Zeus, and multiple functions. Earthly wisdom

is but a copy of this celestial Wisdom. It was represented in historical times by the tabernacle through which God sent an image of divine excellence as a representation and copy of Wisdom (Lev. 16:16; *Her.* 112-113). The Divine Logos never mixes with the things which are created and thus destined to perish, but attends the One alone. This Logos is apportioned into an infinite number of parts in humans, thus we impart the Divine Logos. As a result we acquire some likeness to the Father and the Creator of all.

The Logos is the Bond of the universe and mediator extended in nature. The Father eternally begat the Logos and constituted him as an unbreakable bond of the universe that produces harmony. The Logos, mediating between God and the world, is neither uncreated as God nor created as men. So in Philo's view the Father is the supreme being and the Logos, as His chief messenger, stands between Creator and creature. The Logos is an ambassador and suppliant, neither unbegotten nor begotten as are sensible things.

Wisdom, the Daughter of God, is in reality masculine because powers have truly masculine descriptions, whereas virtues are feminine. That which is in the second place after the masculine Creator was *called* feminine, according to Philo, but her *priority* is masculine; so the Wisdom of God is both masculine and feminine. Wisdom flows from the Divine Logos.

The Logos is the Cupbearer of God. He pours himself into happy souls. The soul comes from the divine breath of the Father/Ruler. It is the invisible and immortal portion.

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