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LAW OF NATURE AND LIGHT OF THE LAW
IN THE BOOK OF WISDOM (WIS 18:4c)

Luca Mazzinghi
(*****)

1. THE BOOK OF WISDOM AND GREEK PHILOSOPHY:
WHAT KIND OF CONNECTION?

The presence of many close connections between the Book of Wisdom and the philosophy of its time, particularly Stoicism and Middle Platonism, is a phenomenon already well-established by scholars. A good point of departure for our study is undoubtedly the *status quaestionis* offered by C. Larcher in his well known *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse*. After a careful examination, Larcher remains convinced that our sage is basically an eclectic who has read a little of everything without, however, having given his allegiance to any specific contemporary current of philosophy.¹ In this connection, we do well to recall the conclusion of the in-depth analysis of J. Reese for whom “the author of Wisdom’s use of Hellenism is primarily strategic, serving merely to effect a bridge between received biblical faith and the contemporary situation of the readers.”²

D. Winston has recently returned to this question in a study presented to the conference at Palermo in 2002 where he takes up again and summarises some of his previous work. According to Winston, “both Philo and the author of Wisdom have refracted their ‘ancestral

¹ Cf. C. Larcher, *Études sur le livre de la Sagesse* (Paris: Gabalda 1969) 201-236 and M. Gilbert, “Sagesse de Salomon (ou le livre de la Sagesse),” in *DBS* 9: 100. A similar position is to be found in F. Focke, *Die Entstehung der Weisheit Salomos. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdischen Hellenismus* (FRLANT 22, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1913) 90-92. Cf. on the other hand, the opinion of J.J. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom in the Hellenistic Age* (Louisville: WJKPress 1997) 202: “The author of Wis. Sol. was not a philosopher (...). Nevertheless there is enough correspondence with Philo to debunk the idea that he was an idiosyncratic amateur making his own superficial use of philosophical terms.”

² J.M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and its Consequences* (AnBib 43, Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute 1970) 156.

philosophy' (*Vit. Mos.* 2:216) through the lens of Middle Platonism, though this fact is not meant to imply that they were Middle Platonist *tout court*.³ However, starting from an analysis of *Wis* 7:22-26, H. Hübner has reached the conclusion that our sage offers his own personal combination of Stoic and Platonic ideas, neutralising, for example, the Stoic materialism with regard to the divine *pneuma* by means of the introduction of the Platonic idea of transcendence.⁴

Although Winston and Larcher take their stand on positions that are clearly different, both authors accept that our sage would have had a good knowledge of Stoic and Middle-Platonic philosophy such as would have been available to a Jew of Alexandria towards the end of the first century BC. Philo is an excellent example and, at the same time, the best proof of such knowledge within Alexandrian Judaism at a period only a little after ours.

The true problem, already evident from this short introduction, is the need to clarify just what type of relationship exists between our sage and the philosophy of his time. In sum, is it a question of an attempt, before anything else, to convince himself that the tradition of the fathers—that is, the Jewish faith—can still retain all its validity in the presence of the very different philosophical context in which our sage found himself living? Or, is the author of *Wisdom*, conscious of the total value and truth of his own tradition, trying to express it in categories which are accessible also to Alexandrian Jews who have been steeped in Hellenistic culture, creating thus what M. Gilbert has defined as a genuine work of “inculturation?”⁵ Or do we simply find ourselves faced with a no holds barred apology for Judaism, re-presented under the veneer of Greek categories to a cultural environment which accused it of being antisocial and xenophobic, a people ἀπάνθρωπος and μισόξενος as Hecataeus of Abdera wrote?⁶

In the present work we shall begin with the text of *Wis* 18:4 in which the Law of Moses is presented under the metaphor of light. We shall ask, in particular, if there could be a relationship between the presentation of

³ Cf. D. Winston, “A Century of Research on the Book of Wisdom,” in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research. Studies on Tradition, Redaction, Theology* (eds. G. Bellia and A. Passaro, DCLY, Berlin: de Gruyter 2005) 9.

⁴ Cf. H. Hübner, “La Sapienza di Salomone e la filosofia antica,” in *La Sapienza di Salomone* (ed. idem, Brescia: publisher 1993) 70-97.

⁵ How to speak to the Jews, steeped in Hellenistic culture “using their methods and terminology without in any way denying the religious content received from the fathers?” M. Gilbert, “Le livre de la Sagesse et l’inculturation,” in *L’inculturation et la sagesse des nations* (Roma: publisher 1984) 11. Cf. also L. Mazzinghi, “Il libro della Sapienza: elementi culturali,” in *Il confronto tra le diverse culture nella Bibbia da Esdra a Paolo* (ed. R. Fabris, *Ricerche Storico Bibliche* 10 [1998]) 179-98.

⁶ Cf. Diodorus Siculus 40.3.4. In this regard, M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols., Jerusalem: publisher 1974-1984) cf. 1: 26-35.

the Law made by our sage in this passage and the concept of the law of nature which was already well known in the cultural atmosphere of the 1st century BC by means of Stoicism.⁷ A more general glance at the theme of the Law in the Book of Wisdom could help us to set out this problem.

2. THE THEME OF THE LAW IN THE BOOK OF WISDOM.

In fact, in the Book of Wisdom, the theme of the Law does not have a central role. The passages in which the term νόμος appears are not numerous: Wis 2:11, 12; 6:4, 18; 14:16; 16:6; 18:4, 9; only in four of these (Wis 2:12; 16:6 and 18:4, 9) are the references certainly to the Mosaic Law.⁸ In these cases, to which ought to be added the references to the Law contained in Wis 9:17 and 16:11, the Law is considered, in a very broad way, in its aspect as at once normative and revelatory. In Wis 18:9, for example, the νόμος is understood more in the sense of “covenant” than of “law.”⁹ In this context, it is worth recalling that the Book of Wisdom avoids any insistence on typically Jewish regulations such as the practice of circumcision, fasting or the Sabbath.

In at least one case (Wis 6:4), the commentators readily emphasise how, in directing himself to the “kings” and accusing them of having not observed the law or conducted themselves “according to the will of God,” our sage has in mind the Stoic concept of “natural law” rather than the Mosaic Law.¹⁰ On this question, as it concerns Wis 6:4, I refer to the already mentioned study of M. Gilbert.¹¹ Refining and improving on

⁷ We shall assume as a date for the Book of Wisdom the time of the principate of Octavian Augustus, as recently confirmed by M. Gilbert, in “La vostra sovranità viene dal Signore” (Sap 6,3): ambivalenza del potere politico nella tradizione sapienziale,” in *Il potere politico: bisogno e rifiuto dell'autorità* (eds. E. Manicardi and L. Mazzinghi, *Ricerche Storico Bibliche* 18 [2006/1-2]) 117-32.

⁸ On the theme of the Law in the Book of Wisdom, I refer to an earlier work of mine: L. Mazzinghi, “La memoria della legge nel libro della Sapienza,” in *Torah e Kerygma: dinamiche della tradizione nella Bibbia* (eds. I. Cardellini and E. Manicardi, *Ricerche Storico Bibliche* 1-2 [2004]) 153-76.

⁹ Cf. M. Priotto, *La Prima Pasqua in Sap 18,5-25. Rilettura e attualizzazione* (Bologna: publisher 1987) 76 and 77.

¹⁰ Cf. Larcher, *Études*, 203, though without further details; this identification is already present, however, in C.L.W. Grimm, *Das Buch der Weisheit* (Leipzig: publisher 1860) 124: “νόμος not the Mosaic Law but the natural foundations of justice...” Cf. also D. Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43, New York: Doubleday 1979) 153, who, perhaps a little generally, highlights how the Mosaic Law was regarded in Hellenistic Judaism as an expression of the natural law (*vide infra*). Cf. by the same author, “Hellenistic Jewish Philosophy,” in *The Ancestral Philosophy. Hellenistic Philosophy in Second Temple Judaism* (ed. G.E. Sterling, BJS 331, Providence: publisher 2001) 18-21.

¹¹ Cf. Gilbert, “La vostra sovranità viene dal Signore,” 125-27; A. Squilloni, “Il significato etico-politico dell’immagine re-legge animata. Il νόμος ἔμψυχος nei trattati pitagorici Περὶ βασιλείας,” in *Civiltà Classica e cristiana* 11/1 (1990) 75-94.

Larcher's intuitions, he shows how in Wis 6:4 our sage, rather than founding himself on straightforwardly Stoic concepts, does so on the basis of the Neopythagorean treatises on sovereignty which, in their turn, were influenced by Stoicism. In the "law" of which Wis 6:4 speaks, therefore, we ought to see the expression of positive laws understood as intermediary between the natural law and the king. According to Gilbert, it is rather difficult to suppose that in 6:4 νόμος refers to the Mosaic Law in view of the fact that our sage's invective is clearly aimed at pagan rulers.

It is necessary, however, to make it clear that in fact the addressees of the Book of Wisdom are *Jews*; passages like Wis 1:1 and 6:1 are not aimed directly at the Roman rulers nor does our sage claim to be read or heard by them. The Book of Wisdom is wholly addressed to those within the Jewish community of Alexandria. Therefore, in my opinion, we cannot entirely exclude from Wis 6:4 a further allusion to the Mosaic Law. Gilbert's argument is thus complemented. In accusing the pagan kings of not having observed the law, our sage could already have in mind, right from the beginning of his work, some type of relationship between the positive law, the law of nature and the Mosaic Law, something which Philo would confirm later in a more systematic way (*vide infra*).

These reflections lead us on now to the text of Wis 18:4 where the 'law' that is mentioned is undoubtedly the Mosaic Law.

3. THE INCORRUPTIBLE LIGHT OF THE LAW (Wis 18:4).

Wis 18:4 closes the fifth diptych, that of the darkness (Wis 17:1-18:4), and, in particular, the last strophe of the same diptych (18:1-4) in which, from the description of the plague of darkness which occupies the whole of Chapter 17, the account passes to the description of the light which illumines the whole world (17:20) and Israel (18:1), light which is at the same time the symbol both of wisdom and of the Mosaic Law. This is the passage which concerns us:

For they deserved to be deprived of light
and imprisoned in darkness
those who had kept thy sons imprisoned,
through whom the imperishable light of the law
was to be given to the world.

I will not go back here to repeat the exegesis of a passage to which I have already elsewhere devoted a fairly extensive commentary.¹² I will simply

¹² Cf. L. Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce. Egesi di Sap 17,1-18,4* (AnBib 134, Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1995) 221-24 and 240-63.

confine myself to some aspects which I hold important with regard to the theme of the law.

First of all, the law to which Wis 18:4 refers is certainly the Mosaic Law, the Law, that is, which the Lord offers to his "sons," evidently the Israelites. The metaphor of light looks back to the theme of guidance: the law is light precisely in that it enlightens man, illuminating and guiding his path; in that sense, the law is in a close relationship with wisdom which is also described in our book as a guide (cf 9:11; 10:17, and, in the same key also, the pillar of cloud of Wis 18:3). Let us remember here, in passing, how in our book "wisdom" is actually presented as superior to the law; without wisdom, in fact, it is impossible to know the will of God expressed in the law which is, therefore, almost the reification of wisdom itself (cf 9:17).¹³

The Law is light not only for "your sons," that is to say, for Israel, but actually for the whole world (τῶ ἀνθρώπῳ); that takes place, however, *by means of* the mediation of Israel (δι' Ἰσραὴλ); the law is, therefore, a reality which, although revealed only to Israel, shines by means of Israel over the whole of humanity (cf. already Wis 17:20). Thus, in Wis 18:4, the particularistic aspect of the faith of Israel is joined with a clear approach of universalistic character, something that is certainly not foreign to at least a part of the Greek-speaking Judaism of the time (cf., e.g., *TLevi* 14:3-4; *LAB* 11:1). Nevertheless, it is precisely the Exodus context of the entire fifth diptych which establishes in 18:4 Israel's responsibility with regard to the whole world. This clear juxtaposition of universalism and particularism in the light of the event of the Exodus appears, perhaps, as the most significant characteristic of the metaphor of the Law as light offered to us by Wisdom.

Then it is necessary to remember that the metaphor of light is also bound up with the theme of incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία); not only is the law an eternal reality, it is also the source of eternal life for the man who observes it (cf. also in this respect Wis 6:18), a life without end which is described precisely with the use of the adjective ἀφθαρτος, a term already employed at 2:23 and which, by reference to the vocabulary of "incorruptibility" deriving from an Epicurean matrix, very probably refers to the theme of bodily resurrection. In other words, exactly as in 6:18, the law is considered as a source of eternal life.

Finally, let us observe that the metaphor of the law as light was certainly not unknown in the Biblical tradition (cf. Prov 6:23LXX; Ps 119 (118):105; Is 2:30). However, our sage goes beyond these texts and also well beyond the traditions of the law as light which are known from Palestinian Judaism.¹⁴ We must ask ourselves, therefore, if it is possible,

¹³ On this, cf. M. Gilbert, „Volonté de Dieu et don de la Sagesse (Sg 9,17s),“ *NRTh* 93 (1971) 145-66.

¹⁴ Cf. Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 246-50.

as in Wis 6:4, to distinguish in the presentation of the law which our sage offers us in 18:4 the presence of influences from the Greek world and in particular the influence of philosophical concepts which had spread through the culture of Alexandria. It is to this world, therefore, that we shall now turn our attention, focusing in particular on the notion of the “law of nature.”

4. THE LAW OF NATURE IN STOICISM

In the Greek world, the idea of an unwritten law, divine and eternal, is very ancient (cf. *Antigone*, 450f); but it is only with Stoicism that there spreads a new concept, that of the law of nature (νόμος φύσεως).¹⁵ In the earliest Stoicism, the Greek idea of νόμος changes in a very radical way; in fact, Stoicism places νόμος and κόσμος in a close relationship where the cosmos is obviously understood in a pantheistic sense.

For the Stoics, there exists a divine law, supreme and universal, which surpasses the written laws and which the sage follows without these. Already in early Stoicism, in fact, the individual laws have to be measured against a law that stands above the laws themselves, something which Chrysippus, adopting a celebrated text of Pindar, defines as νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς,¹⁶ that is to say, the law understood

¹⁵ Until Cicero, the expression “law of nature” is in fact very rare; cf. H. Koester, “νόμος φύσεως. The Concept of Natural Law in Greek Thought,” in *Religions in Antiquity* (ed. J. Neusner, Leiden: Brill 1968) 527-41. According to Koester, Philo would actually be the true coiner of the concept of the “law of nature.” On Koester, cf. however, the recent criticisms of J.W. Martens, *One God, one Law. Philo of Alexandria on the Mosaic and Graeco-Roman Law* (Leiden: Brill 2003) xviii, n. 3, and well before that the different position of R.A. Horsley, “The Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero,” *HTR* (1978) 35-59. Cf. also the history of this concept, F. Flücker, *Geschichte des Naturrechtes I* (Zürich: publisher 1954) 1-282; G. Watson, “The Natural Law and Stoicism,” in *Problems in Stoicism* (ed. A.A. Long, London: publisher 1971) 216-38; P. Mitsis, “Natural Law and Natural Right in post-Aristotelian Philosophy. The Stoics and their Critic,” in *ANRW II.36.7*: 4814-24; G. Striker, “Origins of the Concept of Natural Law,” in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy 2* (ed. J.J. Cleary, New York: publisher 1986) 79-94.

¹⁶ SVF III, 77; frg. 314 (cf. R. Radice, *Stoici antichi. Tutti i frammenti raccolti da H. Von Arnim* [Milano: Rusconi 1999] 1122; henceforward cited as Radice); cf. Pindar, frg. 169: νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς θνατῶν τε καὶ ἀθανάτων. The text is much discussed: cf. M. Gigante, *Nomos Basileus* (Napoli: publisher 1956) 72-102. For the general idea of law in Stoicism, cf. M. Pohlenz, *La Stoa. Storia di un movimento spirituale* (Firenze: publisher 1967) 1: 266-84 (= *Die Stoa. Geschichte einer geistigen Bewegung* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1959]); H. Kleinknecht, “νόμος,” in *TWNT* 4: 1016-28; L. Monsengwo Pasinya, *La notion de nomos dans le Pentateuque grec* (AnBib 52, Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico 1973) 42-46; G. Reale, *Storia della filosofia antica* (Milano: publisher 1989) 3: 419-23; M. Schofeld, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge: University Press 1991) 109-11.

as expression of the λόγος.¹⁷ Stoicism tends to posit a certain identity among the λόγος, law and divinity, with a strongly pantheistic emphasis.

Often this universal law is defined by the Stoics as νόμος κοινός and also as ὀρθός λόγος. The law is thus identified with universal reason and therefore with God. Already Zeno speaks precisely of ὁ νόμος ὁ κοινὸς ὅσπερ ἔστιν ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος (...) ὁ αὐτὸς ὧν τῷ Διτί;¹⁸ one is, therefore, the reason of everything, one the law to which everything is subject. The law comes near to being right reason, and, understood as divine and universal law, is certainly one of the more typical concepts of Stoicism.¹⁹ In this connection, Chrysippus uses the expression νόμοι τοῦ τῆς φύσεως ὀρθοῦ λόγου.²⁰ Stoicism thus overcomes the dichotomy between φύσις and νόμος present in classical Greek thought, binding the law at the same time to the cosmos and to right reason in a way which, even in the time of the Stoics, could seem really paradoxical, a paradox which not even the Stoics resolve in any clear and definite way.

A particular form of this universal law is the νόμος ἔμψυχος, the living law. This concerns a concept which from early Stoicism passes into the Neopythagorean treatises on sovereignty perhaps by means of the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (4th century BC).²¹ In these treatises, the king is described as the true living law; like the divinity, he governs the world on the basis of a law that is not written but which conforms to nature. Thus, if the king shares in the divine λόγος and governs his subjects with justice, he is the νόμος ἔμψυχος and is, therefore, superior to the written laws. We have already noticed the importance of this question *à propos* of Wis 6:4.

The universal law, then, is valid for all men and is a source of liberation for the man who grasps it and follows it wholeheartedly: the

¹⁷ Οὐκ ἄλλο τι νόμος ἔστιν ἢ ὁ τοῦ σοφοῦ λόγος; Plutarch, *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 11 (=SVF III, frg. 175,13; Radice, 1052). "Lex est ratio summa, insita in natura, quae iubet ea quae facienda sunt prohibetque contraria," Cicero, *Leg.* 1, 6,18 (= SVF III, frg. 315,3s; Radice, 1124). "Legem neque hominum ingeniis excogitatam nec scitum aliquod esse populorum, sed aeternum quiddam, quod universum mundum regeret, imperandi prohibendique sapientia (...) Quam ob rem lex vera (...) ratio est recta summi Iovis," *ibid.* 2,8 (= SVF III, frg. 316,12ss; Radice, 1124).

¹⁸ Cf. SVF I,42.43; frg. 162 (Radice, 80 and 82).

¹⁹ Cf., again SVF III,158; frg. 614 (Radice, 1284); III,81; frg. 332 (Radice, 1130); II,295; frg. 1003 (Radice, 866).

²⁰ SVF III, 128 frg. 323 (Radice, 1128).

²¹ For a more extensive consideration and a richer bibliography on these treatises and for the problem of their dating, cf. C. Termini, "Dal Sinai alla creazione: il rapporto tra legge naturale e legge rivelata in Filone di Alessandria," in *La rivelazione in Filone di Alessandria: natura, legge, storia* (eds. A.M. Mazzanti and F. Calabi, Villa Verrucchio: Pazzini 2004) esp. 167, n 29; Termini suggests a date for these treatises of around the 3-2 centuries BC. Cf. also A. Squilloni, "Il significato etico-politico."

famous Stoic aphorism, ἄνθρωπος ἐκ φύσεως δούλος οὐδείς, “no man is a slave by nature,”²² involves exactly this question: the sage who follows the law is truly free, the foolish man a slave.²³ The universal λόγος re-establishes fraternity among men; from thence derives the Stoic condemnation of the alleged “egoism” of the Epicureans.²⁴ The universal law is, therefore, the authentic form of all true wisdom. The Stoics, in fact, “arbitrantur prudentiam esse legem.”²⁵ Right reason, which is identified with wisdom, puts the gods into a relationship with men, but right reason is none other than the law: “quae cum sit lex, lege quoque consociati homines cum diis putandi sumus;” for this reason, the cosmos is indeed a single city: “ut iam universus hic mundus una civitas communis deorum atque hominum existimanda [sit].”²⁶ We shall discover analogous ideas in Philo.

At the end of the second century BC, therefore, there was abroad in the Hellenistic world a philosophical concept which linked the belief in the existence of a universal law with the idea of the divine λόγος, right reason and the cosmos, thus creating the idea of the existence of a law of nature, an idea to which Philo would contribute an unexpected development. Conceived within the system of Stoic thought, this concept was taken up also in Neopythagoreanism (cf *supra*) and probably in the thought of Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 130-68 BC), whose theory on the law of nature cannot have been very different from that of the Stoics. The *de Legibus* of Cicero probably bears the mark of Antiochus.²⁷ Of the Middle Platonism attested at Alexandria with Eudorus (c. 64-19 BC) we do not know enough to be able to assert whether within it too the Stoic idea of the law of nature was developed or not.²⁸ In any case, that happens with Philo to whom we now turn.

²² SVF III, 86; frg. 352 (Radice, 1140).

²³ Cf. SVF III, 85-89; frg. 349-366 *passim* (Radice, pp. 1138-1146).

²⁴ I note that in Wis 11:15-12:27 the digression on divine philanthropy recalls another well-known Stoic idea; Israel performs the duty entrusted to it by God, that of being φιλόανθρωπος (cf. Wis 12,19); φιλανθρωπία is a concept well known to Stoicism, and not only to it. Cf. C. Spicq, *Note di lessicografia neotestamentaria* (Brescia: Paideia 1994) 2: 722-28 (= *Notes de lexicographie Neotestamentaire* [Fribourg: Presses universitaires 1978-1982]); G. Scarpit, *Libro della Sapienza* (Brescia: Paideia 1989) 1: 82-87; M. Gilbert, *La Sapienza di Salomone* (ADP 2, Roma: publisher 1995) 18-21.

²⁵ Thus Cicero; cf. SVF III, 78; frg. 315 (Radice, 1124).

²⁶ Cicero, *De leg.* I, 7,23; SVF III, frg. 339 (Radice 1133).

²⁷ “Antiochus’ universe is essentially a Stoic one;” cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: a Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London: Duckworth 1977) 52-106 (esp. 79).

²⁸ On Eudorus, see *ibid.*, 115-35. On the possible links of Antiochus and Eudorus with the Book of Wisdom, cf. Larcher, *Etudes*, 224-26, and, more recently, M. Neher, *Wesen und Wirken der Weisheit in der Sapientia Salomonis* (BZAW 333, Berlin: de Gruyter 2004) 203-26 (with extensive bibliography). According to Neher, the Book of Wisdom is absolutely original with respect to these two philosophers.

5. THE PHILONIC RESTATEMENT OF THE 'LAW OF NATURE'.

The idea of a universal law, of divine origin, written in nature and identified with right reason, is accepted and deepened by two non-Greek philosophers each of whom restates it in his own way in two very different cultural contexts between the first century BC and the first century AD: Cicero in Rome and Philo in Alexandria. The closeness of the subjects dealt with by the two authors makes us immediately think of common philosophical sources which could be located in the thought of Posidonius of Apamea, or else in the middle position taken by Antiochus of Ascalon (*vide supra*) between Stoicism and Middle Platonism, even if the question is still far from being resolved.²⁹ It is in Philo and in Cicero that the expression "law of nature" begins to be employed in a systematic manner. We can concern ourselves here with only the main points of the concept of the law of nature in Philo; serious studies have been devoted to it.³⁰ I shall confine myself to recalling only some of the basic notions typical of the Alexandrine philosopher which will undoubtedly be useful to us for understanding better the way in which the Book of Wisdom speaks of the Law.

As a general observation, we should note how Philo does not change the Stoic vocabulary; rather, he inserts it within his Jewish faith in the one God, the Creator, which leads him to see the Mosaic Law as the direct revelation of God. Here lies the essential difference between Philo and Stoicism; God has in fact created the φύσις.³¹ Adopting an idea of Chrysippus, Philo affirms that the world is one big city in which rules the λόγος which is none other than the law of God and, therefore, also

²⁹ Cf Horsley, "Law of Nature in Philo and Cicero." According to Horsley, it is the Stoics who are responsible for the identification of the law of nature with universal reason. Nevertheless, the originality of Cicero and Philo of Alexandria remains well established. Middle Platonism is opposed to the pantheistic and materialist monism of early Stoicism, valuing it, however, for its ethical appeal; the Stoic concept of the λόγος φύσεως becomes the Philonian one of the νόμος φύσεως or the Ciceronian one of the *lex naturae*.

³⁰ Cf the items cited in n. 15 to which may be added: C. Termini, "Dal Sinai alla creazione," with further and extensive bibliography; very useful is the fine work of D. Farias, *Studi sul pensiero sociale di Filone di Alessandria* (Milano: Giuffrè 1993) 101-42; cf. again, H. Najman, "The Law of Nature and the Authority of Mosaic Law," *SPhA* 11 (1999) 55-73; eadem, "A written copy of the Law of Nature: an unthinkable paradox?," *SPhA* 15 (2003) 54-63.

³¹ "Philo finds that the Stoic ideas properly explain God's work in nature, without contradicting Jewish creation accounts, and he believes that the Jewish idea of a transcendent God supplies missing information for the Stoic view of nature," Martens, *One God, one Law*, 86. On the richness of the concept of "nature" in Philo cf. also Farias, *Il pensiero sociale*, 105-07; in some passages of Philo, there is a notable oscillation between nature and God, so much so that one can speak of the theological value of nature; cf. also Termini, "Il rapporto tra legge naturale e legge rivelata," 174 and n. 56.

the law of nature. We are dealing with a concept well expressed in *Ios.* 29, but taken up again many times by the Alexandrine and already noticed by us with regard to Cicero, thus confirming a common Stoic root for the concept:

The constitution of various peoples is an extension of nature which is clothed by a universal authority. This world is, in fact, a great city ruled by one sole constitution and by one sole law (ἡ μὲν γὰρ μεγαλόπολις ὅδε ὁ κόσμος ἔστι καὶ μία χρῆται πολιτεία καὶ νόμῳ ἐνί). It is the reason of nature (λόγος δὲ ἔστι φύσεως) which commands the actions which must be performed and which must be avoided (...) The laws of the individual states are just extensions of natural right reason (τοῦ τῆς φύσεως ὀρθοῦ λόγου).³²

Here indeed Philo follows Stoic ideas very closely: the κόσμος is nothing else than the old Greek πόλις enlarged into the entire world, a world brought back into unity thanks to a unique creating principle, God-λόγος, and a single regulating principle, the Law. Nature itself (φύσις) impels man to cosmopolitanism: in this case too, Philo reflects thinking present in Cicero:

sic apparet a natura ipsa ut eos, quos genuerimus, amemus impelli. Ex hoc nascitur, ut etiam communis hominum inter homines naturalis sit commendatio, ut oporteat hominem ab homine ob id ipsum, quod homo sit, non alienum videri. Facile intelligitur nos ad coniunctionem congregationemque hominum et ad naturalem communitatem esse natos.³³

A passage like that of *Prob.* 46³⁴ shows very well the strong Stoic roots of Philo. He is free who lives in conformity with the law; but the true law is none other than right reason: νόμος δὲ ἀψευδῆς ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος. It is very interesting to observe the fact that such a law is, for Philo, "incorruptible," written by immortal nature with immortal script in the immortal mind of man: ὑπ' ἀθανάτου φύσεως ἀφθαρτος ἐν ἀθανάτῳ διανοίᾳ θυποθεῖς. We find here an interesting connection between law and immortality, and even between law and ἀφθαρσία which reminds

³² Cf. SVF III, 79-80; frg. 323 (Radice, 1126-29) and also *Spec.* 2.37; *Ebr.* 80 where mention is made of the ὀρθὸς λόγος; cf. also *Prob.* 46; Plutarch, *De Alex. M. fortuna aut virtute* I,6; cf. Mosengwo Pasinya, *Nomos*, 43.

³³ Cicero, *De finibus*, 3,19, 62s (= SVF III, 83; frg. 340; Radice, 1135). Cf. also *De legibus* I,23, and *De natura deorum*, II, 154. We should remember how in the Middle Stoa, but above all in Cicero, the Stoic notion of universal Law is placed at the service of a precise political agenda (cf. F. Adorno, *Storia della filosofia. II. La filosofia antica* [Milano: publisher 1965] 48-49). This is true also of Philo who tries to insert the imperial rule into the frame of the ideal state which belongs to the Stoic matrix; with Caligula, Philo's dream would evaporate very quickly. Cf. SVF III, 87; frg. 360 (Radice, 1142-44).

³⁴ Cf. SVF III, 87; frg. 360 (Radice, 1142-44).

us, as we shall see, at least of the vocabulary of our passage, Wis 18:4. A corresponding relationship between the law and eternity is present also in Cicero: “sed et omnes gentes et omni tempore una lex est sempiterna et inmutabili” (*Resp.* III,22,33).

A particular aspect of Philo’s presentation of the law of nature, at which we can only hint here, is that concerning the unwritten law and the already mentioned νόμος ἔμψυχος, two concepts which Philo applies to the figure of the patriarchs. Now, in the tenth chapter of the Book of Wisdom, which concludes the second part of the book and, at the same time, acts as the prelude to the third, the work of wisdom is described as a universal activity, and only at the end of the section, with the introduction of the figure of Moses in Wis 10:15, does wisdom appear as addressed to Israel. Thus wisdom is at work in Adam and the patriarchs before the Sinai revelation, an event which, moreover, does not seem to have a particular importance in the Book of Wisdom, as also happens in the Enochic literature. From this point of view, the Book of Wisdom appears to be only at the beginning of a process of reflection on the natural law with regard to the patriarchs which Alexandrine Judaism renders explicit only in Philo.³⁵

In the thought of Philo, the patriarchs are living examples of that natural law which is later going to find its written expression in the Law of Moses. Philo’s treatise *De Abramo* opens with the assertion that the patriarchs are “living and rational laws” and concludes by recalling that the life of Abraham “is this very law and unwritten code.”³⁶ The patriarchs—I am simplifying here a doctrine which is none too clear in Philo—are as though the living incarnation of the universal law, or else are sages and philosophers capable of understanding the structure of the universe ordered by the divine λόγος and of living in conformity with it, according to right reason.³⁷ It is the whole patriarchal history which, for Philo, guarantees the perfect correspondence between the written Mosaic Law and rational law, the law of nature, both of them derived from God.

As for Moses, Philo presents him according to the more classical canons of the royal ideal which is expressed in the Neopythagorean treatises on sovereignty. Moses is in fact *par excellence* not only the lawgiver, but also the νόμος ἔμψυχος καὶ λογικὸς (*Mos.* 1.162; but cf. the

³⁵ On this point cf. Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 211-12; and “A Century of Research,” 11-12 and Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 214-15.

³⁶ Οἱ γὰρ ἔμψυχοι καὶ λογικοὶ νόμοί (*Abr.* 5); the life of Abraham is νόμος αὐτός (...) καὶ θεσμός ἀγραφός (*Abr.* 276).

³⁷ Cf. W. Richardson, “The Philonic Patriarchs as νόμος φύσεως,” in *Studia Patristica: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* (eds. K. Aland and F.L. Cross, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1957) 1: 515-25; Martens, *One God, one Law*, 86-95; Termini, “Dal Sinai alla creazione,” 154-91.

whole passage, 1.148-162); in *Mos.* 2.4 it is clear that the model according to which Moses is described is that of the king as he is portrayed in the Neopythagorean treatises; cf. also *Praem.* 55; *Migr.* 130.³⁸

The Sinaitic Law was put into writing by Moses for those who, unlike the patriarchs, are not capable of living according to this law of nature of which the Mosaic Law is, as it were, a written copy. But the connection between the law of nature and the Mosaic Law is still closer in Philo;³⁹ the Jews possess, in fact, a perfect copy, the true copy of the law of nature (cf. *Abr.* 3, *Mos.* 2.11.48). We should note that such a position can well be interpreted as a right and proper response to the by now widespread Stoic conception by which they attributed lesser value to written laws by contrast with the universal unwritten law. For his part, Philo does not distinguish any contrast between the law of nature and the written Law of Moses:

This origin (of the law) is wonderful because it contains the creation of the cosmos (κοσμοποιίαν), because the cosmos is in harmony with the law and the law with the cosmos and because the man who observes the law is constituted thereby a citizen of the world, regulating his doings by the purpose and will of nature which guides the whole universe (cf. *Opif.* 3).

Here we find expressed another idea typical of Philo: the unity between creation and lawgiving (cf. also *Mos.* II,48). Philo's aim is that of making it understood—utilising language and concepts typical of Stoicism—that the Mosaic Law, in so far as it is a true and authentic copy of the law of nature, is superior to all other laws, which are certainly not so. In doing this, Philo shows his total originality, not without leaving a certain amount of paradox: "Philo creates his unity of law, first by relating all forms of higher law to one another, and second by connecting the Law of Moses closely to the law of nature."⁴⁰ Philo shows himself unique in

³⁸ On this matter, cf. **first capitals** Barraclough, "Philo's Politics. Roman Rule and Hellenistic Judaism," in ANRW II.21.1, 520-21 and F. Calabi, *The Language and the Law of God: Interpretation and Politics in Philo of Alexandria* (**series**, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1998) 7-10.

³⁹ On the argument, cf. Martens, *One Law, one God*, 95-99; A. Myre, "Les caractéristiques de la loi mosaïque selon Philon d'Alexandrie," *Science et Esprit* 25 (1973) 37 and 67; idem, "La Loi de la Nature et la loi mosaïque selon Philon d'Alexandrie," *Science et Esprit* 28/2 (1976) 163-81.

⁴⁰ Martens, *One Law, one God*, 101. Cf. also J.W. Martens, "Philo and the 'Higher' Law," *SBLSP* (1991) 317: "Philo could not admit that the Mosaic law was only a shadowy sketch of true law. God gave the law to Moses; God also created the world and with it the law of nature. The law of Moses, divinely given, could in no way contradict the law of nature, divinely implanted in the world of creation." On this Philonic paradox cf. Najman, "Written Copy of Law of Nature:" "The paradox is that Philo regards the Law of Moses as a written copy of the law of nature, but the law of nature is unwritten and so cannot be reduced to a code of rules that could be written

the context of his time in obtaining the effect of reinforcing the value of the Mosaic Law by anchoring it to the idea of the law of nature propounded by Stoicism. Philo thus obtains a further result—like Cicero in Rome too—that of deepening the idea and at the same time in developing it. So Philo responds to the double challenge, at once philosophical and political, which he had set himself, at an undoubtedly highly critical time for the Jewish community of Alexandria. It will be remembered, moreover, that already in Stoicism the idea of a law that is eternal and universal is born *also* from political factors (the collapse of the *polis*) and not only philosophical ones (the ontology of the imminent *logos*).

In sum, Philo seeks a balance between creation and Sinai, an attempt already present *in nuce* in Ben Sira by means of the bringing together of wisdom and the Mosaic Law (cf. Sir 24).⁴¹ In Philo, rather more than in Ben Sira, the Mosaic Law, filtered through the Stoic concept of the law of nature, is taken within the Biblical-Judaic framework of creation. If Cicero in Rome translates the Stoic λόγος φύσεως in juridico-religious terms more congenial to the Roman spirit, the same expression evokes in Philo the divine perfection of the Torah. Precisely the indefinite content of the λόγος φύσεως allows Philo to fill it with all the significance of the *Tôrah* of Israel and thus to contribute in creating a truly original idea with regard to the λόγος φύσεως.⁴² The Alexandrine, intending thus “to give credibility and universal value to the Mosaic Law in a competitive way with respect to the political and cultural world in which he lives, uses shrewdly the conceptual and terminological tool of Greco-Roman

down. (...) I do not think that this paradox can be entirely removed” (62). This is because Philo has in front of him a written text, the Law of Moses, which is something more than a written law; it is the very revelation of God.

⁴¹ On the relationship between law and wisdom in Ben Sira, cf. the exhaustive study of G.L. Prato, “Sapienza e Torah in Ben Sira: meccanismi comparativi culturali e conseguenze ideologico-religiose,” in *Il confronto tra le diverse culture*, 129-51, with extensive bibliography. Prato, discussing the opposed positions of J. Marböck (*Weisheit im Wandel. Untersuchungen zur Weisheitstheologie bei Ben Sira* [BBB 37, Bonn: publisher 1971] 39-46) and J.E. Schnabel (*Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul. A Tradition Historical Enquiry into the Relation of Law, Wisdom and Ethics* [WUNT 2.16, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1985] esp. 69-77), sees in the connection which Ben Sira establishes between wisdom and law a new interpretation in view of a reformulation of a more precise cultural identity. In this perspective, the possible connection of Ben Sira with Stoic philosophy seems secondary. More interesting and more fruitful, in the case of Ben Sira, is the study of the relationship with the Isis aretologies. “More than a cultural ethos to which he refers, more interesting is the fact that the link achieved by Ben Sira suggests a different hermeneutic for the elements brought together, creating from them, so to speak, a third which is the simple sum of both,” Prato, “Sapienza e Torah,” 135.

⁴² Cf. Farias, *Studi sul pensiero sociale*, 106.

philosophy.”⁴³ The fruitfulness and novelty of this *interpretatio judaica* of the Mosaic law in the light of the concept of the law of nature are today ever more evident.

As an appendix to what we have said on Philo, it is necessary at least to take note of a text perhaps contemporary of Philo, that is, the *Fourth Book of the Maccabees*.⁴⁴ One gets the impression that the author of this work wishes to distinguish himself deliberately from the position of the Alexandrine; the “law” which stands at the centre of the book is, in fact, not the unwritten, universal and eternal law to which—as happens in Philo—the patriarchs are subject; it is the Law of Moses that alone allows one to live κατὰ φύσιν (cf *4 Macc* 5:25). Law and nature, law and reason are thus in perfect agreement.

Precisely such a passage as *4 Macc* 5:25 attests on the one hand a full awareness of the Stoic idea of a law that is divine and eternal, written in nature, and on the other hand the presence of an open polemic against such a position. In the face of Greek philosophy, *4 Maccabees* reclaims the whole validity of the Law of Moses. In fact, right from the beginning of the book (*4 Macc* 1:1), there is affirmed the worth of “pious reason,” that εὐσεβῆς λογισμός which in reality coincides with observance of the Law (cf. e.g. *4 Macc* 2:9-10; 5:34-35). The absolute centrality of the *Torah* shows how there is no true rationality except in the observance of the *Torah* itself within which, therefore, is taken up the very idea of the “law of nature” of which, significantly, by contrast with Philo, the author of *4 Maccabees* never speaks but shows himself aware, precisely by means of adopting these polemical positions.

6. THE ANTECEDENTS OF PHILO IN GREEK-SPEAKING JUDAISM.

In no other author of Alexandrian Judaism do we find so rich an account of the subject of the law of nature as in Philo. Nevertheless, it is possible to imagine the existence of a current of thought which, influenced by Stoicism, perhaps known through the, already Middle Platonic, mediation of Antiochus of Ascalon and then of Eudorus and Posidonius

⁴³ Termini, “Il rapporto tra legge naturale e legge rivelata,” 191.

⁴⁴ The precise date of *4 Macc* is still discussed; cf. C. Marucci, “La rilevanza sapienziale della Torah nel Quarto libro dei Maccabei e negli scritti di Flavio Giuseppe,” in *Sapienza e Torah*, 83-90 and D.A. DeSilva, *4 Maccabees* (Sheffield: Academic Press 1998) 12-18; it goes from the first years of the 1st century AD to the end of the same century: before 38 AD: H. Anderson, “4 Maccabees,” in *OTP*, 2: 334. Between 18 and 55: E. Bickermann, “The Date of 4 Maccabees,” in idem, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* (Leiden: Brill 1976) 275-81. Around 90-100 AD: see the recent edition in Italian with introduction, translation and commentary by G. Scarpat, *Quarto Libro dei Maccabei* (Brescia: Paideia 2006) 65, see also 66-69, 81-84, and 201; and P.L. Reddit, “The Conception of Nomos in Fourth Maccabees,” *CBQ* 45 (1983) 249-70.

(cf *supra*), developed within Alexandrian Judaism, in particular with regard to the Jewish ethic.⁴⁵ Philo, therefore, had predecessors who had opened up the way for him. Among these was the author of the Book of Wisdom.

Already in the course of the second century BC, it is possible to identify some background ideas which will be taken up again by Philo. Witnesses to these are the fragments of Aristobulus and, especially, the *Letter of Aristeas*. Aristobulus attests the existence of a Jewish-Alexandrine philosophical tradition influenced notably by Stoicism and perhaps also by the *De Mundo*. Three aspects in Aristobulus in particular reveal the existence of common ground with Philo: the deanthropomorphisation of the divine attributes; the recourse to Greek philosophy; and the taking up of that philosophy within the Jewish faith.⁴⁶ It is much more difficult, however, to show in any detail just what conception Aristobulus had of the Mosaic Law in relation to the Stoic concept of the universal law, given the scarcity of fragments which have reached us.

Well known, though, is the fragment in which Aristobulus asserts: "it is clear that Plato has followed our legislation, at every stage;" and a little further on: "the whole complex of our laws is governed by piety, justice, continence and the other true goods."⁴⁷ From this point of view, Aristobulus is very close to the *Letter of Aristeas*: according to Aristobulus, the Mosaic Law is in full accord with Greek philosophy; better still, in the Law of Moses are expressed the highest ethical demands of the Greek philosophers. In any case we find ourselves in the field of ethics.

Our knowledge of Aristobulus is really too limited for us to be able to draw certain conclusions. What we do know of him is, however, sufficient to prove that in Alexandrian Judaism the encounter with the Greek philosophy of the time is a real one and not just casual. Aristobulus' position is certainly apologetic: the Law of Moses is the true philosophy and does not stand in contrast with a reason that has been philosophically educated. Aristobulus thus "must be understood as a

⁴⁵ Cf. G.E. Sterling, "Universalizing the Particular: Natural Law in Second Temple Jewish Ethics," *SPhA* 15 (2003) 64-80.

⁴⁶ On Aristobulus, cf. A. Paul "La Torah sapienziale a confronto con il mondo culturale ellenistico," in *Sapienza e Torah. Atti della XXIX Settimana Biblica* (Bologna: EDB 1987) 50-55, with further bibliography; M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism. Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1974) 1: 163-69; for the connections between Aristobulus and the Book of Wisdom, cf. Larcher, *Etudes*, 136-37; for his links with Philo, cf. R. Radice, *Platonismo e creazionismo in Filone di Alessandria* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero 1989) 186-201.

⁴⁷ Cf. Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.*, XIII,12,1-16.

positive effort to adapt the traditional conceptions of the Jewish tradition to the spiritual demands of a new age."⁴⁸

The first time that we find expressed with sufficient clarity in the sphere of Alexandrian Judaism the idea that the Mosaic Law corresponds to the dictates of right reason is in the *Letter of Aristeas*, evidence of what we could describe as "Judaism in dialogue."⁴⁹ In connection with the laws relating to the purity of animals contained in the Mosaic Law, we read in *Arist.* 161 that "it has not been laid down by chance, or by something which has poured into the soul, but through truth and the expression of right teaching." The bringing together of law and ὀρθὸς λόγος is already an indication of the existence of a link with concepts hailing from a Stoic ambience. A little further on, we read again that the Mosaic Law was conceived as the expression of a universal norm of justice ("everything has been disposed with a view to justice," cf *Arist.* 168-69); thus there is no dichotomy between the demands of the Law of Moses and the ethical requirements of contemporary Greek philosophy. Aristeas does not speak again explicitly of the law of nature, nor does he openly use Stoic vocabulary, but, in the *Letter*, the influence of the Stoic-Pythagorean concept of the universal law is undoubtedly apparent. We recall the words of Demetrius at the beginning of the *Letter* where he speaks of the Law of Israel as legislation that is "philosophical, pure and divine" (*Arist.* 31). The Law of Moses acquires thus in Aristeas a truly universal value which, to that extent, brings it close to the "right reason" and "common law" propounded in Stoicism. By this means, however, recognition is given within Judaism to the Greek *paideia* as something of value.

Among the predecessors of Philo, as far as our topic is concerned, the *Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* are of great importance.⁵⁰ Although the dating of this highly individual work is much debated, it is possible to accept a date of composition about the beginning of the first century AD, therefore at a time almost contemporary with Philo and the Book of Wisdom, but certainly prior to the clashes caused by Caligula. Although not certain, the Alexandrine origin of the *Sentences* remains the most probable option.⁵¹

The ethics of Pseudo-Phocylides are based on an evident faith in the existence of a natural law rather than on the Mosaic *Torah* as such, although a good part of the content of his work can be related to the

⁴⁸ Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 168.

⁴⁹ Cf. Paul, "La Torah sapienziale," 55-63, with further bibliography. On the notion of "giudaismo dialogico/Judaism in dialogue" in Aristeas, cf. G. Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism. Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress 1991) 161-85.

⁵⁰ Cf. P.W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Leiden: Brill 1978); Paul, "La Torah sapienziale," 62-66; Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 158-77.

⁵¹ Cf. Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 158-59.

Decalogue. For example, when speaking of marriage, Pseudo-Phocylides asserts that to get married signifies “giving something to nature,” giving to nature what is owed to it (l. 176); that is in full accord with the Stoic idea that to get married is κατὰ φύσιν.⁵² Thus Pseudo-Phocylides bases his own ethic on the typically Stoic idea of the universal law; the analogies between marriage and the animal world (ll. 201-204) are, for example, typical of the Stoic ones relating to the law of nature; similarly, Pseudo-Phocylides avoids basing marriage directly on the divine command contained in Scripture.

Although the aim with which Pseudo-Phocylides composed his work is still the object of discussion, we may think that his real interest was not in Judaism in itself. He does not cite Scripture explicitly and his work lacks any manifestly Jewish statements: “His purpose, the only purpose we can safely impute to him, was to impart to his readers, whether Jews or Gentiles, his understanding of the moral life.”⁵³

The position of Pseudo-Phocylides, motivated by arguments drawn from the natural law, is further evidence that, in the Jewish world of Alexandria, the coming together of the Mosaic Law and the universal law, the one law of reason and of the cosmos, as it had been conceived in Stoicism and in the contemporary philosophy which had been influenced by Stoicism, was, despite obvious nuances, a well-established tendency. Thus, the Greek-speaking Jews (and, in fact, not only they) were fully capable of performing that hermeneutical twist which brought them to reconcile the Law of Moses with the law of nature.⁵⁴ In this way, Judaism showed itself able to respond to the accusations of being “misanthropic” and particularist, and also succeeded in conferring on the Law of Moses a universal significance.

So then, it is against this unitary, but certainly not univocal, background that the Book of Wisdom is placed, even in terms of chronology, and it is to this book that we now turn our attention.

7. WIS 8:4: THE UNIVERSAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAW OF MOSES.

We have already recalled how, in Wis 6:4, our sage speaks of the law, bringing together in a certain measure the positive laws—both human laws and, probably, also the Law of Moses—with the idea of a universal

⁵² Van der Horst, *The Sentences*, 226, with citation of Stoic parallels; cf. also G. Striker, “Following Nature: A Study in Stoic Ethics,” *Oxford Society for Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1991) 1-73.

⁵³ Collins, *Jewish Wisdom*, 177.

⁵⁴ “The equation of Mosaic legislation and natural law took place on a routine or semi-routine basis in Second Temple Jewish circles (...). Jewish moralists used it when they thought appropriate but did not work out a full-scale or systematic analysis,” Sterling, “Natural Law,” 79.

law as happens in the Neopythagorean treatises on sovereignty which, in their turn, take up Stoic concepts. The presentation of the patriarchs in Wis 10, moreover, is not far from the way in which Philo describes them, that is, as men who observed that unwritten law which is the universal law of nature, the “living law” which Philo identified with the Law of Moses.

Nevertheless, it should be observed that in none of the passages in which our sage speaks of the law does he use any of the expressions which could make us pinpoint a direct philosophical influence. In fact, expressions such as ὀρθὸς λόγος, νόμος φύσεως, νόμος κοινός, νόμος ἔμψυχος... are wholly absent from the Book of Wisdom. It is clear how distant we are from Philo’s thought. The very term φύσις is present only in Wis 7:20, 13:1 and 19:20, never, however in connection with νόμος and never used in a philosophical sense in relation to the “nature” of the cosmos.⁵⁵ However, there are some clues which help us to put the idea of the law expressed in 18:4 into some relationship with the Stoic concept of universal law, that law of nature so well noted by Philo.

Let us observe first of all how in Wis 18:4 (but cf. already 17:20), our sage thinks of an evidently universal destination for the Mosaic Law, thus distinguishing himself, as has been said, from the traditions about the Law as light in Palestinian Judaism, traditions which point rather towards particularism and to the destination of the light of the law as Israel alone. The universalism of the Book of Wisdom can certainly find its origin in some Biblical texts as we have already noted. But the position of our sage who, in Wis 17:20 and 18:4 inserts the idea of a universal destination of the Law within a context that is at once Exodic and eschatological, is certainly original. It is possible that a strong impulse towards such universalistic overtures could have been suggested to our author precisely by a consideration of the Stoic idea of universal law, an idea that was certainly not foreign to Alexandrian Judaism. The light of the Law offered “to your sons” does not just illuminate them, the Israelites, but through them the whole cosmos to which it was also addressed. The cosmos is, therefore, one big reality, animated by one law which is identified with the divine will, an idea certainly not far from the Stoic concepts which we have outlined.

To follow the Law means to obtain that ἀφθαρσία which characterises the Law itself which is an ἄφθαρτος φῶς. As we have seen, this connection is also found in Philo (cf *supra* with regard to *Prob.* 46) and is not absent from the Stoic perspective on the universal law; whoever follows the universal law of nature finds a life without end. Wis 18:4, however, does not speak of the law of nature understood as identical with right reason, as Philo does in the text mentioned above,

⁵⁵ In 19:20 φύσις is probably synonymous with δύναμις.

but talks only of the Law of Israel. Moreover, the idea of ἀφθαρσία has a much more Semitic meaning in the Book of Wisdom, given that our sage, although employing a philosophical vocabulary borrowed from the Greeks, is thinking very probably, as in 2:23, of the resurrection of the body.

The typically Stoic connection between the universal law (the νόμος κοινός) and right reason (ὀρθός λόγος) is not, however, totally absent from the Book of Wisdom. In fact, our sage gives great importance to reason. His whole book, for example, is characterised by a continual rational reinterpretation of the ancient sapiential categories. The miracles described in Wis 11-19 may be those of a distant past but, for the addressees of the book, they reveal the deep sense of the structure of the cosmos.⁵⁶

The divine gift of wisdom is not so much opposed to reason; on the contrary, it includes it. Solomon is a wise man according to the canons of Greek culture *also* (cf., for example, Wis 7:17-21). In this connection, the text of Wis 18:4 is situated precisely at the end of the fifth diptych, at the centre of which we find the definition of fear (17:12-13), defined exactly as “surrender” (προδοσία) of the aids that come from λογισμός. Our sage thus takes up again in his definition of fear ideas which were already circulating in Platonic spheres and then within the Stoic philosophy. Fear is linked with the decrease of reason.⁵⁷ The darkness which characterises the whole of the fifth diptych is undoubtedly a very rich symbol, but it also represents the situation in which the ungodly who have not known how to make use of their reason come to find themselves. They are exactly like the ungodly described back in Wis 2:1: λογισόμενοι οὐκ ὀρθῶς (cf also 2:21; already in 1:3 the σκολιὸι λογισμοὶ of the ungodly are censured).

So then, the presentation of the Law as light in Wis 18:4 occurs within a context in which reason has considerable importance. Even if there does not appear in the Book of Wisdom any direct alignment between νόμος and λόγος,⁵⁸ the Law does not in fact seem opposed to

⁵⁶ Cf. M. Sweet, “The theory of miracles in the Wisdom of Solomon,” in *Miracles* (ed. C.F.D. Moule, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965) 115-26. We should observe, however, that, according to Sweet the aim of Wisdom is merely propagandist and, therefore, little more than polemic; cf., on the other hand, A. Passaro, “L’argomento cosmologico di Sap 19,18 e la concezione della creazione nel libro della Sapienza,” in *In Charitate Pax. Studi in onore del Card. Salvatore De Giorgi* (eds. F. Armetta and M. Naro, Palermo: publisher 1999) 47-61. Starting from Wis 19:18, Passaro shows how the use of Greek philosophy in a context of miracles (in 19,18 the renewal of creation) is much more than a work of propaganda.

⁵⁷ Cf. Mazzinghi, *Notte di paura e di luce*, 122-27.

⁵⁸ Cf., however, Wis 16:12, where the λόγος is placed in connection with the law which has been mentioned in vv. 6 and 11, and Wis 18:15; but in both cases the

the λογισμός mentioned in Wis 17:12. In any case, to follow reason does not exclude one from following the Law.

At this point, we can draw a first conclusion: the Law which is spoken of in Wis 18:4, certainly the Mosaic Law, is not introduced by our sage in directly philosophical categories, but such a presentation does not contradict, and certainly does not exclude, the Stoic concept of a universal law, in conformity with reason, eternal, written in nature. Rather than talking of direct Stoic influences, it is preferable, therefore, to speak of a description of the Mosaic law which is not opposed to the Stoic idea of νόμος, but recalls at least two fundamental elements of it: its universality and its conformity with reason.

From this point of view, the Book of Wisdom can certainly be considered as one of the antecedents of Philo, to be situated within that trajectory in Alexandrian Judaism which begins with Aristobulus and the *Letter of Aristeas*. Within this complex panorama, our sage reveals himself, certainly not as “Greek” as Philo, but nor as opposed and adverse to the Hellenistic world as will be the author of *4 Maccabees*.

The sage-author of Wisdom shows certainly that he is not aware of (or at least does not wish to accept) all the Philonic speculation about the law of nature, and his intention is different from that of Philo. The Alexandrian, in fact, intends to offer to his readers a thoroughgoing *interpretatio judaica* of the Stoic notion of the universal law, succeeding thus in developing the idea of the law of nature in a new direction. The Book of Wisdom, on the other hand, makes use of some ideas in circulation in its time—for the most part exactly the same as a little later would be taken up by Philo—to express in a way adapted to the needs of its readers, the correct teaching as far as the *Torah* of Israel was concerned. At all events, our sage seems much less interested in this than Philo given that the emphasis of his work falls rather on the figure of wisdom. In Wis 18:4, the alternative to falling into the darkness comes only from that light which, before being the light of the Law, is the light of wisdom, as appears clear from 17:20 seen as a flashback to Wis 7:29-30. In 18:3, the image of the pillar of cloud as “guide” of Israel recalls again the theme of wisdom which is also described as a guide in Wis 9:11 and set alongside the pillar of cloud itself at 10:7.

In this way, by means of the encounter with the Hellenistic cultural world, the Book of Wisdom allows the faith of Israel to advance, achieving a successful balance between its particularistic aspects (the Law of Moses given to “sons”) and universalistic ones (light for the world). It is my contention that it is precisely reflection on the Stoic concept of the law of nature which offers our sage the possibility of

background is principally Biblical. On λόγος in the Book of Wisdom, cf. M. Priotto, *La Prima Pasqua in Sap 18,5-25. Rilettura e attualizzazione* (Bologna: publisher 1987) 125-36.

rereading the Mosaic Law in a universal key. The literary and theological figure of personified wisdom likewise becomes the hermeneutic base for this encounter.⁵⁹

8. THE ORIGINALITY OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LAW IN WIS 18:4
AND IN THE WHOLE OF THE BOOK OF WISDOM.

The author of the Book of Wisdom and Philo have undoubtedly a common interest, that of binding together creation and Sinai, and so cosmos and Mosaic Law, cosmos and revelation. Philo creates this link by developing the Stoic idea of the law of nature and rereading and revaluing the Mosaic Law in this perspective. Along a line which is developed from Aristobulus and Aristeas and above all in Pseudo-Phocylides, the Mosaic Law is repropounded in Alexandrian Judaism as the bearer of a series of ethical principles which can be shared by all, Jews and Greeks, because they conform to the universal law of nature. The Philonic allegory serves this aim exactly.

In the Book of Wisdom, on the other hand, there is no allegory,⁶⁰ and at the theological heart of the book there is rather the *relecture* of the events of the Exodus carried out through the filter of the sapiential theology of creation and, at the same time, within a perspective that has a clear eschatological stamp. The third part of the book (Wis 11-19) is illuminated by the first (Wis 1-6) and illuminates it in its turn; the figure of wisdom (Wis 7-10) unites both these sections of the book.⁶¹ The context in which the text of Wis 18:4 is situated is in this respect significant: the law which will be offered to the world through the mediation of Israel is inserted in a framework that is clearly Exodus but which does not lack references to the creation or even an apparent eschatological background.

Similarly, by emphasising the themes of creation and history, our sage is able to retain the particularity of the Jewish faith. Exodus and creation become exemplary events. By contrast with Aristeas and

⁵⁹ Cf. Prato, "Sapienza e Torah," 147-48.

⁶⁰ On the use of allegory in Philo, cf. J. Laporte, "Philo in the Tradition of Biblical Wisdom Literature," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. R.L. Wilken, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press 1975) 103-43; J. Cazeaux, "Philon: l'allégorie et l'obsession de la totalité," in *Etudes sur le judaïsme hellénistique* (eds. R. Kuntzmann and J. Schlosser, Paris: publisher 1984) 267-320. On the differences with the Book of Wisdom, cf. C. Larcher, *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse* (Paris: Gabalda 1969) 151-78.

⁶¹ Cf. M. Gilbert, "The last pages of the Wisdom of Solomon," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* (Dublin: publisher 1997) 48-61; M. McGlynn, *Divine Judgment and Divine Benevolence in the Book of Wisdom* (WUNT II/139, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2001) 170-219. Cf. also L. Mazzinghi, "Il libro della Sapienza: elementi culturali," *Il confronto tra le diverse culture*, 181.

Pseudo-Phocylides, our sage avoids dwelling on a series of moral precepts common to all men because in conformity with a universal law of nature. The viewpoint which our sage adopts is thus a lot more Biblical than philosophical. The ethical aspect is not obscured. The metaphor of light in Wis 18:4 also refers to the idea of the law as a moral guide for man. On the other hand, however, the ethical dimension of the law does not prevail over the salvation-history perspective which characterises the Book of Wisdom as a whole.

The adoption of philosophical categories is not, therefore, as explicit in the Book of Wisdom as in Aristobulus, Aristeas, Pseudo-Phocylides and, above all, Philo. The Biblical and Jewish particularity of our texts always remains very strong. For our author, the existence of a law of nature which is identified *tout court* with the Law of Moses seems to be unthinkable. Rather, the latter, the objectivisation of the wisdom which pervades the whole creation (cf. Wis 8:1) can be better understood precisely in the light of the widespread Hellenistic concept of the universal law.

It is true that for Philo, as for Wisdom, the Mosaic Law is before everything *revelation* rather than merely a corpus of written norms (cf. what has been written with regard to the patriarchs). For the Book of Wisdom this idea is even stronger: the Mosaic Law refers to wisdom which, in its turn, is the symbol of the presence of God in the world and in man, that is to say, a mediatory figure. For our sage it is wisdom—not so much the law—that is at work in the world before the Sinaitic revelation (cf the whole of Chapter 10). Perhaps precisely for this reason the Mosaic Law is never identified with reason or nature.

To return to the questions with which we began: the question of the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the law of nature helps us to clarify the connection between the Book of Wisdom and Greek philosophy. This connection has to be seen within the theological perspective of the book: in Wisdom, Exodus and creation are not simply restated but reinterpreted in the double light of the tradition of the fathers and the historical situation of the community of Alexandria. The *midrashic* background of the Book of Wisdom is well known;⁶² our sage does not shrink from utilising the cultural tools of his time to actualise the Biblical text for these particular listeners. This is what happens with the Stoic idea of the natural law; the Book of Wisdom never makes full use of it as Philo will do, nor is it confined, on the other hand, to solutions of an apologetic or propagandist character. Rather, Wisdom uses some philosophical concepts well known to Alexandrian Judaism

⁶² Cf. M. Gilbert, "Sagesse de Salomon (ou livre de la Sagesse)," in *DBS* 9: 77-87; J.R. Busto Saiz, "La intención del midrash del libro de la Sabiduría sobre el Exodo," in *Salvación en la Palabra; en memoria del profesor A. Díez-Macho* (ed. D. Muñoz León, Madrid: publisher 1988) 63-78.

in order to *rewrite* Scripture⁶³ and render it still more effective for its hearers. In other words, it is a question of a work in the service of the faith, a position of fine balance, the sign of a real wish to enter into dialogue with a world that, at first sight, is totally foreign.

And finally: rather than a possible appeal for obedience to a universal law of nature which is to bind all men in the name of a reason that is divine and universal and which is incarnate in the Mosaic Law, it is the conviction of our sage that the Mosaic Law does not contradict those universal values on which Hellenistic culture is based. It is precisely in this context that it becomes possible to accept it. Moreover, before even the law, there is wisdom, a real means of mediation which refers at the same time to the presence of God in creation and in history. The paradox which characterises the position of Philo is thus avoided; the Law of Moses is *not* identified with the law of nature, but nor is there a radical exclusion of a mutual relationship between the two. Precisely the dimension of mediation typical of sapiential theology enables the Book of Wisdom to accept the universalism typical of the Stoic concept of the law of nature within a perspective absolutely typical of Israel: the Law of Moses, revelation of God to men.

⁶³ On the idea of "rewritten Scripture," cf. H. Najman, *Seconding Sinai. The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (series, Leiden: Brill 2003) 7-8, nn. 13-14; 16-17, n. 33; P.S. Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," in *It is Written: Scripture citing Scripture, Essays in Honour of B. Lindars* (eds. D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson, Cambridge: University Press 1988) 99-121.