

The Archetypal Mediator in John and Philo: *Logos-Jesus and Nous-Moses*

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<Abstract>

This paper explores the human archetypes presented in the Fourth Gospel and in Philo of Alexandria, with particular attention to their respective conceptions of the ideal human figure. Both traditions present a singular individual who mediates between God and humanity, characterizing this figure through personified metaphysical-philosophical terms and emphasizing the excellence of vision and knowledge. In the Gospel, this archetype is Jesus, the incarnate *Logos*, while in Philo, it is Moses, who embodies the pure *Nous*. Whereas previous studies have focused extensively on the conceptual parallels between Philo's and John's *logos* doctrines, they have given scant attention to the correspondence of John's personified *Logos* to Philo's personified *Nous*. To address this gap, this study examines the *Logos-Jesus* in John and the *Nous-Moses* in Philo

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by analyzing the ideas and ethical visions they articulate and discussing how they converge or diverge in their respective understandings of the ideal human. The primary methodologies include philological analysis, intertextual comparison, and the history of ideas. This paper also critically engages with scholarship on the possible connection between the Fourth Gospel and Philo, particularly the line of inquiry initiated by C. H. Dodd's 1953 proposal of shared symbols. Determining whether Philo's concept of *nous* influenced the formation of the *logos* in John lies beyond the scope of this paper.

***Keywords**

Gospel of John; Philo of Alexandria; *Logos*-Jesus; *Nous*-Moses; Plato.

1. Introduction

The aspiration to transcend the limits of ordinary human existence is not a modern phenomenon. Rather, it appears deeply rooted in the human condition, as illustrated by the story of the fall in Genesis 3. In this narrative, the serpent questions the woman regarding God’s command about the trees of the garden (Gen 3:1). The woman clarifies that only “the tree which is in the midst of the garden” is forbidden, lest they die (RSV Gen 3:3). The serpent counters that eating from the tree will not bring death but will instead open their eyes and make them “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4–5). Of all divine attributes, the serpent highlights vision and knowledge—symbolic of discernment and divine consciousness—as the means of becoming godlike. Despite the divine warning, the humans are compelled by the desire to possess such attributes.

This Genesis story raises a perennial theological question: what does it mean to be “like God”? What kind of human is most desirable or ideal? While conceptions of ideal humanity have varied across cultures and traditions, this paper focuses on two influential ancient perspectives: the Fourth Gospel and the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Both present a particular figure as the ideal human archetype who mediates between God and humanity, characterize this figure in personified philosophical terms, and emphasize the excellence of that figure’s vision and knowledge. In the Gospel, the archetype is Jesus, identified with the personified *Logos*. In Philo, the corresponding figure is Moses, who is associated not with the

Logos but with the *Nous*.¹ This prompts a crucial line of inquiry: if Jesus corresponds to Moses as the ideal human archetype, does the *Logos* in John correspond to the *Nous* in Philo? While previous scholarship has extensively compared the *logos* in Philo and the Fourth Gospel, scant attention has been given to the correspondence between the Johannine *Logos* and Philo's *Nous*.

This paper therefore seeks to examine how each tradition—Philo and the Fourth Gospel—defines the ideal human archetype, focusing specifically on each tradition's respective articulation of *Logos*–Jesus and *Nous*–Moses. To this end, I begin by surveying previous scholarship on the relationship between Philo's *logos* and the Johannine *logos*, noting the absence of major studies directly comparing Philo's *Nous*–Moses and John's *Logos*–Jesus. I then briefly turn to Plato—one of Philo's two principal ante-texts along with the Septuagint (LXX)—to outline the key philosophical meanings of *logos* and *nous*. Subsequently, I introduce Philo's understanding of *Nous*–Moses, followed by an analysis of *Logos*–Jesus in John. Drawing on these analyses, this study examines the notions and ethical visions expressed by each figure and discusses how they converge or diverge in their respective understanding of the ideal human being. This study employs a combination of philological analysis, intertextual comparison, and the history of ideas.

¹ In this paper, I distinguish between *Logos* (capitalized), referring to the personified *Logos* as identified with Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, and *logos* (lowercase), referring to the broader conceptual or philosophical notion of *logos* as discussed in both Philo and the Gospel. A similar distinction is made between *Nous* (capitalized), which refers to the personified *Nous* embodied in Moses in Philo, and *nous* (lowercase), which denotes the general philosophical concept of mind or intellect.

The Fourth Gospel shares numerous thematic elements with Philo—such as the personified *Logos*, the Spirit, the Son, eternal life, faith, light, and various Jewish festivals—and recent scholarship has increasingly tended to interpret these parallels as evidence of literary dependence.² A detailed assessment of literary dependence, however, lies beyond the scope of this study.

2. Previous Studies

Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker, in their translation of Philo's works, observed that the *Logos* appears as a personified concept in both Philo and John. They suggested that Hellenistic Jewish thought may have influenced early Christianity through Philo.³ Following a detailed comparison, Anthony W. Argyle concluded that "so many resemblances and parallels cannot all be attributed to coincidence."⁴ Charles H. Dodd interpreted the concept of the *logos* in both traditions as a mystical element oriented toward the knowledge of God.⁵ Charles K. Barrett evaluated

² For further discussion, see Wooil Moon, "Symbols in Philo and the Fourth Gospel—Revisiting Charles H. Dodd's Proposal," *Korean New Testament Studies* 31, no. 4 (2024): 545–76.

³ Cf. Francis H. Colson and George H. Whitaker, "General Introduction," *Philo I*, Loeb Classical Library 226 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), ix–xxii, xx.

⁴ Anthony W. Argyle, "Philo and the Fourth Gospel," *Expository Times* 63, no. 10 (1952): 300–302, 302.

⁵ Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), 60–68, 160–168, 222.

Philo's integration of the Stoic-Platonic concept of the *logos* into Judaism as an continuation of the speculative Jewish wisdom tradition. He further recognized that Philo's *logos* corresponds both to the personified Torah in rabbinic Judaism and to the personified *Logos* in John.⁶

In contrast, Raymond E. Brown challenged Dodd's assumption, arguing that while Philo and John may share common traditions, there is no compelling evidence of direct contact.⁷ Masanobu Endo likewise contended that the Johannine prologue is not derived from Philo but reflects earlier Jewish interpretations of Genesis.⁸ Despite such skepticism, scholarly interest in the connection between Philo and the Fourth Gospel has persisted, particularly within the framework of Merkabah mysticism.⁹ Wayne A. Meeks situates this mystical context in the Moses–Sinai tradition, portraying Moses as both the messenger of God and a typological figure

⁶ Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: S.P.C.K., 1956), 40, 128.

⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), LVIII; Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 133.

⁸ Masanobu Endo, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 5.

⁹ Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo*, Novum Testamentum Supplement 10 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 2–3, 147; idem, "God's Agent in the Fourth Gospel," in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of E. R. Goodenough*, edited by Jacob Neusner, Supplements to Numen 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 137–48; D. A. Hagner, "The Vision of God in Philo and John: A Comparative Study," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (1971): 81–93.

for Israel who beholds the divine.¹⁰ James D. G. Dunn emphasized that Philo exemplified a form of Jewish intellectual engagement with Greek philosophy nearly half a century before the composition of the Fourth Gospel. According to Dunn, the Gospel emerged within the broader intellectual milieu shaped by figures like Philo, making questions of direct dependence unnecessary.¹¹

However, David T. Runia, a leading authority on Philo, considers it highly probable that Philo's concept of the *logos* influenced the Fourth Gospel, while maintaining that the incarnation of the *Logos* is a distinctive feature of John.¹² One of his key arguments is the grammatical distinction in John 1:1, where θεός with the article refers to God, while the anarthrous θεός refers to the preexistent *Logos*. This, he argues, parallels Philo's identification of the anarthrous θεός with the "most ancient *Logos*" (πρεσβύτατος λόγος, *Somn.* 1.229).¹³ Gregory E. Sterling likewise observes

¹⁰ Wayne A. Meeks, *The Prophet-King: Moses Traditions and the Johannine Christology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967); "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 44–72; Philo, *Her.* 78; *Fug.* 208; *Somn.* 1.129.

¹¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2nd edition (London: SCM Press, 1989), 216.

¹² David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey III: Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 78–80.

¹³ Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2001), 82–83.

that John 1:1–5 closely mirrors Platonic terminology found in Philo’s commentary on Genesis.¹⁴

Drawling on this body of scholarship, this paper proposes that the Johannine *Logos*–Jesus, while sharing certain conceptual affinities with Philo’s *logos*, also engages with Philo’s *Nous*—as embodied in Moses—in ways that both reflect and resist his philosophical and ethical implications. By juxtaposing *Logos*–Jesus in John with *Nous*–Moses in Philo, this paper explores some convergences and divergences in their respective articulations of the ideal human archetype.

3. *Logos* and *Nous* in Plato: Conceptual Background for Philo

Plato unfolds a myth about the creation of the world (cosmos) and humankind with the mouth of Timaeus by depicting two distinct worlds. One is the world of Being (τὸ ὄν), which always exists, and the other is the world of Becoming (τὸ γιγνόμενον), which is constantly changing. The former is often referred to as the noetic world (κόσμος νοητός), while the latter is called the sensible or aesthetic world (κόσμος αἰσθητός). The noetic world is created by the Demiurge (δημιουργός) and is perceivable only through the rational faculties of *nous* and *logos* (νοήσις μετὰ λόγου). In

¹⁴ Gregory E. Sterling, “The Place of Philo of Alexandria in the Study of Christian Origins,” in *Philo und das Neue Testament: Wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen I, Internationales Symposium zum corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum 1–4 Mai 2003, Eisenach/Jena*, ed. by Ronald Deines and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 47.

contrast, the aesthetic world is assembled by lesser gods and goddesses and is grasped through the irrational and physical faculties of perception and opinions (δόξα μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου).¹⁵

According to Plato, Demiurge is the best god (ὁ ἄριστος θεός) and, by nature, can do nothing but create what is good—namely, the noetic world. To generate this rational cosmos as a living organism, the Demiurge (1) transformed disorder (ἀταξία) into order (τάξις), and (2) implanted *nous* into the Soul (ψυχή).¹⁶ This living organism (τὸ ζῶον) is the “only begotten heaven” (μονογενὴς οὐρανός), whose essence is the “purest *nous*,” derived from the Demiurge himself.¹⁷ The Demiurge then fitted all forms and laws (νόμοι) into the ideal world and created time, thereby establishing a beginning and an end.¹⁸

Subsequently, the Demiurge mixed the remaining ingredients of *nous* with the physical necessity (ἀνάγκη) to form the invisible Soul of the aesthetic world (ψυχὴ τοῦ παντός). He then finely divided this unified Soul into countless seeds and scattered them into the celestial bodies—such as the earth, moon, and stars—as well as into time.¹⁹ Afterward, he summoned gods and goddesses, his divine offspring, and instructed them to fashion the visible and mortal parts of the cosmos according to his principle (ἀρχή) and laws (νόμοι), before withdrawing into his original

¹⁵ Plato, *Timaeus* 27d–28a.

¹⁶ Plato, *Timaeus* 30a–b.

¹⁷ Plato, *Timaeus* 30a–31b.

¹⁸ Plato, *Timaeus* 38b.

¹⁹ Plato, *Timaeus* 41d.

transcendent state.²⁰ Through the work of these subordinate deities, the corporeal world came into being, and with it, the bodily and sensory components of human beings emerged in the visible realm. Plato envisions the Soul of the invisible world is filled with purest *nous*, while the Soul of the visible world is a mixture of impure *nous* and necessity (ἀνάγκη), accounting for the unreliability of external and bodily perception.

For Plato, the most important part of the body is the head, as it houses the intellectual soul, especially *nous* and *logos*.²¹ Every human soul contains a seed of *nous*, though this seed is mingled with necessity and thus rendered impure. At birth, the soul loses her vision due to the shock of embodiment and becomes irrational (ἄνους). Yet education (παιδεία) in accordance with reason (κατὰ λόγον) can reopen the soul's eyes, directing them toward contemplation and the love of heavenly *Sophia*.²² Such contemplation purifies the soul by liberating it from the influence of the bodily senses and necessity, leaving behind only the pure *nous*, which is light enough to escape the body and ascend to its celestial home in the noetic realm.²³

Plato conceives that the human body is mortal, whereas the soul is immortal. He describes the soul as a composite entity consisting of three parts: (1) the head, which houses reason and resembles a miniature human being; (2) the chest, which is spirited like a lion but lacks reason; and (3)

²⁰ Plato, *Timaeus* 41a–42d.

²¹ Plato, *Timaeus* 46d.

²² Plato, *Timaeus* 44a–b, and 47b.

²³ Plato, *Timaeus* 48a.

the lower abdomen, which is wild, irrational, and likened to a many-headed beast. Plato calls the rational, miniature human as “the inner human being” (ὁ ἐντὸς ἄνθρωπος), and refers to the lion and the beast collectively as “the outer human being” (ὁ ἔξω ἄνθρωπος).²⁴ Similar expressions appear in the canonical epistles, where the adverb ἔσω is used instead of ἐντός.²⁵ In *Phaedrus* 248a, 253c–d, Plato further likens the inner human being to a charioteer, and the outer parts to two horses pulling in different directions. In order for the soul to escape the body and return to the noetic realm (ἰδέα), the rational element—the inner human being—must govern and persuade the irrational parts, a task that necessitates the purification of the soul.

4. Philo and his Concept of *Nous*-Moses

Philo lived in Alexandria between 30 BCE and 50 CE. He was born a few decades before Jesus and likely continued writing for several decades after Jesus’s death, producing approximately fifty works.²⁶ He interpreted

²⁴ Plato, *Republic* 588c–589b.

²⁵ Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16.

²⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 2.18. According to Goodenough, Philo was older than Rishimacus who was born about 10 BCE. Erwin R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 9–10. Medico, however, assumes that Philo was born about 30 BCE. Henri E. del Medico, *L’énigme des manuscrits de la Mer Morte: étude sur la date, la provenance et le contenu des manuscrits découverts dans la grotte I de Qumrân* (Paris: Plon, 1957), 79; cf. Jean

the Pentateuch (LXX) through the lens of Greco-Roman philosophy and terminology, seeking to defend both Jewish faith and civil rights under Roman rule. His writings established a significant precedent for early Christians, who likewise had to articulate their beliefs within a Hellenized cultural and political environment. Christian authors served as the principal conduit through which Philo's works and thought reached later generations.

Philo is represented in a variety of ways in ancient sources. Clement of Alexandria refers to him as an “apologist of the Pythagorean school”;²⁷ Jerome compares him to Plato and identifies him as a philosopher, a biblical commentator, a descendant of the priestly line, and even a Jewish national leader who defended Jewish rights before Emperor Gaius—an image based on Josephus and Eusebius. He is further portrayed as having met Peter in Rome during the reign of Claudius (Eusebius, Jerome) and as a proto-Christian or honorary Church Father who wrote about the church founded by Mark in Alexandria (Eusebius, Jerome).²⁸ Although Philo was not a Christian, the early Church held him in high regard—so much so that, for a time, he was even classified among the Church Fathers—until the rise of modern critical scholarship prompted a reevaluation of his legacy.

Philo was widely read in Greek literature and philosophy, freely referring to the works of “Homer, Hesiod, Pythagoras, Zeno, Socrates,

Daniélou, *Philo of Alexandria* (trans. by James Colbert; Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 2 and 27.

²⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata* 1.5, 15, 21, 23; 2.19; 4.19.
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0210.htm> (2025.6.9.).

²⁸ Flavius Josephus, *Ant.* 18.8.257–260; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Hist. eccl.* 2.5, 16–18; Jerome, *Lives* 11;

Euripides, Xenophon, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, and Chrysippus.”²⁹ However, he did not systematically adopt or exemplify the language or doctrines of any single philosophical school. As a result, his thought and methods have often been criticized as a form of eclecticism that lies outside the bounds of philosophical orthodoxy.³⁰ John M. Dillon, however, challenges this view. He characterizes Philo not as a derivative thinker bound to any one school, but as “a man who read the basic texts, such as Plato, Aristotle, Chrysippus, for himself.”³¹ Dillon places Philo’s philosophy within the early Middle Platonic tradition, alongside figures such as Antiochus of Ascalon, Archytas, and Eudoros of Alexandria.³² He rightly observes that what may appear as eclecticism in Philo’s thought stems not from philosophical inconsistency, but from a different aim: to demonstrate that Moses was “the very father of philosophy” as revealed through the Pentateuch.”³³

²⁹ Wooil Moon, “The Significance of Philo of Alexandria as a Tool for New Testament and Early Christian Studies,” *Korean New Testament Studies* 26, no. 3 (2019): 815–51, 832.

³⁰ Robert M. Berchman, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Tradition* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984), 23. Thomas H. Tobin, S.J., *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, The CBQ Monograph Series 14 (Washington: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983), 1.

³¹ John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 145.

³² Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 143–45.

³³ Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 143. The content of this paragraph is based on the following paper mentioned above: Moon, “The Significance of Philo of Alexandria,” 832–833.

In Philo, Moses is presented as the most genius philosopher (φιλόσοφος),³⁴ “king (βασιλεύς), lawgiver (νομοθέτης), high priest (ἀρχιερεύς), prophet (προφήτης),”³⁵ “divine word (θεολόγος),”³⁶ “hierophant (ιεροφάντης), and the one most beloved by God (θεοφιλέστατος).”³⁷ His extraordinary authority and quasi-divine status derive from having God as his Father and Sophia as his Mother. He was untainted by ordinary human parentage, which in Philo’s framework, consists of assembled *nous* as father and external sense (ἡ αἴσθησις) as mother.³⁸ Instead, Moses chooses to become “the purest *nous*” (ὁ καθαρώτατος νοῦς), a soul so thoroughly purified that it participates in the divine realm. Through this transformation, he receives the heavenly Sophia, who pours out the legislative and prophetic gifts upon him without measure.³⁹

To understand what Philo means by “the purest *nous*,” we must consult at least two of his primary ante-texts, Genesis 1–3 and Plato’s *Timaeus*. According to Thomas H. Tobin, Philo’s accounts of human creation are not always consistent.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that Philo draws heavily on Platonic texts— particularly *Timaeus*—in his interpretation of

³⁴ Philo, *Mos.* 2.2.

³⁵ Philo, *Mos.* 2.292.

³⁶ Philo, *Mos.* 2.115; *Praem.* 1.53.

³⁷ Philo, *Spec.* 1.31.

³⁸ Philo, *Fug.* 1.109.

³⁹ Philo, *Congr.* 1:132.

⁴⁰ Thomas H. Tobin, *The Creation on Man*, 8.

the creation narratives in Gen 1:26–27 and 2:7.⁴¹ In Gen 1:27, the statement that “God created man in his own image, in the image of God” is understood by Philo to refer to “God alone as the sole Creator” (εἷς ὁ μόνος θεὸς δημιουργός), who created the “human being of the human being” (ἄνθρωπος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), identified as the “purest *nous*” (ὁ καθαρώτατος νοῦς).⁴² For Philo, the true essence of the human being is the *nous*—the purest mind—derived directly from God. This *nous* corresponds to the noetic world (κόσμος νοητός) described in Plato, which is fashioned by the Demiurge.

In Gen 1:26, God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” For Philo, the plural “us” refers to God and His powers (δυνάμεις). Philo maintains that God Himself created the rational component of the human soul—the purest *nous*—while His powers assembled the mortal components of the human.⁴³ As a result, the corporeal human emerged as a composite of *nous* and the external senses (νοῦς μετ’ αἰσθήσεως), endowed with free will and the capacity to choose between good and evil.⁴⁴ The rational component, created by God, inclines toward the good, while the irrational components, formed by the powers, tend toward evil.⁴⁵

Philo defines the “purest *nous*” created by God as the “heavenly human

⁴¹ David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 32; Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 176.

⁴² Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 176.

⁴³ Philo, *Fug.* 1:68–70.

⁴⁴ Philo, *Fug.* 1:68–71; *Opif.* 1:75.

⁴⁵ Philo, *Fug.* 1:70.

being” (ὁ οὐράνιος ἄνθρωπος) or “a begotten thing”(γέννημα).⁴⁶ The heavenly human is also described as the “created *nous*,” the “image of God,” the “seal of God,” the “eye of the eye,” and the “soul of the soul.” It is imperishable, immaterial, and unconnected to any physical element, such as air or ether.⁴⁷ By contrast, Philo refers to the perishable “earthly human being” (ὁ γήϊνος ἄνθρωπος), fashioned by the divine powers, as a “molded thing” (πλάσμα).⁴⁸ The earthly human figure is the “molded *nous*” (ὁ πλασθεὶς νοῦς), which is material and mortal.⁴⁹ God breathes spirit (πνεῦμα) into the *nous* of the heavenly human in order to grant the capacity to perceive and contemplate God.⁵⁰ As a result, the heavenly person possesses “expertness, perseverance, and memory,” enabling a life of heavenly contemplation, love of wisdom (φιλοσοφία), and ultimately, immortality.⁵¹

The nation chosen for this purpose is “Israel” in Philo, and the foremost among the Israelites is Moses. For Philo, human beings are the most beloved (θεοφιλέστατος) of all animals, and among human beings, Israel is the most beloved race (τὸ θεοφιλὲς [θεοφιλέστατον] γένος) because it embodies the *nous* that contemplates both God and the cosmos, qualifying

⁴⁶ Philo, *Leg.* 1:31, 53–55; *Her.* 1:57.

⁴⁷ Philo, *Opif.* 1.66; *Leg.* 1.88.

⁴⁸ Philo, *Leg.* 1:31, 53–55; *Her.* 1:57.

⁴⁹ Philo, *Leg.* 1:31, 42, 88.

⁵⁰ Philo, *Leg.* 1.37.

⁵¹ Philo, *Leg.* 1.55; *Opif.* 1.77.

it as “the one who sees God” (θεὸν ὁρῶν).⁵² Because of this very nature of Israel, Israel is considered God’s “firstborn” (πρωτότοκος) even “regardless of its late birth.”⁵³ Israel, in Philo’s allegory, is the “most sacred vineyard,” “the dwelling of the mind,” and the “whole soul” that produces the divine fruit of virtue (ἀρετή).⁵⁴ Israel is described as “the only soul permitted to perceive God,” although it was temporarily “ensnared in the physical nets of Egypt.”⁵⁵ At that moment, God delivered Israel from Egypt through the Levites, Aaron and Moses. Owing to this salvific function, Levi is also called the “firstborn” (πρωτοτοκος) of Israel.⁵⁶

Among the Levites, Moses in particular is described as the “purest *nous*,” unmixed with any impurity, and thereby occupies a unique position like “Moses, the (most) beloved of God” (ὁ θεοφιλῆς [θεοφιλέστατος] Μωϋσῆς).⁵⁷ As the *hierophant* (ὁ ἱεροφάντης) of God’s mysteries, Moses symbolizes the heavenly *nous*, Aaron represents the *logos*, which articulates and interprets Moses verbally, and Miriam corresponds to the

⁵² Philo, *Opif.* 1.114; *Somn.* 1.108; 2.173. ὁ Ἰσραὴλ ἐστὶ νοῦς θεωρητικὸς θεοῦ τε καὶ κόσμου). For human beings as the most beloved by God among animals, see Philo, *Opif.* 1.114; *Somn.* 1.108. For Israel as the *nous* “who sees God,” see Philo, *Somn.* 2.173; *Leg.* 3. 186; *Post.* 1.63; *Sacr.* 1.134, and as the “race most beloved by God,” see Philo, *Conf.* 1.95; *Migr.* 1.63; *Her.* 1.203; *Abr.* 1.98.

⁵³ Philo, *Post.* 1.63.

⁵⁴ Philo, *Somn.* 2.172–3.

⁵⁵ Philo, *Conf.* 1.92.

⁵⁶ Philo, *Mut.* 1.207; *Sacr.* 1.119.

⁵⁷ Philo, *Leg.* 1.76; 2.88, 90; *Cher.* 1.49; *Sacr.* 1.77; *Plant.* 1.62. For Moses as the purest *nous* created by God, see Philo, *Congr.* 1.132; *Mut.* 1.117, 208; *Mos.* 113.

outward senses.⁵⁸ In this context, the term *logos* carries a twofold meaning. It can refer to (1) the divine word or law of God, and (2) the *rhēma* (ῥῆμα)—the spoken utterance that expresses it orally.⁵⁹

Philo also maintains that although the *nous* of the heavenly man is a created entity, it is capable of producing and governing the irrational parts when activated and empowered by God's *Logos*. In this role, the *nous* functions as a kind of "god" (θεός) to the irrational faculties.⁶⁰ However, the same *nous* cannot serve as the source of rational beings, since God alone is their sole source and creator.⁶¹ In Philo's view, heavenly humans are endowed with *spirit* (πνεῦμα) from God, whereas earthly humans, whose *nous* is material, are given only *breath* (πνοή). While *breath* animates the physical senses and bodily organs, it rises like vapor with limited force and perishes with the body.⁶²

According to Philo, God initially placed both kinds of human beings in Paradise. In Genesis 2:15, God commands the person with the purest *nous* to cultivate and guard Paradise; in 2:8, God also sets the earthly human in the same place. The heavenly human remains in Paradise to cultivate and preserve virtue, whereas the earthly human—represented by Adam—unable to resist desire, since his rational faculties are weakened by the

⁵⁸ Philo, *Spec.* 1.41. For Aaron as "the divine *Logos*" (ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος) or Moses' mouthpiece, see Philo, *Leg.* 1.76; 3.45, 103, 119; *Det.* 1.39, and for Miriam as the outer sense, see Philo, *Leg.* 1.76; 3.45, 103.

⁵⁹ Philo, *Post.* 1.102; *Migr.* 1.130; *Leg.* 3.176.

⁶⁰ Philo, *Leg.* 1.37–41.

⁶¹ Philo, *Leg.* 2.46.

⁶² Philo, *Leg.* 1.37–39, 42.

physical nature of sensation. Consequently, he eats from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” which is situated outside Paradise, and is ultimately expelled to cultivate the land from which he was formed.⁶³

The earthly person does not appear to have died immediately after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9, 17), but Philo asserts that he is already spiritually dead. According to Philo, there are two kinds of death: (1) in general, death is the emancipation of the soul from corporeal necessity;⁶⁴ (2) the death of the soul is a condition in which virtue is corrupted and the wicked body gains mastery over the soul.⁶⁵ To explain this death of the soul, Philo employs the metaphors of the tripartite soul and the charioteer with two horses. When the soul dies, the charioteer of reason (the tiny human being) can no longer control the horse of passion (the lion) or the horse of greed (the many-headed beast), resulting in injustice and the birth of evil.⁶⁶ For this reason, the sacred *Logos*, Aaron (ὁ ἱερὸς λόγος Ἀαρών) pleads with God’s beloved, Moses (ὁ θεοφιλὴς Μωϋσῆς) to heal Miriam’s leprosy, lest her soul be consumed by the disease of colic, which produced wicked things.⁶⁷

⁶³ Gen 2:9, 17; 3:17; Philo, *Leg.* 1.54, 90, 96, 103.

⁶⁴ Plato, *Phaedo* 80e–81a; 82d–e.

⁶⁵ Philo, *Leg.* 1.105–106.

⁶⁶ Num 12:12; Philo, *Leg.* 1.71–76; Plato, *Phaedrus* 248a, 253c–d; *Republic* 588c–589b.

⁶⁷ Num 12:13; Philo, *Leg.* 1.76.

5. The *Logos*-Jesus Concept in the Fourth Gospel

Meeks has convincingly demonstrated that, although Moses never became a king in historical reality, Philo portrays him as the ideal prophetic-royal and divine figure—just as the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus, who likewise never ruled on earth, as a divine prophet-king.⁶⁸ While Meeks rightly observes that John’s Jesus corresponds to Philo’s Moses as an archetypal human figure, he does not sufficiently explore the parallel between Philo’s personified *Nous* in Moses and John’s personified *Logos* in Jesus. This oversight is likely due in part to the fact that John never uses the term *nous* and defines Jesus as *Logos*, not *Nous*.

As noted earlier, Philo identifies Aaron—not Moses—as the personified *Logos*. Does this mean the Johannine Jesus corresponds to Aaron? Hardly! Jesus in John aligns more closely with Philo’s Moses than with Aaron. According to Philo, God revealed His essential nature—clearly and without concealment, as under the light of the sun—only to Moses the purest *Nous* (*Plant.* 1.27). This Moses is called “a friend to God” (φίλος τῷ θεῷ, Ebr. 1.94). Similarly, the *Logos*-Jesus in John is portrayed as the one who was with God, facing Him (John 1:1–2), and as the only begotten Son (μονογενής), who dwells in the bosom of the Father and has made Him

⁶⁸ Meeks, *The Prophet-King*, 287. For a discussion of how the Platonic-Philonic concept of kingship resonates with the Johannine portrayal of Jesus as the only true king, see Wooil Moon, “My Kingdom Is Not from This World” (John 18:36): A History-of-ideas Approach to the Concept of King (*Basileus*) in the Fourth Gospel,” *Theological Forum* 115 (2024): 131–61.

known (John 1:18). Philo further describes Moses as the divine *Logos* (ὁ θεολόγος, *Mos.* 2.115; *Praem.* 1.53), the most holy (ὁ ἱερώτατος, *Virt.* 1.175; *Det.* 1.135), the all-wise (ὁ πάνσοφος, *Agr.* 1.20), and the most perfect (ὁ τελειώτερος, *Ebr.* 1.94).

Yet the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel not only fulfills but transcends and challenges these titles: he is not merely the *Logos* but also called “a god” (θεός) and is described as the one through whom all things were made (John 1:1–3). Whereas Philo asserts that Moses and Israel are those who have seen God, John insists that no one has seen God except the only begotten Son (1:18; 6:46). The Johannine Jesus is the divine figure who brings grace and truth that surpass the Mosaic Law (1:17). Unlike Philo’s *Nous*, which depends on auxiliary agents—such as the *Logos*-Aaron, divine spirit, energy, and senses—to produce the irrational and material realm, the Johannine *Logos* is the sole creator of all things, rational and irrational alike, without recourse to any intermediary (John 1:3–4).

In Stoic pantheism, divine λόγοι σπερματικοί pervade the universe as rational seeds composed of *ether* or *pneuma* (πνεῦμα).⁶⁹ Both Philo and John incorporate *pneuma* in their theological cosmology. “God is *pneuma*” (John 4:24) and the *pneuma* descends upon Jesus “like a dove from heaven” and remains (1:32). God sends the *pneuma* to his children to sustain their life and bestow knowledge of the truth (6:63; 14:17, 26; 16:13). The *Logos* of John is the light that illuminates both individuals and the world (1:4, 9; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:46), not through Stoic-style cosmic diffusion, but

⁶⁹ Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, Vol. 2, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 7.158–59.

through the “children of light” (υἱοὶ φωτός, John 12:36). In contrast, Philo’s occasional adoption of the term λόγοι σπερματικοί suggests an openness to a pantheistic framework that is absent from the Fourth Gospel.⁷⁰

Like Philo, John also distinguishes between those who are “from above” and those “from below” (John 3:31; 8:23, 47; 15:19; 18:36). Those of the earth claim descent from Abraham (8:33, 37, 39) and loyalty to Moses (9:29), but they “neither act as Abraham did” (8:39–40) nor follow “the law of Moses” (7:19). Though they claim to see, they remain blind (9:41), for they “do not know the Son or the Father” (8:19), having neither seen nor heard God (1:18; 5:38; 6:46). By contrast, the Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father (10:15), and those who know and see the Son also know and see the Father (14:7). As in Philo’s schema, John’s “heavenly race” possesses superior vision and knowledge compared to those of the earthly race.

Whereas Philo maintains a dualistic divide between the ideological (heavenly) and the sensory (earthly) realms—*Nous* being incompatible with the body—the Fourth Gospel proclaims that “the *Logos* became flesh” (1:14). This is not merely the incarnation of divine reason in a particular individual, but the collapse of boundaries between celestial *Logos* and terrestrial flesh. Their union forms a more complete but paradoxical whole. As Jennifer L. Kuss, drawing on Donna Haraway, explains:

Instead of reifying our differences and distinctions, in this moment all flesh collapses into divinity, all language (reason, logic) into flesh, all

⁷⁰ Philo, *Legat.* 55; Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 159.

nature into culture. This is not a merger or fusion that erases difference, but rather a crossing and borrowing of boundaries that complicate our categories. She uses the term natureculture to suggest that this collapse does not negate difference. Her manifesto concludes with, “The Word was made flesh in mortal natureculture.”⁷¹

6. Conclusion

In both Philo and the Fourth Gospel, the heavenly human possesses superior vision and intelligence compared to the earthly. However, the path by which God’s children come to perceive and understand divine reality differs markedly between the two. Philo locates the true essence of humanity in the recovery of incorporeal attributes through the total renunciation of bodily realities, enabling the soul to behold the invisible God. What must be cast off includes not only one’s body, emotions, and physical senses, but also interpersonal attachments such as neighbors and friends. For Philo, Israel—whose name he interprets as “the one who sees God”—is the only people to have attained such vision, and Moses is its supreme exemplar.

By contrast, the Fourth Gospel proclaims, “No one has ever seen God; the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him

⁷¹ Jennifer L. Koosed, “Extreme Humanity,” in *Bible and Posthumanism*, ed. Jennifer L. Koosed (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature): 3–12, 5; cf. Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 18.

known” (John 1:18; cf. 5:37). A direct vision of invisible God is impossible; instead, one comes to know, see, and love God through the embodied words and deeds of Jesus (14:9). According to Jesus, love for one’s fellow human beings—including neighbors and friends—is the true mode of loving both the invisible Father and the visible Son. Only through such embodied and relational practice can human beings ultimately be united with the invisible God forever (14:21; 15:10, 12–15; 17:21).

Philo’s pure *nous* contemplates God from a considerable distance, excluding all sensory and emotional faculties. The Fourth Gospel, however, presents the *Logos*—identified with Jesus—as one who dwells in the bosom of the Father, learning from and loving Him in intimate unity (1:18; 17:24). Likewise, the beloved disciple reclines physically in Jesus’ bosom, symbolizing relational intimacy and learning (13:23). Jesus employs his physical body to wash the disciples’ feet, transforming a humble bodily act into a model of ethical and spiritual practice. After the resurrection, the glorified Jesus—portrayed as the consummate human—retains a tangible body: he speaks with his disciples, eats with them, and invites them to touch his wounds (20:20–27; 21:12–13). In contrast to Philo, who defines the human ideal by the renunciation of visibility and corporeality, the Fourth Gospel affirms the value of embodiment and emotion as integral to divine self-revelation. It invites readers to seek eternal truth not by escaping the visible and material, but by receiving them as conduits for communion with the invisible God.

Philo also presents a rigid hierarchy of human value: male over female, Israel over the nations, the tribe of Levi over the other Israelite tribes, Moses and Aaron over other Levites, and Moses above Aaron. This

stratification mirrors the architectural hierarchy of the Herodian Temple, which spatially segregates Gentiles, women, lay Israelites, priests, and the inner sanctuary. The Fourth Gospel, by contrast, presents Jesus as challenging and ultimately dismantling this inherited system. Declaring that the temple must be destroyed and replaced by the temple of his body (2:19–21), Jesus subverts traditional markers of religious and social distinction. He envisions a radically inclusive humanity in which each person is honored as fully human.

This vision is not merely rhetorical; Jesus enacts it at the cost of his life. In the new temple imagined by the Fourth Gospel, “the children of God” are “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (1:13), transcending all ethnic, gendered, and genealogical boundaries. These children of God love one another and participate in eternal life—not as members of a privileged class, but as human beings embraced in divine communion (1:12; 11:52).

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<한글초록>

요한복음의 로고스-예수와 필론의 누스-모세

문우일 *

이 논문은 요한복음과 알렉산드리아의 필론이 제시하는 인간 원형을 탐구하여, 각각의 전통이 추구하는 이상적 인간 유형이 어떤 유사성과 상이성을 보이고, 어떤 실천 방향을 제시하는지를 분석하기 위한 것이다. 두 전통 모두 하나님과 인간 사이를 매개하는 특정 인물을 이상적 인간으로 제시하며, 이 인물을 형이상학적 철학 용어로 의인화하여 정의하고, 그 인물의 시각과 지식의 탁월성을 강조한다. 그 인간 원형이 요한복음에서는 성육신한 로고스인 예수이고, 필론에서는 순수한 누스를 구현한 모세다. 선행 연구는 대개 필론의 로고스 개념이 요한복음의 로고스 개념 형성에 어떤 영향을 끼쳤는지에 집중했을 뿐, 요한복음의 로고스와 필론의 누스를 비교하는 일에는 거의 무관심했다. 이 공백을 메우고자, 이 논문은 요한복음의 로고스-예수와 필론의 누스-모세를 탐색하여 그 개념과 실천 방향의 유사성과 상이성을 분석한다. 이를 위한

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주요 방법론은 문헌비평, 상호텍스트성, 그리고 사상사비평을 포함한다. 이 논문은 1953년에 C.H. Dodd가 요한복음과 필론에 공통적으로 나타나는 상징 목록을 제시한 이후 진행된 요한복음과 필론의 관계에 관한 일련의 선행연구를 비평적으로 반영하고 개선하는 면이 있다. 요한복음이 로고스-예수 개념을 형성하는 데 필론의 누스-모세 개념을 실제로 참고했는지를 결정하는 일은 이 논문의 범위를 벗어난다.

***주제어**

요한복음; 알렉산드리아의 필론; 로고스-예수; 누스-모세; 플라톤.