God’s Word to Man, Wisdom Personified and the Christ of Hebrews 1:3

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By
Peter A. Langenkamp

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Abstract

Many scholars propose that Hebrews 1:3 borrows aspects of its language from the Old Testament book, The Wisdom of Solomon. This paper examines the intention and purpose of the exordium of Hebrews, specifically Hebrews 1:3, in describing the Son of God, Jesus, in the language of divine Wisdom as found in the Wisdom of Solomon 7:26-27. Through an analysis of the terms of Hebrews 1:3—ἀπαύγασμα, δόξα, χαρακτήρ, ὑπόστασις, and ῥῆμα—this paper explores why the author of Hebrews may have borrowed some aspects of the Wisdom of Solomon while forgoing others. This paper proposes that the author is seeking to describe Christ in a language borrowed from the established Wisdom tradition while at the same time avoiding possible misunderstandings with Greek philosophical thought seen, for example, in the works of Philo. Though both the Wisdom of Solomon and the Letter to the Hebrews are influenced by the philosophic currents of their time, the author of Hebrews does not ultimately describe Jesus as a philosophical concept but rather the physical manifestation of God’s presence and action in the created world. The author is seeking language to describe God’s revelation of Himself through his Son. In order to properly speak about this revelation, the Author of Hebrews borrows from the Wisdom tradition which saw Wisdom as a revelation from God spoken to humanity.
This thesis by Peter A. Langenkamp fulfills the thesis requirement for the master’s degree in Theology and is approved by:

Advisor: Mr. Marco Mulattieri, S.S.L.
Readers: Dr. Matthew C. Genung, S.S.D.
          Rev. Steven Beseau, S.T.D
Abbreviations for the Works of Philo Cited Throughout this Work

Conf. De Confusione Linguarum (On the Confusion of Tongues)

Cher. De Cherubim (On the Cherubim)

Deus Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis (On the Unchangeableness of God)

Fug. De Fuga et Inventione (On Flight and Finding)

Her. Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit (Who is the Heir of Divine Things)

Leg. Legum Allegoriae (The Allegories of the Law)

Migr. De Migratione Abrahami (On the Migration of Abraham)

Mut. De Mutatione Nominum (On the Change of Names)

Opif. De Opificio Mundi (On the Creation)

Plant. De Plantatione (On Noah’s Work as a Planter)

Pos. De Posteritate Caini (On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile)

QE Quaestiones in Exodum (Questions on Exodus)

Somn. De Somniis (On Dreams)

Spec. De Specialibus Legibus (On the Special Laws)

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1 All the citations from Philo in this paper are taken from Philo/With an English Translation. Translated by F.H. Colson, G.H. Whitaker, and J.W. Earp. The Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929.


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Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰώνας: ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτὴρ τῆς ύποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δέξια τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the refulgence of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. (Heb 1:1-4).

In the first chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, the Son of God is described as the “refulgence of God’s glory” and the “exact imprint of God’s being.” The language of the author’s exordium is striking for its poetry and for its claims concerning the Son. It is made all the more interesting when one considers that words like refulgence (ἀπαύγασμα) and imprint (χαρακτὴρ) are hapax legomena, occurring nowhere else in the New Testament. This language, however, does not appear to have arisen out of the mist; it bears a distinct resemblance to a passage found in the Old Testament describing Wisdom:

Ἀτμὶς γάρ ἐστιν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινής διὰ τούτο ὡδὲν μεμιαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς ἀϊδίου καὶ ἑσοπτρὸν ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκών τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ μία δὲ ὁσς πάντα δύναται καὶ μένουσα ἐν αὐτῇ τὰ πάντα καινίζει καὶ κατὰ γενεάς εἰς ψυχὰς ὀσίας μεταβαίνουσα φίλους θεοῦ καὶ προφήτας κατασκεύαζει

My own translation based on the New Revised Standard Translation. All other biblical citations in this paper are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford Press, 2010), unless otherwise noted.
For [Wisdom] is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nothing defiled gains entrance into her. For she is a refulgence of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets (Wis 7:25-27).

Based on similarities of language and thought, many scholars see this passage as a source of inspiration for the exordium of Hebrews (i.e. Heb 1:1-4). This paper will seek to examine the intention and purpose of the exordium of Hebrews in describing the Son of God, Jesus, in the language of divine Wisdom. What is the author of Hebrews attempting to convey by his use of Wisdom 7:25-27? Why does he seem to borrow only some aspects of these verses while forgoing others? I propose that the author is seeking to describe Christ in a language borrowed from the established Wisdom tradition, specifically, as developed in the Hellenistic/Jewish Book of Wisdom, while at the same time avoiding possible misunderstandings with Greek philosophical thought seen, for example, in the works of Philo. Though both the Wisdom of Solomon and the Letter to the Hebrews are influenced by the philosophic currents of their time, the author of Hebrews does not ultimately describe Jesus as a philosophical concept but rather as the physical manifestation of God’s presence and action in the created world. The author is not struggling with a philosophical conundrum such as those Philo was seeking to solve, rather the author is seeking language to describe a historical reality. The ontological

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status of Jesus as briefly described in the exordium allows the author of Hebrews to then
develop his greater theme of Jesus Christ as the perfect mediator and high priest, which is
examined throughout the rest of the author’s epistle.

**Historical Context and Literary Influence**

To better understand the intention of Hebrews, one must have some sense of its
historical setting. The historical milieu and the influences on Hebrews is a question which
has garnered much speculation. Many authors have examined the book in light of
Hellenistic Alexandrian Judaism, as seen for example in the writings of Philo. The
apotheosis of this school of thought can be seen in the writings of biblical scholar Ceslas
Spicq who considered the author of Hebrews to be a “Philonic convert to Christianity.” Other scholars see connections to Alexandria, but not necessarily to Philo directly. Some
have tried to connect the book to the writings of Qumran. Others have sought insights
into Hebrews via Gnostic writings. Still others have tried to connect the work to the
Stephen tradition of Acts. This paper cannot go into all the details of these various
arguments concerning who or what was the primary influence for the author of Hebrews.

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Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Arbeiten Zur Literatur Und Geschichte Des
Hellenistischen Judentums Bd. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1970) for two standard contrasting opinions on the
relationship between Hebrews and Philo.

5 “Au total, nous souscrivons à la formule de Ménégoz: (l’ auteur de l’ épître) est un philonien

6 Yigael Yadin, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Aspects of the Dead
Sea Scrolls*, ed. Yigael Yadin and Chaim Rabin, Scripta Hierosolymitana 4 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press,
Hebrew University, 1965), 36-55.

7 Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the

8 L.D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: Its Background of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1990), 89-106 and his conclusion 131-133.
For reasons which will be described later in greater depth, one could tentatively posit a connection of some kind between Hebrews and Alexandrian thought, though the debate concerning Philo’s influence still continues. Before proceeding to a comparison of these three works—Hebrews, Wisdom, and Philo—we will give an overview of their various backgrounds in order to establish the legitimacy of comparing these works for possible insights into the exordium of Hebrews.

**Evidence for a Shared Tradition: Hebrews in the world of Wisdom and Philo**

We will begin with an examination of Hebrews and its historical relationship to the Book of Wisdom and the writings of Philo. These books were likely written within one hundred years of one another: scholars now generally believe the Book of Wisdom was written no earlier than 30 B.C. while the Letter to the Hebrews is often dated to no later than the end of the 1st Century. It is not unreasonable to suppose a much smaller interval of time existed between these two compositions. When dating the Old Testament Book of Wisdom, the year 30 B.C. is now considered the *terminus post quem* due to the use of the term κράτησις (“domination”) found in Wisdom 6, an apparent reference to the Roman occupation of Alexandria in the summer of that year. The general esteem for the book in both Jewish and early Christian circles would argue for a dating closer to the aforementioned *terminus* of 30 B.C. since a composition date closer to that year would

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9 See Kenneth L. Schenke’s overview of the *status quaestionis* in his article “Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews: Ronald William’s Study after Thirty Years,” *Studia Philonica* 14 (January 2002): 112-135.

10 This year marks the beginning of Roman rule in Egypt. Cf. Roland Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2002), 265-266.


allow more time for the book to attain its elevated status in Jewish, and later Christian, circles.  

Philo was a Jew who lived from about 20 B.C. to 50 A.D. and so would have been a rough contemporary of our unknown author of Hebrews. He was the son of a wealthy family, was well-educated, and spent the entirety of his life in Alexandria, Egypt where he was a prominent member of the Jewish community. The works of Philo are clearly influenced by Middle Platonism which combined Platonic and Stoic thought. The writings of Philo, which are largely exegetical tracts on the Old Testament, shed some light on how an educated, Hellenized Jew may have approached, understood, and employed the texts of the Old Testament.

Despite the fact that both Philo and the Book of Wisdom are of Alexandrian origin, and the fact that all of these documents—Wisdom, Hebrews, and Philo—bear the stamp of Hellenistic influences, this evidence is not enough to prove that the three writings are all part of a shared geographic tradition i.e. Hellenistic Alexandria. The question must be asked: Is the author of Hebrews operating from a specifically Alexandrian milieu or a larger Hellenistic milieu? The fact that Hebrews 1:3 mirrors Wisdom 7:26 indicates that the author is probably aware of the Book of Wisdom, but this does not prove that Hebrews is also from Alexandria: the Wisdom of Solomon, though of

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13 If composed after 4-6 BC, there is something intriguing in the notion that this book which the Catholic and Orthodox Churches consider to be part of the official canon of the Old Testament was created shortly after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.

Alexandrian descent, was known outside of Egypt. For example, St. Paul seems to be aware of the book in his letter to the Romans.\textsuperscript{15}

Examining the texts of Hebrews and Philo, David Runia has provided possible evidence that these writings both came from the same Alexandrian milieu. He bases this proposition on the fact that both authors use the same variant texts on several occasions.\textsuperscript{16} He notes four passages where Philo and Hebrews cite the same non-standard form of a verse found in the Septuagint. The first citation is Gen 2:2 which both Philo and Hebrews quote while also adding an “ὁ θεὸς ἐν” to the passage despite no known form of the Septuagint including these words.\textsuperscript{17} The second citation is Exodus 25:40 where both authors add the word πάντα.\textsuperscript{18} The third citation involves the use of Prov 3:11-12 where both authors use the passage in the context of reprimanding children. The fourth citation is the most interesting, and it involves Josh 1:5 conflated with several other scriptural passages, Deut 31:8 and possibly Gen 28:15. Both texts employ this composite text in almost the same form “οὐ ἔτελεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ.”\textsuperscript{19} Based on these insights, the assumption of a shared Alexandrian milieu seems reasonable. And though it cannot be proven that Hebrews had direct knowledge of Philo, i.e. Hebrews never quotes Philo, the comparison of Philo and Hebrews based on a shared tradition is valid.


\textsuperscript{16} David Ruina, \textit{Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey}, Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum Ad Novum Testamentum 3 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 76. See also Schenk, 128 which provides additional information regarding this insight.

\textsuperscript{17} Heb. 4:4 and Post., 64 both state: “καὶ κατέπαυσεν ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ”

\textsuperscript{18} Heb 8:5 and Leg. III., 102. Hebrews 8:5 states: ὡς γὰρ φρονήσεις παντα κατὰ τὸν τόπον τῶν δειχθέντα σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει:

\textsuperscript{19} Heb 13:5 and Conf., 166.
Possible Hymnic Source Material

Another issue which must be briefly touched upon before continuing is the widespread hypothesis that Hebrews 1:3 may be part of an early Christian hymn fragment.20 The existence of such a fragment would imply the author of Hebrews is not borrowing directly from the Book of Wisdom but rather from some early Christian “hymnal” text. Such a hymn fragment could belong to a collection of scriptural passages which scholars have noted for their “lofty language, verse composition, hymnal titles referring to God or Christ, the portrayal of divine drama, the cosmic perspectives of redemption or exaltation of the works of God or Christ—all of this in an exalted tone of worship and thanksgiving.”21 Such passages proposed as hymns by New Testament scholars include 1 Cor 8:6, Col 1:15-20, Phil 2:6-11, and John 1.

While this is an interesting hypothesis, ultimately this cannot be proven or disproven. Martin Hengel notes: “One should differentiate more than has been done in the past between the widespread hymnic language and the really provable form of a hymn.”22 Frankowski tries to show that authors of these hymns are not likely quoting texts verbatim but rather employing “certain common themes and expressions in the NT.”23 He argues that Heb 1:3 is its “own composition” in which the author “borrowed existing credal and hymnal themes [which] provided only certain thoughts and elements

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23 Frankowski, 187.

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out of which he fashioned...a new Christological hymn conceived as a launching point for the message of the letter.”\textsuperscript{24} The intricate structure of Hebrew’s exordium and the author’s gift for writing both argue that the author of Hebrews did not borrow from another source but instead composed Heb 1:3 himself.

Though one should not ignore the possibility of a hymnic origin, it need not interfere with the current examination of the relationship between Hebrews 1 and Wisdom 7. The author of Hebrews may have borrowed from such a “hymn” in order to appeal to an audience who would have been familiar with it, but it is reasonable to assume the author is not simply trying to establish a connection with his audience. Such a connection could have been established in any number of ways, ways that need not describe Christ as “ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς υποστάσεως αὐτοῦ” (Heb 1:3). Regardless of what redaction criticism may reveal about this verse, i.e., whether Hebrews 1:3 is truly based on an early Christian hymn, the verse itself still finds its ultimate basis in the wisdom tradition found in Wisdom 7. Thus the main question which we seek to answer in this paper remains: why would the author of Hebrews describe Jesus in language taken from Wisdom 7, albeit perhaps channeled through an intermediate, hymnic source?

\textit{The Tradition of Wisdom Personified}

To answer this question, we must examine the various theological strands and developments of which the Wisdom tradition is composed. Only by understanding the Wisdom tradition, particularly the tradition of \textit{personified} Wisdom\textsuperscript{25}, can one understand

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 191.

\textsuperscript{25} While the personification of Wisdom in the Old Testament literature is quite striking, the use of personification is found throughout the Old Testament, e.g. Psalm 85:11: “Steadfast love and faithfulness
what the author of Hebrews may be attempting to do by drawing from these earlier sources. One need only examine the following texts to develop some understanding of the biblical presentation of wisdom: Job 28, Proverbs 8, Sirach 24, Baruch 3:9—4:4, Wisdom 7-9.

In Job 28:12 and Job 28:20 the reader is asked “Where shall wisdom be found?” and “Where then does wisdom come from?” To these questions a reply is given in verses 23-28: “God understands the way to [wisdom], and he knows its place. For he looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens...And he said to humankind, ‘Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.’” Here the figure of personified wisdom begins to make her appearance in the Bible. Wisdom is not portrayed as a woman like she will be later in the Book of Proverbs. Wisdom is simply connected with God in such a way that man cannot find access to her without the assistance of God who knows “[Wisdom’s] place...established it and searched it out” (Job 28:27). In other words, wisdom is a revelation from God. Here too Wisdom is portrayed as somehow present in the created order of things.

In Proverbs 8 this connection between Wisdom and creation is continued and supplemented. In many ways this passage is the central text for the personification of Wisdom. Here God not only knows where Wisdom is to be found, He has assigned Wisdom an active role in creation. We first read that Wisdom was present from the beginning of creation: “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth”
Later in verses 29-31 we read that not only was Wisdom present but she somehow participated in the creation of the earth: “when [the LORD] marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a child (master worker); and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (Prov 8:29-31). It should be noted that this verse has been the source of arguments due to the various translations of the word (אמון) as either “child” or “master-worker.” If we translate the word as “master-worker” we can detect in this passage another reference to the role of Wisdom with regard to the created order which we will see continued in both Wisdom and Hebrews (cf. Wis 7:27 and Heb 1:3). This term “master-worker” highlights an important aspect of Wisdom: not only was she present before the created world but she was somehow a participant in this creation.

When we examine Sirach we encounter the question of where Wisdom can be found and where has she now taken root. Sirach tells us that she has come to dwell in Jerusalem (Sir 24:10). Israel is privileged with a special relationship with Wisdom by virtue of Israel’s reception of God’s law. Sirach develops the concept of Wisdom by identifying her with the Torah: “All this is true of the book of the Most High’s covenant, the law which Moses commanded us as an inheritance for the community of Jacob” (Sir 24:23). The Book of Baruch further cements the connection between Torah and Wisdom (cf. Bar. 3:9-4:4) and explicitly states that “Wisdom is the book of the commandments of

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God, the law that endures forever” (Bar 4:1). Roland Murphy suggests that this connection between Torah and Wisdom seen in both Sirach and Baruch was presumably based in the promise of life which both Wisdom and the Torah offer (cf. Deut. 30:15 with Prov 3:1ff).  

The Book of Wisdom can be seen as the culmination of this long tradition of Wisdom literature. In its discussion of Wisdom, the book shares many characteristics of what came before (Job, Proverbs, Sirach, Baruch), yet the book also deals with distinct issues. The Book of Wisdom can in part be viewed as the fruit of a unique cross-pollination between Biblical thought and Hellenistic thought. Roland Murphy notes that the book contains “a vocabulary of 1,734 words, of which 1,303 appear only once, and 335 (about 20 percent) are not found in any other canonical book of the Old Testament.” In some ways this incorporation of extra-Biblical thought in the Wisdom tradition is not new. Murphy makes this very point when he states that “the most striking characteristic of [Wisdom] literature is the absence of what one normally considers as typically Israelite or Jewish. There is no mention of the promises to the patriarchs, the Exodus and Moses, the covenant and Sinai, the promise to David (2 Sam 7), and so forth.”

Though the Wisdom of Solomon incorporates Hellenistic thought, it by no means ignores the biblical tradition that came before it. One of the things that distinguishes the Wisdom of Solomon from other Wisdom books is its emphasis on salvation history, the very things which the other wisdom books largely pass over. It deals extensively with God’s active presence amid the Jewish people. For example, in Chapter 10 the author

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28 Murphy, 141.

29 Ibid., 85.
explores God’s providential action in the protagonists of the Old Testament from Creation until the Exodus and then again in chapters 11-19 the author explores God’s providential action during the Exodus at length. The Book of Wisdom combines facets of the Wisdom tradition with salvation history and so demonstrates Wisdom’s presence throughout Israel’s history.

The Wisdom of Solomon portrays this presence in terms of spirit. One should note the shift which this portrayal marks. Wisdom had been presented in terms of the Torah in books such as Sirach and Baruch, now Wisdom’s portrayal is given in terms of spirit (cf. Wis 7-9). Martin Hengel speaks of this development in the Wisdom of Solomon wherein we now see the complete unity of Wisdom and Spirit:

“Here Wisdom has taken on all functions of the Spirit of God becoming completely one with him. This may be connected in part with these sentences having been formulated in Hellenistic conceptuality, however, that does not explain this last step. The decisive factor rather is that here Wisdom’s function as mediator of revelation is brought to the consistent perfection already prepared in Palestinian Judaism by its identification with God’s Law in Prov. 1-10, Sir. 1 and 24, or Bar 3-4.” 30

This development of Wisdom gives emphasis to certain traits of Wisdom which had been associated with the Spirit of God, for example being sent forth and renewing creation (cf. Ps 104:30).

The identification of Spirit with Wisdom highlights Wisdom’s role as a mediator of creation and its renewal. This insight will prove helpful when we later turn our eyes toward the Letter of Hebrews and its statement that “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds … and he sustains all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:2-3). Hengel notes that

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30 Hengel, 101.
in the Wisdom of Solomon, “Wisdom has the mission that in early Christianity belongs to the Spirit, while on the other hand, she has herself become a mediator of salvation, entering into the work of salvation—as the throne companion of God—a role reserved in the New Testament for Christ himself. Following the older Palestinian Wisdom tradition however, she remains at the same time the mediator of Creation in tandem with the creative Word of God” (cf. Wis Sol 9:1-4).\(^{31}\)

To summarize and complete our exploration of Wisdom Personified we will offer eight general characteristics of Wisdom as outlined by Roland Murphy\(^{32}\):

1. Wisdom has a divine origin (Prov 8:22; Sir 24:3; Wis 7:25-26).
2. She existed before creation and seems to have had a role in creation (Prov 8:22-29; Sir 1:4; Wis 9:9; Prov 8:30; 3:19; Sir 1:9-10; Wis 7:22; 8:4-6).
3. Wisdom is identified with the (divine) spirit and she is also immanent in the world (Wis 1:7; 9:17; 12:1; 7:24; 8:1).
4. Wisdom accounts for the coherence and permanence of the cosmos (Wis 1:7; 7:24, 27; 8:1; 11:25).
5. Wisdom has a particular mission to human beings (Prov 8:4, 31-36; Sir 24:7, 12, 19-22; Wis 7:27-28; 8:2-3).
6. Wisdom is particularly associated with Israel (Sir 24:8-12, 23; Bar 4:1; Wis 10:1-21)
7. Wisdom is a gift from God (Prov 2:6; Sir 1:9-10, 26; 6:37; Wis 7:7; 9:4), but at the same time she is associated with effort and “discipline” (Sir 4:17; 6:18-36; Prov 4:10-27; 6:6; Wis 1:5; 7:14).
8. Wisdom is portrayed as a person (Job 28; Prov 1, 8, 9; Sir 1:9-10, 4:11-19, 6:18-31, 14:20-15:8; 51:13-21; Bar 3:9-4:4; Wis 6:12-11:1)

Many of these qualities could also be applied, and indeed some are applied explicitly, to the Son of Hebrews 1. This Son has a divine origin (Heb 1:2), had a role in creation (Heb

\(^{31}\)Ibid., 102.

\(^{32}\)Ibid., 145.
1:2), plays a role in the coherence and permanence of the cosmos (Heb 1:3), has a particular mission to human beings, is associated with Israel (Heb 1:1-2, i.e. He continues the revelatory word of the prophets who were assigned particularly to Israel), is associated with themes of effort and discipline (Heb 10:36), and is of course a true human person with flesh and blood (Heb 2:14-17).

Our overview of the Wisdom tradition has also allowed us to see that Wisdom acts as a revelation from God to human beings (cf. Job 28, Prov 8, but especially Sirach/Baruch where Wisdom is equated with the Torah), which could be compared to the revelatory nature of the Son of Hebrews as God’s spoken word (cf. “in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son” Heb 1:2). It should be noted, however, that one important difference between the Son of Hebrews and the personified Wisdom tradition is the nature of Wisdom’s personification. As commentators point out, personified Wisdom always remains, ultimately, a literary device. Murphy notes that “In the biblical context the figure of Wisdom cannot be conceived as hypostasis or person because of the strict monotheism of the post-exilic period. Whatever associations Wisdom may have had in an earlier era, she is best understood in her biblical expression as a communication of God.”

33 Murphy, 133.

34 Literally meaning “word” but logos is a word with a rather broad semantic field and so “reason” “speech” and other such related terms are also covered by this single term.
which he identifies with Wisdom at various times in his writings.\textsuperscript{35} Yet the exact relationship between Biblical wisdom and the Philonic doctrine of the Logos is difficult to delineate. C.H. Dodd notes that “the Logos doctrine of Philo is the subject of endless disquisitions in Philo’s writings, incredibly complicated, and doubtfully consistent in detail.”\textsuperscript{36} Hence this is a subject which we cannot hope to cover in its entirety in the course of this paper. For our purposes let us glance at one passage from Philo to see how the writings of Philo, Wisdom, and Hebrews use similar language and ideas. In this regard, perhaps no passage of Philo excites more interest for speculation as does the following passage in which Philo expounds upon an allegorical understanding of the High Priest of Num 35:9-34:

“Great difficulty is created by this if it is taken literally...[but] we say that the High Priest was not a man but a Divine Word (λόγος) having no part in intentional or even unintentional errors. For Moses says that he cannot be defiled in respect of his father, the mind, or his mother, sense-perception, since, I imagine he received incorruptible and wholly pure parents, his father being God and Wisdom his mother, through whom all things came into existence.”\textsuperscript{37}

Though a cursory glance of this passage or others like it might excite hopes for some sort of direct connection between the author of Hebrews and Philo, one must not be too hasty in this regard. A concurrence of imagery does not necessarily entail also a concurrence of thought. When we begin examining the exordium of Hebrews we will carefully see whether these similarities are due to a common purpose and thought or simply a common

\textsuperscript{35} Philo, \textit{Leg. I.} 65; \textit{Fug.} 97; \textit{Somn. II.} 242.

\textsuperscript{36} Williamson, 410-411.

historical/cultural background. Both Hebrews and Philo may speak of the High Priest, yet what is Philo attempting to convey in this portrayal of the Logos as High Priest?

Philo, as a both Hellenistic philosopher and Jew, struggles in his writings to reconcile the immanence and the transcendence of God. The Bible clearly shows a God who makes himself present and known to his people and yet God is ultimately beyond the created world. This understanding of God as transcendent harmonized well with the philosophical perspective of Middle Platonism in which Philo was steeped. From his philosophical school, Philo understood God to be pure being (τὸ ὄντως ὄν) and so transcendent. Yet as a Jew, Philo also believed in the God who created the World and had made himself known in a special way to the Jewish nation.

Starting from these two presuppositions, two questions naturally arise: how is the physical world created by a transcendent being? How does a human being, for example, Moses, have contact with such a transcendent being? To answer these questions, Philo employed concepts found in Middle Platonism which posited an intermediary between the transcendent God and his creation. This intermediary is the Logos, the very one which we saw clothed in the imagery of the Jewish High Priest. This Logos acts as a medium between God and creation. In Middle Platonism this Logos also had properties associated with the Stoic doctrine of the Logos/Pneuma. For the Stoics, the word Logos was used to describe the rational principle that was present throughout the entire Cosmos;

38 Williamson, 414.

39 For a brief overview of the passages where Philo speaks of the Logos see Harold Attridge’s “Philo and John: Two Riffs on One Logos,” in Essays on John and Hebrews (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 48-58.

the word Pneuma (i.e. spirit, breath) was used to describe the pervasive, animating principle of a body. Together these two words described one reality: the animating principle which holds the created material universe together. According to Stoicism, the human reason of an individual is a portion/share in this cosmic Logos. From Philo’s *De Opificio Mundi*, we discover that he connects this Logos to the God of the Jewish people by stating that the Logos is the incorporeal world of ideas which reside in the mind of God.\(^4^1\) The Logos however is also the expression of these ideas in the phenomenal, material world. In occupying this middle ground, the Logos acts as a mediator between man and God.

With this philosophical background of Philo and the biblical background of Wisdom of Solomon in place, we are almost ready to proceed to examine the exordium of Hebrews. Yet at this point, something more must briefly be said about Middle Platonism. Scholars will argue about how much Middle Platonism was an influence on not only Philo but also Wisdom of Solomon and Hebrews.\(^4^2\) Ronald Cox makes the claim that all these writings (Philo, Wisdom, and Hebrews) exhibit characteristics associated with this philosophical school. Cox does not argue that they employ and argue for the same philosophy per se but rather that they use the language and concepts of Middle Platonism to express their own unique ideas.\(^4^3\) He sees an “exegetical Tendenz that posits an

\(^4^1\) Philo, Opif. 36. See also Opif. 24-25, and 29.

\(^4^2\) Cf. James Thompson, a proponent of Middle Platonic influence in Hebrews, in his commentary *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

\(^4^3\) “There are substantial differences between Hellenistic Judaism, early Christianity and Gnosticism and these writings reflect those differences when it comes to the topic at hand. In particular, each of these traditions varies in their adaptation of Middle Platonic doctrine as a result of their distinctive understanding of creation and humanity’s place therein.” Ronald Cox, *By the Same Word: Creation and Salvation in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*, Beih ete Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neu testamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche 145 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 25.
intermediate reality between God and creation, …[It is an] ontologically-based cosmological agency that unites Philo, Wisdom of Solomon and the four NT texts [including Hebrews] as at least a special sub-set within the larger Sapiential tradition."\textsuperscript{44}

This insight has value, and it is one to which we will need to return after our examination of the exordium of Hebrews.

\textit{Exordium and The Christ of Hebrews: Heb 1:1-4}

Having briefly examined Personified Wisdom as described in the Book of Wisdom and the Logos of Philo, we may now ask the questions: What is the author of Hebrews attempting to convey in his exordium and why does he introduce Christ in the language of Wisdom and Word? Let us now turn our attention to the text itself. The exordium itself is chiastic in structure and has as its center the lines which will be the focus of our study: Heb 1:3a. This chiastic structure can be seen below:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,

\textsuperscript{2} but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son,

whom he appointed heir of all things, through

whom he also created the worlds.

\textsuperscript{3} He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being,

and he sustains all things by his powerful word.

When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 12.
having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs

This structure clearly indicates there is an importance to Heb 1:3a worthy of further inquiry. In a cursory examination of these verses, we see several things. First, this central verse (Heb 1:3) describes the very nature of the Son. This verse is then surrounded by verses which describe the Son’s role in creation and the world. These verses are then surrounded by themes associated with his glorification. J.P. Meier rightly sees these verses as a movement “from exaltation (ekathisen) to creation (epoiesen), and [finally] to timeless preexistence (on)” and then back again.45

The Use of the Term ἀπαύγασμα

We will begin with the ἀπαύγασμα term found at the heart of this chiasm since it contains the most explicit connection between Hebrews and Wisdom. The use of the term ἀπαύγασμα in both the Letter to the Hebrews and the Book of Wisdom is noteworthy because this term is found nowhere else in the Old and New Testament.46 It is found in extra-biblical writings, for example, Plutarch.47 The word ἀπαύγασμα is derived from the Greek verb ἀπαυγάζω which means to emit bright light, the word αὐγή itself meaning brightness. The case-ending of the word ἀπαύγασμα is passive though the word can be interpreted in an either passive (e.g. reflection) or active sense (e.g. effulgence) and so it


46 However it should be noted that the verbal form of this term is found in 2 Cor 4:4 and 2 Pt 1:19.

47 For example Plutarch’s use of the term in De fac. In orbe lunae 934D (21.9): “Since here on earth places near lakes and rivers open to the sun take on the color and brilliance of the purple and red awnings that shade them, by reason of the reflections giving off many various effulgences (ἀπαύγασματος), what wonder if a great flood of shade…takes from the moon at different times the strain of different hues…?” Taken from Williamson, 37.
can be “either the light emitted from a luminary or the reflection of the luminary.” The word is used to describe Christ himself in the letter to the Hebrews, where we read that “he is the ἀπαύγασμα of God’s glory.” Scholars have debated how the author of Hebrews used this word and have come to no consensus on its active or passive meaning. Though many ancient commentators favored an active meaning, modern commentators are divided over the active/passive meaning, ultimately the use of ἀπαύγασμα as active or passive is inconclusive.

The corresponding passage from Wisdom sheds little light on the active/passive question because here too scholars often debate the sense of the word. There Wisdom is described as “the ἀπαύγασμα of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God.” (Wis 7:26). The mention of the word “mirror” (ἔσοπτρον) favors the passive meaning. That being said, the preceding verse describes wisdom as a “pure emanation (ἀπόρροια) of the glory of the Almighty.” This term ἀπόρροια has a clearly active meaning which could hint at the author’s understanding of ἀπαύγασμα in the following verse. Here too the argument over active/passive meaning is inconclusive. This ambiguity may be an indication that the author of Wisdom is not trying to express some technical understanding of Wisdom as an emanation (active) or a reflection (passive) of God but simply the reality that Wisdom possesses the traits of God. Gregg in his commentary notes that:

The emphasis in these vv. lies not so much upon breath, effluence, effulgence (emphasis mine), mirror, image, as upon power, glory, light, workings, goodness. As that which is born of spirit is spirit, wisdom as

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emanating from the Divine possessor of these attributes, possesses them herself by inherent right. Power, glory, light, working, goodness are part of her very essence.\(^{50}\)

Having emphasized the importance of the terms power, glory, light, etc. over the terms breath, effluence, effulgence, etc., Gregg goes on to state that Wisdom’s “origin only emphasizes her personal prerogatives: her derivation is of little importance, unless derivation denotes identity.” Another commentator, Ernest Clark, expands on this notion of origin/derivation and identity and states that this passage points to the derived identity of wisdom. Ernest Clark states:

\begin{quote}
Wisdom is not independent but derives her identity from God. Hence, she is personified as a fine mist rising as the power of God. Words such as streams from, mirror, image underline the fact that wisdom is a reflection of God and not the source of her own identity.\(^{51}\)
\end{quote}

This concept of the derived identity of Wisdom could be a fruitful avenue for insights into the understanding of what the author of Hebrews may be attempting to do. Perhaps the author of Hebrews is seeking to stress the close, even inseparable, relationship between God and His Son. How does one separate a ray of light from its source? One cannot be without the other. Such a relationship will eventually be crystallized in the later Creed as “light from light, true God from true God.” Later theologians like Thomas Aquinas will speak of the person of Jesus Christ being a subsistent relation: his Sonship/Filiation is his very identity.\(^{52}\)

The ambiguity in the word ἀπαύγασμα could simply be a way for the author of Hebrews to say something meaningful about the Son in a manner which gives insight into

\(^{50}\) Gregg, 75.


\(^{52}\) Cf. Thomas Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae} I, q. 29, art. 4
his relationship with the Father, by channeling the Wisdom tradition as found in the Wisdom of Solomon, without presuming to say something more definitive. As Harold Attridge notes: “in such poetic language complete precision is not to be expected. The image, in whatever sense it may be taken, serves to affirm the intimate relationship between the Father and the pre-existent Son.” For our author this relationship ultimately cannot be known in its fullness. This relationship is a revelation, a word spoken to humanity by God (cf. Heb. 1:2). The inaccessible nature of this mystery could be seen as a further echo of the Wisdom tradition wherein personified Wisdom resides in a place not known by man but known by God alone (cf. earlier discussion, Job 28).

Extra-Biblical Uses of ἀπαύγασμα in the Writings of Philo

Of course, it remains to be seen if the Wisdom of Solomon is the only source of influence here. At this point we turn once again to Philo. This term is found only three times in his entire corpus. The first occurrence is from De Opificio Mundi where Philo is describing human beings as body and soul: “Every man, in respect of his mind is allied to the divine Reason, having come into being as a copy or fragment or ray (ἀπαύγασμα) of that blessed nature.” Earlier in this same passage Philo describes the soul/mind of man as a sign of “their kinship with their first father [i.e. God].” For Philo man shares something with the Divine by virtue of his rational mind. Here there is a divergence between Hebrews and Philo: in Hebrews the connection between the Son and God is not based on the Son’s rational nature. This emphasis of Philo on the rational mind will

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53 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 43.

54 Philo, Opif. 146; cf. Williamson, 37.

55 Ibid., 145.
continue to appear throughout our examination of Philo and it is this emphasis that argues most convincingly against the notion that Hebrews is borrowing directly from a rational philosophy like that which is exhibited in Philo.

The second occurrence of ἀπαύγασμα is found in De Plantatione: “[The world] is a ‘sanctuary’, an outshining (ἀπαύγασμα) of sanctity, so to speak, a copy of the original.”\(^56\) This line also occurs within a discussion of reason and the mind, and so here we have the world of sense perception described as an ἀπαύγασμα of realities apprehended by the mind. Again we see the term ἀπαύγασμα connected to human reason and Platonic thought. The final occurrence is found in De Specialibus Legibus IV where Philo describes the essence of the soul of man: “And clearly what was thus breathed (cf. Gen 2:7) was ethereal spirit, or something if such there be better than ethereal spirit, even an effulgence (ἀπαύγασμα) of the blessed, thrice blessed nature of the Godhead.”\(^57\) Here Philo connects the breath of God mentioned in Gen 2:7 with mental and rational life, which he contrasts with animal and non-rational life using the image of blood. So we see spirit, effulgence (ἀπαύγασμα), and rationality contrasted with blood, materiality and non-rationality.

In each of these three instances Philo uses ἀπαύγασμα to speak of realities that extend beyond the material world. Cox notes that “both terms [ἀπαύγασμα and χαρακτήρ] Philo uses to express the relationship between the (rational) soul and God…Philo draws from this cluster when he wishes to describe the origin of the sensible realm based on the intelligible realm, whether at a microcosmic level (the human soul) or

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\(^{56}\) Philo, Plant. 50; cf. Williamson, 37.

\(^{57}\) Philo, Spec. IV. 123; cf. Williamson, 37.
the macrocosmic level (the creation as a whole).” At no point does Philo explicitly use this term (ἀπαύγασμα) to describe the relationship between Wisdom and God. The ἀπαύγασμα of Philo are essentially reflections in the created world of non-material, Platonic realities. With no further insights from Philo, we are brought back to the use of ἀπαύγασμα in Wisdom 7 as the main source for insight into the use of ἀπαύγασμα, a use which stresses Wisdom’s derived identity from God.

Extra-Biblical Uses of ἀπαύγασμα in the Writings of Clement of Rome

There is still one more source to be examined for possible insights into Hebrew’s use of ἀπαύγασμα. This final source is the early Christian writing, the First Letter of Clement to the Corinthians. In that letter we read:

This is the way, dearly beloved, wherein we found our salvation, even Jesus Christ the High priest of our offerings, the Guardian and Helper of our weakness. Through Him let us look steadfastly unto the heights of the heavens; through Him we behold as in a mirror His faultless and most excellent visage; through Him the eyes of our hearts were opened; through Him our foolish and darkened mind springeth up unto the light; through Him the Master willed that we should taste of the immortal knowledge Who being the brightness (ἀπαύγασμα) of His majesty is so much greater than angels, as He hath inherited a more excellent name.

It is virtually certain here that Clement is borrowing from the Letter to the Hebrews. Evidence of this includes the reference to Jesus as High Priest, the use of ἀπαύγασμα, the comparison between Christ and the Angels, and the use of Ps 110.

58 Cox, 217.
61 Though Clement pairs ἀπαύγασμα with the term majesty (μεγαλωσύνη) instead of the term glory (δόξα), this shift does not undermine the idea of literary dependence as μεγαλωσύνη is found later in
When we examine this passage for insights into ἀπαύγασμα, we are struck by a series of three prepositional phrases which use imagery associated with light and seeing, and two dealing with the mind and knowledge. This imagery of light and enlightenment links these five phrases to the term ἀπαύγασμα which acts as a sort of climax for this list:

1. through Him let us look steadfastly unto the heights of the heavens;
2. through Him we behold as in a mirror His faultless and most excellent visage;
3. through Him the eyes of our hearts were opened;
4. through Him our foolish and darkened mind springeth up unto the light;
5. through Him the Master willed that we should taste of the immortal knowledge

These phrases suggest the term ἀπαύγασμα could possess some notion of mediation between God and the human person who is otherwise unable to see/know God. The fivefold repetition of the preposition “through” (διὰ) gives an emphasis that Christ, who is described as High Priest, acts as mediating agent between God and man. Without Christ, man is darkened and unable to attain to the vision of God. In the progression of these petitions we get the sense that in beholding Christ who is the ἀπαύγασμα of God’s majesty, we come to knowledge of the Father. The presence of these five clauses which give to Christ a mediating role illustrate the concerns of an author who likely borrowed from the Letter to the Hebrews precisely because it too sheds light on Christ’s mediating role.

Heb 1:3 where the Son is described as having “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty (μεγαλοσύνη) on high.”
Can one assume then that the author of Hebrews understood the term ἀπαύγασμα to have some connotation of mediation? If we recall the biblical tradition of Wisdom which the author Hebrews is likely channeling in his exordium, we could tentatively posit that a strand of the “wisdom as mediator” tradition can be found here. It is that strand of the tradition found in Proverbs, Baruch, and Sirach; one in which Wisdom acts in a mediating role—e.g. in the role of Torah as seen in Sirach and Baruch—that allows man to encounter the Divine. This tradition of Wisdom as mediator becomes more explicit in Wisdom of Solomon, influenced as it was by Middle Platonism and its emphasis on mediation. Hebrews appears to channel this strand of the Wisdom tradition as it has been interpreted by Wisdom of Solomon.

The Use of the Term δόξα

Having examined ἀπαύγασμα, we must now turn our attention to the term to which it is linked: glory (δόξα). Classically, δόξα had the basic meaning of “opinion/repute.” The LXX, however, used this term δόξα to cover the semantic value of קָבֹוד (kabod) apparently on the basis of קָבֹוד being sometimes used to denote social status.62 The semantic field of δόξα can range from opinion, an indication of social status, even a designation of a theophany (cf. God on Sinai in Exod 24:16-17 or God in the tabernacle in Exod. 40:34-35). It is this last understanding of glory, i.e. as theophany, that the author of Hebrews appears to be channeling. Commentator Harold Attridge notes: “Glory (δόξα) as a designation of the divine reality or of the heavenly state is commonplace in the Old Testament, post-biblical Judaism, and Early Christianity. Glory

in Hebrews is also a characteristic of the exalted Son and is the eschatological goal of the people he leads.”

This understanding of the term δόξα as a designation of the divine reality in the Epistle of the Hebrews is present almost from the beginning and is found in the early exegesis of the Church Fathers. For example, Gregory of Nyssa commenting on Hebrews 1:3 states: “When he was asking how to give a name to what cannot be grasped in thought and did not discover a word expressing an interpretation of the incomprehensible, [the author of Hebrews] called “glory” and “substance” whatever underlies all good and is not sufficiently known or spoken of. The underlying essence of being he dismissed as unnamable.”

Theodore of Mopsuestia also has similar comments: “Quite appropriately [the author of Hebrews] does not say ‘God’ but ‘glory.’ In this way he does not allow us to meddle in the things of that nature when we are thunderstruck by his name, since of course the only “glory” worth mentioning is God’s nature.”

We can conclude that δόξα, functions as a means of describing God’s nature, and that it may be understood as operating in parallel with the term found later in this same verse, ὑποστάσις, often translated as substance or being. These two terms both appear to operate as ways of describing the reality of God. The first (δόξα) could be considered an expression of biblical thought, the second (ὑποστάσις) an expression of Hellenistic thought, though such a distinction should not be applied too sharply. Alternatively Hebrews 1:3 could be seen as a sort of hendiadys conveying one meaning through two

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63 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 43.
64 Gregory of Nyssa, On Perfection, 58:105-6.
66 Cf. Cox, 207 where he describes both δόξα and ὑποστάσις as “circumlocutions for the deity.”
distinct descriptive phrases concerning the Son. Caution should be used in applying such an interpretation however since this can obscure the two distinct contributions of these phrases.

Let us now examine δόξα in the Book of Wisdom for more possible insights. The Book of Wisdom references δόξα several times in its discussion of Wisdom in chapters 7-9. There we see that wisdom is described as “a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty (καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινής).” (Wis 7:25). Here, as in Hebrews, the term δόξα acts as a circumlocution for the Divine, for God himself. We also read that the one who possesses wisdom “will have glory in the assembly” (ἕξω διὰ αὐτὴν δόξαν ἐν ὄχλοις) (Wis 8:10). This use of δόξα to describe both Wisdom and the people who possess Wisdom is also paralleled in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Attridge notes that “Glory in Hebrews is also a characteristic of the exalted Son and is the eschatological goal of the people he leads.”67 This idea of glory as the eschatological goal of the people who Jesus leads can be seen in Hebrews 2:10: “It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” In conclusion, the term δόξα is a circumlocution for the being of God, yet it is also something which both Wisdom and the Son participate in—as an ἀπόρροια or ἀπαύγασμα as the case may be—and it is something into which human beings can also be brought (cf. Heb 2:10).

Philo and the Term δόξα

While Philo typically uses the term δόξα in its classical meaning of “opinion/repute,” there are two instances where Philo uses δόξα in a manner which could

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67 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 43. (Emphasis added)
shed light on our examination of Hebrews 1:3. In these two instances, Philo describes the descent of God’s δόξα on Mt. Sinai. In his description of this event, he makes an interesting distinction between the glory (δόξα) of God and the being (οὐσία) of God. As Jesper Tang Nielsen notes: “In his interpretation Philo insists on a distinction between God’s δόξα and his οὐσία. God chose to appear (δοκεῖν) in δόξα. But his appearance (δόξα) is not a manifestation of his essence (οὐσία), which is not accessible to physical sight but only to noetic contemplation (cf. Quaest. Ex. II 45-47).” In that passage, Philo states: “Scripture clearly puts to shame those who whether through impiety or through foolishness believe that there are movements of place or of change in the Deity. For behold, what is said to come down is clearly not the essence of God, which is understood only as to its being, but His glory...[and this glory] produce[s] in the minds of those who happen to be there an appearance of the coming of God.” This language again demonstrates that the notion God would reveal his δόξα and by extension something of his οὐσία through a flesh-and-blood Son does not align with Philo’s thought. The figure of Jesus Christ as a revealer of God’s δόξα and ὑποστάσις would be totally foreign to him.

The Terms δόξα and φῶς

Let us now turn our attention to another question regarding the use of δόξα. In Hebrews the Son is described as the ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης but the Wisdom of Solomon

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68 Cf. Nielsen, 347.
69 Philo, Spec. I. 45; QE. II. 45, 47.
70 Nielsen, 347.
71 Philo, QE. II. 45.
72 In some respects the term ὑποστάσις is synonymous with οὐσία, though later the two words will take on different meanings in the realm of Trinitarian theology.
uses the phrase ἀπαύγασμα γάρ ἐστιν φωτὸς ἀϊδίου to describe Wisdom. Why this shift in language? With regard to the use of δόξα instead of φῶς, the two words do share a certain connection in biblical thought. The term δόξα can often carry connotations of luminosity, see for example Isaiah 60:19-20:

19 The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. 20 Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.

In this passage God is described as bringing both everlasting light (φῶς αἰώνιον) and glory (δόξα) to his people. The two phrases of 19b (“the LORD will be your everlasting light” and “your God will be your glory”) are an example of parallelism, both driving at the same ultimate reality.

Knowing the connection between these two words, the replacement of φῶς with the term δόξα may not be indicative of any profound shift. However, one commentator makes the following hypothesis: “ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης is apparently a combination of ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης and ἀπαύγασμα…φωτὸς ἀϊδίου in Wisdom 7:25. Hebrews as usual avoiding φῶς.”73 If this conflation is a reality, then perhaps this avoidance of φῶς may be derived from a desire to avoid some sort of miscommunication. Now if there is a certain compatibility and even interchangeability between the terms φῶς and δόξα in Biblical semantics as shown above, the avoidance of φῶς could find its

source in some non-Biblical semantic field such as the philosophical thought of the time. Perhaps the avoidance of φῶς is intended to prevent misunderstandings from occurring due to philosophical uses of the term.

To explore this possibility let us examine Philo and his understanding of φῶς. For the philosopher Philo, there is a strong connection between light, wisdom, and understanding. This can be seen for example in the De cong. Quaer. 47 where Philo states: “Now knowledge is the great sunlight of the soul. For as our eyes are illuminated by the sun’s rays, so is the mind by wisdom.” For Philo light is associated with the mind which can be enlightened and given knowledge of God. In addition to equating wisdom and light, Philo also describes God with “light” imagery. Williamson notes that the “Philonic conception of God as Light” is not explicitly present in Hebrews, and that “entirely absent from Hebrews is the Philonic equation of light and wisdom.” The author of Hebrews in avoiding the phrase ἀπαύγασμα…φῶς ἀϊδίου is showing that he is concerned with a mediator who provides a link to God via “enlightenment.” The mediator of Hebrews is not the mediator of some philosophy or gnosis concerning God. Rather the mediator of Hebrews is the mediator of “a new covenant.” (Heb 9:15) He mediates by virtue of his status as Son—who participates in the Father’s δόξα (Heb. 1:2, 1:3, 1:5, etc)—and his sharing in our humanity (Heb.1:14). The Christ of Hebrews is not some sort of giver of wisdom through which the rational mind can naturally attain knowledge of God. The avoidance of φῶς could be understood as the result of the author

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74 For another example: “Wisdom is God’s archetypal luminary and the sun is a copy and image of it.” Philo, Migr. 40.

75 Cf. Philo’s Mut. 6; Cher. 96-97.

76 Williamson, 40.
of Hebrews distancing himself from an overly rational and philosophical understanding of mediation like that presented by Philo and his Middle Platonic philosophy. So the avoidance of φῶς and the concentration on δόξα allows the author of Hebrews to present the Son in terms of theophany rather than enlightenment. Christ is the ultimate theophany in a series of revelations which stretch from the theophany of Moses at Sinai to the word spoken “in these last days” (Heb 1:2). Jesus allows us to encounter the glory which he possesses in virtue of his being the Son of the Father. It is a glory which the author of the Hebrews will also call his audience toward (cf. Heb 2:10).

The Use of the Term χαρακτήρ

The next line of Hebrews 1:3 describes the Son as the exact imprint of God’s very being (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ). The word χαρακτήρ in its most basic meaning is used to describe “a mark engraved, impress, [or] stamp on coins and seals.” The term comes from χαράσσω which means to “engrave, carve.” The word χαρακτήρ is also commonly used in a metaphorical sense to refer to a “distinguishing mark” or “characteristic.” This term, along with the previously examined ἀπαύγασμα, is a hapax legomenon, occurring nowhere else in the New Testament. It is found twice in the Septuagint: Leviticus 13:28 and 2nd Maccabees 4:10 (and a third time if one includes the occurrence of χαρακτήρ in 4th Maccabees 15:4). None of these instances of the term are employed in a technical sense.  

78 Ibid.
When we examine the Hebrews 1:3b phrase “the exact imprint of God’s very being” (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ) we can detect a parallel with the text of Wisdom 7:26b where we read that Wisdom is “an image of God’s goodness” (εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ). Both authors use sensory language, i.e. image, imprint, to describe their subject as somehow revealing something about God, i.e. his being, his goodness. Since Hebrews deliberately borrowed the term ἀπαύγασμα from Wisdom, it is reasonable to conclude that the phrase χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ might also be written under the influence of Wisdom 7:26. If this is the case, why then would Hebrews shift the language from εἰκὼν to χαρακτήρ and ἀγαθότητος to ὑποστάσεως? Vanhoye notes this may simply be a way of emphasizing the accuracy with which Jesus represents God:

Instead of “image of his goodness,” [the author of Hebrews] put literally “imprint of his substance.” “The image” takes shape at a distance and may not be faithful; “the imprint” is obtained through direct contact and reproduces exactly all the features in relief.  

Images can deceive but an exact imprint is a more faithful interpretation. Philo himself speaks of the sometimes untrustworthy nature of images in his commentary on Genesis: “Since images (εἰκὼν) do not always correspond to their archetype and pattern, but are in many instances unlike it, the writer [Moses] further brought out his meaning by adding ‘after the likeness’ to the words ‘after the image,’ thus showing that an accurate cast (ἐκμαγείου) bearing a clear impression (ἔμφασιν), was intended.”


81 Philo, *Opif.* 73; The term for ‘impression’ here is ἔμφασις (as opposed to χαρακτήρ). It can carry the meaning of an image in a mirror, reflection, outward appearance, impression. Cf. Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἔμφασις.
This explanation which Vanhoye proposes has validity, but an examination of εἰκών and its Biblical connotations could reveal a deeper reason for this shift in language. The term εἰκών which appears in Wisdom 7:26 (εἰκών ἀγαθότητος) also appears earlier in Wis 2:23-24 where we read: “For God created us [human beings] for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity (εἰκόνα τῆς ἰδίας ἀϊδιότητος), but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.” Here Wisdom clearly recalls man as the “image of God” (cf. Gen 1:26). If we then examine Wis 7:26b in light of Wis 2:23-24, we see that the description of Wisdom as the “image of his goodness” brings us back the beginning of creation. There we remember that Wisdom was present as God himself created and saw his creation to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). The Book of Wisdom recalls this theme of man being created in “God’s image and likeness” (κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν) (Gen 1:26).

The term εἰκών is also frequently read in light of the Genesis narrative in the writings of Philo. From the κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν of Genesis 1:26, Philo sees εἰκών, as a way of speaking about man and his rational nature which function as an image of God. This rationalistic understanding of the human person’s creation in the image of God can be seen in Opif. 69: “Moses says that man was made in the image and likeness of God…for the mind which exists in each individual has been created after the likeness of that one mind which is in the universe as its primitive model, being in some sort the God of that body which carries it about and bears its image within it.”

82 Prov 8: 27-30; “When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker.”

83 Philo, Opif. 69.
created in the image of God due to their rational minds. This statement will be important when we later examine how Christ reflects God nature in Hebrews, not as an εἰκὼν but as the χαρακτήρ.

Philo goes further and also speaks of the εἰκὼν of God from Genesis in connection to the Logos of God. He states: “the immortal soul…was fashioned after the image of the Self-existent. And the image (εἰκὼν) of God is the Word through whom the whole universe was framed.” Here we can see a connection made between man, Logos, and God. Such a connection is made on the basis of Logos understood as reason. The very fact that εἰκὼν does not appear in Hebrews 1:3 with its description of the Son seems to indicate that the author may have wished to avoid the connotations which we have just described. If both Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon, as works of Alexandrian Hellenistic Judaism, connect the use of εἰκὼν to the Genesis narrative, then Hebrews, also a probable work of Alexandrian Hellenistic Judaism, might consciously have avoided such language to prevent confusion for an audience born from the same milieu as Wisdom of Solomon and Philo. Hebrews does not wish to have Jesus the Son interpreted in the light of the creation narrative of man as found in Genesis. This Son is not an image of God like any other man, he is rather a χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, a phrase not found elsewhere in the Bible. By avoiding a word associated with the Genesis narrative and instead utilizing a word (χαρακτήρ) which, although found in the Septuagint, did not carry strong connotations, the author would have been able to give a clearer message to

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84 Philo. Spec. 81.

85 εἰκὼν does appear in Hebrews 10:1: “Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form (εἰκὼν) of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach.” It is obvious that the surrounding language does not hint at a possible connection to Genesis 1:26 so there is little worry that εἰκὼν could be misconstrued.
his audience. Yet if this is all true, then why do similar Christological hymns speak of the εἰκών of God?\footnote{cf. Col. 1:15 and 2 Cor 4:4} Jonathon Worthington notes in his “Creation in Paul and Philo” that Paul \textit{purposefully} draws upon the Genesis account since Jesus Christ is the New Adam. What Hebrews seems to avoid for fear of confusion is itself the raw material which Paul uses to illustrate a truth about the humanity of Jesus. The reason behind this apparent avoidance/employment of the Gen 1:26 tradition could be explained solely on the basis of each authors’ respective aims, but it should also be noted that Paul is writing for a different community, a community which is not Alexandrian. These reasons could sufficiently account for their use in the Pauline letters but their avoidance in the letter to the Hebrews.

\textit{The Term χαρακτήρ in the Septuagint}

We now must proceed to briefly examine χαρακτήρ as is it is found in the Septuagint for possible insights into the word’s use in Hebrews. As mentioned above, it is likely that the obscurity of this word in the Biblical tradition makes it a useful tool for the author of Hebrews. It is a word that only occurs twice in the Septuagint in minor passages (a third occurrence can be found in the Fourth Book of Maccabees). In the first instance, Leviticus 13:28, we see χαρακτήρ used in a passage describing purity laws pertaining to skin disease. The word itself is used to describe a mark left by a burn: “But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread in the skin, but is dim, it is a swelling from the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him clean; for it is the scar (χαρακτήρ) of the burn.” In the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Book of Maccabees 4:10 we see the term used in a metaphorical sense to describe a manner of life: “When the king assented and Jason came to office, he at once shifted his countrymen over to the Greek way of life (Ἐλληνικὸν χαρακτῆρα).” In the 4\textsuperscript{th}
Book of Maccabees 15:4, we see what is perhaps the most relevant use of the word: “In what manner might I express the emotions of parents who love their children? We impress upon the character (χαρακτήρ) of a small child a wondrous likeness both of mind and of form.” Here we see a use of the word which resembles the use found in Hebrews. In both 4th Maccabees and Hebrews, the word χαρακτήρ implies a likeness derived from a familial bond. Despite this connection, this passage in 4th Maccabees carries little theological weight in the tradition and so it is unlikely the author of Hebrews is specifically attempting to draw attention to this passage. That being said, did the author of Hebrews draw some inspiration from this passage? At the very least the passage affirms that χαρακτήρ was sometimes used in familial descriptions.

*Philo and Extra-Biblical Uses of χαρακτήρ*

If the word χαρακτήρ was used to avoid εἰκών because χαρακτήρ had no strong preexisting Biblical tradition associated with it, we now turn our examination again to extra-biblical sources for possible insights into the term χαρακτήρ. Philo makes use of the word χαρακτήρ fifty-one times, assigning to it a variety of related meanings.87 In his examination of Philo, Williamson outlines seven categories for the use of the term χαρακτήρ. He first notes the basic, literal meaning of the term i.e. a stamp or image engraved on a coin. This use can be found, for example, in *De spec leg I.104*. More frequently however the term is used in one of six metaphorical senses, as outlined by Williams, related to the idea of “marks” or “impressions.”88 These metaphorical uses of

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87 Williamson, 74.
88 Ibid.
χαρακτήρ are often employed by Philo in his descriptions of the human soul which receives “marks/impressions” from sources such as “God or virtue or wisdom.”

For our discussion the fifth and sixth categories are most relevant. With regard to the fifth category, marks impressed on the human soul, Williamson quotes a number of texts that deal with the both χαρακτήρ and λόγος. In one such passage Philo describes the human mind as a “genuine coinage of that dread Spirit, the Divine and Invisible One, signed and impressed by the seal of God, the stamp of which is the Eternal Word (ὅς ὁ χαρακτήρ ἐστιν, ὁ ἀιδιος λόγος).” Man was made in God’s image in virtue of his rational mind and the stamp which impressed this image was the “Eternal Logos.” Here again we see the rational emphasis which Philo places on man’s relationship to God, a relationship which involves the mediation of the Logos. It is important to note that though a mediating role is given to Christ in the Letter to the Hebrews, the mediation emphasized there is not of a rationalistic nature. Rather Christ is a “mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15). Christ established this covenant so that those called “may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because [Christ’s death] redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.”(Heb 9:15). This mediation deals with transgression, sin and reparation; not a rational system wherein the finite mind encounters the infinite God through the rational Logos.

The sixth category outlined by Williamson deals with Philo’s description of God being without χαρακτήρ. Philo states in Quod Deus that God’s being is “simple being”

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89 Ibid.

90 Philo, Plant. 18; cf. Williamson, 76.
(ψιλὴν τὴν ὑπαρξίν) and it is “without other definite character” (ἄνευ χαρακτῆρος). If Hebrews and Philo share some similarity due to language and a shared cultural milieu, here the two authors diverge. A statement like Hebrews 1:3 wherein Christ is described as “the stamp of his being” χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ would not mesh with the idea of God as one who is ἄνευ χαρακτῆρος, literally “without character.” Ultimately the comparisons between Christ and Philo’s Logos can only be taken so far. One commentator notes that in the writings of Philo “God’s being is simply and without other definite characteristic. No one presumably can be an exact “representation of this nature.”92

From this analysis we see the term χαρακτήρ was likely not channeling Philo with his discussions of the rational soul and Middle Platonic philosophy, but neither was χαρακτήρ chosen to channel some element of the Wisdom tradition. Rather, as Vanhoye noted, the word χαρακτήρ emphasizes the close relationship between the Son and God.93 It is a relationship which Vanhoye rightly considers as more accurate than a mere εἰκὼν. Further, the term χαρακτήρ may have been chosen to avoid possible misunderstandings about the nature of the Son’s relationship to God—the term εἰκὼν recalling man’s creation in the image of God. Christ is not just an image of God like the biblical figure of Adam—or any other human being—rather Christ is the very χαρακτήρ of God’s being.

Analysis of ὑποστάσις

91 Philo, Deus, 55.
92 Lane, 13.
93 Vanhoye, 56.
Having examined χαρακτήρ, we can now turn our attention to the latter half of Hebrews 1:3b and examine the term ὑποστάσις which modifies the term χαρακτήρ. The term ὑποστάσις can carry a wide variety of meanings and at the time Hebrews was written it did not yet have the precise, technical meaning of person as understood in post-Nicene Christian theology. The term is the Greek etymological equivalent of the term substantia where we get the modern word substance—both terms literally mean “standing under.” Attridge notes that the word “developed from the scientific and medical uses of the term for a sediment that collects at the bottom of, and hence ‘stands under’, a solution. The term eventually came to refer to whatever underlies a particular phenomenon.”94 The term ὑποστάσις was sometimes used as a synonym for ὄψια the Greek word for “being.”

This range of meaning in ὑποστάσις can be seen in Hebrews itself where the term is found three separate times. The first occurrence is the aforementioned Hebrews 1:3. The two other occurrences are Hebrews 3:14 (τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως) and Heb 11:1 (Ἐστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις). In Hebrews 3:14 the author is discussing the need to hold firm to the “τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς ὑποστάσεως” a phrase which is translated in a variety of ways, for example the NRSV translates the phrase as “first confidence” while the NABRE translates the same phrase as “beginning of the reality.” The range of meaning can be seen in these two translations, yet in both the word ὑποστάσις represents something foundational to which the Christian community should hold firm. In Hebrews 11:1 the author speaks of faith as the substance of our hopes. In both of these places, Hebrews 3:14 and Hebrews 11:1, we see a certain flexibility with which the word can be applied. Yet together with Hebrews 1:3, these three uses of the term in Hebrews share

94 Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 44.
some notion of “foundational reality” with each also carrying its own nuance arising from the three different applications/contexts in which the word is situated.

The term ὑποστάσις occurs 23 times in the Septuagint where it often has the meaning of “substance/being” as described above, though it could take on different senses here too depending on the context. For example we see the term used to describe man’s being in Psalm 39:5: “You have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime (ὑποστάσις) is as nothing in your sight.” Then in Psalm 139:15: “My frame (ὑποστάσις) was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.” Each of these uses carries its own nuance—the temporal term “lifetime” vs. the corporal term “frame”—but the common concept of “being” is present in both. The term ὑποστάσις only occurs once in the Book of Wisdom.95 In Wis 16:20 we read: “Instead of this, you nourished your people with food of angels and furnished them bread from heaven, ready to hand, untoiled-for, endowed with all delights and conforming to every taste. For this substance (ὑπόστασις) of yours revealed your sweetness toward your children…” This use of the term in the book of Wisdom, though interesting, does not shed much light on our examination of Hebrews 1:3. Any connection between this use of ὑπόστασις and the use of ὑπόστασις in Hebrews would be largely speculative.

With no clear insights from the use of ὑπόστασις in other parts of the Bible, we will now broaden our examination to see how ὑπόστασις relates to the rest of Hebrews 1:3 and Wisdom 7:26. When we compare Hebrews 1:3b (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως) with its corresponding line in Wisdom 7:26 (εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ), we see that

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the author of Hebrews has shifted from the term ἀγαθότητος to the term ὑποστάσεως. Why the shift? Vanhoye states: “‘Goodness’ is a virtue among many others; ‘substance,’ a philosophical term, designates the whole being in its most profound reality. The author has thus expressed the closest possible relation uniting the Son to God.”96 This explanation of the shift shows that while Christ is being interpreted in the Wisdom tradition, he is more than Wisdom personified. The phrase χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως is a phrase which, when compared with εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ, conveys a much stronger sense in both the manner of representation and the content being represented. In other words, the term ὑποστάσεως exceeds ἀγαθότητος, just as the term χαρακτήρ exceeds εἰκὼν. From this we see that ὑπόστασις is a word which allowed the author of Hebrews to speak boldly about the relationship between the Son and God.

When we examine the use of ὑπόστασις in the writings of Philo, we see that the word ὑπόστασις was used by him to refer to authentic reality. This use can be seen in the following quote wherein he contrasts ὑπόστασις with mere appearances:

For as those who desire to see our cities go in through gates, so all who wish to apprehend the unseen world are introduced to it by receiving the impression of the visible world. The world whose substance (ὁ δὲ νοητῆς ὑποστάσεως κόσμος) is discernable only by intellect apart from any sight whatever of shapes or figures, but only by means of the archetypal eternal form present in the world which was fashioned in accordance with the image beheld by him with no intervening shadow…97

From this quote, we see that both Hebrews and Philo use the term to describe a foundational reality, but yet again we encounter a rational (νοητῆς) element in the way that Philo employs the term ὑπόστασις. This rational aspect of Philo’s ὑπόστασις is not explicitly present in Hebrew’s use of ὑπόστασις. The Son of

96 VanHoye, 56.
97 Philo, Somn. I. 188.
Hebrews does not appear to be a mediator by bringing the mind to apprehend the "νοητῆς ὑπόστασεος κόσμος." Rather, as we have already mentioned, he mediates through his salvific actions and the establishment of a new covenant (cf. Heb 9:15). Ultimately the term ὑπόστασις in Hebrews, while not having any strong connections to other biblical passages, also does not have any strong connections to Philo’s thought either. It is a term associated with Hellenistic thought, but it does not appear to carry any precise philosophical meaning like that found in Philo or that found later in the Christian tradition i.e. ὑπόστασις as “person”.

He sustains all things by his powerful word: ῥῆμα versus λόγος

The final aspect of Hebrews 1:3 to be examined will be its use of the term ῥῆμα in the statement: “he sustains all things by his powerful word (ῥῆμα).” It is worth noting that Hebrews does not use the term λόγος at this point, a fact which strengthens the assertion that Hebrews is avoiding the philosophical worldview of Philo in favor of something else. As we have already seen, the term λόγος was frequently employed for philosophical purposes (cf. Logos as High Priest as discussed earlier). Though numbers cannot tell the whole story, Philo employs the term λόγος over 1400 times in his corpus of writings while ῥῆμα can only be found 67 times in his writings.98 The term λόγος appears a number of times throughout Hebrews (Heb 2:2, 4:2, 4:12-13, 5:11-13, 6:1, 7:28, 12:19, 13:7, 13:17, 13:22), yet the only time the term appears to be used in manner reminiscent of Philo is the use of λόγος in Hebrews 4:12-13 with its description of the

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word (λόγος) envisioned as a sword (μάχαιραν). Philo uses similar imagery in reference to the Logos; for example, he describes the Logos as a flaming sword (φλογίνη ῥομφαία) in reference to the angel of Genesis.\(^9\) He also speaks of a “severing Logos” (λόγος τομεύς) as a cosmic principle which is intelligible to human reason.\(^1\) However, this similarity in language between Hebrews and Philo is most likely explained by the presence of “logos/sword” imagery in the Old Testament. Both Philo and Hebrews are taking advantage of a preexisting tradition. This tradition can be seen, for example, in such passages where the tongue is portrayed as a sword (cf. Is 49:2, Ps 57:5). The “word” as a sword could be considered an extension of this imagery. More relevant to this study is the description of the Logos found in Wisdom 18:14-16, where we read that, “while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, thy all-powerful word (λόγος) leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword (ξίφος) of thy authentic command.” Such a passage demonstrates that the logos/sword imagery of Hebrews 4:12 need not be directly inspired by Philo.

The term ρῆμα appears three other times in Hebrews (Heb 6:5, Heb 11:3, Heb 12:19). The reference in Heb 11:3 states: “By faith we understand that the world was created by the word (ρῆμα) of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.” This quotation is of note due its use of ρῆμα in a statement which easily could have employed the term λόγος if the author of Hebrews was trying to channel Philo and his Middle Platonic thought. Of course the absence of λόγος does not necessarily entail a total absence of what some refer to as “Logos Christology.” Ronald Williamson,

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\(^9\) Philo, Cher. 28.

\(^1\) Philo, Her. 130-32, 225, 234-36; cf. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 133-134.
in an examination of whether Hebrews has a “Logos Christology” states: “[The human life of Jesus Christ] is certainly for [the author of Hebrews] an ‘incarnation’ of the pre-existent, divine Son of God. Of that there can be no doubt.”

Williamson sees a number of connections to the Gospel of John and its explicit Logos Christology. Williamson notes that while the author of Hebrews does not specifically employ the term λόγος there are enough elements in the text of Hebrews to suggest that the author is seeking to present a vision of Christ which is markedly similar to the Gospel of John: “As in the Fourth Gospel, so in Hebrews, the Word’s functions are soteriological as well as cosmological and revelatory. As in the Fourth Gospel, so in Hebrews, in the Son’s life there is a manifestation of the divine glory (cf. Heb 1:3 and John 1:14). And...[both] speak of the coming of the Son or Word in the ‘world.’”

In Hebrew’s use of the term ῥῆμα one could detect a deft maneuver on the part its author to assume aspects of a “Logos Christology” similar to that of John’s Gospel without also taking on the baggage associated with the Philonic “Logos.”

The ῥῆμα of Hebrews is a word spoken by the Son and it “sustains all things” (φέρων τε τὰ πάντα). Such language is reminiscent of the powers which are accorded to personified wisdom in Wisdom 7:27. There Wisdom is described as one who “can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets.”

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102 Ibid., 8.

103 Though a few scholars will argue that the αὐτοῦ of this verse should be understood as referring to “God’s word” and not the “Son’s word.”
Wisdom’s mission. In Hebrews the Son “bears all things” (φέρων τε τὰ πάντα) which parallels quite well with Wisdom who “renews all things.” Creation looks to God and his spirit for sustenance and renewal. Hebrews by channeling the Wisdom of Solomon hearkens back to this tradition.

*Putting the Pieces of the Puzzle Together*

When we begin to bring together the various strands of thought which we have thus far explored, a coherent image of the Son begins to form. The author of Hebrews appears to use some terms as a way to recall aspects of the Biblical tradition, most notably ἀπαύγασμα and δόξα. The term ἀπαύγασμα, hearkens back to the Wisdom tradition as seen in Wis 7:26 and it stresses the close, even inseparable relationship which exists between the Father and Son while the term δόξα hearkens back to theophanic expressions of God’s being. The author of Hebrews however also appears to have avoided/altered some of the terms found in Wisdom 7, for example ἄγαθότητος and εἰκὼν. The replacement of εἰκὼν with the term χαρακτήρ seems be an attempt to express the accurate nature of the Son’s representation while also stressing that the Son’s representation is different than man’s reflection of the divine as given in Genesis 1:26—Christ is more than an image of God like other human beings, as the Son he bears a unique relationship to the Father which the author of Hebrews describes as the “stamp of his being”. The replacement of ἄγαθότητος by ὑπόστασις seems to clarify that the Son reflects not simply one aspect of God’s being but His whole being. Finally we saw certain terms, for example χαρακτήρ and ὑπόστασις, while not channeling the Biblical tradition, do not appear to be endorsements of philosophical thought either.
When all of these various strands of the Hebrews 1:3 text are brought together we begin to see an image of the Son which is new in its formulation yet also rooted in the preexisting Wisdom tradition—any apparent similarity to Philo most likely arising from shared sources (both authors are steeped in the Biblical tradition) and a shared Hellenistic milieu and not due to direct influence. This analysis then affirms something which the Biblical scholar Martin Hengel noted: “If we seek a pre-Christian-Jewish key to understanding the development of post-Easter Christology we will most probably find it in the Wisdom of Solomon, where Palestinian traditions of apocalyptic and Wisdom provenance have combined in unique fashion with typically Hellenistic vocabulary.”\(^{104}\)

If the author of Hebrews consciously makes use of Wisdom language to describe Christ while avoiding philosophic misidentifications with authors like Philo, the author of Hebrews is ultimately not adverse to philosophy. Though it is clear that he chooses not to present Christ as a philosophical concept and so takes pains to craft an exordium that will avoid this sort of miscommunication on the part of the reader, yet can the role of philosophy be discounted? In a word, no. Philosophical influences are present in Hebrews. This fact is well demonstrated by Ronald Cox who argues convincingly that Middle Platonism persists as “a surviving mythic form” in “Hellenistic Jewish sapientialism” (i.e. Philo and Wisdom) and early Christology (i.e. Heb 1:1-4, John’s prologue, etc.).\(^{105}\) He sees this use of Middle Platonism as a way for the various authors (Philo, Wisdom, Hebrews) to provide “cosmic dimension and transcendent meaning” to

\(^{104}\) Hengel, 102.

\(^{105}\) Cox, 27.
their differing salvific schemes. As Cox makes clear, it would be wrong to discount some influence of Middle Platonism with regard to the letter to the Hebrews. Yet it should also be stated that it would be wrong to see the Letter of Hebrews primarily through the lens of Middle Platonism. Perhaps one should speak of a “mediated” influence with regard to the exordium of Hebrews, conveyed through texts like the Wisdom of Solomon. Yet despite this influence, Hebrews is ultimately not giving philosophy, it is giving a word of encouragement (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως cf. Heb 13:22) grounded in the person of Jesus Christ.

This encouragement is markedly different from the writings of Philo which are based in a timeless realm of the mind; Hebrew’s encouragement is based in the historic, incarnate figure of Christ. This “horizontal/eschatological” dimension of Hebrews and the contrasting “vertical/noetic” dimension of Philo have been noted by Schenke and other authors. In Hebrews we encounter a book that is marked by eschatological and apocalyptic thought. In the exordium, we read that this revelation has been presented in these last days (ἐπ’ ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν Heb 1:2). The concerns of Philo, on the other hand, are far less eschatological. They deal primarily, as we have already noted numerous times, with a rational approach to God in which the mind can apprehend truths through effort and contemplation, hence his predilection for allegory: the physical events of the Pentateuch are seen as a way to encounter underlying intellectual truths. Philo searches the Old Testament with philosophical conclusions in mind which he believes are

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106 Ibid.
imbedded in the text and can be extracted through this use of allegory.\textsuperscript{108} The idea of a God who speaks as the God of Hebrews speaks, such a God is ultimately foreign to Philo and his Logos theology.

This rational approach to God can be contrasted with the approach taken in the Wisdom tradition. In the Book of Wisdom, Solomon asks for wisdom (cf. Wis. 9), and so reveals that wisdom is a gift bestowed from God and is not simply something one acquires through effort and contemplation. God alone can speak the wisdom and the word which man needs to hear. God fills this void in man, i.e. his lack of knowledge concerning God and His ways, through His self-revelation: in the Law and the prophets, the “many and various ways” of our opening line (cf. Hebrew 1:1). It is important to understand the revelatory nature of Wisdom if one is to grasp why Hebrews makes use of the Wisdom of Solomon. Ernest Clark states that the biblical theme of wisdom was “one of the main avenues for divine revelation after the conclusion of the prophetic movement.\textsuperscript{109} There is a natural development within the Wisdom tradition which Hebrews draws upon: Wisdom as a mystery hidden with God (Job), Wisdom as present in the created order (Proverbs), Wisdom as revelation/Torah (Baruk/Sirach), Wisdom as Spirit (Book of Wisdom), and finally, one could say, Wisdom as Son (Hebrews). God continues to disclose himself to His people and this act of disclosure culminates in Jesus Christ who remains the ultimate act of God’s self-revelation. The communicative nature of Wisdom is also seen by Roland Murphy who notes that “whatever associations

\textsuperscript{108} Williamson, 433.
\textsuperscript{109} Clark, 54.
Wisdom may have had in an earlier era, she is best understood in her biblical expression as a communication of God.\textsuperscript{110}

The author of Hebrews, by describing Jesus in the language of Word and Wisdom at the very start of his letter, is grounding his own word in the Scriptural Word. Unlike Philo who is speaking a rational word with the intent of giving philosophical truths to his Jewish brethren, the author of Hebrews is speaking a word about Christ to a Christian audience who is struggling. He interprets and applies Old Testament passages to Jesus Christ in order, as we have already examined, to say something meaningful about Christ.

The Old Testament gives the author a voice. It is, in a sense, the voice of God. The author of Hebrews uses the Word of God to speak a word about God. The frequent use of Scripture in Hebrews is not proof-texting to demonstrate a point; rather it is an examination of God’s revelation in order to speak a word about God who is ultimately unknowable unless He himself first engages man in conversation. It is worth noting that the author of Hebrews does not introduce biblical quotations by saying “it is written”—like St. Paul—but rather by using phrases such as “God says” or “he has promised” (cf. Heb. 1:5, 2:11-13, 3:7, 10:15). Such language points to the “living and active” nature of God’s word (cf. Heb 3:7, 4:12).\textsuperscript{111}

This use of the Wisdom tradition can be seen as part of a larger effort on the author of Hebrews to interpret the Son on the basis of scripture and tradition (cf. Hebrew’s examination of Christ in light of Psalm 110). He seeks to say something about

\textsuperscript{110} Murphy, 133.

\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Mary Healy, \textit{Hebrews}, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 35.
God by sifting through the biblical data.\textsuperscript{112} There is, if you will, a movement on the part of the author to examine what came before in order to understand what has only now come to be. Joseph Ratzinger, prior to his election as Pope Benedict XVI, has spoken of this very relationship between Old and New Testament:

“The words of the Old Testament, in which Israel’s faith-experience of the word of God is reflected, anticipate the history of Jesus, the living Word of God in this world. It is only in the light of that earlier word that the figure of Jesus becomes theologically intelligible. Jesus is interpreted on its basis, and only thus can his whole existence be acknowledged as itself substantially “Word.” And yet, no matter to what degree the biblical word interpreted him ahead of time, only the real figure of him-who-came makes visible what remained hidden within the linguistic word alone and resisted extraction by purely historical means. This tension between old word and new reality remains the fundamental form of Christian faith. Only by means of it can the hidden reality of God become known.”\textsuperscript{113}

While these words of Joseph Ratzinger were directed toward eschatological concerns found in the Gospels, they are very applicable to this passage of Hebrews. The author of Hebrews seeks to understand who Jesus is by searching the Old Testament. The Wisdom tradition does not reveal who Jesus is per se, rather it prepares a way of viewing God’s actions toward man. The Wisdom tradition is certainly not the only lens through which we begin to understand the Son of God, yet the author of Hebrews chose to begin his letter with this aspect of the Son for a reason. Wisdom helps one understand who Christ fundamentally is. First and foremost He is the Son who reveals God. He is a Word, a communication. Later in the Epistle we also see that he is the Savior. Origen makes a similar insight when he states:

\textsuperscript{112} “Data” literally meaning “things given.”

If we collect the titles of Jesus, the question arises which of them were conferred on him late, and would never have assumed such importance if the saints had begun and had also persevered in blessedness. Perhaps Wisdom would be the only remaining one .... And happy indeed are those who in their need for the Son of God have yet become such persons as not to need him in his character as a physician healing the sick, nor in that of a shepherd, nor in that of redemption, but only in his character as Wisdom...

Bibliography


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