

AND THE WORD WAS GOD
AN EXAMINATION OF PANTHEISTIC, PANENTHEISTIC, AND THEISTIC
INTERPRETATIONS OF *LOGOS* AND *THEOS* IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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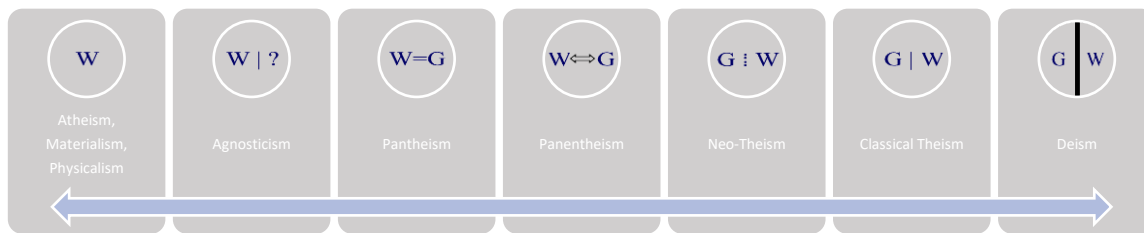
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Introduction

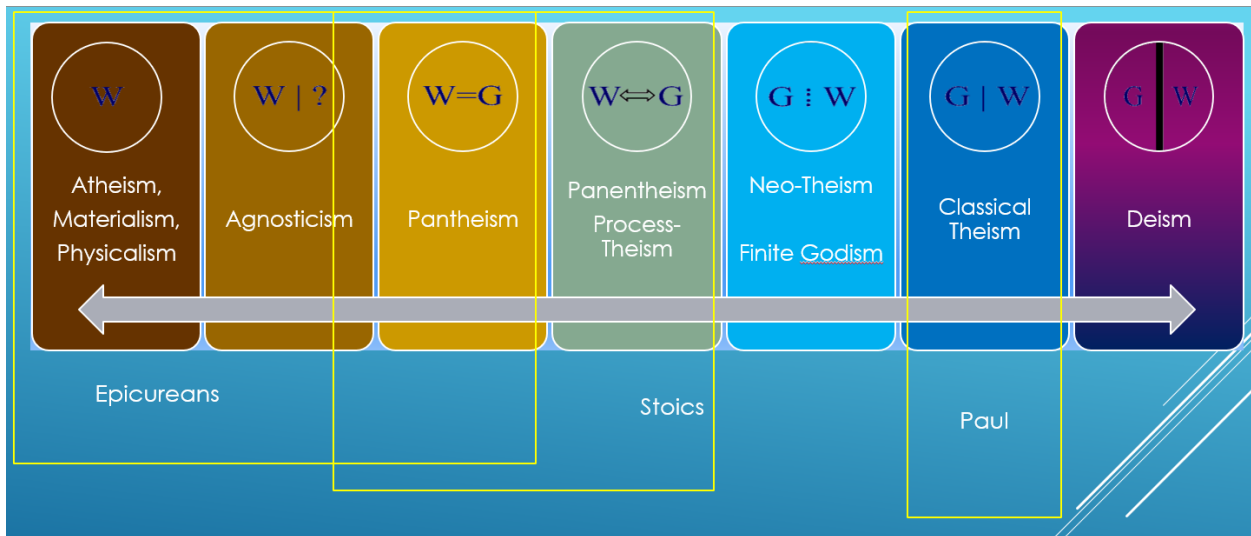
For those of us who hold to orthodox Christology, worshipping Jesus as “very God of very God,” the prologue to John’s gospel offers one of the most rich and robust passages evidencing the full deity of the Lord Jesus Christ.¹ Quite ironically, however, linguistic and conceptual complexities in John’s prologue also make it one of the chief sources for heterodox and even heretical views. This was true for many of the Alexandrian thinkers of the 2nd century and 3rd century AD. They were so far removed from the Hebraic theism and so steeped in pantheistic Neoplatonism, that they naturally were inclined interpret John’s prologue through the lens of their worldview and contextualize its meaning to fit with their worldview. Two of the main examples would be the Origen of Alexandria (195-254 AD), a former student of Plotinus, and Bishop Arius (250-336 AD), the fount of the Arian heresy. They both reinterpreted the prologue to support the position that Jesus was on a lower level of being than God.² The problem is not just an ancient one however. Neoplatonism is alive and well today (under different names) and its apologists may lead people to heterodox and heretical views of both God and Jesus with the help of their interpretations of John’s prologue. Particularly vulnerable to this drift away from orthodoxy are the thoughtful laypeople who are read their English translations of John, Hebrews, and Colossians and sincerely trying to understand poorly translated or otherwise complex and controversial passages about Jesus without any allegiance to the ancient orthodox creeds and without the benefit of scholarship of recent orthodox Bible scholars.

As this talk is very worldview heavy, it may be good for you to know what I mean by various worldviews. As seen in the infographic below, at the far left, Atheism only believes in the world (symbolized by “W”), which stands for not just our planet but the universe that we live in. Shifting to the right, pantheism, like atheism, only sees the world but it likes to call the world God (“G”). The only difference between atheism and pantheism is that the atheist may avoid God-talk while the pantheist may embrace God-talk. Shifting to the right further, panentheists hold that while God and the world are separate things, the lines between them are very permeable and blurry such that God is very much imminent in the world and the world may also intrude into God.



Shifting further, in theism, God and the world are totally separate from one another and not to be confused. The Creator is separate from (transcendent to) his creation. But God is fully aware of everything going on in the world (omniscience), may interact with the world (providence, miracles, etc.), and even enter into the world in some mysterious way (shekinah glory, theophany/Christophany, incarnation, etc.) whenever he pleases. Deism similarly sees the Creator and the creation as totally separate things but holds that God either cannot or will not interact with the world. Theism is the view presented in the Bible and held by the authors of the Bible. Neoplatonism and other forms of ancient Greek philosophy tend to operate in (and be the fountain of) pantheism and panentheism. While pantheism and panentheism are not technically the same worldview, we should not be surprised when the

inconsistent pantheist drifts into panentheism momentarily and nor should we be surprised when the inconsistent panentheist drifts into pantheism. For perspective, when the Apostle Paul was speaking to epicurean and stoic philosophers in Athens (Acts 17), Paul was the apologist for classical theism, the stoics would likely flow between pantheism and panentheism, and the epicureans would typically flow between atheism and pantheism. Paul quoted stoic poets to try to find some common ground, reach them where they were at, and bring them towards theism. Stoicism was influenced by Platonism and would in turn influence Neoplatonism. In the 3rd century, Neoplatonism would produce some of the fiercest critics of Christianity (as with Porphyry [234-305 AD] who had also been a student of Plotinus) and some of the



most subtle semi-Christian (Origen) and pseudo-Christian (Arianism) competitors to Christianity. Under different banners, Neoplatonism still provides some of the greatest critics and competitors. Now that we are on the same page with worldviews, I want to make sure you feel the problem of interpreting John’s prologue before we set about trying to defend the orthodox interpretation. In feeling the problem, I may take you out of your comfort zone.

In his prologue to his gospel, the Apostle John introduces us to Jesus Christ with three terms—the Word (λόγος), the Light (φῶς), and a Son who is “begotten” (μονογενής) by his Father. All three of these analogs may incline the interpreter towards sub-orthodox, heterodox, and heretical views Jesus. They may also inspire a slide from theism towards pantheism. When attempting to make sense of John’s enigmatic term λόγος (Jn. 1:1,14), for example, the interpreter may quite naturally superimpose upon it his own connotations of what words are to him. Or he may impose upon it a meaning from earlier pagan usages of the term. Such a λόγος could serve as a cornerstone for an emanational pantheistic God-world model—a model where the line between Creator and creation blurs and where the λόγος is an emanation of God.³ Making matters worse, John’s identification of Jesus as the true Light (Jn. 1:4-9) may naturally lend additional support pantheistic interpretations of both God and Jesus. We tend to think of light as wave-particles (photons, quanta) that are created by the inner workings of our yellow sun which are then emitted out from (or emanating out from) to our planet. With this kind of thinking, we might reason that if Jesus is to God like sunlight is to the sun, then Jesus is perhaps a generated emission of God that has a beginning, travels, illuminates, is absorbed, and transformed into thermal energy. There is a big difference between the sun as a whole and a bit of the light it gives out. John’s third analogy for Jesus, that of the son who was generated by his father (Jn. 1:14-18), may give additional force to Neoplatonic interpretations of both λόγος and θεός. When a father “begets” a son, while that son is an extension of his

father's substance, is remains a new and created thing that is not exactly identical to the older thing, and is causally contingent upon it.

In this paper we will focus our attention to the problem of interpreting λόγος and leave the related problem of light/φῶς⁴ and begetting/μονογενής for others to solve.⁵

The Problem of Superimposing Our English Connotations and Preconceptions

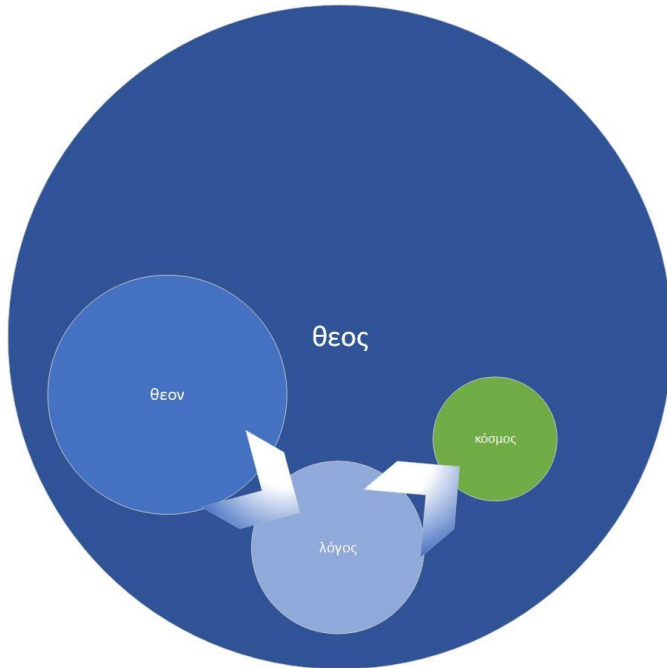
At the outset, we English readers are quite unfortunately well-positioned to misunderstand John's prologue. We may have preconceptions that may not fit with John's concepts and our English translations may not be adequate vehicles of John's meaning. Almost every English translation of John's gospel translates ὁ λόγος as "the word." But for English speakers in the 21st century, words tend to be very cheap things. Most of the words that are said around us perhaps don't even need to be said or heard. A single word by itself may have so many potential meanings that it remains actually meaningless in isolation. Also, words tend to be very transient. At first, they only exist potentially as symbols that a given community can use to encode and decode concepts. The word then flashes briefly into the mind of an individual, is spoken into the air, may or may not find a home in another's mind, and then is gone. Words are just filtered expressions of one mind to another mind. We would much rather have the voicemail (containing our words) deleted than be deleted ourselves. We would rather have the letter we mailed be burned than to be burned ourselves. While thinking that God relates to Jesus just like a speaker relates to a single spoken word (or perhaps multiple words), we are at the outset rather underwhelmed. We may also be poised to understand John's God (θεός, θεον) and John's Word of God (λόγος) in a Neoplatonic perspective.

A Glimpse of a Neoplatonic Interpretation of John's Prologue

John introduces Jesus Christ to his readers first and foremost as the *Logos* (ὁ λόγος), a being who is simultaneously distinct from the God (τον θεον) in one way and the same thing as God (θεός) in some other way. Christians in the orthodox formulations of Christianity explain this distinct-and-same mystery by clarifying that God-the-Father and Jesus (the *Logos*, God-the-Son) are different *persons* who share the same *essence*. There are three *who's* that share one *what*. This disarms the predictable accusations of polytheism, bi-theism, tri-theism, and the embrace of logical contradictions about a triune God. But what if John, writing in Greek as he did, was integrating some Greek notions about God? John did not invent the term λόγος. It was used as an important technical term among many pagan Greek philosophers and Jewish contextualizers long before John. The matter may not be as simple as choosing the Hebraic meaning rather than the Hellenic one. What if John, much like Philo, the Alexandrian Jew, before him, was synthesizing Hebraic and Hellenistic concepts together into a hybrid model of the relationships between God (θεός), the God (θεον), the *Logos* (λόγος), and the cosmos (κόσμος)?

If John wrote his gospel as a Neoplatonic type of trinitarian philosopher, perhaps he was trying to say that that divinity/deity (θεός) was the first and ultimate substance of reality. And then, at some point before our world came into existence, the God (τον θεον) emanated from θεός as the first emanation. Next the λόγος emanated out of the God (τον θεον) as the second emanation. John attempts to explain the

emanation in three ways: The *Logos* emanated (1) like a word or statement (λόγος) is an expression of the thought in a man’s mind and of the air from his lungs and mouth, (2) like golden sun light (Jn. 1:4-9) radiates out from our yellow sun, and (3) like a son emerges from the loins (or “bosom”) of the father that “begets” him (Jn. 1:14, 18 KJV, NKJV, NASB). This second emanation of deity began to exist in parallel



with (πρὸς) the first emanation of deity for a time. Both emanations remain divine because ultimately all is θεος. There is nothing outside of θεος. The One had begun in some way to appear as many. After some time had passed, the second emanation (λόγος) created our material world (κόσμος) as the third emanation of θεος. As part of the creative process, the λόγος gave form, design, order, governance, energy, and sustenance to the κόσμος. The λόγος also deposited a seed of λόγος inside of us humans so that we could reason, speak, recognize the λόγος, and do other similar things that plants and animals cannot do. Sometime later, the λόγος entered into the κόσμος as part of the κόσμος and as one of us. He did this so that we humans, could become extensions of the God like he is, enjoying more participation, interaction, and

mystical connection with the second emanation.⁶

The Problem of the Son being “Begotten” by His Father

Compounding the problem of interpreting λόγος is ambiguity in a second term John uses when describing Jesus Christ—*monogenes* (μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός in 1:14 and either μονογενής υἱος or, depending on textual variations, μονογενής θεός in 1:18). *Monogenes* has been understood in Greek, Latin, and in English traditions as the act of a father “begetting” (generating, fathering, producing) a son. Although the modern English translations translate *monogenes* in a variety of surprising ways, it was translated as “begotten” in the older, more univocal translations.⁷ Quoting Psalm 2:7, Acts 13:33 and Hebrews 1:5 & 5:5 also talk of God-the-Father begetting God-the-Son. The Nicene (325 A.D.), Chalcedonian (A.D. 451), and Constantinopolitan (A.D. 381) creeds echo this language as well. Phenomenologically, in our experience of life, fathering a child suggests a type of creation out of pre-existent matter and form. Such a normal understanding of *monogenes* could naturally support the view that the *Logos* was created in some way by God-the-Father. This in turn would lend itself well to emanational-pantheistic and panentheistic interpretations of λόγος where the son is of the same basic substance as his father (but not a genetic clone), is chronologically second to his father, and is causally contingent upon his father.

The churchmen who composed the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) anticipated this pitfall and clarified that Jesus was “eternally begotten of the Father” (rather than placing a moment of conception or birth

within time) and was “begotten not made, of one being” (clarifying that Jesus was not a created being). While fully embracing the Father-Son analogy, they seem to suggest that that the analogy breaks down when pressed too far. What’s normal to us might not fully apply to *theos* and *logos*. Perhaps this proves that the problem is not just natural to modern English-thinking minds; even the Greek-speaking Christians in Christianity’s very early days may have been inclined to interpret *monogenes* as excluding timeless eternity. Norman Geisler elaborated the orthodox stance further saying: “the Son is eternally ‘begotten’ or ‘generated’ from the Father, but the Father is never said to be ‘begotten’ or ‘generated’ from anyone.”⁸ But even with these clarifications, the language of begetting can still make it seem like the existence of the *logos* is in some way contingent upon and secondary to God-the-Father.

Additional Catalysts for Drift

John’s prologue is a slope that is naturally slippery in three related ways. It’s ambiguities, especially in combination with ambiguities in other important Christological passages,⁹ can cause readers to begin to drift from orthodoxy to heterodoxy. Today’s English readers of John’s gospel are not likely to have his or her preunderstandings conditioned by an upbringing in a traditional, orthodox Christian cultural context. Times have changed. The English-speaking communities have changed. They are, as of the beginning of the 21st century, mixtures of Christian, post-Christian, non-Christian, and/or pseudo-Christian. He is just as likely—or perhaps even more likely now—to be pre-conditioned by platonic, Neoplatonic, gnostic, or “New Age” pre-understandings. Those preunderstandings will be brought to the interpretative table.

There are many scholarly-sounding voices in the world who hold Neoplatonic or Neo-Gnostic views of *λόγος* and *θεός* and teach in ways that would accelerate this drift. As with most passages in the holy scriptures, it can be said of the verses in John’s prologue (Jn. 1:1-18) that “There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures” (2 Pe 3:16 ESV). Francis Young’s sees John’s *Logos* as “a quasi-divine . . . mediating link in the chain of Being, forming a triad or Trinity not unlike that of Neoplatonists.” To Young, John’s *Logos*, borrowing most immediately from Philo’s *logos*, was ultimately still borrowing meaning from Stoic and Neoplatonic sources, retaining the kernel of meaning of those pagan sources while being imbued with additional layer of meaning, and lent itself well to Christian doceticism and Christian gnosticism.¹⁰ Similarly, John Hick, former professor of religion and theology at many universities, encourages us to see John’s terms of *Logos* and *son* as being “hyperbole” and “mythological expressions” that the mature will not take literally.¹¹ But we can still enjoy them in a non-literal sense and find them significant in our personal mystical experiences of “the ultimate transcendent Reality which is the source and ground of everything” in our “response to the mystery of the universe, powered by religious experience and guided by rational thought.”¹² A similar view of *logos* may be found in the Gnostic gospels.¹³

Precursors to John's *Logos*

John did not coin the term λόγος. That coin was minted, melted, and reminted many times before John wrote. It was used as an important and technical term by many ancient Greek philosophers, each one adding and subtracting some meaning. While we may focus on John as the mind writing his gospel, we also must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit mysteriously inspired the writing of John's gospel through John (2 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 14:26, 16:13) and that inspiration trickles down not just to the mind of John but into every "jot and tittle" (Mt. 5:17) of every letter penned in the text. Whatever λόγος means, it was assuredly a very strategic word for the minds of Greeks, Hellenized Jews, and Hebraic Jews of the first century. By examining usages of λόγος from earlier Hellenic, Hebrew, and Hellenic-Hebrew hybrid sources, perhaps we can determine which usages best fit John's usage of λόγος. A concomitant concern will be determining which God-world model (worldview) John's λόγος best supports.

There may be a tendency for some to focus on the Greek traditions.¹⁴ This is natural because John's gospel was written in koine Greek, which was based largely on Attic Greek. Consulting the 10-page entry on *Logos* in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*¹⁵ would seem like a logical place for the Bible student to start his research. And it may be of great value. However, there is a Heideggerian-Bultmannian philosophy that underlies the methodology used to produce this lexicon. Using it may subtly incline the researcher to slide away from John's theistic usage of λόγος towards presocratic (and therefore atheistic-pantheistic) connotations.¹⁶ Consulting the 37-page entry on *Logos* in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* instead could help decrease the exposure to the Heideggerian bias.¹⁷ The tools we use to do scholarly research are not neutral in their philosophy of language and may incline some researchers to drift in the direction of Neoplatonism.

But John's λόγος it is not simply "all Greek to me." It is also well-known, albeit less well-known, that the Hebrew traditions also imbued their word for Word (*dabar/davar* in Hebrew and *memra* in the Aramaic targums) with profound meanings with deep metaphysical-to-physical implications. Quite naturally, when *dabar/memra* was later translated into Greek, in a time and place where Hebrew and Hellenistic streams were starting to mingle, *dabar* would be translated as λόγος. A few influential Jewish thinkers blended Hebrew and Hellenic notions of λόγος before John wrote. And a few early and noteworthy Greek Christian thinkers interpreted λόγος in a Hebraic-Hellenic hybrid style not long after John wrote. We can explore ancient Greek, Hellenistic, Hebrew, and hybrid usages in the attempt to see whose coin purses John may have borrowing from. Leon Morris, a Johannine scholar, suggested, "It is not proven beyond doubt whether the term [*logos*], as John uses it, is to be derived from Jewish or Greek or some other source. Nor is it plain precisely what he meant by it. John does not tell us and we are left to work out for ourselves the precise allusion and its significance. ... his combination of simplicity and profundity often leaves us wondering whether we have caught all of his meaning."¹⁸

Greek Logoi

The Logoi of Pre-Socratic Philosopher

Although for some it would mean much more, among most of the pre-Socratic philosophers of Greece, λόγος generally meant "account," "word," "thing said," "argument," "discourse," "lecture," "teaching," or "statement."¹⁹ In this paper, I am presenting an orderly, logical account (a *logos*) about the subject of the *Logos*. This meaning may be in harmony with John, who explicitly stated that the *Logos*

“made him [God] known” (ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο) to those of us who cannot see God (Jn. 1:18). Jesus as the logos of God does, in a sense, provide a logical account of, discourse of, and statement about God. And this also may harmonize well with John’s epistle which says, “We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true life. . .” (1 Jn. 5:20). This may be a decent start but it is not a perfect fit and surely doesn’t exhaust John’s meaning.

Heraclitus (d. 475 BC) appears to be the first writer to use *Logos* as a technical term for a philosophical concept. In saying, “having harkened not to me but to the *Logos*, it is wise to agree that all things are one,”²⁰ Heraclitus seems to consider the *Logos* to be a timeless, eternal, independent, absolute, and recognizable truth claim about ultimate reality. The *logos* is a message, an account, or a source of deeper knowledge. It is “an objective law-like principle that governs the cosmos, and which it is possible (but difficult) for humans to come to understand.”²¹ Whereas the natural inclination of the natural man is to assume that the natural world is made of several things, if he can comprehend the message about reality more deeply, he will see that reality is ultimately one. For Heraclitus then, it seems like the *logos* was a deeper revelation to the human minds about reality—and sent by reality. Those who could comprehend the *logos* better would understand reality better with their minds.

His *logos* is not to be confused with the will or action of Zeus and the other gods of the polytheistic Greek pantheon. It is more fundamental than the gods. It is a “single order that directs all things,” is “divine,” “unchanging,” is a “single ordered system that also steers and controls the whole cosmos, but from within [the cosmos],” explains the appearance of change as ultimately changeless, is permanent, a “rational order,” “an intelligent system,” “an intelligent plan, at work,” “the cosmos working itself out in accordance with rational principles,” “an account of the self-regulation of the cosmos,” “contains the unchanging account that explains the alterations and transformations of the cosmos,” “an ordered system like a language that can be read or heard and understood by those who are attuned to it,” and is an intelligent principle that can be understood by intelligent people who can use their minds to transcend what is obvious from the five senses (phenomena).²² The ultimate truth he is famous for is that while everything is constantly changing, opposites are still connected to and balanced by one another, the basic material of the world is fire, and ultimately everything is one (monism, pantheism). Favorable towards Neoplatonism himself, Richard Tarnas summarizes, “All things are in constant flux, and yet are fundamentally related and ordered through the universal *Logos*, which is also manifest in the human being’s power of reason.”²³ Thomistic philosopher Norman Geisler locates the root and inspiration for Alfred North Whitehead’s panentheistic “process theology” first in Heraclitus and second in Plato.²⁴

Parmenides’s (b. 510 BC) use of *logos* seems to be confined to the ability in humans to think and reason in ways that animals cannot.²⁵ While he is usually depicted as saying the opposite of Heraclitus, they may ultimately be saying very similar things.²⁶ Whereas Heraclitus has the reputation for emphasizing change and multiplicity, Parmenides is generally seen as a pundit of lack of change the monism that would undergird pantheistic models of God. Diogenes of Apollonia insisted that “anyone beginning a *logos* ought to present a starting principle (*arche*) that is indisputable and a style that is simple and stately.” The account of cosmology that he gave ultimately says that “all the things that are alterations from the same thing and are the same thing.”²⁷ For him it seems that a *logos* is a persuasive account of explanation of something important. And his *logos* is one of monism, and therefore, pantheism. Leucippus (c. 560 BC) was a follower of Zeno and Parmenides and the founder of atomism. While he does not make it explicitly clear that there is an overarching *logos* that controls the world, he does insist that an account (*logos*) can be given of the “causes of all occurrences” because nothing happens for no reason. Everything happens for a reason (*logos*) and by necessity.²⁸ For the Sophists, *logos*

was simply “argument” or “story.” A well-educated man must be able to argue persuasively in public discussions and debate.

The Logos of Plato

Plato’s *Timaeus* is an account he wrote to provide a reasoned, orderly account (*logos*) for the generation of the universe. In this particular case, Plato introduced it as a plausible account rather than a certain one. It was “presented as reasonable, thus meriting our belief, but neither definitive nor complete and thus open to possible revision.”²⁹ Despite the fact that Plato occasionally uses poetic myth (*muthos*) as part of his discussions (*logos*) of philosophy, he generally maintained the bifurcation between poetic myth and logical discourse (*logos*). This was in keeping with precedents by historian Herodotus and most of the pre-Socratic philosophers who were attempting to move away from the old tradition of religio-poetic myths (which did not give persuasive accounts of the world) and into well-informed and highly-reasoned understandings and explanations (*logoi*) of the world we have found ourselves in. In *Protagoras*, Plato affirms the distinction between *mythos* and *logos*. It seems clear that *mythos* means stories (that are mostly false but may have a kernel of truth in them) while *logos* implies logical argumentation. However, Plato also seems to have been able to see his own creation myths (such as *Timaeus*, *Gorgias*, and *Phaedo*) not as being on the same level of the not-so-helpful myths of Homer, Hesoid, and the poets of old but as a new type of *mythos* that qualified as *logos*.³⁰ In his discussion of the Sophist, *logos* is meaningful speech” that expresses the interweaving of ideas.³¹ For Plato, *logos* may not be simply confined to an account, a speech, or a statement. In his *Theaetetus*, *logos* is “a statement (*logos*) of the elements of the object of knowledge” in a thing before the thinker can have true knowledge and true belief about that thing. It also may, for Plato, extend beyond the knowledge that the five senses can give and go to a deeper, more rational understanding.³²

Plato’s *logos* doesn’t seem to follow Heraclitus’s *logos*. Plato was more than favorable to Anaxagoras’s concept *Nous*, or Mind, as the transcendent source of the order of the cosmos.³³ His followers then could make *Nous* and *Logos* rather interchangeable terms as they attempted to blend several philosophies into their Platonism. With John’s *Logos* being sort of an intermediary agent in creation, it is important to note that Plato, in *Timaeus*, somewhat similarly, posits a *demiurgos* as the divine (but secondary) craftsman of the world in his *Timaeus*. The *demiurgos* was a created Creator who forms the world out of pre-existent matter. The creation that It created, which we live in, was a world that is inferior to the ideal world after which it was patterned. This is one of the many factors that contributed to the general disdain for this material world that the Greeks had, and, therefore, to have disdain for the idea that Jesus was resurrected from the dead in a material body (as in Acts 17:31-32). There may be some overlap in the thought of some between Plato’s *demiurgos*, who gave form and order to our material world, but didn’t seem to hang around after forming the world to continue to give any rational order (as with the Heraclitian and Stoic *logoi*) to that world.

While it would be too far of a stretch to call Plato a panentheist, it is fair to call him a proto-panentheist and note that some of his ideas—especially the idea of the “world soul” in *Timaeus*—were used as inspiration by later thinkers in the creation of panentheistic models of God and the world. It is difficult to understate the impact Plato had on subsequent Greek, Roman, European, English, and American thought.

Aristotle's Logos

To Aristotle *logos* is an “account” of a subject.³⁴ But Aristotle sets the bar very, very high for what constitutes an account. He has a reputation for giving some of the most orderly, perceptive, reasoned, and impressive accounts of any of the ancient Greek thinkers. Not surprisingly then, for Aristotle, *logos* can also mean “deliberation, . . . a process of rational inquiry. . . [and] reason.”³⁵ In his *Prior Analytics*, which is an account (*logos*) of deductive logic, Aristotle says that a logical deduction (with major premise, minor premise, and conclusion) is a type of *logos*—a logical argument, an account, an explanation.³⁶ *Logos* also seems to be tied to the act of reasoning and *logos* offers a “general pattern of argumentation (*logos*)”³⁷ and the human “capacities for reasoning and articulate speech (*logos*).”³⁸ *Logos* may also be used of a mathematical “formula,”³⁹ a definition that explains the essence of a thing,⁴⁰ and a sentence.⁴¹ While Aristotle does not use *logos*, however, to represent a rational principle that governs the universe. Presumably he understood the universe to be very orderly, governed by order, and that inherent order is what enables people like Aristotle to learn about it and present an ordered account (*logos*) that explains it.

The Stoic Logos

The Stoics saw the *logos* as a great and quasi-divine principle that gives order to the universe and gives reason to the human mind. Comparisons could be made with the Tao (or Dao) in ancient Chinese thought or an “intelligent design” concept in modern Western thought. Why does the sun rise every morning, clouds drop rain, and crops grow? Because of the order that the *logos* gives it. Bishop Athanasius (d. 373 AD), a Greco-Egyptian Christian who helped define Christian orthodoxy, seemed to give a recognizable and favorable echo to the Stoic *Logos* when he described John’s *Logos* as “the Word Who ordered these things [stars, planets].”⁴² The Stoic idea of the *logos spermatikos* is the seed inside of every human that connects him or her with the *logos* of quasi-divine reason (*logos*). This is what theists would tend to call being made in the image and likeness of God. Some of the more panentheistic “Christian mystics,” like Meister Eckhart, might conceive of this in terms of humans having the “divine spark” inside of them. But to the Stoics, it was more than that. “The Stoics taught that it was possible to align yourself with the divine process of nature only if you understood scientifically that it was programmed by the *Logos* and could not be altered.”⁴³ It was acquiescence to determinism. It was a pantheism of the will, where ultimately there is just one Will that governs the universe and the rest of us need to harmonize our illusory and individual wills with that Will. In one sense, Stoics were materialists much like the Epicureans. However, Stoics were, unlike the Epicureans, apt to talk about something approximating what we call “God.” However, their quasi-divine *logos* was finite in size and strictly immanent, existing only inside of the material world. Dirk Baltzly elaborates:

In accord with this ontology, the Stoics, like the Epicureans, make God a corporeal entity, though not (as with the Epicureans) one made of everyday matter. But while the Epicureans think the gods are too busy being blessed and happy to be bothered with the governance of the universe . . . , the Stoic God is immanent throughout the whole of creation and directs its development down to the smallest detail. The governing metaphor for Stoic cosmology is biological, in contrast to the fundamentally mechanical conception of the Epicureans. The entire cosmos is a living thing and God stands to the cosmos as an animal’s life force stands to the animal’s body, enlivening, moving and directing it by its presence throughout. The Stoics insistence that only bodies are capable of causing anything, however, guarantees that this cosmic life force must be conceived of as somehow corporeal. More specifically, God is identical with one of the two ungenerated and

indestructible first principles (archai) of the universe. One principle is matter which they regard as utterly unqualified and inert. It is that which is acted upon. God is identified with an eternal reason (*logos*) or intelligent designing fire or a breath (pneuma) which structures matter in accordance with Its plan. ... The designing fire is likened to sperm or seed which contains the first principles or directions of all the things which will subsequently develop. ... The biological conception of God as a kind of living heat or seed from which things grow seems to be fully intended. ... Just as living things have a life-cycle that is witnessed in parents and then again in their off-spring, so too the universe has a life cycle that is repeated. This life cycle is guided by, or equivalent to, a developmental plan that is identified with God. There is a cycle of endless recurrence, beginning from a state in which all is fire, through the generation of the elements, to the creation of the world we are familiar with, and eventually back to the state of pure designing fire called 'the conflagration'...⁴⁴

The Stoics could see what we call the laws of physics, chemistry, and genetics at work and they were smart enough to know that these amazing principles were not the product of purposeless and randomness. But they did not locate the source of that intelligence and purpose outside of their model of the world. They confused the code with the Coder. Whereas the theist sees that God, as the intelligent and purposeful writer of codes—codes which when executed instruct all the forces of physics in how to behave and which, as with the genetic code in living cells, instructs the cells on how to live and do all manner of amazing things—the codes were neither eternal nor self-generated. They were created by a Coder (i.e., God) who was prior to the world and outside of the world. The Stoics couldn't quite make it there. Regardless, the Stoic use of *logos* as a quasi-divine principle of order in the world would be very influential among many later thinkers in the Greco-Roman world. It is theoretically possible their *logos* could have served as inspiration for John's *Logos*. The Stoic *Logos* certainly influenced future usages of *logos* among future Greek thinkers.

The Logos of the Neoplatonists

Like Plato before them, the Neoplatonists tended to try to reconcile and synthesize together the attractive ideas of previous Greek thinkers. They attempted to blend Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, and more into their Platonism. While their *Logos* was not quite the same as the Stoic *Logos*, it was heavily influenced by it. And unlike the Stoics, *Logos*, while still profoundly important, was not the most important thing in their system. Plotinus (d.271 AD), arguably the founder of Neoplatonism, considered soul to be the "discursive rational principle." For Proclus (d.485 AD), *logos* is the activity of speaking or engaging in verbal discourse. For Simplicus of Cilicia (d.560 AD), *logos* was "the rational principle." In one of his commentaries on Aristotle's works, which he was favorable towards, *logos* could include in its meanings the calculation of votes, internal discourse, external discourse, and the "guiding and definitory formula for each thing." While Simplicus does not teach that nature thinks like we do, it still acts rationally and possesses *logos*, or *logoi* (plural), the "immanent rational principles" which "are the images of the transcendent [Platonic] Forms."⁴⁵ He seems to endorse Plato's demiurge and Aristotle's Unmoved Mover without assuming they are the same being and argues against a creation in time. For the Neoplatonists, it seems that the first principle of reality was "the One" (monism, pantheism) and that the some of the most important and quasi-divine principles (*logoi*) unfolds (perhaps like the many petals of a flower eventually unfold from the singular bud) to do other creative work. They borrowed from the Stoic *logos* but, unlike the Stoics, did not make the *Logos* the highest principle. For them, the One was higher than the *Logos* and the *Logos* was really the *logoi* (plural). While it is true that the Neoplatonists technically wrote 200 or more years after John wrote his gospel, and therefore could not have influenced John, it could also be said that there were many interpreters of Plato before John's day and therefore they, and possibly John too, could be pioneers of what would become Neoplatonism.

Hebraic *Logoi*

Dabar in the Old Testament

There is an obvious echo of Genesis 1:1 in John 1:1 with the words, “in the beginning.” In Genesis 1, the six days of creative work are accomplished by the mere act of God speaking words. This is the obvious starting point for understanding John’s *Logos*. This source goes back approximately 3,400 years—a time long before Heraclitus was born.⁴⁶ Psalm 33:4-9 echoes Genesis 1 well saying, “For the **word of the Lord** is right; and all his works *are done* in truth. . . . By the **word of the Lord** the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host [stars, planets] . . . For he **spoke**, and it [the world] came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” John’s contemporaries wrote in perfect harmony with this tradition. The Apostle Peter, who was very close to John, wrote, “from the beginning of creation. . . the earth was formed out of water and through water **by the word of God**” (2 Pet. 3:4–6 ESV). In a very similar wording to John 1, the anonymous author of the book of Hebrews says God **spoke** on many occasions and in many different ways, speaking mainly through various Hebrew prophets, but then ultimately speaking through his Son Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2). He also said that Jesus “upholds the universe by the **word** of his power” (Heb. 1:3) and that “the universe was created **by the word of God**, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” (Heb. 11:3). It is very likely that John is saying the same type of thing in his prologue.

In the Hebrew prophetic tradition, the word (*dabar, memra, logos*) of God is something that is distinct from God and which accomplishes the will of God. In the context of God’s sending rain to nourish our crop-bearing fields, God explains, “so shall **my word** be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa. 55:11 ESV). John’s *Logos* seems to harmonize with this usage as well, even if it is not predicated directly upon it.

Not surprisingly, the Old Testament *logos* also could indicate something which is portrayed as being distinct from God and which communicates perfectly what God wanted to say. When searching the ESV translation, we find the curious phrase “the word of the Lord came. . .” occurring a total of 109 times. J.B. Taylor says *dabar* is actually used 394 times in the Old Testament books.⁴⁷ This phrase is in Genesis only twice but can be found twenty-four times in Jeremiah and fifty times in Ezekiel. This is a phrase indicating that a prophetic revelation went from God to some human prophet. It starts with Abraham: “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great. . . . And behold, **the word of the Lord** came to him. . . .” (Gen. 15:1-4). The same phrase is used of Samuel the prophet: “And **the word of the Lord** was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. . . . Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and **the word of the Lord** had not yet been revealed to him. . . . And the Lord appeared again at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh **by the word of the Lord.**” (1 Sam. 3:7, 21; 15:10.)

Memra in the Targums

During the Babylonian Captivity and the Second Temple period, very few Hebrews could read Hebrew. Being the language of the holy scriptures, however, the scriptures were still read in Hebrew in the meetings of the synagogue. To accommodate the majority of listeners, translations were made into Aramaic. At first the translations were strictly oral. But eventually they began to be written down. They

seem to have been paraphrases than exact word-for-word translations. In fear of breaking rabbinic hedge laws surrounding the third commandment, the translators replaced the divine name with an alternative. Occasionally they used the Aramaic word *memra* as the substitute for the name of God. J. Dwight Pentecost concludes that John's *Logos* is primarily rooted in the Old Testament usages—but that it also goes beyond it:

It has its roots in the Old Testament. Because of the law that prohibited a Jew from taking the name of the Lord their God in vain, it was customary to substitute another word for the name Yahweh. When God in the Old Testament appeared to reveal Himself or to reveal truth to men, the Revealer was referred to as "Memra," which is the Hebrew word for "a word." The Memra, or word, emphasized that which was communicated from God rather than the God who made the revelation. ... [But John's] idea of the *Logos* was not ... merely that of Hebrew *memra*, the manifestation of God as the Angel of Jehovah or the Wisdom of God.⁴⁸

Leon Morris offers a similar judgment:

... in the Targum of Jonathan alone the expression [*memra*] is used in this way about 320 times. It is often said that this Jewish use is not relevant, because it does not denote a different being in any way distinct from God. It is just a reverent way of referring to God Himself. But this is hardly the point. The point is that wherever people were familiar with the Targums, they were familiar with 'the Word' as a designation of the divine. The Johannine use is not that of the Targums, but to those familiar with the Targums it must necessarily arouse these associations."⁴⁹

Hybrid (Hebraic-Hellenic) Logoi

The Sophia/Wisdom Tradition

Many have equated John's *Logos* with *Sophia*, or Wisdom. There are at least two precedents in the Old Testament books which were used as a springboard for imaginative writers in the intertestamental period.

In Job 28, wisdom, while not personified, is treated like an important and mysterious thing somewhere. It is something that understands and which he used when terraforming the earth. Wisdom here does overlap to some noteworthy degree with the quasi-divine *Logos* of Heraclitus and the Stoics, which gave order to the natural world. Today we might be tempted to describe the wisdom that Job talks about as "the laws of physics" or Stephen Hawking's famous "theory of everything" (which he playfully and audaciously called "the mind of God")—something that gave form and order to the created world as it was created and as it began its expansion into the cosmos it is today. But this wisdom seems to lie outside of the physical cosmos. It's something that Job and the rest of the human race cannot seem to find. So it's something more fundamental and transcendent than the laws of physics. It seems like something that goes to the techniques the intelligent designer used when fine-tuning the "gravitational constant" and so many of the things which made our universe possible before it was hatched from its shell, so to speak. It seems like something that would be located only in the unfathomably creative mind of God. And yet Job 28 talks of it poetically as something outside of our world and also perhaps as something outside of God. But perhaps we should not make too much out of poetic books as they are allowed some poetic license.

Proverbs, another poetic book which may exercise some poetic license, seems to follow Job. Proverbs 3:19 says “The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens.” Several proverbs encourage the reader to seek and get wisdom. Pr. 4:8 personifies Wisdom as a “her” and 7:4 as a “sister” and “intimate friend.” Pr. 8 also has her (Wisdom) saying “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth... when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight” (Pr. 8:22, 23, 29, 30 ESV). There is some debate over the word ESV translates as “possessed.” The Hebrew word is *qanah*, which the LXX translates as created (*ektisen*). The RSV translation also says God created this Wisdom. *Qanah* can mean acquire, purchase, or possess. But some modern scholars, who are intoxicated with genre criticism, and possibly superimposing extrapolations from the Egyptian Wisdom literature upon the Hebrew Wisdom tradition, have been trying to argue that it means beget, procreate, or create.⁵⁰ Several of the early Greek Church fathers, perhaps with the Stoic and Neoplatonic concepts of *Logos* in mind, connected Proverbs 8:22 with John’s *Logos* and turned Proverbs 8:22 into a “central Christological text ... in the light of the Christian theological agenda.”⁵¹ Arius was “notorious for teaching that the Son was a creature, and Pr. 8.22 was for him a prime proof-text.”⁵²

What the intertestamental writers did to advance the Hebraic “Wisdom tradition” will not be covered in depth here due to constraints of space and time. They used the poetic descriptions of wisdom as springboards and may have taken them to more radical extremes. They may have also done some Hellenic contextualization. The *Book of Wisdom*, or *Wisdom of Solomon*, is a hybrid blend of Greek and Jewish thoughts and features. It was written in Alexandria, Egypt, by someone who had a Hellenistic background and made it into the Septuagint. Athanasius judged it to not be divinely inspired but still worth reading and considering.

Even if we regard these intertestamental writings as apocryphal, non-canonical, not divinely inspired, and non-authoritative, they still have to be considered. It is theoretically possible that John could have been familiar with them and could have been influenced in some way—directly, indirectly, positively, or negatively—by this tradition. They are useful for better understanding the thinking of the early Greek Church Patristic scholars who, quite arguably, should not have made such a big deal out of these passages in the poetic genre books. Perhaps they should not have attempted to build their Christology off of them. Perhaps John did not either. Deferring again to Leon Morris,

In the period between the two Testaments there was a marked extension of the usages we have been discussing. There are some striking statements about Wisdom. ... While it is too much to say that these writers thought of Wisdom or the Word as having any distinct existence of their own, yet their bold imagery was certainly preparing the way for John’s idea of *Logos*.⁵³

The Logos of Philo Alexandrinus

As with many of the educated Jews of Alexandria, Philo of Alexandria (d. 10 B.C.?) swam in both Hebrew and Greek intellectual streams. He admired Plato but may have tried to correct him along traditional Hebrew lines. Philo’s *logos* had a major overlap with the Stoic *Logos* but it seems he was also trying to redefine it in a more kosher direction. For Stoics, *logos* was their equivalent of God, but, for Philo, “*logos* is not ultimate reality but merely what we can see and understand of God ... it corresponds to ... the powers of God who created the world and governs it. ... In fact, the *logos* is only God’s shadow,

His image, the instrument by which He created the world, or in a more anthropomorphic way, His ‘first-born son’ or His deputy (Agr. 51).”⁵⁴

The scholars that suffer from “parallelomania”⁵⁵ in their exercise of genre criticism may presume that John simply borrowed his *logos* from Philo or the Stoics. Those who see the differences outweighing the similarities, will tend to see less or no influence of Philo upon John. Others have suggested that Philo’s *logos* was a synthesis of the Biblical Wisdom, the Stoic-Platonic *logos*, and the *Dabar/Memra*. John’s *Logos* may have included all of that and added an additional layer or two on top of that conglomeration. But we have no guarantee that Philo wrote before John did. He is difficult to date. “It is impossible to give precise dates for Philo’s birth. The consensus is that he lived between the end of the first century BCE and the middle of the first century CE, during a period of acute agitation and interethnic tensions in Alexandria.”⁵⁶ This makes a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* argument especially tenuous. Even if he did write before John wrote, the distance (both physical, cultural, and situational) between Alexandria and Ephesus (where Irenaeus suggests John ministered) is considerable. As fascinating as Philo’s ideas may be, it is highly questionable whether John, who was Jesus’s disciple for three years, would have any interest in it. Even Karen Armstrong, as an ecumenical panentheist with strong sympathies to Greek gnosticism, concludes that John, “was not using the Greek word *logos* in the same way as Philo: he appears to have been more in tune with the Palestinian than Hellenized Judaism.”⁵⁷

Conclusion

There are significant similarities between the Greek *Logoi* and John’s *Logos*. Capitalizing on the compatibility, several of the early Greek Church thinkers created bridges from the Greek *logoi* to John’s *Logos* to make Christianity more intelligible and acceptable to the Greco-Roman mind.⁵⁸ Despite the overlap, our tour of the evolution of the pagan Greek conceptions of *logos* ultimately shows that the differences between the Greek concepts of *logos* and John’s *Logos* far outweigh the similarities. The Greek concepts shed little if any light on John’s *Logos* as there was little or no actual mimetic inheritance from the pagan Greek thinkers to John. John’s *Logos* instead seems to be predicated more on the Hebrew *memra* tradition, which would have been quite natural for John, a Palestinian Jew writing in a very basic style of koine Greek, to do. But John’s *Logos* transcends that tradition and becomes a richer and even more profound term with John.

The best way to understand John’s *Logos* is of course to let John speak for himself. The scholars who examine John’s gospel and his epistles using careful exegesis and avoiding eisegesis are the voices to listen to. It would be difficult to improve on the wording of the judgment of Johannine scholar Leon Morris:

When John used the term *Logos*, then, he used a term that would be widely recognized among the Greeks. The average man would not know its precise significance to the philosophers ... But he would know that it meant something very important. John could scarcely have used the Greek term without arousing in the minds of those who used the Greek language thoughts of something supremely great in the universe. But, though he would have not been unmindful of the associations aroused by the term, his essential thought does not derive from the Greek background. His Gospel shows little trace of acquaintance with Greek philosophy and less dependence upon it. And the really important thing is that John in his use of *Logos* is cutting clean across one of the fundamental Greek ideas. The Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches and joys and fears with serene divine lack of feeling. John’s idea of the *Logos*

conveys exactly the opposite idea. John's *Logos* does not show us a God who is serenely detached, but a God who is passionately involved. The *Logos* speaks of God's coming where we are, taking our nature upon Himself, entering the world's struggle, and out of this agony winning men's salvation. More important for our understanding of this Gospel in general and of its use of this term in particular is its Jewish background. ... The *Logos* ... alike for Jew and Gentile represents the ruling fact of the universe. ... the Jew will remember that 'by the Word of the Lord were the heavens made'; the Greek will think of the rational principle of which all natural laws are particular expressions. Both will agree that this *Logos* is the starting-point of all things. John was using a term which, with various shades of meaning, was in common use everywhere. He could reckon on all men catching his essential meaning. This, then, is the background of John's thought. But it is not his thought itself. He had a richer, deeper, fuller idea than any of his predecessors. For him the Word was not a principle but a living Being and the source of life; not a personification, but a Person and that Person divine. The Word was nothing less than God.⁵⁹

Looking at it from a more philosophical standpoint, Christian philosopher and theologian Norm Geisler has a similar judgment:

Some scholars have assumed that John's Gospel (1:1) borrowed from this Greek usage of *logos* and, hence, did not teach the full deity of Christ. There is no reason, however to suppose John is depicting something inferior to God in the *logos*. John declares clearly and emphatically that "the Logos was God" (John 1:1; see also 8:58; 10:30; 20:28). John's concept of the Logos is of a personal being (Christ), whereas the Greeks thought of it as an impersonal rational principle. The Logos is referred to by personal pronouns, such as *he* (1:1) and *his* (1:14). This was not true of the Greek *logos*. According to John, the Logos "became flesh" (1:14). To combine *logos* (reason) or *nous* (mind) and flesh was contrary to Greek thought. Flesh was either evil as in Gnosticism, or nearly evil, as in Platonic or Plotinian thought. Only in the Judeo-Christian tradition was matter of flesh thought respectable in any sense. Christians saw it as so good as to be worthy of clothing God in the incarnation. The Old Testament, not Greek ideas, is the root of New Testament ideas. John, as all New Testament writers (except may be Luke) were Jews. The root of their thought was in Judaism. They cite the Old Testament hundreds of times. Hence, it is contrary to Jewish background and thought of the New Testament writers to use Greek sources for their theological ideas. The New Testament is a theistic book, whereas Greek thought was polytheistic and pantheistic. . .

Reinterpreting John's gospel along emanational-pantheistic or process-panentheistic lines is unwarranted. Examined rigorously, John 1 offers an apologetic for classical theism and orthodox trinitarianism. Read in a shallow way and re-interpreted, it offers an entry point for Neoplatonists to begin to control the narrative and paint a different picture of God than John really does. This type of challenge was described by Norman Geisler as "a serious challenge to the traditional theism"⁶⁰ and "the greatest challenge to evangelical classical theology" because, in its denial of God as infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, "the whole of evangelical theology collapses."⁶¹ Orthodoxy involves siding with theism against pantheism/panentheism, with Aquinas against Plotinus, and with Athanasius against Arius. The need to keep a firm distinction between the Creator and his creation is part of the apologetic mission: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. . ." (2 Cor. 10:5 ESV. C.f., Rom. 1:18-25).

Postscript - April 26th, 2023

After presenting this paper, conversations with three others made me realize that I need to begin to address the following questions in the next iteration of this paper: Is Neoplatonism right in some ways and wrong in others? What if that movement was asking some of the right questions and was going in the right direction in some sense? To what degree does Thomistic metaphysics borrow from Neoplatonism? Is it possible to categorize Aquinas a Neoplatonist? Did Aquinas fix Neoplatonism? Where does the Thomistic metaphysical model disagree with Neoplatonism and how is it superior? Does Aquinas's *De Ente* reasoning about being and essence in his *De Ente Essentia* go deeper anything any of the Neoplatonists ever dreamt of? In this paper, I tended to present Thomistic, trinitarian, classic theism as the antithesis to emanational pantheism, process panentheism, and triadic Neoplatonism. I recommended siding with Aquinas over Plotinus. But I too detect some detectable echo of Neoplatonism in Thomism. In some future edition of this paper, I hope to explore that in more depth. While Neoplatonism generally leads people away from theism and produces some of the greatest critics of and competitors to orthodox Christianity, it may have also enriched some of the greatest orthodox Christian thinkers as well. Augustine, Athanasius, Aquinas and many other theists were heavily influenced by Neoplatonic thought. Focusing on Thomas Aquinas, who I recommend as the superior answer to Plotinus, at least one thomistic philosopher goes so far to categorize Aquinas as a Neoplatonist on metaphysical matters.⁶² Some presuppositional Christian apologists cite the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic influences on Aquinas as a disqualification for the type of classical apologetics that Aquinas was known for.⁶³ If we dare under some technicality to categorize Aquinas as a Neoplatonist, we should only do so thinking that Neoplatonism is a large tent and Aquinas was the one who finally answered the ultimate question it was asking but could never quite get the right answer to.⁶⁴ If there was synthesis, it was one with corrections rather than compromise. Generally, however, it seems better not to categorize Aquinas as a Neoplatonist and instead see Thomistic metaphysics as an apologetic against Neoplatonic metaphysics.

About the Author

Christopher Travis Haun was born in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1973 and still lives there with his wife Trish and four young-adult children. Christopher majored in biblical studies at Tyndale Theological Seminary and Biblical Institute and has been slowly working through a Master's Degree in systematic theology and Christian apologetics at Veritas International University. He is the director of Bastion Books, a small Christian book publishing company which he and Norm Geisler started together in 2013. He is also the editor of the Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics. He has contributed chapters to the *Comprehensive Guide to Science and Faith* (Harvest House, 2021), *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics* (Harvest House, 2019), *Vital Issues in the Inerrancy Debate* (W&S, 2016). He has also contributed articles to the Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics and blogposts to <http://defendinginerrancy.com>.

This paper may periodically be updated at <http://cthaun.tech/papers>

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Notes

¹ The International Society of Christian Apologetics (ISCA) is a champion of orthodox, trinitarian Christology. In its doctrinal statement, it says, regarding the trinity, “God is a triunity of three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in one infinite, eternal, and uncreated essence, having infallible foreknowledge of all future events. The Trinity is understood here as it was expressed in the historic orthodox Nicene, Chalcedonian, and Athanasian Creeds.” <https://isca-apologetics.org/doctrine>. It also reproduces those creeds at <https://isca-apologetics.org/creeds>.

² Norman L. Geisler, “Logos Theory,” *The Big Book of Christian Apologetics* (Baker, 1999, 2012), 314.

³ Today there may be twenty or more varieties of pantheism and perhaps as many varieties of panentheism. Historically, the lines between pantheism and panentheism were constantly blurred in previous centuries. Only in the nineteenth century did they start to become distinguished from one another. They all tend to be predicated in part upon Neoplatonism. In this paper, I am focusing mainly on “emanational pantheism” but am also giving some attention to process philosophy (a type of panentheism), many of the other forms of pantheisms, and some (but not all) other forms of pantheism. While the differences between pantheism and panentheism are sometimes important to acknowledge, the similarities tend to outweigh the differences and may be treated as one here. For elaboration, see Christopher Haun, “What is Panentheism, and What Is Its Essential Flaw?” in Joseph Holden, ed., *The Harvest Handbook of Apologetics* (Harvest House: Eugene, OR, 2018), 399-400. Alternatively, see Christopher Haun, “Where in the World is God? Philosophical and Biblical Evaluations of Panentheism” (2019) at <https://www.academia.edu>. Also helpful are James W. Cooper *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006) and Norman L. Geisler, *The History of Western Philosophy: Modern and Post-Modern*, vol. 2 (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2012), 404-435.

⁴ While the identification of Jesus as “the light” (φῶς) may have a rich and multi-faceted meaning, the primary association may be with the *shekinah* glory of God and, therefore, an argument for deity. Connecting “light” and visible “glory” (Jn. 1:14) and contrasting them both with darkness is natural. When Saul of Tarsus was surrounded by and blinded by the manifestation of God’s glory, he naturally asked, “Who are you, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). For further discussion of the *shekinah* glory, see Arnold Fructenbaum, “Appendix IV: The Shekinah Glory in History and Prophecy,” *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2004), 591-619. For an extensive and valuable treatment of Memra, Logos, and Shekinah together, see Arnold Fructenbaum, *Yeshua: The Life of the Messiah from a Messianic Jewish Perspective, Vol. 1* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2016), 201-279.

⁵ The *monogenes* problem is a multi-faceted one (including a textual critical problem) with several good answers by several scholars. Leon Morris offers an important facet:

John brings out the uniqueness of that relationship by referring to Christ as God’s “only” Son, for example when he says, “God so loved the world that he gave his only (*monogene*) Son” (3:16). The adjective *monogenes* has sometimes been understood in the sense “only-begotten”, but we should bear in mind the fact that it derives from *gen-*, the stem of *ginomai*, not *gennao* ... it is “only-being” rather than “only-begotten”. But it certainly points to uniqueness. It may be used of an only child... but perhaps we see more of its distinctiveness when we notice that it is used of Isaac as Abraham’s “unique” son (Heb. 11:17). Isaac was not Abraham’s only son... But Isaac was unique. . . That Jesus Christ is God’s *monogenes* then means that he is “Son of God” in a unique way. . . . [John is] saying that no one else stands in the same relationship to God the Father as does Jesus

Christ. Christ is the Son of God not only in the sense that he is the object of God's love, but also in the sense that his being is bound up with the being of the Father

Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Eerdmans, 1989), 92-93. Also see Duncan Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press) 1998, 71-74; Wayne Grudem, "The *Monogenes* Controversy: 'Only' or 'only begotten'?" (Appendix 6) in *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994, 2000) 1233-1234; Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press) 1989, 202-203.

⁶ The connection between "emanational pantheism" and Neoplatonism is normative. However, there may be some reason to think that Plotinus, one of the main founders of Neoplatonism, did not think of emanation in terms of time where one thing emanates into another and then later that other thing emanates into another. He may have thought about emanation more as a chain of being without respect to time. So Lloyd Gerson:

The causality of the One was frequently explained in antiquity as an answer to the question, 'How do we derive a many from the One?' Although the answer provided by Plotinus and by other Neoplatonists is sometimes expressed in the language of 'emanation', it is very easy to mistake this for what it is not. It is not intended to indicate either a temporal process or the unpacking or separating of a potentially complex unity. Rather, the derivation was understood in terms of atemporal ontological dependence.

Gerson, Lloyd, "Plotinus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus>

⁷ The translations such as KJV, NKJV, and NASB render it "only begotten Son." WEB says "the one and only Son." NASB "the only begotten God" which introduces additional problems to try to explain and fits well with the ancient arguments of the Arian heretics. Several of the more modern translations, such as the NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, and NET, translate it as "the one and only God."

⁸ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2003), 291.

⁹ Hebrews 1:5 and 5:1 also speaks of the father having begotten the son. Other landmines that may incline sincere readers towards sub-orthodox Christology may include Col. 1:15, where Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God but is also the "first-born" of creation, suggesting that Jesus was the first thing God created/emanated, Phil. 2:5-11 where the confusing wording of the English translations inclines many English readers to think that Jesus was a secondary divinity, and Peter's preaching in Acts 2-3 where it clear dozens of times that Jesus was a special man who should not be confused with God.

¹⁰ Francis Young, "A Cloud of Witnesses," in John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977) 15, 25. Also Francis Young, "Two Roots or a Tangled Mess?" *Ibid.*, 119. Young was an ordained Methodist minister and the head of a theology department in an esteemed British university.

¹¹ John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," in John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 183-184.

¹² John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age*, 2nd edition. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005) 187-188. WJK Press is a fount for panentheistic and non-literal interpretations of Christianity. It's not difficult to imagine that traditional Calvinists such as the Westminster Divines and John Knox would be far from thrilled to have their names associated with this publishing company.

¹³ See, for example, Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1979) 133-141. While the Greeks who preferred Gnosticism did have disputes with the Greeks who preferred Neoplatonism, from our vantage point today, their similarities tend to outweigh the differences. Apologists of Neo-Neo-Gnosticism today tend to compete against Christianity while apologists of Neo-

Neoplatonism tend to blend Christianity with their views. Both seem to arrive at virtually the same mystical endpoints.

¹⁴ Bruno Bauer, for example, assumed the evolution of Christian ideas from Hellenism and Stoicism. He assumed that John's *Logos* was taken from Philo and Neoplatonic sources. Moggach, Douglas, "Bruno Bauer", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Many other influential German scholars of the 19th and 20th century may have assumed and taught the same thing. Today this assumption may be the most generally prevalent but is far from universally accepted.

¹⁵ Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985) 505–514.

¹⁶ Norman Geisler warned, "In his early work, Heidegger affirmed that man speaks through language; in his later work, he affirmed that Being speaks through language. Since the presocratics let Being speak through language, etymology of Greek works is the key to the true meaning of words. This became the basis of Kittel's massive *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, which traces the origin and history of Greek words in a quest to find their real meaning." Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume One* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2002) 164.

¹⁷ Bertold Klappert, "Logos," in Collin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol.3* (Grand Rapids: Regency/Zondervan, 1986), 1081-1117

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 74.

¹⁹ Curd, Patricia, "Presocratic Philosophy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²⁰ Graham, Daniel W., "Heraclitus." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²¹ Curd, Patricia, "Presocratic Philosophy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 45.

²⁴ Geisler, *Collected Essays, Vol. 2*, 300.

²⁵ Palmer, John, "Parmenides." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²⁶ Daniel Graham offers:

Heraclitus may have provoked Parmenides to develop a contrasting philosophy, although their views have much more in common than is generally recognized. ... From an early time Heraclitus was seen as the representative of universal flux in contrast to Parmenides, the representative of universal stasis. Cratylus brought Heraclitus' philosophy to Athens, where Plato heard it. Plato seems to have used Heraclitus' theory (as interpreted by Cratylus) as a model for the sensible world, as he used Parmenides' theory for the intelligible world. As mentioned, both Plato and Aristotle viewed Heraclitus as violating the law of non-contradiction, and propounding an incoherent theory of knowledge based on a radical flux. Yet Aristotle also treated him as a coherent material monist who posited fire as an ultimate principle. The Stoics used Heraclitus' physics as the inspiration for their own, understanding him to advocate a periodic destruction of the world by fire, followed by a regeneration of the world..."

Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²⁷ Curd, Patricia, "Presocratic Philosophy." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²⁸ Berryman, Sylvia, "Leucippus." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

²⁹ Zeyl, Donald and Barbara Sattler, "Plato's *Timaeus*." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³⁰ Partenie, Catalin, "Plato's Myths." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³¹ David, Marian, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³² Chappell, Sophie-Grace, "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³³ Tarnas, 45.

³⁴ Falcon, Andrea, "Aristotle on Causality." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³⁵ Kraut, Richard, "Aristotle's Ethics" *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

³⁶ Gómez-Torrente, Mario, "Logical Truth" *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

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- ³⁷ Reichenbach, Bruce, “Cosmological Argument”. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ³⁸ Outlaw Jr., Lucius T., “Africana Philosophy” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ³⁹ Cohen, S. Marc and C. D. C. Reeve, “Aristotle’s Metaphysics.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Also see Mendell, Henry, “Aristotle and Mathematics.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ⁴⁰ Smith, Robin, “Aristotle’s Logic” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ⁴¹ Bobzien, Susanne, “Ancient Logic” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ⁴² Athanasius, *Against the Heathen*. Quoted in Melissa Cain Travis, *Science and the Mind of the Maker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2018).
- ⁴³ Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation: The Beginning of our Religious Traditions* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.) 2006
- ⁴⁴ Baltzly, Dirk, “Stoicism.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ⁴⁵ Helmig, Christoph, “Simplicius,” and “The Commentaries of Simplicius,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- ⁴⁶ Many liberal scholars think that the book of Genesis was written during the Babylonian Captivity of Judah around 600 BC. If that is true, it was still written several decades before Heraclitus began to write about his *Logos*. Assuming that book of Genesis was written soon after the Exodus, however, would put the date, depending on one’s theory about the timing of the Exodus, between 1,600 BC and 1,250 B.C. This was long before the pre-Socratic philosophers of Greece but would be contemporaneous to the Mycenaean Greek civilization.
- ⁴⁷ J. B. Taylor, “Word.” In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 1247.
- ⁴⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981) 29-30
- ⁴⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 120.
- ⁵⁰ Paul Joyce, “Proverbs 8 in Interpretation (I): Historical Criticism and Beyond,” in David Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 2003) 91, 92
- ⁵¹ *Ibid*, 99.
- ⁵² Frances Young, “Proverbs 8 in Interpretation (2): Wisdom Personified; Fourth-century Christians Readings: Assumptions and Debates” *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom: Scripture and Theology, Ibid*, 107.
- ⁵³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 120-121.
- ⁵⁴ Lévy, Carlos, “Philo of Alexandria,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The idea that the firstborn son is the deputy of the father may be relevant to the *monogenes* controversy.
- ⁵⁵ Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13. Sandmel attempted to warn biblical scholars in the 1960s of the excesses in the practice of drawing parallels between documents and genres. He wrote: “The key word in my essay is extravagance. I am not denying that literary parallels and literary influence, in the form of source and derivation, exist. I am not seeking to discourage the study of these parallels, but, especially in the case of the Qumran documents, to encourage them. However, I am speaking words of caution about exaggerations about the parallels and about source and derivation. I shall not exhaust what might be said in all the areas which members of this Society might be interested in, but confine myself to the areas of rabbinic literature and the gospels, Philo and Paul, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and the NT.”
- ⁵⁶ Lévy, Carlos, “Philo of Alexandria.”
- ⁵⁷ Karen Armstrong *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. (New York, NY: Ballantyne Books, 1993), 89. It is possible that those inclined towards Gnosticism, such as Karen Armstrong and Elaine Pagels, may tend to set John up as a competitor and are more likely to emphasize discontinuity between John and the Greek philosophers. By contrast, those inclined towards

reinterpreting Christianity into a Neoplatonic mold or synthesis may be more likely to emphasize continuity between John and the Greek philosophers.

⁵⁸ In my copy of Athanasius's *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1993), there are sixty mentions of the *Logos* in the first twenty-five pages of the book! This Alexandrian Bishop was intoxicated with John's *Logos*. It permeated his God-world view, his contextualized repackaging of the gospel for the Greek world, and his incarnational view of atonement. He writes against the Epicureans, Stoics, Gnostics, Arians, and even the Greek philosophers as a whole. And yet his view of the *Logos* seems to echo loudly with a reformed and enlarged version of the Heraclitian-Stoic *logos* (but seemingly without their pantheistic/monistic metaphysics). And his view of salvation seems to be flavored not just by the Apostles John and Paul but by Neoplatonism as well. He helped shape what we consider to be orthodoxy today.

⁵⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 116-117, 123.

⁶⁰ Norman Geisler. "Process Theology and Inerrancy," in Paul Compton, Ed., *The Collected Essays of Norman L. Geisler*, Volume 2 (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2019) Chapter 40.

⁶¹ Norman Geisler. "Process Theology vs. Classical Theology," in Paul Compton, ed., *The Collected Essays of Norman L. Geisler*, Volume 3 (Matthews, NC: Bastion Books, 2019) 430.

⁶² Gaven Kerr, "God, Creation, and the Act of Existence | Dr Gaven Kerr | Thomistic Institute Oxford," February 6, 2023. Aquinas Institute YouTube Channel. <https://youtu.be/uoo7iCsK7Tw>. After explaining how Aquinas moved beyond Aristotle and Plato, and identified God with existence, at 19:11, Professor Kerr explains, "This is why I think Aquinas was a Neoplatonist." Earlier he explained that Aquinas was an original who is reducible to any of the traditions he interacted with. He isn't reducible to Neoplatonist in every way; but in one important way, he is.

Brandon Zimmerman disagrees with Etienne Gilson who posits Plotinian metaphysics as the "reverse" of Aquinian metaphysics in "Plotinus as a Precursor to Aquinas." https://www.academia.edu/4814757/Plotinus_as_a_Precursor_to_Aquinas

⁶³ John M. Frame, "Greeks bearing Gifts," in *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought*, ed. W. Andrew Hoffecker (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 33. Quoted in Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 238-239. Frame finds it "unfortunate" that Christian theologians "during the medieval period and beyond" "relied extensively on Neoplatonism and (beginning with Aquinas) Aristotelianism." While he leaves some room for very cautious critical interaction with pagan Greek philosophies, Poythress ultimately judges that the critical reaction of Augustine with Platonism/Neoplatonism and Aquinas with Aristotelianism was "not critical enough" and may lead to being "corrupted at the same time that he is learning." Later, in his 2017 review of James Dolezal's Thomistic book, Frame again made it clear that he has little patience for Scholasticism and Thomism. (John Frame, "Scholasticism for Evangelicals: Thoughts on All That Is In God by James Dolezal," November 25, 2017. <https://frame-poythress.org/scholasticism-for-evangelicals-thoughts-on-all-that-is-in-god-by-james-dolezal>) But then he proceeded to make arguments against the doctrines of divine immutability and divine simplicity. While this direction is arguably away from Scholasticism, Thomism, and the western metaphysical tradition that began with Parmenides, these steps may actually be in the direction of Heraclitus, Plato, Plotinus, and the Neoplatonists.

⁶⁴ Steven L. Kimbler agrees in his 2010 paper "*Plotinus and Aquinas on God*." http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ohiou1275619376