

# Philonic Allegory in Hebrews

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## Introduction

It might be justified to ask why readers should once again be dragged through a comparative study of Hebrews and Philo of Alexandria. The Hebrews/Philo-debate took off as early as 1644 when Grotius suggested that the author of Hebrews might have been acquainted with the Alexandrian philosopher.<sup>1</sup> And in the twentieth century, the question of a Philonic background has been the subject of intense scholarly debate. Positions range from those of C. Spicq (1952, 39-91) and S. Sowers (1965, 64-74), who claim that the author of Hebrews must have known Philo personally, to those of R. P. C. Hanson (1959, 89-96), R. Williamson (1970, 576-80) and L. D. Hurst (1990, 7-42), who doubt that he ever read a single fragment of what the Alexandrian wrote. Interestingly, however, all these interpreters agree that the two writers differ at least with respect to their biblical hermeneutics. Both writers, it is argued, read the Old Testament non-literally, but whereas Philo applied allegory, the author of Hebrews used typology. The anonymous author behind the letter may have been indebted to Philo on other points, but he certainly was not in his choice of exegetical methods.

This is where I beg to differ. As a number of scholars have pointed out, the distinction between allegory and typology is historically untenable and tells us less about ancient hermeneutics than about post-reformation efforts to separate philosophy from religion.<sup>2</sup> It is significant that while the distinction plays a major role in modern scholarship (particularly in literature from the 1950s onwards [Lindars 1991, 125 note 8]), no ancient writer appears familiar with it. Allegory, of course, had wide currency, but the word *τυπολογία* is unrecorded and the adverb *τυπικῶς* is never applied to distinguish a certain hermeneutical practice (Martens 2004, 17). We may, in other words, assume that a typological method did not exist at the time of Hebrews' composition.

The contrast between allegory and typology should therefore not be invoked in the Hebrews/Philo-debate, and in this paper I shall argue that we do not really have to. Both Philo and the author of Hebrews read the Old Testament allegorically, and the author of Hebrews even appears to have been in direct contact with the hermeneutical tradition that Philo represents. Thus I

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<sup>1</sup> '... Philonem quem legisse videtur hic scriptor', quoted in Spicq 1952, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Dawson 1992, 12-7. Cf. also Martens 2004.

shall claim that the writer adopted Philo's allegorical method and developed his argument around certain of Philo's concrete exegetical results, not least his interpretation of the Jewish high priest. As will be clear, however, the two writers did not read the Old Testament in exactly the same way. There are significant differences, but it is crucial that these differences are understood, not as reflections of a dichotomy between allegory and typology, but as modifications or adjustments within the allegorical method itself.

The paper falls in two parts: in part one, I shall identify the similarities and differences between Philo and Hebrews and attempt to explain and interpret the differences; in part two, I shall discuss how an understanding of the author's hermeneutics may help us decide why the letter to the Hebrews was written at all. It will be argued that the exegetical differences between Philo and Hebrews ultimately reflect the two writers' different rhetorical goals.

## **Part one**

Throughout the letter, the author of Hebrews performs a number of non-literal readings of central Jewish identity markers: the land of Canaan (3:7-4:11), the tabernacle (8:1-6; 9:1-10) and the Jewish high priest (mostly, but not only, 9:11-10:18). Philonic influence is detectable in all cases, but the scope of this paper allows me to focus only on the reading of the high priest.

Let me begin by outlining briefly why Philo's allegory of the high priest should be thought to underlie the reading of the high priest in Hebrews. Two factors should be mentioned: (a) Both Philo and Hebrews operate with a distinction between a heavenly and an earthly high priest, and both speak of their mutual relationship in Platonic, dualistic categories. Both of them, in other words, establish a Platonically inspired symbolic liaison between the two distinctive priests. (b) Philo interprets the Jewish high priest as a symbol of God's logos, and Hebrews reads him as a symbol of Christ. However, the Philonic notion of the logos and the conception of Christ in Hebrews are so similar that we may assume the Christology of Hebrews to be modelled on the doctrine of the logos. Although the two heavenly high priests thus carry different names, they are defined in strikingly similar ways.

(a) That Philo interprets the Levitical high priest as a symbol of the logos requires practically no demonstration.<sup>3</sup> Philo is consistent on this matter although sometimes the high priest signifies the logos in its cosmic (*Mos.* 2.133-135), sometimes in its anthropological form (*Fug.*

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<sup>3</sup> For Philo's conception of the high priest, see also Laporte 1991.

108). However, as the logos that enlightens human rationality is ultimately the same force that pervades and sustains the cosmos, that duality does not lead to ambiguity. The high priest signifies the logos in whatever shape and function it may have. In accordance with this symbolic link, Philo refers to the logos as the true, heavenly high priest who intercedes on behalf of the created world and whose functions are thus reflected in the cultic activities of the high priest on earth (*Somn.* 2.215). In similar Platonic fashion, the author of Hebrews perceives the Jewish high priest as a reflection of the heavenly high priest, i.e. of Christ. He does not say so explicitly, but he does say that the earthly high priests ‘serve in a shadowy replica of the heavenly realities’<sup>4</sup> (ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιά τῶν ἀληθινῶν ἐπουρανίων) where Christ now resides (8:5; cf. also 4:14; 7:26).<sup>5</sup> He emphasizes that Christ is divine (1:2; 5:5), whereas the Jewish high priests are human (7:28). And he is at pains to demonstrate how the activities of the Levitical high priests symbolize the more perfect activities of Christ (9:11-10:18). In sum, the author establishes a connection between the earthly and the heavenly high priest that owes a lot to Philo’s allegory of the Jewish high priest.

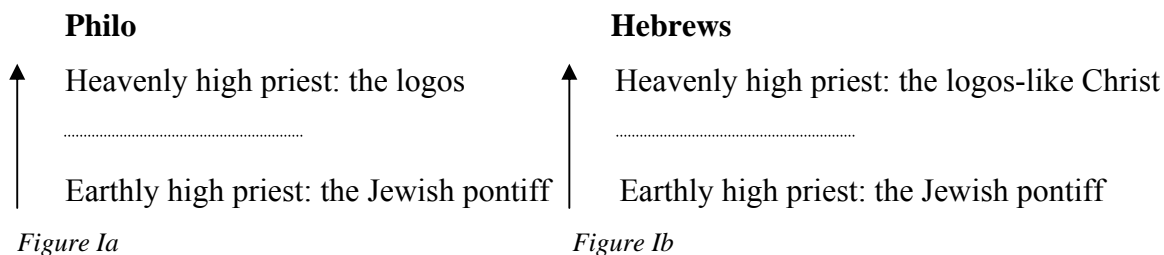
(b) This impression is strengthened once we consider the particular way in which the author of Hebrews portrays the heavenly high priest. According to Philo, the heavenly high priest, the logos, should be construed as God’s reflection (*Opif.* 25), as the creative principle through which he formed the world (*Opif.* 12-16) and as the providential agent through which God upholds the cosmos (*Fug.* 106-118). And when committing himself to eulogy, he even refers to the logos as the firstborn son of God (*Somn.* 1.215). It is striking how this portrayal is echoed in Hebrews’ description of Christ. He is the firstborn son of God (1:2; 2:10-18), the one through whom (δι’ οὗ) God created the world (1:2), the reflection (ἀπαύγασμα) of God, the imprint of his being (καρὰ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ) and the one who sustains the world (φέρων τὰ πάντα) through his powerful word (1:3). Scholars (e.g. Williamson 1970, 412) have sometimes sought to identify other sources behind the author’s Christology, and it is true that *The Wisdom of Solomon* defines God’s wisdom (the sophia) as the τεχνίτης behind the creation of the world (7:21; cf. also 7:12; 8:4), as God’s ἀπαύγασμα (7:26) and as the providential principle that sustains the world (7:24, 27). But it is only in Philo, as in Hebrews, that these themes merge with a distinctively priestly discourse. It is only in Philo and Hebrews that this metaphysical principle is described also as a priest.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Translations from the Greek are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Attridge 1989, 219; Sterling 2001, 194f.

<sup>6</sup> The Dead Sea Scrolls and certain Jewish pseudepigrapha (notably the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*) operate with a notion of a heavenly high priest (Attridge 1989, 98f.), but these high priests are never described as creative or providential principles or as reflections of the divine.

All things considered, I can see no reason to deny that Philo’s allegory of the high priest underlies and informs the reading of the high priest in the letter to the Hebrews. Both Philo and the author of Hebrews construe the Jewish high priest as an earthly reflection of the heavenly high priest, and the two writers define the heavenly high priest in very much the same way. The following model captures the resemblance:



So far, I have focused only on the similarities, but there are significant differences which must be accounted for as well.

In spite of the hermeneutical similarities, the author of Hebrews operates with a notion of horizontality and temporal development that is entirely absent from Philo’s thought. According to Hebrews, Christ is the true heavenly high priest who is reflected in the high priests on earth, but, we learn from 9:11, he is also the high priest ‘of the good things which have come into being (twh genomenwn αγαqw)’. He ‘is the mediator of the new covenant (diakhk~ kainh~ mesith~ ejstin)’ (9:15), and the old covenant (or rather, the Law on which it is based) contains only ‘a shadow of the good things to come (skian twh mel l ontwn αγαqw)’ (10:1). Thus the contrast between the two poles of the allegorical sequence, i.e. between the Jewish high priests and Christ, is not only one of earth vs. heaven; it is also one of the past vs. the present (and future). We never encounter anything similar in Philo. Furthermore, Philo identifies the allegorical correlate of the high priest, the logos, as an idea (or, to be more exact, as ‘the archetypal idea of ideas [ol arctetupo~ ijdea twh ijdewh]’ [*Opif.* 25]). The writer of Hebrews, on the other hand, identifies it as a person – a divine person, to be sure, but an individual nonetheless who feels, acts and thinks. It is clear that Philo would never allow a transcendent correlate to take such a non-conceptual form.

If, as I have argued, the author was hermeneutically influenced by Philo, how might one explain these differences? Why did the author supplement the allegorical method with an element of temporal movement, and why did he conceptualize the correlate of the Jewish high priest as a person and not as an abstract ideal entity? It is probably these differences that have caused

interpreters to deny Philonic influence and to conceptualize the exegesis of Hebrews as being typological in nature. As we shall see, however, it is possible to explain the differences as adjustments and modifications that do not go beyond the allegorical method, but develop it in a particular direction.

For the sake of clarity, it might be helpful to note how typology has traditionally been defined. In his monograph on Philo and Hebrews, S. Sowers (1965, 11) gives a standard definition. According to Sowers, typology is ‘the interpretation of earlier events, persons and institutions in Biblical history which become proleptic entities or “types”, anticipating later events, persons and institutions, which are their “anti-types”.’<sup>7</sup> At first sight, this definition seems to fit Hebrews nicely. What we have in Hebrews is precisely a hermeneutical movement from the past to the present that connects a biblical individual, not to an intangible idea, but instead to a person of the present time. Graphically, we might represent it as follows:

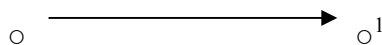


Figure II

However, this model does not capture the complexity of the author’s exegesis. The writer does not move solely from the past to the present, but also from the sphere of immanence to that of transcendence. Christ is a new but also a celestial high priest. There is, in other words, a combined movement from the past to the present and from earth to heaven. The following model is therefore more to the point:

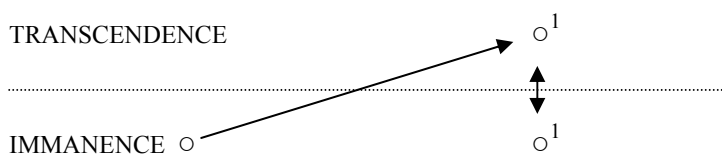


Figure III

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also the definitions of allegory and typology in Bienert (1972, 42) quoted in Martens (2004, 8), ‘Allegory is the vertical manner of interpretation, since it establishes unhistorical-timeless relationships between images (allegories) and their spiritual archetypes; typology, in contrast, is the horizontal manner of interpretation, since it transports the historical events of the past into the present and future.’

Let me repeat the question from above. If the author was influenced by Philo and did indeed apply Philonic allegorical hermeneutics, why did the method change in his hands in the way we have now seen?

The answer is that even though he adopted Philo’s hermeneutical method, he did not adopt his metaphysical outlook on the world. Whereas Philo operated within a worldview of Middle Platonism, our author assumed a fundamentally apocalyptic approach to reality. My contention is that the author adopted Philo’s hermeneutical method, but severed it from the Platonic metaphysics within which it was developed, and incorporated it into his own apocalyptically inspired conception of the world. In order to understand the hermeneutical differences, it is therefore necessary to appreciate how Jewish apocalypticism differs metaphysically from Middle Platonism.

It has often been assumed that what distinguishes apocalypticism (and hence the worldview of Hebrews) from Platonism is the supposed fact that apocalyptic writers think horizontally, whereas Platonic philosophers think vertically. The former operate along a temporal axis from the past over the present towards the eschaton, whereas the latter operate along a conceptual axis from the phenomena of the immanent world to ideas of the transcendent. More or less as captured in the models below:

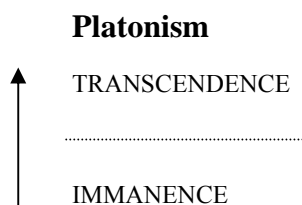


Figure IVa

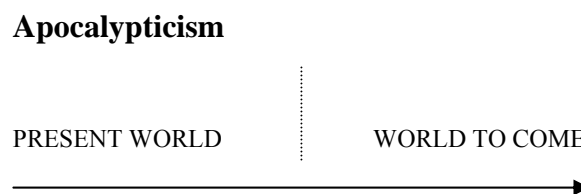


Figure IVb

Though overly simplified, of course, the characterization of Platonism in *Figure IVa* is fairly accurate. The depiction of apocalypticism, on the other hand, is appallingly inadequate. As H. Tronier has argued (2001, 165-82; in particular 178-80), what distinguishes apocalypticism from Platonism is not in the first place that it operates with notions of horizontality and eschatology, but that it operates with a notion of verticality that is defined precisely in such a way that horizontality and eschatology follow as logical complements. Both Platonism and apocalypticism involve a concept of vertical duality (i.e. both incorporate a distinction between the worlds of immanence and transcendence); what sets apocalypticism apart from Platonism, however, is that in apocalyptic literature the realm of transcendence is conceptualized not as an intangible noetic structure, but as an actual physical place that exists – quite literally – on top of the immanent world.

Tronier (2001, 176) therefore speaks of an apocalyptic ‘spatialization’ of the Platonic notion of transcendence. To capture the nature of this spatialization, we might contrast the Philonic description of the ideal world in *Opif.* with the description of the heavenly world that we encounter in 2 Enoch. In *Opif.* 16 Philo discusses the creation of the world and speaks of the transcendent in the following way:

When he [God] wished to construct this visible cosmos (ton oraton kosmon touton), he first delineated the intelligible cosmos (ton nohton), in order that he might use it as an incorporeal and most god-like paradigm (ajswmatw/kai; qeoidestatw/paradeigmati) and so produce the corporeal cosmos, a younger likeness (apeikonisma) of an older model, which would contain as many sense-perceptible kinds as there are intelligible kinds in the other one.

The transcendent world is an abstract conceptual entity, in fact the thoughts of God (*Opif.* 24), which was used as a blueprint for the construction of the physical world. Contrast this idea with the description of heaven that we encounter in 2 Enoch 20.1-21.1. Immediately prior to the passage to be quoted, Enoch has ascended through the six lower heavens, and being escorted by angels, he has now arrived at the seventh:

And I saw a great light, and all the fiery armies of the incorporeal ones, archangels, angels and the shining *otanim* stations. And I was terrified and I trembled. And the men picked me up with their (...) And they said to me ‘Be brave, Enoch. Don’t be frightened!’ And they showed me from a distance the Lord sitting on his throne. And all the heavenly armies assembled, according to rank, advancing and doing obeisance to the Lord. And then they withdrew and went to their places in joy and merriment, immeasurable light, but gloriously serving him by night, nor departing by day, standing in front of the face of the Lord carrying out his will – with all the army of cherubim around the throne, never departing, and the six-winged ones covering his throne, singing in front of the face of the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

As appears from this passage, the author of 2 Enoch (and apocalyptic writers in general) do operate with a notion of vertical duality, but as opposed to Philo, they conceptualize the world of transcendence, not as a complex of Platonic ideas, but as a physical location that houses various divine and quasi-divine beings. One might say that apocalyptic writers share the Platonists’ belief in the existence of a world of transcendence, but transform their philosophical conception of it into a dynamic one (Tronier 2001, 175f.).

The spatialization of the transcendent affects the way in which apocalyptic writers understand the relationship between the heavenly and the immanent worlds. As appears from *Opif.* 16, Philo perceived the realm of transcendence as a template for the construction of the material world. This means that even though the noetic and the material worlds exist on different ontological

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<sup>8</sup> The quote is from recension [A] in Charlesworth (1985, 135).

levels, they nevertheless correspond to each other in such a way that the latter constitutes an accurate physical expression of the former. As a result, complete harmony exists between the two worlds (Tronier 2001, 172-4).<sup>9</sup>

This harmonious relationship disappears in apocalyptic literature. The world of transcendence is not a structure within the physical world and the immanent world is construed, at best, as disorderly and, at worst, as wicked and controlled by demonic forces. In any event, the order of the transcendent is characterized above all by its absence from the present world (Tronier 2001, 178). It is because of this absence that a temporal dimension enters the apocalyptic scheme. The immanent world is fundamentally flawed. As a result the apocalyptic writer must distance himself from it. In order for him to find peace with the world, the world itself needs to be transformed. It must disappear and give way to the heavenly realm of existence which will eventually manifest itself at the eschatological events (Tronier 2001, 178-80).<sup>10</sup>

We should therefore dispense with the above model and represent apocalypticism in the following way:

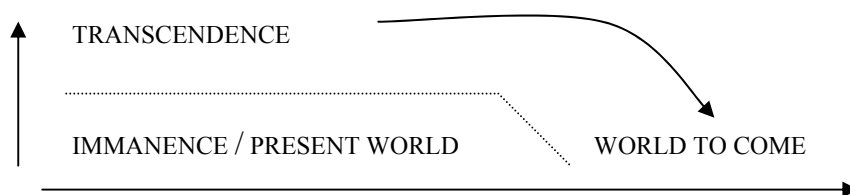


Figure V

Even a casual glance at Hebrews reveals that this is precisely the worldview that governs the author's thought. Notice, for instance, the nature of his eschatological anticipations in 12:25-27,

<sup>9</sup> Philo regards the physical world as 'the most perfect piece of work' (*Opif.* 9).

<sup>10</sup> According to Tronier (2001, 168, 174-6), it is possible to draw a direct line of influence from Middle Platonic to apocalyptic thought. The essential point of resemblance is not that both worldviews share a belief in the existence of a world of transcendence (in that respect they are certainly not unique), but that both systems of thought assign a similar hermeneutical function to that world. For both, the world of transcendence constitutes the order of the cosmos. Through visions of the transcendent, the both Platonic philosopher and the apocalyptic seer thus recognize the essential structures behind the world. The difference is that Platonic philosophers believe that that structure is present within the world and that transcendent cognition therefore allows him to see the world as it really is. Apocalyptic writers, on the other hand, believe that order to be absent. Through visions of the transcendent they acknowledge the world as it ought to be, but really is not.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking! For if they did not escape when they refused the one who admonished them on earth, how much less will we who turn away from the one who admonishes from the heavens, whose voice then shook the earth, but who now has promised, saying, ‘yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven’? The ‘once more’ portends removal of the things that are shaken (τῶν σαλευομένων μεταρῆσιν), as things that have been made, in order that what is not shaken may abide (ἵνα μείνη/τα; μὴ σαλευόμενα).<sup>11</sup>

At the eschaton, the immanent world (including the visible heaven) will disappear and the heavenly world will impose itself and take its place.

The question, of course, is: what happens if Philo’s allegorical mode of interpretation is separated from its Middle Platonic context and inserted into a worldview of Jewish apocalypticism? Exactly what we have seen to be the case in Hebrews. Due to the apocalyptic spatialization of the transcendent, the heavenly world assumes a dynamic and non-conceptual form, which allows for divine individuals to take the place that in Philo’s worldview is occupied by Platonic ideas. The transcendent correlate of the allegorical sequence may now take the form of a divine person instead of the form of a divine idea. The mythic figure of Christ may, in other words, take the place of the philosophical notion of the divine logos. Furthermore, because of the introduction of eschatology (which is itself a result of the spatialization of the transcendent [Tronier 2001, 178]), a temporal distance between what is allegorized and its allegorical correlate is now to be expected. It is quite natural that the Jewish high priests reflect a heavenly high priest who, as a high priest, comes into being only at a later point in history.<sup>12</sup> The combined horizontal and vertical trajectory of this allegorical sequence corresponds to the combined horizontal and vertical orientation of Jewish apocalyptic metaphysics.

It follows from this that the differences between Philo and Hebrews should not compel us to think of the two writers along the lines of an allegory/typology divide. Both applied allegory, but allegory is a malleable interpretive method, and in the hands of our author, it has been reshaped so as to fit in with his apocalyptic outlook on the world.<sup>13</sup>

However, in order to substantiate my claim that the hermeneutics of Hebrews are indeed allegorical, I would like to draw attention to one last feature of the author’s description of the Jewish high priests vis-à-vis Christ. It is well known that Philo often connected different biblical incidents to one and the same allegorical correlate. For instance, Abraham’s, Moses’ and Jacob’s

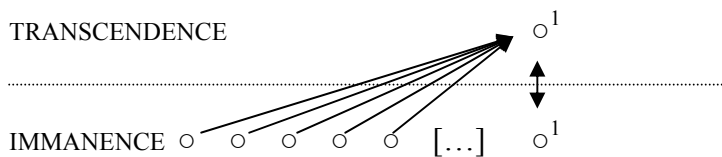
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<sup>11</sup> The quotes within the quote are from Haggai 2:6, 21.

<sup>12</sup> According to Hebrews, Christ existed before the creation of the world, but he was not always a high priest. The exact time for this appointment is disputed (for an overview of the scholarly positions, see Peterson 1982, 191-5), but he certainly was not a high priest prior to his incarnation.

<sup>13</sup> That allegorical exegesis may take several different forms is apparent not least from the differences between Philonic and Stoic applications of the method. For Stoic allegory, see in particular Long 1992 and Boys-Stones 2003.

arrivals in the holy land are all symbolic representations of the pious soul's entering the wisdom of God. Metaphysically, this corresponds to the way in which a single Platonic idea is reproduced an infinite number of times in the world of matter. Similarly, one allegorical correlate may be reproduced several times at the literal level of a text. Seen in that light, it deserves attention that the author of Hebrews emphasizes how the Jewish high priests are many, whereas Christ is one. Notice above all 7:23f., 'and they are many (πλείονες εἰσιν) who have become priests because through death they were prevented from remaining (κωλύεσθαι παραμένειν), but because he remains (διὰ τὸ μένειν) he has an inviolable office' (cf. also 7:28). The model given above (*Figure II*) on the relationship between the Levitical high priests and Christ therefore needs further refinement. The final model looks as follows:



*Figure VI*

In Hebrews the Levitical priests are characterized precisely by the kind of multiplicity that according to Platonic philosophy and Philonic hermeneutics distinguishes the immanent world from the transcendent one. Christ, on the other hand, is heavenly and hence unique.<sup>14</sup>

## Part two

We have seen (i) how the author of Hebrews adopts elements of Philo's hermeneutical practice and (ii) how that practice is transformed due to its incorporation into an apocalyptic worldview. The allegorical correlate changes from a concept into a person and notions of temporal development and horizontality enter the scheme. However, the absorption into a worldview of Jewish apocalypticism affects the method in yet another way: it reshapes the relationship between what is allegorized and its allegorical correlate. To explain this more adequately we need to revisit Philo. Afterwards we will return to Hebrews, and it will emerge how the author's transformation of the allegorical method may finally be indicative of his overall rhetorical purposes.

<sup>14</sup> The contrast between multiplicity and uniqueness is of course also in play in the comparison of the numerous Jewish sacrifices and the singular sacrifice of Christ (the sacrifice performed εἰς ἅπασι; cf. e.g. 9:12; 10:11f.)

As appeared from *Opif.* 9 and 16, Philo believes that the heavenly and the earthly realms of existence are in complete harmony. The world of transcendence (the logos) was used as a paradigm for the creation of the physical world, and it now sustains the world with the result that the world remains a ‘most perfect piece of work’ (*Opif.* 9) characterized by orderliness and regularity. Though it is ‘impermissible to speak of or conceive of that world of ideas as being in any place (ἐν τόπῳ/τίνι)’ (*Opif.* 17), the noetic world does permeate the material cosmos and provide it with its structure and rationality.

This metaphysical conception affects the way in which Philo conceives the relationship between the literal (belonging to the world of immanence) and the allegorical (belonging to the world of transcendence) levels of interpretation. Just like the two metaphysical realms are intimately intertwined, so are the two different levels of the allegorical hermeneutics. The allegorical correlate is present within the symbol itself. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob each symbolize different kinds of pious souls, the trained, the self-taught and the practiser, but they not only signify these types; they also embody them. Each of them possesses the very souls that they symbolize. The symbol, we might thus say, participates in what it signifies (cf. Tronier 2001, 169-72). This means that if what is signified (the allegorical correlate) is worthy of praise, then the symbol is worthy of praise as well. The allegorical manoeuvre turns out to operate as a form of praise of what is allegorized. When they are subjected to allegorical analysis, the excellent natures of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are brought to light.

That being the case and considering that Philo conceives the Jewish high priest as a symbol of the logos, we should expect him to demonstrate how the high priest more than any one else participates in the nature of the logos, how, in fact, he represents an earthly manifestation of God’s transcendent reason. Such expectations are not disappointed. Throughout his oeuvre, Philo does everything he can to establish that the high priest is completely saturated by the rationality of the logos. As a result, he emerges as the perfect and absolutely flawless sage who incorporates the very ideals of ethical conduct.

In terms of ethical theory, Philo is highly influenced by the Stoic school, and it is interesting to notice how he consistently stages the high priest in accordance with its conception of the sage. Notice, for instance how, in *Spec.* 1.97, he presents the high priest as a Stoic *kosmopolitēs*~ who, as distinct from the priests of other nationalities, serves on behalf of the whole world,

Among the other [nations] the priests are accustomed to perform prayers and sacrifices only for their relatives and friends and fellow-countrymen (*uβer oi keiwn kai; filwn kai; poli twh*), but the high priest of the Jews makes prayers and gives thanks not only on behalf of the whole human race but also for the parts of nature, earth, water, air, fire. For he holds the world to be, as in very truth it is, his own country (*eautou' patri da*).

According to the Stoics, a perfect sage and cosmopolitan may never have walked on earth – or he may, as they say, be as rare as the Phoenix born once every 500 years. In this passage, Philo implies that while such an individual may be rare or even non-existent in the pagan world, he is perfectly embodied by the Jewish pontiff.

In fact, Philo's ambition to present the high priest as a flawless *σοφο* ought to be unattainable since a number of biblical texts suggest that the high priest was not perfect and was actually liable to sin. Thus, both Leviticus 9:7 and 16:6 specify that Aaron, the archetypal high priest, needs to offer sacrifice to atone for his own sins as well as those of his family. Philo nonetheless insists on the high priest's absolute sinlessness. In *Spec.* 3.134, he states that it may be sufficient for laymen and ordinary priests to stay free from voluntary transgressions, but the high priest must remain 'innocent both of the voluntary and of the involuntary.' Such claims should be hard to reconcile with passages such as Leviticus 9:7; 16:6 and also 4:3 where the texts directly specify how the high priest's sins may bring guilt upon the people. Philo, however, inventively works his way around this and in *Spec.* 1.230 expounds the verse in the following manner,

August and marvellous is the command on this matter. 'If', it says, 'the high priest sins involuntarily', and then adds, 'so that the people sin'. This demonstrates, almost directly (*momon ouk ahtikru-*), that the one who is truly (*pro- aj hqei an*) high priest and not called so falsely (*mh; yeudwnumo-*), is free from sin (*ajmetoco- amarthmatwn*), and if he ever slips (*oj isqhsoi*), it will be because of some fault common to the nation, not because of himself (*ouj di' aujton*).

Without actually justifying how, Philo reverses the order of cause and effect, relegates all sinfulness to the people while triumphantly keeping the high priest free from fault.

The high priest is sinless and a cosmopolitan, but according to Philo he fulfils yet another Stoic ideal, viz. that of absolute freedom from passion (*ajpaqei a*). In *Spec.* 1.114 he discusses why Moses (cf. Leviticus 21:10-12) prohibits the high priests from showing any signs of mourning even at the deaths of their own relatives.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, he notes that no one except the high priest can perform his services and that the cult would therefore suffer if he gave himself

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<sup>15</sup> Leviticus specifies that the high priest should not loosen his hair, should not tear his clothes and should not leave the sanctuary.

over to grief. But at the same time, and more importantly, he maintains that it would be inappropriate for someone in his position to be carried away by irrational sentiments:

Since he is dedicated to God and has been made commander (taxi $\alpha$ rc $\omicron$ -) of the sacred order, he ought to be estranged (ajl $\lambda$ otriou $\varsigma$ qai) from all the ties of birth and not be so overcome by affection (ou $\tau$ w-  
eu $\rho$ oia- h $\lambda$ t $\omega$ meno-) for parents or children or brothers, as to neglect or postpone any of the religious duties which he must always perform without delay.

Philo does not expect the high priest to suppress any emotions he might have at the death of a relative; he expects him, much more radically, not to have such emotions at all. For, as he continues at 116,

The law desires him to be endowed with a nature higher than the merely human (meizon $\omicron$ - memoira $\varsigma$ qai  
f $\upsilon$ sew- h $\lambda$ kat' a $\eta$ qr $\omega$ pon) and to approximate the divine, on the borderline (meq $\omicron$ rion), if truth be told, between the two, in order that men may propitiate God through a mediator and God may have a servitor to employ in extending his blessings to humanity.

In exemplary fashion, this paragraph reveals how the high priest, in Philo's view, participates in the nature of the logos. Having been gifted with a superior nature, he rises above the level of ordinary human ontology and assumes the role of an intermediary between God and humanity – the role that Philo elsewhere assigns to the logos itself.

This portrayal of the high priest is linked, as I have argued, to Philo's metaphysical belief that the immanent world (and hence whatever exists at the literal level of meaning in biblical texts) is permeated with the transcendent. But what happens if the allegorical method is severed from a Platonic context and incorporated into a system of thought where the world of transcendence is thought to exist at a spatially distinct place on top of the visible universe – where the immanent world is believed to be characterized precisely by a detrimental lack of contact to the transcendent?

As might be expected, such a change causes the symbol, i.e. the immanent pole of the allegorical sequence, to be characterized, no longer by possessing, but rather by lacking the features of its allegorical correlate. The allegorical correlation turns out to highlight the contrast rather than the similarity between the symbol and what is symbolized. This is exactly what happens in the letter to the Hebrews and in its construction of the relationship between Christ and the high priests. Here the allegorical correlate, Christ, is characterized by all the features that are regularly associated with the transcendent. As already mentioned, he is unique (7:23). Furthermore, he is sinless (4:14; 7:26f.), living, eternal (5:6; 7:3, 8, 21, 24, 28) and of divine origin (5:5; 7:28). Had we remained within a Philonic mode of thought, we would have expected these qualities – perhaps in a somewhat

diluted form – to be reproduced in the earthly high priests. But since we have moved to Hebrews and into an apocalyptic conception of the world, they are not. Quite the opposite, we find that the Jewish priests are distinguished precisely by the lack of these features. They are mortal (7:23), weak (7:28) and sinful (5:2f.), and they perform rituals that have absolutely no effect. In fact, their sole purpose is to point beyond themselves – through their cultic activity – to the coming of Christ and to the effective sacrifice that he provides. They are, we might say, empty semantic shells that superficially may have a slight resemblance to their heavenly counterpart, but who are nothing like him in terms of essence.

The author of Hebrews thus adopts a Philonic mode of interpretation, but transforms it in such a way that the net result of the hermeneutical manoeuvre turns out to be the exact opposite of Philo's. Both writers apply allegory to bring out the true nature of high priests and to clarify their relationship to the heavenly realities. But in Philo, the allegorical operation functions so as to glorify the Levitical high priests; in Hebrews, on the other hand, it works as a form of deprecation. The contrast between Christ and the high priests is brought into focus and the latter are exposed as entirely worthless.

Why does the author choose to espouse Philo's interpretive method and turn it upside down the way he does? The reason, I would argue, is that his rhetorical interests are the exact opposite of those of Philo. As a serious philosopher, Philo obviously used the allegorical method in order to discuss and develop theoretical doctrines of his day. At the same time, however, he also used it for distinctly apologetic purposes.<sup>16</sup> In Alexandria, at the time of Philo's literary activity, the Jewish people was under heavy fire (both intellectually and physically) from the surrounding non-Jewish community. Physically, conflicts reached an apex with the pogrom in 38 CE.<sup>17</sup> Intellectually, Jews were attacked in philosophical and historical treatises, partly for being intellectually inferior, partly for being anti-social. Not least their refusal to merge with the surrounding Pagan community met with hostile reactions.<sup>18</sup> It is clear that as a Hellenized philosopher who insisted on maintaining the particularity of the Jewish race and on the legitimacy of commitment to his ancestral customs, Philo had an interest in presenting the Jewish way of life as the ideal of the philosophical lifestyle. That is precisely what he achieves through his allegorical exegesis. By exposing how, for instance,

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<sup>16</sup> This is well brought out by Dawson 1992, 113-26.

<sup>17</sup> See Philo's *Flac.* and Barclay 1996, 48-81.

<sup>18</sup> Our principal source to this is Josephus' *Contra Apionem*. Cf. Dawson 1992, 117 and Barclay 1996, 55-60. Gruen (2002, 54-83) is probably correct, however, that tensions between Alexandrian Jews and Gentiles have been exaggerated in the scholarly literature. Jews were no doubt ridiculed and scoffed, but up until 38 CE violent conflicts appear to have been at a minimum.

Jewish religious institutions like the Jerusalem high priest perfectly reflected the order of the transcendent, Philo proved the philosophical superiority of the Jewish faith, the legitimacy of remaining loyal to the Jewish traditions and of refusing to espouse religious customs of foreign origin. In a nutshell, Philo's allegorical hermeneutics showed the legitimacy of unyielding observance of the practices prescribed by the Torah.

That, however, is the exact opposite of what the author of Hebrews sought to achieve. As appears not least from 13:9-13 (though the passage is replete with exegetical difficulties), the writer's main rhetorical purpose was to persuade the recipients not to subject themselves to observance of the Torah. At this point, near the end of the letter, he writes:

Do not be carried off by diverse and strange teachings (didacai'~ poikil'ai~ kai; xenai~ mh; paraferesqe). For it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods (brwmasin) through which those who observed them did not benefit. We have an altar from which those who serve in the tent are not authorized to eat. For the bodies of the animals whose blood is carried into the sanctuary as a sin offering by the high priest are burned outside the camp (ekw th'~ parembol h'~). Hence Jesus too suffered outside the gate (ekw th'~ pul h'~ epaen) in order that he might sanctify the people with his own blood. Let us therefore go out to him outside the camp (ekw th'~ parembol h'~), bearing his reproach (ton opeidismen ajtous feronte~).

In the history of research, scholars have variously identified the 'diverse and strange teachings' as ascetic doctrines, teachings about pagan or Gnostic ritual meals, instructions about the Eucharist and as Jewish dietary laws.<sup>19</sup> The references to unbeneficial 'foods', (13:9b) and to 'those who serve in the tent' (13:10), however, render it almost impossible that Jewish dietary laws are not in view. The author instructs his audience not to be led astray by Jewish teachings about dietary purity (cf. also Lindars 1991, 10).

In order to explain why Jewish food-laws should not be observed, he next turns to the significance of the fact that the bodies of the Jewish sacrificial animals were burned 'outside the camp' just like Jesus suffered 'outside the gate' of the city. Apparently, the author understands the burning of the sacrificial animals to be symbolic of the death of Christ. What is important at this point, however, is the symbolic meaning of the 'camp' (and the city) since in 13:13 the readers are encouraged to leave it behind and search for Jesus at the outside. Given that the author no doubt understands these comments as explanations for the instruction in 13:9, the camp and the city must be related to the teachings mentioned there. Like most interpreters I therefore take them to be

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. the helpful overview in Attridge 1989, 394-6. Attridge himself concludes that 'Whatever the objectionable practice was, our author certainly held that it represented the antithesis of his understanding of the life of the new covenant' (396).

symbols of Judaism or, more accurately, of the zone of Jewish ritual purity.<sup>20</sup> The burning of animal bodies prefigures the death of Christ, and Jesus died outside the gates of the city in order to signify that he should be sought not within the confines of the region of Jewish purity, i.e. not through observances of the Mosaic Law.<sup>21</sup>

The allegorical reading of the Levitical priesthood should be interpreted as part of this endeavour to dissuade the recipients from submitting to the Torah. By revealing how the Jewish high-priestly institution, which is inextricably linked to the Mosaic Law (cf. 7:11), is nothing but a faint shadow of the priesthood of Christ, the writer seeks to establish that both the Jewish priesthood and the Law are obsolete now that the ‘thing itself’ has been revealed. To ignore that fact by subjecting oneself to the Torah even after the Christ event has taken place is to trample upon the son of God and to profane the blood of the new covenant (cf. 10:29).

One might, of course, object that if the author’s real aim was to prove the obsolescence of the Law, he might as well have dispensed with the comparisons of the priesthoods and focused directly on the question of the Law. Why should he go to such lengths to disparage the Levitical priesthood if the real problem lay with the Law? Why not merely pronounce, more briefly and pointedly, that the Law is invalid now that the new covenant has been realized? Perhaps because it is impossible to do so on the basis of the Old Testament. As is well known, the Old Testament nowhere testifies to the future obsolescence of the Law, and the only scriptural text to ever discuss the new covenant explicitly, Jeremiah 31:31-34 (MT; 38:31-34 LXX), unambiguously verifies the Law’s validity even after the inauguration of the new dispensation.<sup>22</sup>

In order to prove the obsolescence of the Law, the author therefore makes a detour and includes the Levitical priesthood within his argument. He links the Mosaic Law to the Levitical priesthood and opposes that priesthood to the priesthood of Christ, as anticipated in the figure of Melchizedek, linking that priesthood to the new covenant. This is certainly rhetorically hazardous since there is neither scriptural warrant nor any exegetical precedent for associating Melchizedek with a distinctly non-Levitical priesthood.<sup>23</sup> However, having made this association he argues that two priesthoods cannot legitimately exist at the same time and that the coming of a new priesthood

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<sup>20</sup> For histories of research, see Attridge 1989, 396-8 and Koester 2001, 571.

<sup>21</sup> One of the most prevalent alternatives to this interpretation is found in Thompson (1982, 141-51) who suggests that the camp and the city both symbolize the earthly realm of existence, whereas the place outside signifies heaven. Thus the recipients are urged ‘to “go out” from earthly securities’ and to “enter” the heavenly world’ (149). As this would imply that Christ, who was crucified *ἐκὼ τῆς πόλεως*, was in fact crucified in heaven and not on earth, that suggestion must be rejected.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremiah 38:33b: *didou~ dwsw nomou~ mou' eij- thn dianoian aujtwh kai; epi; kardia~ aujtwh grayw aujtour.*

<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, ancient Jewish author’s sometimes explicitly link Melchizedek to the Levitical order. According to Josephus *Bel.* 6.438, Melchizedek thus inaugurated temple worship in Jerusalem. Cf. Koester 2001, 339.

must necessarily imply the cancellation of the first (cf. 7:11). And as the first priesthood is inextricably linked to the Mosaic Law, the termination of the priesthood must also entail a termination of the validity of the Law (7:12).

This explains why the author includes the Levitical priesthood within his discourse, but it does not really explain why he presents it, Platonically, as a shadow of the priesthood of Christ. It does not explain, in other words, why he subjects the Levitical priesthood to allegorical analysis. He presumably does so in order to avoid the danger of theodicy that otherwise threatens to undermine the credibility of his argument. Nowhere in the letter does he insinuate that the Levitical priesthood has been established without divine approval. In fact, he occasionally implies that it does, or at least did, have a divine authorization (8:5; 9:20). At the same time, however, he argues that it is soteriologically worthless. Critics might naturally ask why God should have chosen to benefit his people with a fundamentally ineffectual priesthood. Why should he have established a priesthood that was eventually going to be replaced by another?<sup>24</sup>

In order to forestall such criticism, the author sought to provide a satisfactory explanation why the Levitical priesthood might have a divine origin and at the same time be fundamentally inadequate. In that context, the categories of Platonic metaphysics and Philo's allegorical exegesis proved valuable. By presenting the Jewish priesthood as a shadow of the priesthood of Christ, the author managed to make sense both of the existence of the Levitical priesthood and of its limitations. Intellectuals of the first century certainly had no difficulty accepting that God was the source both of heavenly archetypes and of less valuable shadowy copies. Thus, by invoking the categories of Philonic hermeneutics the author strengthens the rationality of his deprecatory discourse on the priesthood of the Jews. Both the world of transcendence and the world of immanence have their origin in God. As a result, we should have no trouble conceptualizing God as the source both of the heavenly priesthood of Christ and of the less than perfect counterpart on earth.

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<sup>24</sup> As Lehne (1990, 43-6) convincingly demonstrates, this danger of theodicy sticks to the very theme of the new covenant. It is significant that in antiquity Jeremiah 31:31-34 played a role only in Christian literature and in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Mainstream Jewish authors never refer to it – no doubt because the notion of a new covenant potentially undermines the reliability of God.

## Conclusion

For decades, the debate over the author of Hebrews' intellectual debt to Philo of Alexandria has been conducted in terms of a false dichotomy between typology and allegory. Scholars have identified various discrepancies between the two writers' biblical hermeneutics and explained them as deriving from two fundamentally different hermeneutical traditions. Historical evidence, however, forces us to conclude that a distinctly typological method did not exist in the first century CE, and it has been the objective of this paper to show that appeal to this scholarly phantom is unnecessary. Both Philo and the author of Hebrews read the Old Testament allegorically; and the differences between their hermeneutical practices are all explicable as adjustments of the allegorical method itself. The author of Hebrews adopted Philo's hermeneutical method, but transformed it in certain ways by severing it from the Platonic metaphysics within which it had emerged and incorporating it into his own worldview of Jewish apocalypticism.

The differences between the two writers' interpretive proceedings, however, correspond not only to their different metaphysical ideas, but also to their different rhetorical interests. Whatever else Philo did, he certainly also used the allegorical method as a means to defend the legitimacy of loyalty to the Torah. In Hebrews, the author uses it to achieve exactly the opposite effect. By proving that the priesthood of the Jews and the Law on which it is based constitute only shadowy reflections of the realities revealed through Christ, he seeks to verify his claim that submission to the Torah is indefensible after the inauguration of the new covenant. In the end, Torah observance and allegiance to Christ are mutually exclusive. But while the allegorical method thus allows him to denounce the Levitical priesthood, it also enables him to provide an intellectually defensible explanation of the fact that God might thus have furnished the Jews with a priesthood of transitory nature. As a shadow of the true priesthood of Christ, the Levitical priesthood may have a divine origin while at the same time being essentially inadequate.

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