From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 1. The Rise and Fall of Logos

Bond University *Year* 1986

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From Word to Silence
Vol. I

by Raoul Mortley

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Begründet von Franz Joseph Dölger und Theodor Klauser,
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30

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I

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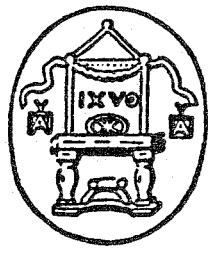

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From Word to Silence, 1. The Rise and Fall of Logos

Bond University *Year* 1986

Chapter I. Logos Identified

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pendent on that inferior technology as its cause. The Greek deployment of reason is one such inferior and superseded instrument. After the confident appeal to logos in the fragments of Heraclitus and Parmenides in the sixth century B.C., we voyage to the sixth century A.D. claim of Damascius that logos "founders" in its attempt to formulate the ultimate principle of reality, and that principle is a much-travelled version of Parmenides' "One".

What is the meaning of logos? It is a major term in Greek intellectual history, and part of its importance is acquired through the prologue to John's Gospel, since in this way it is adapted and modified in the subsequent Christian tradition. The question to be raised here concerns the original insight in to the word, and an important issue throughout the book will be the relationship of logos to speech, since in its progress Greek thought comes to emphasise silence as the characteristic of true thought. It is not however until the Stoics that the relationship of logos to discourse is dealt with, since the Stoics formulate the idea of an internal (*endiathetos*) and an external (*prophorikos*) form of the logos.

Deriving from *legein* (to say), logos has some suggestion of collecting or gathering: the verb occurs in this sense quite frequently in early Greek, and is used of gathering quite down to earth objects, such as building materials, or wood (Odyssey 18,359) for example. It can also mean "gather together", that is, "assemble". In the abstract it suggests gathering material together to make some sort of whole out of the selections made, and in this case the whole constructed is speech. Like logos, *lego* contains the sense of "listing", "counting", "enumerating", or "describing". The gathering aspect of logos is not so clearly attested, though it is probably present.

Logos is sometimes translated as "account", and this is not unlike the sense just described, since listing facts is part of giving an account. Homer especially uses logos in the sense of narrative, and here it comes close to *mythos,* "myth" or "fable". The tendency to draw a sharp distinction between *mythos* and logos springs from the desire of scholars to illustrate the transition from myth to reason through the use of appropriate Greek words: it is helpful however to dwell on their similarities as well as their dissimilarities. The *mythos* is a fable, a collection of material which is as much a narrative as the logos, though its content is different and its premisses are different. As the forerunner of the historical account, myth constitutes a collection of data about alleged reality, presented in the form of a story. Logos has this same characteristic: it provides a story about people and things. Herodotus, in discussing the myth of Helen outlines the Egyptian version (II.119), including the detail whereby Menelaus was said to have sacrified two local children in order to provoke the change of wind which would permit his departure.

> This is what the Egyptian priests told me. I myself believe their tale (logos) about Helen, since I consider that if Helen had been in Ilium, she would have been given back to the Greeks with or without the consent of Alexandrus. (II.120)

It should be noted that the myth of Helen is here referred to as a logos; Herodotus is not averse to making the two concepts interchangeable, and it is clear that no radical opposition existed between the terms *mythos* and logos.

Snell (The Discovery of Mind 224) warns against polarising myth and logic in this early period, claiming that "myth refers to the content of thought, logic to its form". This statement does not appear to clarify the issue, but it is at least right in its warning against rigorous differentiation between the two. The mythical consciousness and the rational consciousness are closely allied. G. E. R. Lloyd's work Polarity and Analogy may also be cited in support of the idea that modes of reasoning existed before the development of formal logic in Plato and Aristotle: Lloyd dwells on the use of reasoning through opposites and through analogies in ordinary and common-or-garden thought, both prior to and including the classical philosophical period. Ordinary literary expressions are examined with a view to establishing that a form of reasoning was available and being employed in pre-philosophical literature. The "mentalité pré-logique" (Lévy-Bruhl) turns out to have a logic of its own, which is not in any way random or bizarre, but which is recognizable in terms of later developments.

That Herodotus should refer to a myth as a logos is not in any way surprising, and what he means by logos is a sequential and coherent tale, capable of being grasped by the rational mind. Dictionaries show that "logos" develops a technical use in economic contexts, where it means "account", "reckoning" or "calculation", and it is the idea that logos lists, or gives an account of the elements of a situation, which should be retained when one is considering the central meaning of the term. As an account rendered itemises all the elements of a given financial transaction, so logos lists the elements of a matter in their proper and coherent order. Coherence, together with listing, are the prime elements in the idea of logos, and for this reason *mythos* and logos are compatible. The mythical table has all the elements of rationality in this sense, since its account includes a variety of elements laid out in a comprehensible sequence.

The *mythos* has the twofold characteristic of sequence and coherence, and it therefore has logos as well. In a myth there is no experimentation on the order of events: time may be suspended in some sense, but that things proceed developmentally is an uninfringed rule of Greek myth. A situation can only ever be that which follows and which renders obsolete a preceding situation: one thing must grow out of another. The sequence which emerges out of the developing tale contributes to its coherence, which is the overall fitting together of all its elements.

Both *mythos* and logos have these characteristics, and the progress from myth to logic is therefore not an easy one to identify. Snell's rather muddled observation does not help, but what can be said is this. It is change in respect of what is held to be credible which underlies the progress from *mythos* to lo-

comparison of it with the Word of a prophet is inadequate, because Fr. 50 explicitly warns people not to listen to Heraclitus himself, but the logos. It is fair to take this point since there is an explicit differentiation between Heraclitus and the word: he is not the vehicle for, or the owner of, some particular revelation. He is the exponent of a word which is independent of him; of which he offers a description. (Socrates will later speak of logos as functioning independently of his own volition, offering a similar differentiation between himself and logos: Prot. 333C, Euthyph. 11d.)

One of the most interesting aspects of the first fragment is the claim that Heraclitus' method involves distinctions between things: "distinguishing each thing according to its nature, and declaring how it is". It seems to me that this is the characteristic feature of Heraclitus' logos, that it engages in an activity of division, an activity which was consecrated in the *Sophist* and *Theaetetus* of Plato. Dividing things from each other, and adding up a list, are activities which are closely related, and it is this sense of logos which brings it close to the concept of myth. Heraclitus' logos, like a fable, is a selection and compilation of material, presented to the hearer or reader. Like a *mythos,* the logos is in no way the personal possession of its retailer, but it is something to which he directs attention, like an object which is available to all. The logos, however, is a different and new kind of fable, which is unfamiliar and which provokes disbelief or apathy. There is no radical difference between myth and "word", but rather a similarity. As Nestle observed (Vom Mythos zum Logos 9), myth is only one half of the Greek creative achievement: the other is Logos, the completion of myth. Whilst it is true, as Nestle also says, that myth gradually weakens and allows Word to replace it, it should be reiterated that Word does bear this proximity to myth. Myth creates a form to which Word is indebted: both are narratives, and both purport to describe the things of the universe. Plutarch will later say:

> The mythos endeavours to be a false logos, which resembles a true one. (On the Fame of the Athenians 348A)

Plutarch here makes myth a certain kind of logos, and continues to describe logos as a tale which is a "likeness and image of actual fact", whereas myth is a likeness and image of such a logos. The two are seen as similar, though logos is distinguished by its closeness to reality. Heraclitus is offering a tale about reality, and he says that this tale distinguishes things "according to their nature". Separation and division are the hallmark of Greek rationality, and they provide the different elements which constitute Heraclitus' tale.

Fragment 2 comes from Sextus Empiricus (Adv. Math. VII. 133):

> Wherefore it is necessary to follow the common, but although the Logos is common, the many live as though they had a private understanding.

Sextus Empiricus comments that common (*xunos*) means general or universal (*koinos*), and this fragment gives a second characteristic of Heraclitus' Logos, namely that it has some universality, despite individual and particular modes of thought. One may draw the conclusion, as does Kirk (59), that the logos is said to be somehow part of all things, but this interpretation is partly the result of juxtaposing Fragment 2 with Fragment 114:

> Those who speak with intelligence must rely on what is common to all things, as a city relies (and to a much greater extent) on its laws. For all human laws are nourished by one law, the divine. For it has as much power as it desires, is sufficient for all, and is still abundant.

Heraclitus points to two levels of commonness: in the first place the law which is common to a city, and in the second the Law which is common to all civic laws. It does seem fair to compare these two fragments, and to conclude that Heraclitus' logos is not simply common, or universal, in the same way as a myth, in that it has an objective existence and is available to all, but rather in the sense that it is applicable to all things. It is that in which a variety of things find their unity, and just as one should "follow" the law, so one should follow the common logos. What is left open by these cryptic relics of Heraclitus' philosophy is whether the logos is understood to be an inherent principle, which is in things and has some kind of reality as an underlying common factor, or whether it is an external factor, a construction of mind, like law. In later Greek thought there is a clear tendency to give it some substantial reality, and it is fairly clear that Kirk is thinking along these lines for Heraclitus, since he emphasises (69) the corporealist tendencies of Presocratic Thinkers, and denies that Heraclitus' logos is merely "a truth about things, determined by human analysis" (69). It is held that Fragment 114, cited above, refers to law in materialist terms, thus permitting us to conceive of its analogue, logos, similarly. It is to be thought of as corporeal, as "some substance which makes things behave in a particular way". Kirk admits the speculative character of his reasoning here, but he endeavours to shore it up by reference to the meaning of *cosmos* (Fr. 30), which is identified with fire in one of its mutations. He concludes that it would be fair to associate logos, as the common essence of things, with this fundamental element of fire.

Kirk's arguments constitute a reasonable extrapolation from the evidence, if we accept the possibility of a corporealist interpretation of logos. This, however, is a crucial issue, and the tendency to treat logos as some kind of substance, however ethereal, is on the whole a late Greek phenomenon, and it requires a considerable leap to portray it as such in this early period. Fragment 114 is an inadequate basis on which to establish such a case, partly because the fragment is only about the law, and the comparison with logos must be mounted through other arguments. Even if the comparison is held to

be valid, as I believe it should, there is no warrant for transferring all the characteristics of the law to the logos: in other words, it is not clear that Heraclitus would have personified logos to the same extent as law, if he had been talking about it, which he was not. Even if it is conceded that Heraclitus meant, in discussing law, to develop a comparison which would be applicable to logos in all respects, a vast leap of the imagination is required to move from the personification of law to the equation of logos and fire. The personification of law might conceivably provoke one to imagine a personification of the word, but the essence of this is the universality of both concepts. The law is said to have "as much power as it desires" to be "sufficient for all, and ... still abundant". The language of personfication simply serves to highlight the fact that the divine law can cater for all things, and is never found without a response because of its complete universality. One could imagine such an image for Heraclitus' logos.

Kirk proceeds to identify the logos further as the source of unity. Fragment 50 reads as follows:

> Listening not to me, but the logos, it is wise to agree that all things are one.

Having rendered the logos substantial, Kirk (70) proceeds to identify it as the source of unity: the logos "results in the fact that 'all things are one' in two ways: they are 'one, first, in that they all have a common component, part of their structure; and secondly because they all connect up with each other *because of* this common structure". Whilst it may be conceded that, if the logos could be identified with fire, then it might be regarded as a source of unity, insofar as it would be a common factor throughout the various existents. However arguments have already been advanced against the identification with fire, and in respect of the second point, it seems clear that Fragment 50 does not say what Kirk wants it to say. We are merely told that we learn from the *logos* that all things are one, and not that they are one "because of the logos", which phrase would surely have been within the range of Heraclitus' Greek. In short, all the evidence points to the meaning of "account", or "tale" for logos. Heraclitus' logos is a kind of *mythos,* a tale of a different type, with a different subject and different canons of belief.

M. L. West (124) emphatically dissociates himself from the idea that Heraclitus had a Logos doctrine, as opposed to an ordinary pre-fifth century use of the word logos. In other words, there was no cosmic entity envisaged by Heraclitus, but this Logos was manufactured by his later exponents. It is also claimed that Ionian writers habitually refer to their writings as if they were "self-activated autonomous beings" (124). The examples cited seem to fall somewhat short of this assertion, since the evidence is drawn mainly from Heraclitus and Herodotus, but other passages (from non-Ionian writers) are adduced, and it is indeed striking that there was a generalized tendency to

treat the logos as if it had a life of its own (West 127, n.2). This is an interesting point, and it undoubtedly contributes to the explanation of the later tendency to hypostatize the logos.

However it would appear that there is no great mystery. If one understands the logos as a kind of myth, it is clear that it would have a life of its own, since myths did have such a life, outside the minds of their individual exponents. Thus can one of the passages cited by West (127, n.2) be explained, where Aristotle refers to Heraclitus' logos which states that everything is, and is not. It might be thought odd that Aristotle refers to his logos rather than to Heraclitus himself, but the explanation no doubt lies in the fact that Heraclitus made such a distinction in Fragment 26, when urging his hearers not to listen to him, but his logos. A number of scholars seem to feel that a contrast between the speaker and his logos is odd in the extreme, and this fact itself is odd in the extreme. The tendency to identify an individual and his opinion is a function of an individualist view of society, in which the formation of individual and private opinion is encouraged. We tend to foster the illusion that thinkers own their ideas, and that they create them *ex nihilo.* The Greeks were unaware of the private ownership of ideas, and for them the distinction between the individual and his teaching was not bizarre. In Heraclitus' case, if logos is understood as meaning a "rational tale", then it is not unnatural that he should draw attention to the fact that such an account is larger than himself. The logos, like a myth, was considered as a body of necessary and uncontrovertible notions which were an objective part of the cosmos, to be sought by a philosopher, rather than created by him. For West, the advice "don't listen to me but to what I'm saying" is puzzling, but it is quite understandable if a deliberate attempt is being made to objectify one's discourse as being apart from one's own state of mind. This is precisely the myth-like aspect of logos, in that it does stand as a body of knowledge which is available to all, and which belongs to all.

This is the notion which explains Fragment 2: "Wherefore it is necessary to follow the common, but although the Logos is common, the many live as though they had a private understanding". It is emphasised that the logos has a kind of universal authority and presence, which goes beyond individual perceptions, and for this reason it is doubly odd that the many live according to their own, private way of thinking. Heraclitus expresses a bewilderment like that of Parmenides in the face of the fact that his account, though it has a universal validity, goes unrecognised. Against Guthrie (I. 428), there is no evidence at all that Heraclitus' logos is "both human thought and the governing principle of the universe". In respect of the first claim, Guthrie proceeds on the basis of an elementary logical fallacy, as follows. Fragment 2 tells us that the logos is common, and Fragment 114 (by means of a word-play involving ξύν νόῳ and ξυνῷ) tells us that intelligence is common, and the conclusion is drawn that the logos may therefore be identified with intelligence.

worthy of note that it was not a major subject of discussion prior to Plato, and only with him did epistemology become a necessary part of the philosophical curriculum. This is odd, since the assertion that variations in perceived reality constituted manifestations of one single substance entailed a departure from the plain evidence of the senses. Yet it is true in general that ontology takes priority over epistemology in Greek philosophy, from its origins to the end of antiquity. What exists is determined in the first place, and how it is known is determined in consequence. For these reasons we may concur with Guthrie that Parmenides' confrontation of reason with the "heedless eye, sounding ear and tongue" was a major step in Western thought, and Fragment 7 gives a striking statement of the new consciousness which was unfolding.

Plato will later take up the issue of the meaning of logos, and give a conscious analysis of its significance. This is a noteworthy step, since it indicates that the word has reached the status of a technical term for the philosopher, and that it is now regarded as an acquisition of thought, of which some explanation must be given. By the stage of Plato's *Theaetetus*, the Greeks have developed some self-consciousness about their possession of this thought. In 206D it is noted that the claim has been made that the most complete knowledge derives from the addition of logos to true opinion, and the need to investigate the meaning of this logos is stated. The passage concerned amply illustrates the ambiguity of the term, since it scrutinizes three possible meanings for it. The goal of this part of the Theaetetus is the definition of knowledge, and it is in relation to opinion (*doxa*) and knowledge (*episteme*) that logos is determined. Socrates and Theaetetus work from the suggestion that right belief becomes knowledge when logos is added to it. What is this ingredient, which is added? What quality enables logos to transform belief into knowledge? Socrates inherits the question posed by the Presocratic transition from *mythos* to logos, and he first puts forward the idea that it refers to the ability to express one's thought in speech, through connecting verbs and nouns in a stream. The image of the thought would thus be "mirrored" in speech. The difficulty with this is clear enough, since most people have the capacity to speak; "right opinion" and knowledge would in this case be incapable of differentiation. Knowledge must be something more than the expression of one's thoughts in speech, and logos must be more than verbalisation.

The second understanding of logos brought forward emphasises the ability to give an account of something in terms of its constituent elements (*stoicheia*), as when a wagon is defined as containing so many pieces of wood. It was argued earlier that Heraclitus seemed to be using logos in this sense, since he spoke of "distinguishing each thing according to its nature". Crombie (II. 113) finds it a matter of curiosity that this definition should occur here, but recalls the role of dialectic in the Republic, noting that part of its

Gorgias had less of a philosophical position than Protagoras, but nevertheless shared the philosophical quandary engendered by the new relativism. Speeches were his mode, on subjects like the myth of Helen, and he foreshadows the kind of superficially learned disquisition that we find in Plutarch, centuries later. Plato tells us that Gorgias repeatedly stated that logos was a "mighty despot" (Philebus 58 A–B), and he uses the power of the word as an explanation for the behaviour of Helen and her adultery. It is an irresistible force against which we cannot prevail. Gorgias thus gave himself to the teaching of rhetoric, writing a number of manuals (*Technai*), which purported to give instruction in the art. Plato tells us that he did not claim to be able to teach virtue (*arete*), but laughed at those who claimed to do so (Meno 95C). Not only did Gorgias repudiate the pretensions of men like Protagoras, who did claim to give instruction in virtue, but he also thought that their proper business was teaching skill in public speaking. This appears to be a claim that the proper task of a recognized class of sophists was to be education in rhetoric. Following this reference to Gorgias, the dialogue continues:

Socrates: Then you don't think that the sophists are teachers (of virtue)?
Meno: I can't say, Socrates. I have the same view as everybody else: sometimes I think they are, sometimes I don't.

Gorgias took a specific view of his profession, then, which consisted in teaching the young how to use logos in a certain way. This was clearly teachable (unlike virtue), and Plato did not criticise Gorgias on that score. Yet his view of rhetoric came with a philosophy of a well-defined kind, and it was this which was most provocative. Gorgias recognized that skill in the use of logos could lead to deceitfulness, but deceit was widely practised in arts which were held to be edifying. The poetic or dramatic artifice was a kind of deceit. Gorgias saw as his role the function of teaching people how to persuade, but not that of teaching them how to distinguish between right and wrong. All one person can offer another is opinion (*doxa*), and there is no soundly based truth which can be passed on (Helen 11, in DK B11, p.252). Since opinion is all that can be offered the mind, then one must set about making it as compelling as possible: the logician is no longer judge of ideas, and so the orator may come onto the field as a kind of combatant, ready to persuade, since opinions can always be swayed by persuasion. One can easily see why the distinction between true and false belief must have become very urgent for Plato, for he wished to safeguard objectivity in matters of ontology and epistemology. There is a kind of immoralism about Gorgias' view formulated in its most radical form (though he himself lived an "exemplary" life), since for him the efficacy of a speech counts for more than its content.

The philosophy of reality which lay behind this was appropriate. We have seen that logos can mean the ability to detail the true nature of a thing: that

seemed to be the case with Heraclitus, and Aristotle also has this usage. In Metaphysics 1024^{b}17, Aristotle deals with falsehood, and claims that a false logos is of something which does not exist. Conversely the true logos specifies an existent. This has been referred to elsewhere as "naive rationality". Gorgias seeks to undermine such an understanding of logos by arguing against the notion of an absolute existence, which alone could guarantee knowledge, on the view obtaining thus far in Greek thought.

Gorgias' ontology broke the nexus between logos and reality, and his *logoi* were aimed at effect rather than the categorization of reality. In a fitting piece of sophistry, the sophist devotes himself to the question of nothing. On the basis of Sextus Empiricus (Against the Logicians I.65) and the treatise On Melissus, Xenophanes and Gorgias (attributed to Aristotle), it is possible to reconstruct his argument as consisting of the following propositions: that nothing exists, that if it did it would be incomprehensible, and that if it were comprehensible, it would be incommunicable. That this discussion is dictated by Parmenides' poem is clear, though Gorgias' intention is not so clear. It seems that he is taking one aspect of Parmenides' discussion and deliberately trivialising it in order to destroy its claim to be seriously accepted by anyone. Gorgias sought to undermine the idea that there was any abiding substance of reality, and in this way struck a blow at the "naive rationalism", characteristic of Greek thought up until his time: the function of logos was not that of designating truly some aspect of reality, but in the absence of an essential reality, it had the function of altering opinions about things, in a system where each opinion was as valid as the next. Sextus Empiricus saw this as denying the *kriterion,* or touchstone, whereby all opinions might be tested for their truth or falsity. In the absence of this, rhetoric became the mere deployment of persuasive force. Gorgias had produced, to the non-Sceptic at least, an alarming caricature of the new intellectual tool.

In the post-Socratic era, it is natural that Plato saw such a view as a trend to be resisted, waves of irrational feeling having been responsible for the trial and death of Socrates. He did so with great vigour in the Gorgias, a dialogue in which that sophist submits to the Socratic cross-questioning. As with the Protagoras, it is the pretension of the sophist which is to be punctured:

> *Socrates*: So we have come too late for a feast, as the proverb says?
> *Callicles*: Yes, and a most elegant feast; for Gorgias gave us a rich and varied display a short while ago. (Gorgias 447A)

Gorgias' proneness to giving such displays of logos will be put to the test in the dialogue: he declares his art to be "about *logoi*" (449D), and with his customary use of the analogy from other skills (τέχναι), Socrates finds this to be a non-specific characteristic, since it is true that all the skills are concerned with speech (*logoi*). Gorgias considers the power of persuasion to be the greatest good, a source of freedom and personal power.

It is a thing Socrates, which is genuinely the greatest good; a cause of freedom to man in general, and a cause of the individual sway of others, in their several cities. (452D)

After more discussion comes the vitriolic reply of Socrates that rhetoric is not a form of art, but a type of flattery. Like cookery, it is not a skill (τέχνη), but a kind of knack. Rhetoric is merely a *semblance* of political activity (463D). Gorgias appears aghast at this suggestion, and Socrates consistently refuses the term "art" to such an activity, indicating as much about his high view of τέχνη as he does about the major issues being discussed.

Gorgias' view is situated within the general debate over *nomos* and *physis*, and the thrust of it appears to be an extreme emphasis on the former, and apparently a complete denial of the latter. Like other sophists, he emphasised the contribution of education and culture to the formation of the personality, and minimised the endemic natural factor. The Sophists provided a remarkable challenge to the mainstream Presocratic tradition, and raised important questions about its foundations. It was earlier argued that Greek philosophy began with questions about reality, and that epistemological questions arose out of changes in the understanding of reality. The need for reason manifested itself, as Parmenides' Fragment 7 indicates, when conflicting reports of the nature of reality were given and the function of reason was that of specifying reality as it truly was. Now the Sophists focussed a critique on the very factor that had brought reason into existence, namely the real reality underlying appearances. Non-manifest reality was declared not to exist by them, or at least not to be knowable, and in consequence the newly crowned prince of human faculties, reason, had neither object nor foundation. Plato's reply to this idea, and to Gorgias, is simply a continuation of the mainstream Presocratic tradition, that there *is* an underlying reality, and that the function of reason *is* to deal with it. His metaphysical system aims at formulating what the objects of reason are.

Aristotle's philosophy was not developed in the context of the sophistic critique, and it seems to express more confidence about the meaning of logos in the Greek tradition. He is in no doubt about its value, importance or meaning: not only does he believe in an objective physical world, but at times he seems to see logos as rooted in nature itself.

Aristotle's use of logos provides a bridge between the Classical and the Hellenistic usages. On the one hand, it shows that the identification of logos with the rational was now complete, and commonly recognised. On the other hand however, there are some passages which tend towards the kind of hypostatization of logos which we find in the late Greek cosmic force, Logos. One of the classic passages is Politics $1332^{b}4$, where man is distinguished from the animals by evidence of his possession of the faculty of reason. Men are said to be virtuous through three things, namely habit, nature and reason. Animals, it is said, live chiefly by nature, but also by habit to a certain extent:

Politics 1336ª30, where the responsibility of educators is said to lie in the selection of the kind of "myth" or "rational tale" which children are permitted to hear. In Rhetorica 1393ᵇ8 logos is used in a way in which we would normally use "myth", since it is used to designate a legend used by Stesichorus and Aesop. In the same work it is used in the context of mathematicians to mean mathematical "discourses" or "arguments". These are examples of the use of logos to describe extended pieces of reasoning, or rational thought, which might well be covered by the general term discourse, which is a recognized and distinctive human capacity: so the πρακτῶν λόγος (the "theory" of practice: Nicomachean Ethics 1104ª3). In his discussion of choice, Aristotle posits two conditions which are necessary for choice to occur, namely desire and reason. Choice causes action, and choice is caused by a combination of desire and reasoning being directed towards some end. Thus choice involves the exercise of reason through intellect or thought, and disposition (ἕξις: Nicomachean Ethics 1139ª32). In this case "reason" (λόγος) clearly refers to a capacity, rather than a formulated set of principles.

Logos elsewhere means reason in the sense of rational propositions, as in Nicomachean Ethics 1179ᵇ27 where the man who is living according to passion is described as he who will not listen to reason (logos) from the person who seeks to deflect him from a course of action. The rational part of man is referred to as being twofold (Nicom. Ethics 1098ª4), and in 1103ª2 the rational part (τὸ λόγον ἔχον) is again alleged to be twofold (διττόν). In both cases the two levels of this rational part are defined as the capacity to obey reason, as a child obeys its father, but the other level constitutes rationality properly speaking, for it is the capacity to exercise intelligence: to indulge in reason, as well as obeying it. The passage first cited from the Ethics has some significance because it dwells on the idea of man's function, which has a great importance in Aristotle's teleological view of reality.

Just as the carpenter and shoemaker have specific functions and businesses, and the eye, the hand and the foot all have a function of their own, so does the human being have some specific function. Various possibilities are entertained here, but each is rejected as being non-specific. Living is common to plants as well as man; sentient living is shared by animals; there remains the practical life of the rational element in man. Aristotle thus defines man's function as the active exercise of the soul's faculties in accordance with reason. This confirms other statements about the specific quality of man's reasoning capacities, which constitute a defining characteristic. (It is interesting to pursue the posterity of Aristotle's bifurcation of the logos-capacity. The two types of reason surface later, in Christian philosophy, as the Father and the Son. R. P. Casey has traced the importance of the διττοὶ λόγοι in early Patristic philosophy, and Clement of Alexandria distinguishes between the paternal logos and the immanent logos, which is incarnate, in a fragment listed by Stählin III, p.202. This distinction is generally held to have contributed

to Arianism, in which a substantial difference between the Father and Son was claimed, by offering a means of prising apart two sides of the logos. The Arians leapt upon such justifications, and in this way Aristotle seems to have played an unwitting part in the trinitarian disputes which divided the late Roman Empire.)

An important qualification is placed on the role of logos in Metaphysics $1059^{b}27$, which will be seen to have a future in Neoplatonism and also Patristic Philosophy. The question under discussion is the object of science (*episteme*), and the idea that science is concerned with the ultimate elements is rejected.

"It would seem rather that the science being sought is to do with universals, for every reasoning (logos) and every science concerns universals rather than ultimate (species); and so it must deal with the primary genera. These would be Being and Unity."

The proper concern of reason, then, is not to do with particulars, but with the broad bases of reality, being and unity. This point of view is confirmed in the Physics 189^{a}:

"... the universal is known by logos, and the particular by sense-perception. For logos grasps the universal, and sense-perception the partial (κατὰ μέρος). Thus great and small are known by logos, whilst thick and thin are known by perception."

Such an assessment of the epistemological function of reason demonstrates its claim to be the highest faculty possessed by man, since it is that part of him which deals directly with the essence of reality. The Neoplatonic use of this will do more to highlight the difference between the universal and the particular, and will give a transcendent significance to the One and Being, said by Aristotle to be the primary genera, or the proper objects of logos. In keeping with its focus on the general, logos is closely connected with definition (ὁρισμός). We are told that every definition is a logos, and that the definition indicates the essence of a thing. The idea of definition contains the idea of limit, and thus the essence of a thing is contained by reason (see also Meteorologica $378^{b}20$).

Aristotle's logos marks the full flowering of the concept in the classical era, since its great variety of meanings is fully exploited, and fully accepted as part of the technical language of rationalism. He is heir to all the tendencies discovered in the use of the word prior to him; logos appears as the defining characteristic of man; it is contrasted with "voice", and therefore appears to mean the faculty of making rational sounds; yet it is defined as having an internal aspect, as well as an outward, articulated aspect; it is the characteristic of man which is chiefly responsible for his being a city-dweller; it has an exploratory and expressive power; it is the essence of man, and the basis of his

equivalent to a "creative fire", creative being understood in the sense of being able to design and make (τεχνικόν). Proclus, in his commentary on Plato's Parmenides (V, 135 ed. Cousin) also refers to the seminal principles in the plural, as a group of eternal forces, combining them with the Platonic ideas in an effort to guarantee the stability of "the entities which participate in the idea", and this later use of the Stoic notion gives a good example of the Neoplatonic deployment of concepts native to Stoicism.

In general the ancients report the Stoic doctrine in the context of matter and its generation, rather than that of the soul or mind. But of course Stoic philosophy is materialist and any attempt to accommodate such entities must be carried out within the limits of physical reality. The status of the seminal principles is not quite clear because they appear to exist alongside matter, as things "according to which" matter takes its quality and shape. In this way, according to Galen (Defin. Medicae 29: SVF II.218, line 1), the Stoics defined the soul as "a body composed of small particles moving out from itself in accordance with seminal principles". This notion is clearly quite different from the later Christian use of the seminal logos, since the soul has no special status, and like all other reality, evolves from matter shaped according to seminal principle.

There subsists some ambiguity in the causative value of the seminal logos. The first passage cited from the Stoics has God as seminal reason, and reality is held to grow out of him as plants grow from the seed. Other passages speak of reality emerging "in accordance with" (κατά) the seminal principles, as if they are merely an agency for shaping reality as it emerges. Yet even in D.L. VII.136 there is an ambiguity, since the seed is presented as both the origin of reality and a force which exists alongside matter, accommodating it to itself. Such a dualism in the originating principles of the cosmos is characteristic of Greek philosophy, since from Plato's Timaeus onwards there is held to be a certain given set of factors, Nature or Matter, sometimes described as Necessity, and in tandem with Necessity some kind of designing and constructing force, called in the Timaeus the demiurge. The *logos spermatikos* of the Stoics comes close to this artisan God of Plato's, even though it is intended to unite both aspects of the dualism outlined above in a single function. Any dualism is an embarrassment in Stoicism, which holds that reality is constituted out of a single principle, namely matter: and so the originating logos has the character of something out of which reality grows rather than that of a controlling force standing above it.

Of course logos has its ordinary meanings of "speech" and "reason" in Stoicism. In a definition which smacks of Aristotle, logos is defined as a semantic vocal sound proceeding from the intelligence (D.L. VII.56), and here Diocles Magnus is being reported on the subject of speech, which term provides the best translation for logos in this context. An interesting argument is ascribed to Diogenes of Babylon by Galen (SVF III.215, line 30) according to

which voice comes through the pharynx. Speech proceeds from the intelligence, and is voice in a certain form: the intelligence is not therefore located in the brain, since its product in the form of speech would not pass through such an indirect route as the pharynx if this were the case. The understanding of logos/speech here appears to be that vocal sounds are formed into a semantic structure by the intelligence, thus yielding speech. The Greek word *semantikos* comes from *sema,* meaning "sign" or "omen", and is thus similar to our "significant": the "semantic" is that which contains recognizable signs; that which is interpretable.

The Stoics recognized the capacity for silent thought, which seemed to be speech-like, though without the articulation of sounds. Their terminology allowed for silent discourse. A distinction was drawn between the *logos prophorikos* and the *logos endiathetos,* uttered and internal reason respectively. The internal logos is that by which we know the connections between things, argument, division, synthesis, analysis and demonstration (SVF II 43, line 14). These are all the forms of reasoning which make up the armoury of Greek logic. Sextus Empiricus (Adv. Math. VIII 275; SVF II 43, line 18) gives us the Stoic view of the uttered word: Aristotle's famous definition of man as being distinct from the animals by his capacity for speech, that is vocal sounds which possess significance, is now refined by virtue of the Stoic distinction. Sextus reports the Stoic opinion to be that man is distinct from animals not by virtue of externalised discourse, but the faculty of internal discourse. His ability for silent reflection places him apart from the animals: that this should be the case is an interesting development, since one might have considered the ability to utter sounds possessing significance to be an adequately distinguishing feature. Clearly the idea that thought could take place without words was a striking fact to the Stoics. The dominant part of the soul is that from which reason springs. Logos and intelligence have the same origin: the spring of such higher faculties lies with the heart.

Logos as reason is amply attested. Chrysippus spoke of the rational being as guided by the faculty of reason (SVF III.95, line 11). Galen reports him (SVF III.113, line 21) as stating that the rational being is moved according to reason, rather than the soul. The emphasis on nature is important, since it establishes reason as a part of the ordinary functioning of reality. The connections between things and the ability to grasp these connections are rooted in the same physical process as the rest of reality: reason is not considered to be a transcendent entity, hovering above the real world upon which it must sit in judgment. According to the Stoics, virtue is a disposition of the soul, springing from reason, which was held to be a stable and immutable power (SVF I.50, line 2). Diogenes Laertius VII.54 attests the Stoic understanding of right reason as the "*kriterion*", or standard of truth. This notion of an intellectual touchstone was a common subject of discussion among Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics, and Diogenes reports a variety of views among Stoics on

the subject of the *kriterion.* Some argued that the genuine and indubitable apprehension of a real object constituted the means of testing concepts: others, for example Boëthus, advocated several standards, namely intelligence, sense-perception desire and knowledge. Chrysippus advocated sense-perception and "*prolepsis*", a term which is usually translated by the word preconception, by which the Stoics meant a naturally endowed and innate system of thought involving universal concepts. Posidonius, we are told, made right reason the *kriterion,* and he also considered it to be a faculty endowed by nature. Chrysippus (D.L. VII.128) claimed that both law and right reason exist by nature and not by convention. Right reason is said to be common to gods and men (Cicero, De Legibus 1.7.22).

In conclusion then, the Stoics stress the idea that logos/reason is *rooted in nature,* and it consequently looks like an arche, or the first principle familiar from the Presocratics. Reality grows out of seminal reason, which is both its source and its designer: both mind and physical reality share in reason, which is inherent in them. Logos has an embodiment in speech, which is the production of significant sounds (*logos prophorikos*), but it does not need this vocal incarnation in order to exist. Reason is also an innate capacity, like a disposition enabling the comprehension of rational procedures.

Scepticism is a crucial ingredient in the development of later Greek philosophy. Its prime concern was the *kriterion* for distinguishing truth from falsehood, and its exponents were more doubtful about finding such an instrument than the Stoics or Epicureans. They emphasised that what we acquire is manifestations of reality, and that reality itself is either difficult or impossible to apprehend. Scepticism is extremely important for this study in particular, because of this thoroughgoing concern with epistemological issues. In many ways its contribution is negative, since it strikes at the foundations of the edifice built around and upon the advances of the Presocratics by Plato and Aristotle. These thinkers are now seen as dogmatists, and ripe for intellectual pruning; such movements occur regularly in the history of Western philosophy, following hard upon periods of intellectual confidence and theoretical construction. Once philosophy departs from questioning, from the Socratic inquiry, and moves to the statement and the theory, it overreaches itself, and its hubris brings the critical vengeance of the Sceptics, of William of Ockham, of Husserl.

The Sceptics, then, pay particular attention to the earlier and most fundamental acquisition of Greek philosophy, the idea of reason/speech. One of the most perplexing things about reason is that it brings different results. This in fact had been a failing in sense perception and the thought of ordinary mortals, and the antidote seemed to lie in reason, which provided a stable and disciplined account of reality. The Presocratic understanding of reason presents it as canonical and unambiguous: yet those deploying it differed from each other. This was a terrible failing in the new tool, and one

which the Sceptics triumphantly exploited. The story of Carneades' speeches for and against justice, delivered in Rome on successive days in 155 B.C., is well-known and it is a good illustration of the Sceptical method of pitting *logoi* against each other. Conflicting arguments (ἀντικείμενοι λόγοι) were brought together in order to illustrate the inefficacy of reason. Sextus Empiricus outlines the Pyrrhonian approach to this (Outlines of Pyrrhonism I.8), and notes the ethical value of opposing ideas. The conflict thus generated will show us that many such judgments possess "equipollence" (ἰσοθένεια), or that they are equal in strength: as Sextus says (I.10), they are equal in respect of their probability and improbability. The knowledge of the real status of arguments will have a psychological effect, relieving us of tension and bringing us to a state of intellectual suspension of judgment, which will in turn yield imperturbability of mind (*ataraxia*). In the first place one opposes the sensibles to the intelligibles, but one may also oppose intelligibles, that is intellectual judgments. None of the conflicting arguments (τῶν μαχομένων λόγων) will take precedence over any other. An example of this type of procedure at work may be found in the same work (II.130), where the question of the existence of the "sign" (*semeion*) is discussed. The Stoics had argued for the existence of such a logical indicator in argument, whereby the conclusion is permitted. The sign is that which allows and brings forward the conclusion, and is itself apprehended before the thing signified. Sextus first argues against the sign, and then proceeds to argue in favour of it, in order to demonstrate the "equipollence of the conflicting arguments (ἀντικειμένων λόγων)".

It was claimed that to every argument (logos) an equal argument could be opposed: Sextus qualifies this statement by saying that it refers to arguments for which the hypothesis has been tested, so that it is limited to one's personal investigation of arguments and their counter-arguments. The concern here is to avoid the charge of dogmatism, to which the whole Sceptical enterprise was opposed. The view is therefore reformulated as follows:

> To every argument examined by me, which establishes something dogmatically, it seems to me that there is another argument opposed, which establishes a point dogmatically, which is equal to it in credibility and incredibility. (Outlines of Pyrrhonism I.203)

The emphasis on the subjective aspect is included to avoid giving the proposition a dogmatic form, but rather to make a claim about one's own state of mind. This particular strategy is not wholly successful in avoiding dogmatism: it is true that Scepticism was defined in a passage quoted earlier as the ability to place arguments in opposition to each other (I.8), and the emphasis pretty clearly lies on the psychological disposition. Yet the claim about the capacity for opposing arguments must be more than a psychological or sub-

jective one, since for it to have any importance there must be a presupposed claim that the construction of such antitheses is a possibility in the world of discourse; that argument lends itself to this treatment when properly examined. Self-contradiction is thus a characteristic of argumentation, irrespective of the manoeuvres of the philosopher.

Scepticism wishes however, to lay stress on the subjective experience of the antithetical character of argument. Sextus tells us that the basic principle (*arche*) of Scepticism is the hope of attaining quietude (op. cit. I.12): nevertheless there does appear to be a dogma involved, despite the desire to avoid this charge, and that is the view that many propositions have equipollence: none of the conflicting arguments takes precedence over any other. For this reason Scepticism stands at a crucial point in the progress of Greek rationalism, which it reduces not to absurdity, but to impotence: and it is held that the failure of logos to produce unambiguous answers does not result in anxiety, but peace. It does not interest itself in the dogma of physics per se but only in the possibility of establishing contradictions within its dogma, with a view to reaching quietude (I.18). The word argument (logos) is understood as that which establishes something dogmatically, a point which is not evident in itself, but acquired through the reasoning process: it is ratiocinations of this kind which are to be opposed to each other (I.202). Sextus differentiates between his school and that of the Cyrenaic school on the question of the logos of external objects. This school was founded by Aristippus of Cyrene, and had ethical goals similar to those of the Epicureans: pleasure, the greatest good, consists of an internal state whose cause is unknown. Truth is measured subjectively, rather than by reference to the external world. Sextus comments here (I.213) that external objects have an "inapprehensible nature" in this view, whereas members of his school suspend judgment on the logos of external objects, which appears to refer to the account of them which is to be given. So Protagoras is said to have believed that the *logoi* of appearances reside in matter. In this way matter is the appearance (I.218), and this, according to Sextus, gives us the meaning of his claim that "man is the measure of all things". Protagoras' statement means that man is the *kriterion* of all things: he is the *kriterion* of all existence, since logos is in matter, and things which appear to man therefore exist. Protagoras thus, somewhat oddly, becomes a realist: but we note the idea of logos as signifying the *meaning* of an object. For him the object contains its meaning; for the Cyrenaic, the nature of the object cannot be known; and for the Pyrrhonian, the meaning of the object is a matter for suspended judgment. (The Sceptic has the appearance as *kriterion*, since that is not open to question, like the issue of whether the appearance has a basis in reality: I.22.)

The appearance has a certain validity, for one can be certain of having it, whatever its provenance. Against the idea that the appearances can be undermined through reasoning, is pitted the argument that if reason were held to

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Chapter III. Thought As Sight

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Chapter IV. Thought As Self-Thought

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Chapter V. Naming And Being

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Chapter VI. The Silence Beyond Names

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Chapter VII. Thinking Negatively : The Foundations Of The Via Negativa

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Can it then partake of being apart from in the present, past, or future? It cannot. Then the One has no share in being at all.

As a consequence, there can be no rational account (logos), science (*episteme*), perception (*aisthesis*), or opinion (*doxa*) of it (142A). Therefore it cannot be named, and in this way predicates are ruled out.

The second hypothesis seeks to reverse this result by taking the One as having being. The One both "is", and "is one". In this case, it is pluralised, since it now has two characteristics, and this leads to an infinite number of parts in the course of the argument. In this alternative, the One has shape, is in places, and is subject to time. The rather baffling argument concludes by stressing this point (155D): the One "partakes" of the past, present and future, and there is something in relation to it, and which belongs to it.

Certainly, and there would be knowledge and opinion and perception of it . . . And it has a name and a rational account (logos), and is named and spoken of. (155D)

On this hypothesis, the One is in time, has being, and has relational characteristics: it is therefore knowable, and speakable.

Hypotheses five and six consider the possibility that the "One is not", giving two different meanings to this proposition. On hypothesis five the statement "the One is not" is taken as having meaning (it must have meaning, since we can see what its opposite would mean). We know the meaning of this statement. The One may not exist, but it may partake of many relations, and it is in this respect that predication is possible. Using the breadth of the word "is", a series of contradictory statements is produced. The "One is not", but it must have "is-ness" for this statement to be true: it therefore both is, and is not. What follows is a similar set of contradictions, with the conclusion that everything can be simultaneously predicated and denied of the One which does not exist. The sixth hypothesis also treats of the non-existent One, but insists that in this case that being should be completely denied of the One: this is the purely and simply non-existent principle of the Gnostic Basilides (see p. 108). In this case the One does none of the things which the previous One both did, and did not do, such as move, alter, or be at rest. It has no relations. It has no name, logos, perception, or opinion formed of it.

The seventh hypothesis entertains the notion that the One does not exist at all, and the result is an infinite divisibility of what other entities there are.

But, as it seems, each mass of them is unlimited in number, and even if one takes what seems to be the smallest piece, it suddenly seems, just as in a dream, to be many, having seemed to be one . . . (164D)

Plato is prone to having dreams about the basic particles of reality, as we know from the Theaetetus, but in this case the particle explodes into a mass of infinitely dividing fragments. The absence of unity means that reality lacks a principle of cohesion, and a further point of interest is that this pluralisation is the result of discourse.

> In my opinion all being conceived in discourse must be broken up into tiny segments. For it would always be apprehended as a mass devoid of one. (165B)

The hypotheses of the Parmenides are bewildering. There are those who find the dialogue a jolly piece of philosophy (Taylor, Plato 370), and there are those whose sense of humour is less acute (Cornford, Plato and Parmenides 114). It is certain however that it is a profound piece of analysis of the breadth of the word "is", and is no less an examination of ontology than of epistemology. There was enormous interest in the dialogue in later antiquity – witness the massive commentary by Proclus – and it seems perverse to strip it of serious intention, on the basis of Peano's dubious distinction between the existential and predicative uses of the word "is". It must be kept in mind that unity and "being", which is what we might call reality, are closely allied in the treatment of Plato, and of Parmenides himself. The question is not so much about mathematics, as about the nature of the fundamental stuff of things. Plato is asking, through this series of antinomies, about the character of essential being and its relation to discourse. It is the old Presocratic issue of whether the stuff of reality is one, or several. The Parmenides is about monism, and the questions asked are about monistic explanations of reality. Is the essence of things a single principle, or are there several such principles? If there is no unity, how can anything be? What is the relation of discourse to this unity in reality? Is it the kind of thing which lends itself to apprehension through discourse? These are the questions asked by Plato throughout the sometimes tortuous reasonings of the dialogue. Obviously there is no clear verdict given on the matters discussed, but the grounds for discussion are established: "is-ness" belongs to discourse as well as to the external world, and it seems to be necessary that they have it in common in order for both to exist. The principles thrown out for discussion are crucial to the development of negative thinking, since the conditions under which predication can apply to essential reality are spelt out: if the One does not have being, it cannot be the subject of discourse. If it does not exist in time, it cannot be the subject of discourse. Both these suggestions say as much about the limits of discourse as they do about the nature of reality. Further, the notion outlined immediately above, that discourse fragments reality, is particularly significant for the later Platonists. The antithesis is set up as follows: given the absence of unity in things, discourse can only break them in pieces. Unity would provide a kind of epistemological bulwark against the dividing tendency inher-

Augustine's philosophy of time, developed in the Confessions (XI) will reiterate the principle that discourse is time-bound. For these reasons it should be noted that the second hypothesis stakes out an area for discussion in subsequent philosophy, and Plato's proposition seems to be this. If unity is in time, then predication about it is possible: the antinomy involved lies in the consequence of the One's being in time, since this *modus vivendi* is not satisfactory to it, and it loses its character as one. In later Platonism it will be established, then, that the separative character of discourse and the fact that it is time-bound are one and the same characteristic: the collecting of pieces involves a process like going shopping, and such a process is inevitably temporal. The result will be the drawing of a distinction between discursive thought and a higher form of intelligence.

It can be quite clearly seen how predication is assessed on this view: it involves putting together separate pieces, and has a multiple structure. This is quite obvious, since each part of a sentence refers to different items, and the sentence attempts to combine them. In this respect the sentence seeks to overcome the individuation which characterizes particular entities, and to approximate the wholeness which the real possesses: the sentence tends towards the holistic because it endeavours to surmount the isolation of the atoms, by spelling out their relations. Yet the defect in this is evident: what if there is a reality which is itself a whole, without differentiated parts. Such a being would have no pieces to be combined in a sentence, and this tool would be useless for the task of apprehending it. Further, it would be positively ruinous to the effort to apprehend a whole being: because of its habit of dealing with parts, the application of discourse to such a being would be rather like passing a document through a shredding machine before reading it. However, unlike the document in this analogy, such a being would be recalcitrant to the process, which would therefore function in vain.

When Plato concludes that where the One does not exist, it is unknowable and unspeakable, he is offering to the Neoplatonists a means of characterizing their highest being. The question will be, henceforth, whether the One, or God, has qualities such as being, and consequently whether he can be apprehended in discourse. The answer will be found to lie in negative discourse, and language will become the means of its own self-removal.

The philosophy of the One is therefore closely related to the issue of the efficacy of discourse, and will remain so throughout the history of later Platonism and Patristic philosophy. It was carried on in the Academy by the shadowy figure of Speusippus, whose importance as a bridge between Plato and Neoplatonism has been established by Merlan, Armstrong, Krämer and others. So far as we can piece the story together, Speusippus carried on Plato's theorising about unity, and dispensed with the theory of forms. Aristotle refers (Metaphysics 1083^a22) to "some who do not believe in the Ideas". It is generally agreed that this refers to Speusippus, and Aristotle goes on to re-

... 128), though his suggestions on the origin of Platonic mysticism are confusing. The process of negative conceptualisation arises not so much from the source of not-Being standing above not-Being, but from the One's general transcendence. Speusippus says nothing about the negative method, and so speculation centres on what he may have said, given his philosophy of unity. The development of Speusippus appears to lie in a response to the paradoxes of the Parmenides, and given that these link discourse to the One's being within time, being and so on, it is clear that Speusippus' attempt to place the One outside the Good, Intellect, Being and the mathematical One must have resulted in a negative judgment on the capacity of discourse to apprehend it. (It is not strictly correct to speak of the transcendence of the One in either Plato's Parmenides or Speusippus. The Parmenides is concerned with the logic of unity, and whether or not it has logical priority, rather than its position on a ladder of being. The Parmenides habitually speaks of the One not being in time, or place, rather than of its being "above" them. Nevertheless the distinction between logic and metaphysics is not one we should insist on, for Plato's sake, since it would no doubt go unappreciated. Plato's logical realism means that logic, for him, is about the behaviour of beings, and the same is probably true of Speusippus. This point will be developed later, in discussion of Dodds' account of the Pythagoreanization of the Parmenides.) As Merlan guessed, then, Speusippus may well be the father of negative theology, since he apparently took the One out of the range of discourse.

The exclusion of the One, that is the basic substance of reality, from the realm of being means that discourse must resort to negation to capture it. As we have seen, the issue of the One is in fact about the issue of the limits of discourse, and we do well to remember that the discourse issues raised in the Parmenides are not only concerned with expressing the One in language, but also the extent to which unity is necessary for language. To distort a phrase of Chairman Mao, Being is the sea in which the words we speak swim; it is the stuff language is made of. Is this being to be characterized as unity, or should it be regarded as having a plural character? Further, should we disjoin being and unity altogether? These are the questions of the Parmenides, and one of the issues is whether unity provides language with its basic stuff, as does being. Language seems to have some holistic drive, which seeks to bring things together: it is an interweaving (*symploke*: Plato, Theaetetus 202B; Aristotle, On the Soul 432^{a}12) of notions. Predication combines, and expresses relations between things. Is the unity of being that after which language gropes: put differently, is the unity of being that on which language rests, that which language presupposes? Is it in fact unity which is the sea of language, in which the individual words swim? Apparently so, but if unity is logically distinguished from being, if it is said to be separate, above, or beyond it, then there must be consequences for language. If the hypothesis that the One is not in being is accepted, then it is possible that we may have to

On this view "not-motion" does not mean rest, but is indefinite, referring to anything else but motion. What is being referred to is left open by the negative, and leaves open an infinity of possibilities, minus one. The development of this view must be seen in the light of the preceding discussion of being. The question of the dialogue has been about the extent to which the forms of being, motion and rest (which seem to be greater, and more active than other forms) combine with, or differ from each other. The result is that one can predicate not-being of motion for example, since motion is clearly not identical with being. This characteristic of not-being, which things may possess, is to do with otherness and difference, and it is here that the analysis of negation plays its part. When we predicate not-being of a form, we are not attributing to it a characteristic which is opposite to that of being: if we were doing so, the entity in question would cease to be. We are attributing an existent characteristic of otherness, designated by the term not-being, and which forms may possess without disappearing.

The conclusion of this argument is significant for this discussion, in both its aspects (258E), for the existence of not-being is allowed, and negation is explicated as a statement of otherness. Both results are significant for later Platonism, but our specific concern here is the logic of negation. This form of negation is understood as making a statement of difference only, and there is no sense in which the negative contradicts or opposes. A negation is therefore very much an open statement: a non-specific affirmation. Not-Y means everything but Y.

> And in speech we know there is . . . affirmation and negation. (263E)

Speech is therefore composed of two manoeuvres only, and given the above analysis they are not dissimilar to each other, since negation becomes an indefinite form of assertion. *Aphairesis* and *apophasis* differ in the following way: the former negates a specific characteristic of an entity, effectively removing it and thereby creating the absence which *apophasis* fails to do. *Apophasis* is associated with the attribution of not-being: it does not create a conceptual hole, but rather attributes the characteristic of not-being, or otherness.

Given this background one can see why Aristotle is able to treat "not-man" as an indefinite noun (ὄνομα ἀόριστον), after denying that such a term is either a sentence, or a negation (On Interpretation 16^{a}31). The negation in this case leaves open the range of possible affirmations, and so could be described as a noun which lacks definition. In general, Aristotle gives a great deal of attention to defining the different forms of negative, and some effort should be made to clarify his views, since they have as much importance for Neoplatonism as do those of Plato. Aristotle gets over the problem of how to formulate the "oppositeness" of negation, by using the word contradictory

(*antiphatikos*), noting that some contradictory statements contain contraries or "opposities", (*enantiai*: On Interp. $18^{a}10$). Not all negations involve contraries, or opposites: for example the statement of a thing that "it is good" has as its contrary "it is bad", but the negation "it is not good" does not produce the contrary (On Interp. $23^{b}2$). Further, Aristotle is capable of categorizing the statement "man is not-just" as an affirmative statement (op. cit. $19^{b}25$): the reasoning behind this is that the verb determines the negativity, or otherwise, of a statement. If the "not" is considered to be attached to the verb, then the statement is negative: if however the verb is positive, then the statement is affirmative. Aristotle distinguishes between "man is not-just" which is an affirmation, and "man is not just" which is a negation. In the first case, the verb is free of the negative, and the sentence is considered to be affirmative.

That the negation in this case must be attached to the verb is a principle also maintained in the Prior Analytics ($51^{b}6$), where an extensive argument is mounted in favour of it. "To be not-X", and "not to be X" are said to be quite different; the negation of "to be white" is "not to be white", rather than "to be not-white". Aristotle explains this by reference to the expression "he is able to walk": the real negation of this statement is "he is not able to walk". If the negative were applied to walking, the result would be "he is able not to walk". The last statement, for Aristotle, implies an assertion about a person's walking ability, and is therefore not a genuine negation of the first statement. This point is developed at some length, and at times in a cryptic way, but the result of it for our enquiry is as follows. In terms of the negative theology of the later Platonists, the statement "the One, or God, is good", would have as its genuine negation "the One is-not good". The statement "the One is not-good" is in fact an assertion, with being attributed by the verb "is". Apparently negative statements turn out to be assertions, though Aristotle himself does not tell us what he considers to be attributed to the subject by the copula "is", in a statement where the predicate only is negated.

Late Greek and early Christian philosophy, together with Gnostic philosophy in particular, are characterized by their great use of the alpha privative, in adjectives applying to the highest deity. In this view God is said to be invisible (*aoratos*), unnamable (*anonomastos*), and many other negations are piled onto these in order to create a picture, or rather, non-picture, of the divine. The late period is the period of the theology of the alpha privative, and Aristotle gives his attention to this phenomenon of the Greek language. For in Greek there is a symmetry of form throughout a vast series of negative adjectives, because of this extensive use of the prefix alpha. Such a uniformity in negative adjectives is not present in English, and its presence in Greek naturally requires Aristotle to give some logical analysis.

The alpha privative makes words mean their opposites (On Xenophanes $978^{b}23$), and Aristotle makes this observation as he notes that a negative ad-

jective like "unmoved" (*akineton*) can attribute a certain positive quality. Perhaps one could legitimately infer that the alpha prefix could produce an adjective negative in form, but positive in meaning. The question is taken up in greater detail in the Metaphysics (1022^b23) in a passage where privation itself is discussed, and its various forms defined. Aristotle observes:

> Privation has as many senses as there are negations derived from the alpha privative. (1022^b33)

He therefore considers this form of adjective to contain a considerable range of possible meanings. The alpha privative may "deprive" a thing of a quality which it could naturally possess; alternatively, it could deprive a thing of characteristics which it does not naturally possess. By "invisible" we may mean that an object is completely colourless, or perhaps only faintly colourless: by "footless" we may mean that something has no feet, or that it scarcely has feet. Aristotle appears to refer to the use of hyperbole through the alpha privative adjective: we may call a thing "uncuttable" to emphasise the difficulty encountered in cutting. In this case the alpha does not produce the strict opposite, or contrary. Aristotle concludes this section with the odd remark:

> Thus not every man is good or evil, just or unjust, but there is also the intermediate state. (1023^a6)

This apparently unconnected conclusion draws attention to the vast range of meanings of the alpha privative adjective, and the point seems to be that though the opposite is connoted by such an adjective, it is not necessarily meant. "Invisibility" may therefore suggest varying degrees of visibility, and the alpha privative should not be taken as inevitably suggesting the opposite of the positive form of the adjective. These remarks should sound a cautionary note over the use of such adjectives in Gnosticism, Neoplatonism and Patristic philosophy. In the first place, the range of meanings of an alpha privative adjective is considerable. In the second place opposites, or contraries, are not always implied by them; nor is the complete absence of the characteristic under consideration. All we can say about the alpha privative adjective is that it diminishes the degree to which a certain characteristic is present in an entity. Aristotle observes that the logic of the alpha privative is like that of privation itself (1022^b33). Such an adjective, we may conclude, is intended to help the imagination to modify its view of a certain entity: it is not necessarily intended to help it think in opposites. Further, the distinction between negation (*apophasis*) and privation (*steresis*) is introduced to the discussion of unity and multiplicity in the Metaphysics (1004^a10). The passage indicates that where negation is applied to unity, the result is the claim that unity is not

to make things what they are, yet it is this very force which proves recalcitrant to the division process. In the Physics (206^{a}18) Aristotle remarks that there is no difficulty in demonstrating that there is no such thing as an indivisible line, and so gives his view of the matter.

In a reference to induction (Posterior Analytics 81^{b}2) he claims that even abstractions (τὰ ἐξ ἀφαιρεσέως) can only be known by induction. Induction is literally examination of individual parts, whereas deduction deals with wholes, and abstractions are liable to be elucidated by the inductive method. Abstractions are still in the individual genus, and so may be dealt with by induction (this is an extremely difficult passage and it is difficult to say much more than this with any degree of certitude). On the other hand, abstractions (meaning literally, things stated by "removal" or "subtraction") cannot be the subject of natural science. Aristotle gives as his reason (Parts of Animals 641^{b}11) that things made by nature are made "for the sake of some purpose" (ἕνεκά του): unfortunately this is not developed, and it can only be surmised that he means that abstract thinking involves movement away from objects, whereas nature functions in a different way, accumulating "for the sake of some purpose". Alternatively we can understand the phrase as saying: "Nature makes all *as a consequence* of something" (ἕνεκά του). The succeeding lines deal with the ultimate cause of reality, and so the interpretation might be plausible. On this view then, the remark would mean that natural science cannot deal with abstractions, since nature generates on the basis of some causal principle, whereas abstraction retracts from nature that which it accumulates. This interpretation is confirmed by On the Heavens 299^{a}14:

> . . . the method of mathematics makes statements by abstraction, whereas that of physics proceeds by addition (ἐκ προσθέσεως).

The study of abstractions carried out by the mathematician is distinguished by two things, according to Metaphysics 1061^{a}18. In the first place it deals only with quantity (τὸ πόσον) and continuity (τὸ συνεχές), and secondly it does not consider them in relation to anything else. The mathematician abstracts everything sensible, such as hardness, lightness, heat or cold, leaving only the above characteristics. Mathematics isolates a part of its appropriate subject-matter, and studies it separately (1061^{b}23). The study of being is similar, says Aristotle, in that it takes only one aspect of things to deal with: being. The object of philosophy is being: it does not deal with the attributes of things, but only with that which *is*. Aristotle does not identify the study of being with the study of mathematics, but he clearly sees them as similar in that they abstract their objects of enquiry from other entities.

Is abstraction a form of negation? John Whittaker has denied it to be such (Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology 123), at least in the case of Albinus, who leant heavily on earlier formulations. A good picture of the Aris-

volve himself in. In 1029ª8 he claims to have stated "in outline" the nature of substance; that which underlies things, and to which predicates apply. Is matter identical with substance? If matter is not the *hypokeimenon,* it is difficult to say what else it is. When everything else is taken away, there is only matter left. All other things are characteristics of matter, such as length, breadth and potencies, but they are not matter itself.

> But when length and breadth and depth are taken away, we can see nothing left, unless it is that which is bounded by them, so that on this view it must appear that matter is the only essence. (1029ª19)

The notion is that matter is something which is formed by the characteristics of three dimensional figures, and the question is whether, on the removal of the three dimensions, anything else but matter remains. Aristotle continues by suggesting that the ultimate essence might be the negations of such things as quantitiy, or the thing in itself. The ultimate essence is not concluded to be the negations of these things, however, since even negations would only apply to it accidentally (κατὰ συμβεβηκός).

This last consideration is most revealing: it appears to be an effort to contradict the position that the essence of reality is the negation of material characteristics. (The idea that matter is the negation of spirit will be found to be crucial in later thought. In this way matter becomes a negativing force, a kind of death for spiritual values and spiritual life.) Aristotle however debates a different issue, seminal though it may be: he is concerned with the issue of whether the ultimate essence can be conceived of in terms of negations, and he concludes that it cannot. It is plausible that he should be considered to be attacking an established position here, since he makes it rather emphatic. Apophatic negation must have been used by some as a means of defining the essence of reality, and if we take Plato's understanding of *apophasis* as normative, then this must mean that some used the negative as a means of attributing otherness. Aristotle, as was noted (p. 137), retained the notion of indefinite otherness in his understanding of *apophasis,* though he did believe that in certain cases a definite result was produced by negation. In this respect his understanding of *apophasis* as negation is quite close to that of Plato. There must, however, have been a school of thought which advocated the use of apophatic negation as a tool for conceptualising the substrate, or matter, or the ultimate essence: whatever the base reality was thought to be. Aristotle rejects this approach, and it is no doubt the indefiniteness which is part of apophatic negation, which leads him to see it as a pointless way of trying to conceptualise the basic essence. Definition (*horismos*) is a matter of saying what something is in itself, and a procedure which leaves us without a definition of this kind is clearly useless in an effort to comprehend the essence of things: apophatic negation does just this, since it produces the inde-

finite (*aoriston*) noun (see p. 140). The issue of definition is intimately related to the question of negation, and Aristotle gives some views on the issue in the passage under consideration (1029^{b}29; 1030^{a}17).

There follows a most important observation:

> For it must be homonymously that we say these things are existents, or by adding or abstracting, as the unknowable is known. (1030^{a}33)

That two methods of knowing the unknowable were available for consideration is clear from the above passage, and Aristotle refers to abstraction and addition (*prosthesis,* no doubt the forerunner of the late Greek *synthesis,* in which characteristics are compiled as far as possible). *Aphairesis* must also have been advocated as an appropriate means of grasping the difficult of comprehension, just as apophatic negation had been. Here however Aristotle does not make it clear how he regards the claim that *aphairesis* can be used for knowing the unknown: the Greek is too cryptic. This is not a debilitating fact, since it is clear enough that the developments of later philosophy were already present in the time of Aristotle. Two forms of negation, if we may call *aphairesis* a kind of negation, had been explored in order to find a route to the unknowable, or the epistemologically obscure, and Aristotle gives evidence of this. It has occasionally been thought that abstraction was limited to mathematical procedures in the time of Aristotle, and the question is therefore seen to be the issue of how and when the method of mathematics became associated with the pursuit of the ontological essence. The preceding analysis makes it pretty clear that both *apophasis* and *aphairesis* were broadly explored with a view to resolving the more acute problems of epistemology, and that they were not limited to particular disciplines: the Neoplatonic investigation of types of negation is already present with Aristotle. Abstraction was the geometrical method par excellence, but it already had a broader application to general problems of ontology.

A further most revealing section in this passage of the Metaphysics concerns the issue of how reality is generated. This must be briefly examined because the abstracting approach depends on a certain view of how reality is constructed. Taking away its most concrete elements, in order to arrive at its essence, may be held to work where reality is conceived as growing more and more in material presence, as it builds upon its own beginnings.

Generation is described as follows (Met. 1032^{a}13): some generation takes place through nature. Matter is essential for this process, since all things which are generated have it. Nature is the source from which, and in accordance with, they are generated. Some things are generated not from nature, but from "art" (*techne*: 1032^{b}1), and these originate from the soul, which possesses their form (*eidos*). There is, however, another category of things which are said to come from "privation" (*steresis*: 1033^{a}10), and the explana-

tion runs like this. Some things in matter we say are "made of bronze", or "made of stone", for example. In the case of a man who has been an invalid, and who becomes well, we do not say, however, that he is "made of health". Rather, the present condition proceeds from the privation: "a man becomes healthy from being an invalid rather than from being a man". In a case like this, Aristotle says, generation proceeds from privation. The lack of a quality is that which produces the state in which the quality is present, since there is an attempt to alter the preceding state. Throughout this passage Aristotle is discussing the conditions under which *genesis*, or coming-to-be, can take place, and so the lack of something is considered to be one cause of generation taking place. Another case he suggests to lie in the process of wood developing into a structure which we recognize as a house ($1033^{a}15$): in its finished state, we call the structure "wooden," rather than "wood". This indicates that some change has been effected to the original material, which means that it is no longer mere wood. We sometimes mistakenly suppose that the cause of the generation of the house is the wood itself: in fact, however, it is the lack of form in the material which is the cause of the house's coming into existence, and the change of description from "wood" to "wooden" is an indication that some other agency has played a part. In this case too, the cause of coming-to-be is privation.

The notion that the absence of something could be a cause is a curious exception to Aristotle's general approach to the question of generation. He uses the notion of "production" (*poiesis*) to describe the way in which things come into existence. The physician endeavours to produce a certain state in an ill man ($1032^{b}8$), and the process thus engendered is called "production". Coming to be is regarded as a making process which adds to the state of the entity at the point of departure. Essence (*ousia*) is at the basis of the coming-to-be process; from it spring all kinds of beings, including those which have form and matter ($1032^{b}15$). Essence is to do with the "whatness" of a thing, and so it is the starting-point for syllogistic reasoning: coming-to-be also springs from it ($1043^{a}31$). Essence is thus the cause of this process of bringing into existence, of "making", and Aristotle's remarks about privation providing the first principle for certain realities seem out of step. Probably the privation envisaged occurs at a point along the way, after the essence stage, but before the object has attained its full complement of characteristics: the notion of privation as a cause of coming-to-be would not therefore stand in contradiction to the principle enunciated.

The combination of privation, a form of negation, and the generation process is interesting because it brings together two sets of issues. The knowledge of reality and the generation of reality are intimately connected problems, since the knowing process tends to imitate the generation process, but in reverse. The knowledge of first principles will depend on one's ability to go back over the stages of generation, in order to find the starting point.

Knowledge is the reverse of generation, since it seeks to remove systematically the various elements that reality has built up around itself in the production process. In this way the abstracting mind will discover the seed which lies at the origin of the coming-to-be.

The generation of reality is therefore an issue of considerable importance. The Greeks regarded physical reality as emerging in a cumulative process, from some infinitesimal or insubstantial beginning, but developing into a kind of massive accumulation embodying all the sensible characteristics with which we are familiar, both quantitative and qualitative. This view, that reality's bulk emanates from an insubstantial first principle, can be discerned throughout Greek thought, although it is best known in relation to the Pythagorean view that reality was generated from numbers, which in turn sprang from the One. That number underlay the world was a view that did not commend itself to all with equal success, and Aristotle in particular saw it in a jaundiced manner: how could white, sweet or hot be numbers, he asked (Met. $1092^{b}15$). However elsewhere he displayed more sympathy for the Pythagorean view:

> Thus the many and the earlier thinkers thought that essence and being were "body" (*soma*), and other things affections of body . . . whereas later and wiser thinkers considered (essence and being) to be numbers. (Met. $1002^{a}9$)

Numbers comprise the universe, we are told ($986^{a}22$); number is derived from unity, which combines both the odd and the even in itself. Number is said to be the principle (*arche*) and matter (*hyle*) of things ($986^{a}18$). Perhaps the clearest statement of the Pythagorean position is to be found in Diogenes Laertius, who reports Alexander Polyhistor:

> The principle of all things is the monad. From the monad emerges the indefinite dyad, which serves as material substrate to the monad, which is cause. From the monad and the indefinite dyad emerge numbers; from numbers points; from points, lines; from lines, plane figures; from these, solid figures; from solid figures, sensible bodies; the elements of which are four, five, water, earth and air . . . these elements produce an animate universe. (D.L. VIII.24)

This picture of emerging reality presents it as accumulating on the basis of the unit, which stands at the origin of the whole process. The unit leads to number, and the rest results from this. It is clear, then, that body, or man, is the product of a much more refined essence of being, and this is considered by the Pythagoreans to lie in number. Exactly how number yields body is never clearly stated in the Aristotelian reports of their position, and one must be satisfied with the simple notion that reality arises out of number itself. Material reality is an accumulation of characteristics, attached like to barnacles to the hull of essential reality. Layer upon layer goes to make up the phy-

cess will have to match the construction of reality. A hint of this is contained in the Laws passage (893E), where Plato says that "things increase when combined and decrease when separated". Or as Aristotle notes (Met. 1033^{b}12): "that which is generated will always have to be divisible, and to be both this and that". The accumulation theory of reality means that it is composed of discernable stages and parts. Far from being an impregnable whole, its elements naturally separate out into their discrete characteristics when the intellectual tool of division is applied. This at least is common to Plato and Aristotle; the divisibility of physical reality implies that the conceptual tool of division will bring results. It is in this context that the use of negation as an epistemological instrument must be understood. Where division is seen as the appropriate model for the investigator, it is inevitable that negation will come under consideration as a kind of ally of the division process. This explains the considerable emphasis on the logic of privation in Aristotle: it was a form of negation which placed specific emphasis on the removal of attributes.

The issue of privation as a possible cause of coming-to-be was referred to earlier (p. 145), since in the Metaphysics (1033^{a}10) Aristotle allowed for the absence of characteristics to be the cause of those characteristics accruing to the object involved. In some sense then, reality comes from privation: *steresis* is defined in the Metaphysics (1011^{b}20) as "the negation of a characteristic from a defined genus". (This definition occurs in a formulation of the excluded middle principle, with Aristotle denying that contraries can apply to the same object at the same time, since one of the contraries would be a privation in form.) One must now take into account a passage of the Physics which reinforces the above claim that privation is a cause of generation: the hints of this notion in the Metaphysics are given a full and combative statement in the Physics, and give some crucial insights into the relationship between ontology and epistemology discussed above. Aristotle claims (Physics 191^{a}28) that previous thinkers had an overly rigid dichotomy, by claiming that generation must spring from being or not-being only. Scrutinising the concept of the non-existent, Aristotle concludes that not all cases are identical, with some cases of non-existence being incidental, rather than being cases of non-existence *qua* non-existence. He concedes (191^{b}14) that nothing can come-to-be out of non-existence proper, but argues that things can emerge out of incidental non-existence, which occurs because of privation (*steresis*). This corresponds to the example of illness and health given in the Metaphysics, where health is said to emerge not from illness, but its own absence: here (Physics 191^{b}17), Aristotle reflects on the oddity of this conclusion, which is nevertheless seen as mandatory. Privation is a cause of coming-to-be, and it is the failure to recognize this special category of the non-existent which caused Parmenides to conclude that coming-to-be was an impossibility, since something could not emerge from nothing (192^{a}1). Aristotle concedes that *steresis* could be seen as a principle of evil, or attenuation, in

privation, it is argued, cannot be apprehended unless the corporeal is apprehended, since we cannot arrive at the notion of blindness without first grasping the state of being sighted: but this we cannot do. In this way the incorporeal turns out to be inapprehensible, since grasping it presupposes the ability to grasp the corporeal, which is then operated on by the method of privation. With reference to abstraction proper (*aphairesis*), another argument is advanced to show that it is in fact impossible (Outlines of Pyrrhonism III.85): if one is to abstract X then the object under consideration must contain X. If this is the case, then the equal cannot be abstracted (six from six, for example) since the object cannot be said to include that which is equal to it. Similar arguments apply to subtracting the greater, and the less, and so it is concluded that the manoeuvre of abstraction is logically impossible to perform. The method of addition (*prosthesis*), another conceptual tool used by the mathematicians, is similarly found to be fraught with difficulties, leading to the conclusion (op. cit. III.97):

> With addition, abstraction and local motion, transposition is also annulled, since this is abstraction and addition by transition.

All these things are alleged to be logically impossible to perform, and all involve modes and techniques of thought. The Against the Physicists (I.277) broadens it to a statement about reality itself claiming that abstraction, addition, change and alteration "do not exist", since things do not undergo any such movements. The same passage returns to the logical impossibility of abstraction, arguing that it is impossible to remove the incorporeal from the incorporeal, and subsequently that it is also impossible to remove the corporeal from the corporeal (295–302). The discussion turns to the conceiving of numbers since the notions of the greater and the less are being discussed, and these take a numerical expression. The impossibility of conceiving number by abstraction is also argued in the Against the Professors (IV.30):

> Now by these considerations it has been shown that it is impossible to conceive any number by abstraction (*aphairesis*).

In both of the above passages, it is clear that the method of abstraction by removal of characteristics is an established mode of dealing with a range of epistemological problems, and that is not simply a matter of mathematical method. Abstraction can be used to deal with geometrical figures, numbers, but also any kind of object or entity. The passage quoted above deals with the subtraction of the unit from ten conceived as a whole, that is as a decad. Sextus observes that:

> . . . number is conceived by addition or abstraction of the monad.

In the Against the Physicists passage (I.278) Sextus takes his refutation of the method of abstraction to the issue of subtracting letters from words. When the first syllable is taken from the word *kobios,* we are left with the word *bios* (life). This example of what may happen to language is taken as a guide to what may happen to bodies, and the refutation follows on this basis. Clearly then, abstraction has a variety of applications, and the linking of the mathematical method to general epistemological procedures has been well established by the time of Sextus. Of course Sextus is reporting Sceptical doctrine, and the collection of arguments he marshalls must come from a number of sources and periods of time. Some of his material undoubtedly dates back to Pyrrho of Elis, a younger contemporary of Aristotle, and to the sporadic revivals of Scepticism in the Athenian academy, though it must also reflect discussions of his own day (circa 200 A.D.). In other words Sceptical arguments must have been current, available for use or inviting refutation, during the entire period in which the revival of Platonism was forming into a recognizable school. Though Scepticism is an iconoclastic movement, and makes a contribution in a negative direction, the possibility that it fertilised contemporary schools in various positive ways should not be overlooked. In respect of the specific issue of abstraction, we learn from Sextus' arsenal of critical weaponry that by his time abstract thought was held to be an option for all epistemologically awkward concepts. Anything approaching the incorporeal was held to be the appropriate subject matter for abstract thought, and it was to this that Sextus made his reply. We learn also, as noted already, that the proponents of abstraction had put forward further justifications of their position, apparently as a response to criticism: hence the idea of "intensification" (*epitasis*) as the mode by which the mind carries out the removal process, when reaching the last stages of corporeity. We learn that privation (*steresis*) and abstraction (*aphairesis*) had practically merged, and generalising on the basis of the evidence contained in the passages outlined above, one may infer that privation, in Sextus' mind, referred primarily to what we have seen in Aristotle to be the mathematicians' abstraction. On the other hand, abstraction in Sextus seems to be broader than this, though it does include, and so is not divorced from, its old mathematical formulation. For Sextus, the two processes merge, but abstraction is the broader term, including all types of noetic subtraction carried out in the interests of forming concepts. Privation is more narrowly limited to the method of the mathematicians.

To return to the theme of this chapter, "thinking negatively", some observations can now be made. The *via negativa* of the mystics takes its origin from the foregoing theorizing about the nature of negation. If it is found surprising that metaphysics, which appears to be a propositional skill, should resort to negative statements in order to make its claims, then one's attention must be drawn to the connection between negation and abstract thinking. In contemporary parlance, abstraction refers loosely to a mode of thought

which deals with the more than merely physical, or empirical: abstract art is that which departs from recognizable forms, and substitutes another form of visual communication, for the representation of the physiognomically familiar. In Greek philosophy however, abstract thinking was specifically linked to a negating procedure. The same drive, that of developing a way of thinking which goes beyond the mere cataloguing of observed data, is there, but the specifically Greek view of abstraction is that it negates. The negative aspect of abstract thought has quite a specific definition, it involves the removal of attributes. One important consequence of this is that the procedure is tied to already acquired epistemological experience: since, on this view, abstract thought takes as its starting-point a known entity and begins to pare it away with a view to arriving at some "essence", then abstract thought will involve the notion of progress from the known to the unknown. Abstract thinking is in fact identical with this move from the concrete to the incorporeal. It is in this sense, then, that metaphysics is thought to be founded on negation: it would be truer to say that the *via negativa* takes its origin from the Greek notion of abstract thinking. The late Greek development of the latter turns it into an instrument of mysticism, but this is a matter of where the stopping-point is held to be. Since abstraction involves the progressive removal of characteristics, the issue of where this process stops is clearly of crucial significance. Discussion of the method by Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus shows that the end of the process lay with the discovery of the monad, or the unit, at least as far as the mathematical formulation of it was concerned. Discussion turns on the nature of this point, but no further abstraction is envisaged: in the third century A.D. however, Clement of Alexandria will speak of removing the point, and being precipitated into the "greatness of Christ" (see Strom. V.11.71.2). Here there is an attempt to take abstraction beyond its range of application, and this is the chief differentiation to be made between traditional Academic abstraction and that of the later Platonists. It is this change in the deployment of the method which must be annotated, since it goes hand in hand with the developent of mysticism and transcendentalism. It is of course clear that abstraction was not conceived for such tasks, since it can only function in relation to the familiar world of the known. Its negating function is parasitic on there being a known entity available. Abstraction works by positing, of a tree for example, not-green, not-wooden, not-plant life and so on. Later philosophy speculates on that which lies beyond the last stage, when the last epistemologically familiar entity has been negated, and there is nothing left for the method to apply itself to. The mystics ask, in effect: what lies beyond abstraction?

To conclude, some investigation of the survival and mutations of this tradition of thought among Philo and the Gnostics should be undertaken, since taken together they provide some clues as to the climate out of which late Greek thought sprang. Philo has no remarks of interest on the subject of ne-

gation (*apophasis*) in general, nor does he use the term privation (*steresis*) in any philosophically interesting sense. There are, however, one or two interesting observations on abstraction, which is frequently linked with addition (*prosthesis*) in Philo's exposition. The process of addition seems to imply that of abstraction:

> the addition of one thing constitutes the removal of another, as in the case of arithmetical quantities, or the reasonings of our souls. If we must say that Abel was added, it must be considered that Cain was taken away. (On the Sacrifices of Abel & Cain 1)

The removal (*aphairesis*) of vainglory is the addition of truth (On Flight and Finding 128): the two notions are frequently associated in the discussions of Sextus Empiricus, though without the reciprocity of effect envisaged by Philo. All of reality is subject to this kind of change, he seems to think, except for the unit. The unit, or monad, is not capable of addition or abstraction (Who is the Heir 187): Philo does not quite explain why this is so, but clearly it has to do with the fact that the monad has no parts, and cannot remain itself if either exercise is operated upon it. Its indivisibility excludes the possibility of the use of either abstraction or addition. Philo's example in this passage is the drachma, but he goes on to claim that the unit is "the image of God, who is alone and complete". This is an interesting observation, in view of the fact that the monad was apparently considered to be the stopping-point of the abstraction process: it was noted earlier that Clement took it beyond the monad, in order to achieve a kind of knowledge of God. Philo does not do so, but regards the twin techniques of abstraction and addition as belonging to the physical world, and as yielding knowledge appropriate to that level. He in fact recognizes four types of change (The Eternity of the World 113), namely addition, abstraction, transposition (*metathesis*) and mutation (*alloiosis*), and in this passage advances another case where abstraction is held to be impossible. Dealing with the enduring character of the world, Philo claims that abstraction cannot be applied to a whole such as the world. In an argument which again could have Sceptical roots, Philo claims that "it is impossible that any body should be detached from its fellow substance and dispersed outside the whole" (op. cit. 114). It is clear then that Philo sees abstraction as a technique which is limited (i) to that which has parts, and (ii) to that which is itself a part of a wider whole. It has no applicability beyond the world of the multiple.

Philo does not however suggest the method as a means of gaining knowledge of the transcendent, or the divine. He says nothing of the allied methods, negation and privation, which together with abstraction, were to become the principal instruments of Neoplatonic and Patristic metaphysics. Nor is he a great devotee of the alpha privative, and the negative adjectives he applies to God are only aimed at getting rid of standard anthropomor-

phisms. We do not find in Philo the famous account of Apollo as representing the negation of multiple attributes, by the supposed derivation of the name from *a-pollon,* or "not-many-things". Apollo became the patron saint of the *via negativa* because of the unfortunate morphology of his name, but Philo nowhere alludes to this, despite the presence of a fairly long passage on the attributes of Apollo (Embassy to Gaius 106). These facts must be weighed against the influential claim by Wolfson that Philo established a notion of the transcendence of God which was to exercise a heavy influence over the Fathers (Philo II.110). It is true that Philo pushed God beyond the monad, and Being in general (see J. Whittaker, Neopythagoreanism ... 79), but it is also true that he advocates no systematic negative theology.

The same remark is generally true of the Gnostics, who are devotees of the negative adjective, but not advocates of the method of abstraction. They are thoroughgoing transcendentalists, and combine this emphasis with a great variety of negations:

> Not one of the names which are conceived, spoken, seen, or grasped, not one of them, applied to him, even if they are exceedingly glorious, great, and honoured ... It is impossible for mind to conceive him,
>
> nor can any work express him,
> nor can any eye see him,
> nor can anybody grasp him
> because of his inscrutable greatness,
> and his incomprehensible depth,
> and his immeasurable height,
> and his illimitable will.
> (Tripartite Tractate 54, trans. Attridge, Mueller)

The Father of all resides in silence and inscrutability, and when he breaks forth, he does so into language and knowledge, which are properly speaking incapable of grasping him. But he does so through a series of intermediaries, and though the result is that language forms around him, in reality no name applies to him, as the above passage observes. The first Man created is the accessible being: he is the "face of the invisible": the "form of the formless", the "body of the bodiless", "the word of the unutterable" (op. cit. 66). In this way language and thinking receives an object capable of being processed by them, whilst the ultimate being remains shrouded in silence:

> For there is a boundary to speech set in the Pleroma, so that they are silent about the incomprehensibility of the Father, but they speak about the one who wishes to comprehend him. (op. cit. 75)

Thought and language are applicable to a certain level, but they are stultified by the Being who lies beyond the Son. In this system, therefore, it is not sur-

The sixth hypothesis gives the radical interpretation of non-existence, and it is this which Basilides takes up in order to show that God is unspeakable. There can, according to Plato, be no name, no rational account, nor even any opinion of it established.

Basilides' radical theology reminds us that Plato's Parmenides had become a text-book for metaphysical method in late antiquity, and it takes us back to the original issues of this chapter. Plato's Parmenides seems to provide *dicta* about the use of language in relation to (i) unity, and (ii) transcendence. All the themes of later Greek philosophy pass through the Parmenides: existence, being, the nature of "is-ness", negation, discourse and time. The conditions of the validity of discourse are established by this dialogue, and the existence and nature of unity are constantly at stake. It is as if oneness is the basis of reality, and the conditions of oneness are being investigated, in respect of how they cast light on the nature of discourse.

The negative is crucial in the issue of how to express the reality thus dominated by unity. Negation has a specific form, privation, which can be used for the discovery of abstract realities. Abstraction (*aphairesis*) is the source of the *via negativa,* and simply refers to a method for getting at the originating essence of material reality. "Abstract" thought is thought which distils the fundamental. It is not continuous, or discursive, but it focusses on the essential aspect of the object which it considers. It proceeds by subtracting characteristics, and this manoeuvre matches the generation of reality itself, which emerges by a layering process until it becomes perceptible. The accumulation theory of reality produces an appropriate mode of thought, one which dissects the stages. The classical use of abstraction limits it to the investigation of the basic stuff of reality (though the Sceptics opposed it on logical and psychological grounds), and it can only deal with plural entities: there must be something to remove, and a remainder for further attention. It has not yet become an instrument for mysticism, but stops short at the monad, as Philo tells us. Nevertheless the alpha privative is coming into its own, as the Gnostic documents show. Reality emerges out of non-existence and silence. In the Nag Hammadi document Allogenes (53), the second power emerges from the silence and manages to utter only unformed sound, far removed from the lower verbal reality:

> . . . the power appeared by means of an energy that is at rest and silent, although having uttered a sound thus:
> Zza Zza Zza.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 1. The Rise and Fall of Logos

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Chapter VIII. Conclusion

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Conclusion

The ideas outlined thus far establish the setting in which the *via negativa* of late Greek thought was able to flourish. Logos begins as a type of rational account, a canon of material about the world which exists, myth-like, independently of the individual thinker and philosopher. It was a touchstone, an instrument of checking and measuring the validity of the sense-data and notions generated in the human mind. It denoted the language of science, as against the language of common-sense, in much the same way as we might distinguish between the scientist's account of things, and that given in popular lore. Logos exercised a strong fascination over the Greek, in this early period of blooming confidence in the power of rational investigation, and within a short time it came to be seen as having an existence in itself. The Greek tendency is to objectify, to give reality to concepts, thereby creating the material of ontology and metaphysics. The word logos, once isolated as a concept, could not fail to fall prey to this reifying tendency, with the result that even as early as Aristotle, there are signs of logos becoming an originating principle, an *arche* like that sought by the Presocratic seekers after a single essential substance. The tendency issues most clearly in the creation of a new verb in late Greek, to "enreason" (*logoo*). This linguistic fact is a most important datum in the history of ideas, since it shows that a new aspect of the word logos was endeavouring to assert itself. Logos becomes a Force, or principle of rationality at work in reality. It becomes an existent.

The Hellenistic period saw a *mise en question* of the whole confidently erected edifice of the classical Greek rationalists. The iconoclasts, headed by Euripides, manifest doubts about the achievements of logos, and this mood is no more clearly attested than in the brilliant scrutiny of the Sceptics, who show the weakness of logos simply by their formulation of the idea of the equipollence of two equivalent *logoi.* Rational accounts can match each other in their ability to extract conviction. On the second generation Greek pursuit of a *kriterion,* the Sceptics have a further negative response: there is no criterion of truth. Discursive thought (*dianoia*) does not provide such a touchstone. In this way the Sceptics provide a riposte to the major claims of their predecessors, opening the way to a new and suprarational approach to the knowledge of existence. Scepticism negates the power of logos, the force of discursive thought, the principle of the self-knowledge of mind, and the notion of the possibility of abstract thought. In this case, both the possibility and the value of *aphairesis* are repudiated. The Sceptical attack does not, of course, conclude discussion on these typical themes of Greek metaphysics. The three notions of logos, thought's self-thought, and the abstract method persist and survive in the Neoplatonism of late antiquity, and they are not

they designate. The revival of etymology in late antiquity, whereby one probes the meaning of a word by examining its etymology, indicates that Socrates' ridiculing of the practice in the Cratylus did not manage to extinguish it. Words were still thought to contain in themselves clues as to the nature of things.

The early confidence in language and thought gives way to a gradual interest in the virtues of silence. Keeping silence can be not only a moral improvement, but also an intellectual advance. In late classical religious philosophy, a new emphasis on silence emerges, and it seems to respond to the Sceptics' advocacy of *epoche,* or suspension of judgment. It is in this sense that the Sceptics create the conditions for, or perhaps participate in, the late Greek awareness of the limits of logos, and so the abundant quasi-philosophical literature of this period manifests a great interest in wordless comprehension of essential realities. The limits of discursive thought have now been clearly perceived, though of course they were adumbrated in Socrates' dream about the unknowability of ultimate elements, described in the Theaetetus. Perhaps he should have referred to it as a nightmare, since the great classical exponent of the power of the word is hinting at a difficulty which will prove the key problem of discourse, namely that it combines elements in order to construct meaning, and that it cannot endow the isolated individual element with meaning. Discourse cannot embrace the Alone.

The long tradition of negative theology, ancient, medieval and modern begins in this period with the efforts of the Greeks to develop a mode of thought capable of dealing with that which is essential in reality, yet beyond the senses. The method of abstraction (*aphairesis*) is the new tool, developed in Aristotle, attacked by the Sceptics, and adopted by the Middle Platonists. It is negative in that it involves the removal by negation of specific characteristics of objects, in the pursuit of the essential characteristic. Physical reality is seen as layered, with the role of abstraction being the conceptual removal of layers, in order to arrive at the essence. That abstract thought should be conceived as taking place through the negation of the various layers of reality is an important fact about the Greek understanding of thinking. Abstraction becomes an instrument of mysticism in late antiquity, but not because of a change in the way it was understood: the change lies in the new transcendentalism, whereby Platonism in particular placed the highest reality beyond the mind (*nous*) and essence (*ousia*). Abstraction develops into a tool for the understanding of the transcendent.

In the same period the first stirrings of dissatisfaction with *logos,* the rational account of things, were felt. The Gnostic parody of logos, portrayed in the Tripartite Tractate as the principle of ignorance, foreshadows the statements of Damascius, the last Greek philosopher about the inefficacy of logos. The relation of logos to discursive thought brings it into disrepute, in the era of the new transcendentalism. The multiple aspect of discursive

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Index

WHAT IS NEGATIVE THEOLOGY?: THE WESTERN ORIGINS

Raoul Mortley

Negative theology begins with the speculations of the Greek philosophers. It denotes a method of knowing the transcendent essence of things, called the Good by Plato, the One by the Neoplatonists, and Father by the Christians. It is a method which places its confidence not in affirming, but denying, and therefore constitutes a use of language which is unique. The *via negativa* uses language against itself, since it negates the positive claims made in language about the nature of things. The ability to organise information, to make claims about things, to use verbs in a positive sense, is called into question. The essence of the method lies in the negating of statements intended to be of transcendent applicability: the One is not just, not noble, not existent. The ordinary capacity to reach elevated sentiments is subjected to radical doubt, so that the manoeuvre to formulate the loftiest claims of human experience is transformed into an anti-manoeuvre. The first stages, which strain to give linguistic expression to that which is perceived but which can scarcely be imagined, give way to the second, which simply negate the first. The pride of linguistic achievement, and in the virtuosity of the highest deployments of language, gives way to a kind of scepticism. This scepticism, however, is of a specific kind, since the negation is parasitic on the affirmation: the latter is logically prior to the former. In any standard exposition of negative theology, the negations apply to a selected list of established and conventional descriptive statements. There has to have already been a determination of the attributes to be applied to the ultimate principle, and it is these, specifically, which yield to the *via negativa*: these epithets are now said to be inapplicable. It is in this way that language discovers its own limits: it is capable of self-measurement and self-supersession.

Clearly the way of negation is a second phase activity, coming after the first flush of enthusiasm for language and scientific discourse. The first period of Greek philosophy, from the Presocratics to Aristotle, shows great confidence in the ability of language to convey the essential facts about human and cosmic reality: the art of *logos* was the highest achievement of the human race thus far, and this early period of exuberance over its capacities is not muddied by any sceptical doubt. Even Plato, with all his interest in the gift of the Muses and the extra-rational capacities of the human mind, did not employ the negative as an epistemological tool, and neither did he emphasise silence as an important part of thought. Both these themes, together with a surge in the use of the alpha privative, characterise

the philosophy of the late Greek period. In fact the preoccupation of the earliest Greek philosophers was not so much with knowledge and its limits, as with the nature of reality. They asked ontological questions rather than epistemological ones, and were always concerned with defining the nature of what is. Whether reality was to be resolved into numbers, flux, primary elements or Being, the Presocratics always focussed on that first question of philosophy: what is the nature of reality? The progress of philosophy must have caused a certain amount of exhilaration, just as the progress of science in our own century has caused tremendous confidence in its stability and problem-solving capacities. Classical Greek thought was dominated by words: the average citizen was bombarded by them, in the form of poetry, drama, philosophy and above all, rhetoric. Travelling sophists declaimed to those who could pay, democratic assemblies were dominated by those who could be heard, and who could persuade, and there was no escape even in the market-place, where Socrates was lurking, eager for a dialectical exchange. No wonder, as Socrates observes[1] himself, that Athens spawned a class of misologists, word-haters, who had had enough of the age of *logos*.

Doubts about language also surfaced among the philosophers, and Plato's *Parmenides* develops this theme throughout its discussion of the relation of Being, Unity and Language. The *Parmenides* begins with a discussion of the theory of forms, and one of Plato's concerns here is epistemological: without the existence of some stable basis for things, it seems impossible that thought should have anything on which to rest. If all were Heracleitean flux, then the power of discourse would be utterly destroyed (135b). Then follows the series of eight hypotheses on unity, which are not only about unity and multiplicity, but also about the assessment of discourse in the light of the claims made about the One. The first hypothesis, for example, has the One in its purest form, with no parts, no shape, no beginning or end, and no movement or rest. If the One is to be defined like this, it is concluded that there can be no rational account given of it, nor any perception, opinion or science of it made possible (142a).

It is because the issue of unity became so important in the Academic tradition that these questions about the value of discourse persisted, and eventually rose to prominence. Speusippus carried on this discussion immediately after Plato, and elevated the One to a position beyond the Good, Intellect, Being and the mathematical One. Though his pronouncements on the value of discourse do not survive, we may well assume with Merlan,[2] that he was the progenitor of negative theology. Even so, the claim to this title may well have been laid by Plato already, since he makes

1. *Phaedo* 89d.

2. Ph. Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague 1960), p.128. See the fragments of Speusippus in P. Lang, *De Speusippi Academici Scriptis* (Frankfurt 1964).

the following observation on discourse:

> In my opinion all being conceived in discourse must be broken up into tiny segments. For it would always be apprehended as a mass devoid of one. (*Parmenides* 165b)

This observation about the fragmenting power of discourse will be found to have echoes right throughout the history of Greek philosophy, as it becomes clearer and clearer that intelligence is for the multiple, and that if applied to a unity, will inevitably shatter it. Language and unity are simply seen to be incompatible.

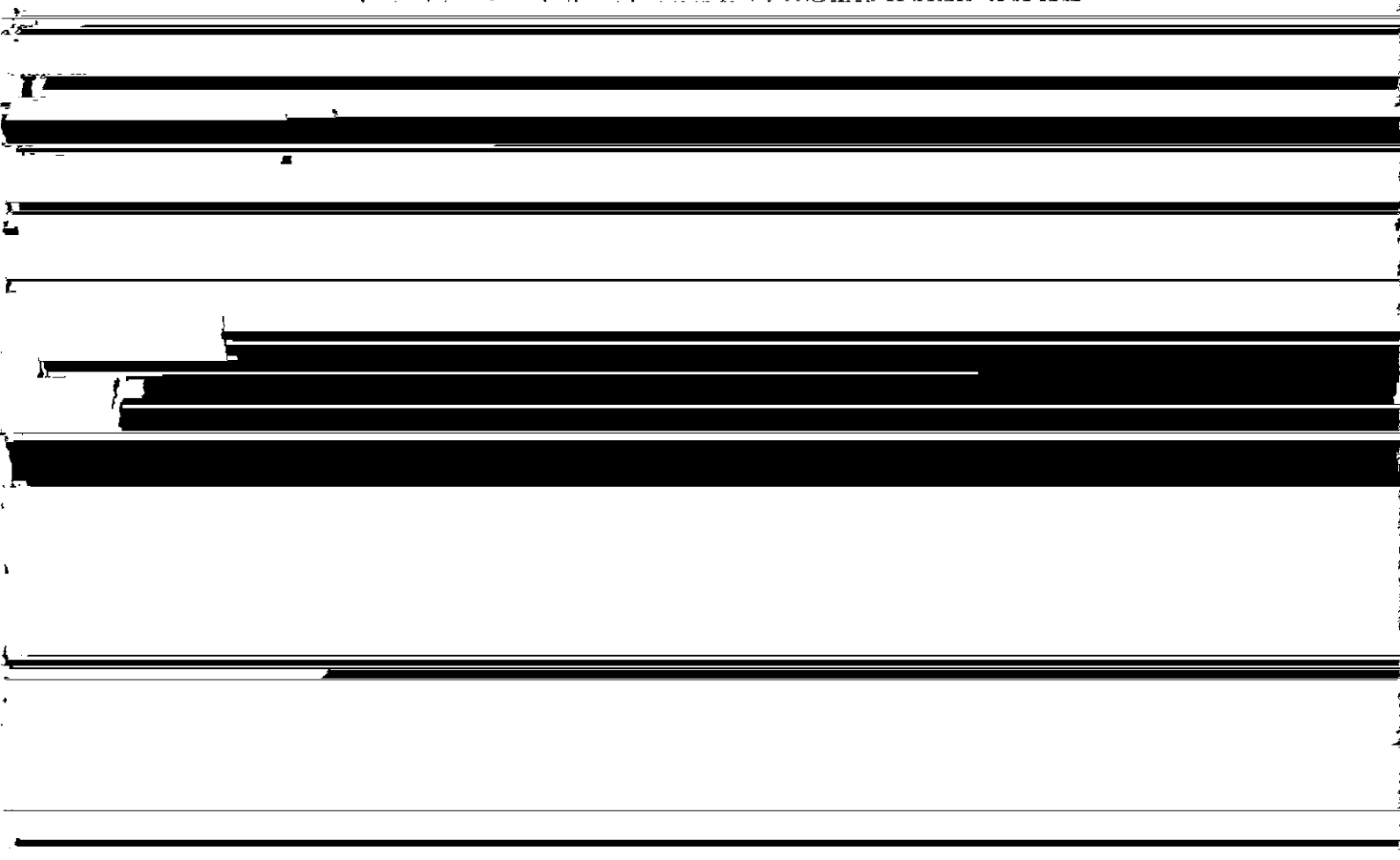
Aristotle contributes to the development of negative theology in a completely different, and entirely unconscious way. He offers a development of the term *aphairesis* (abstraction) which he intends to be useful in the process of developing concepts of the mathematical kind, and which is quite removed from the unity/discourse debate of Plato and his successors. Abstractions, to Aristotle, were much the same as they are to us: he was thinking of the kind of thought which grasps at something which we know to be present in things, but which can be isolated from its spatio-temporal instances. In order to consider such things we seem to need to separate them from their many contexts, and it is this process of separation which constitutes the method of abstraction referred to. The method of *aphairesis* is the fundamental concept of negative theology in the first generation of its exponents, that is, the Middle Platonists and Plotinus, and Clement of Alexandria on the Christian side. It is important to take note of these beginnings, since they are not nearly so unfamiliar as one might expect. Negative theology begins with the simple technique of abstracting for the purpose of considering ideas rather than bodies.

Aristotle's use of the term is as follows. Abstraction is the principle whereby one denies an attribute to a thing in order to conceive more clearly of another attribute which belongs to it; it may also involve a systematic network of denials in order for the principle in question to emerge clearly enough. Nevertheless *aphairesis* is not a matter of negation, which is discussed by Aristotle in an entirely different way. In Plato negation (*apophasis*) had been seen as a matter of oppositeness,[3] and then of otherness, and the legacy of this discussion surfaces in Aristotle. The *On Interpretation* (16^a31 ff.) has a detailed discussion of negation in these very terms, but the question of abstraction comes up in an entirely different context. It arises in discussion of mathematical methods:

> . . . the method of mathematics makes statements by abstraction, whereas that of physics proceeds by addition.[4]

3. See *Sophist* 257b ff.
4. *On the Heavens* 299^a14.

There is a clear statement here of the view that whilst the other sciences deal with an accumulation of data, mathematics proceeds by isolating the subject of its interest. Its focus lies not in instances, but in principles which find their exemplification in such instances. Ontological inquiry is similar, says Aristotle, since it takes only one thing out of many for consideration, namely being. Abstractions, that is τὰ ἐξ ἀφαιρεσέως,[5] are concepts which separate things from the surroundings in which they reside. Can the point be separated from the line? The process of *aphairesis* is invoked here,[6] in



it could be expected that the point could be abstracted from it as being its essential building-block. The line was regarded as the instantiation of the point, being the next stage in its proliferation into sensible reality. There followed the generation of the plane surface and volume itself, so that material reality is understood to be a process of growing out into steadily increasing bulk. This understanding of the composition of physical reality evidently dominated mathematical thinking, and the result was the view of abstraction as outlined above. It was clear that a method of progressive removal was necessary if one were to arrive at the basic ingredients in this process. The Middle Platonists formulate their negative theology in the light of this concept of abstract thinking, built as it is on the idea that reality is incremental in its generation. Aristotle and his colleagues provide the Middle Platonists with a technique which aims at stripping away inessentials, in favour of the essential. It is a way of dealing with incremental creep.

Having noted these two ingredients in the formation of the *via negativa,* it should also be noted that a change in language accompanied the Middle Platonists' advocacy of the *via negativa.* Hermetic, Gnostic, Christian and Middle Platonist systems of thought all show a sudden upsurge in the use of the alpha privative, that is the alpha which negates adjectives similarly to the English 'in', as 'invisible' for example. The ultimate essence had begun to be designated by adjectives in the negative form: the quest for the right

denials, but rather are carefully tailored to existing claims about the divine essence. The new effusion of alpha privatives is fairly precisely aimed at contradicting older theological claims: the negations are parasitic on prior affirmations, and they cannot invent themselves. Where God had been said to be good, he is now said to be not good, and it seems that the dependency of the negation on the original affirmation constitutes a real limitation on its semantic range. When one says that God is not-good, there seems to be something about the word 'good' which one wants to retain, in spite of the 'notness' added to it. The reversal of the traditional god-language is not entirely a departure from the original semantic field, which is only modified.

It is worth pointing out this characteristic of the alpha privatives, namely that they retain rather than annul the semantic field of traditional kataphatic theology, since one might easily think the opposite to be the case. Further, what does the negative expression 'not good' imply? It could suggest an infinity of possibilities minus one, that everything is applicable except goodness. Alternatively it could imply a specific opposite to goodness: common-sense often extends negation into opposition, though a coherent logical account would scarcely do so. Given these possibilities it is here pointed out that the alpha privatives constitute neither a licence for a random parading of thoughts, nor a collection of opposites: they are rather a means of refining the terms to which they attach themselves.

Alpha privative words are ambiguous, and the alpha prefix falls into three categories, *στερητικόν*, *ἀθροιστικόν* and *ἐπιτατικόν*. Shipp suggests[7] that some alpha prefixes had no semantic significance, and this category of 'unmotivated' alphas may be added to the three distinguished by Liddell and Scott. The intensive use of the prefix functions in a precisely opposite manner to its privative use, since in the former case the meaning of the word is enhanced and multiplied, and in the latter it is negated. This fascinating pair of contradictory possibilities made it possible for Plato to play an elaborate joke on the meaning of the word Apollo, as I have argued elsewhere: to counter the divine significance of the name which had been alleged to mean 'the absence of many things' through the invocation of the alpha privative, Plato by implication took the alpha of Apollo to be intensive, claiming that the etymology of the word revealed its meaning to be 'many poles'.[8] Apollo became the symbol of negative theology because his name allowed an etymological analysis which contained a hint of the method: it is my belief that even a writer as early as Plato knew of the fan-

7. G.P. Shipp, *Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary* (Sydney 1979), under 'A and *ἀνα—*.
8. *Cratylus*, 405b ff.

ciful etymology and its significance, and that he deliberately made fun of it by exploiting the opposite sense of the alpha prefix.

Yet even the alpha privative was ambiguous. This most important point has not often been grasped: Aristotle comments on it and indicates that his understanding of the Greek language allows quite a range of meanings to the alpha privative. The word 'uncuttable' (*ἄτμητον*) may mean 'impossible to cut', or simply 'hard to cut': Aristotle does not say much here, apart from the examples of usage he cites, but clearly enough the latter case would result from the use of hyperbole.[9] If he is right about the Greek language, and it is reasonable to assume that he is, then a considerable range of meanings might attach to the alpha privatives of the seers of late antiquity. That God should be said to be 'limitless' might merely mean that he is relatively unlimited, rather than that he is absolutely without limit; similarly for 'invisible', 'unknowable' and so on.

For these reasons the use of the alpha privative is rather slippery to assess. It lacks conceptual precision, and one might suspect its users of aiming at a certain *feeling* about the transcendent, rather than at intellectually watertight claims about it. I believe that this is so, and that the glut of alpha privatives in the late Greek period is the sign of a new transcendental theology, but nothing much more than a sign. It may nevertheless be possible to work out what the different schools of alpha privative were, thereby discerning some intellectual pattern. Those of Basilides, for example, clearly reflect a Parmenidean tradition against which he is negatively identifying himself: this revisionism often characterises the Gnostic systems, and the alpha privatives may well be a key to the background against which the various reactions emerge.

Aristotle regards the alpha privative as a form of negation,[10] and on negation itself has some observations which are well worth keeping in mind when reading the Neoplatonists and the Christian philosophers. He classifies the term 'not-man' as an indefinite noun,[11] considering that a genuine negation should result from the negativing of the verb in a sentence. The field of meaning is in no way tied down by either negative adjectives, or negated nouns, and it may be for this reason that Aristotle rejects *apophasis* as a useful route to higher forms of thought.[12] He prefers abstract thinking, *aphairesis*.

The chief problem confronting those who wished to identify the divine was the fact that thought and language have a multiplying effect, made as they were for the realm of the many. Abstraction was used as a means of

9. *Metaphysics* $1023^{a}1$.
10. *Met.* $1023^{b}33$.
11. *On Interpretation* $16^{a}31$.
12. *Met.* $1029^{a}25$.

countering the multiple in things, since it progressively removed qualities ('accidents') until the essential remained. The Middle Platonist generation was able to see abstraction as a tool of transcendental theology because it was believed that all reality was interrelated. The great chain of being enabled one to ascend from the sensible to the essential. Discursive thought proceeds in units, says Plotinus:[13] what we know to be really a unity is divided up and eventually emerges in rows of individual words. The unity of knowledge, the unity of the thing known, is lost in the process of being processed by thought. The fatal truth is that Intellect is the originating principle (ἀρχή) of number,[14] and in consequence all its products will be marked with this characteristic. Intellect spawns number across the entire range of its activities, and this notion is the crux of Plotinus' case against predication. The problem with the latter as a means of furnishing information about the ultimate principle is not that it ends up with predicates that are inappropriate, but that it ends up with predicates at all. It is not so much that 'brown', 'warm', 'lofty' and other such adjectives are inapplicable in themselves, but more that they are instantiations of number. Predicates fail not so much because they are predicates, but because they are number. The fundamental Neoplatonic insight, with all its emphasis on the One and the Many, lies here: things such as qualities and accidents differ from one another because they are many. Differentiation is a precondition of multiplicity, in that things cannot be many unless they differ from one another. If they were identical, then they would be one, on this view. Material reality is therefore characterised by the different, which scatters it and fragments it. To take two ordinary predicates, it is clear that it is not very different to predicate 'brownness' of God than it is to predicate 'justice'. Both are inapt, not because the predicates are wrong and could be replaced by better predicates, but because they are predicates *tout court*. Predicates numeralise, and it is in this that they are hopelessly inadequate for the task of representing the ultimate essence. The various qualities, accidents and so on, which the predicates stand for, are not inappropriate *in themselves*, they are inappropriate because they instantiate number. Predication itself involves a threefold structure, that of subject, verb and object, and so it is impossible that it should ever be able to grasp unitary truth without perverting it in some way. The way in which it perverts will be clear: it will multiply the One.

In the light of this, I would like to point to two passages which exemplify the method of negative theology, and which are virtually identical though they come from a Platonist and a Christian source. In Plotinus

13. *Enn.* VI.9(8).5, 17ff.
14. *Enn.* III.8(30).9, 4.

Enn. V.8(13).9, 1ff. there is an example of the negative imagination at work: we are invited to imagine the material world as if it were one, with all its elements, including living creatures, the sun and the stars, wrapped up altogether in a transparent sphere, in which everything is totally clear. Next, we are to take this image, and abstract its bulk; then we abstract its extent and its substance; then we invoke the god who made the sphere itself.

> He comes bringing his own world with all the gods that are in it: he is one and he is all; he is each and all, coming together into one, and being other by the various powers, but all being one by virtue of that one and many power. (loc.cit.)

One may note here that we begin by seeing things in a totality of parts, as encased in a sphere. This in fact corresponds to Plotinus' view of the spherical encasement of the real: he is concerned here that we see things rightly to begin with, that is, holistically. Then the method of *uphairesis* takes over, and we remove various elements of this familiar and composite picture. But then there comes a halt to the abstraction process, and to the thought process in general: we must 'invoke the god'.

The first Christian exponent of negative theology has a similar passage. In *Strom.* V.11.71.2, Clement uses the word *analysis,* but he means abstraction, and says that contemplation involves abstracting depth from bodies, then breadth and length. Arriving at the point, we abstract its position and so are left with unity itself. This is said to be equivalent to 'casting ourselves into the greatness of Christ', but there remains a further stage, that of moving up to the unknowable First Cause. This takes place after the abstraction process has been exhausted, and constitutes another, extra-rational step. As with Plotinus, after the abstraction process we 'invoke the god': the first stage involves the unity which is a complex of parts, and the second the pure, unparticipated One. These are the two unities of Plato's *Parmenides,* preserved as such by Plotinus, and called the Father and the Son by Clement. In both cases the method of abstraction, the negative method, stops at the lower manifestations of the One.

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ANCIENT MYSTICISM

Greek and Christian Mysticism, And Some Comparisons With Buddhism

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ANCIENT MYSTICISM

Greek and Christian Mysticism, And Some Comparisons With Buddhism.

On 19 August 1662 died in Paris Blaise Pascal, the French philosopher and religious thinker. Several days after his death a maid noticed something in the lining of his doublet. On cutting it open she found a document written in Pascal's hand, now known as The Memorial. For the last eight years of his life, Pascal had had the document sewn into his doublet whenever he replaced it, and it reads as follows:

. . . 'From about 10:30 pm till about half past midnight.
Fire

'God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not
[the God of]
philosophers and scholars.
Certitude, certitude, emotion, joy, peace.
Forgetting the world and all excepting God. Just father,
the world has not known you, but I have known you.
Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.'

(The "Memorial", Pensées 913)

And so Pascal recorded his particular mystical experience bearing the record of it close to his heart, deliberately sewn into his clothing. A fiery vision of God, with a unique and centralised focus on God alone; this was an experience to which Pascal alone of all the world was privy. These are the typical themes of mystical experience, which bring great peace of mind to those who experience them. A transcendent experience, going beyond language and reason, and beyond the boundaries of normal experience, which gives the individual a sense of unification with a higher reality, and complete certainty. Most world religions have had their mystics, and it is in their mysticism that they most resemble each other, since mystical experiences go beyond the constraints of language, doctrine, and ritual, and function in an area of the human mind untouched by cultural differences.

In the Jewish tradition a strong mystical tradition has developed around the Kabbalah (or 'tradition'): the Kabbalists

first appeared in the Languedoc at the end of the twelfth century, and claimed to have received a revelation from the prophet Elijah. Though they wished to hold forth something new, they also advocated respect for the orthodox sources of authority, such as the Torah. Isaac Luria carried on their work in the sixteenth century, and the intricate symbolism of the Kabbalistic books, of which an example is the Zohar, is scarcely understood today. Yet this tradition is foreshadowed much earlier in Jewish history, in which there is repeated evidence of interest in mysticism. Scholem (On the Kabbalah 14) regards Paul as an outstanding example of a revolutionary Jewish mystic, arguing that Paul had a mystical experience 'which he interpreted in such a way that it shattered the traditional authority.' Scholem believes that Paul gave a perverse reinterpretation of the Old Testament documents in order to preserve his link with the traditional Jewish sources of authority, but at the same time to allow himself to develop the new themes which were consonant with the experience on the way to Damascus. In the same period we know of the Therapeutai, described by Philo, a Jewish/Alexandrian writer spanning the first centuries B.C. and A.D. Philo actually wrote a work on the contemplative life, and it is here that he gives us the information about the Therapeutai. There were both men and women in the sect, and Philo distinguishes them from the Essenes, whom he claims to have been active rather than contemplative in their manner of living. The Therapeutai lived an ascetic life, and spent their time seeking the vision of the divine on the shores of Lake Mareotis in Egypt. Philo says that they desired 'the vision of the Existent' and soared 'above the sun of our senses . . . ' They were carried away by a heaven-sent passion of love, remaining rapt and possessed like bacchanals or corybants . . .' The comparison with the Dionysiac orgies, or rites, comes to his mind because of their habit of dancing wildly throughout the night during the Pentecost period (The Contemplative Life 89; 12). Philo describes their prayers, their exotic feasts, and the entire ritual associated with the pursuit of the contemplative life.

After this period most mystical thinking tends to be dominated by the growing tradition of Neoplatonism, the revival of Plato's thought which occurred in the early and late Roman

Empire, and which has become a permanent deposit in Western thought, as well as Arabic philosophy. Greek philosophy had established reason and rationality as the only avenue to knowledge, and by the end of its long career, Greek philosophy had disestablished them.

Parmenides, a philosopher of the sixth century B.C., first formulated the claims of reason (the Greek word is *logos*) by casting doubt on ordinary concepts, resulting from the ordinary perceptions of the senses. In the seventh fragment he distinguishes between a true and a false way of thinking, and invites his reader to judge by *reason.* Guthrie, in his monumental history of Greek philosophy (II.25), rightly points out that this was a major advance in Western thinking - reason had now been identified and given pride of place. The importance of reason is commonplace to us : we urge each other to be reasonable, to cease being unreasonable, and we all recognize the rational basis of science, whose benefits we reap daily as consumers surrounded by our possessions, which are all symptoms of the progress of reason. But in all this we are heirs to a discovery which had to be made, and which is now part and parcel of our lives : the primacy of reason had to be realized and argued, thus providing the basis of rationality and science, and Parmenides was the first in Greek literature to articulate this. However, it was not long before the shadow of a doubt was cast over this achievement by Plato, in his work appropriately entitled the Parmenides. Here, with a series of torturing paradoxes in the Eleatic mode, Plato explored the limits of language and reason. In general, however, the succeeding five centuries were centuries of development of Greek philosophy in the confidence that the essence of reality and knowledge would unfold itself to reasoning. The power of *logos* is infrequently questioned in the classical period, and with Aristotle in particular one encounters a sublime confidence in reason, this ability which distinguishes man from the animals. For Aristotle it was the instrument with which urban civilisation was built, and the basis of all political activity. The shadow of doubt which hangs over rationality in the works of Plato is absent from those of Aristotle.

Reason was not seriously questioned until the era of the Sceptics and the Middle Platonists, that is the pre-Neoplatonists,

who worked and wrote in the first century B.C., and the first two centuries A.D. Not much of their writing survives, but their names are known : they were Asiatic and Roman Greeks, Apuleius, Atticus, Albinus, Numenius, and Clement of Alexandria, if we are permitted to include a Christian writer in this category. They called the ultimate essence of reality the One, but they also called it God, and developed theories about how one might know this reality. These come down to three modes: the way of analogy, the precursor of the Thomist theory of analogy; the way of ecstasy (a development of the pursuit of beauty in Plato's Symposium), and the way of negation. This is the first development in the apophatic tradition in Western religious philosophy, where *apophasis* (or 'negation') replaces affirmation. In crude terms, the idea is this : it is better to say nothing about God, than to say something, because nothing will almost certainly be more accurate. Albinus, a non-Christian Greek writer describes the method to us as follows : we imagine a surface, then abstract extent from the surface, leaving a line; we abstract length from the line and we are left with a point (ed. Hermann, p. 165, 14). Albinus follows this with a long list of negative adjectives about what God is not : in relation to Clement, Chadwick calls this tendency the "apotheosis of the alpha privative", the Greek alpha doing duty for our negative prefixes in- and un- (The Cambridge History . . . 179). Thus for Albinus, the ultimate reality, which he also chooses to call God, is invisible, indescribable, unknowable, immoveable, and unnameable. Nothing can be said of him except that he exists, and even that is denied by Clement of Alexandria. Clement, a Christian writer, uses exactly the same mathematical analogy, referring to the capacity to conceive of length without width, a surface without depth and a single point without parts. If, he says, we abstract from sensible entities all their properties, we are thrown into the greatness of Christ, thus reaching the omnipotent, knowing not what he is, but what he is *not* (Strom. V. II. 71.2). In similar vein writes Augustine : . . . . de summo illo Deo, quo scitus melius nesciendo – God is better known through not knowing (De ordine II.16.44).

The late philosophers practised the method of refining their thought : it amounts to this; you think of something familiar, you remove some aspect of it, say its colour, you remove something

else, say one part of its shape, finally you remove everything. Properly practised this method of intellectual ascent will lead to a sudden change in the mind, a sudden encounter with conceptual blank space, and this is the mystical experience.

Plotinus, a third-century Greek and non-Christian philosopher, living and teaching in Rome, had such an experience four times, we are told by his biographer, and his writings are full of attempts to convey the experience of being 'thither', *ekei* in Greek. Like the Buddhists, Plotinus emphasises self-knowledge as the route to the general essence of things. Enn. V.8. [13] 13,19: 'We ourselves possess beauty when we are true to our own being; we are ugly if we go over to another order; our self-knowledge, that is to say, is our beauty; in self-ignorance we are ugly.' And in fact Plotinus arranged to go on a trip to study the Persian and Indian philosophy : he went with the emperor Gordian on his expedition, and escaped with difficulty back to Rome when Gordian was assassinated (Life 3, 15). In Enn. V. 8. [13] 4, 4 he describes his vision as follows. Thither 'all is transparent, nothing dark, nothing resistant; every being is lucid to every other; inwardly and in every respect; light runs through light. Each being contains all within itself, and at the same time sees all in every other; so that everywhere there is all, and all is all and each all. Each of them is great; the small is great; the sun, thither, is all the stars, and every star is all the stars and sun.' Making an attempt to describe the vision that the ultimate principle has of itself, Plotinus says that it is like seeing light, not lit, or illuminated objects, such as light bulbs, or objects over which light is cast, but light itself and he describes it like this. 'The eye does not always perceive an outside and alien light; there is a prior light within itself, a more brilliant light, which it sees sometimes in a momentary flash. At night in the darkness a gleam leaps from within the eye : or again, closing our eyelids, we make no effort to see anything, and yet a light flashes before us; or we rub the eye and it sees the light it contains. In this case, it sees without seeing, but it is the truest seeing, for it sees light whereas its other objects were the lit not the light' (V5 [32] 7, 25).

This is also the language of the Christian mystics, whose most notable representative was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a mysterious figure who cannot be dated with any ease.

He refers to God as the divine darkness, and claims that God possesses all the attributes of the universe, but in another sense does not possess them, since he transcends them. He is beyond all affirmations and negation. The Christian mystics refer to God being known through the night of the mind, or the desert of the mind, or in holy silence. There is in this period a very great incidence of the use of the word silence *(sige)* in epistemological contexts, and across the whole spectrum of Neoplatonism, both Greek and Christian, it is emphasised that knowledge is non-verbal. Language is multiple : the statement has a triple structure involving subject, predicate and a statement of existence. Such an approach is inimical to the knowledge of the divine essence, who is perfect unity. Pseudo-Dionysius writes : 'Now we shall penetrate the darkness which is beyond the intelligible : it is no longer a matter of precision in speech, but rather of a complete withdrawal from word and thought' (Mystical Theology III, Migne, PG. III, 1033 B-C). (John Chrysostom's work on The Incomprehensibility of God is dedicated to outlining these themes, and Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Moses also contains much which shows him to be in touch with Platonic mysticism). Pseudo-Dionysius claims that when united with the unspeakable God, we are 'utterly speechless' (loc. cit.).

We do not know the precise extent of the contact between Buddhism and the Graeco-Roman world, but there are traces which are intriguing. In the first place, we know that Alexander the Great reached Northern India towards the end of his campaign, and Arrian tells a number of stories about his contact with the Indian philosophers, some of them indicating interest on Alexander's part in their discussions. More importantly, Alexander's entourage of philosophers, sophists and theologians hold conversations with the Indians, and Anaxarchus figured particularly in these. Pyrrho, the famous Sceptical philosopher also talked with the Indians, and professional historians of logic speculate on the influence of Indian logic on Pyrrho's thought, in particular in the area of contradiction (see Diogenes Laertius IX). Secondly, whilst we know of course that Buddhism predated the century of Alexander, the fourth century B.C., it received a tremendous thrust in the third century B.C., when Ashoka acceded to the

kingship in the Northern Indian kingdom bounded by the Hindu Kush, and containing Afghanistan. The Hindu Kush, we must be sure to realise, actually separated this Indian kingdom from a Greek kingdom, a far-flung outpost of the Seleucid empire. Nevertheless there continued to be contact between the courts of the Seleucid kings and the Mauryan empire, as it was called then. Under King Ashoka, who became a convert to Buddhism, there was organized a kind of synod, or religious conference, and the teachings of the Buddha were put into a kind of statement of faith, plans being laid to make it a missionary faith. Historians of Buddhism note that Ashoka claimed converts in the kingdoms of Antiochus II, Ptolemy Philadelphus, Antigonus Gonatas, Megas of Cyrene, Alexander of Epirus. The geographical areas represented by these names are as follows : Syria and Asia Minor in the south, Egypt, Athens and Sparta, Cyrene and Epirus. Ashoka publicised the religion of the Buddha in inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic, some of which survive. Despite this tremendous drive towards the West, the Greek sources seem to reflect no impact, at least in Greek circles themselves. Of course it is difficult to estimate what its effect might have been outside the elite circles to which most of the authors of our literary sources belong, but it is clear that there was no substantial influence on the corpus of Greek philosophical writings.

The third point of contact between Buddhism and the classical world occurs with Manichaeism : the founder, Mani, flourished in the mid-third century A.D., and probably learnt of the Buddha in Persia where the religion had long been established. Manichaeism was a form of gnosticism which survived well into the middle ages, and emerged in China in the form of Tao. The best known adherent of the Manichaean movement was Augustine, who had been a follower of the learned Faustus, a Manichee bishop. Manichaeism was an eclectic religion, which gave a place to the Buddha. On a cautious note however, it should be noted that some doubt that Buddhism was an important part of Manichaeism in its early period, that is in the period of the late Roman Empire. (We are not therefore bound to regard Augustine as a crypto-Buddhist.)

The Buddha, Gautama, probably lived from 560-480 B.C. in

India and the facts of his life are now encased in legend. India, the parent country of the new religion, gave birth to an aggressively proselytising movement : the Buddha gave commands to his disciples to go and convert. The original school of Theravada Buddhism (a branch of the Hinayana school) took the message to the South, and eventually there grew up the Mahayana school and, in the sixth century A.D. in China, the Zen school. It is the Zen school whose form of meditation can be most interestingly compared to that of the Greek and Christian mystics. The Zen movement then rooted itself deeply in Japan, and has in our century made considerable inroads into the West. Harvey Cox, in his book, Turning East, treats oriental religion as one of the major sources of spiritual life in the United States today. He describes his experiences in learning to meditate in the cross-legged position, and claims to have made this a regular part of his life. He allows us to glimpse his own meditation on the most famous of the Buddhist Koans, the sound of one hand clapping. What is the sound of one hand? Meditation on the question eventually yields the solution : the 'soundless sound' (Reps, Zen Flesh, Zen Bones, 21).

In his account of his own movement through Zen, Cox describes the frustration and tension which overtook him as he tried to meditate on such problems, seemingly lacking in consequence and ordinary reasonableness. In fact at the heart of the experience lies the very idea of the Koan. The drive of Buddhism is towards self-realisation and self-understanding, which when achieved, will put us in touch with the essence of the all; the Koan, that is the subject for meditation, provides a discipline of the mind which leads us towards this end. The Koan demonstrates the importance of the contemplative part of life, an aspect largely lost in our Western culture, though it survives in Roman Catholicism and in eastern forms of Christianity. Many of the Zen teachers are insistent on arousing a most intense spirit of doubting in the meditator, and it becomes almost impossible to forget the tantalising subject for whose solution one is searching. By feeding his mind with apparent contradictions, the apprentice is taught to doubt all his perceptions : he begins to feel that he knows nothing, and eventually begins to move around mecha-

nically, living in a 'vivid daze' as it is described. Eventually this sense of distance is dissolved, and there is no longer any sense of the self standing over against the world, and separate from it, but there is a sense of being at one with it.

It is well known that posture is very important in meditation : the cross-legged position is required with feet up on the thighs, back straight, and eyes cast on the floor a few feet in front of oneself. One method of instruction involves asking the apprentice to tense his muscles, in order to show him what not to do, and there seem to be certain physical concomitants of the spiritual experience. In the meditation itself there is a frenetic initial period of examination of the Koan, which is then perceived as futile. There is here a parallel with negative theology, which begins with concrete, physical and anthropomorphic terms, and moves upward to the less and less familiar until the mind is precipitated into a new experience of mystic union. There is also a sense of the recovery of one's true identity through finding one's true relationship with existence : normal modes of thought and reasoning are seen as a dislocation of the true self, which is uncovered when these shackles are abandoned.

Much has been written on Buddhist logic, and there is one fundamental difference between it and that of the West, and this concerns the Aristotelian law referred to as the law of the excluded middle. Many scholars have pointed to the dominance of this principle in Western thought, and this holds true for the narrow area of the negative theological tradition. The law of the excluded middle states that any proposition is either true or not true : e.g. 'this board is green', is either true or not true. Buddhist documents tend to infringe this principle; the concept of the gateless gate is a case in point (Reps. 17), as is the soundless sound, reached after meditating on the sound of one hand clapping. Spread out into statements these concepts emerge as follows : this gate is, and is not a gate, or in the second case, the sound of one hand is a sound, which is not a sound. Neither proposition abides by the law of the excluded middle, since each of them is intended to be both true and false. A deliberate use of contradiction is made in order to cause reason to founder, and to disturb one's ordinary psychological reactions. Contradiction is

employed to allow the mind to go beyond ordinary thought, through causing ordinary thought to implode.

In Graeco-Christian mysticism the goal is similar, but the Aristotelian principle is respected. Familiar and ordinary reasoning is transcended, but in a way which does not seek to make ordinary thinking destroy itself through the use of contradictions. The Graeco-Christian state of mystical ecstasy results from abstraction *(aphairesis),* from taking away from concepts until the most refined is left and then removing it. There is also what we might call a psychological element, in that these unfamiliar manoeuvres of the mind produce a sense of disorientation which helps to lead to the mystical experience, but reason is used as a cathartic or critical weapon. It is not destroyed. It is a tool which enables the user to outgrow its use.

Knowledge gained through a state which transcends reasoning and language continues to be a preoccupation in world culture. In 1966 and 1969 Japanese scientists studied the brain patterns of those engaged in transcendental meditation and found that there was an increase in the incidence of alpha waves, that is, the particularly slow electrical discharges of the brain which occur when one is in an alert, but relaxed state, and which appear on an encephalogram as 'waves'. One subject is reported to have said (Staal p.112) '.... you keep asking me to describe this darned alpha state. I can't do it: it has a certain feel about it, sure,

destroyed. The great chain of being makes knowledge like the ascent of a ladder, with each entity leading into another. Whereas for Zen, the sound of one hand clapping is a soundless sound, for Augustine the sound of God is a sound that does not die away. In the former case a self-contradictory notion is presented to the mind, whereas in the latter an ordinary concept has an element subtracted from it. Christian negative theology evolves from the basis of Aristotle's understanding of abstract thinking *(aphairesis),* and by this he meant the technique of removing in thought the outer layers of a thing until one reached its essential character. In such a process reason is not the enemy : in the version of aphairetic thinking that we find in Greek and Christian mysticism, reason is a useful tool which nevertheless renders itself obsolete. It does not contribute towards the construction of a system of thought; rather, it systematically deconstructs.

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For ancient sources, see relevant articles in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary,* and the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church.*