From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

Bond University Year 1986

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From Word to Silence
Vol. II

by Raoul Mortley

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Chapter I. The Middle Platonists, The Mathematicians, and the Gnostics

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reality is held to be a collection of increments, then it follows that these should be pared off in order to discover the basis to which these increments have added themselves. Euclid exploits this in his definitions, but as we have already seen (I, 135), the later Plato displayed a sudden predilection for the way of abstraction, and it is plentifully used in Aristotle.

The generation of reality from point to solid figure has been detected by Whittaker in Philo, Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Alexander Polyhistor, Hippolytus, Theo of Smyrna and Iamblichus. It was therefore not uncommon in late antiquity, and it is probably true that it finds more emphasis in late antiquity than in the classical period. It was a current of Greek thought which came to be emphasized, and the suggestion has been that the Pythagorean revival had an influence here. This was put forward by Dodds (Proclus: The Elements of Theology 312), and has received attention from Whittaker (op. cit.) and in his Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute.

One must however exercise some caution here. It is not enough simply to suppose Neopythagorean influence, and the fact is that some things were shared across a variety of schools. Much of what is attributed to Neopythagoreanism seems to be a matter of assertion only. It may be true that the "Neopythagoreans took the lead in refusing to assign to the first principle any positive quality, even that of unity" (Whittaker, Neopythag./ Absolute 82), but this principle had equally well been canvassed as one possibility in Plato's Parmenides, whose influence is known to all. The thesis of the revival of Pythagoreanism and of its influence relies on the labelling of certain ideas as exclusively Pythagorean, whereas some of the evidence leads to the view that such ideas were more broadly disseminated than this.

But there *is* a point to be made, and to this effect the following piece of evidence may be adduced. A passage of the scholia on John Philoponus describes the thought of Aristocles, a little known second century writer of about the level of Maximus of Tyre, and who argues that arithmetic provides one of the most useful ways to reach the intelligible. This passage has so far not been adduced in any discussions of the matter; the fragments of Aristocles were collected in a dissertation by H. Heiland, and published in 1925, under the title Aristoclis Messenii Reliquiae.

All sciences lead the way to the intelligibles, and this is especially true of arithmetic, which is the starting-point for everything... And it is indeed prior to geometry, for much geometrical demonstration depends on arithmetic. Overall this is true, since shapes are constituted of one line, like the circle, or of many: this comes from number, the one and the many. The monad is the principle of all size, and the point is a monad which exists, being without parts. The monad is indivisible, and is the principle of number. (ed. Heiland, 25, 85 ff.)

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Chapter II. The First Christian negative theology: Justin and Clement

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Clement's unity within existence, or beyond it: this is the question raised by the second hypothesis of the Parmenides (142 B *ff.*). There are no answers to these questions, but whar can be said is that Clement envisages a furthe? srage: there is an "immensity of holiness" beyond the unity which has been arrived at through the abstraction process. We might speculate that this last stage is that of the Father, the One beyond being and language, and without parts. The "greatness of Christ" would correspond to one of the lesser unities, and we would have the result that the Father is unity pure, and the Son the unity which is a completeness of parts.

A passage of the Protrepticus (IX.88.2; see my Connaissance religi 92) refers to the Christian flock being brought together by "the unitary being". This writing is a sermon, but it proceeds to develop a philosophical concept as follows:

> Let us, being made pod, pursue unity analogously, seeking the good monad (or "unit"). The union of many in one, arising out of polyphony and fragmentation, becomes one single symphony by taking on a divine harmony. We follow one choirleader and teacher, the Word, towards the same truth, and resting therein, crying, "Abba, Father". (Protrepticus IX.88**2-3)**

The metaphysical structure in this passage is the same as that of the Stromateis, quoted above. It reveals a little more, however, about Clement's interpretation of the Parmenidean alternatives. In the present passage, it is clear that Christ is the unity of many parts, and the giver of unity to inharmonious elements. But beyond the unity thus achieved, there lies the further realm sf pure unity, recognized in the call to the beyond, "Abba, Father". The Protrepticus passage casts light on that of the Stromateis, and we must assume that with Christ we have the lesser unity, which springs from wholeness and completeness: this is the unity envisaged in the second and third hypothesis of the Parmenides. The One pure, the Father, lies still further beyond this stage.

So much for the levels of unity. On the method of abstraction itself, Clement will elsewhere reiterate his interest in it. In Strom. VI.11.90.4 he commends the study of astronomy, because it trains the mind in various skills, including that of the method of deconstructionist thinking which we have designated the *via negativa*. Astronomy enables us "eo conceive length without breadth, surface without depth, and a point without parts" (Strom. W.11.90.4). The value of astronomy is coupled with that of music, and of philosophy, and each annotated: that of astronomy in particular is that it takes the soul up to the study of celestial objects. The study of the heavens brings us nearer to creative powers, and this takes us much closer to the source and essence of things. Astronomy draws us away from matter, and terrestrial preoccupations in general. It therefore predisposes us towards the method of abstraction.

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Chapter III. Plotinus and abstraction

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multiplicity, therefore, but it is not a matter of the absolutely fragmented sort of multiplicity which belongs to the domain of discourse. What could be less unified than language, which contains countless individual words? Its multiplicity is the kind which has some kind of underlying unity. It is not however the first principle, or the One, and this being is now distinguished from the Intelligence by means of a further set of negative descriptions built upon those of the lower hypostasis. The One only has simplicity whereas the unity of the Intelligence does not possess this simplicity in its pure form. The Intelligence is not the One, but like the One, and now the tables are turned and the Intelligence is depicted as being a little lower than the One in all aspects. The dominant model is now the One itself, with the negatives applying to it in order to construct a picture of the Intelligence "which does not dissipate itself, but lies genuinely in itself, and holds itself in the vicinity of the One, after it..." (VI.9[8].5, 28). There is a circular movement here, in that the negation of Intelligence is used to produce a picture of the One, and the negation of this image is then used to construct a picture of Intelligence; this matter will be taken up again.

A good example of this imaginative negation will be found in V.8[13].11, which returns to the theme of self-seeing. We are incapable of seeing ourselves, Plotinus says, but imagine that we produce a vision of ourselves "on some occasion when possessed by that god yonder". We may see ourselves as embellished, but if we leave behind this image, no matter how beautiful it is, we may find ourselves "noiselessly" united with the god. If, further, we find ourselves separated from him, and find ourselves returning into duality, we are nevertheless pure. If once again we turn back to him, we will possess the advantage of beginning to perceive ourselves as other. This whole passage is based on the conditional: "if" we are possessed by that God yonder, "if" we abandon the image of ourselves, "if" we are joined to the One, then we will begin to perceive ourselves, until we become other (thus I interpret V.8[13].11, 10). Thereupon we turn inwards to the all, for fear of being other than the God. This sequence of events is based on the initial "what if" question, and it shows the negative tendency in one of its deployments.

Negative imagination is used to great effect in the discussion on time and eternity (III.7[45]). The two are coupled because of the traditional explanation of time as a copy of eternity: Platonic exemplarism makes it seem that they must be taken together, one as the model, and the other as the this-worldly image of it. Eternity is pictured first in terms which build negatively on existing images; can it be identified with rest, that is with the negation of the movement with which we are so familiar (III.7[45].2, 20)?

> Time might speak thus about itself: that before, prior to producing this "before", and to feeling some need for the "after", it rested with itself in real being. It was not yet time, but was in that (i.e. being), and it maintained quietness. (III.7[45].11, 13)

In this way a picture of the eternal is built up which will serve to illustrate the nature of time, when it emerges. In eternity there is real being, quietness, and there is neither before or after. Eternity must also be thought of as without parts, as without extension or interval, and of course without movement (III.7[45].7, 31). Eternity begins to sound a little like the ultimate Being itself, and so the question arises of whether it is identical with it or not (73). It cannot be quite the same, and so Plotinus gropes after images to express its nature. It is not the substrate, but "shines out of" the substrate, for example. Eternity is the life (ζωή) of Being (7.3, 37), and this proves to be the most durable metaphor: eternity cannot be an adjunct to unity, since unity would thereby cease to be so, but it is nevertheless considered to have some sort of separate identity, and for this reason the life metaphor seems to commend itself. To say that eternity is the life of Being seems to mean that it is essential to Being, though not differentiated from it. Time is then characterized by opposition to this image of eternity, as it has been spelt out. It is to do with process, movement, change, and the before/after sequence. In this case therefore, the lower is defined by the negation of the higher, and the *via negativa* is deployed in reverse.

This raises a vital question about its use in the discussion of time. It is clear that eternity has been pictured as a result of a series of negations of time, and it is the imaginative construct to which we have been referring. The concept of eternity was developed through a reflection on the nature of time and its limitations. Having thus established his picture of eternity, Plotinus now proceeds to negate it in order to arrive at a view of time. The circularity here is obvious, since reciprocal negation cannot work: the concepts of time and eternity seem bound together by a network of imaginative negations, yet these negations cancel each other out. Statements are made by opposition to the model provided, yielding a new model, and the next stage brings a negation of the new model in order to return to the old. There is a certain autoparasitism in this procedure.

It is nevertheless interesting to note that the negative manoeuvre can be used in a downwards direction, and it is now appropriate to embark on a general assessment of this method of constructing conceptual pictures. We are familiar with the notion of imagination, but this use of it is limited by certain ground-rules: the imagination must proceed by systematic denial. The precise character of this negation will be examined below, but it should be noted to begin with that such a procedure starts from a reflection on contingency. It was noted at the outset that Plotinus uses a method which combines the familiar with the unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar assumes its shape by means of negation. Plotinus seeks out what he considers to be contingent in human experience, and expresses its contingency by negating it. What we know could conceivably be different from the way in which we experience it: that is what is being said. However there is more to it than this: there has to

progress of number as it moves away from unity. Number in its pure form is evidently a lofty principle (such that it might even be a genus), but in its instantiated form it produces ever-increasing materiality. From insubstantial beginnings, such as points and lines, size (*megethos*) takes on its accumulated nature. There is clearly a progress towards bulk, that is the result of the progress of number in its lower effects, and it is the notion that there are various gradations in the coming-to-be of this bulk, that makes the method of *aphairesis* particularly apt. It systematically removes the accumulated conglomerations.

A further illuminating passage may be found in VI.3[44].13, 9, where the work of making the ontological divisions is continued. The continuous is distinguished from the discrete (line 1), and subsequently the definition of the continuous is offered. The continuous is said to consist of the line, the surface and the solid, and these consist of one, two and three dimensions respectively: this, however, is not to divide them off into species (εἴδη), but it is simply to offer an enumeration of them. (The argument is that a series of numbers have nothing in common between their individual entities, and there is therefore nothing in common between the three levels of physical reality: "when one thus takes a series of numbers in sequence, there is no common genus between them...", line 12.) Nevertheless, it is argued, there is *something* that is common to all of them: quantities are all quantities, and the argument applied is derived from the consideration of numbers. (Bréhier's translation departs considerably from the Greek here, and one must exercise much ingenuity to discover what it meant.) With respect to numbers, it is argued (line 19), it may not be the case that two produces three, three produces four and so on: it may be the case that the same principle produces all numbers. What applies to numbers also applies to quantities, and so we may distinguish between the species (εἴδη) of the quantities, while supposing them to be produced under the one genus (γένος).

The above is my interpretation of a difficult passage, and I have tried to remain close to the text. The importance of it is this: Plotinus sees the nature of physical continuity as being analogous to that of the realm of numbers. He sees number as a sequence, and since he finds it difficult to concede that each number is radically separate from the next, he finishes by postulating some one thing which lies behind number in this form. After all, numbers do not become; they are. Nothing generates them, and so he is caught with the difficulty of specifying what this generating force is, since he cannot make it a cause in the lower sense. The same problematic applies to the gradations of physical reality, from line to surface to plane figure. They are in some sense separate from each other, but seem to have one single principle: and Plotinus has, after all, begun by defining this section as being about the continuous. It moves into a long discussion of all the different types of plane figures and solids, but the importance here is that it provides confirmation of a view

which is as old as Aristotle, and even older, and which envisages reality as starting from infinitesimal beginnings, and as turning into a series of heavy and encumbered physical objects. Reality takes on more and more accretions until it reaches the form which we see and feel: it balloons out in layers of physical being. Like number, it proceeds from the unitary to the multiple: its generation is sequential and involves a progress which multiplies. As we have seen elsewhere, it is not only like number, it is number spelt out and physically instantiated. With number the procession from one, through twoness to threeness, and so on, is of crucial importance, and it is this which provides the model for the understanding of physical reality.

We cannot gain an adequate understanding of abstraction as an epistemological tool unless we have a matching understanding of the generation of reality in Plotinus. His negative theology really involves the process of systematically attacking the layers of physical being which have laid themselves upon the essential beginning. Their removal will lead to true knowledge of the essence. This is the whole context of the method and in view of this it is not surprising that privation (*steresis*) should have been brought into the discussion, since it also involves the removal of characteristics. What difference is there between abstraction and privation?

Aristotle's view may be summed up as follows. Privation is a kind of conceptual removal of a characteristic, as instanced by the alpha privative, which is a kind of privation (Met. $1022^{b}33$). In privation generally however, "there is a certain substrate of which the privation is predicated" ($1004^{a}16$). A privation applies to a specific thing, and is really the negation of a characteristic which one might reasonably expect that thing to have. To say that a sheep is not white would be a privation: whiteness might be expected to apply to a sheep. That two is not infinite cannot be a privation, however, since infinity could not under any circumstances belong to duality. Privation is a state of lack, registered in language by the use of the negative.

Plotinus builds on these views, and accordingly privation turns out to be quite close to abstraction, but not quite the same thing, since abstraction involves the deliberate use of removal for epistemological purposes: it has a conceptual goal, which is not the case with privation. The latter is in fact more frequently mentioned by Plotinus: the method of abstraction is continually practised, though rarely formulated. In II.4[12].13, 12 privation is discussed in relation to qualities, and this sets the pattern for Neoplatonist discussion of the issue: privation is an ontological matter.

> For anyone who is deprived has a quality – a blind man, for instance. (trans. Armstrong)

Plotinus here treats of the question as to whether privation itself might be a form of quality, like the ordinary qualities, like whiteness, heat and so on.

and it is always bound up with the particular nature which is said to be qualified, or in a relation. Privation is to do with specific absences, and is *determined by them.* Speech merely registers the ontological state of affairs, by the use of the negative, or the alpha privative, and privation is really only the potential for a specific quality or relation, in a specific substrate, or the substrate in general. Since it is merely potential, it is not a quality, but it is quality-like, and it is this thought which bemuses Plotinus. By contrast, abstraction is not limited by that which it negates: nor is it the linguistic registering of a state of affairs, but it is a positive investigation, a foray by language into the existent.

Abstraction is a conceptual tool, a means of thought. It is not the highest form of intellection, which involves seeing all things at the one time and as a whole, but it is a route to the highest form of contemplation:

> For intellect too is a part of ourselves and to it we ascend. (I.1[53].13, 8)

These are different levels of intellectual activity, and the human being is a composite, combining lower and higher faculties. Human rational thought is one thing, but genuine intellection is another. They are interrelated, and the former may lead to the latter, but they can also be seen to have quite distinct characteristics.

What does thought (νόησις) desire? What does it seek? These are questions asked by Plotinus in VI.7[38].40, 53, and the answer is: "what the extent of its power is". This fascinating remark on the nature of thought shows it as having the following characteristics: it is a self-investigating phenomenon. The power of thought is not different from thought itself, however: its investigating, and that which it investigates, are not different from each other. That thought thinks itself is a well-known theme from Aristotle onwards (On the Soul 429^{b}9), but the distinctive contribution here is that in its self-absorption, thought is seeking to discover the limits of its own powers. Its self-thinking is also a self-assessment. The discovery of its limits will constitute an intellectual advance. "For thought", Plotinus continues, "may be an aid given to beings which, though divine, are lesser and who would of themselves be sightless" (VI.7[38].41, 1 ff.). Thought is a low-level mechanism.

The ontology of thought is as follows. The universal intelligence is prior to the intelligences-in-act, which exist. But these numerous intelligences form a group which is a whole, and the universal intelligence in fact constitutes this whole, and it gives to the individual intelligences everything they have. The overall intelligence constitutes the power of these multiple intelligences: it is in each in potency, but in act it is in all the intelligences (VI.2[43].20, 1–23). In other words, the ontology of intelligence in Plotinus is similar to that obtaining in the rest of his system: there is a descent from a single source to multiple instances, but all these individuated intelligences are interrelated,

and they are related to the higher source. And the unresolved problem of the Neoplatonic system is also present: why does the higher give birth to the lower?

This real Intelligence does not make mistakes, nor does it forget, or fail in knowledge (V.5[32].1, 1–5). It perceives and knows the intelligibles (*noeta*), which are inside it (V.5[32].2, 1). This is an important issue, which may be traced back to the Aristotelian concern over the identity of mind and its objects (On the Soul 429^{b}6 ff.). The problem goes like this: when we see an object we observe its colour, shape and position, in sum all the things which characterize its material presence. These material manifestations are available to sense-perception only, and such perceptions do not tell us the truth about the thing itself (loc. cit., l. 18). What we perceive by the senses is merely an image of the thing itself, which remains hidden to them, "for perception remains outside the thing itself" (loc. cit., l. 18). There is therefore some essence which is perceived by reason and the intellect, and this is the inner part of the object. The supposition that some background to the object exists, which is its real basis and essence, causes a rupture between the capacity of the senses and that of the intellect. A gulf widens between them, like that between the soul and the intellect, such that it becomes necessary to polarise their functions. The one focusses on the outside, the materiality, the mass and quality of the object, whereas the other dwells on the form, teleology and essence of the object.

Because of the tendency to find a landing-place for intellect somewhere in the object, there grew up the tendency for it to be supposed that there was something "intelligible" in it, that is, something capable of being embraced by intellect. The "sensible" and the "intelligible" were different aspects in the object, and a different characterization had to be found for each. The aspect of the object which was seen as apt to be grasped by intellect was its *logos*, or design-function. This will be discussed in what follows, but for the question of the intelligible being inside the intellect, the importance of the idea is that there is a similarity between the intellect and its objects. The logos of a thing is intelligible, and thus does not lie outside the intellect: it is not separate from it, foreign to it, or in any way beyond it. Thus the intelligibles are inside the intellect.

This *logos*, or design-function in things, flows from intellect (III.2[47].2, 15):

> So Intellect, by giving itself to matter, made all things in unperturbed quietness; this *logos* flows from Intellect.

The word of the intelligible is nothing more or less than this *logos*, which is in things, but also capable of being abstracted from them. If Intellect descends and flows outward, then it must endow lower species with something of it-

self, and this something is that which has to do with purpose, plan, structure and form: all these things are included under the term *logos.* This design-principle comes from soul, which itself comes from Intellect, we are told in III.3[38].3, 21.

Thus the intelligence can find something to feed on in the sensible world – because that something is part of itself, yet is part of these apparently discrete and alien objects. As it hastens into matter, this *logos* becomes more and more deficient (loc. cit., l. 25–30), and eventually finds itself very far removed from its origin: "and yet, it is a wonder!" The procedure of thought is to find this *logos,* and this means that the task of sifting and discriminating is required, along the lines of the technique of abstraction described earlier. Thought involves an ἐπιστροφή, or descent followed by a "turning back" towards the higher (IV.8[6].7, 15–30). Thought goes on a journey downwards to the lower levels of the intelligence, and to the soul: this descent is motivated by a kind of necessity in its nature, which draws it inevitably downwards (loc. cit., l. 20). Having reached the soul it stops, and moves upward to its source again. The stopping at the soul is the *telos* of its descent, and it then undertakes the *epistrophe,* or turning back upwards, during which it abandons the being which comes after it. It seizes higher beings, and commits itself to intellectual contemplation.

Thought has various phases, and in the above passage its lower phase is referred to as discursive thought: the word διέξοδος (loc. cit, l. 17) suggests a journey, or the following of a pathway, and consequently a mode of thought which progresses by moving through stages. Such linear thought is a lower form in Plotinus, and we know also that thought can multiply, thereby damaging the unity inherent in reality. As it sluggishly plods along its way, discursive thought enumerates and divides, and provides a form of knowledge which is essentially a narrative. Such thought-narratives are really only lists of items, and since the essence of things is unity, are directly inimical to the acquisition of true knowledge, which sees all at the same time, and as a whole.

> The intelligence which divides is one thing, and that which is indivisible, and which divides neither being nor the all, is another. (V.9[5].8, 21)

Being and Intelligence are one and the same thing (loc. cit.), but there is our lower intelligence which tends to separate and deconstruct. Even that which is an integral whole is subjected to this separating process, which is an essential part of our lower intellectual function. "Intelligence discovers doubleness, for it divides until it comes to something single, which can no longer be resolved into parts" (II.4[12].5, 4–5). Its usefulness lies essentially in its ability to deal with the plurality of elements in a situation, or an entity: its disadvantage lies in its tendency to multiply. There are three ingredients implicit in

this damaging process of division: firstly it is incompatible with unity, since the listing of predicates adds number to an entity; secondly it is temporal, since the knowledge of an entity is laid out in successive stages; thirdly it is spatial, since the successive stages are linear in shape. These are the disadvantages of discursive thought, which is clearly inappropriate for the contemplation of the transcendent.

There is however a form of Intelligence which sees the light in things, their logos, even though they may be cloaked in the darkness of matter (II.4[12].5, 7–15). Just as a brightly coloured object attracts the eye by its light, concealing the darkness of the matter beneath it, so the logos in a thing shines like a beacon to the Intellect, which also looks away from the lower darkness of matter. Sensible reality is shrouded in darkness, and looking at a physical object is like looking into darkness, unless by the use of intelligence we manage to perceive the luminous kernel of genuine reality within it.

In conclusion, the negative theology of Plotinus may be said to be a method of turning the inadequacies of discursive thought to good purpose. Its step-by-step dissection is directed towards the removal of physical characteristics, so that the light will emerge from behind the screen of materiality. Reality is an incrustation around essence, a materialization of number, and it grows and multiplies like oysters on a rock. The multiple character of discursive thought fits it for the systematic removal of the many elements which have grafted themselves onto the real essence. A crucial part of this systematic abstraction is the imaginative selection of entities to be negated, since the highest form of reality can only be known by such a procedure of negative imagining, which asks the question: "what might be otherwise, and how might it be?" The ultimate aim of intellect is the discernment of its own limits, and eventually even abstraction will be left behind. As the intellect courses on its upward way, it will go beyond the techniques of thought. Paradoxically, thought will be used to show its own inadequacy: the moment thought can assess itself, it will have been superseded.

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Chapter IV. Origen: Christian mysticism without the via negativa

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IV. Origen: Christian mysticism without the *via negativa*

It will be recalled that Luke's gospel gives the story of Zacharias and Elisabeth, and that an angel appeared to the former to announce that Elisabeth would bear a child, despite her barrenness (Luke 1.13). The child was to be John the Baptist. Zacharias asks for independent verification of this promise, and as a penalty for his failure to accept Gabriel's words as self-authenticating, he is struck dumb. For demanding a criterion whereby the words coming from God's emissary might be assessed, Zacharias himself loses the capacity to speak. After the naming of the child (1.63), he regains the capacity for speech. The story in its New Testament form is obviously heavy with symbolism, since Zacharias' renewed capacity for speech is followed by a prophecy of John's role as revealer. Unbelief and silence are succeeded by an outpouring of words. There is a strange symmetry in the punishment of Zacharias, since the failure to accept speech on its own terms is sanctioned by the removal of the capacity for speech.

As noted with Clement, the story was taken up as symbolizing the contrast between the silence of the pre-Messianic time, and the full revelation of Jesus' words and presence. Origen alludes to it on a number of occasions, and one entire homily is devoted to it (Homelies on Luke 5: PG 13,1812 A). Origen interprets the silence of Zacharias as that of the prophets of Israel, and extends the divine silence beyond the advent of Christ: "for us Christ does not remain silent, but for the Jews he keeps silence to this day" (5.1: PG 13,1812 B).

Origen's interpretation of the story dwells on Zacharias' compensation for his dumbness by the use of gestures. He chooses to see them as meaningless acts; this is somewhat forced since Zacharias was clearly intent on conveying something by gesticulating during his affliction. However it is what Origen thinks which is significant here, and he distinguishes between acts which are devoid of reason and those which stem from some rational purpose. The "meaningless" gestures of Zacharias are assimilated to the behaviour of the Jews. The Jewish act of circumcision, for example, is a random gesture which lacks any rational underpinning.

There is an interesting linguistic complication here, well discussed by Crouzel, Fournier et Périchon in their Sources Chrétiennes edition (136–7), since we have both the Greek (GCS IX) and Jerome's translation into Latin (PG 13,1812 A). The breadth of the word *logos* allows Origen a considerable amount of latitude in his interpretation of the notion of speech in Zacharias' case. Jerome's translation uses two words to translate *logos*: *ratio* and *sermo*,

terable, the ordinary believer will not do so: he will not return from his experience.

> If you believe that Paul was caught up "to the third heaven" and that he heard "unspeakable things which cannot be uttered by man", you will know accordingly that your knowledge will be immediate, richer and greater than the unspeakable utterances revealed to him at that time, following which he descended from the third heaven. You will not descend after receiving knowledge (γνῶσις), if you take up the cross and follow Jesus, whom we have as a "great high priest who traversed the heavens".

For the unspeakable things which "cannot" be uttered, the Greek New Testament has ἐξόν, which Origen also uses in his citation, and the Latin translation usually employs *licet.* An important logical distinction arises out of the use of the two terms, since the Greek implies the impossibility of repeating the "unspeakable utterances", and the Latin merely the impropriety of doing so, since *licet* is normally to do with whether an act is permitted. The consequences are significant: in the first place the Greek suggests that the transcendent experience cannot be reproduced in language, with corresponding epistemological effects about the value of theological discourse. And the Latin version has the social consequence of suggesting the existence of the arcanum discipline, or the possibility of an early Christian practice of secrecy over what were held to be the most precious truths. The question of which of the two alternatives belongs to Origen's thought will be a matter of primary concern in what follows.

For the moment it should be noted that Origen believes Paul to have gained knowledge from his experience, and that this experience of receiving *gnosis* is that which is laid up for eventual martyrs. Jesus is a kind of intellectual pilot of the heavens. These are the mysteries of earth, and the mysteries of the heavens, but:

> ... in God much greater visions than these are treasured up, to which no corporeal nature can advance before being separated from the body. (PG 11,531 A)

The limitation of his remaining in the body probably explains why Paul's incommunicable experience is in some respect inferior to that of the believer in a terminal situation, when full separation from matter occurs.

Origen gives us an unequivocal answer about the *licet*/ἐξόν dilemma in the De Principiis II.7.4 (PG 11,218 A), where he claims the Spirit to be he who teaches truths which cannot be uttered in words. At this point in the De Principiis we are dealing with the extant Latin translation, and the translation of the relevant part of II Cor. 12. 4 is as follows: quae non licet homini loqui. Origen then interprets this as meaning: quae indicari humano sermone non possunt. In other words, that which *may* not be uttered is interpreted as that

which cannot be uttered, and it would seem that Origen perceived some ambiguity in the Greek, requiring clarification. The question of why he perceives ambiguity in apparently unambiguous Greek is in itself most intriguing, but whatever the answer to this may be, Origen answers one question quite clearly: the incommunicability of the words heard by Paul is of a logical character, and not of a voluntary character. It is not part of the "arcanum discipline". It is the Spirit which is responsible for the communication of this transcendent knowledge (end II.7.4; PG 11,218 C; "sensum scientiae spiritualis": on all of this, see Crouzel, Origene... 37).

Another perspective on incommunicability may be found in the Contra Celsum (V.19; PG 11,1208), where Paul is said to conceal his meaning in I Corinthians 15.48–9, since the passage was not suitable for the class of simple believers. To indicate that there was more in the passage than appeared to be there, he appended the words: "Behold, I show you a mystery" (I Cor. 15.51). This, according to Origen, is his way of introducing matters of a more mystical nature, such as should be concealed from the multitude. This material of course leads into Origen's theory of categorical interpretation, which we shall leave aside, noting only that Origen credits Paul with deliberate concealment of certain truths. Whilst this attests the idea that the hiding of certain truths was a deliberate policy, it is not the case that voluntary concealment explains the entire mystery of the Judaeo/Christian revelation. As is well-known to exponents of ancient hermeneutics (R.P.C. Hanson and Jean Pépin for example), Origen envisaged a truth of an allegorical kind lying behind all the words of the scriptures.

In the Selecta in Psalmos (50.12; PG 12,1453 C) the Scriptures are said to be full of unspeakable and mysterious notions, which are difficult to contemplate, and the breaking of the age-old silence by the coming of the logos is said to allow the discovery of these mysteries. In the Fragments on Proverbs, the interesting word "enigma" (αἴνιγμα) is used of these scriptural mysteries. This word seems to mean nothing more than "symbol" in many contexts in late Greek, though when the symbol is held to evoke truths which are hidden away, then it is not difficult to see how αἴνιγμα can retain some of its sense of a problematic symbol, which teases the understanding by its lack of clarity. Having found certain symbols (αἴνιγματα) in the text of Proverbs (PG 13,24 C), Origen proceeds somewhat later to explain what he means by the term. He quotes as an example Judges 9:8: "The trees went forth to anoint a king over them", and considers an *ainigma* to constitute an "exposition (διέξοδος) of things which have not taken place, treated as if they had taken place, indicating some secret thing in a concealed way." Similar definitions of parables, obscure sayings and wise sayings are given (PG 13,25 C). There are a number of reasons for the cryptic style of the Scriptures (one recalls here Clement's defence of the symbolic form of expression (p. 40), and one of them is the arcanum discipline. This seemed to be rejected above, but now we

Thus prayer approaches silent contemplation in which ordinary human epistemological modes are eclipsed. Commenting on the Song of Solomon (LXX) 4.3 (on the Song of Songs, Excerpta Procopiana 4.3; PG 13,201 B), which could be translated "Your lips are like a scarlet thread, boundaries of your silence", Origen finds praise of the virtue of silence in the text. The maiden in question knows the time for silence. She hides her contemplation "in the deep", as pomegranate seeds are hidden, and the mention of silence in Origen's view refers to "those teachings which are veiled in silence like the pomegranate seeds (κόκκους ῥοᾶς) within their husks". Origen quotes Proverbs 11. 13 in support of this principle: "A talebearer reveals secrets, but the trustworthy person conceals the matter." The arcanum discipline again, it seems.

Despite this view of prayer and contemplation as taking place in silence, it by no means follows that the soul is somehow passive. In fact, as if to counter the idea that the personality is superseded by the intercession of the Spirit, Origen emphasizes the Pauline principle that one prays with the spirit, but also with the "understanding" (I Cor. 14.15). The prayer of the saint speeds forth like a dart, counteracting hostile spirits: it is sent on its way by "knowledge, reason or by faith" (γνῶσις, λόγος, πίστς: XXI.1; PG 11,452C). The epistemological faculties are therefore fully operative in this process, and we turn now from the emphasis on silence to Origen's consideration of the epistemological apparatus which functions in this manner. This is closely tied to the question of God's being, and so it will be necessary to consider these ontological questions first. The nature of the transcendence of the being which is to be known comes first in the logical order of consideration, and so it will be necessary to examine briefly Origen's general approach to the problem of characterizing God, and in particular of characterizing his relation to "being" or "existence" (οὐσία). This problem of Greek ontology seemed inescapable to Christian philosophers of the time, and this preoccupation gave rise to many fundamental issues in the history of Christian thought, including the Arian controversy.

In the preface to the De Principiis (8; PG 11,119B), Origen raises the question of whether the term incorporeal (ἀσώματον) is a proper part of Christian theological language. His interest in it stems from the desire to stress the divine transcendence, and to find terms which will serve to divest God of any anthropomorphic images. It is not used in the Christian scriptures, he notes, though the concept might be, and it is this question that is set up for examination at the outset. Origen does point out that the word occurs in a document which he calls the Doctrine of Peter, in which Christ says to his disciples: "I am not an incorporeal demon". Origen argues that even if this document were accepted as authentically Petrine, or inspired, the word "incorporeal" refers to the fine and thin kind of matter of which the demons' bodies are made. Origen finds the question of whether God has shape or substance

to be a matter which lacks clarity in Christian teaching (op. cit. 9; PG 11,120B).

He proceeds almost immediately to the scriptural answers, attempting to answer the question about God's nature from scripture. Pitted against the anthropomorphic language of the Old Testament is the spiritualist language of the New. "Our God is a consuming fire", becomes "God is a Spirit..." (I.1; PG 11,121B; Deuteronomy 4.24; John 4.24). The answer to the question of incorporeality Origen finds in the quotation from John.

> And note how reasonably he joins the "truth" to the "spirit": he called God a spirit to distinguish him from bodies, and the truth to distinguish him from shadows or images. (I.4; PG 11,123C)

It seems that Origen's concern is apologetic here, in that he is not so much concerned with the issue of whether God has a body or not, as with defending Judaism and Christianity against the charge of such anthropomorphism. He continues with a variation on the Middle Platonic claim that God is *incomprehensibilis* and *inaestimabilis*, with the former term appearing to mean "incomprehensible" (i.e. unable to be embraced by the comprehension) and the latter to mean "incapable of assessment". Though the Latin word in the latter case normally carries a reference to value ("invaluable"), it can hardly do so here, and it is difficult to be certain what Greek word the translator Rufinus was attempting to convey. The translation "incapable of measurement" (ANL 243) implies that some such word as ἀπερίμετρος was used, but if so one wonders why "incircumscriptibilis" does not appear as its translation, since it would be most apt. (The term "incomprehensibilis" is not far from the Latin Platonist Apuleius' statement that God is "... neque loco neque tempore neque vice ulla comprehensus..." [Apology 64], and in the De Platone 1.5 Apuleius does lapse into Greek [ἀπερίμετρος] to express the idea of immeasurability, which might suggest some uneasiness over a Latin equivalent.)

Consequently God is to be thought of as "a single intellectual nature" (intellectualis natura simplex), admitting no accretion to himself. Certain properties of physical bodies are systematically negated of God, namely physical space, size, shape, colour. This is a relatively easy question, but later Origen encounters the more difficult problem of the quality of goodness, and whether it is applied to God, and how it is shared by the other members of the Trinity. The "principalis bonitas" is in God (De Princip. I.2.13; PG 11,144A), and Luke 18.19 is quoted in support: "There is none good save one alone, God the Father." The problem of how a *simplex* intellectual nature can also be good appears to be unresolved, but Origen certainly wants to identify God as the source of cosmic goodness. No secondary goodness exists in the Son which does not already have its existence in the Father. (Justinianus'

Greek survives at this point and shows some important differences in respect of the Latin translation: it reads that the Son is not ἁπλῶς ἀγαθός, or "singly good". He is rather the "image of the goodness of God, but not the good itself": οὐκ αὐτὸ ἀγαθόν. That he is not "singly good" can only mean that he is good in a composite way, or a differentiated way, whereas the unity of the Father precludes any suggestion of a composite nature.)

The purpose of the verse asserting the goodness of God alone is, according to Origen, the implication that the Son's goodness derives from the Father only, and that there is "no dissimilarity or difference of goodness in the Son". There are other things labelled "good" in the Scriptures, admits Origen, but the qualities thus referred to are accidents. Such things as a good heart, or a good tree have an accidental rather than substantial goodness. The terms here are obviously Aristotelian, and Origen is deploying a combination of Platonic exemplarism and Aristotelian logic. If we suppose "substantialis" to translate οὐσιώδης in the citation following, then we have a clear picture of essential goodness being predicated of the members of the Trinity, and accidental goodness of lesser beings. Of accidental cases of goodness, Origen's text reads: haec omnia abusive dicuntur, accidentem, non substantialem in se continentia bonitatem (loc. cit.).

This passage dwells, then, on God as the Good, and appears to regard this Good as having being (οὐσία), or essential reality. There are other passages, however, where the question is not dealt with in such a straightforward manner. In the Contra Celsum, God's relationship to being is directly dealt with (VI.64: GCS 3, p.135, 4; PG 11,1396C), because of Celsus' earlier discussion of the Jewish/Christian anthropomorphic view of God. It is noteworthy that Origen asserts the question of ontology to be lengthy and difficult and offers in fact two alternatives about the relationship of God to being (οὐσία): the prevarication here explains the difficulty encountered in the passage from the Exhortation to Martyrdom, where God was apparently both beyond the scope of mind, yet also within it. There is peculiar unwillingness on Origen's part to commit himself in the Contra Celsum: one alternative is that God is beyond being in seniority and power (πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει). These terms are part of a traditional statement of transcendence: they in fact come from Plato's Republic (509 BC) where the Good is discussed. In terms which Origen closely reproduces, the Good is said not to be being itself (οὐσία), but beyond being in seniority and power (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβείᾳ καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος). The adverb ἐπέκεινα is often a sign of a transcendence statement in the philosophical or theological writing of this period, and the view that the One is "beyond being and intelligence" has been discussed by John Whittaker (ΕΠΕΚΕΙΝΑ...), who argues that this phrase is characteristic of writing in the period, despite earlier claims to the contrary. Whittaker finds evidence of interest in the question of whether God transcends being and mind in Justin, Calcidius, Celsus/Origen, Clement, Nume-

nius and other writers who lie more in the Neopythagorean camp, and he therefore dispels any notion that Plato's phrase went unnoticed in the pre-Neoplatonic period.

If God were beyond being, he would communicate through giving his Word. If on the other hand he *is* being, nevertheless he is said to be invisible, and by implication incorporeal (ἀσώματος): here again Origen uses the word which he declared to be non-scriptural in the preface to the De Principiis.

In the first instance then, we draw from this passage Origen's unwillingness to decide on whether God is within, or beyond being. This passage attests Origen's orthodoxy, despite his general reputation in ecclesiastical history; he is always reluctant to depart from biblical terminology. However there are other interesting points about it which should be raised. Celsus, in attacking Christian anthropomorphism, had argued amongst other things that God does not participate in "form or colour" (PG 11,1396 B). It is easy for Origen to reply that God is not coloured, and he adds a number of categories in which he does not participate. He does not participate in motion, because his nature is permanent. Biblical texts which seem to imply motion on his part should not be interpreted literally, and are only interpreted in this way by sinners. Nor does he participate in being (οὐσία): the term "participate" (μετέχω) of course situates the discussion in the old Platonic tradition of the Forms. Causal and ontological relationships are seen in this way, and among other things questions of logical priority are solved. Thus, God cannot be said to participate in being: he himself is participated in, rather than the reverse, and those "who have the spirit of God" participate in him. Similarly "our Saviour does not participate in righteousness; being himself righteousness, he is participated in by the righteous". At this point follows the remark about the difficulty of ontological questions, but it is clear that what Origen is resisting in these preliminary remarks is the tendency to establish and define the various ontological levels and hypostases as logically prior to the establishment of the Father and the Son. He refuses hypostases which are named independently of the Father and the Son, since one result of this would be a great deal of speculation about the interrelationships of the parallel powers, allowing for a great variety of answers. Origen's answer is to endeavour to limit the discussion to biblical concepts, which are themselves philosophically limited. His position here contrasts with the confident endorsement of the transcendent ontology outlined in the commentary on the Lord's Prayer (see p. 76), but the context is quite different. Here Origen is being pressed on questions of the ontological hierarchy, and the position occupied by the Christian "hypostases". In fact the only point at which Origen is willing to use Greek ontological language here, where there is not some prior warrant in scriptural language, lies in the statements that God and the Saviour are "participated in". The cautious tone of the passage is striking,

since Origen is clearly sounding a note of warning about assimilating Christian trinitarian thought and Greek ontology, a development which lay at the basis of the Arian controversy. Origen's reticence about the language of Greek philosophy is a striking fact: he is, after all, an Alexandrian.

Similar caution on the subject of οὐσία is displayed in the Commentary on John, where the question of God's relation to being is again raised. Many things, Origen says, are claimed about God and his being (*ousia*: PG 14,432 C), some claiming him to be of a corporeal nature, whilst others claim him to be incorporeal; here he uses the word ἀσώματος which was the subject of some questioning elsewhere (see p. 71). Origen also raises the claim that God is "beyond being in seniority and power", which we have seen to be from Plato, and to have become something of a commonplace. Again however, he proposes not to answer the questions he sets himself, at least not in the terms in which they are set, but to explore the scriptural language used for matters which seem to stand in the same area of concern. The following chapters deal with God as spirit (John 4.24), the significance of this, and the need to use allegorical interpretation in order to avert claims that God is a physical being, such as a "consuming fire". Origen does not return to the philosophical problem as stated: he allows the philosophers to ask a question, but answers it in an entirely different conceptual language. That he sees the question as a question is nevertheless significant, and Origen is not always suspicious of ontological language. Some later passages show some willingness to theorize on the basis offered by the Greeks, and it is really the issue of God's relationship with *ousia* which is an embarrassment for Origen.

Where the status of God is not involved, he is prepared to use the concept of being and the Commentary on John (II.7; PG 14,136 B) makes particular use of the concept of not-being in order to explain evil. The subject of the chapter is the creative work of the logos, and whether or not the existence of evil can be attributed to it: Paul is quoted as assimilating things which are not, with things which are evil: this view is provided from an exegesis of the last part of Romans 4.17. "... God, who revivifies the dead and calls the things that are not as things that are" (καὶ καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα). This curious wording almost certainly contains no allusion to being in the Greek sense, referring more to life, but it helps Origen to introduce such concepts.

> The Good then is the same as he who is. Opposed to the good is evil, or wickedness, and opposed to being is not-being. It follows that wickedness and evil are not-being. (PG 14,136 B)

In the first sentence the classic identification of the Good and Being is made, and in referring to God as "he who is" (τῷ ὄντι) there is probably an allusion to the LXX version of Exodus 3.14, where God says to Moses: "I am that I

am". In Greek this comes out as a technical ontological statement, since God is designated "ὁ ὤν": he who has *ousia,* or being. The consequences of this had already been perceived by Clement of Alexandria, who used the LXX phrase in his own discussions of the relationship of God to being (Strom. VI.16.137.3; Paedagogus 1.8.71.2).

Origen concludes that evil-doers are those who have given up their part in being: by depriving themselves (ἐστερῆσθαι) of being, they have become not-beings. We note therefore that the idea of being is used in order to solve the problem of evil. Further use of this general Platonic divide may be found: it may seem odd to find a disquisition on ontology in the middle of a treatise on prayer, but it is occasioned by the word ἐπιούσιος ("daily"), which seems to Origen to be fraught with significance: "Give us this day our daily bread" (On Prayer 27.7; PG 11,512 A). What kind of bread is this which secretes a reference to the Greek "essence" (οὐσία)? Origen links with this the LXX version of Exodus 19:5: "You shall be to me a peculiar (περιούσιος) people", and allegorizes the two verses into a joint comment about being (οὐσία). The one verse refers to the bread which "contributes to being", and the other refers to people "dwelling around beings and sharing in it" (loc. cit.). It seems that Origen is combining two thoughts, concerning the source of true reality and its pursuit by the faithful.

Now, importantly for our purpose, the idea of "primary incorporeal reality" is defined as that which cannot be subjected to addition or subtraction (ἀφαίρεσις). The capacity for these indicates that such bodies belong to the realm of change, and are in need of some "sustaining force ... to nourish them". They increase and decrease according to the infilling they receive: there are some cases of things which are in a state of continual decrease. Origen attacks some unnamed opponents, who hold incorporeal reality to be of a secondary kind, with physical reality taking primacy as the source of reality. "Matter (ὕλη) is the first essence of existents, and the source of existents" (On Prayer 27.7; PG 11,512A). This matter is without quality, it receives all alterations though it itself is not subject to any alteration, since it continues throughout all alteration or change. Though it has no quality, it is inherent in every quality, since it is place (χωρίον). What Origen appears to have done here is to pit Platonism against Stoicism for the purpose of an exegesis of the Lord's Prayer. The point that he wishes to make is that our "daily bread" is of the kind which constitutes the provision of sustenance from the higher levels of being. "The *epiousios* bread is that which is most appropriate to the rational nature, and akin to its very essence: it furnishes at once health, vigour and strength to the soul, and grants a share of its own immortality to him who partakes it, for the word of God is immortal" (27.9; PG 11,513 A).

One may note however, that almost in passing Origen claims that true reality is that which is not subject either to increment or subtraction (ἀφαίρεσις). This word is of course crucial to our understanding of the theme of ne-

gative theology, since it operates as the alternative for ἀπόφασις, or negation. Here however, abstraction is taken in an ontological sense, since it is to do with a process occurring in being. There seems to be no thought of the epistemological use of the term, characteristic of the *via negativa.* The point to make is probably this: since the logical realism of Aristotle, it had been very easy to slip from epistemology to ontology, and vice versa. Origen sees abstraction here as a real process happening to real objects, but he would not see the intellectual process as substantially different. The term we might have expected for this ontological diminution is στέρησις or *privatio* (privation), though contrary to what some think, privation is not confined to the ontological (see appendix I).

Continuing with being, there is such certainty in Origen's mind about the ontological relationship which holds between the rational soul and God himself, that a problem arises over martyrdom, which appeared to constitute too crude a recognition of this identity of nature. In the Exhortation to Martyrdom 47 (GCS 2, p.43, 7; PG 11,629 B), it is claimed that "a man may still love life even though he is convinced that the essence of the rational (λογικῆς) soul has some kinship with God". Both are intellectual, invisible and incorporeal (ἀσώματα), and Origen here uses a word over which he was in some doubt in the De Principiis (see p. 71). We know the story of Origen's own impulse towards martyrdom when an adolescent, and his views here expressed enable us to understand this, despite the fact that he begins by affirming the possibility of love of life. For he speaks with such enthusiasm of putting off the corruptible body, and of "being released from the waves which buffet the life of flesh and blood" (loc. cit.). He claims a longing for communion with God as a given element in human nature, and that it would be absurd to suppose that human beings were not capable of realizing the desires which had been granted them.

> And it is clear that just as each of our members has some appropriate capacity for what is naturally suited, the eyes for visible things, the ears for audible things, so the mind is for the intelligible, and the God who is beyond (ἐπέκεινα) them". (loc. cit.)

The famous adverb of transcendence (ἐπέκεινα/beyond) occurs in this statement, but it is important to note that this transcendence does not defeat the mind. The whole point of Origen's comment here is that we do have a "connatural" relationship with God, and that this is part of our urge towards him: the mind is both for the intelligible and that which lies beyond them. Origen is asserting that God is within the intellect and not outside it, and this view can be confirmed from elsewhere in his works. The whole passage is devoted to the idea that God can be apprehended by mind, and here Origen gives his answer to a problem of Middle Platonism.

Turning now to the question of knowing God, Origen enunciates the clas-

sic view of knowledge developing as mind moves from the visible level to the contemplation of intellectual things. At the end of Book II of the De Principiis (PG 11,247 A) we are given a description of the growth of the rational nature. The feebleness of our intellectual powers does not allow us to distinguish between or grasp the whole range of transcendent entities, of which we have been informed by the astronaut of transcendence, Paul. However the rational nature grows, not as a body grows, but in power or perception. It is significant that the intelligence focusses on the causes of things; the understanding of things and their causes constitutes the food of the intelligence (PG 11,248 A). There is the classic movement from sensible nature to the intelligible, that is familiar since Plato's world of sensibles and exemplars. The principle of moving *a visibilibus ad invisibilia* is stated in De Princip. IV.37 (PG 11,413 A). The rational understanding moves from small things to great things, from visible to invisible. Being placed in the body, it advances from corporeal things to intellectual, until it reaches knowledge of the divine nature: "For the divine nature knows even those thoughts which we turn within ourselves in silence" (PG 11,414 A). The mind is of the same nature as that which it contemplates, and of this comparisons are given from the sensible realm: all hearing is of one nature since it receives voice and sound, although there are cases of slow and rapid hearing, depending on the quality of the hearing faculty. So it is with the mind: "let us now pass from these sensible examples to the consideration of intellectual things" (De Princip, IV.36; PG 11,411 B). The understanding of things in the sensible world provides analogies for the understanding of the intelligibles, and such models must be used to make the transition.

One type of move from the sensible to the intelligible involves negative thinking. In a passage first analyzed in detail by A-J. Festugière in 1954 (La Révélation... 119), Celsus puts forward a number of remarks about God's being and the means of his knowledge. This passage has already been referred to in relation to the question of incommunicability, but there are also the important epistemological statements which formed the basis of Festugière's discussion. Wise men, says Celsus, have endeavoured to express that which is impossible to express in words "... by synthesis (σύνθεσις) which is the combining of entities, by analysis (ἀνάλυσις) which is the separation from entities, or by analogy (ἀναλογία)". This passage (Contra Celsum VII.42; GCS 3, p.192, 32; PG 11,1481 A) constitutes one of the best pieces of evidence for the epistemology of Middle Platonism, though J. Dillon includes it as a mere Loose End (The Middle Platonists, 401). The concept of analogy in the philosophy of this period is a separate issue, since it does not form part of the negative approach, but relates rather to the attempt to make positive theological statements. However the concept of analysis is familiar from Clement, and brings us to the notions of negation (ἀπόφασις) and abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις), whose meaning has been traced elsewhere. The only

specific comment Origen makes on the meaning of the terms comes at the beginning of VII.44:

> Celsus thinks that God is known by synthesis, which is the combining of entities, like the procedure called synthesis among the geometers, or by analysis from entities, or by analogy, also like the analogy employed by the geometers.

I have adhered fairly closely to the text in translating, since detail is important here. Festugière (loc. cit.) regrets that Origen did not give us the full text of Celsus' comments on the "three ways", and it would certainly have been of interest, since the other Middle Platonic evidence on the issue is quite scanty. Festugière has no hesitation in declaring Origen's interpretation false (119), which is bold, since Origen says almost nothing. In an effort to repudiate the geometrical context, Festugière proceeds to outline what we know of synthesis and analysis from mathematical texts, translating a passage on the subject from Pauly Wissowa (VII 1212, Geometria, by Hultsch), and then a passage from Proclus (In Eucl. p.43, 18 Fr.) which in fact confirms in summary form what follows from Pappus. The context is important here, and it is necessary to be clear about this, since the word synthesis generally means something like "combination", but has a specialized meaning in various fields, like grammar, biology, philosophy and mathematics. Origen specifically refers to geometry, and we do have a definition of synthesis and analysis given by the Alexandrian geometer Pappus, who lived at the end of the third century A.D., in Book VII of his "Synagoge", or Collection. This book speaks of a collection of works known as the Treasury of Analysis, a book of essential material for mathematicians. The word analysis was thus well-known as being a technical mathematical term. It is extraordinary that Festugière simply translates Hultsch's gloss on Pappus, without going to Pappus himself. As will emerge, there are important differences. Pappus writes as follows:

> For in *analysis* we assume that which is sought as if it were already a fact, and we inquire what it is from which this results, and again what is the antecedent cause of the latter, and so on, until, by so retracing our steps, we come upon something already known or belonging to the class of first principles, and such a method we call *analysis,* as being solution backwards.
>
> But in *synthesis,* reversing the process, we take as a fact that which was last arrived at in the analysis and, by arranging in their natural order as consequences what before were antecedents, and successively connecting them one with another, we arrive finally at the construction of that which was sought; and this we call *synthesis.* (Pappus, Collection VII, ed. Thomas II, p.596)

Proclus' passage simply confirms that analysis moved toward first things and principles, whilst synthesis departs from first principles and draws out that which follows from the first principles. The position thus far, then, is that

Origen has suggested that geometrical usage will explain the three epistemological modes advocated by Celsus, and we have some evidence about the geometrical usage in question, drawn from a writing dating approximately one hundred and fifty years after that of Celsus. Festugière believes that Origen was mistaken, and the following translation of his comments on the substance of the comparison will provide his view: "It emerges immediately that this synthesis of the geometers is of no use in respect of God, who is First Principle. One can go from the created (or ordered) world up to the Demiurge. In ancient philosophy, which knows of no creation *ex nihilo* and which posits that the world is an eternal given element, it is probably true that one can also move downwards from the Demiurge to the world, since the very notion of the Demiurge presupposes the existence of matter ordered by him. But God cannot be treated as a consequence beyond which one can reason (analysis); nor can one deduce God using a principle superior to him as a starting point (synthesis). We must therefore look elsewhere."

Festugière sees no way of using these views to explicate the three ways given by Celsus. This is extraordinary, since the geometrical comparison is classical in Middle Platonic documents (see p. 20), and Festugière himself quotes Albinus (165, l. 14 Hermann): "The first mode of conceiving God will be achieved through abstraction from those things, in the same way as we come to conceive of the point by abstracting it from the sensible, having conceived of the surface in the first place, then of the line, and lastly the point." The term abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις) ist of course different from the "analysis" discussed here, but we have already seen that they amount to the same thing. Clement of Alexandria has a passage (Stromata V.11.71.2) in which the same intellectual manoeuvre, of abstracting from depth, width, length and then from the "monad" is recommended, and this procedure he refers to as analysis. As Whittaker observes (Neopythagoreanism... 113), since both Celsus and Clement use this term, it is clear that it was a "current Middle Platonic term for the term in question".

Apart from the equivalence between the terms ἀνάλυσις and ἀφαίρεσις it is clear that the mathematical presentation of the procedure is also familiar. This was reviewed in chapter I, but there is a mass of evidence which indicates interest in the generation of reality from point to solid, and some evidence on interest in reversing the conceptual process, taking it from solid back to the point (see Whittaker, Neopythagoreanism... 110). Wolfson and Krämer (see bibliography) have discussed the question of the mathematical framework for the *via negativa*, and Krämer sees it as a legacy of the Old Academy (Ursprung... 105). It is absolutely clear that Origen's gloss on Celsus' three epistemological modes is predictable, and most probably correct.

Can we make sense of the analysis and synthesis of the geometers in the context of the epistemology of the transcendental One? It seems possible. Returning to the definitions of Pappus, analysis is presented as taking some-

ply that Origen was correct in clarifying Celsus' text by reference to the mathematicians, and that he was placing himself in the mainstream of philosophical tradition by doing so.

There remains the question of what he made of it all, and in particular whether he endorsed the negative method as a theological instrument. A part of this whole passage has been discussed elsewhere (p. 24) and the finding was that Origen stressed the unspeakability of God, claiming that Celsus' Platonic God was in fact communicable in language, and thus less deserving of respect. Since he emphasizes the poverty of language, one might expect Origen to endorse the *via negativa* as an appropriate instrument. This is not in fact the case: he neither endorses it nor gives any assessment of it, but chooses to discuss the issue in his own language, which is impregnated with biblical quotation. The main theme of chapters 42–44 derives from Celsus' use of Plato's Timaeus (28): "It is a difficult matter to discover the maker and father of the universe, and having done so it is impossible to declare him to all men." Origen draws two implications from this: firstly, as has been noted, that the Platonic God was communicable in language and therefore a lesser being. Secondly it is concluded that the Platonic view implies that God lies within the reach of human nature unaided.

> Plato may say that it is a hard thing to find out the creator and father of this universe, thereby implying that it is not (οὐκ postulated) impossible for human nature to find God in a way worthy of him. (Contra Celsum VII 42; PG 11,1481 B)

And a little later on the opposing point of view is stated:

> We however maintain that human nature is in no way sufficient for the search for God, or for finding him in an unsullied way unless aided by Him who is being sought.

Human epistemological impotence is again noted in chapter 44, where the love and grace of God are noted as the source of the added capacity required by the seeker for God. It seems that the traditional Christian postulation of the necessity of grace constitutes Origen's reply to the *via negativa,* and the three Platonic modes in general. They are techniques developed by human beings for use by the human mind, in the belief that they will enable the mind to grasp the object of its search. That they recognize the epistemic capacity of the human mind would appear to constitute the chief difficulty felt by Origen in this regard, despite the fact that one might have suspected him of being capable of using the *via negativa* for his own development of the theme of silence and incommunicability. It is not so however: the human effort involved clashes with the Christian posture of waiting for the divine intervention, of which the archetypal experience was that of Paul's being "caught up". In Origen's view, the three Platonic modes can only lead to a low view

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Chapter V. The logic of negation; between Plotinus and Proclus

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V. The logic of negation; between Plotinus and Proclus

Plotinus taught in Rome, Proclus in Athens. About two centuries of intellectual development separated the two, as well as the constraints of locality. The middle period of classical Neoplatonism has always seemed to be a shadowy one, and the nature of its development has not been well traced. The reader of Damascius is plunged into a philosophy which is obviously Neoplatonist, but at the same time light years away from the exploratory excursions of Plotinus. There seems to have taken place a development whose lines have not yet been clearly delineated in scholarly work on the area, though they could be, if more detailed work was carried out on the late Greek commentators on Aristotle. The key figures in this uncharted development are Plutarch of Athens, Syrianus, Dexippus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias. All of these writers have a strong sense of the importance of Aristotle, and they seem to represent an increasing Aristotelianization of Neoplatonism. Dexippus stands in the Roman line, following Porphyry and Iamblichus; Syrianus follows Plutarch of Athens in the Athenian line, and both Proclus and Damascius depend on Syrianus. The really important figures, then, are Syrianus and Dexippus, since their use of Aristotle is not dissimilar, and yet they stand in different lines of tradition. Both show the trend towards the increased deployment of Aristotelian logic in the development of Neoplatonism, and both take us quite close to the better known world of Proclus and Damascius. Of course the little known figure of Plutarch of Athens must also be crucial, since he stands at the beginning of the Athenian line, and his influence must have been of great importance. What was his approach? Who and where were his teachers? These questions are of great importance, yet little progress can be made on them. (One notes with dismay that the Oxford Classical Dictionary does not even have entries on Dexippus, Plutarch of Athens, or Damascius). A similar sort of question exists, of course for the history of the Christian Platonists, and Rist has recently endeavoured to redraw the lines leading up to the Platonism of Basil (Basil's "Neoplatonism"...). Porphyry and his influence play a large part in this, and the influence of Alexandria is of crucial importance as well. The evolution of pagan Neoplatonism is an entirely different one, and only detailed studies of the relevant volumes of the Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca will solve the problem. It is a difficult one, since it requires study of the Aristotelian texts themselves, together with the ability to perceive interpretative glosses on the part of the Neoplatonist commentators. Over-interpretations, or shifts of perspective, often indicate the path which this Aristotelianized Neoplatonism is treading.

In what follows, the commentaries of these authors on the texts of Aristotle which deal with negation will be studied, together with some which deal with privation. On many occasions the Neoplatonist commentators simply reiterate the Aristotelian teaching on negation, but at times they add interpretations of their own, and this is a highly significant step in the development of negative theology.

Plotinus' word for the negation of the via negativa is *aphairesis,* or "abstraction". Athenian Neoplatonism, however, uses the term *apophasis,* or "negation" proper. The words do have different meanings, and it is worthwhile inquiring whether there is therefore any substantial difference between the negative theology of Plotinus and that of the Athenian school. It lies along these lines: that of Plotinus is fundamentally the *via negativa* of Middle Platonism, with its emphasis on the progressive removal of attributes with a view to forcing an understanding of the transcendent. That of the Athenian Neoplatonists follows a tradition of revived study of Aristotle, during which the logic of negation as explored by Aristotle in the Metaphysics and elsewhere, was considered and developed. As a consequence, the term *aphairesis* disappeared from usage in the context of the *via negativa,* and the richer possibilities of the logic of negation proper were exploited. The way in which the logic of the relevant terms was developed will be illustrated in the texts which follow. Because these are not generally available in Greek, and are not translated, I have given both my translations and the Greek texts where necessary. It is worthwhile observing to start with, that the same usage of *steresis* that is found in Aristotle, is also found in the late commentators. (I stress this in view of van Winden's artificial distinction between ἀπόφασις and στέρησις in Vigiliae Christianae 36, 1982, 70–75, reviewing my Gnosis in the Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum: see appendix I.) There is a tendency to treat *steresis* both as an epistemological and an ontological concept, and this can be attested by reference to Syrianus (CAG VI, 16, 10 ff.):

For if one knows and is able to say something about a thing through privation or negation, such as knowing that the point has no parts or that the divine is immortal...
(εἰ γὰρ οἶδε μέν πως καὶ ὁ διὰ τῆς στερήσεως ἢ τῆς ἀποφάσεως εἰπεῖν τι περὶ τοῦ πράγματος δυνάμενος, οἷον ὁ εἰδὼς ὅτι τὸ σημεῖον ἀμερὲς καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀθάνατον...)

Syrianus here treats both privation and negation as ways of knowing, and shows no consciousness of the later Thomist tendency to limit *privatio* to states of being. It may be noted that the examples he chooses both use the α privative as the means of negating or depriving of characteristics. One further notes that Syrianus speaks of considering things στερητικῶς (CAG VI, 56, 34), which can only mean "privatively". The difference between saying that things are considered "privatively" and that things are considered "nega-

tively", is not very great. As with Aristotle, negation is a broader concept, and privation a narrower one: privation simply specifies the type of negation involved.

Syrianus develops his interpretation of the Aristotelian privation/negation on page 61, 1.29 ff. (CAG VI). He is commenting on Aristotle's Metaphysics, and Aristotle in 1004[a] has been dealing with the study of opposites: he talks of plurality as "the negation or privation of unity". Syrianus proceeds to attempt to distinguish between the two, and Aristotle himself says a few words about this. Aristotle's own view (Met. 1004[a]) is that in privation there is a substrate (ὑποκειμένη) of which the privation is predicated, but that negation is an absence (ἀπουσία) of the thing in question. Aristotle seems to think he has made a distinction here, and it can be glossed like this: a privation is predicated of a certain "base", of which a thing is said to be absent, but a negation refers to the absence of a thing without any reference to a "base" which might support it. Syrianus offers his own gloss as follows, and it is instructive to note how he builds on the terms:

Plurality is either the negation or the privation of the one. These opposites differ from each other, in that negation is true of everything beyond the one which is denied. For "not horse" is true of everything apart from the horse, but this is not the case with privation. For privation does not supply <the notion> of the simple absence of a state (it is not the case, for example, that being blind is not having sight, since a stone would then be blind), but of the state's absence from what is naturally disposed to bear it. "Deaf", then, applies not to everything which does not hear, but to the ear (if it fails to hear), since it has the natural capacity to hear. For it is necessary to postulate one nature in the state, and in the privation. This difference between privation and negation is the very greatest. If then privation or negation of the one is plurality, since through each contemplation of the one occurs, knowing the one and the many is the same thing. Overall, knowing opposites which are distinguished from each other in this manner is a single science.

(τὰ γὰρ πολλὰ ἤτοι ἀπόφασις τοῦ ἑνὸς ἢ στέρησις. διαφέρουσι δὲ ἀλλήλων αἱ ἀντιθέσεις αὗται, ὅτι ἡ μὲν ἀπόφασις ἐπὶ πάντων ἀληθεύει τῶν παρὰ τὸ ἓν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἀναιρούμενον · τὸ γὰρ οὐχ ἵππος ἐπὶ πάντων ἀληθὲς τῶν παρὰ τὸν ἵππον, ἡ δὲ στέρησις οὐχ οὕτως · οὐ γὰρ ἁπλῶς ἀπούσης τῆς ἕξεως <ἔννοιαν> παρίστησιν ἡ στέρησις (οὐ γὰρ τυφλὸς ὁ μὴ ἔχων ὄψιν, ἐπεὶ καὶ λίθος ἂν ἦν τυφλός), ἀλλ' ἀπούσης τοῦ πεφυκότος αὐτὴν δέχεσθαι · κωφὸν οὖν οὐχὶ πᾶν ὃ μὴ ἀκούει, ἀλλὰ τὸ οὗς ἐὰν μὴ ἀκούῃ, ὅτι πέφυκεν ἀκούειν · δεῖ γὰρ ὑποκεῖσθαι μίαν φύσιν τῇ ἕξει καὶ τῇ στερήσει. καὶ διαφορὰ μὲν αὕτη μεγίστη στερήσεως καὶ ἀποφάσεως. εἴτε μέντοι στέρησίς ἐστι τοῦ ἑνὸς τὰ πολλὰ εἴτε ἀπόφασις, ἐπειδὴ δι' ἑκατέρας ἔστι τὸ ἓν θεωρῆσαι, τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἐστι τό τε ἓν εἰδέναι καὶ τὰ πολλά.) (CAG VI, p.61, l. 30 ff.)

One notes firstly that negation proper is said to be a matter of indefiniteness, since "not horse" is true of everything but "horse". On this view negation liberates thought, opening up to it a limitless range of possibilities. "Green",

"yellow" and "Wednesday" are all cases of "not horse", and in fact everything else is as well: everything is "not horse", except of course that single thing, "horse" itself. This appears to be the major feature of *apophasis* which is stressed by Syrianus. Privation, on the other hand, contains a hidden statement about the capacity or nature of the thing which is the subject of discussion: blindness implies a nature capable of possessing sight. Blindness cannot be attributed to a stone, for example, and so predicating blindness carries with it two kinds of information: firstly the absence of the ability to see, and secondly that the capacity to see could logically belong to the subject under discussion. Privation, on this view, carries with it a clearly kataphatic aspect, in that absence is coupled with an implied statement about the nature of the object under discussion.

In this way *apophasis* and *steresis* emerge as types of negation which are very different in function: the latter actually reveals something in the course of making a negative statement about a thing, but the former reveals nothing at all by negating something about the subject under discussion. Syrianus' explanations here are quite consistent with what Aristotle himself says in various places. The observation about *steresis* is already contained in the Aristotelian passage under discussion (Met. 1004[a]), but the observation about the indefiniteness of *apophasis* is to be found elsewhere, at least implied elsewhere. In the On Interpretation 16[a] 31 the difficulty of classifying "not-man" is discussed: it is said to be neither a sentence (λόγος) nor a negation (ἀπόφασις), but an indefinite noun (ὄνομα ἀόριστον). Despite the fact that Aristotle refuses to call this verbless utterance a negation, it is instructive to note that he considers a negated noun to be indefinite in character. A proper negation requires a full sentence with a verb, but one may deduce that since indefiniteness results from the use of οὐκ in this case, it would result from the negation of a full sentence.

Syrianus' commentary seems to be alluding to some such consideration as this, when it says that "not horse" is true of everything apart from "horse". The negative, in effect, opens up the field so that the range of possible meanings is limitless, and this appears to be the view of the On Interpretation passage. It is worthy of note that Alexander of Aphrodisias echoes this view in his commentary on the Sophistic Elenchos (CAG II[3] 98, 1.22 ff.): ... αἱ ἀποφάσεις ἀόριστοί εἰσιν · ἡ γὰρ λέγουσα ἀπόφασις 'τόδε οὐ λευκόν ἐστιν' ἀόριστος... Negations are indefinite, Alexander says, and confines his example to a non-verbal expression, in the manner illustrated above.

Returning now to Syrianus, there are two crucial passages for the *via negativa,* both of which illustrate a certain development over and above Aristotle's view. Syrianus here makes certain remarks about being and negation which are distinctly un-Aristotelian, and which therefore pinpoint the moment of transition. This transition, occurring in the course of Neoplatonism, is effected through advances in the interpretation of Aristotle. This may seem

odd, but then the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions have never been so inseparably removed from each other as students of Western thought have sometimes imagined. The first of these passages is drawn from Syrianus' Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics 1003[a] 21 ff.

And what is remarkable, if we make negative statements about accidents and being itself? "Not white" and "not man" are examples. In this a certain remarkable and miraculous power emerges within the essence of being. For if it gives a part of existence to such opposites to being as this, it surely fills all with existence and brings succour without stinting to all things, from itself. Thus the good would be the cause of that which is said to be evil, and the light of darkness, and thus being could be the cause even of that which does not exist. Whenever then we say that not being does not exist, we rightly predicate being of it.

(καὶ τί θαυμαστόν, ὅπου καὶ τὰς τῶν συμβεβηκότων ἀποφάσεις καὶ τὰς αὐτῆς τῆς οὐσίας εἶναί φαμεν; ἔστι γάρ πως καὶ τὸ μὴ λευκὸν καὶ τὸ οὐκ ἄνθρωπος. οὗ δὴ καὶ θαυμαστή τις καὶ δαιμονία τῷ ὄντι τῆς οὐσίας ἡ δύναμις ἀναφαίνεται · εἰ γὰρ καὶ τοῖς οἷον ἀντικειμένοις αὐτῇ τοῦ εἶναι μεταδίδωσι, πῶς οὐχὶ πάντα τοῦ ὄντος πληροῖ καὶ πᾶσιν ἀφθόνως τὴν παρ' αὐτῆς ὀρέγει βοήθειαν; καθάπερ οὖν τἀγαθὸν καὶ τῶν λεγομένων κακῶν αἴτιον καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ σκότους, οὕτω καὶ ἡ οὐσία τοῦ καὶ τὸ μὴ ὂν εἶναι πως αἰτία · ὅταν γοῦν λέγωμεν τὸ μὴ ὂν εἶναι μὴ ὄν, ἀληθεύομεν τὸ εἶναι κατηγοροῦντες αὐτοῦ.) (CAG VI, 57, l. 4 ff.)

Syrianus is dealing with what is presented as a conundrum by Aristotle in the Metaphysics 1003[b] 10, namely that "we even say that not being *is not being*". Aristotle is more concerned with the classification of things which deal with being, and whether they form one science (*episteme*) or not. There are no lyrical testimonies to the power of being, such as we find in Syrianus' commentary. Syrianus develops the ontological side of Aristotle's statement, dwelling on the "miraculous" power of being to sustain all types of reality, even those standing in opposition to each other. Thus even the statement "not being is not" attributes being of some kind: otherwise it could not have been made. Its negative character does not deprive it of the ability to attribute being. Syrianus marvels at the sustaining power of this being, but we note that even the negative statement about the existence of being implies being of some sort. In other words, we have a second example of a way in which a negative statement can carry a kataphatic, or positive, statement implied within it.

Elsewhere however Syrianus raises the possibility of that which is beyond being. In an unfortunately passing reference, Syrianus raises the question of the *hyperousios,* the being which is transcendent. Aristotle asserted (Met. 996[b] 30) the principle that everything must be either affirmed or denied as one of the received principles of the demonstrative sciences. Syrianus confirms this, but asks the following question:

But if something is transcendent and has neither name, nor science nor is in any way

capable of utterance, how then must it be capable of affirmation or negation, in respect of which all discourse is false?

(ἐπεὶ ἐάν τι ὑπερούσιον ᾖ καὶ μήτε ὄνομα ἔχῃ μήτε ἐπιστήμην μήθ' ὅλως ῥητὸν ᾖ, πῶς ἀνάγκη τοῦτο τὴν κατάφασιν ἢ τὴν ἀπόφασιν δέξασθαι, ἐφ' οὗ πᾶς λόγος ψευδής;) (CAG VI, 18, l. 25 ff.)

It is unfortunate that Syrianus does not pursue this question, which is probably the result of applying the Parmenides of Plato to the present passage of Aristotle. The One which is beyond being, and is not capable of being referred to in discourse, and is not subject to either negation or affirmation, appears among the hypotheses of the Parmenides (160 B ff.) and is most likely in Syrianus' mind here, where he is focussed on Aristotle's view of what is demonstrable.

Syrianus is clearly pitting the sceptical elements of Platonism against the logocentric views of Aristotle. In the immediately preceding passage of the Metaphysics (996^b 10 ff.) Aristotle has defined wisdom as the knowledge of being (*ousia*). Aristotle continues:

While there are many ways of knowing the same thing, we say that he who knows what a certain thing is, knows more than he who knows what it is not. (Met 996^b 14)

Aristotle does not develop this, but it is an intriguing remark. It is of course obviously true, but he may just have had in mind some view which is the forerunner of the *via negativa*, and may be criticizing it. I have argued elsewhere that he seems to know of the negative method of conceptualizing abstract ideas, and that he seems to object to it (I, p. 143). We may have another case of that here. Syrianus, however, is not so interested in this part of it, but rather highlights the confidence with which Aristotle speaks of the knowledge of being. He asks the question which Aristotle does not ask, and which a Neoplatonist commentator had to ask, namely what of that being which is beyond (*hyper-*...), or transcendent? Such being is not subject to the normal rules, and there is no sense in which such being must either be affirmed or negated. The rules of discourse simply do not apply to it. Aristotle's concern here is entirely with the speakable, whereas the Neoplatonist commentator wants to raise both the question of the speakable, and that of the unspeakable simultaneously.

It should be noted that in both of these passages Syrianus accepts that negatives apply to being. In the last passage discussed, the implication is that kataphatic and apophatic statements apply to being, in both cases. In the former passage this is also true, and Syrianus appears to be saying that despite appearances, negations such as "not white" or "not man" carry with them an implication of the existence of being. The *hyperousios* is beyond both affirmation and negation.

Here is the clear preparation for the view of Proclus (see pp. 107 ff.), for

whom negations serve a useful purpose, but only up to a point. When one has reached this point, the method of forming concepts by negatives is no longer useful, and so the final negation of negation itself occurs. Proclus tries to deal with the transcendent being, the *hyperousia*, through the hyper-negation, and in this it is as if he is replying to the question raised by Syrianus: how can the transcendent admit of negation or affirmation? But in the end Proclus too seems to connect negation with being, and abandons it for pure silence. Negation is treated as part of a series of linguistic manoeuvres, which have only a pretranscendental applicability.

We move now to Dexippus, another little-known precursor of later Athenian Neoplatonism, whose importance is very great. Like Syrianus, he deserves more study if the gap between Plotinus and Athenian Neoplatonism is to be better understood. We have Dexippus' commentary on Aristotle's Categories, and through this medium a few quite important observations on the nature of negation. It is worth noting, in passing, that Porphyry also left a commentary on Aristotle's Categories: he, however, did not rise to the occasion on the subject of negation, and made no remarks of any importance about it, at least in this commentary. Dexippus did feel that the subject was worthy of extended comment within the framework of this exercise.

We begin with a passage which compares negation with affirmation, and has negation revealing the "truest essence of things".

But that is worth querying, since it does not tell us what essence is, but what it is not, and that it causes us to know other things, but not itself, since if we say in response that man is neither horse nor dog, we have said what he is not, none the more defining what he is through the negation, than when man was undefined at the outset. For we would not give a particular characteristic, knowing it already, for example that man is capable of laughter.

But it must be added, that it is not a definition which is profferred, but a description, and that many definitions are given by negation, whenever that which is affirmed is familiar. Thus, with the good and the bad being familiar, some define the indifferent, which is neither bad nor good. And thus one makes a statement about that which is in the subject, or in respect of the subject, in order that through their negation one might display essence in the truest sense. And one is not satisfied with negation alone, but adds an example, as one might say that man is neither horse, nor ox, and then add, "for example, Socrates".

(Αλλὰ μὴν κἀκεῖνο ἄξιον ἀπορῆσαι, ὡς οὐ διδάσκει, τί ἐστὶν ἡ οὐσία, ἀλλὰ τί οὔ, καὶ ὅτι ποιεῖ τὰ ἄλλα γιγνώσκειν ἥδε, ἑαυτὴν δὲ οὔ, ἐπεὶ καὶ εἴ τις τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀποδιδοὺς μήτε ἵππον εἴποι μήτε κύνα, ὅ τι μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν εἴρηκεν, ὃ δέ ἐστιν οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἀφωρίσατο διὰ τῆς ἀποφάσεως ἢ ὅτε ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἀόριστος ἦν ὁ ἄνθρωπος · ἐπεὶ οὐδ' ἂν τὸ ἴδιον εἴπῃ τις, ἤδη ἐγνώκαμεν τί ἐστιν, οἷον τὸν ἄνθρωπον γελαστικόν.

'Αλλὰ πρὸς ταῦτα λεκτέον, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὅρος ὁ προκείμενος ἀλλ' ὑπογραφή, καὶ ὅτι πολλοὶ ὅροι κατὰ ἀπόφασιν λέγονται, ὅταν γνώριμα ᾖ τὰ καταφασκόμενα · οὕτως γοῦν γνωρίμου γενομένου τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ τὸ ἀδιάφορον ὁρί-

ζονταί τινες, ὃ μήτε ἀγαθόν ἐστι μήτε κακόν. καὶ ἐνταῦθα δὴ οὖν διὰ τοῦτο προεῖπε περὶ τοῦ ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ καὶ καθ' ὑποκειμένου, ἵνα διὰ τῆς ἀποφάσεως αὐτῶν τὴν κυριωτάτην οὐσίαν δηλώσῃ. καὶ οὐκ ἠρκέσθη μόνῃ ἀποφάσει, ἀλλὰ καὶ παράδειγμα προσέθηκεν, ὥσπερ εἴ τις λέγων εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον μήθ' ἵππον μήτε βοῦν προσθείη ἐφεξῆς 'οἷον Σωκράτης'.) (CAG IV², 44, l. 4 ff.)

This passage is prompted principally by Aristotle Categories 2ᵃ 11 ff., and here Aristotle asserts the impossibility of affirming or denying predicates of a subject. Dexippus takes a step which is not given any underpinning in the text of Aristotle, when he claims that by negation "essence in the truest sense" (τὴν κυριωτάτην οὐσίαν) is revealed. This corresponds to Aristotle's οὐσία ἡ κυριώτατα ... λεγομένη (Cat. 2ᵃ 11), and this Aristotle claims cannot be asserted of a subject, or found in it. He reiterates and develops this in Cat. 2ᵃ 28, where it is argued that the names and definitions of things found in a subject cannot be predicated of that subject. Now on this point Dexippus makes a claim which is not adumbrated by Aristotle, namely that the "truest essence" can be revealed by negation: this is an epistemological innovation, added by Dexippus to the themes being developed by Aristotle. Dexippus further notes that many definitions are given through negative statements, and his own desire to introduce the negative method of conceptualizing things is quite clear: his gloss on Aristotle adds a theme. It is also to be noted that Dexippus couples knowledge of the familiar with the ability to make a successful negative statement: in other words, the use of the negative depends on the ability to make positive statements first. These positive, or kataphatic, statements serve to pinpoint the concept being defined negatively. That such is Dexippus' view is confirmed in the following passage:

Wherefore number is prior, just as we become familiar with the negation through the affirmation, and for this reason affirmation is prior...

(διὰ τοῦτο ὁ ἀριθμὸς προτέτακται, ὥσπερ διότι τὴν ἀπόφασιν γνωρίζομεν διὰ τῆς καταφάσεως, διὰ τοῦτο κἀκείνη προτέτακται...) (CAG IV², 68, l. 4 f.)

Affirmation and negation have a close relationship, in which negation takes second place. Clearly enough negation is logically secondary, since it cannot negate without a prior positive claim having been made. Dexippus sees the two as working together, and does not envisage negation as some kind of solo epistemological function, putting paid single-handedly to all accumulations of kataphatic statements. One is sometimes tempted to see the *via negativa* in isolation like this, and it is useful to note Dexippus' presentation of the apophatic method as part of a prior kataphatic procedure.

Another passage tending to link apophasis and kataphasis is as follows:

Aristotle himself treated this better in the Notes. Having expounded the categories together with their modes, negations, privations and indefinites at the same time, he

dealt with them calling the modes "inclinations". Thus barefootedness will be of the same category as being shod, and breathing a horse is of the same category as driving it, and similarly of harnessing it. And the negations of these things will be of that of which the affirmations are part, and their indefinites of that of which their definitions are part. For in general it is in this that negations and privations have being, in that they are not the things denied... Concerning the one, it could be demonstrated in many contexts, that it does not fall outside the categories.

(Περὶ δὴ τούτου βέλτιον αὐτὸς Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τοῖς Ὑπομνήμασιν ἀνεδίδαξε · προσθεὶς γὰρ τὰς κατηγορίας σὺν ταῖς πτώσεσιν αὐτῶν καὶ ταῖς ἀποφάσεσι καὶ ταῖς στερήσεσι καὶ τοῖς ἀορίστοις ὁμοῦ συνέταξεν αὐτῶν τὴν διδασκαλίαν πτώσεις τὰς ἐγκλίσεις ὀνομάζων. ἔσται δὴ οὖν τὸ ἀνυποδετεῖν τῆς αὐτῆς κατηγορίας, ἧς καὶ τὸ ὑποδεδέσθαι, καὶ τὸ ἀναπνεῖν τῆς τοῦ ἔχειν κατηγορίας, ὥστε καὶ τὸ ὠπλίσθαι. καὶ αἱ ἀποφάσεις οὖν τούτων ἔσονται ὧν καὶ αἱ καταφάσεις, καὶ τὰ ἀόριστα τούτων ὧν καὶ τὰ ὡρισμένα · καθόλου γὰρ ἐν τούτῳ ἔχουσι τὸ εἶναι αἱ ἀποφάσεις καὶ στερήσεις ἐν τῷ τὰ ἀναιρούμενα μὴ εἶναι ... περὶ δὲ τοῦ ἑνός, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν ἔξω πῖπτον τῶν κατηγοριῶν, πολλαχοῦ ἄν τις ἀποδείξειε.) (CAG IV², 33, l. 10 ff.)

In this brief discussion of the Notes (probably lecture records, not by Aristotle himself; see Grayeff, Aristotle ..., p.78) the same general assertion is made about negation and affirmation, that they are of the same thing. What links "shoelessness" and "being shod" is that they fall within the same category. And since the one is said not to fall outside the categories, the same link between negative and positive statements about the one must exist. The underlying category unites the two, so that they are part of the one discourse (*logos*). Again we see the use of negation, not as an isolated epistemological tool, but as part of a web of discourse, and dependent on various other forms of speech. It is a tool which can only be used in a reciprocal relationship with other such linguistic tools.

We turn now to the evidence of Alexander of Aphrodisias, whose Greek is somewhat more limpid than that of Dexippus. Alexander, however, is somewhat less useful as a source for the transitional stage which has been the object of inquiry here. The real advances over Aristotle seem to lie with Dexippus and Syrianus. A study of the following passage will show why. In a crucial passage (Met. 1022^{b} 32) Aristotle says that there are as many privations as there are negations formed by the alpha privative. I have studied this elsewhere (The Fundamentals..., and vol I, 139), and one might have hoped for some illuminating comment from Alexander on the passage, or at least some sign of another point of view on the passage coming into existence. But Alexander writes as follows:

"And", he says, "there are as many privations as there are negations derived from the alpha [sc. privative]". He says that alpha negations are privative denials. This is properly the case of the negation arising from the use of "not". As many, he says, as there are denials through the use of the alpha, which are negations of things, to the same

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Chapter VI. Proclus and positive negation

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language of the Phaedrus about the Parmenides. These two dialogues, usually taken by Plato scholars as representative of the two sides of Plato, as if they were virtually incompatible, are seen in harmony by the later Platonists. Proclus has rendered logic corybantic: in doing so, he may be less wrong than those who see so clearly two, separate, Platos.

Beierwaltes (Proklos... 353) cleverly juxtaposes a remark of Proclus on the Parmenides, with a hymn he had written to the principle beyond all. Proclus describes the negations in Parmenides 139E as constituting "a theological hymn leading to the One through negations" (ἀποφάσεις: Cousin, col. 1191). In this case the One had been said, by Plato, "to be neither like nor unlike itself, or any other thing", and Proclus sees here a statement of the One's transcendence of the ten categories: the resulting negations appear to him to be like a hymn. Proclus himself was the author of a hymn once attributed to Gregory Nazianzenus, and as Beierwaltes observes, it fits perfectly well with his general philosophical thought. (This hymn is not included in Vogt's collection, but may be found in Jahn, Eclogae e Proclo ..., p.49.) It is a hymn to a principle, whom Proclus nevertheless does not hesitate to call "Thou". The first five lines run as follows:

> O thou beyond all. How else is it meet for me to sing of Thee?
> What words can make thy hymn? For no word can describe Thee.
> What mind perceive Thee? For no mind can grasp Thee.
> Thou alone art unspeakable, though creator of all that is spoken of,
> Thou alone art unknowable, though creator of all that is known.

The hymn continues along these lines, and it is clear that Proclus had no need of his God to be made flesh in order to reach those heights of religious aspiration attained by Augustine in the Confessions.

The two experiences are not totally dissimilar, however, since it is beauty, in Proclus, which turns the soul upwards towards the One. There are two aspects of beauty, says Proclus (Plat. Theol. I.24, 16); one being that it enlightens, and the second that it is "graceful" (ἁβρός). These are ideas which are both drawn from Plato's Symposium, and Proclus emphasizes that the beauty of which he speaks is compelling in character: it is that which inspires *eros.* This beauty "turns all things towards itself", "calls them to itself through love (ἔρως)", "awakens all things through desire and passion for itself". For these reasons the soul is turned upwards, and finds itself in a continuous state of a longing, a longing which is incapable of satiety, and which springs from the absence of one's essential being. That which one is most truly, is missing; it is to be found elsewhere, and is ultimately unavailable. Hence the tension of the human being, and this is the explanation of the agonizing for language (ὠδίς) mentioned later in this chapter.

For these reasons Proclus attributes great importance to his state of mind;

But the One is unknowable for a separate reason, "by its own nature". It is unknowable not because of defects in the knowing apparatus applied to it, but because of a quality in itself, namely its own super-excellence (p.63, l. 21). This is a point of great importance since it places the unknowability of the One in a positive light. Negative theology is built not on the incompetence of human vision, hearing, thought and logic, but on a specific and positive quality of the One. Its unknowability is not to be attributed to epistemological failure, but to a quality of the One which somehow must be represented in a positive light, like a kind of glow in an unearthly hue, which can neither be seen, nor registered as a colour. It is rarely that this point is made so clearly by the Neoplatonists, though it is clear to all that despite the apophatic strand, there is somehow a kataphatic, or positive set of statements to be understood of the One. As we might expect from Proclus' analysis of Euclid, the negation points to a higher reality, and the unknowability involved does more than merely negate the value of ordinary knowing procedures: it paves the way for a higher affirmation, by negation of the lower.

The second passage, which endorses the value of names, is explained as follows. The question of the validity of names is taken up in the manner which one might expect, that is through discussion of the Cratylus, but bolstered by discussion of the Parmenides (Plat. Theol. I.29). The One of the first hypothesis is denied any name (ὄνομα) or any description (λόγος), but that of the second hypothesis has both. The names of the gods have a special value and Socrates' great awe of them is quoted with approval (see Philebus 12C). What follows is difficult, but it seems that there are some names of gods which have a natural and authentic being of their own: these names "are established among the gods themselves". (Saffrey translates: "... doivent être considérés comme établis au niveau des dieux eux-mêmes"; Budé p.124.) Such names are "genuinely divine", and enjoy the highest status. There are lower degrees, however, and the next grade down has the names as copies of the first. These are considered to be of the status of *daimons,* or intermediate spirits. There is a third level of names, "at three levels from the truth". This phrase of Plato's is used repeatedly by Proclus, as Saffrey points out (Budé p.164) and it comes from the discussion of art in Book X of the Republic (597 E), where Plato gives his well-known analysis of the low-level concerns of the artist. The notion of varying degrees of reality is applied to divine names by Proclus, who considers that this lower form of language comes of the same desire as that felt by the artist to manufacture copies, a desire of the human intelligence which needs such things for its own procedures.

... our mode of knowing constructs through discourse, after the manner of the intelligible production, likenesses of the other realities and indeed of the gods themselves, representing the non-complex by the complex, the simple by the variegated, and the unified by the multiple. Having moulded these names, it finally holds them forth as

images of the gods, producing each of the names as a statue of the gods, in the same way as theurgy, through certain symbols, invokes the unstinting generosity of the gods for the illumination of statues of human origin. Similarly our apparatus for the apprehension of the divine reveals the hidden being of the gods, by the composition and division of sounds[1]. (Platonic Theol. I.29)

This is a remarkably interesting passage as much for the understanding of pagan piety, as for the philosophy of language it reveals. It demonstrates, in the first place, a fully-fledged philosophy of theurgy, and on the practical level, the belief that statues could be made to have symptoms of various sorts on the intervention of the gods. Secondly it shows a philosophy of language which bears some similiarity to that found in Gnosticism. Some Gnostic systems show the same philosophy of language, working in terms of graduated levels. For the Gnostic Marcus, the greater the sonorisation, the lower the status of the word concerned. For Proclus the lowest type of noun/name is that which divides, or separates, and therefore multiplies. The primary names however, have the status of gods themselves: this remarkable claim must confer great power on certain words, in that some must contain the ability to act, to determine, and to endow with meaning. Proclus must have reserved such a place for certain divine names, and what is clearly at stake here is the basic material for a philosophy of word-magic. Even those words which belong to the lowest status, "removed from the truth", are like statues in relation to the gods, in that they may become the vehicles of the higher words, and the recipients of their power. For these reasons, the names of the gods should arouse the "utmost fear", as they did for Socrates.

Trouillard, with his customary perceptiveness, has seized on this theme in Proclus (L'activité onomastique selon Proclos...). He collects material on the power of names from various sources in Proclus, including the one already quoted, and others from the commentary on the Cratylus. It is worth quoting Trouillard's account of Proclus' thought: "To name is to create, to create is to express; naming is therefore an act of wisdom. The gods name and create by their act of thinking. For us, the power of imposing names is measured against the extent of our participation in the divine wisdom. To the extent that we yield passively to impressions, we introduce into language an element of chance and arbitrariness" (op. cit. 242). Names, for Proclus, have the power of discerning the essence of things (Comm. on Cratylus 20, 18–21). Names are created, along with other beings, by the gods. These divine names come into being as the procession unfolds, and are left throughout the universe of the real as signs (συνθήματα) and traces (ἴχνη: Comm. on Cratylus pp.29 ff.). In these pages Proclus sums up the development of

1 See on this passage, M. Hirschle, Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie... 17 et passim. Hirschle gives a very useful collection and analysis of passages on the theme of the reification of names.

the idea of names which is so hotly debated by Eunomius and the Cappadocians, discussed elsewhere in this book.

It is worth reflecting on this philosophy of language. There is here a hardening, a conservatism on the power of language, and that on the part of probably the greatest ancient exponent of the *via negativa.* Proclus has taken up a position of linguistic realism: he has given objective reality to certain words. They happen to be the names of the gods, but nevertheless certain other words are said to exist as intelligible entities, and they have all the status of other such entities, as models, sources and causes of lower realities, and as guarantors and assessors of lower entities. Proclus is in the astonishing position of being a linguistic realist, and thus adopts a view which is virtually unknown in early Greek philosophy, though it is becoming familiar in his time. The Greeks usually discuss the question of whether names bear any natural relation to reality, or whether they are merely conventional. The idea that names (our "nouns" – ὀνόματα) *are* the reality is a late departure in the world of Greek ideas, and an extraordinary one. That it should come from the pen of an exponent of the way of silence and the way of negation is all the more surprising, since it bespeaks a desire to give language an impregnably secure foundation. Discourse itself is guaranteed, though of course there are lower levels of it, and clumsy copies of the original: nevertheless it is language itself, in its essential form, which is given intelligible reality. There is very little to compare with this in the preceding works of Greek philosophy, with the exception of certain Gnostic theories, and one can compare Philo's discussion (see I, p. 89) of Adam's distribution of names. On this view names were given, by someone: Adam did this, but he could not name himself. Such a reflexive action was considered to be impossible, and it was God who gave Adam his name, thereby conferring on him, and it, a specially firm status. Similarly, Eunomius appears to believe in the existence of certain names (see ch. VIII).

Proclus gives certain divine names the status of gods. Herein lies the difference between the two passages discussed: Proclus reifies only certain names, those of the gods, and other nouns may well fall into the lower categories. This point is of equal interest to the philosopher of language: certain names are safeguarded by being declared sources and models of linguistic reality. It happens that these are of religious significance. *Proclus thus guarantees the truth of Greek theological language,* within the general limits of language. His linguistic realism is probably a response to the advance of the word in the form of the growing Christianization of the Roman Empire. The word made flesh finds a sophisticated rejoinder in Proclus' word made intelligible reality: he elevates the word rather than depreciate the divinity.

Before moving into the question of Proclus' interpretation of the Parmenides, and of the development of his negative theology, it is necessary to begin with some important information from his commentary on Euclid. This

form of negative is used. The first definition is nothing but a negative. No statement is made. An implied statement, however, is negated. The second definition accepts a state of affairs which could be made into a statement, but adds a negation of a further state of affairs. The third adds, in order to form a definition: that is, a state of affairs is accepted, and a further is accepted and added to it in order to obtain the definition. The notion "point" is added to the notion "line", and this gives us an example of the function of the process which is exactly opposite to that of negation, namely addition (προσθήκη). The fifth combines the methods of negation and addition, in that two given states of affairs are limited by the implied negation in the word "only", which means "without x".

These are the considerations brought out by Proclus in his discussion of the first book of Euclid's Elements, as indicated in the following passages. Morrow has provided an excellent translation of Proclus' Commentary on Euclid, but the following translations differ slightly.

(I) Wherefore the geometer added "only" to the two dimensions as the third dimension does not exist in the surface: this is equivalent to the negation of depth, in order that the superiority of the surface, in its simplicity in relation to the solid, might be shown through negation, or by means of an addition equivalent to a negation: its inferiority to the things which precede it is shown through affirmations. (Comm. on Elements I, Def. 5, ed. Friedlein, p.114)

(II) Euclid taught the point as the principle of all things of size, through negation alone, but the line he elucidated through both affirmation and negation. (Comm. Elements I, Def. II, ed. Friedlein, p.96)

(III) For negative statements are appropriate to originating-principles as Parmenides teaches us, through elucidating the first and ultimate cause by negations alone. For every originating-principle has a being other than that of the things which flow from it, and the negations of these show us the specific character of the former. (Comm. Elements I, Def. I, ed. Friedlein, p.94)

The collective significance of these passages is as follows. Every entity which has size, stems from the point as its ultimate source: only negation can formulate its nature, however. Positive statements are appropriate to that in a thing which is the inferior part, whereas the superior aspect will always be designated by negation. The point does not fall into this ambit of positive statements, since it has no combination of lower and upper facets: consequently it must be known by negation alone. Where positive statements are made, one can be sure that their referents are of the lower kind on the ontological scale. Negation is especially appropriate to principles (ἀρχαί), and this is a point worth noting. The principle may be a real entity, at work in the world of things, but it is an excessively refined type of entity, and difficult to grasp: in such a case the method of negation is well-suited. A further point is made in this connection: one may distinguish two aspects of a principle, that

and then simultaneous affirmations and negations. The idea of the simultaneous application of both does not refer to any desire to create paradoxes, as one might superficially conclude. Given the above analysis of the remarks on Euclid, it can be seen that a claim combining negative and positive elements would simply represent a straddling of stages, the positive referring to the inferior, the negative to the superior element. As Trouillard notes (Théologie négative ... 253): "... each position has as its cause the corresponding negation". A joint negative/positive claim would place the One in the situation of being a combination of cause and effect, a hybrid of the higher and the lower. The One in this particular context, and in this particular definition, cannot be of this kind.

Some definition of terms will be useful at this point, since the way of negation being advocated must be defined: ἀπόφασις is Proclus' term, and this marks a change, since Plotinus and the Middle Platonists used the word ἀφαίρεσις. It may be assumed that Proclus was not an innovator here, but that in the Athenian tradition the word ἀπόφασις was already established. The crucial question is that of the difference: the present author must confess to having had the assumption that the move from abstraction to negation proper marked a radicalization of the negative method; that the later the date, the more radical the refusal of language. We will return frequently to this question, but it is of course entirely possible that the difference is innocuous, and that it reflects differences in school tradition only. For the present, the relationship of the technical terms in the field will be examined.

It is difficult to discover Proclus' view of ἀφαίρεσις: he does, however, have a remark on the advantages of negation over other forms of thought. Things conceived by ἐπίνοια (hypothetical thought), and understood in a matter-free way,. cannot possibly be the principles of any sort of reality (Comm. Parm. VI, col. 1054). Some sort of abstract thought is clearly being referred to here, since the method arrives at an idea which is matter-free (ἄνευ ὕλης). It sounds suspiciously like the old method of abstraction, but Proclus notes that the type of thing conceived by such a method will not have genuine existence (*hypostasis*), but merely *hyparxis,* or secondary reality. If one ceases the mental act, the thing disappears: this cannot be the case with genuine principles, since they do not disappear; they have being in themselves, and are not dependent on our hypothetical thought (ἐπίνοια).

The question of privation is fairly fully discussed. In the Platonic Theology (I.12), Proclus speaks of a category of negations which are in fact privations (στερήσεις). As we have seen elsewhere (139), this accords with Aristotelian usage, since Aristotle accepts the view that negations may include privations. (On the other hand, not all privations are negations.) Proclus is speaking of the negations of the fifth hypothesis of the Parmenides; in this case, according to the Parmenides itself, things other than the One are neither identical nor different, mobile or immobile, and so on, because they are

deprived of the One (Parm. 160A). The negations of this hypothesis, says Proclus (Plat. Theol. I.12) are simply privations, whereas others "are the transcendent causes of all which springs from them". The negations of the fifth hypothesis are not a function of the superiority of the higher principle, but are such κατὰ ἔλλειψιν, or "by default".

Proclus sees the Parmenides as having distinguished between two types of negative: on the one hand a negative statement may derive from the superiority of the principle referred to. This idea we have already seen developed in connection with Euclid's Elements, and we may take an example as follows. The negative involved in the statement "the point has no parts", might, according to Proclus' analysis of Plato's logical exercise, derive from the fact that the point is other than the part, but connected to the part insofar as it is its source and originating principle. "Non-part" suggests, in this case, a higher grade of being within a general affinity. In the case of the fifth hypothesis, however, the One and the others are separated from each other, in such a way that the latter are deprived of unity: in the case of our example, "the point has no parts", the negation would entail the point's being deprived of something, and so is really a case of privation, in Proclus' view. It is difficult to sympathize with the distinction being drawn, since all cases of negation seem to entail a deprivation of some element. But Proclus wishes to make the point that there is an ambiguity in negation which needs clarification, and it is this: when one says, for example, "he is not happy", one may be implying that he is in fact more than happy, in fact in a state of delirious ecstasy. Alternatively, he may be non-happy in the adverse sense, in that he is unhappy. The lower and higher possibilities included in the negation are what Proclus has in mind here, and he uses mathematical terms to put his point. The one form of the negative points to a superiority (ὑπεροχή) implied in it, and the other to a defect (ἔλλειψις). Such a narrowing of the field had to be made, for in the theological conception of negation, it is obviously necessary that the negatives be heading in an upwards direction. However a further, and crucial, point should be noted: the negatives derive their significance from a certain ontological base. In the second case, that of deprivation, the lack of a certain sort of being gives the negative its content: in the first case, the presence of being gives substance to the superiority to which the negative refers. However the second case, it should be noted, implies some continuity between the higher stage and the lower. The notion of continuity has been investigated by Annick Charles in relation to Proclus' doctrine of analogy, but it should be noted that it is also fundamental to his negative theology. For the negation of superiority to have any efficacy as a theological instrument, there must be some continuity between ontological levels. The higher principle may well have a being of its own, which is proper to it and separate from its lower manifestations, but there must be some link between it and that of which it is the cause and the source. If this ontological continuity is not pres-

ent, then there is no guarantee that the negative process is in fact an ascent. To put it differently, negation works as a means of ascent because it does respond to what is, and to how reality is structured. Elsewhere, Proclus has the following defensive remark:

> Let no one attempt to devalue such a form of discourse, by claiming that these negations are privations, nor to dismiss this voyage upwards towards the very first principle by defining analogy as an identity of concepts, and the concepts as relations. (Platonic Theol. II.5)

I have followed loosely the translation of Saffrey, and I take it that the remark about analogy means that some argued against analogy as a means of knowing the divine, by claiming analogy to be capable of dealing with relations only. (A remark of Damascius, see p. 121, seems to be in the same context, and may help clarify this passage.) However whatever this means, it is clear that there was a context of debate over the value of these various approaches: negation was attacked, it would seem, on the grounds that it was really to do with privation only. (Proclus tried to counter this by his idea of the negation of superiority.) One is reminded of the Sceptics, and their attack on the notion of *aphairesis,* at a much earlier stage: and even in the time of Aristotle, it is clear that there is a debate going on over the use of the method for conceptualizing very abstract ideas. Against these critics, Proclus can direct the whole of his commentary on the Parmenides, which in the last analysis, is nothing more than a sustained critique of the idea of negation.

Proclus has a further tilt at the anti-negation party in the sixth book of his Commentary on the Parmenides (col. 1072). Are affirmations better than negations, he asks? There was evidently a school of thought which thought so, on the grounds that negation was merely privation. We have seen this already, but the element added here derives from Plato's Sophist, and its discussion of being and not-being (258 A). Privation was clearly identified with not-being, a lack of some sort, whereas affirmation was perceived as implying being. On this view, apparently, all negation was reduced to privation, and held to signify the absence of something. Proclus replies by arguing that the Sophist envisages several possible meanings for "not-being": it can designate that which is superior to being, or equal to it, or lower than it. Accordingly, if negation is to be allied with not-being, it has three possible meanings.

Taking up a point made by Aristotle, as well as the example he uses (see my Fundamentals...) Proclus observes (col. 1074) that "negations have an indefinite force". "Not-man" has a much broader range of meaning than "man":

> Affirmations pare beings down, but negations open them up, taking them from the

circumscribed to the uncircumscribed, from the state of being divided within their own limits, to that of being unlimited. How then can they not be appropriate to the contemplation of the One? (Col. 1074)

Aristotle in fact classifies "not-man" as an indefinite noun, and does not see it as a genuine negative at all; it is true that one of the first things that strikes us about negation is its indefiniteness, in that it seems to leave open an enormously wide range of possibilities. It is non-specific. "Not-man", for example, could signify anything at all in the range of existents, except for one thing, man himself. Proclus makes a virtue of this openness, comparing it to the narrowness of selection inherent in affirmation. It is, he says, more appropriate to the One, and one cannot help suspecting that his concept of negation really makes it into a form of affirmation.

This interpretation of the Sophist constitutes an important part of his philosophy of negation, and he has recourse to it in the fifth book of the Commentary on the Parmenides (col. 1000). The Sophist was in fact vague on this point: the Eleatic stranger had initiated a discussion on the meaning of the verb "to be", in its copulative use. Affirmation seemed to require (256 ff.) some participating in being, for the word "is" to have any force in such a statement as "the boy is obstreperous". A negation, similarly, seemed to require participation in not-being, in order for the negative copula to have any force. The Sophist does not really take up a dogmatic position on either of these claims, but of course the discussion was there for the disciples to make dogma if they wished.

In this passage of the Parmenides Commentary, Proclus offers an interpretation of the non-being under discussion, in terms of otherness. Consistently with his attempt in the sixth book to argue that negation has the function of opening up the field of discourse, rather than closing it, Proclus interprets not-being as implying difference. The negation involved is not one of contrariety.

... when we say not-being, we are only expressing the negation (ἄρνησιν) of being, but not the opposite of being, where opposite would mean that which is the furthest removed from being, and that which has completely fallen outside it. (Col. 1000)

Against the anti-negation party, then, Proclus reduces negation to nothing more than a form of differentiation.

The issue of negation and privation must have been of considerable importance in Proclus' own circle, for he also devotes a number of pages of the Platonic Theology (II.10 ff.) to showing that the two must be distinguished. The following passage is well-known:

In the third place, in addition to what has been said, I specify that the negative mode is not a matter of privation of that to which it applies, but productive of what might be called opposites. (Plat. Theol. II.10)

lus says (Comm. Parm. col. 1172) that it has been shown in the Sophist that the One is itself the cause of "what are called hypernegations". The One does not participate in any of the genuses, and by this means it is demonstrated that the One transcends, and is established over and above the intelligible world. The genuses of the same and the different mentioned in the Sophist (256) do characterize the lower world (the demiurgic *diakosmos*): certain genuses, those of motion and rest, precede the former and characterize the zoogonic diakosmos, while the "in itself" and "in another" characterize the highest ranks of intelligible beings. There follows a lengthy discussion on the subject of which genuses are appropriate to which ontological levels, but in col. 1176 he returns to negation and the One.

There is a threefold classification of negation. "The One is unknowable to the knowing endeavours of those things which are secondary to it", and negations must fall into three categories, appropriate to three phases of the One's relations. In the first place, we have the One in the relation of itself to itself: secondly, of itself to itself and others; and in the third place of itself to others only. The three types of negation correspond to these three relations of the One. The three types of negation are in descending order. In the first and highest position come those negations which apply to the One's relation to itself, and under this relation movement and rest are denied of it. In respect of its relation to itself and other things, sameness and difference are denied; similarly, of the One in relation to itself and to others, the like and the unlike, the equal and the unequal, the younger and the older are denied. Thus the One is deprived of quality, quantity and temporality (col. 1176). Proclus also notes that Plato goes further than Parmenides himself, in denying the same and the different of the One. The Fragment V.84 of Parmenides is quoted:

> It remains the same in the same, and is in respect of it itself.

Thus Plato is seen to be more of a negator than Parmenides himself. The negation of sameness and difference is of crucial importance, and here Proclus goes beyond Parmenides himself in his attempt to define the otherness of the One. These genuses are the primary genuses, and constitute the highest category of predication possible. "Sameness" is the closest to the One, yet both sameness and difference are denied of it. It is thus taken beyond the rank of the one-in-being. Herein lies the real radicalism of Proclus, and the conservatism of his venerable predecessor, Parmenides. Proclus does not emphasise so much the poverty of language, as the transcendence of the One. That the essence of reality should be beyond Being itself could scarcely have occurred to Parmenides, since this ethereal substance was what he was trying to define as the essence. Yet Proclus wants it removed from any relations which could allow affirmative predication, and so it must go beyond Being itself:

> For if that which participates identity and difference is not yet truly one, it is necessary that the genuinely One should exist prior to them, and be free of them. If it participates in them, it will not be purely One, being replete with things foreign to the One. For what you add to the One, through this addition obscures the unity, which is spurned, of that which receives the entirely other. (Col. 1177)

Genuine Oneness lies therefore beyond these relations of sameness and difference, and Proclus here restates the familiar paradox that addition results in substraction, when it is a matter of the One. The One is such that any addition decreases it. This may be true of any entity in the Neoplatonist system, since the accumulation of characteristics always constitutes a diminution, in the sense that it gives the entity in question a kind of downward thrust. In this way the paradox concerned is to be found right throughout the ontological system of the Neoplatonists: any increase brings about a corresponding decrease. Yet in the case of the One this principle is more outstandingly true, since the One is the very entity which is nothing else than its own singleness. An addition to it will transgress its very nature, leaving it no longer what it was. If added to, the One is completely destroyed: any other entity, however, retains its character in the face of addition. Proclus wishes to insist that even that which is the same as itself cannot be added to the One, without its unity being "spurned" and "obscured".

For Proclus, then, the One is beyond being and therefore beyond the affirmations which can be generated from even the most lofty of the genuses, the same and the different. Yet he is a linguistic conservative, despite his ontological radicalism. Negation is the linguistic act most appropriate to the voyage towards the One, and it is, it is necessary to insist, a linguistic act. The negative turns out to have positively affirming capacities, and the term "hypernegation" captures most securely this notion. The negating procedure is not one of abandoning language, or arriving somehow at a linguistic terminus, but it is every bit a linguistic manoeuvre. Proclus is most concerned to keep negation within the category of discourse, and negative discourse is not the same thing as discourse negated. Negation and affirmation are intimately related: I have observed elsewhere that the negation seems to have to follow some affirmation, that it is therefore parasitic on a prior claim, but it is important to note that the reverse of this idea occurs in Proclus himself. On several occasions, Proclus speaks of negative statements producing positive ones.

In the sixth book of the Commentary on the Parmenides (col. 1097) an order of priority among negations is given. The first is that of multiplicity: the One is not many. The second is that of parts: the One is not a whole consisting of parts. And in accordance with the causal principle established above, the One engenders the multiple, and the second unity consisting of a whole complement of parts. Here Proclus is working towards the following claim:

If then, negations generate affirmations, it is clear that the first negation generates the first things, the second the second things. (Col. 1099)

The generating power of the negation is at stake, and prior to this Proclus makes two logical observations. Firstly, when in denying the first part of a conditional, the second is negated as a result, the first is always more general than the second. For example: "if he is not an animal, he is not human" (col. 1098). The negation of the first part has entailed the negation of the second, because the first part is more general, and includes the second. If on the other hand, by negating the consequence we are able to negate the condition, then the consequent is more "powerful". This logical point having been settled, Proclus notes that the One is the most comprehensive of all, and that being is more comprehensive than life, for example. The key to what follows is the claim that in a hypothetical argument, that which annuls the other part is the more powerful.

Proclus' argument is an ingenious reinterpretation of the Parmenides argument, and it runs like this. Take the proposition: "if the One is a whole (composed of parts), then it is many." If one denies the first clause, there is no effect on the second: it may still be true, or it may be false. Negating the second, however (assuming that it is given an "if" form), would entail the negation of the first clause. From which it is deduced by Proclus that the many is more "powerful" than the whole-of-parts. It must therefore be closer to the One, and herein lies the interesting step: the notion of the logical "power" of one clause over another is given an ontological application. The logical power of a notion matches, and stems from, the existential power of the corresponding entity in the hierarchy of beings. From the behaviour of the logic, Proclus can deduce the status of the entity, and after various exercises in negating conditionals, he concludes that the many is closer to the One, than the whole or its parts. "The more comprehensive is closer to the One" (col. 1099): this is the main principle, and it is enunciated several times.

How then do we reach the following claim?

Thus if negations produce affirmations, it is clear that the first negation produces the first things, and the second the second things. (Col. 1099)

There are two ideas to be ferreted out here. Firstly, the exact manner in which negation can engender affirmation: secondly, the relation of language to reality in this particular context. In respect of the former issue, the explanation of Proclus' thinking would go like this. The negative may be applied like a litmus test to certain conditional statements, and it will determine which of the two clauses in any such statement has the more "power". In thus revealing one clause to be the more powerful, the negative has caused a recognition of its true worth: it has made it possible to make claims about it. In

the case of the argument set out above, concerning the One, the many, and the whole-of-parts, the negative test has shown the many to be more "powerful" than the whole, or its parts. It has thus placed us in the position of being able to say positively, or kataphatically, that the many is above the whole in the order of being. It is in this sense that the negative produces affirmations: it enables the uncovering of ontological facts.

The second issue is not easily accessible to the modern mind. Proclus' philosophy of language is worthy of an entirely separate study, and one can only hint at solutions here. It has been noted earlier that Proclus is a linguistic realist, and in the passage twice quoted above, he speaks of negations *engendering* "the first things", and subsequently "the second things". What is his position? Do the negations correspond to a state of affairs, which is itself productive of the successive states of affairs? In this case, saying that negations produce entities would be no more than a figure of speech. However it would seem that Proclus considers the negations to be somehow in reality, and that the distinctions between logic, language and being have no force for him. It would seem that a state-of-affairs can itself be a negation.

That negations produce statements is a theme taken up by Proclus with relative frequency, and one would expect this to be the case, since it is part of his attempt to positivise negative theology. At the end of the sixth book (col. 1133), he refers to negation as "mother of affirmations", and is confident at this point that he has shown through this procedure of kataphatic *apophasis,* precisely how the middle order of realities is established. The intelligibles and that which flows from them have now been treated, and the whole order has been displayed in its relation to the One, thanks to the creative use of the negatives used in the passage leading up to Plato's Parmenides 137 E. Later still, in the seventh book (col. 1208) it is considered to be established that the negative produces positive affirmations: "For the negative, as has often been said, is the genesis of affirmation". In this case Proclus is no longer dealing with the middle order of entities, but with the generation of positive statements about the One itself. And in this case, inequality is removed from the One, leaving it itself. Not-inequality can imply nothing other than pure unity, or so I would reduce Proclus' argument. As the hypothetical argument has been developed, it is clear that it cannot be used of the One itself, since it is impossible to deny unity of the One. It is the last in the series, and is incapable of submitting to the litmus test, for the obvious reason that there is no higher power. For these reasons a series of linking arguments is proposed, leading to the abstraction of inequality from the One (the verb ἀφαιρέω is used here).

The last part of the seventh book, surviving in Latin only and edited by Klibansky/Labowsky, with an English translation by E. E. M. Anscombe and L. Labowsky, is crucial at this point, since it takes the discussion of negatives up to the level of the One. The positive force of the negatives is reaffirmed,

but with certain qualifications now entered. In the words of the above translation (70, l. 5–10 Klibansky/Labowsky):

> But negative propositions about the One do not really express anything about the One. For nothing at all applies to it, either formally or privatively, but, as we have said, the name "one" names our conception of it, not the One itself, and so we say that the negation also is about our conception, and none of the negative conclusions that have been stated is about the One, but because of its simplicity it is exalted above all contrast and all negation. So he rightly added at the end that these negative propositions do not express anything about the One.

In this crucial passage Proclus introduces an asymmetry in his philosophy of negation. In the first place, negations are said not to express anything about the One, whereas they can function at all lower levels. Yet it is obviously possible to formulate a negative statement about the One, to put it into words at least; such a negative can be nothing more than a linguistic phenomenon, applying to our "conception" of the One rather than the One itself. Negations about the One differ from those of the intelligible or sensible spheres, and the asymmetry introduced turns on the difference between "de" and "circa" in the Latin text. The translators, Anscombe and Labowsky, have seen the need to differentiate clearly between the two, and they correctly make the difference into one of two types of reference: a statement "de uno" is a statement "referring to the One", and a statement "circa unum" is one which expresses something "about the One": the former only is possible. What was the Greek original here? A note on page 97 provides a parallel passage from In Parm. book VII (col. 1191). If we are to juxtapose the two, it is clear that, contrary to what might be normal expectation, the equivalent of *circa* is not περί. The translation of the In Parm. passage reads as follows:

> For our discourse is not, properly speaking, on the One (ἐπὶ τοῦ ἑνός), and as we advance we will hear the philosopher proving this: we nevertheless make some utterances about (περί) it through the natural anguish of the soul about the One (περὶ τὸ ἕν).

We produce language round about the One through the unsatisfied desire of our souls, but we cannot speak "on" the One: our language can oscillate around the One, so to speak, without ever coming upon it. The Latin "de" can suggest a loose relationship; "about the One", in an imprecise way, and we must therefore suppose "de" to be the equivalent of περί, if we accept the comparison of the two texts.

Clearly the language about the One does not result from the ability to speak about it in the proper sense, but rather from the yearning to speak about it. Negatives applied to the One are similarly dismissed.

The asymmetry lies in the relation of language to reality: language does grasp lower realities, but it has no relation to the One. In this latter case

therefore, a psychological explanation of its origin is proffered: it comes from the aspiration of the soul. In the former case, an ontological explanation is offered. On the preceding page (Klibansky/Labowsky 68) Proclus says that the meaning of a negation is determined by the thing of which it is a negation: different types of realities are expressed in the different varieties of negation, such as the privative, and so on. An attempted negative about the One would have no such reality to determine its meaning.

We are left in the position of having no linguistic instruments appropriate to this highest reality, and it is here that it becomes clear that this last part of Proclus' commentary, only recently made generally available through the Klibansky/Labowsky edition, is the most important of all. Neither negations nor affirmations can be used of the One, it is now claimed, and so the *via negativa* has come to its natural terminus, not at the One, but at the next lowest level. The negative way also falls short of its goal, and thus silence constitutes its completion. The negative is not a form of silence, but a speech-act. Proclus' conclusion is simple:

> For by means of a negation Parmenides has removed all negations. With silence he concludes the contemplation of the One. (p.76)

That the contemplation of the One should be carried out in silence is confirmed by a passage of the Platonic Theology II.9, where it is said that the One's unspeakability and causeless causality must be celebrated in silence (see the note by Saffrey/Westerink, p.116). Again there is reference to the anguish (ὠδίς) of the soul, "which desires both to know and speak of the One", and these soul-pangs serve to produce words where there should be none. Silence then is the crowning epistemological achievement, after all the speech-acts have been accomplished, including those of the highest genre, negation. It is particularly fascinating to note that after the ascent into this rarefied Himalayan atmosphere, a coup de grâce is delivered, which ends the progress of language: negation finally dismisses itself. Proclus sees Parmenides as asking the last question and formulating the last negation in 142 A, where the conclusion is drawn that the One is neither named, nor spoken of, nor known. For Proclus negations are truer than assertions (Klibansky/Labowsky 70), but for a negation to be formulated there must be a name, which may be negated. If, now, names are ruled out, no negatives are possible. "Even the power of generating all things, which we said was a characteristic of negation, does not belong to the One, although it is said to generate and produce" (op. cit. p.72). All those aspects of the negation which lead us to see it as a transcendent power are now found to be inapplicable. It is the negation of negation which takes us into the appropriate silence.

I do not however see this negation of negation as a positive step like those of the previous stages, and I see no emphasis on the negation of negation in

be positive assertions in disguise (op. cit. p.68, l. 30 ff.) and for this reason also cannot be used of the One. The fact that language can produce negatives about the One is not of importance, as we saw earlier: these are mere linguistic follies, whose origin is psychological.

For the deeper explanation of this point, one must return to the borrowing from Euclid of the key ideas of negative theology. As shown earlier in this chapter, coupled negations and assertions reveal the higher and the lower in the order of beings, but the point is grasped by negation alone. The pure negation demonstrates the nature of this principle: it is precisely this which Proclus wants to avoid claiming in relation to the One. For him negation reveals the higher being which stands above and as the source of any being which is the subject of an assertion. Even hypernegations, which illuminate the transcendence of some particular quality, by showing that it does not exist in a lower quality, are not applicable to the One, which is itself the cause of these hypernegations (see p. 110).

Proclus' metaphysics takes him beyond the point, beyond the pure Euclidean negative. He advocates now the annulment of negation, it having served its purpose as an inverted mode of assertion. The last negation, the negation of negation, including all language, reveals nothing about the One, and this is what differentiates it from all others. For Proclus, the purpose of the *via negativa* is the transportation of the soul to the penultimate stage, and here his treatment of it coincides with that of Clement of Alexandria and Plotinus. The negative method takes one high, but not to the Highest. Proclus does however give clear expression to that which has only been implicit hitherto: negation is a tool which causes its own supersession.

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Chapter VII. Damascius and Hyperignorance

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VII. Damascius and Hyperignorance

Damascius represents an extreme, the end of a development, which caricatures that development. The last chair-holder of the Platonic succession in the Athenian Academy, Damascius, was to see it closed in 529 A.D., by the Christian Emperor Justinian. He then went East, with other Greek philosophers to the court of King Chosroes in Persia. Given the evolution of his views, he was probably well-advised to go East, rather than stay in the West: his philosophy constitutes one of the clearest case-studies for those who wish to seek for affinities between the philosophy of Greece and that of the East. Damascius' emphasis on silence, on the failure of reason, and on the idea of hyperignorance takes him closer than any other Neoplatonist to the themes of Buddhist philosophy, and there is curious symmetry between the content of his philosophy and its historical encasement: the exhaustion of the Platonic tradition is accompanied by Justinian's closure of the Academy, for quite other reasons, and the eclipse of logic in favour of supra-rational knowing, is accompanied by his departure eastwards. We do not know what human and intellectual contact, what level of cultural exchange, may have lain behind the move to Persia, but the question is a fascinating one. (Alan Cameron, in the Last Days of the Academy at Athens, discusses the reputation of the king among Athenian philosophers, and generally takes the view that the period of Damascius was one of renaissance for the Academy. Damascius' brilliance is beyond question, but he is a classic case of one who threw away the ladder after climbing it.)

Damascius stresses the desire to know, with the suggestion that this results in the erection of misleading hypotheses. The excellent article by M. Combès (Negativité ... 115) puts it this way: "All that we say about the Ineffable, whether in the negative or positive mode, is merely the product of our own states (οἰκεῖα πάθη)". Damascius postulates a desire to know on the part of both the knowing and the knowable:

> It must be said that the knowable wants to be desired, and that which knows wants to be desired, within the difference of various relations, and in relation to each other as mind and being. (Dubitationes 81, p.185)

Reason desires that which is knowable because it is absent from it. (Clearly enough, the fact that something is absent does not cause us to desire it, for that fact alone: as with Spinoza much later, so with Damascius; desire seeks its object because it already shares in it.) But when reason attains the object of its desire, it is no longer a matter of knower and known, but a certain unity follows, a relationship of being (οὐσία). Thus reason is capable of be-

ing both knowable and known: it exists in two aspects but is fundamentally the same. If Damascius were of the twentieth century he would speak of the abolition of the subject, and indeed he means something like this. Knower and known merge: both want to be desirable: they are known separately as mind and being from time to time, according to the relations obtaining at that time. If one is to separate them, one would say that being is desirable, and mind that which is capable of desiring. But Damascius' view is thoroughly integrationist: desiring and the desired are but two phases of the one reality:

> Further, the knowable is that which is desired by the knowing subject: knowledge is thus a return (ἐπιστροφή) of the knowing subject to the knowable; and every return is a conjoining. (27, p.48)

The highest principle, however, is beyond either knowledge or unknowability: it is merely the object of our "own feelings" (οἰκεῖα πάθη: 4, p.7). Whilst M. Combès (Négativité... 116) gives a somewhat florid interpretation of the term πάθημα (6, p.11), the general lines of his interpretation are right. (He represents Damascius as saying that the Ineffable is the object neither of our knowledge, nor our ignorance, but of our "torment"; the passage seems to have quite a different meaning.) Overall however, Combès has made an excellent point, which one could put like this: since the ultimate principle is beyond the reach of language and knowledge, those linguistic and gnostic products which put themselves forward as descriptions of It, must spring from emotional sources only. They have no rational or ontological basis: their origin is mereley psychological. We have already seen with Proclus the notion of the soul's ὠδίς, its straining, or its anguish (see p.99, 116: "son travail d'enfantement", as Saffrey translates it, thereby including the notion of the labour of child-birth in that of the pain of ignorance seeking to convert itself into knowledge.

Names come from human intentions, rather than from anything in reality which might warrant them. Pythagoras gave the Ineffable a name because he had to teach philosophy (46, p.92). In fact the name One is relatively suitable to the highest principle: it can have some usefulness to apply the highest and most noble names to the One, "as what could be regarded as symbols of the highest sanctity" (49, p.100). It is clear that such words have no real ability to express the inexpressible, and in fact the term "One" applies to other principles. The utility of such terms lies not in their rational significance.

As Westerink has noted, from the basis of his deep knowledge of the texts, Damascius comments on Proclus, criticizing and enhancing the work of the latter. He presupposes the reader's knowledge of Proclus' writing on the Parmenides, and adds his own views as a further layer. It is therefore with particular interest that we find in Damascius an attack on negation and analogy, defended by Proclus against some unnamed opponents:

There is an illegitimate form of reasoning, which proceeds via negations, and one which proceeds via analogies, and yet another, the syllogism which proceeds by the linking of necessary conclusions: indeed it does not know how to grasp all these things, but as it were treads on air, knowing things on the basis of other things. So that if one does not know the simple, one cannot know the whole proposition, nor therefore the whole syllogism. And analogy always deals with things which have no existence whatever: "as the sun is to the seen and the seeing, so is the One to the known and the knowing". The sun we know, but the One we do not know. Negation abstracts what we know, but what it leaves we do not know. (26, pp.46–7)

This is a forcefully put argument against the classic three ways of knowing the One. Damascius strikes at their weakest point, in that each of them depends on knowing things on the basis of other things. They are therefore limited to the world of existents and multiplicity. Each of them has the same weakness, in that in each case something is not known, and this absence constitutes a fatal gap in the machinery of the argument. One can draw analogies between things one knows, but one cannot do so where one side of the comparison is unknown. One can negate or abstract, and one will learn by this so long as there is something left to know, but where the remainder is unknown, one remains uninstructed. This vigorous attack in the Sceptical style on the axis of Neoplatonic epistemology is in direct contrast to the view of his predecessor, Proclus.

Damascius is formulating an attack on the method of negation, and we have already seen Proclus alluding to such opposition. In the preceding chapter it was noted that Proclus had opponents in this matter; though he does not say much about them (see p.108). The question there concerned the precise nature of the objections to negative theology, and we may now use Damascius to fill in the gap left by the silence of Proclus' opponents: his objections to negation are probably those of the opposition in Proclus' circle.

A further trenchant attack on the epistemology of negation is launched by Damascius:

But negation is a kind of statement (λόγος); the negated is an entity. But the Nothing is neither a negated entity, nor an entity which is expressed in any way whatever, nor knowable in any way. Thus it is impossible to negate negation. (7, p.15)

Damascius rejects the concluding claim of Proclus' commentary on the Parmenides (see p.116), namely that in the end negation itself is negated, thus leading to silence. Whilst Damascius is prepared to concede the silence, he does not admit the idea of an ascent to negation, and up through a final double negation.

What can be the end of this discussion, but intractable silence...? (7, p.15)

The general thrust of his rejection of negation here is similar to that of the passage mentioned above. He continues (8, pp.15–16) to castigate those who have failed to recall that the Ultimate has nothing in common with the things in this world. Any attempt at analogy (ἀναλογία) or assimilation (ὁμοιότης) will fail because of the gulf between the known and the unknown. Both negation and analogy are damaged by this absolute ontological discontinuity, and Damascius thus situates himself within a branch of Neoplatonism which opted for a radical transcendence, with the consequent rejection of these classical methods of overcoming ontological difference. His advice is that it is better to "remain at rest within the unspeakable depths of the soul" (8, p.16). And if it is necessary to "show something", then it is better to use negations. We could speak of Him in such terms, calling him the "in no way, nowhere". This would be nothing but "idle chatter", says Damascius, but we may still want to do it. The implication is that of all the idle chatter that takes place, the negation is the best, though it should not be imagined to be of more significance that it is. The use of the word "show" (ἐνδείκνυσθαι) is revealing, since it suggests "pointing out", or "displaying". It is a sign that language has fallen on hard times when linguistic acts are reduced to the status of non-complex physical acts, such as pointing. The soul may wish to point in the direction of the Nothing: if it sets the soul at ease to do so, it may, by uttering the useless negatives "in no way, nowhere". Language is reduced to empty gesticulation.

Other things should be said about Damascius' repudiation of negation in the passage quoted above (7, p.15). Why is it impossible to negate negation? The argument seems to mean that since negations are statements which apply to things, one cannot negate negation itself. Since negation is only a linguistic construct, it cannot itself be negated. In any case, the Nothing is not even a negated entity. Thus any attempt to apply a negative statement to it will fail to result in the required double negation: neither is it an expressed entity, so that even a first attempt at negation will not succeed. The negated thing must be available for any negation to succeed. These appear to be the arguments telescoped into this brief passage, which encapsulates Damascius' objections to the conceptually more optimistic views of Proclus. For him, negation has an affirmative value: for Damascius, it is idle chatter, as much as any other verbalizing, though preferable in some sense.

But the real achievement is to attain the state of "hyperignorance" (ὑπεράγνοια: 29, p.56). It is astonishing to find a Greek philosopher coining such a term, and advocating such a state, but this is nevertheless the position of the last Academic. He describes it like this: referring to Plato's analogy about seeing the sun (Rep. 532A), Damascius notes that at first one sees it from afar. The closer one approaches, the less one sees of it, and in the end one sees neither it nor the other things outside it. The eye being flooded with light becomes the light itself.

> Is the One unknowable by its own nature, if indeed the unknowable is something other, beyond the One? The One wishes to be by itself, with no other. The unknowable, which is logically opposed to the knowable is beyond the One, entirely unspeakable; we agree that we neither know it, nor are ignorant of it. We are rather in a state of hyperignorance in respect of it, whose proximity obscured even the One. (29, p.56)

The One "abides in the inner sanctuary of that silence". Early Neoplatonists had been radical in their expulsion of the One beyond being itself, yet even this degree of transcendence is transcended by Damascius. Beyond the One lies a further principle, called only "that yonder" (loc. cit.). As suggested in the passage above, this principle transcends not only knowledge, but also ignorance: it lies beyond this pair of opposites, and so our state in relation to it can only be described as "hyperignorance". This higher principle obscures the One by its proximity. What does this mean? Seemingly that as we approach it, it floods our whole seeing apparatus with its own presence, to the extent that all else is obliterated from view. The hyperunknowable principle floods the mind's eye, so that even the One becomes an other, which disappears from view. And yet the One wants to be by itself.

There is a curious comparison between such metaphysics, and Christian theology. The latter is flooded with images, and replete with anthropomorphic descriptions of the divinity and its workings. At the time of Justinian, who terminated Damascius' academic employment, this image-bound system of thought was the main alternative to the pure metaphysics of the Neoplatonists, with their theurgic substructure. The present Christian problem, of whether God should be referred to in masculine imagery and by the masculine pronoun, was resolved by the Neoplatonist Damascius with his suggested use of the term "that yonder". Yet the apparently image-free metaphysics of the Neoplatonist is also anthropomorphic in one major respect: these transcendent principles have desires. In the end the motivating force of the abstract Neoplatonist principle is desire itself: thus the One "wants to be by itself".

Damascius proceeds (29, p.57) to develop this theme. "That yonder" does not abide being known (29, p.56): then follows a statement on what may be known, which captures a great deal of Neoplatonist thought.

> ... the genuinely knowable is that which is perceived in a certain distinction, and which is in some way species (εἶδος). This, by its own circumscription accepts circumscribing knowledge. Wherefore knowledge begins from such as this: but its opposite is entirely unspeakable, and is not capable of being grasped. (29, p.57)

This is classical Neoplatonism. What is known is that which is distinguishable, or divisible, and that which is circumscribed. The casting of a circumference around an entity is that which makes it both a thing, and a knowable thing. Both concepts, that is of divisibility and circumscription, are clearly

linked; the drawing of boundaries is that which enables the division to occur. The idea of *eidos* ("form", or "species") is also crucial: it is this basic notion of Greek philosophy which is dominant here. This term, which has such broad ramifications in Greek philosophy, originally means "shape" or "outline", and comes to mean "class" in the logical sense. It forms the axis of the discussion in Plato's Sophist and Theaetetus, but despite its tendency to develop an abstract meaning, never loses its connection with the idea of shape. Circumscription, divisibility and shape are all linked in this way, thus providing us with the picture of the knowable.

Yet the soul suffers its anguish, its desire for knowledge of the ultimate. In its search to produce some offspring this "gnostic labour" continually misproduces: it deals only with the offspring of the One, and not with that principle which lies beyond it. Damascius concludes this section with a statement which summarises the dilemma at the heart of every metaphysical system:

> This is the cause of the fact that all research, every judgment about that principle is ambiguous, according to whether it is knowable, or unknowable. (29, p.57)

The fundamental problem of a system which posits a transcendent principle lies in this ambiguous character of the knowledge acquired. Such a principle has a face which is open to knowledge, and in some sense available to the mind: yet behind this face lies another reality, which is inaccessible and clothed in mystery. This is the aspect which escapes imagery, and defies any attempt to put it into words: the mystery which lies behind the familiar. Any principle which is connected with our experience, but is at the same time defined as lying beyond it, offers this ambiguous aspect. The familiar gives way to the unfamiliar.

Damascius emphasizes the oppositeness of the transcendent principle. This is a development, and represents a kind of radicalism on his part, in comparison with Proclus. In the second last of the passages quoted (29, p.57), the transcendent is referred to as the "opposite" of the knowable: the word used is ἀντίξους, which signifies "opposed", in concept or place. It has been noted earlier (p.110) that Proclus was at pains to eliminate the notion of oppositeness from his account of transcendence: further, that he repudiated the idea that negative theology was a means of dealing with such oppositeness. He espoused a view of negation which allowed the negative to produce other than opposites. It is clear, however, that there was a group among his contemporaries who thought of the transcendent principle as opposite. Damascius aligns himself with this party, and sees it as opposite to the One, the next hypostasis. The consequences are clear: Proclus is able to emphasize continuity and accessibility, in the manner suitable to a theurgist/philosopher, whilst Damascius stresses the absolute gulf which separates human experience from the

transcendent. The latter lays much more emphasis on the impotence of language and thought: such "gnostic" activities amount to nothing more than pointing aimlessly. At least we know the direction, even if we do not know what we are pointing at.

"All that we say here is but vain rhapsody" (7, p.14).

This is but one of the striking remarks of Damascius, whose philosophical language sounds a new note within the history of Greek philosophy. He continues with the theme of the supersession of language: we know the things we know, but we also know of them that they are limited. We simultaneously know them and assess them, and in this case we find them to be unworthy of the first hypothesis (of the Parmenides).

There is a problem here, about the possibility of knowing one's own ignorance, on which Damascius has firm views. He quotes Plato (Theaetetus 199A) to the effect that it is impossible not to know what one knows. If one really does know it, then one cannot claim ignorance, though of course one may make a mistake of some kind. Damascius agrees, but limits the extent of his endorsement:

For Plato rightly says that it is impossible to say that one knows, and that one knows nothing; but the last knowable thing is the One, and we know nothing beyond the One. All that we say here is but vain rhapsody. (7, p.14)

Such language will inevitably turn into silence, as we realise that we know nothing of those things which we are not permitted to know, because it is impossible for us to know them (7, p.15). In fact Damascius would seem to be controverting Plato, in that he admits that we know our ignorance, of that which lies beyond the One. The logical problem is clear: how can we know about that which we do not know? The same problem arises over the self-supersession of language: how does discourse stand outside itself, in order to be able to assess itself, and find itself wanting? Language can only provide linguistic products; it cannot provide anti-language products.

Damascius addresses himself to the question in section 6 (p. 9). If this thing really is unknowable, he asks, how is that we are writing so much about it? Is this incessant word-manufacturing simply pointless? Further, with respect to that which is said to be unknowable, it is not clear whether we knew this to be the case, or whether we are ignorant of it. Ignorance might seem to be appropriate to that which is not known, but if we are in fact ignorant of it we can make no claims about its unknowability. Damascius continues with what seems to be an argument against negative theology, which goes as follows (6, p.9). One cannot negate a thing of another, unless one knows the other: the man blind from birth can deny that colour possesses warmth. He is

able to do so because he can experience warmth, though he knows nothing of colour. In fact his negation is defective, because of this asymmetry in what he knows: all he knows of colour is that it is not sensitive to touch. This piece of knowledge is not in fact a form of knowing colour, but it is knowing his own ignorance. Similarly, when we say of the ultimate principle that it is unknowable, we do not succeed in making a genuine negation, since we are not fully cognizant of both elements in the negative statement: like the blind man, we are in fact revealing our own ignorance. Just as he "knows" that colour is not sensitive to touch, we "know" that the ultimate is unknowable. This, suggests Damascius, is not knowledge at all, but simply an admission of our own mental state.

Damascius' argument is a subtle critique of the *via negativa.* We have noted elsewhere his opposition to it, and his apparent alignment with the anti-negation group alluded to by Proclus. He returns here to his familiar argument, that to employ negation (or analogy for that matter), one must have knowledge of both entities, namely the quality negated and the thing of which the quality is negated. Now in this case the thing concerned is unknown, and the negative method cannot do its work. However with the blind man argument, Damascius is adding something: suppose, he says, negation were used. What logical assessment of it can be given? His answer is that like the blind man's statement about colour not being sensitive to touch, the claim about the unknowability of the Ultimate is not a claim about the Ultimate at all, but a statement of the limits of one's own mental capacity.

> It is therefore in us that the unknowing of that of which we are ignorant resides. For the knowledge of the known is in the knower, not in the thing known. (6, p.10)

Unknowing is a state of the subject, misrepresented as the unknowability of the object.

Thus Damascius' contribution is to make negation a state of the subject, and this is a unique development. It is in keeping with his emphasis on the subject elsewhere. We have noted already Proclus' tendency to reduce discourse and thought all to that straining of the mind to create (ὠδίς), but Damascius goes much further, and employs philosophical arguments to reduce apparently objective statements to subjective self-assessments.

The same theme is developed in an extraordinary passage in sections 4 and 5 (pp. 6–8). That highest being, most worthy of our veneration, is said to be Nothing. There are two kinds of nothing, that which is higher than the One, and that which is lower than it. "If in saying this", says Damascius (4, p.6), "we are walking in a void, there are also two ways of walking in a void". There is the Nothing which is so because of its perfection, and that which is so because of its imperfection. If in the course of discussing this principle of Nothingness, our language is undermined ("pris de vertige", says the transla-

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Chapter VIII. Arian negative theology: Aetius and Eunomius

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VIII. Arian negative theology: Aetius and Eunomius

The Anomean branch of the Arian school provides an interesting use of the principles of negative theology. Both Aetius and Eunomius draw on this tradition, yet they simultaneously offer a theory of the positive origins of language.

Aetius came from Antioch: he was made bishop there in 362. The orthodox view is that he was not properly educated, but his surviving work provides evidence of a subtle and rigorous mind, more philosophical in approach than that of the orthodox theologians. Antioch had become a centre of Arianism, and Aetius wrote a series of theses in defence of the principle of the unlikeness of the Father and the Son. Forty-seven of these highly compacted arguments survive, but Epiphanius reports that he composed three hundred such theses. Had they survived, we would have had a much clearer insight into Christian Platonism than we have: it is clear that Aetius and Eunomius were not Aristotelians, as the orthodox polemic had it, but much closer to being Aristotelian Neoplatonists (despite Wickham's claim, discussed below). And they were much more Platonist than those who often pass for Platonist Christians, such as the Cappadocians, or Origen, or to some extent Augustine.

Discussion of Aetius has been greatly assisted by the publication of Wickham's excellent article, the Syntagmation of Aetius the Anomean. A text and a translation are offered and together with the latter bold gesture, there are provided a number of useful notes. In what follows, we will concentrate on those aspects of the text which bear on language and negation: an attempt will be made to reconstruct the ideas of Aetius, and to shed still more light on what was meant by the text. Inquiry into the *via negativa* may seem somewhat narrow, but a mastery of the terminology in this area can sometimes unlock quite a broad set of ideas for the would-be expositor of late Greek thought.

Aetius' view was that God was ingeneracy, neither more nor less, and that he was superior to all generated existents, including the Son. The term "ingeneracy" is the only applicable term and it reveals God's actual essence. In the introductory preamble, Aetius refers to his opponents as "temporists" (χρονῖται): this is Wickham's translation, and the following discussion will make frequent use of this. Why is the opposing party associated with time? Wickham quotes ps. Athanasius (Dialogues on the Trinity, c.11; PG 28, 1173–1201), who says that "we" have the Son being generated (γεννάω), and that generation is a time-bound process.

But this is not altogether clear, and it is not clear how Wickham's references to Eunomius clarify the problem. It is however clear that the issue of

time had begun to be of crucial importance in trinitarian debate. It figures greatly in Gregory of Nyssa's treatment of the issue, and he was roughly contemporaneous with Aetius. And later, time plays an important role in Augustine's De Trinitate, and in this work, together with the Confessions and the City of God, the Patristic philosophy of time reaches its highest development.

In chapter X, it will be pointed out that for Gregory God is out of time; that he sees time as implying measurement, and the deity is of course incommensurable. Gregory also places the Son out of time. Further, it will be noted in that chapter that Gregory caricatures Eunomius' view by the continued use of the word "follow" (ἕπομαι), where it is a matter of God's ingeneracy "following" his essence. Through this misrepresentation of Eunomius, Gregory is able to find temporal sequence in the nature of Eunomius' deity, and to accuse him of a mundane conception of God. Gregory's strong preoccupation with the question of time dominates much of his response to Eunomius. In other words Gregory's accusation of his Anomean opponent, is that he has temporalized the deity. Aetius is probably referring to some such point of view, so that when he complains of "temporalists", he means those who dwell on the subject of time, and who claim to find the Achilles' heel of his system in doing so: time, they say, is necessarily part of the Anomean relationship between Father and Son. And, as we will see, Gregory makes "timelessness" an important member of the collection of negative epithets which had been current since Middle Platonism. The χρονῖται, on this view, would be those who harped on the subject of time.

The thrust of Aetius' response is given in thesis 4:

> If the Deity remains everlastingly in ingenerate nature, and the offspring is everlastingly offspring, then the perverse doctrine of the "homoousion" and the "homoiousion" will be demolished; incomparability in essence is established when each nature abides unceasingly in the proper rank of its nature. (trans., text of Wickham, op. cit.)

The point appears to be that Aetius takes both Father and Son out of time as well as his orthodox opponent. If he does this, then he believes that it will be unnecessary to assert identity of being, or likeness of being, between Father and Son. This contradiction, that the different are the same, was necessitated (he seems to imply) by the desire to preserve the timelessness of the Godhead. But that problem can be solved simply by taking the Son's nature as "offspring" (γέννημα) out of time as well. The last clause of the quotation probably means this: not only are the Father and Son not of the same essence, but they are not even to be compared. Each exists perennially in his own rank (ἀξίωμα): Wickham notes (op. cit. 552) that ἀξίωμα and τάξις are often equivalents. I take this to be an allusion to the Neoplatonic principle that things have their own existence appropriately to their own stage in the

κυριωτάτην is drawn from the language of Aristotle about οὐσία (Cat. 3ᵃ1; 1ᵇ11). However the word δηλόω, or δηλωτικός, is not used by Aristotle in this passage: he uses other terms for the idea of "signifying" the essence of something. It seems to be a word brought in by Dexippus, in his exposition, perhaps through a conflation of the Cratylus (422D, where the word occurs) and the Categories. The coincidence in language between Aetius and Dexippus is tempting, and it is possible that Aetius had read Dexippus' commentary on Aristotle, or that he had been educated by someone who had. In general it is true that Aristotle (and the Categories) were enjoying a revival of interest, and exercising some influence, as the polemic of Basil and Gregory shows: but it is always a *mediated* Aristotle, an Aristotle read through Neoplatonist eyes. Aetius is dealing with the problem of how to signify essence, just as Aristotle did in the Categories, but in a Neoplatonized way.

For, like Dexippus, Aetius offers a negation as a means of revealing essence. The term *agenneton* is his negation, and he goes on to clarify its logical status, raising the question of whether it is a privation. In other words, Aetius is aware of the logical status of his proposition. "Ingeneracy" does not just happen to be a negation, unnoticed by Aetius: he is aware of the logical basis of what he is doing, namely trying to demonstrate essence by negation. This is why he enquires into the nature of his negation.

As we have seen, Dexippus takes a step not taken by Aristotle, when he claims that *ousia* can be designated through negation. Aetius is probably using some such reading of the Categories as this: if not directly influenced by Dexippus, he is influenced by a tradition of interpretation of the Aristotelian problem of how to signify *ousia*, a tradition which recommends negation as one method.

In what follows, Aetius devotes considerable attention to demonstrating that ingeneracy is not a privation (*steresis*). His discussion suggests that the point was a matter for debate. But the debate over it engaged in both Basil and Gregory, discussed below in several contexts, is not a sufficient explanation. Both Basil and Gregory tend to disclaim any interest in the issue, and Gregory claims that no-one would ever have argued that ingeneracy was a privation in the first place. In other words, the claim against which Aetius and Eunomius are defending themselves does not come from their Cappadocian opponents. Who are the advocates of privation then? Perhaps other representatives of orthodoxy: but it has been argued below that Basil and Gregory were both uninterested in, and uninformed about, the issue of privation. If these two were detached from this important aspect of Neoplatonic logic, who among the orthodox could be expected to be more expert in the issue than they? It is very difficult to specify any candidate.

Aetius and Eunomius were here defending themselves against certain Neoplatonists. Assailed on one flank by the orthodox, I surmise that they were assailed on the other by Neoplatonist critics. Aetius' association with the Em-

tion of state or a state of privation. If it is a privation of state, how should what is not present be counted as present to God?...

The first few words run: εἰ αἱ στερήσεις ἕξεών εἰσιν ἀφαιρέσεις. It may be noted that this is a slightly unusual use of the word ἀφαίρεσις, which is usually confined to mathematical abstractions in later Neoplatonism. But Aetius seems to think that there are two available concepts of privation, both of which have to suffer a *reductio ad absurdum.* The first definition of privation envisages the removal of a characteristic from a *hexis* ("state"), or a *hexis* which is a deprived state: that is, a privation is either the removal of something, or a state which has undergone this removal. If we are to categorize them (which is unwise), we would have to say that the former is a logical concept of privation, and the latter ontological. But the former concept is difficult: Aetius' *reductio ad absurdum* really treats this type of privation as an absence: "how should what is not present be counted as present to God?" This is an interesting refinement of the discussion of privation, and it may give more of an insight into the thinking of the anti-negation group in Proclus' circle, than we have had heretofore. If privation comes down to the absence of something, and all negations are seen to be statements of absence such as this, then it would be impossible to characterize God by negation. Interestingly, Aetius allows two possible concepts of privation, a luxury he can allow himself since he intends to exclude both.

It should be recalled that Aristotle defined negation as an absence (ἀπουσία) of a thing in the Metaphysics 1004[a], and here he seems to indicate that for privation to occur, some substrate is necessary. Now Aetius does not use the term absence, but speaks rather of that which is "not present" (τὸ μὴ προσόν): nevertheless the closeness to Aristotle's thought is clearly there. Perhaps, it may be speculated, Aetius was in touch with interpretations of Aristotle which brought these ideas together through the juxtaposition of one Aristotelian text with another.

Finally, some remarks should be made on Aetius' philosophy of names (*onomata*), since this figures so largely in the debate between Eunomius and his adversaries. In the first place, we find the Philonic principle that a name is always given by a "parent", or that which is ontologically prior. The ability to name implies superiority: this is implicit in thesis 17.

If "The Ingenerate" affords no transcendence in essence over against 'offspring', the Son being transcended only verbally will know that it is those who use that title who are superior to himself, not he who is called his "God" and "Father".

The argument seems to be that those who give names are superior: it is difficult to see Aetius' point, because a name with no foundation in essence would either be a mistake, or the result of *epinoia,* "imaginative thinking".

nature, nor did he possess it in some prior state, becoming ingenerate by the privation of this state. It is exceedingly impious and destructive of true thinking about God and his completeness, and especially of the understanding of those who would discover him, to say that God is wholly deprived of something, namely his attributes. It is difficult to argue with any sanity that somebody is deprived of something which did not previously belong to him. If then ingeneracy is neither in thought, nor by privation, as the above remarks show, nor is it applicable to a part (for He is without parts, nor is there anything in him as other), for he is one-dimensional, and uncomposed. Nor is there anything else beyond him; for He, one and alone, is ingenerate; then it (ingeneracy) must be ingenerate essence. (Migne, PG 30, 841D–844B)

This passage needs careful commentary before we move on to other ideas of Eunomius, and the commentaries of Basil and Gregory. Eunomius is much closer to Neoplatonism than are the Cappadocians, and not much headway can be made with him unless he is studied in the light of the vocabulary of the Neoplatonist commentators on Aristotle. The syllogistic form of presentation, so repugnant to Basil, is very similar to the mode of argument adopted by Proclus in the Elements of Theology. Eunomius begins by establishing that God is the first being, that it is logically impossible for another being to be prior. The argument has the character of a demonstration, and it aims to prove two things:

(I) that nothing is prior to God
(II) that he is ungenerated.

The two are interconnected for Eunomius, in that he sees the inevitable priority of God as implying his ingeneracy. In this way he is able to *demonstrate* the quality of ingenerateness: it is a necessary conclusion of the very concept of God. Thus one acquires a characterization of God through formal, logical, methods, and it so happens that the characteristic thus deduced is a negative one. In this way he has proceeded like Euclid, whose first entity was defined negatively, and whose manner of proceeding was so attractive to Proclus (see chapter VI). Thus Eunomius has both a proven characteristic, and a negative characteristic. He has blended a concern with negative theology, with an interest in Aristotelian-style demonstration.

Eunomius proceeds, in the above passage, to distinguish his negation from privation. Our discussion above (see pp.131 ff.) shows that Aetius had a similar concern, and it has been noted that debate took place in non-Christian Neoplatonism over the relation of privation (*steresis*) to negative theology. Eunomius is obviously aware of this set of problems, and is at pains to say that he is not using a privation with the alpha privative in his *agennesia.* Why? Because it was the clear understanding of the later Greek philosophers that the privative type of negation carried with it a positive implication of some sort. A privation implied some sort of ground, or identifiable entity, of which

the privation could be predicated. To speak of blindness, a privative concept, has the appearance of speaking negatively. It could appear that to speak of ingeneracy might be somewhat like speaking of blindness, and Eunomius wants to make sure that the difference is understood. Blindness implies that the subject is a living creature, human or animal, who could logically be expected to be sighted. It is a negative concept of the privative kind, and it carries with it a statement about the nature of the thing which is considered to be deprived of some entity or faculty. Eunomius' "ingeneracy" is not intended to imply anything at all about the subject: it is a negation which is nothing more than a negation.

Eunomius' philosophy has its roots in the Greek philosophy of the period: it makes for more use of Neoplatonic logic than does Patristic philosophy in general. Thus for some enlightenment as to what Eunomius might have meant by his refusal of privation in respect of his characterization of God as *agennesia*, we must turn to writers like Proclus, Syrianus or Dexippus. For example, Syrianus:

> For it is necessary to postulate one nature in the state (*hexis*) and in the privation. And this is the greatest difference between privation and negation. (CAG VI, 61, 37 ff.)

Syrianus sees some posited state as causing a degree of common nature between the *hexis* about which the predication is being made, and finds this to be an important difference. If we turn to Alexander of Aphrodisias, we find him also inclined to stress the importance of the difference between the two. Commenting on Aristotle Metaphysics 1011^{b}19, Alexander says that

> ... negation (*apophasis*) is predicated of indefinites, but this is not indeed the case with blindness. (CAG I, 327, l. 20)

Using the usual example of blindness, Alexander notes that to predicate blindness ties down the statement: one cannot predicate blindness of a wall, since one cannot predicate sight of such an entity. It therefore follows that to predicate blindness implies the possibility of predicating sight, which narrows down the field enormously. By contrast, negations open up the field to virtually complete indefiniteness. Alexander continues:

> In this, he says, privation differs from negation, in that negation is predicated of things which are, and are not, but privation of some underlying nature, which manifests form (*eidos*) and state (*hexis*). (CAG I, 327, l. 27)

This is the background to Eunomius' claim that his negative description of the deity is not a case of privation. If it were, some prior state would be implied, and Eunomius' principle is that God has no antecedent. Eunomius

clearly regards the privation as "secondary" to the pre-existing state: the privations are δεύτεραι, and this adjective refers back to the very beginning of his demonstration, where it is claimed that God cannot be preceded, that that which is "prior to the secondary" (πρὸ τοῦ δευτέρου) would have pride of place.

In sum Eunomius' philosophy is quite technical here, like that of Aetius. He goes further than Aetius on privation, in that he exploits the Aristotelian/Neoplatonist logic of privation in order to emphasize that privation implies the ontological priority of the state of which the privation is being predicated. The Neoplatonist commentators on Aristotle do draw the distinction between privation and negation, but as far as the present reader is aware, do not make any attempt to play on the duality involved in a privation, whereby one aspect can be distinguished from another. Eunomius' attempt to have this two-level function of privation mean ontological primary and secondariness, may not be entirely convincing, but it is nevertheless clever and shows a knowledge of contemporary philosophy. As we observed earlier, there was some argument in Proclus' camp over whether the negations of negative theology were actually privations:

> Let no one attempt to devalue such a form of discourse, by claiming that these negations are privations... (Platonic Theology II.5)

Proclus must be referring to a debate similar to that to which Eunomius is referring, because Eunomius shows the same sensitivity to the notion that his *agennetos*, as a description for God, might be depreciated if regarded as a privation. Elsewhere Proclus takes negation to imply some kind of superiority of being; and in the Platonic Theology I.12, he compares privations unfavourably with those negations which "are the transcendent causes of all which springs from them". It is not necessary here to go over what has been said in chapter VI, on Proclus, and on Aetius, above, but the general point is clear. Privation was a kind of negation which had a different logic. Exponents of negative theology, such as Eunomius and Proclus, wished to exclude that particular logic from the negations of their own *via negativa.* Proclus in particular developed the difference between privative negation, and negation itself, in order to provide a more secure basis for the apophatic way.

Let us now look at the approach to this matter taken by Basil and by Gregory of Nyssa in their respective critiques of Eunomius. Basil's reply has been discussed and expounded at great length by Anastos (in Fedwick, Basil ... 67 ff.), and there is a wealth of information here which places every reader in his debt. The reply quotes Eunomius verbatim on the secondary nature of privative negations, and proceeds to a lengthy response (I.9, PG 29, 532A). Basil's first point is that this view is the "wisdom of the world". These words are the words of Aristotle, he says, who argues in the Categories that priva-

tions are secondary. Now this is not true: Aristotle does not make this claim in the Categories. He does discuss privations and negations at length, and he also does discuss the notions of priority and posteriority (14^a 27 ff.), but he nowhere connects the two issues, and nowhere makes the claim which Eunomius makes. He does speak of secondary substances, but not in relation to privation (1^b13). In other words Basil has not read the source, and he is unaware of the real advance that Eunomius is making. (The claim that privations are secondary is not in Aristotle's text, but it is possible that it results from the kind of interpretation which might seek to synthesize different parts of the Categories, whether or not this was intended. School interpreters would be quite capable of drawing together different parts of the work to form a somewhat artificial synthesis, and Eunomius may have done this, or may be using a Neoplatonist commentator on the Categories who has done it. If this is so, it is just possible that Basil may know of the same type of commentary, and this may explain his remark. But it is more likely that he has not understood the point clearly, and has only a hazy recollection of Aristotle's Categories. In any case Anastos cannot be right when he claims, op. cit. p.84, that "Basil heatedly repudiates Eunomius' reference to privatives because, he says quite rightly, it is based upon Aristotle's *Categories*...").

Basil objects to the use of Aristotle, rather than the inspiration of the Spirit, and continues to bluster, in Biblical terms, against Eunomius' use of secular philosophy. Many terms of a similar kind to Eunomius' *agennetos,* could be brought forward to describe the divinity (532C), such as invisible, immortal and so on. All the terms chosen by Basil have the alpha privative, and so resemble Eunomius' own term. Basil continues:

> We consider them to be of the same type as the "*agennetos*". If some people call such things privative, then that means nothing to us. Neither do we recognize such verbal trickery, nor do we seek those who do. (PG 29, 532C)

Basil shows here that the point made by Eunomius is wasted on him, and is clearly unaware of the debate over the logic of privation, as compared with that of negation. He continues to miss the point with great consistency, but does raise the interesting question of why this attribute alone has been selected by Eunomius, of all the things that could be said of God. Basil:

> Why is it more appropriate to philosophize about the ingenerate rather than the indestructible, and indeed about any term of the same type which could be brought forward? None of the others is conducive to his brand of impiety: therefore he forgets the rest, and indeed the myriad things, as they are, which are said about God. (PG 29, 533B–C)

As Anastos says (op. cit. p.84), Basil means here that the ingenerate is the on-

Who did? The answer is not clear, but we may note that Eunomius' problem is exactly the same as that of Proclus, since some were complaining that his *via negativa* consisted of privations only, as noted earlier. It may be surmised that Eunomius' defence of his defence (Ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀπολογίας ἀπολογία) was aimed at a much broader group of detractors than Basil alone, and that these detractors were more to the point than Basil. It has been suggested, in respect of Aetius, that such opponents were actually Neoplatonists.

The point of the fragment is, of course, that a privation provides for the logical possibility of the application of the attribute which is denied: in other words, to say that God is blind, which is a privation, is also to imply the logical possibility that God could have eyes which see in the normal manner. Eunomius' point is that the negation involved must be some other type of negation, unless some absurdity is to result. Gregory's response, curiously enough, is as we might expect. He asks who, in the history of creation, would ever have maintained such a thing, and indeed points to a logical flaw in the view. If one were to claim this as a privative negation, one would be asserting that God lacked something which properly belonged to his natural state. Eunomius' response is indeed mysterious. It would make perfect sense if it came up in the same context as Proclus' discussion of privation: if, for the sake of argument, some opponents of Eunomius had been saying, as they had against Proclus, that this type of negation was privative and that *therefore the via negativa would not work in such a circumstance,* then one could understand. But we cannot see that this was the case. Eunomius' remark is a curious anomaly, and constitutes evidence of a broader and deeper discussion than that displayed by the narrow triangular debate that we have inherited, that between Eunomius, Basil and Gregory.

Reverting now to Gregory's treatment of Eunomius' view of privation, it has been noted that Gregory now takes seriously the issue of the negatives applied to God. He offers a genuine challenge to the philosophy underlying Eunomius' position, and it runs as follows (Contra Eun. II, 572 ff. Jaeger). All words aim to express the knowledge of some reality, but reality is twofold: it is divided into the intelligible and the sensible. With regard to the intelligible world, there is a certain degree of striving required for thought to hit the mark. We may fail in either thought or word, or both (Gregory here allows for the possibility that our thought may correctly grasp the transcendent, though our words may fail us). Some of our concepts are formed by taking the familiar and then removing it: we know about change, corporeality and so on. We can form words which are based on these concepts, words like "changeless", or "incorporeal". Gregory's next statement on this is worthy of quotation, since it is crucial for negative theology:

Those who wish classify such types of nouns as they please, and apply other terms to these words, such as "privative", "abstractive" (ἀφαιρετικά), calling them what they

nasia) of men and that of angels. Gregory sensibly points out that there cannot be degrees of immortality. It is difficult to see what Eunomius means: Schaff and Wace (the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers editors, p.309) suggest that the solution to the puzzle lies along the lines of the ambiguity of the word *athanatos,* which can mean either "not dead", or "immortal". This doesn't seem to resolve the problem: perhaps Eunomius, like a Neoplatonist, envisages different degrees in states or qualities, where they occur at different levels of being. Thus human oneness would be less pure than angelic oneness, and similarly with immortality. Whether or not this is what Eunomius means, Gregory complains that he fails to be consistent in his doctrine of privation, that he considers separation from good things to be privation, but that separation from bad things is not privation. I take this to be a misunderstanding of Eunomius, whose actual position is not this, and who believes that he can demonstrate that his "ingeneracy" (*agennesia*) is not a privative negation. The difference between privative negations and ordinary negations is not a matter of goodness or badness, but is determined on logical grounds.

Eunomius complains that his opponents are "unscientific" (ἀνεπιστήμονας Contra Eun. II, 592 J.), and it is certainly true that Basil and Gregory are ignorant of the highly developed system of thought from which he is drawing. Their Platonism is of the loose kind, involving an imprecise emphasis on transcendence and mystery, but not the closely argued philosophy of negation which is found in Proclus and Damascius.

Gregory continues to argue about privation, in apparent ignorance of the logic of Eunomius' position. He complains again:

> He [Eunomius] actually considers that the destructible is not opposed (ἀντιδιαστέλλεσθαι) to the incorruptible, and that the abstracting indicator (ἀφαιρετικὴ σημασία = the α privative) does not indicate the absence of the bad, but that the essence itself is referred to through the word under discussion. (Contra Eun. II, 594 J.)

We note firstly the return of the word *aphairesis,* whose derivative seems to be used here as a synonym for "privative". But Gregory is simply at a loss to understand the point made by Eunomius, which seems to be along these lines: there is a negation entailed in the term "ingenerate"; it is not however a privative negation since the logic of privation is inappropriate to God, carrying as it does covert statements about the nature of the being under discussion; nor does the negative involve the opposite in this case, though negation can be taken by some to entail opposition (see vol. I, 136); but the negation under study here is the type which reveals the transcendent cause, a positive negation. Proclus refines these ideas later, but he regards some negations as hypernegations, and as referring positively to transcendence. It seems probable that Eunomius believes something similar, namely that the term "ingenerate" reveals the actually transcendent cause of all that is generated: it is a

positive negation of the type later envisaged by Proclus. This is why he contests the idea that there is some incompatibility between the generated and the ingenerate; he sees a causal relation between the two in the Neoplatonist manner, and far from seeing them as opposites, he stresses their continuity. Gregory, for his part, simply doesn't understand how a negative word can denote the essence of something, and it is clear that he was simply not aware of certain developments in philosophy. The "land animal", as Gregory calls him (Contra Eun. II, 625–6 J.), in contrast with the soaring Basil, claims to have found the one word which really points to the essence of God, and to have uncovered the logic of this one negative word. Naturally then, Eunomius responds to the Cappadocians:

> "But I do not see how God can transcend his own works through things which do not belong to him". (Contra Eun. II, 596 J.)

In other words, Eunomius believes that it is impossible both to assert God's transcendence, and to attempt to validate a string of labels for him, all of which are drawn from mundane experience. And Gregory does try to do both at once.

In the above exposition, it has been found useful to draw on the comparison with Proclus, since there seemed to be a similarity of ideas. It should be noted that such similarity has been discovered in an entirely different area, by J. Daniélou (Eunome l'arien et l'exégèse du Cratyle, 426–7). Daniélou deals with the debate over the origins of language, which takes place between Eunomius and Gregory: Proclus' commentary on Plato's Cratylus, the ancient text which is first and foremost in any discussion of names, shows strong terminological and intellectual links with Eunomius' discussion, as given in his own document, or as reflected by Gregory's response. Daniélou's conclusion is similar to the view taken above: that "Proclus provides evidence of a tradition known to Eunomius" (op. cit. 427). He further surmises that it is the milieu of the disciples of Iamblichus which provides the tradition from which Eunomius draws, and which culminates in Proclus. Whether this hypothesis will work for our subject area, namely the *via negativa,* is open to doubt: Iamblichus has not been found to be seminal in this field, and as is clear from the above, the Athenian tradition of Aristotelian study has shed the most light on the nature and power of negation. Thus we would surmise that Eunomius was deeply influenced by a Neoplatonist tradition, and probably that represented by Dexippus, Plutarch of Athens and Syrianus. Daniélou goes so far as to call Eunomius a contemporary of Proclus (loc. cit.), and this is not the case: what we can say, however, is that Proclus stands in a tradition with which Eunomius was familiar at an early stage. Eunomius died in 394, and therefore knew the Neoplatonist thought of a group two generations older than Proclus. We should probably be looking for things which

of Truth sounds like a speculative extension of his ideas. Grobel supposes (The Gospel of Truth, 181) the words "the name of the Father is the Son" to be an interpolation in the Gospel of Truth: if he is right, the Nag Hammadi version of the Gospel, which contains these words, may be a later redaction incorporating some Arian elements. I have argued this case elsewhere.

Eunomius frequently reverts to names. In fact it could be said that the question of *onomata* is the theme which dominates his Apology.

> If anyone contentiously adheres to his familiar opinions, and does not attend to what is said, he would insist that the word for the Father was indicative of his essence: let him endow the Son with the same word, by which manoeuvre he has already given a share in the same essence, to each of the two, a share in the Son to the Father, and a share of the Father to the Son. For identity of being compells those who hold this opinion about them to call them by the same name. (PG 30, 861 A)

Eunomius believes in the real value of names, that names are κατὰ φύσιν, not κατὰ θέσιν as Aristotle believed (see vol. I, 99). Accordingly he was concerned that a due amount of caution and scepticism be exercised in the use of names for God. The name of God is a given thing: it is part of the real. Eunomius came back to this point in defence against Basil: the response by Gregory makes this clear. Eunomius reproaches Basil for suggesting that the term ingenerate is an abstract concept (ἐπίνοια), and he believes that the ingeneracy preexists any exercise of the human intelligence (Contra Eun. II, 44 J.):

> The ingenerate should not be assigned to God merely by abstract concept. For what is thus spoken in words is of such a nature as to dissipate. (Gregory, quoting Eunomius)

Gregory is baffled by this view of language: he wants to know what type of language does not pass away. All words, whether right or wrong, disappear once they have passed our lips, says Gregory: they aren't imprinted on the spot. What Eunomius seems to imply is that there is a category of terms which are given, which exist, and which are part of the furniture of reality. Against this Gregory develops a lengthy statement of God's transcendence and ineffability, and then returns to what he sees as the pretentiousness of the claim that this single word captures, indeed in some sense *is*, the essence of God (Contra Eun. II, 125 J.). The preceding passages are full of all the standard statements about the inexpressibility of God, and they read like the Middle Platonist statements of several generations before. Gregory's position is roughly this: God is unspeakable, and our efforts to name him are inadequate; they do however point us in the right direction. Eunomius, on the other hand, despite his contempt for the plethora of terms for God provided by the orthodox, is in the end much more pretentious himself, since the one term he offers is alleged to be not merely a sign, or a symbol, or a pointer to God, but God's *very essence*. Gregory asserts that Basil has already shown

that this term "has no existence in nature" (ὡς οὐκ ἐκ φύσεως ὄντων, Contra Eun. II, 125 J.). Clearly Eunomius is a kind of linguistic realist, at least so far as some terms go. In fact Gregory later complains that he observes no difference between "necessity" (the given, in nature) and the name "the ingenerate". Gregory recommends the use of language as a guide, but has no sympathy with Eunomius' tendency to reify language.

> For God is not an expression, nor does he have his essence in voice or utterance. (Contra Eun. II, 148 J.)

But men have the right to build words (ὀνοματοποιία) according to their own judgment.

There is also a question of timing which runs throughout the discussion. Gregory agrees to accept the term "ingenerate", so long as it is considered to be a word devised by human beings to grasp at the divine state *after* the creation process.

> He says that God was what He is before man came into being. We do not deny this... But we maintain that it [the world] received its name after the namer came into being. (Contra Eun. II, 166 J.)

For Gregory, the namer is man: it is man, after all, who needs instruction, and who devises language to clarify his view of things. God has no need of language or instruction. This is the fundamental point of division between the two: for Eunomius, language is given, along with nature itself. And it was given *prior* to the creation of man – thus for Eunomius, God is the namer, and language preexists man.

The emphasis on priority here reminds us very much of Philo's discussion of naming. In fact, despite the time gap between Philo and Eunomius, there are few texts so close to Eunomius. Philo's view has been annotated in volume I, but it can be recalled here. God created the world, and with it certain names. Then he created Adam, whose task it was to distribute names correctly. Adam however was unable to name himself, and so received his name from God: he was unable to do so because a name is based on nature, and Adam was unable to know himself. Only God could do so, and therefore only God could give the name "Adam". On Philo's view then, names are natural, and reflect reality. Only a person who is prior can grasp reality sufficiently to give a correct name. Adam can therefore name the things which follow him in order of being, but his antecedent must name him. Thus ontological priority is required for true naming: as parents precede their children, they can name their children. Names do not come from posterior entities. Now Gregory reverses this: names are devised subsequently, and his is the conventionalist position.

It is possible that Philo's views hardened into a tradition which influenced Eunomius. He apparently discussed the Babel story (Daniélou, Eunome... 427) and this received an elaborate exegesis from Philo (De confusione linguarum). Further, Gregory asserts that Eunomius borrowed from Philo (Contra Eun. III, 8 J.). But in any case Daniélou (Eunome ... 425 ff.) gives various Neoplatonist sources to establish the theme of the natural basis of names in this quarter.

The extent to which the discussion of names makes its return in this period is extraordinary. Long dead issues are given a new lease of life, and reading Gregory's response to Eunomius, one could believe oneself to be back in the period of middle Stoicism, reading discussions of the relationship between *onomata* and thought, or of the notion of meaning (the *lekton*). It is the Trinity which provokes this revival of the philosophy of language, since it raises the issue of names and being all over again. Gregory even accuses Eunomius of reviving the Cratylus, the Platonic dialogue which most of all deals with names (Contra Eun. II, 404 J.). He believes that Eunomius has either read it or heard of it from some other quarter. It is not clear how well Gregory knows the Cratylus either, but he takes it to be a work which pleads for the real basis of names. He accuses Eunomius (Contra Eun. II, 403 J.) of believing that "God's greatness is seen not only in what he has made, but his wisdom is also displayed in their names (ὀνόμασι) since he adapted these nouns (προσηγορίας) most appropriately and naturally to each of the things begotten". This, apparently, is the message of the Cratylus for Gregory, that names have a natural basis, and are "given". That this is the burden of the Cratylus is not at all clear to the reader who is innocent of ancient views of that dialogue, but that is immaterial to the present consideration. The logic of Eunomius' position is clear: if names and objective nature are necessarily related, then the names "Father" and "Son" imply the existence of two separate natures. If Eunomius were to accept the view that language is a convention, then he would not be forced into the separation and ranking of Father and Son. Gregory proceeds by endeavouring to rebut this view of names, citing the variety of names in different languages. How can a name have a real relationship with its object, when in each language the name is different?

Clearly the view that names were natural (κατὰ φύσιν) had become a thing to rebut, and Gregory reiterates his position over and over again in this writing, that names are conventional in origin. To take but one example of a constant theme:

> For the meaning of the words "bread" and "lion" is not the same, nor that of "axe" and "water", but it is possible to give a specific definition for each of these names, in which the others have no share. In no way do they signify nature. But no-one would dare say that this nomenclature is inappropriate and meaningless. (Contra Eun. II, 303 J.)

Gregory returns to this idea of the conventional basis in the meaning of names over and over again. It is worthy of note that he still maintains the view that names are correctly or incorrectly used, according to convention: this is an important principle for theology, but he does not want to accept the view that a quasi-natural theology can develop simply on the basis of alleged truths about the nature of things enshrined in language itself.

Eunomius' view of names is intimately related to his theory of abstract conception (ἐπίνοια). It is clear from what Gregory says that his view was that "conception", produces some names which are therefore strictly speaking afterthoughts, things thought of after the event. The conception is the human intellectual response to what is, and it is a therefore later than what is: it constitutes a subsequent reaction to it. Words which emanate from this after-the-event conceptualization are clearly after-the-event words, and therefore to be dismissed as trivial. Gregory quotes Eunomius in a very interesting passage as follows:

> But, like a mighty wrestler, he does not relinquish his inescapable grip on us, and affirms in so many words that "these names are of human conception (ἐπίνοια) and by conception are predicated of things – names which none of the apostles or evangelists taught". And after this irresistible onslaught, he raises his holy voice, again spitting his foul abuse at us with a voice well trained in such language. "For", he says, "to introduce verbal identity into human conception, on the basis of analogy, is the work of a soul bereft of judgment but of eager intelligence, a soul which studies the words of the Lord with a weakened understanding and in a diminished mode of thought". (Contra Eun. II, 305 J.)

The question of what ἐπίνοια means is crucial to the whole debate between Eunomius and the Cappadocians. It seems to be relatively new as a technical term, and it has been translated here as "abstract conception", or simply by "conception". As indicated above, there is an element of posteriority in the word: an ἐπίνοια is a thought which comes after, which is subsequent to what is. This aspect was emphasized by E. C. E. Owen (ἐπινοέω, ἐπίνοια and allied words..., p.373), in gathering information for the compilation of the then projected Lexicon of Patristic Greek. Another element in this article stresses the inventive side of ἐπίνοια, according to which it comes to mean "fiction". Now this is a meaning for the word which will fit fairly well into a number of contexts, since Eunomius in particular wants to suggest that names for God which are developed by ἐπίνοια, are pure inventions. Gregory, on the other hand, plays down this side. The word "fiction" is too pejorative a translation, and suits only a few contexts. Owen concludes (p.376) that the term is not a technical philosophical or theological term.

It is certainly true that it is not a *classical* technical term, but there is evidence that it had become a technical term in the neo-Aristotelianism of the third and fourth centuries. Like *steresis*, it was a term brought into theologi-

cal discussion by the Anomoean Arians, from the neo-Aristotelianism of the neo-Platonist writers, if one may be permitted so cumbersome an expression. Dexippus introduces it in his commentary on Aristotle, Categories 1[a]:

> We do not have a previous notion of these things, and somehow it is necessary for us to be brought to a conception of them from the accurate use of names. (τούτων γὰρ πρόληψιν οὐκ ἔχομεν καί που πάντως ἔδει παρὰ τοῦ ἀκριβῶς τοῖς ὀνόμασι χρωμένου εἰς τὴν ἐπίνοιαν ἡμᾶς προαχθῆναι) (CAG IV², p.17, l. 11)

Dexippus uses it again (CAG IV², p.10, l. 10) as follows: "And if I say μέθυ (wine) and οἶνος (wine), there is one conception (ἐπίνοια) in respect of both, and yet the names are other, and they are not identical". Again Dexippus: "It is one thing to separate something in concept (ἐπίνοια), or mentally, and another to grasp it as being present in the subject" (op. cit. p.50, l. 14). In line 19, the expression ἐπίνοια ψιλή is used, "conception pure": this expression is also found in Ammonius' commentary on the Categories (CAG IV⁴, p.9, 26). This fifth century philosopher also uses ἐπίνοια in his commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge, where he repeatedly contrasts it with ὑπόστασις (CAG IV³, p.11, 26; p.9, 26). Things may exist mentally, or in fact, and ἐπίνοια is the word which captures the former. This same contrast between *hypostasis* and *epinoia,* between reality and thought, is found in Plotinus II.9.1.40 ff.

These authors are getting at the notion of abstraction. The "pure concept" of Dexippus (CAG IV², p.50, 19) is that which gets furthest away from the raw fact, and he gives "footedness", or the state of having feet, as an example. The foot itself is the entity, but "footedness" is the ἐπίνοια drawn from this. Thus the ἐπίνοια is not just the mental image of the object itself, but the refinement of it into an abstraction. This interpretation of it is confirmed by Syrianus' Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics (CAG IV¹, p.161, l. 26), where Syrianus claims that man grasps things "by concept, on the basis of abstraction from sensible objects" (κατ' ἐπίνοιαν ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἀφαιρέσεως τῶν αἰσθητῶν ... τὴν ὑπόστασιν εἰληφώς).

Now, in none of these cases does Aristotle use the word. His commentators introduce it in order to expound the text, and they do so with a degree of consistency which suggests that ἐπίνοια had become a technical term in the exposition of Aristotle. This is part of what we may refer to as neo-Aristotelianism, which is the tendency to develop another layer of thought and terminology for the purposes of the exposition of Aristotle. The word ἐπίνοια is not therefore an Aristotelian technical term, but a neo-Aristotelian technical term, and it means thinking about things in the abstract, as a response to the fact of things (a response which is inevitably subsequent to the existence of things). It is an after-thought, as opposed to a prior notion (πρόληψις); Owen (op. cit. 375) emphasizes that ἐπίνοια is held by Gregory and Basil to form the basis of all the sciences, and this lends support to the

The question of priority is of great importance in Eunomius' view.

He says that God was what He is, before the generation of man. Nor do we [i.e. Gregory] deny it, for whatsoever we think about God existed before the creation of the world. But we maintain that it received its name after the namer came into being. (Contra Eun. II, 166 J.)

Here is the difference between the two. For Gregory names come later, with the naming party, that is man. For Eunomius names existed along with the cosmos prior to the creation of man. The profusion of names that he finds loosely accepted by Basil and his group, are all for him after-the-event constructs, and this must include ideas which are based on analogy. Names are given, just as what is, is given. Names preexist man, and are therefore imposed on him, just as entities are. The names of orthodox theology are but fairy tales concocted by libidinous intelligences in the pursuit of linguistic nourishment.

The view of names as given entities is an odd one. Yet it is undoubtedly present in both Greek and Christian philosophy. The background in Philo has already been alluded to. A passage of Origen also asserts the principle: he rejects the view of Aristotle that names are conventional, and seeks to show that names are given. Origen uses an empirical argument:

However, since Celsus imagines that it makes no difference whether we call Zeus the Most High, or Zen, or Adonai, or Sabaoth, or Amoun like the Egyptians, or Papaeus like the Scythians, let us briefly discuss this too, at the same time reminding the reader of what was said earlier on this question when Celsus' remarks led us to deal with these matters. Accordingly, now we say also with regard to the nature of names that they are not arbitrary conventions of those who give them, as Aristotle thinks. For the languages in use among men have not a human origin, which is clear to those able to give careful attention to the nature of spells which were adapted by the authors of the languages in accordance with each different language and different pronunciation. We briefly discussed this question above when we said that if names whose nature it is to be powerful in some particular language are translated into another tongue, they no longer have any effect such as they did with their proper sounds. This phenomenon is also to be found with men's names. For if we translated the name of some man or other who from birth has had a name in the Greek language into the language of the Egyptians or Romans or some other nation, we would not bring about the experience or action which would happen if he were called by the name first given to him. Nor, if we translated into the Greek language the name of a man called in the first instance by a Roman name, would we effect what the spell is professed to do if the first name by which he was called is preserved.

If this is true of human names, what ought we to think in the case of names that are applied for whatever reason to God? (Contra Celsum, V. 45)

This is a most important passage for understanding the tradition between

Philo and Eunomius. Origen grasps the issue in its classical form, actually referring to Aristotle, and offers an opposing view. He believes in the rightness of names, as does Philo, and rejects the conventionalist view. His view is developed in response to Celsus' relativism, a typically Hellenistic attitude according to which each religious system was more or less of equal value, a consequence of which view was that the various terminologies were all of equal value, and could be substituted for each other. Origen's response is that names have a correctness which means they cannot be exchanged or translated. He clearly believes in the power of names used in religious incantations of all kinds, and believes also in the power of personal names. Origen thus emphasizes the sound of the name: throughout this passage the emphasis is on utterance rather than writing, and it is clearly the phonic aspect of the name, rather than the "graphic", which constitutes its authority. It is when we speak names that we lay hold on their power, and on their link with the real. The givenness of names is in their sound.

This may provide some background for Eunomius' philosophy of names. Looking forward, we can also find some parallels with Proclus. In the first place, Daniélou (Eunome l'Arien...) has pointed out a very interesting passage of Proclus which links the givenness of names with the practice of theurgy. The Commentary on the Cratylus refers to the Chaldaic Oracles, and quotes them saying "that the Greeks must not use the names of Egyptian, or Scythian, or Persian gods, but the names of the Greek gods" (57). Proclus here invokes the same principle as Origen; religious language is given, and it must be used in its traditional form. Knowledge of some names is privileged:

> Some, having had contact with demons or angels, have learnt from them names which are more appropriate to reality than those established by men. (Comm. on the Cratylus 52)

This is exactly Eunomius' point, namely that some names are given, and are there just as much as other ontological entities, and that there is another category of names which are invented by men. In Eunomius' case, names formulated by analogy fall into this category of the inappropriate names of human invention. (Daniélou also mentions similarities between these views and those of the work on the Egyptian Mysteries, and attempts to establish a link between the theurgy of the school of Iamblichus, and the view of names mentioned here. He has in mind the possibility of showing a link between Eunomius and the school of Iamblichus. The connection with this group, and particularly with theurgy, is a very interesting one to explore, but in fact the realist philosophy of names is probably much more broadly based than this.) But Daniélou's view has been subjected to a searching critique by Rist (Basil's Neoplatonism ... 185–188). In the first place he singles out the narrow view of Eunomius' sources in the matter of linguistic theory, in that Eunomius is

alleged to have been influenced by Iamblichean Neoplatonism, and particularly by Proclus' commentary on the Cratylus. As I have said above, this does appear to be too restrictive a view of the sources of a broadly based theme, and Rist is probably right here. Rist further raises the question of Eunomius' alleged dependence on Plato's Cratylus, an accusation brought by Gregory of Nyssa (II, 404) as we saw above. But Rist asks, do we know that Eunomius had actually read the Cratylus, or a commentary on it? It seems likely to me that the mention of the Cratylus is just a form o abuse for Gregory, who is trying to establish guilt by association, in the same way as Basil, when he accuses Eunomius of reading Aristotle, rather than being led by the Spirit. Who knows whether either Basil or Eunomius had read Aristotle's Categories? In my view Eunomius may have read a Neoplatonist commentary, and Basil neither Aristotle nor a commentary. Today one could use the expression the "means of production" without ever having read Marx: it's part of the climate, so to speak, and one can well imagine a gibe claiming this to be a piece of jargon picked up from Marx's Capital. The level of reprehensibility would be about the same as picking up something from Aristotle, if one may be permitted to postulate Basil's attitude to Marx as well. Overall then, the claim about Eunomius' dependence on the Cratylus or its commentaries ought not to be pressed at all. And as Rist points out (p.186), "mystical" theories of names had been "in the air since the second century AD and are known in Christian circles".

However the view to be advocated here does not depend on this close theurgical link postulated by Daniélou. The view that names are somehow part of reality is not only to do with theurgy or mystical practices. I have pointed to a tendency to "reify the semantic" in various quarters. In my view Daniélou has shown a certain part of the development, but what he deals with is not the whole story. Theurgical words are only one aspect of the wider and deeper tendency to include language within the scope of ontology. For a fuller development one would have to pursue the term *onoma* in Proclus, Syrianus and Dexippus and possibly even Damascius, since he provides evidence of a counter-attacking tradition within Proclus' circle; and Origen on the Christian side).

We may press on here with a further passage of Proclus. Having dismissed the idea that any name can be applied to the One, Proclus then proceeds to argue that names are valid for some lower realities (Platonic Theology I.29). Not only are they valid, they are "established" among the lower realities. Proclus believes that the names of the gods have a special value, and claims that these names actually exist. They have the status of *daimones.* He is thus a linguistic realist, and hopes to provide guarantees of the truth of theological discourse. The assumption is that there are certain key names, few in number, which are there to be known as much as any *hypostasis.* These, for Proclus, are revealed to men by the daimons. Eunomius' position is very similar,

in that he has the one word, "ingeneracy", which stands as a given name prior to any human speech. Given this ability in late Greek philosophy to hypostatize language, we need not be terribly surprised at the Christian ability to sustain the idea of the "word made flesh". That the word was flesh may have been difficult and repugnant, but that the word was an entity was apparently not very difficult at all. In fact Proclus himself reifies certain words, though not of course at the mundane level of the world of becoming. He did not commit any of his words to incarnation.

The essence of Eunomius' system lies in this insistence on a single word which both describes and is, the deity. Gregory is willing to accept the term "ingeneracy", provided that it is seen as a term "devised" later, to indicate the state of ingeneracy. He separates the state from the word, and finds it absurd to imagine that "anyone should argue that God was not ingenerate till the name ingenerate had been invented" (Contra Eun. II, 169 J.). Eunomius "shifts the debate from the name to things", Gregory complains (Contra Eun. II, 173 J.). "The name is the result of the existence", he adds, and not the reverse (Contra Eun. II, 164 J.). But Gregory not only singles out this tendency to reify a word, but he also objects to the concept of ingeneracy being singled out as the only concept applicable to the Deity. Many other descriptive epithets may be used, in Gregory's view, and of course Gregory thinks that all such epithets are more or less inadequate, though to some extent useful in grasping the divine.

We have adequately dealt with the linguistic philosophy which makes it possible for Eunomius to assert the existence of the name ingeneracy. The possibility of reifying the semantic had apparently been established, and this tendency has been observed elsewhere in relation to the Gnostic Gospel of Truth. That certain privileged terms should exist prior to all thought and discourse objectifies the linguistic, and offers a subsequent guarantee for all discourse based on these given elements. A real basis for discourse is provided. But that Eunomius should choose this one term above all others is an interesting feature of his view. Why so? We have to speculate a little to reconstruct his approach, since he himself does not say a great deal, and not much survives in any case. Neither Gregory nor Basil really understand it; they simply perpetuate a *dialogue de sourds,* and so we do not gain much help from this quarter.

We can try to reconstruct Eunomius as follows. He sought to take a position on the trinitarian issue. At the same time he was an exponent of the *via negativa,* and his description of the essence of the Father had to be a negative one. He therefore chose the term *agenneton,* "ingenerate", a term rendered negative by the alpha privative in Greek. Longstanding discussions in the Greek world of negation, privation, and even of the alpha privative (see our Fundamentals...) gave him a clear idea of the logic of his position: he insists that the negative term he has chosen is not a case of privation, because of the logical implications of such a position. It is another type of negation, and as

a matter of fact, the Greek alpha privative can suggest much more than a mere privative negation. So he characterizes one member of the Trinity in negative terms, and the other, the Son, in positive, or kataphatic terms, such as "begotten" etc. (In this he differs from the later Proclus, who refuses even a negative term for the One, unless it is a hypernegation.)

But he also believes that he has demonstrated that this single negative term is the mandatory one, that it is dictated, and can be demonstrated. In this he is influenced by the contemporary study of Euclid, outlined in the chapter on Proclus. The methods of the geometers fertilised philosophy, raised questions for it, and tended to restructure its metaphysics: like quantum physics in the twentieth century, the methods of the geometers had a ripple effect across the whole field of ancient philosophy. What was of particular interest, as Proclus shows, was that Euclid defined his highest principle negatively: "the point is that of which there are no parts". Every subsequent entity in Euclid's system was an outgrowth of this transcendent entity. There is a logic which forces Euclid to this particular negative: every lower, and more solid being, has this characteristic of having parts. It may have special characteristics of its own, but it does share this characteristic of having parts with every other body. Euclid, deconstructing according to the geometers' method of *aphairesis* (abstraction), finally removes this particular aspect, common to all his other bodies, but absent from the highest entity. By a negative manoeuvre, the point is seen to be absence of that which characterizes all the rest. There is only one option: multiplicity of parts is the only completely shared characteristic, and therefore the only candidate to be negated.

Eunomius has done the same thing. Plunged as he is into the middle of the trinitarian dispute, with terms like "begotten" and "unbegotten" dominating the discussion, he casts about for a negative definition of the Father. He wishes to proceed in the geometrical manner from the mundane to the transcendent, and he seeks a Euclidian-style definition of his ultimate principle. The essential and shared characteristic of all that is lower than the Father is that it is "begotten" (we pass over the question of γεννάω and γίγνομαι). This then is the ground for his negative description: the ultimate principle is unbegotten, ingenerate. The negative description rests on the kataphatic descriptions which are posterior to it (negative theology always requires collaboration between the positive and the negative). Like Euclid, he has only one option. For Euclid "partlessness" is the highest principle, and for Eunomius "generation-lessness". The Father and Son are therefore related, as are the point and the line in Euclid, but they are unlike (*anomoios*).

The above is a sketch of what may have been the substance of Eunomius' thinking. Lest it be thought that too much emphasis has been placed on Euclid's definitions, the reader should be invited to study Proclus' commentary on Euclid's elements: Proclus makes perfectly clear the transition from geometry to metaphysics.

But there is a further sense in which Eunomius considers himself to have demonstrated the correctness of the choice of the term ingeneracy, and this is clear from the text itself, thanks to a clarification brought by Anastos (Basil's Κατὰ Εὐνομίου ... p.79). Both Gregory and Basil take Eunomius' statement that ingeneracy follows logically (ἀκολουθεῖ τούτῳ τὸ ἀγέννητον) as meaning that it follows temporally, or physically. But ἀκολουθία can have a logical sense, as Anastos points out (see also my Connaissance religieuse..., p.102–108, and Daniélou, 'Ακολουθία chez Grégoire de Nysse ... on this term). The result is that we must interpret Eunomius as offering a clear argument for his ingeneracy, and so the passage was translated above as follows:

> If therefore it is shown that he is not prior to himself, and that nothing else precedes him, he is before all things. Ingeneracy is a consequence (ἀκολουθεῖ) of this [not "follows this as a next stage"].

The misunderstanding of Basil and Gregory results from their desire to discover a logical flaw, and so they seek to bring a notion of temporal sequence into the constitution of the deity, in Eunomius' view. But in fact Eunomius is trying to offer a watertight logical argument, as follows: if we accept, as we all do, that nothing is prior to God, and that God cannot be prior to himself, *ergo* he is ingenerate, since there was nothing capable of creating prior to God himself. Eunomius is doing more than "merely adding to his conclusion" (Anastos op. cit. p.79); he is proving that it is logically necessary, given the premises.

In two senses, then, Eunomius believes in the necessity of his conclusion. But above all, he is an exponent of the *via negativa,* using the ideas of later Neoplatonism with very little dilution. He believes both that God should be described negatively, and that one can *demonstrate* which negative epithet is appropriate.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

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Chapter IX. Basil and Letter 38: the negative theology of the amateur

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IX. Basil and Letter 38: the negative theology of the amateur

The philosophy of the Cappadocians, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa is intimately related to their debate with Arianism, specifically represented by the figure of Eunomius. It has to be abstracted from this debate, and this is not always easy. Much has been said on Basil in the preceding chapter, but here an attempt will be made to give a coherent picture of his views on language and its limits, isolated from the particular demands of the polemic with Eunomius.

We begin with what may be pseudo-Basil, namely the Letter 38, addressed to his brother Gregory. Cavallin has found this to be of dubious authenticity (Studien zu den Briefen des hl. Basilius, 71–81). And now Fedwick (A commentary...) has exhaustively studied the manuscripts, and confirmed Cavallin's opinion. Some have supposed it to be by Gregory of Nyssa, and Fedwick also entertains the possibility: the text is given by Migne under both headings, PG 32, col. 325/PG 46, col. 235. It does not seem inconsistent with Basil, and in particular is in perfect accord with Letter 8. However, I agree that it is unlikely to be by him, and it is unlikely to be by Gregory into the bargain, since it shows too good a knowledge of Aristotle, or the mediated Aristotelian tradition. The ignorance of both Basil and Gregory of this tradition has been stressed in the preceding chapter.

The words *ousia* and *hypostasis* had come to be of crucial importance, since the trinitarian debate had raised the question of the unity within diversity of the Trinity. Scholars tried to find two aspects, of which these two separate states, unity and diversity, could be predicated. These two aspects had to be fundamental, or somehow basic, because the unity and diversity of the Trinity could not be said to apply to categorially distinct qualities of an entity. They had to apply – and here was the difficulty – to the very being of the godhead. The offence to philosophy seemed all the greater since unity and diversity had long been held to be utterly dissimilar. To resolve this the Christian philosophers sought to distinguish different types of essential being, both equally fundamental, and both equally "essential", but somehow different. The wealth of the Greek language in the matter of ontology provided the possibility: *ousia* and *hypostasis* were both words for being, and were capable of definitions which could nevertheless distinguish between them.

This is the subject chosen by Basil (?) in Letter 38, and the author wishes to demonstrate that these words contain the possibility of asserting "one, yet three" of the same thing. The author proceeds as follows: if we had to offer a

transcendence and of the consequent value of negative concepts, but the Cappadocian orthodoxy is slightly different. The defence of the equality and homogeneity of the members of the Trinity is still there, but as part of this the *unknowability of the Father is extended to all three.* The Cappadocians are attracted by the essential mysteriousness of the transcendent, and as orthodox trinitarians, must make this pertain to all three persons of the Trinity. This at least is how the Letter 38, attributed to Basil and others, should be read: as crystallizing the Cappadocian view of incomprehensibility within the Trinity. (The Letter of course could be said to be unorthodox, since one of the anathemas of the Creed of 325 expressly outlaws the claim that God the Son was different from the Father in either *hypostasis* or *ousia*: see Denzinger/Schönmetzer, Enchiridion Symbolorum, no.126 p.53. But this is a matter of semantics: whilst Letter 38 does draw a distinction between the hypostases, it does not do so within the *ousia* of the Trinity. And its intention is to safeguard the unity of the Trinity: it may infringe this rule of language, but in fact it is restructuring the use of that same language in order to maintain the orthodox position which is being defended by the anathemas. It is for this reason that it is here placed in the orthodox category. One may note further that the Letter uses arguments drawn from Aristotle's Metaphysics and Categories to defend the orthodox poisition. It does however introduce the word *hypostasis*, which Aristotle did not use in these passages. The tradition of Christian philosophy had by now a rich heritage in the use of this word, so prominently figuring in ontological and trinitarian discussions. Even an Aristotelian-style discussion had to use this word: since the Epistle to the Hebrews (1.3) had sanctified it, and since the Neoplatonists had developed it in their own terms, and since no thorough ontological discussion could now take place without it, the word *hypostasis* had to be introduced into any debate. But, despite its absence from the language of Aristotle, we note that Aristotle's concern at the beginning of the Categories is exactly that of the author of Letter 38: Aristotle seeks to distinguish general *ousia*, common to a variety of things, and particular *ousias*, referring to individuating characteristics. Aristotle uses *ousia* in the plural, where the author of Letter 38 chooses – and had to choose – the word *hypostasis*).

The Letter 38 therefore shows signs of an updated Aristotelianism. The question of negative theology is not central to the document, but it is clearly involved, in that the Arian position tended to concentrate negative descriptions on the Father alone. In this the Arian position is closer to Neoplatonism, in that it seeks a single and undivided principle at the apex of an ascending series of lower, and more complex principles: this tendency to ascend implies a progressive withdrawal from the plane of matter and discourse, and so the Arian God rises out of language. It seems natural, then, to have a lower deity who is accessible to language, and who is capable of speaking in human terms.

Basil's response to Eunomius consists, at this point, in demanding an account of human rational thought. This seems to be a weakness in Eunomius, namely that he allows only for preexistent names in his epistemology, and tends to dismiss others. Thus he believes that these subsequently developed names will vanish as soon as they are articulated, "with the sound of the tongue". Basil's view is the not unreasonable one that thought has some validity, and this really is a question for Eunomius: how does he explain human noetic experience, and what value does he attribute to it? He refers to the tendency of language to dissipate, as we have seen in the previous chapter, but to what extent does he recognize its contribution? Basil offers a view of thought which removes it from perception: a degree of deliberation follows the perception, and this is somehow solidly rooted in the soul. Thoughts are "established" (ἐνίδρυται) in the soul, and this verb suggests a settled disposition. He wants to convey an idea of stability because it is precisely the instability of such thoughts that Eunomius complained of. In other words, he attributes value to the human cognitive process, where Eunomius did not.

It would be interesting to know how Eunomius dealt with this problem of how to evaluate human cognitive processes. He believes that certain words and ideas are given, and are part of that which necessarily is: but how are these communicated to men, and how do they accommodate themselves to other human thoughts? In short, what is the value of Eunomius' own ratiocinations?

It is important to note another point in Basil's philosophy of language: we may take one entity (seed) and give it a variety of names, depending on context. For example, at harvest time we would refer to it as "produce": before a meal as "nourishment". It is our rational capacity which develops these different names, and they are permanent acquisitions of the soul. Whilst Basil is according value to the human noetic process, he is specifically answering Eunomius' complaint about the profusion of names applied to the deity in orthodox theology. Basil's point is that we develop a variety of names for the same thing on rational grounds, and these each have a function. The multiplicity of names for God can therefore have a rational value. Further on Basil continues the point, discussing the many different epithets attributed to Jesus, such as "bread", "way", "gate" and so on.

> But being one in substance, and one simple and uncomposed essence, he calls himself a variety of things, fitting the various nouns to the conceptions. For different names are attributed to him according to the difference in operations (ἐνέργειαι), and the mode of good works assumed. For he says that he is "the light of the world", referring by this name to the inaccessible glory of his divinity, and as lightening with the brilliance of knowledge those who are purified in the eye of their souls... And thus, proceeding through each of the names, one discovers the various conceptions of one and the same underlying substrate, in respect of the essence for them all. Who then could spur his tongue to such blasphemy as to dare to say that "these conceptions dissipate with the sound of the voice"? (PG 29, 525AB)

Basil continues by willingly accepting the adjective "ingenerate" as designating one such aspect of his divinity. The important technical term in the above passage is that for the divine "operations" (ἐνέργειαι), a familiar term from Neoplatonism as well as Patristic philosophy. Basil argues that though the deity consists of one pure unity, the many valid conceptions that we have of him are the result of his various "operations". We see these as different and various, though they emanate from the one unitary source. It is natural, then, that they are many, since the acts of God are many and take place in many contexts. There is no reason to assume, as Eunomius does, that this variety of names is as short-lived as the voices which utter them. These conceptions are "established" in the soul, and respond to that objective plurality of acts, or manifestations. Basil replies to Eunomius, therefore, that the many operations of God on earth require many "conceptions", and many matching words.

Basil later returns to the issue of Eunomius having given a privileged position to this one word, "ingenerate". We have examined in the previous chapter the reasons which probably led Eunomius to believe that he had discovered, by compelling arguments, that one single characteristic, and single noun which was applicable to God. But further than this, Basil examines the conundrum of the relationship between the word and the essence in Eunomius' philosophy. This is, in effect, one of Eunomius' most important ideas, and it is an odd one to our post-Wittgenstein frame of mind. As indicated earlier, there are parallels in Neoplatonism for this name/essence relationship. Certain words have practically the same status as *daimones*, and are part of being. There was a kind of linguistic positivism abroad, in which Eunomius shared, and it covered quite a wide spectrum of opinion from theurgy to philosophy; it probably also touches the Gnostic Gospel of Truth as I have argued elsewhere. The debate between Eunomius and Basil on this point runs as follows:

Eunomius: It is impossible to conceive of essence as something else the other in question being beyond it, but it itself is the existence (ὑπόστασιν), which the name indicates, the noun being truly applicable to the essence.
Basil: They are truly worthy of the judges whom you have imagined, your doctrines. For it is in the market place of dreams, or in the assembly of drunkards that you legislate with such license, with no-one hearing or comprehending what is said, thinking that you yourself having said it, is sufficient to replace every argument. For who is unaware that names which are brought forward for subjects absolutely and in themselves, are indicative of things for them, but these which are uttered in respect of other things show only the relation which is referred to? For example, "man", "horse", "ox" – each one of the things named presents something. But "Son", "slave", and "friend" show only connections with the name which is linked with them. He who hears the word "creation" (γέννημα) is not carried mentally to some essence, but he has in mind a relationship with another thing, for a creation is said to be the crea-

tion of Somebody. He however who forms a concept not of some being, but indicates only a relation to something else, and proclaims this to be essence, must surely be in the last stages of lunacy. And a moment ago we demonstrated that absolute names, even if they do seem to display some subject, do not present the essence itself, but define specific characteristics of it. (PG 29, 588B–589A)

In my view this is one of the most important of Basil's arguments against Eunomius, in that Basil does appear to be grappling philosophically with Eunomius' point of view. Basil uses the logical distinction between absolute and relational terms, and his point is simply that Eunomius has chosen a relational term to designate the Son, who is said to be a *gennema*, or "creation". The point is that to make such a statement implies a relation, and nothing about the essential being of the Son, which remains undefined. It is somewhat difficult to see what Eunomius is getting at, but his view appears to be formulated in order to forestall the kind of objection made by Basil: he wants to avoid the claim that comparisons are being made between the Father and the Son which tend to diminish the status of the Son. What Basil does is to show beyond any doubt that he has done this. Interestingly, the term "ingenerate", Eunomius' description of God himself, is not a relational term. Its negative form indicates rather an absence of relations, of either a prior or a subsequent kind, that is to say that he envisages God not as created, obviously enough, but not even as creator. But Eunomius somehow seems to want to evade this on the level of the Son as well. Presumably the word "creation" (*gennema*) has the same necessary status as "ingenerate", and that is the point of the remark attributed to Eunomius by Basil above. In other words, Eunomius is claiming for this term the same kind of necessary relationship with the essence to which it refers: it is a claim that certain words are special, and their relationship to reality is real. Basil's criticism is philosophically effective, given that he does not recognize this category of privileged words.

Where does this distinction, which Basil deploys, come from? It is an important question, in view of the way in which Basil's philosophical literacy has become a focus of scholarly enquiry (see the discussions of Rist in the previous chapter). The distinction is between relational (κατὰ σχέσιν) terms, and absolute (τὰ ἀπολελυμένα) terms. The latter is to be found in Sextus Empiricus (Math. 8.162), but it is infrequent. The use of σχέσις is of course known since Aristotle, and it is difficult to pick the source of Basil's argument. It sounds like Greek philosophy, but whether it comes from a Neoplatonist source, or a Christian philosophical tradition is difficult to say. I should be inclined to favour the latter view.

The use of philosophy against philosophy is not wholly characteristic of Basil. He also attacks on the level of authority. Just prior to this passage (Col. 584 B) he demands how Eunomius found this idea that Jesus was a "creation": "from what teaching? From which prophet?" None of the apos-

tles used this label for Jesus, he declares. Eunomius has claimed that the son is a *gennema*, "according to the teaching of the Scriptures". Basil replies that he has found this word nowhere in the Scriptures (loc. cit.). This is an interesting case of the conflict between philosophy and religion, since Eunomius claims to be distilling the essence of the Scriptures, but in another language. Basil simply refuses to recognize that language.

One final passage of the Against Eunomius should be referred to. It has been noted that Eunomius was an exponent of the *via negativa*, in that he adopted a negative description of God, and affirmed that the negation involved was not a privative negation. Basil, however, is able to outstrip him on this point. Quoting Exodus 6.2–3 ("And I did not reveal my name to them"), Basil continues:

> To Eunomius, apparently, did God reveal not only his name, but his very essence. And such an unspeakable thing, which was revealed to none of the elect, he writing in his own books makes public and proclaims carelessly to all men. And those matters held forth to us in promises are beyond human understanding, and the peace of God surpasses every human intellect. For he does not admit that the very essence of God is beyond all human intelligence and beyond all human knowledge. (PG 29, 544A)

This must have been a difficult criticism for Eunomius. Basil is in effect stating the transcendence of God and the incomprehensibility of God; he is therefore advocating negative theology, at least in its weak form, that is the simple assertion of the mysteriousness of the deity. He complains that Eunomius is actually an opponent of such mystery, a pretentious revealer of what are in fact unrevealable truths. Clearly the linguistic realism of Eunomius enables him to do so, since Eunomius clearly states that certain words capture the deity completely and essentially. Basil vaunts himself with being able to emphasise transcendence to a greater degree.

He appears in fact to be right. In committing himself to this view of language, or at least of certain language, Eunomius is far more accepting of the power of language than any Neoplatonist. Of course his ultimate term was a negation, but we recall that Proclus advocated even the abandonment of negation in the end. Eunomius is more attached to language than that, and it looks as if he has combined the *via negativa* with the linguistic realism of the later Platonists. But Basil is able to ride above him with a clear statement of the view for which the Cappadocians are known, namely the transcendence and mystery of the Father.

This is not the place for a full-scale examination of Basil's Platonism, though the subject has recently been given a complete shake-up by Rist (Basil's "Neoplatonism" ...), who has examined in fundamental detail the alleged influences on Basil. Rist takes passages demonstrating Plotinian influence, and then those claimed to stem from Porphyry and Iamblichus: he re-

duces remarkably the number that can be considered to fall within these categories. He remarks in relation to Letter 2 (Rist p.213) that it provides an excellent example of how "platonically" or even "neoplatonically" a Christian can talk, without specific textual dependence on a Neoplatonist occurring.

The interest of the present work is focussed on negative theology and the limits of discourse, but from this narrow standpoint some observations can be made which bear on the dispute. Firstly, we can say, in relation to the abovementioned remark of Rist, that there seemed to be a climate of the time which was broader than certain texts and their direct literary dependents. This seems particularly to be the case with Basil's negative theology, which is quite untechnical. It looks as if Eunomius was much closer to the technical logical developments in the *via negativa* which were characteristic of Proclus, and his predecessors. Basil's sense of the transcendent is not characterized by any technical exploration of negation or privation: he merely states the inaccessibility of the divine along with an endorsement of a great deal of discourse aimed at capturing it, with the vague proviso that language is not always adequate. Exactly how language helps, or fails to help, in the acquisition of knowledge about the divine, is not really dealt with in great detail. His negative theology merely consists of a vague emphasis on the transcendent. Proclus, on the other hand exhaustively considers these questions, and the *via negativa* acquires a degree of logical precision with him. Basil's negative theology is little more than an enhanced sense of the transcendent, or a form of piety.

His statements of transcendence are really closer to Middle Platonism, though I do not suggest a literary link. The idea is too simple and too traditional to make it necessary: it is a sense of the loftiness of the divine which has been in the air since the Middle Platonists, including Clement on the Christian side, and which finds conventional endorsement in Ambrose and Augustine as well. This very loose and elementary form of the *via negativa* does not explore in any detail the extent to which the usefulness of discourse is cut back, or to which the negative can be an epistemological instrument. The negative theology of Plotinus is also quite undeveloped, but there are no grounds for postulating a link here.

It is probably the ultimate irony that Basil has posed as a negative theologian against Eunomius.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

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Chapter X. Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius: theology versus philosophy

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X. Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius: theology versus philosophy

Gregory of Nyssa was probably the most gifted intellectually of the three Cappadocian writers. Basil was his elder brother and mentor, and some of Basil's themes are developed and enhanced by Gregory. He lived from approximately 335 until 394, and was raised to the see of Nyssa in 371, and deposed by Arian opponents in 376. Some of his philosophy has already been drawn out of the works attacking Eunomius, but we will turn now to a broader picture of his negative theology and philosophy of transcendence.

We will begin with Gregory's general views on the limits of human thought, and the divine incomprehensibility. The latter is a continually present theme, and it underlies all Gregory's theology. The first passage to be examined comes from his first book against Eunomius (354 ff. Jaeger). Here it is proposed that God is out of time, whereas by contrast human history moves on to its proper end through the sequence provided by time, with a beginning, middle and end. The absence of time-span implies, for Gregory, the absence of any measure for the deity. Nothing can measure the divine and blessed life (Contra Eun. I, 365 J.). Living in time would imply such a measure, and it is interesting that timelessness provides the proof of incommensurability for this author.

> But this power which creates beings circumscribes within itself the nature of that which comes into being, but it has itself no circumscribing boundaries. It encloses every thought striving to reach the source of the divine life within itself, and it exceeds every meddling inquiry and restless questioning which contentiously seeks to declare the limits of the limitless. (Contra Eun. I, 367 J.)

The circumscriber cannot himself be circumscribed, and so any thought seeking to grasp it is "enclosed". This last is an interesting term (κατακλείουσα), for it suggests that thought is an effort to enclose: when, however, the subject is boundless, the thought itself is enclosed and enveloped, in the manner it had intended for the deity. Gregory goes on to say that no place, no form, no size, no measure of time is in the divine nature, but only the incomprehensible. This attempt to exclude the deity from time is fairly familiar; the first hypothesis of Plato's Parmenides (141A) does this in relation to the One, and as is well known, the Parmenides acquired the status of a text book for Middle and Later Platonists. In a sense, then, this emphasis on the atemporal character of God is not novel. The Gnostic work, the Secrets of John, excludes God from both time and eternity. Tardieu explains that both terms suggested the idea of measure (Ecrits Gnostiques: Codex de Berlin, 88 and 251).

But what we do find with Gregory is a striking antecedent of the philosophy of time developed in Augustine, and associated more with his name. With Gregory, the timelessness of God is central, but it is accompanied by the desire to validate time in other respects. He goes on to emphasize that space and time are the conditions of the created world, and that God includes them rather than vice versa. He is prior to them. But again he reverts to the importance of timelessness: God is "unmeasured by the ages", "unaccompanied by time". The following passage could almost be drawn from Augustine's Confessions, in the latter chapters:

> Such characteristics are part of the creation, with life divided between the emotions of hope and memory according to the divisions of time. But in that transcendent and blessed power, in which all things at once have been and are, the future is contemplated encircled within its all-encompassing power. (Contra Eun. I, 372 J.)

As with Augustine we have the timeless present, which brings together both future and past, and this timelessness is a most important part of the deity. The emphasis on time and timelessness is not necessarily a result of the sense of human history, and the consequent absence from history of the deity, which we find with Augustine's Confessions. The issue of time became crucial in the Trinitarian debate since the Son could possibly have been said to come after the Father. The orthodox were aware of the pitfalls involved in the priority of the Father, as would normally be required by such imagery. To have the Father out of time, and the Son in it would have introduced a disastrous imbalance in their respective states. Gregory proceeds to deal with this in the next pages, asserting timelessness of both the Father and the Son. It is here that the specifically Christian problem of the Trinity gives the discussion of time a specifically Christian twist, since two beings are now said to be out of time. It will be found that the response to Eunomius is what draws out Gregory's views.

Earlier in book I Gregory cites Eunomius as declaring that that which is mentioned second or third, must be inferior and dependent (Contra Eun. I, 200 J.). Eunomius is said to believe that such a numerical ranking implies a difference in nature, and Gregory complains that he has never heard of this "wisdom": "For numerical rank does not bring about a difference in nature" (Contra Eun. I, 201 J.). Gregory argues that number deals with quantity only, and that it does not signify qualitative relationships. Thus that the Father is first, above the Son, does not imply any ranking or gradation between them. Gregory takes an example the list "Paul, Silvanus and Timothy": the fact that one is first, another second, and the other third is immaterial. They are three in quantity, but the list does not imply a ranking in quality.

Gregory's point is a skilful one, since number can be used to denote quantity only. However it is also true that it can be used for ranking purposes: a

class of pupils can be numbered from one to thirty in order to determine an order of scholastic merit. That depends on the intention of the numbering agent, and this is the kind of point that Gregory is getting at. Now the imagery of the Trinity, which has a Father/Son relationship for two of the members, and rather curiously an non-family relationship for the third, may indeed suggest a ranking purpose in the numeralisation involved: that is, if one considers the Father necessarily superior to the Son. This is not in fact necessarily to be assumed: the two could be equally potent. Or alternatively, the Son could be the stronger partner. So Eunomius appears to have made an assumption about the meaning of the numbers one and two in the case of the Trinity, and Gregory's argument points this out. Why does Eunomius move this way? Because he is governed by the Neoplatonist framework of emanationism, Lovejoy's great chain of being, which proceeds in ever-decreasing gradations from the purest form of being itself. The first leads to the second, which is related to the first, but also a diminution of it. Furthermore, the Neoplatonist interest in the One and the many governs Eunomius' thinking, according to which the movement away from unity is a descent. It is for this reason that the Second person in the Trinity is said by Eunomius to be in subjection to the First. These are assumptions on Eunomius' part, or to put it differently, he is using a set of metaphysical axioms drawn from Greek philosophy.

Gregory's concern is that this numbering/ranking philosophy of the Trinity implies sequence, that all three members are caught up in an ordering which is essentially a temporal concept. On the example of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy cited above, Gregory denies that this threefold characteristic ranks them in any way, or differentiates them. "Not so. Each is human both before and after this numbering" (Contra Eun. I, 203 J.). The "before" and "after" is the issue which worries Gregory, and this temporal sequence crops up frequently in his discussion of whether the Son "follows" the Father, as Eunomius had claimed. Gregory argues for a threefold characterization of the Trinity without the idea of sequence being involved. This implies a timeless multiplicity, and it is probably in virtue of this conflict with the representatives of Arianism that timelessness came to be emphasised, out of all the usual negative descriptions of God.

Gregory finds speech to be time-bound:

> Speech, since it cannot indicate the three in one utterance, recalls each separately according to the appropriate order, but conjoins them through the middle term, in order, I think, to indicate the harmonious activity of the three towards one goal through the conjunction of names. (Contra Eun. I, 203 J.)

This is an exact precedent for an argument of Augustine, who in the De Trinitate (see p.203) argues that speech introduces temporal sequence where

with it in greater detail. The curious feature of it is that he actually substitutes the verb ἕπομαι ("follow") for the verb ἀκολουθέω ("follow", or "be a consequence of"). This misrepresentation has already been alluded to in our chapter on Eunomius, but can be expanded here. Anastos (Basil's Κατὰ Εὐνομίου... 79) has commented on the misreading of Eunomius at this point by both Basil and Gregory, who assume that Eunomius means that the quality of ingeneracy sequentially follows the deity. We have translated the passage differently on p.58) in line with Anastos' remarks. But it is striking that over and over again Gregory writes as if Eunomius had used the verb ἕπομαι, whereas he did not. (Daniélou's article on ἀκολουθία in Gregory of Nyssa makes no mention of this problem. It does require a thorough investigation, and would provide an interesting complement to the material he has adduced. Gregory uses the word in this passage, but as a play on words.)

Gregory is defending Basil's initial statement on this question, but what is curious is that he seems not to have the text of Eunomius' first writing before him. To compare the text of the two:

Gregory: Somewhere in his writings Eunomius said: "Ingeneracy follows God".
(Εἶπέ που τῶν ἑαυτῶν λόγων ὁ Εὐνόμιος · Ἕπεσθαι τῷ Θεῷ τὸ ἀγέννητον.) (Contra Eun. I, 655 J.)

Eunomius: If therefore it is shown that [God] is not prior to himself, and that nothing else precedes him, he is before all things. Ingenerateness is a consequence of this.
(Οὐκοῦν εἰ μήτε αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ, μήθ' ἕτερόν τι αὐτοῦ προϋπάρχειν δέδεικται, πρὸ δὲ πάντων αὐτός · ἀκολουθεῖ τούτῳ τὸ ἀγέννητον.) (PG 30, 841C)

Clearly Gregory has misquoted Eunomius, or quoted him from memory. He does not have the text in front of him, and his memory of the passage may have been influenced by Basil's gloss. It is Basil who makes ἀκολουθεῖ into ἕπεται, and thus introduces a notion of temporal sequence in what is meant to be a logical sequence. As Anastos remarks, Eunomius seems to have complained that he was misunderstood: Gregory mentions his complaints about Basil's lack of serious interest in the issue (Contra Eun. I, 653 J.). If he was annoyed by Basil's misinterpretation, how much more would he have been annoyed by Gregory's perpetuation of it, apparently in ignorance of the genuine text?

It is a curious situation: Basil was only half interested in Eunomius' argument, and so caricatured it without too much concern; but Gregory, who investigated it very thoroughly and very philosophically, dealt only with the caricature he had from Basil. Eunomius means that ingeneracy is a *logical* consequence of nothing preceding God, and the Cappadocians take it as a temporal consequence.

Thus the question of time and the deity weighs heavily in Gregory's thinking. It is relatively easy for him to defeat the caricature of Eunomius' view

cient Platonism. Paul articulates the idea in Philippians 3.13–14, and Augustine develops it to its most complete form in the Confessions: the Christian believer moves quickly through time to goals which stretch out ahead of him. "Every particle of sand in the hour glass in precious to me", says Augustine (Conf. XI. 2).

Gregory concludes with a logical refutation of Eunomius' position: having challenged him from the standpoint of his own theology, he now moves to offer a critique of Eunomius from Eunomius' own standpoint. His argument is important from the point of view of the history of negation. If, he argues (Contra Eun. I, 676 J.), the Eunomians argue that both the negations "endless" and "beginningless" are simultaneously true, they fall into a contradiction. For beginning and end are opposites (ἐναντίως ἔχει): they are like "the other diametric opposites" (τῶν λοιπῶν τῶν κατὰ διάμετρον ἀλλήλοις ἀντικειμένων). (Throughout this passage the words used for opposite are either ἐναντίος or ἀντικείμενος.) Gregory's argument is simply that, if "end" and "beginning" are opposites, so are "endlessness" and "beginninglessness", since the negations of opposites are also opposite to each other. If the Eunomians accept only one of these negations, then they will be indicating only one half of God's being. If, on the other hand, they accept both of these, then they contradict themselves.

I am at a loss to see why Gregory does not apply this argument to himself as well, since he advocates both negations at various points. In fact he argues that the discussion should be expanded to include both, and so would seem to be hoist on his own petard.

However he concludes with a statement of the negative way, apparently intended to dismiss all preceding linguistic manoeuvres as trivial.

> The simplicity of the true faith assumes God to be that which he is: incapable of being grasped by any name, any thought, or any other conception, remaining beyond the grasp of not only human, but also angelic and every supramundane being, unthinkable, unutterable, and above every expression in language. He has one knowable name for his own nature, the single name that he is above every name. This is also granted to the Only-begotten, through the principle that "all that the Father has is the Son's". Orthodoxy allows certain terms as being indicative of his eternity, but not his essence, such as "ingenerate" and "endless". Thus "ingenerate" means that no beginning can be postulated prior to him, nor any cause held forth. "Endless" means that his kingdom will be brought to no end. (Contra Eun. I, 683 J.)

In this way Gregory asserts an absolute namelessness for God. The *ousia* (essence) of God cannot be put into words: the only name that can be used is "namelessness". Gregory advocates a generic negation of epithets, just as Proclus offers a generic negation; but in the case of negation itself, Gregory offers a blanket negation of all names. There is however, no exploration of the significance of this particular negation. There is no discussion of the rela-

tion of this negative name to his essence: there is no discussion of the logic of negation, in the manner that is to be found in Proclus. In short there is no *via negativa,* in the sense of a way or a technique to be systematically pursued. Gregory offers a negation, but there are no claims that this is in any sense revelatory of the essence.

Further, this is the culmination of his philosophizing about time in relation to the divinity. The negations of time are intended to represent God's "eternity", rather than his "essence". This is a difficulty, since God is said now to have at least two characteristics: an "essence", and "eternity". If eternity is not part of God's essence, then what is it? Surely not an accident, in the Aristotelian sense? And eternity could hardly be said to be one of the divine *energeiai,* which are cosmic activities capable of being designated in human terms. Gregory has let a dualism slip into the transcendent being of the Godhead, without attempting to resolve the problem for us, at least at this point. However it is at least true that a negation has been transformed into an affirmation, as Hochstaffl claims (see below, 174).

The same problem occurs a little earlier in the first book against Eunomius, and here Gregory says more about the types of names which are applied to the divine. He leans heavily on Basil here (see p.166): we may give the one entity a variety of names, depending on the context. Thus at harvest time we call grain "produce"; at meal-time we call it "food". The same entity takes a different name, as its function changes. Gregory uses the idea of bread, as already used by Eunomius (Contra Eun. I, 561 J.): a loaf of bread is flour if we are thinking about its composition, but also bread if we are thinking about food. Eunomius appears to imply that it cannot be both simultaneously: if it is conceded that it is flour, the loaf of bread cannot also be called food. It has been seen earlier that Eunomius believes that names are necessary rather than conventional; he believes there is more to a name than just the focus of the human mind. Gregory controverts this view by arguing for the conventional application of language, following on the focus of the conception. Gregory continues by repeating Basil's distinction (see p.168) between names which are absolute, and names which are relations (Contra Eun. I, 568–9 J.). He refines it in certain ways however: firstly he introduces the category of epithets which are both relations and absolutes, such as "God". One may appropriate God, by speaking of "our God", and in this case the term becomes relational. It can be used in isolation, however, and then it is absolute.

Gregory chooses a series of negative terms for his examples of absolutes: "imperishable", "everlasting" and "immortal". And he reverts to his idea of God's eternity at the end of this passage:

> ... in every epithet, eternity is implied. (Contra Eun. I, 574 J.)

Here again is the problematic status of eternity: it is always alongside other things as an aspect. Originally we saw it alongside essence in an unexplained

way, and now it is involved in all the other characteristics in an equally unexplained way. A comparison with Plotinus may help to show how eternity can occupy this shadowy status. Plotinus struggles throughout his discussion of time and eternity to make them qualities which are not accidents, but integral parts of that to which they belong. Gregory here treats eternity as if it is something like the "life of God": Plotinus toys with this idea for time, and the attraction of life is that it is a characteristic which is indistinguishable from the being itself. Whatever holds for time tends to hold for eternity in these discussions, and perhaps it is this kind of model which dominates Gregory's thought.

It is the idea that the term Father can have a "double meaning" which bothers Eunomius. The view of the Cappadocians is that the term Father signifies two things: (I) that God is the creator of all things and (II) that God himself has no higher cause. Eunomius' response is a syllogistic style argument aimed at showing the incompatibility of the two meanings for "Father". Gregory's point appears to be that "Father" is one of those words which can be both absolute and relative at the same time. On the one hand the term refers to the relationship with the Son and all begotten creatures, and on the other it refers to the Father's absolute quality of ingeneracy. Like Basil, Gregory offers a philosophy of language which admits of a variety of descriptions of the transcendent, all of which are qualified in various ways. Eunomius finds an intolerable looseness in this, accepting only those terms which are demonstrated to be appropriate, and which are unambiguous. The idea of a multiple concept of the Father is a contradiction in terms.

Much later in the work Gregory returns to the question. Eunomius had asserted that the term "Lord" for Jesus is one term which signifies essence, and not the "dignity" of the Son. The position of Eunomius referred to here (Contra Eun. III, V, 33 ff. J.) appears to be something like this: Christ is referred to as Lord in the New Testament. Either this epithet is the true, given term, denoting essence, or it is one of the many which are merely the produce of human thought. Since the Scriptures say "The Lord is Spirit" (II Cor. 3.17), they must be suggesting that this is the essential nature of Christ: in other words Eunomius is taking spirit as a sort of equivalent of *ousia* (essence). Such would appear to be Eunomius' thinking. The same response comes forth as that which was offered on the subject of the Father: for Gregory many names are possible, depending on the approach being taken. Eunomius' position is the same as before: different names mean different things, and to change names is to change the nature of the object being referred to: why, Eunomius asks, would one call man both "man" and "horse" in order to compare them? There is something impossible about this variety of names, if name means essence.

For Eunomius the variety of names means that they fall into the category of names like Peter, and Paul (Contra Eun. III, V, 50J). These names can be

changed. But Gregory replies that this is true of all names: they are all applied by us. Gregory insists on the difference between the essence of the objects and their names:

> For when we gather into the form of a name the concept of a thing which arises within us, we declare our concept by different terms at different times. We do not make the thing, but we make the utterances by which we name it. For the things remain in themselves as they are by nature... And just as the essence of Peter was not changed by the change of names, neither is any of the other things we contemplate changed by the change of names. (Contra Eun. II, V, 52 J.)

The link between name and essence is denied, and language is relegated to the position of being an instrument of the human intellectual process. For Eunomius some names fall into this category, but for Gregory all do. For Eunomius, some names indicate essence, but for Gregory none do.

Gregory concludes on the unknowability of the copula. We may say "God is good", "God is incorruptible" and so on. These terms apply to manifestations of his nature, but between them and God lies the word "is". This "isness" of God remains undescribed. The "is" of the copula refers to the being of God, and this is actually undefinable (Contra Eun. III, V, 60 J.). We may say how it is deployed, but no remark is ever made, or can be made on the "isness" itself of God, for this is his very being. We shall return to the copula later.

Returning to the question of naming, a passage in book II of the Against Eunomius raises the issue of the "name", as used in the New Testament, as when Jesus speaks of "baptizing into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28.19). Given that Gregory has declared the only real name of God the Father to be namelessness, there is some difficulty as to what is being recommended. We have alluded elsewhere to the revival of interest in naming in this period, and Daniélou (Théologie du Judéo-Christianisme) has done much to clarify the early development of the name theology. However here in the fourth century we are in a different context: there is evidence of a very broadly based interest in names and their applicability, which cuts across the pagan/Christian division. A revival of interest in the Cratylus, and a revival of the Stoic belief in the natural truth of names, is part of this (see vol. I, p.101).

Gregory's discussion here must be placed in this context, rather than the earlier and much more limited theology of the name so ably outlined by Daniélou in the abovementioned book. A new difficulty has surfaced, provoked jointly by the contradictions involved in the notion of the Trinity, and by the linguistic realism espoused by Neoplatonist thinkers. Gregory has said that God is nameless: accordingly he asks the question:

For Gregory believes that both man's reasoning faculty and his language is the work of God, and this is asserted in many ways. The value of language emerges, for example, in his endorsement of analogy as a means of constructing concepts of the divine. This was one of the classic Middle Platonist "three ways", and we have seen that Eunomius rejected analogy as a theological instrument, considering it to be an indulgence of over-eager intelligences. But in the Great Catechism (10), Gregory explicitly endorses arguments by analogy though he does not use the word ἀναλογία, the argumentation is quite clear. A comparison is drawn with the flame of a lamp: the flame appears to embrace the material which is burning. Though we cannot perceive the actual distinctness of the material and the flame, we can rationally posit it. Gregory continues:

> What is there then to prevent our thinking (just as we see flame adhering to the material, and not swallowed up in it) of a certain union and approximation of the Divine nature with humanity, and in this approximation preserving the proper notion of deity, believing that though the divine is in man, it is beyond all circumscription. (PG 45, 41D ff.)

On the basis of this approach, certain valuable concepts may be formed, though their limits may be recognized. One notes that Gregory believes in an ontological continuity between God and man, preceding the conceptual analogies which may be used. An actual analogy of being is presupposed in analogies of discourse, and this combination of the ontological and the conceptual in analogy goes back to the very roots of Christian philosophy (see my 'Αναλογία chez Clément d'Alexandrie...).

But in general, language is a God-given gift. Gregory's fully developed views on language and its application are given in his second reply to Eunomius' own second book. It is here that he gives a more detailed response to the philosophy of language that was emerging, and appropriated by Eunomius in particular. In other words Gregory returned to this issue, just as he returned to the issue of privation, in greater detail, probably because both problems were proving to be more stubborn than he had originally thought. A good deal has already been said on the background of this dispute over language in the discussion of Eunomius, but the whole of Gregory's view will be summed up here.

A neo-Stoic view had grown up, according to which a necessary relationship between words and their objects was postulated. The view was that certain words were every bit as "given" as any object belonging to the realm of *physis*. In response to this Gregory argues that language is human construction:

> So that our view remains firm: we define human utterances as the inventions of our understanding. (Contra Eun. II, 254 J.)

The tower of Babel story, according to which different languages arose from God's punishment, was clearly a prime subject of debate. Gregory alludes here to interpretations of the tower of Babel which were being used against him, but it is difficult to perceive exactly what view of it was being offered by Eunomius. Gregory's own view is simple enough. When God willed that the human race should expand and go off in various directions, it followed that men adopted different tongues in different regions. Their knowledge of things was in no way different, but their terms varied. God desired that men should have full freedom to develop their own languages. Gregory adds the hypothesis that the Hebrew language was a relatively recent development (Contra Eun. II, 257 J.), in order to point out the absurdity of the idea that God spoke in Hebrew:

> For to suppose that God used the Hebrew tongue, with no-one present to understand such a tongue, no reasonable person will agree. We read in Acts that because of this the divine power was divided into many different tongues, so that no one of alien tongue might be deprived of benefit. But if God spoke in a human manner before creation, who would have benefited from such an utterance? (Contra Eun. II, 258 J.)

Gregory's purpose is to show that language does not pre-exist man. Hebrew has no particular status as the chosen language of God – indeed it may be a relatively recent acquisition. So that the idea that God might choose to speak in any language at all, prior to the existence of man, is absurd.

This point is a specific response to Eunomius, who believes in the pre-existence of language (Contra Eun. II, 262 J.), and claims to have the testimony of Moses on this issue. The view is that God created things, and the names for them, and then gave them to men. Eunomius' circle apparently took their cue from the verse: "God called the light Day, and the darkness Night", this activity being prior to the existence of man according to the Genesis account (Contra Eun. II, 269 J.). Gregory has to develop a complicated exegesis to extract himself from this problem, and the details of it need not detain us here. His exegesis of this particular verse is really nothing more than an ad hoc arrangement to meet the needs of his argument on language, which he reiterates. Names are human inventions: God has no need of speech. And what of those who invented different names for man, such as *anthropos, brotos* or *phos*? Are these, he asks, to be elevated to the same status as God himself, as inventors of names?

Clearly, for Eunomius, to admit a variety of names is to admit variety of nature. The numerous epithets applied to Christ in the Scriptures cannot therefore, on his view, be taken seriously. Gregory replies that the many names reflect the many operations (ἐνέργειαι), that he undertakes, and that these names are all derived from abstract conception (ἐπίνοια). It is at this point that Eunomius launches his attack on the use of analogy as a means of

forming ideas of the transcendent. We have seen that Gregory advocates this elsewhere, and also that Eunomius seems to share in a hostile view of analogy, current in some Neoplatonist circles. However at this point Gregory chooses not to advocate analogy, but to belabour his opponent with the charge that such words as "analogy" and "homonym" are not Biblical (Contra Eun. II, 309 J.). Though this is to evade the philosophical arguments entailed in the use of these expressions, it is a justifiable response since Eunomius claims to be using the language of Scripture.

Again we see Gregory as either unwilling to tackle, or ignorant of, the technical philosophical issue being addressed by Eunomius. Since the Middle Platonists, analogy had been recognized as one of the three ways of developing concepts of the transcendent. Clement of Alexandria recognizes it, as does Plotinus. Eunomius stands in this tradition, except that he rejects the use of analogy: in other words he shares in a revisionist school of Neoplatonist thought. That analogy was contested seems to result from a difficult text of Proclus (see p.108), and it seems likely that in this circle, there was a group of "contestataires", and their tradition ultimately led to the philosophy of Damascius. Eunomius seems to be aware of this kind of discussion, as we saw with privation. Gregory, on the other hand, seems to be light years away from it.

Curiously enough, Gregory accuses Eunomius (Contra Eun. II, 343 J.) of wanting to promulgate the idea that God speaks in the manner of men, and though this is something of a distortion, it is not unreasonable. Eunomius does in effect try to vindicate human language, certain parts of it at least, by claiming that it is also God's language. His view does suppose a great deal of truth-bearing capacity in human language, and expresses a kind of confidence in it. Gregory's own view is more sceptical than this.

Further, Gregory accuses Eunomius, again with some justification, of arbitrariness in the selection of language. Certain epithets are held to be immutably valid, but most are discarded as inventions. Yet these appear to have been sanctioned by Jesus himself, and Gregory goes on to report a response of Eunomius to Basil on this very point. Basil had said, and it is an argument which Gregory followed virtually word for word (see p.166), that just as grain admits of different descriptions, depending on whether it is used as seed, or as nourishment, so God can be called different things depending on the *energeia,* or operation, involved. Eunomius complains that Basil (Contra Eun. II, 362 J.) compares God to corn, and finds this absurd or blasphemous. But more importantly he attacks Basil for arguing that God is conceived, "through certain analogies and relations" (ἀναλογίας τινὰς καὶ σχέσεις). Again Eunomius' language is the technical language of logic, and again Gregory does not deal with the question of analogy on this level. Eunomius objects to Basil's mode of argument, whereby a point is made about God on the basis of a model drawn from the material world, and he calls this mode of ar-

ture" is not clearly demonstrable; clearly it is not equally in force everywhere, since there is variety in language; if it were really a law of nature, the common human nature would produce a common tongue. These apologetic arguments do not allow us to see further into Eunomius' meaning, but what is interesting is the apparent juxtaposition of two ideas:

(i) that human beings give names;
(ii) that these names do not derive their validity from this, but from some other agency.

Is the "other agency" nature itself, so that the names would be κατὰ φύσιν? Probably not, given the second quotation, which says that they come "from above". They are part of a providential ordering. On this view, then, it seems that human beings use names which are endowed from above, and that they somehow get to know them. How? Speculating again on Eunomius' position, one might say that he believes certain names to be given in Scripture: of the profusion of names available there, he selects only those which are logically demonstrable. This is probably Eunomius' equivalent of Proclus' revelation of preexisting names through the *daimones*.

Gregory's position that language springs from God-given mental capacity places more value on the inventive and rational abilities of human intelligence. Rist (Basil's "Neoplatonism" .. 185) makes the observation that the view of Basil and Gregory is more "scientific" and "more authentically Greek", in that they consider the human rational faculty to be effective, and to be capable of constructing more than just fictitious abstractions. This is probably true in a general sense, though there is plenty to suggest that Eunomius was equally "Greek" in that he was in touch with a developing philosophy of names in Neoplatonist circles, itself perhaps somewhat out of character with the Platonist/Aristotelian stream of Greek philosophy.

Thus Gregory offers his second analysis of Eunomius' philosophy of language, and Gregory's view amounts to this: language is not "from above", but the human intelligence which produces the language, is. Gregory concludes his analysis with a more detailed attack on the "technology of privation" (τῆς στερήσεως... τεχνολογία (Contra Eun. II, 563 J.). Eunomius' view of privation has already been spelt out in that chapter, but it is necessary to show how Gregory's treatment of it positively fits into his own philosophy of language. Though it has been argued that Gregory did not really see the point of the issue, it is nevertheless true that he offers some views of his own in the course of discussion. Eunomius had said that the term "ingenerate" was applicable to the deity, and that though negative in form, it was not a privative term. The reason for ruling out privation appeared to be that priva-

tion carries a covert affirmations of another kind (see p.138), and this is what Eunomius wished to rule out.

Gregory finds it astounding that anyone should imagine that this view should even be entertained (Contra Eun. II, 566 J.), and reveals that he was unaware of the discussion of this issue. He will admit the use of negative words, but declines to consider it important to determine whether these are actually "privative" (στερητικά), or "abstractive" (ἀφαιρετικά). This is one of the few passages in late Platonism to link ἀφαίρεσις with negative theology (Contra Eun. II, 580 J.).

Gregory takes the view that language is about the material world: it falls into four categories. Language will fall into the categories of distance, space, limit or time (Contra Eun. II, 578 J.), or combinations of these. He continues:

> Considering that the transcendent nature would seem to have no relationship whatever with the things below, we use thoughts and terms about the divine nature which express separation from such things. (Contra Eun. II, 579 J.)

For separation Gregory uses the non-technical word ἀποχωριστίκος for "separation", and goes on to say that he means words like "imperishable" or "changeless". It is such words as this that he refuses to categorize as either "privative" or "abstractive".

Thus Gregory admits the use of negative descriptions. But he believes that these convey only the idea of what God is not: they bring no positive information about what he is (Contra Eun. II, 582 J.). In fact God is above every name, and the application of negative epithets does not infringe this principle.

> That he transcends every intellectual manoeuvre, and is far beyond being discovered by any name, constitutes a proof to men of his ineffable greatness. (Contra Eun. II, 587 J.)

This endorsement of certain negative words constitutes an elementary form of negative theology. It is not however a method, but it is simply a statement of the limits of language. For Proclus the negative epithets played a part in theological discourse, as bearers of positive information about the essence of transcendent realities. We find in Gregory a static recognition of the value of negative words, but no advocacy of a part for them to play in the theological procedure. There is no recognition of the unveiling power of the negative, such as we see in the Neoplatonist Commentators, and in Proclus. Gregory's negative theology remains at a relatively simple level.

The identification by Eunomius of the word "ingeneracy" with the actual being of God is refuted by Gregory. The reification of the semantic, a tendency which we have observed to be Gnostic as well as Neoplatonist, is explicitly rejected by Gregory.

> ... for it is clear to all that no name has real existence (ὑπόστασιν) by itself, but that every name is a sign (σημεῖον) and a means of knowing some being or thought, and that a name neither exists in itself nor is thought of in itself. (Contra Eun. II, 589 J.)

In contrasting the terms *hypostasis* and *semeion,* Gregory makes a very clear statement. A name is not an existent, but a sign of something. This statement could almost have been made in response to the Gospel of Truth, with its identification of the Son as a name.

The Godhead alone has authentic existence, and it is shared equally between the three members. Eunomius had declared:

> He whose existence (τὸ εἶναι) arises from generation, did not exist before generation. (Contra Eun. III, VIII, 30 J.).

The intention is clearly to make Jesus' status as only-begotten imply not-being, or a diminished form of being by comparision with the Father. Eunomius argues that the type of existence which relies on generation as its source is not the highest form of existence. Gregory declares himself unable to grasp what Eunomius means, and the alternatives he offers make it clear that it is not a mere ploy. Eunomius offers a demonstration, in the Platonist manner, that existence which is part of the generated world is inferior (the confusion between γίγνομαι and γεννάω is of little consequence here). However Gregory goes on to assert Scriptural arguments against the view that Christ either exists in a lesser way, or exists not at all. It is clear that Eunomius means that Christ does not exist as a pure unity: that he is multiple and it is likely that he is assimiliating God to the One pure, and Christ to the lesser unity of parts, as envisaged in Plato's Parmenides. Gregory's discussion turns (Contra Eun. III, VIII, 35 J.) on this question of simplicity and multiplicity, without however referring to Plato.

Gregory returns to this in his second book, in order to assert once more "that there is no difference in essence to be found between the Father and the Son" (Contra Eun. II, 610 J.). This is then the foundation for the theology of the unknowability of the Trinity: each member participates equally in being, or "is-ness", and so each is equally unknowable. It was observed earlier (p.180) that the copula "is" was thought by Gregory to be unknowable, that to attribute being was unlike any other description. To say "God is good" is an attempt to circumscribe the uncircumscribable: but to say "God is", is not a definition or a description in the same way. It is a statement of unknowable essence. The verb to be is taken as making an ontological statement, and not as a mere copula in such sentences, but the kind of statement it makes is not like an ordinary statement which attempts to draw lines around the subject.

Gregory is in an interesting position. He simultaneously asserts that God is nameless, and that human language is the efficacious product of the human

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Chapter XI. Augustine: the importance of meaning and the unimportance of the negative method

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XI. Augustine: The importance of meaning and the unimportance of the negative method

Augustine's volatile spirit took him into the realm of mystical experience, and he shared an interest in it which was common to his age. The rich Platonist heritage lies behind this interest, and to some extent explains it: however the anthropomorphic imagery of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is equally present, and the ardour of Augustine's desire has to be expressed in those terms. The imagery of desire plays a great part in the expression of his longing for knowledge: the mouth of Augustine's heart is turned to the heavenly stream which flows from God himself, and a fiery affection draws him: in such a way he describes the mystical experience enjoyed by himself in company with his mother at Ostia (Conf. IX.10).

In a graphically painted scene, Augustine describes this moment, at a certain house in Ostia by the Tiber, where he and his mother, leaning in a certain window, looked out upon the garden as they waited for their sea voyage. As they conversed their spirits began to range over all material things, eventually going beyond them, to the sun, moon and stars. Ascending still, their spirits reached beyond to their own souls; then higher still to the region of inexhaustible plenty. After some moments poised in this state, their spirits descend to the mundane level again:

> . . . we returned to the sound of our own speech, in which a word has both a beginning and an end. (Conf. IX.10)

How unlike the Word is the human voice, exclaims Augustine, and this is a major theme of the Confessions, not to mention his philosophy of discourse in general. Running through this passage is a twin dichotomy, between time and timelessness. Augustine's mystical experience has placed him in contact with a Word which has no beginning or end, and he contrasts it with the linear development of human speech, particularly that which is spoken or written. Characteristically of the mystical experience, the pleasures of ordinary existence pale into insignificance, and suffer from the comparison of the higher and lower states.

Elsewhere Augustine describes such a departure from the body in the case of another person, his secretary. This boy desired "to be dissolved and to be with Christ" (Letter 158: cf. Phil. 1.23), and after sixteen days' illness achieved his ambition. Throughout this period, Augustine notes, the boy continually spoke the language of the Scriptures. When the faculty of speech began to fail him, he attempted to make the sign of the cross on his forehead, and on his mouth. Augustine felt that the boy's spirit had left the body, and

was now illuminating his own mind. After describing another account of mystical experience, he concludes that the mind has an immense power of resistance. Though subjected to all manner of annoyances, temptations and burdens, which come from the body, the mind can nevertheless resist and win through to higher things.

> "The mind does not forsake its own strength . . . but since it remembers itself, it is rendered more active and attentive, stimulated by such activity . . ." (Letter 158, 4)

The energy of the mind can free it from the body, and here Augustine returns to a theme of the Confessions. The phrase *meminit sui* recalls the *memoria* of the Confessions, and in this work Augustine says much about the power of memory itself. The Confessions is, in both form and content, a eulogy of memory: on the one hand it provides (Book V ff.) a philosophical analysis of the faculty of memory, and on the other it takes the form of an autobiography, and so is a literary product of memory. "Great is the power of memory", says Augustine (Conf. X.17), "it is my mind, and it is I myself." All the abilities of memory are gone over here, and the relationship between mind and memory is frequently raised.

> . . . whatever is in the memory, is in the mind . . . such is the power of memory, such is the force of life in living man, mortal though he be! (Conf. X.17)

Here mind and memory are brought together, and assimilated as one power. In the Letter, however, the memory focusses on the mind, and this concentration alerts it, stimulates, and releases its energy. But in the Confessions too, memory acts as the consciousness of the self: it triggers the elevation of the mind, which rises beyond memory to God himself (Conf. X.17). The transcendent capacities of the mind wait to be unleashed, and once they are so, they are capable of soaring to unknown heights.

In these passages, then, Augustine the mystic sounds the typical Neoplatonist note. The mind can take flight, like the chariot of the Phaedrus, and in the end reaches its heights through the exploration of its profoundest depths: through focussing on itself, the mind is released, and thus the Aristotelian/Neoplatonist νόησις νοήσεως, the self-thought of thought, is deployed once again (Aristotle, Metaph. $1074^{b}35$). For Aristotle, self-thought was eternal, unlocated in time (Metaph. $1074^{a}11$), and Augustine attributes some similar power to mind's focussing on itself (see I, p. 77 ff.).

Like Plotinus and Proclus, Augustine stresses the desire for knowledge. This dynamic element of *eros* is the key to much of the progress of mind in Neoplatonism, Greek and Christian. This metaphysical system charts the progress of mind, and endeavours to spell out what happens when mind and reality interact, each exerting their forces in the appropriate way. The energy

unleashed by desire accounts for much of the mechanism of the world of being, and so it is with Augustine as well. The boy referred to in Letter 158 actually *desired* to be dissolved from the body, and it is in virtue of this stimulus that the release was achieved. The Confessions is full of statements of desire for God, desire for the knowledge of God, or desire for Augustine knows not what. The famous passage about his trip to Carthage (III.1), where he found himself surrounded by lust, has him as a lover too, but a lover who is unaware of the object of his desire. In the admirably lucid words of the Latin: *quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare* . . . (I sought for something that I might love, loving to be in love). In the lust-filled environment of Carthage, he mistakes his love for a concern with sensual satisfaction: eventually the love-practice of the city of Carthage is found to be misdirected, and he discovers the true object of his desire. Augustine here raises the fascinating idea that one may be ignorant over the object of one's desire, to the extent that one may mistake sensual satisfaction for one's true end. In reality, of course, Augustine believes that communion with the divine is his genuine goal, but he points to a stage at which he was unaware of this. One can desire something without knowing what it is, and he moves gradually towards discovering the object of his desire.

These problems are addressed again in The Confessions: in the above passage Augustine is content with the biographical details of his state of mind in Carthage. Now he considers the philosophical problems produced by desire which is ignorant of its object.

> How then am I seeking the happy life? For I do not possess it so long as I say: "it is enough, it is there". In fact I ought to say: "how am I pursuing it? By way of remembrance, as if I had forgotten it, but as if I recalled that I had forgotten it? Or through the desire (*appetitus*) to learn an unknown thing, which I may never have known, or which I may have so completely forgotten that I do not recall forgetting it. (Conf. X.20)

The answer is found in Conf. X.23: "all men desire that life which only is blessed, all men desire to rejoice in the truth". Augustine puzzles over whether the knowledge of this is to be found in some actual or potential form in the memory, and concludes that the knowledge of the object of desire is somehow there. And so he rejects the alternative in the passage quoted above, that the appetite felt is for some "unknown thing", desired but unfamiliar. The strength of our desire for the truth lies in the fact that we already know it in some way, that we perhaps possess it in the memory. We may have temporarily forgotten it, or what it looks like, but it is still secreted in the memory. The *appetitus* we feel for it is based on the fact that it is something of us, that it is something shared: the desire already has the desired in some form. Desire is not for the alien.

It is for this reason that Augustine lays stress, in the quoted passage, on the question of *how* he pursues his desire for truth. It is not enough to find, or to recognize it; one must also know by what path it has been discovered. This is probably because it is necessary to know what kind of effort is required if one is to discover the true object of desire: is it a search for something other, something unknown and different from oneself? Or is it a search for something familiar, close at hand, which is already within? Augustine chooses the latter:

> There is still a dim light in men: let them walk, let them walk, lest the shadows overtake them. (Conf. X.23)

It is clear that the way to the true object of desire is through the procedure of recollecting: the faculty of memory is that which reminds us what is within. An intellectual labour is therefore required for us to uncover the true object of desire, which will emerge as something known already. So we have the explanation to the conundrum of Book III, in which he arrives in Carthage "loving to be in love", but mistaking the object of his love. One may lose one's way in the desiring process because of forgetfulness.

This way of looking at desire is as old as Plato himself. In effect, the Symposium is all about the object of desire, and of course the nature of desire. All of the speeches raise the question of what is really sought by men, and a variety of answers is proposed. Implicit in all this is the view that love (*eros*) can be misdirected, and gravitate towards the wrong end. This is the interesting feature of the way the question is raised in the Platonic tradition, that human desire is recognized as a force, but some perplexity over its object is admitted: there is a recognition that one can want something and be simultaneously unaware of what it is. This is indeed a most interesting feature of human experience. A corollary of the Platonic analysis is that all desire is in a sense "good" desire, since it is the same type of energy which is involved; the badness occurs when the energy is misdirected. Thus the Platonic writers (including Augustine here) treat desire holistically, as if it is always, and in all manifestations, the same kind of thing. No distinctions between sexual desire, desire for wealth, desire for fame, desire for beauty, or desire for God, are drawn: the "erotic" energy is one and the same throughout. The problem is simply that it can be misused. Augustine stands squarely within this tradition, in that he associates his interest in sexual desire with his real concern for God: Carthage, the centre of sexual desire, is the place where his desire lost its direction. He nevertheless was aware of a strong enchantment with being in love, and was afterwards to find its true object.

Typically Platonic, too, is the emphasis on recollection. Since the Meno ant the Socratic education of the slave-boy through the arousal of his memory, Platonists have placed great emphasis on the ability to recall. Augustine

spect of sensible matters. But in XI.7 the discussion moves to the memory again, and it is claimed that the memory contains that which is the parent of thought. The memory contains the species, and this provides the model on which thought can operate. The memory contains things which pre-exist material things encountered in human experience. Almost as if countering Karl Marx, Augustine writes as follows:

> For the gaze of the mind, which is formed from the memory, when we think of something in the process of recollection, does not proceed from that species which we have remembered, having seen it, since we could not have remembered those things unless we had seen them. But the gaze of the mind, which is formed by recollection, existed also before we had seen the body which we remembered . . . (De Trin. XI.7.11)

The content of the mind is not determined by material processes, says Augustine, but rather it is in the memory long before any such material experience takes place. He therefore takes the "gaze of the mind" out of the realm of learnt material processes, and makes it predate such experiences. There is more in the memory than the sum total of experiences. Augustine's concern here is a long examination of the will, and its relationship to the mind and to memory, and this question need not detain us here.

The mind, moreover, seeks to know itself: in fact it is inflamed with this desire (De Trin. X.3.5). This Neoplatonic principle of the self-thought of thought plays an important part in Augustine's system. What is the significance of this reflexive character of mind? In the first place, mind seeks to know itself simply because it is there to be known: "everyone loves knowing" (De Trin. X.2.4). But secondly, mind wants to know itself because of its content. There is more there than is put there by life's experiences: mind is the entry-point for a whole world of principles, truths and beings. It is the link between the transcendent and the material, and constitutes an image of the supreme Being. It is an imperfect image, but nevertheless an image (De Trin. X.12.19), and so knowledge of it will provide one with a glimpse, by analogy, of the true mind. Thus Augustine, like any Greek, returns to the Delphic maxim: "Know thyself".

> For it is not said to the mind: "Know thyself" as it is said "Know the Cherubim and the Seraphim". For they are absent, and we believe what is taught about them, that they are certain heavenly powers. (De Trin. X.9.12)

Knowledge of oneself is not like knowledge of an absent being, who has to be sought in order to be known. Nor, Augustine continues, does it have the character of external knowledge, as one when he knows somebody else, through his physically expressed persona. Knowledge of oneself is knowledge of something present, and it is knowledge acquired through the internal mode. The moment the word "thyself" is understood, the self-knowledge

Neoplatonist tradition. That he chooses the unfolding of a sentence as an analogue for this general unfolding in time is confirmed by a passage later in the Confessions. He takes as an example of passing from the past into futurity, the recitation of a psalm. The quality of expectation is there, which assures the drive onwards from one word to the next, and his expectation "reaches over the whole" (Conf. XI.28). As we saw with the desire of the semantic in the De Trinitate, the presence of a small beginning is enough to whet the appetite for the remaining words and syllables, and the presence of a starting-point creates the desire for the rest. He repeats the psalm and one part of it recedes into the past; it is now kept in the memory, for future reference. In this way the "life" of his action is extended two ways, forward into the arena of his expectation, and back into the receptacle of his memory. As the expectation is shortened, so the memory is enlarged: eventually the expectation vanishes, and the whole psalm passes into the memory. The image is extended: what applies to the whole psalm applies to every part of it; that, is, each letter in a word is traversed with the same expectation and the same receding into memory, until the whole word is completed. That which applies to the microcosm also applies to the macrocosm: the psalm can be taken as a mere part of the linear movement of life as a whole. There are many psalms, and many other activities, and each is consumed with this same linear movement, under the stimulus of expectation and with the rearguard action of memory.

> . . . it holds also through the whole age of the sons of men, the parts of which are the whole lives of individual men. (Conf. XI.28)

So much emphasis is placed on the consumption of time by Augustine, and that quality of eagerness which characterizes it – the *studium, intentio, amor, appetitus,* and so on – that the choice of a specifically linguistic example is extremely revealing to anyone interested in Augustine's philosophy of discourse. After the example of the psalm, he continues along the lines of his ardent pursuit of the future. Yet stretching forward, he finds truths that "were before": he uncovers the eternal present. There is a quality of eagerness which is present throughout Augustine's autobiography, and which plays an important part in his general philosophy of human endeavour: it is a crucial element in his understanding of human living, and a crucial element in his understanding of discourse. Language is traversed in a linear way, and when grasped, passes into the memory. The past never quite disappears, and in the same way, used language never quite disappears, but finds its way into the "innumerable palaces" of the memory (Conf. X.8).

The contrast between knowledge laid out in lines of words and between the eternal and timeless knowledge of God is the starting-point for Book XI of the Confessions. Augustine asks whether God sees everything happening

in this time-bound way: if not, he wonders, what point is there in spreading before him so many narratives. He finds his answer in the idea of confession, and claims an ardent desire to continue with the sequential tale. Every drop of water in the hour-glass is precious to him, and so he proceeds with vigour to outline the story of his confessions. But he returns to the contrast between the human word and the divine word in XI.7:

> You call us therefore to understand the Word, who is God, God with you: which word is spoken everlastingly; in it all things are spoken everlastingly. For that which was spoken was not concluded, and another thing said, in order that all things might be said, but rather all at once and everlastingly.

The simultaneity and immediate holism of the divine Word contrasts with the step by step unfolding of the human word. This linearity of human knowledge, contrasted with the wholeness and immediacy of divine knowledge is really the theme of Book XI, and in section 9 Augustine furthers the comparison by a Johannine reminiscence of the Word as the beginning. Like the Gnostic Marcus, Augustine toys with the prologue to John's gospel, and finds the deliberate intention to associate the Word with the idea of "beginning": and so he is able to conclude that the conventions of human discourse were adopted for the sake of revelation. In order to speak in a human way, God chose a beginning for his word. Some people foolishly imagine that this sequential tale is the whole of God's story, but it is not the case (XI.10). If anyone were to ask what God was doing before he made heaven and earth, he would be making the mistake of thinking that the linear type of human tale also applied to God: he should rather realize that God exists and acts and thinks out of time, in the eternity which characterizes the true Word. "They strive to know eternal things, but their hearts flutter still between the motions of things past and to come, and remain empty still" (XI.11).

Man is caught with the paradox that he must understand the eternal through the temporal: his whole understanding is riddled with process and development, and so his grasp of the eternal is extremely tenuous. A leap of the imagination is required in order to take us from the linear to the simultaneously whole; Augustine wonders whether he might be the agent of such a leap (XI.11). This itself is strange, since it is at the hands of Augustine that we have the Confessions, the most complete exercise in linearity in early Christian literature, with the exception of Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History. Yet here is the paradox he is struggling with: the linear mode of discourse is appropriate to the human condition, as is memory, the faculty which deals with linearity, but in the end the object is to move from such a mode of thinking.

> Who shall hold back the heart of man, that it may stand and see, how eternity stands

and orders future and past times, though it is neither past nor future itself? Is my hand capable of this task . . .? (Conf. XI.11)

The whole of the latter part of Book XI is about time, process and human knowledge, and in the last words of the book, Augustine will differentiate between the kind of knowledge which comes from human discourse and the knowledge of God, and this is a crucial passage. In effect we cannot grasp Augustine's epistemology, nor his philosophy of discourse without placing everything in the overall context of time and eternity. Plato had established that these two concepts should be considered together, and Plotinus discusses them in an elaborately interwoven way, so that time and eternity help to define each other. In the same way, Augustine proceeds as if these two concepts can only be understood in relation to each other, and within the framework of time is placed the whole mechanism of human knowing, learning and thinking. Human knowledge is time-bound, and in Augustine's understanding of time, it must therefore proceed in a linear way. The characteristics of time are inherited by knowledge and discourse: thus he who sings, or listens to another singing a psalm, will be drawn on from syllable to syllable by the zeal for knowledge outlined above, but while he does this his feelings and attention are diffused. His mind will jump from the past to the future, and so will be in some ways distracted. Yet God himself is changeless, and grasping him truly will be an experience of a totally different character. At the outset therefore, we must posit two entirely different types of knowledge. Augustine has thus far told us about the psychology of human knowledge, and the universe in which human knowledge operates.

This time-bound characteristic of human knowledge provides a constant obstacle for the person who would grasp the sublime theological truths. The dilemma is reflected in the attempt to grasp the concept of the Trinity, which is beyond ordinary human understanding. It is asserted that the three parts of the Trinity work together inseparably, but for this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, cannot be named by our voices without creating an interval, measured in time, as the words move from syllable to syllable. Yet the three members of the Trinity are in fact identical, and they exist without any temporal movement, "without intervals of time or place" (De Trin. IV.21.30). Clearly then the representation of the Trinity in discourse loses something, and in a sense this cannot be otherwise. But Augustine in this passage offers a way of combating the linear character of discourse from within discourse itself: he offers a way of conceiving of the Trinity which is based on the analogy with a trinity of human faculties. The memory, the understanding, and the will are each mentioned separately in the line of human speech, but this separation conceals a basic unity. Each of these words has in fact been produced individually, but by the memory, understanding and will acting together. Without this simultaneity of purpose, the three words could not have

order to discern the intentions of the author (II.5). The purpose of a sign is to communicate something to the mind of a reader, and so the purpose of reading the Scriptures must inevitably be the ascertaining of some purpose in the mind of the author.

Some writings may be misunderstood, because the signs involved are unknown, or ambiguous (II.10). This can be cured by the study of language, and knowledge of Hebrew and Greek is of particular importance. Problems in translation can prevent the understanding of what is there to be understood, and when translation errors occur, the translator has failed to understand the purpose of the writer. The pursuit of the meaning of the author requires us to make a careful study of the languages in which the Scriptures were originally written (II.12–13), and there can be some reaction of impatience with this discipline (II.20). This is a sign of weakness, however, and the spiritually strong will have the zeal to pursue the real meaning, however it may be found.

Words whose meaning is unknown to us should be studied if they come from foreign languages, and the memory should be used to retain them. Existing translations of the Bible into Latin are to be corrected where necessary (II.15). The nature of things is to be studied, where this will help understand Biblical allusions: if we are unaware of the behaviour of serpents, for example, then we will not understand the command to be "wise as serpents" (II.24). Numbers deserve particular study, because numbers have figurative meanings (II.25), and here Augustine shows that there was a great body of theory about the symbolic meaning of numbers, which could be used to clarify the connotations of periods such as forty days, or seven. The numbers are broken down in various ways, and it is clear that there was what was regarded as an authoritative body of doctrine on number theory, which of course is in evidence much earlier, with Alexandrian writers such as Philo and Clement, and which must have come from Neopythagorean speculation. Augustine speaks as if one could get clear guidance on this matter, and that all it required was a little study. He presupposes an orthodoxy on the subject of number symbolism.

All the material in the preceding two paragraphs illustrates Augustine's approach to the reading of his authoritative documents, and they give a practical guide to hermeneutics, which is set in a theoretical framework about the analysis of language. One observation that may be made is that clearly a discipline is envisaged: the reading of the Bible recommended by Augustine requires research of all kinds, and begins with the requirement of linguistic competence. What he spells out is a science of exegesis, and it is obvious that for Augustine there *are* meanings to be ferreted out and to be regarded as decisive: he envisages no loose allegorizing, or personal imaginative flights of interpretation such as the Gnostics might offer: there is a science of interpretation, and it will find the right reading. The idea of the right reading is

based on the idea of purpose: behind every text is an intended authorial view, and this intention is considered to lend clear interpretability to the text in question. A person can only mean one thing. (A comparison could be drawn here with Clement of Alexandria, whose philosophy of reading is markedly different, and strays in the direction of the Gnostic approach to reading, in which greater stress is laid upon the meditative and imaginative capacities of the reader. Clement places less stress on authorial intention, and relates meaning to the capacities of the reader rather than the purpose of the writer. See pp. 38–41.)

A subtle shift now occurs in the direction of the De Doctrina Christiana. Having given his philosophy of reading the Scriptures, Augustine now turns to the finding of meaning elsewhere: meaning is not only found in words, but in reality in general. The universe is a universe of meaning. Thus the movement of the stars is not considered to provide real information about the future lives of men, and this view is characterized as superstition (I.22); Augustine here condemns any kind of science which is based on the alleged collaboration between men and demons, and his target here is obviously the theurgical teachings of the Greek Neoplatonists, and any discovery of meaning guaranteed by that kind of collaboration between man and the divine will be ruled out *d'office.*

There follows a long discussion of the value of omens and symbols of various kinds, and throughout the question is about legitimacy of interpretation. Perhaps the key passage occurs in III.9.13:

> He who produces or worships anything which has a symbolic value, and who does not know what it means, is a slave to a sign.

Two dangers are indicated here, firstly that of manufacturing symbolism without a proper awareness of its significance, and secondly, that of being symbol-bound. This last is the issue dwelt on in the passage, which stresses the need to look beyond the symbols themselves to the meanings they indicate. A person who performs the Christian rituals without a proper grasp of their significance will be subject to a "carnal slavery". Interpreting things to the letter results in this kind of slavery, and a person who is spiritually aware will focus on the realities designated by them. What is noticeable here is that Augustine dwells on meaning as the important part of the Christian symbols, and not on will. The person who practises Christian ritual ineffectively is guilty not so much of a failure of commitment, or a failure of will, but a failure of semantic awareness. What has to be cultivated is an awareness that words and entities have meanings, that they point the mind to other realities, and that they cannot be taken at face value. The literal interpretation of things is a slavery to material reality, and the truly spiritually minded will always be aware of the meaning which lies beyond. This part of the De Doctri-

use the language of Plato's Phaedrus. But by the same token, a certain amount of slippage is allowed, and the refusal of literalism opens up the semantic field of the words under consideration. In this way the meaning of words is deregulated, and the restriction of meaning which would come with literalism is avoided.

Clearly then, despite the objectivist stance taken by Augustine on the interpretation of the text, there is a fundamental doubt running throughout his writings about the value of language; one suspects here a debt to Platonism, in that he sees a word as a beginning, but also as a stage to be got beyond, as one rung in the ladder. The mind will always have to go further, and there is no sense in which the word captures all. Thus in Sermon 188, there is considerable emphasis, as there was throughout the Confessions, on the limited character of the word.

> It is not therefore surprising if man, made along with all things, cannot explain in words the Word, by which all things were made. (Sermon 188, 1)

Human words are inadequate to this task. Why is this so? There can be many reasons for claiming that transcendent powers are essentially mysterious, and it is important to discover the exact reasons for this. Augustine offers a kind of verbal hierarchy in this sermon, in which the divine Word is given priority over the human word.

> For these words which are thought and brought forth are formed by our mind, itself formed by that Word. (Sermon 188, 1)

Our words, therefore, are the products of our own minds, and are very limited tools indeed. One could however posit some value in our words if some continuity were established between the Word of God, and our own words. But Augustine explicitly refuses any relationship between Christ the Word, and the human word:

> Nor does man fashion words in the same way in which man was made by the Word.

God's production of the world through his Word is quite different from man's own production of language. This is an unusual point of view, since the Fathers generally stress the comparison between the two words, and Augustine here announces a complete discontinuity between human language and the Word of God which is very striking: this discontinuity assures us of the very fallible character of the human word. There is no underpinning from the Word himself which guarantees the success of human language. The Word was not made, whereas language is part of the realm of that which was made, and is therefore transitory, and this is a point which we saw em-

phasized in the Confessions, where language and time were seen as closely interrelated.

We come therefore to that part of Augustine which casts doubt on the value of language, and which enters into the debate over the *via negativa*, itself a means of systematically doubting language. The famous statement, of course, is that of the De Ordine :

God is better known through not knowing . . . (De Ordine II.16.44)

This is often quoted to demonstrate Augustine's interest in negative theology, and indeed it does seem to provide a clear statement of such a position. The real position, however, is much more complex than this, and even in this passage the meaning of the above words has to be carefully scrutinised. These words come in almost incidentally, in the course of a statement about man's limited ability to grasp the deeper truths about his own soul. The wider context concerns problems of the province of reason, and the lesser images of true reality which may present themselves to it, and the remark about the knowledge of God is quite unrelated to these issues. It is rhetorical; thrown in as an a fortiori reinforcement of the weakness of the human intellect in relation to its own self. And since it is not part of a protracted concentration on the negative theology issue, we must be careful not to place more weight on it than it will bear. It should be seen in its own context, as part of Augustine's reaction to the negative way. This overall question will be examined in what follows.

Hochstaffl (Negative Theologie...) does not deal with Augustine at all, but since the publication of that book we have a thoughtful article by Lossky (Elements of Negative Theology in the Thought of St. Augustine), who has long been established as an exponent of the negative way in the Patristic tradition. Lossky begins with a caveat: that the negative way is not necessarily associated with mysticism. One may insist that negations are the more satisfactory mode for conceptualizing God, without insisting that there is a mystical end to the process. Lossky further argues (67–8) that the determining issue on this question is that of the ontological position of God: if God is placed beyond being, then it is inevitable that human epistemology will end in mysticism. It is true that this is a crucial issue, and it provides a clear example of the way in which ontological positions can determine epistemological positions. This has been seen to be important from the Middle Platonists onwards, and perhaps even from Speusippus onwards. However another claim of Lossky's arouses some doubt, namely that in expressing itself the *via negativa* can limit itself to the principles used in natural theology, such as the way of eminence, or the method of analogy. Negative theology is endemic in all religious discourse, Lossky argues, where such discourse is aware of the divine transcendence, but it can choose to handle the necessity of negating

misleading positive claims by having recourse to the methods of natural theology described above. However, this is a claim which must be tested in relation to each period, and each author, on its own merits, unless it is a claim made absolutely, from some given theological perspective. Against Lossky we may take Proclus as an example, a good example, since he has the most positive view of negation as a linguistic tool, and we find that here the negative way does not lead into a series of adjustments carried out through analogical argument, for example. Negation is the supreme instrument, and while it may engender new affirmations, it ends in that final, total, negation of negation itself. After this there is nothing but silence to be observed.

Clearly there can be many answers to the question raised over Lossky's claim, and the period under study will yield particular answers from time to time and place to place. This period cannot be understood in terms of a misleading coherence born of the Thomist reinterpretation of the *via negativa.* The interpretation of Thomas Aquinas, of vast importance though it was, is not the key to the understanding of complex earlier developments.

Returning to Augustine's consideration of the *via negativa,* we have here an interesting case of one who had felt the strong pull of contemporary Platonism, and yet passed it by to a certain extent. Augustine's greater conservatism on the nature and value of language will place him close to Origen, who was seen to have given an oblique refusal to Celsus' proposal of the *via negativa.* Clearly, of course, Augustine will endorse the idea of the inadequacy of language. This has been noted earlier, and in Sermon 188 Augustine begins by noting the failure of discourse. This, he says, is not to be considered strange, and contrasts the power of the tongue with that of the heart. This is consistent with his attempt to return to moral issues at the expense of epistemological issues: the pure in heart shall see God, but not through the faculties of discourse and of the mind. It is this theme of the purity of heart which we shall find reiterated in the following debate over whether we shall "see" God.

Arguing in the context of preceding work by Ambrose and Jerome, Augustine raises in his 147th and 148th Letters, the question of the nature of our perception of God. The whole of Letter 147 is devoted to this question of the manner of seeing God, and the problem confronting him is the comparison of physical seeing with the "gaze of the mind" (*obtutus mentis*: 147, 3). We do not see God with our physical eyes "as we see the sun", but with the mind. There is implicit here a remark on the classic Middle Platonist comparison of God and the Sun (Festugière, La Révélation ... IV, 92–140), and Augustine adds a new note when he compares the gaze of the mind to the gaze by which one observes oneself, in the acts of living, wishing, seeking, knowing, and so on. The idea of such self-observation could not have been put forward by the Middle Platonists, since this sense of the clinical observation of oneself had not achieved currency before the Confessions. It is no doubt in

writing this work, in which he does observe himself as an outsider, that Augustine was able to develop a new analogy for the knowledge of God: it was like observing oneself, with all the same abstractions, and the same problem of incorporeality. The capacity to observe oneself will become the axis of his case (147, 4) that we can in fact observe God in a manner befitting his non-material presence.

Prominent in this discussion, and constantly reiterated, is a quotation from Ambrose. It revolves throughout the discussion, taking its place alongside quotations from Scripture. Augustine will quote it in 147, 25; 29; 30; 39; 47; 52, and will endorse it in each case. The statement of Ambrose enjoys a curious authority with Augustine, to which authority he seems to allude in 147, 52. Ambrose's dictum consisted of a series of negatives:

> God is not seen in any place; he is not sought by bodily eyes, nor limited by our sight, nor held by touch, nor heard in utterance, nor perceived in approach (147, 39).

Ambrose sounds here like the Middle Platonist Apuleius, since a series of spatio-temporal characteristics are denied by him in the same way. But in 147, 47 the question appears differently, with the words added that God is seen "in the clean heart" (*mundo corde*). This is also found in 147, 46, and adumbrated in 147, 39. It is these words, of course, which mark him out from the ranks of the Platonists, and which constitute an anti-Platonist element in Augustine's own work: it is a moral condition which enables the vision sought after by all, rather than an intellectual condition. But Ambrose's negations are well within the tradition of Graeco-Christian negative theology, since they do aim to come down on one side of the apparently conflicting scriptural injunctions. In this letter Augustine moves between those verses which speak of seeing God, and those which proclaim the impossibility of this, such as John 1, 18: "No man has seen God at any Time". It is an effort to resolve the seeming contradiction in scriptural language on the matter which causes him to turn to Ambrose, and Ambrose's response is categorically on the side of non-material perception.

What lies behind this, apart from the difficulty of resolving the scriptural contradictions? The opening of the Letter 147 purports to respond to Paulina on this problem, of how the invisible God can be seen by bodily eyes. The issue has undergone some mutations since these negative formulae were first encountered among the Middle Platonists. The debate is still between immanentism and transcendentalism, but in the febrile climate of the Christianized late Roman Empire, the onset of superstition was taking a different form. The manifestation of God in dreams and visions was a regular feature of life, as we read in the correspondence of Augustine, Jerome and others. The holy was making itself available in all sorts of places, and in particular the veneration of relics showed a new sense of the immanence of the divine.

brose's negative statements are a familiar echo from any Middle Platonist or Platonist source, but they emerge in Augustine's text in quite a different way. He is concerned with *visio,* and Ambrose's negatives are taken as correcting the tendency to place emphasis on corporeal images in visions. It is the dream life and the life of the imagination which concerns Augustine. There is a seeming unwillingness to relinquish that astonishing parade of figures and scenes which apparently unfold in the minds of Romans of that period, and it is really this which is at stake in Augustine's discussions of the various types of vision. The rich frescoes of the spiritual imagination are something which Augustine holds dear, but against them he must balance the Platonic otherworldliness that he has learnt to appreciate. Augustine's spiritual background accustoms him to material and corporeal images, through which a higher value could be perceived, but against this he had to weigh the negatives of Ambrose and the Platonists. Though he repeatedly endorses them in Letter 147, he limits their applicability to his chosen context, namely the philosophy of vision. And in his three-fold theory of vision (De Genesi ad litt. XII.xi.22), he is never concerned to dismiss completely corporeal images, as his endorsement of Ambrose would seem to imply. He is rather inclined to dwell on the kind of interpretation given to such mental images, and to concentrate on the *way they are seen.* When one takes the Letter 147 in the overall context of his discussion of vision, as found in the De Genesi ad litteram and certain passages of the De Trinitate, then one comes to see Augustine's endorsement of Ambrose's negative theology as somewhat misleading. In fact Ambrose's statement is too uncompromising for him: he is not really prepared to relinquish the shadow play of mental images which seems so fundamental a part of the religious life to him. In Letter 147, 43, he speaks of ridding the mind of corporeal images: in the event of being unable to do so, we must remind ourselves that these things are not objects in our minds, but copies of them held in the memory. Yet, curiously, Augustine goes no further than this: he does not propose the systematic deconstruction of these memory images, and we know from the Confessions that the faculty of memory is an important part of his concept of personal history and progress. And again in 147, 47 the spiritual value of some visions is retained, even if it is stressed that these are not the visions of the highest kind. Augustine takes Ambrose's negative theology as indicating that there is a hierarchy of visions, not as a broad condemnation of the ordinary knowing process. Augustine never advocates a general negation of kataphatic theological statements, and appears to have no interest in the kind of experiential growth which, in the Neoplatonist tradition, such systematic negation provides.

The main tension felt by Augustine over the usefulness of language is in the area of the Trinity. Here the variant interpretations of the Christian triad, which constituted the heterodoxies and orthodoxies of the late antique world, gave rise to the most concern. The orthodox had to face the apparent

paradox that God was both one and three, and language was stretched to its capacity to accommodate this. If this had been a statement of Mahayanic Buddhism, one would not have found any attempt to unravel it into a plausible statement. However the Graeco-Christian tradition did feel the need to make the statement that God is both one and three into a set of component claims which did not infringe the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction. It had to be dissolved into rationally compatible sub-propositions. It has already been noted that Augustine sees the problem of describing the Trinity as, in part, a problem of time (see 202), since there is an unfolding of terms in the linear sentence structure. It is inevitable, in this situation, that the unity of the Trinity should be unravelled into the three discrete elements: discourse has this effect.

In fact in the De Trinitate (V.7.8) there is an investigation of negation with a view to the specific issue of language and the Trinity. Here Augustine raises some of the issues discussed by the present author in relation to the alpha privative (Fundamentals of the via negativa . . .). What is the meaning of the alpha privative in a negative statement about God, or in the case of Latin the privative "in-" (*inflex* etc.)? Augustine's judgment on this issue is that the Latin "in-" has the same meaning as the simple negative "non" (De Trin. V.7.8) and he notes that the Latin language does not permit all words to be negated by the use of "in-". We cannot say "infilius" for example, since the Latin language does not contain the word, and so "filius" must be negated by the word "non". For this reason, Augustine says, in discussing the Trinity he will refrain from the use of "in-" adjectives, and simply use the "non" formation, which can in fact be used in all cases. (Augustine here finds the use of "in-" to be equivalent to that of "non . . .", and in this he differs from Aristotle's assessment of the Greek alpha privative, the equivalent of the Latin "in-", since Aristotle found the alpha privative to have many shades of meaning apart from the simple negative: see our article Fundamentals . . .)

Augustine's analysis proceeds to the types of statement which can be negated. There are statements about quality, quantity, relation, position, and so on, and this basis is necessary for the treatment of the relation of the Son to the Father. "He is the Son of God" is taken (De Trin. V.7.8) as a relational statement, since a remark is being made about the relation of the Son to someone else, not about the substance of the Son. The relational statement does not imply a difference of substance between the Father and the Son.

Coming now to the crucial point, the adjective "unbegotten" (*ingenitus*) needs some analysis, since the Son is declared to be both the Son of the Father, and at the same time to be unengendered by him. This contradiction is an acute problem for Augustine, in the context of the trinitarian debates, and it is resolved as follows. To say that Christ is "unbegotten", is the same as saying he is "not begotten": this is the point already established by him in the preamble. But to say not begotten is not to deny a relationship between the

saying, when one attempts to put God in words. Augustine speaks of an awareness that one is wrong when one utters any phrase about God. The explanation of this psychological experience is that God is in fact ineffable: it is the unspeakability of the object which generates the unease in the consciousness of the subject over the value of one's words.

This passage is the key to those seeking for traces of negative theology in Augustine. It is the high point of the negative approach in the whole of his writing, and in fact represents a more extreme view than is in general advocated by him. The famous passage of the De Ordine – *deus qui melius scitur nesciendo* – is misleading in this regard: this is a casual remark, and it stands quite undeveloped. One cannot attribute a full-blown negative theology to Augustine on the basis of this text. The text does not warrant it, but this is also the case for the remainder of Augustine's writings: there is no strong interest in negative theology in them. Occasionally the language of the Platonists makes its appearance, but inevitably an ultimate affirmation will stand its ground. Statements about God are what Augustine is interested in, not negatives.

Yet this passage of the De Doctrina Christiana, quoted above, must be the most radical of his commitments to the negative way. In it, ineffability becomes an ontological concept. Unspeakability is part of the being of God, and since unspeakability is there, it has its effect. (As the existence of God had, for Anselm, its effect on the mental apparatus.) For Augustine, then, this ontic unspeakability determines the state of mind of the would-be knower of God. A sense of doubt pervades the rational process, and the potential knower of God becomes aware that his attempts to conceive of God are failures: it is somehow clear that they are inaccurate. One becomes aware of not knowing. It is this psychological awareness of the unsatisfactory character of religious discourse which tells the tale: it is a caused awareness; it is merely a symptom of the realities governing the situation, and those realities include the sheer unspeakability of God. This last characteristic has its effect: it brings about an awareness of the inappropriateness of language.

Elsewhere Augustine will not uphold this negative judgment on language. Even with his most acutely difficult issue, that of the value of trinitarian formulae, he valiantly preserves the linguistic contribution. The negative way is a propaedeutic, a means of clarifying one's thought before the ultimate stage before the primary and binding statement; that the three Gods are one, and that the Father and the Son have a filial relationship which is not the filial relationship of ordinary human family experience.

The passage of the De Doctrina Christiana discussed above is, in the end, a remarkable departure from the linguistically conservative position normally adopted by Augustine. It was noted earlier (p. 208) that he emphasizes the purpose in the sacred writings of Scripture, that purpose which guarantees the meaning to be culled from the text. Augustine is a textual objectivist: it is

not sufficient (or even accurate) to say that he is a literalist, but he is certainly an objectivist. Truth lies in the objectively (or universally) determined meaning of the text. For this reason, the admission of the De Doctrina Christiana I.6.6 is exceptional. Apart from the claim that psychological uncertainty is generated by epistemological and ontological indescribability, Augustine adds the following problem:

> Therefore God should not even be spoken of as ineffable, because when this is said, something is indeed said, and this causes some sort of contradiction . . . (Loc. cit.)

There is certainly a contradiction here, and Augustine suggests that silence be preserved over it, rather than that an attempt at resolving it be performed. It is an interesting contradiction that that which is said to be unspeakable can indeed be described by the word "ineffable", and this may point to the logical impossibility of declaring a thing to be outside the range of language. The word "ineffable" is of course a negative one, and it does not make a positive claim: but it is nonetheless a linguistic manoeuvre, and furthermore, any negative can be seen to be transformable into a positive statement of some kind. Perhaps this is why Proclus sought to take the ultimate step of negating negation itself, prior to moving into transcendental silence. In this way the awkwardness of a self-refuting negation is overcome, and it may be that it is this set of problems which Augustine was touching on. There is no evidence, however, in Plotinus of interest in this final problem of a self-refuting negative as ultimate description of the One, and nor does there seem to be in Porphyry. It is the problem of a later generation of Platonists, not that of those who may have influenced Augustine. It is of course just possible that other influences did come to exert themselves on Augustine. Proclus and Augustine did coincide in time at least, and there is evidence that the negative way was the subject of discussion in Proclus' circle. It is conceivable that some of this may have touched Augustine during his own life-time, through some point of contact which we can only guess at.

It may be suggested that Augustine had in fact become aware of this development in Neoplatonism. As has been noted on p. 116 the recently edited conclusion of Proclus' Commentary on the Parmenides shows Proclus grappling with a similar issue: he claims here that negative propositions do not express anything about the One, and proposes the ultimate negation of negation itself, and the move into silence. The contemplation of the One is concluded in silence. Language engages in an act of self-destruction, and is followed by the new phase, of total silence. Now Augustine does not say this exactly, but he seems to be nibbling at the same question: he notes the inappropriateness of the ultimate negation, and he advocates silence on the issue. The silence of Augustine is tantamount to deciding to overlook the problem, whereas that of Proclus is a logical result of his negative theology. Augustine's words are:

This linguistic contradiction should be guarded against (*cavenda*) by silence rather than resolved by speech. (De Doctrina Christiana I.6.6)

It seems that Augustine has got hold of the notion that silence is somehow the resolution to the problem which he is confronted with, but that he has not quite understood how it works. His rhetorical soul was not quite capable of the great leap into silence of the Greek metaphysicians, and so he chooses to present the need for silence as a simple recommendation to hush up the problem.

If the above hypothesis is correct, what we have here is an attempt to tone down the stronger form of negative thinking advocated by the Neoplatonists. Even if it is not correct, it may be said that this passage of the De Doctrina Christiana is the most radical endorsement of the negative way in any of Augustine's writings, an endorsement not generally sustained elsewhere.

Augustine's sense of history, of the importance of the unfolding of time, and his view of discourse as having this unfolding temporal structure, must in the end draw him away from a strong use of the negative way. In an occasional flourish he will seem to approve of it, and he will in fact use it in effect to resolve the problem of how to conceive of the Trinity, but never could he envisage that ultimate Proclan stage of the negation of all language, followed by silence. At the apex of the epistemological procedure, there will always be a statement, so far as the philosophy of Augustine is concerned.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

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Chapter XII. Pseudo-Dionysius: a positive view of language and the via negativa

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XII. Pseudo-Dionysius: a positive view of language and the *via negativa*

With Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the Christian tradition of negative theology reaches its culmination, and finds its most controlled expression. The question of who the Areopagite was need not detain us, since it seems impossible to make much headway. The early work of Koch (Proklus als Quelle . . .) has in fact been confirmed in a variety of ways, and the current view is that the Areopagite came from a milieu influenced by fifth or sixth century Neoplatonism. Hathaway lists twenty-two different possibilities (Hierarchy . . .), and we can only agree with Saffrey, who denounces with great ferocity the methodology behind such attempts, that over-confident identifications are bound to fail (Nouveaux liens objectifs . . .). Saffrey offers what he calls "objective links" between Proclus and the Areopagite, in the spirit of the comparisons of Koch: by "objective links", he means parallels between the Areopagite and Proclus which commend themselves, without requiring the backing of some overall interpretation, or of some hypothesis as to the authorship of the writings. As Saffrey also argues, we are not so confident of the prosopography of late antiquity as to be able to assume that we know of every likely candidate. The Areopagite may be an otherwise unknown writer. It is nevertheless true that the task of finding the author of these profoundly influential documents is one of the most enticing available in ancient studies: the whiff of a literary or ecclesiastical plot is enough to excite the curiosity of any self-respecting scholar. We shall have to content ourselves, however, with the procedure of analysing the documents in their literary context, and the task of discovering the identity behind it will be forgone. Some observations on the ideas of the author will be made from time to time, in case the use of the specific vantage-point we have chosen for this book does bring forward useful items of information. In general, the author seems to be working in a non-Arian, somewhat Gnostic, Christian, Athenian Neoplatonist tradition. We will return to these points later.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of pseudo-Dionysius for the history of European culture, particularly for the Latin segment of it. The French in particular look back to the Areopagite for the explanation of much that is in their culture, in respect of theology and philosophy, but also in respect of political institutions. The notion of hierarchy in the Areopagite was to play a role in establishing and ordering the social structure of the middle Ages. From the outset, the Areopagite was much read. Saffrey (op. cit) points to John of Scythopolis, the first commentator on his works, and the first to help perpetuate the pseudonymy of the author. John gives much in the way

of interpretation and commentary. Maximus the Confessor (C7th) read extensively, and quoted from the works of the Areopagite. John of Damascus in the eighth century derives a great deal from the ideas of Pseudo-Dionysius. Gregory Palamas (C14th) quotes him frequently, and praises his theology, though he himself continues more along Cappadocian lines, so far as his own theology is concerned. Bernard of Clairvaux, though not a Dionysian, reflects his language. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas quotes the Areopagite extensively, using him frequently as a starting-point for theological debate: the influence of the Areopagite on the medieval interpretation of Aristotle was considerable. The Dionysian system of thought is held to have contributed largely to the formation of the Thomist tradition, particularly in respect of the ontological framework within which the philosophy of Thomas is cast. The Dionysian account of privation, for example, takes on the clearly ontological function that it has in the theory of Thomas. Meister Eckhart (C14th) uses a good deal of Dionysian terminology, though his own mystical philosophy does a great deal to transform the Dionysian influence. In the fifteenth century, Nicolas of Cusa refers to him as *maximus theologus,* or as *divinus vir,* quoting from him extensively. Ficino (C15th) helped re-establish the Areopagite as a major influence by translating and annotating the Divine Names, as well as the Mystical Theology. However *all* his Platonist-style works are considered to bear the influence of Dionysian mystical theology. The negative theology of John of The Cross (C16th) bears the mark of the apophatic descriptions of Pseudo-Dionysius, and here the influence of the latter is most directly discernible. Less clear influences, particularly in the realm of apophatic theology, have been perceived in the work of Giordano Bruno (C16th). There have been few more influential authors in the history of both Eastern and Western Christianity, and it is not really possible to discern where the story ended, or when it will end. The Dionysian tradition has become a cultural undercurrent, emerging at times, but always maintaining the capacity to influence and redirect. The Dionysian corpus, by its own air of mystery, and by its mixture of traditional discipline with speculative imagination, has a magnetism which has proved very durable.

Returning now to the text itself, the very title of the work The Divine Names gives an immediate context for the Areopagite's thought. As we have already seen, the subject of *onomata* was much discussed in the fourth and fifth centuries. The nature and importance of names was seen to form the major issue in the triangular debate between the Cappadocians, Eunomius the Anomoean, and the Gnostics. The Cappadocian position is that names are conventional, and Gregory of Nyssa complains that his opponent speaks as if names and entities were identical. Names do not have existence (ὑπόστασιν ἔχει), he argues against Eunomius (II, 589 Jaeger). "For God is not just a term (ῥῆμα), deriving his being from being spoken, or uttered", he says elsewhere (Contra Eun. II, 148 Jaeger). Gregory writes in a context in which

words have entered the realm of ontology, in which the semantic has been reified. The whole Cappadocian position is developed against this form of linguistic positivism, and in this era it is the Cappadocians who become the champions of the idea that names are conventional, and that they are attached κάτα θέσιν, rather than κατά φύσιν. Language is drawn up after the constitution of reality, as a series of abstractions or distillations from what is, developed after the event. This is the meaning of the term ἐπίνοια, brought into prominence by this debate (see p. 151).

Two important articles help us situate this concern of the negative theologian *par excellence,* with names. We have already alluded to them, but taking firstly that of Trouillard (L'activité onomastique . . .), we have here quite simply a critical description of the teaching of Proclus on divine names. Much of it is drawn, of course, from the Cratylus, this being the dialogue of Plato which deals most with the problem of *onomata.* Some of Trouillard's remarks have already been quoted (p. 101), but they can be summarized here: in Proclus, language has its origin in the "unifying and creative power of the divinity" (p. 229). Names correspond to the ontological levels: there are divine names for divinities, dianoetic names for the dianoetic entities, and so on (p. 241, quoting Proclus in Tim. I, p. 273, 25–27). Language demonstrates the essence of things and it takes this power from its divine origins (cf. in Crat. 51, p. 20, 18–21). But the most important passage is that which (cf. in Crat. 71, pp. 29–35) makes the generation of names part of the divine procession: names are symbols and traces left across the realm of the cosmic by the gods, who wished to guarantee comprehension of truth and reality. Names are therefore things, which are also possessed of symbolic value.

Discussion of Trouillard's paper by those present at the Entretiens indicates that the question of how language "corresponded" to metaphysical reality was seen to be a crucial one, and this is indeed a puzzling issue to the modern mind. Words have their value insofar as they are *not* things: they signify things, but are separate from them, at least as we see it. If words are reified, and become part of the furniture of the real, then other words will be needed to describe them, and to bring them into discourse. This is the crux of the matter: to do this work, words have to be part of discourse. To place them in the world of being seems only to create a problem of infinite regress, since the reification of one word will require the existence of another, to play its role in discourse.

These problems seem to lie at the heart of the Cappadocian rejection of the ontological theory of names, but we do not of course have to solve them for the Cappadocians. Suffice it to say that there was a school of thought comprising certain Neoplatonists, certain Gnostics, and certain Arians, which saw names as divine beings, and accorded them virtually demoniacal power.

Saffrey's contribution (Nouveaux liens objectifs . . .) stresses a different side of the *onomata.* Saffrey uses John of Scythopolis, the Areopagite's first

like all beings they reflect the higher principle which is their source, and of which they bear the mark. It is therefore understandable that these divine names should both *be* and *signify* at the same time: in a sense, every being in the Platonist world of things has meaning. Insofar as things share in being, they tend to point to their source. Entities therefore can have a semantic value, because of the way they have come to be. We have already seen in Clement of Alexandria a tendency to find meaning not just in discourse, or in documents, but across the whole range of existents. For Clement, reality was like a map, all of which pointed somewhere, and in the Areopagite this same tendency is apparent. The world of meaning is not confined to discourse, but to a full range of symbols.

For the divine names then, the semantic value of the existent constitutes an explanation. We seem to have advanced beyond the stage of Eunomius and Gregory, where the debate seemed to be over whether God was actually a name, and a name only. Eunomius did not seem able to rebut this accusation, though this may reflect the paucity of our information on him. The Gnostics, however, certainly did speak as if God *was* his name, as we have shown in relation to the Gospel of Truth, or as Tardieu has shown in Les Trois Stèles de Seth . . ., p. 568 (119, l. 20–22). Proclus and the Areopagite seem to have made some progress with this notion, since it emerges more comprehensibly in their writings. It is probable that the Gnostics knew of this Neoplatonist belief in the real existence of certain names, and that they speculatively developed it in order to assimilate God and his name, or Christ and his name. For Proclus however, the real names are not substitutes for the transcendent realities, but reflections of them.

It is important to have this background clear, because the whole point of the Divine Names is that it reveals and discusses certain *onomata* which are held to have a special importance. Further, this provides the basis for understanding the entire kataphatic, or affirmative, aspect of Dionysius' philosophy. Dionysius is not dabbling in the speculative world of the Gnostics, where names are Gods, but in the more sober world of the Athenian Neoplatonists, in which *onomata* are significant existents, created in the procession from the transcendent. They carry with themselves the imprint of the intellectual beauty, as does any other being. The Areopagite's intention, then, is to offer us a series of these monuments as foundations for discourse. These are the real, and only, building-blocks for kataphatic discourse about God. These names are the poles around which other words move.

Thus Dionysius begins the Divine Names:

> And now, o blessed one, after the Theological Outlines, I shall proceed as far as I am able to the unfolding of the divine names. (PG 3, 585B)

This information is to come, not through the wisdom of man but the inspira-

tion of the spirit (I Cor. 2.4), and it will lead to an ineffable union, a far stronger union than can be achieved through "rational or intellectual" power. The names have an extra-rational effect therefore; unlike discursive reasoning, they tend to unite the mind with the highest principles, by some ontological process. Section 2 enlarges upon this process, stressing that the intellect moves toward the good. All beings have some share in the Good, and they are drawn towards it to the limit of their capacity, not falling away in a further descent.

Dionysius uses the word "analogy" twice in this passage, and the meaning of the term here calls for some explanation:

> . . . the divine is revealed according to the analogy (ἀναλογία) of each intellect . . . (PG 3, 588A)
>
> . . . the Good . . . which alone and of itself is established beyond being, makes a ray of light fittingly appear for the analogical (ἀναλόγοις ἐλλάμψεσιν) illumination of each being . . . (PG 3, 588C).

What is the meaning of analogy in such a context? It is clear that it is being used in an ontological sense, but that at the same time it has an epistemological value. It takes us back to the very origin of the concept, as established by Clement of Alexandria in Christian philosophy at least, for whom the analogy of being was the primary meaning (see my 'Αναλογία chez Clément d'Alexandrie . . .). Analogy is originally a mode of being, a proportion of beings in relation to each other. The proportionality of beings makes possible the knowledge which is based on comparison, and leads to what is known as the *via analogiae,* an epistemological tool in Neoplatonism and Christian philosophy, and in scholastic thought subsequently. Dionysius here envisages that each being will have its own relationship to the Good, its own proportion, and a share of knowledge which is appropriate to that. The illumination received will be directly proportionate to the ratio of being to the Good. It is because Dionysius is not here stressing epistemology, or a form of knowledge which is intellectual and discursive, that the concept of analogy is given such an ontological bias: he wants to maintain that this kind of knowing is a form of being.

Reference must be made here to one of Lossky's articles, La Notion des analogies . . ., and the discussion therein. Lossky notes the scholastic use of the term, but quite rightly stresses that God "is not an object, much less an object of knowledge, as he could be for St Thomas or any other scholastic Theologian" (op. cit. 280). He is beyond being, and unknowable. Lossky stresses (287) that for Dionysius God can only be known through his participations in mundane reality, and turns to an analysis of the concept of analogy from this starting point. Reviewing the mathematical usage of the term (288), in which analogy means "proportion", Lossky finds it impossible to suppose

that Dionysius meant that there was some sort of proportionality between creatures and God, since God is not an object. The difficulty that Lossky sets himself is that whilst Dionysius refuses to make God into an object, he frequently refers to the relationship of analogy that holds between believers and God. For such a relationship to exist, God must be objectified in order to preserve the symmetry of the analogy relationship. (We may observe in passing that we have seen Damascius refuse arguments from analogy on the ground of the symmetry implied.) The answer, based on a considerable collection of texts, lies in the notion of causality, and Lossky concludes that analogy is the means by which created beings participate in the virtues of God, that is, his self-expression through the various levels of reality. Lossky further makes the interesting point that analogy is not to be considered a passive quality, but is closely related to free will, and to the love that creatures have for the created. This last point provides a useful enlargement of the way in which analogy is ordinarily conceived, since a voluntarist account of it can be given.

Analogy, then, is a kind of posture in relation to transcendent principles, and ultimately God. If we add to the term "posture", the notion of a quasi-geometrical harmony between the posture of the lower being and that of the higher being, we come closer to Dionysius' idea. And if we further add the voluntarist element so ably adduced by Lossky, we might say that the posture involved is a tendency to "lean towards" the higher principle. There is an element of striving and of desire in this ontological positioning, and the fulfilment of one's being is the natural goal.

The divine names assist in this process. Dionysius insists that the names must be drawn from the sacred writings (τῶν θείων λόγων: PG 3, 589D); and his concern that this be so is repeatedly stressed. Section 4 of Book I begins:

> We are initiated into these things by the sacred writings, and you will find that the theologians' sacred celebration (so to speak) of the good-bearing processions of the thearchy, prepares the way by revelation and celebration for the divine names. (PG 3, 589D)

There is a connection here between the procession, and the divine names, and we have already seen these two things linked by Proclus. The names appear to be the products of this procession, and celebration of this procession will lead to celebration of the names. There follows a list of *onomata*: monad, unity, trinity, cause of beings, wise and beautiful. Each of these could be found in Neoplatonic texts, and do not appear to have anything specifically Christian about them. The names given throughout the rest of the work are often recognizable from Plato's Parmenides and that tradition, but also include clearly biblical terms, such as the Holy of Holies, King of Kings and so

on (ch. 12). Von Ivanka observed the connection with the Parmenides in his Der Aufbau . . ., 386 ff.; Vanneste (Le Mystère de Dieu, 37 ff.) also discusses the issue.

A further matter to do with the Parmenides should retain our attention. The Areopagite invites us to contemplate a series of terms, namely great, small, the same, the other, like, unlike, rest and motion. In his precise words:

> . . . let us now contemplate these statues which are the divine names insofar as they are manifest to us . . . (PG 3, 909A)

A list of traditional kataphatic descriptions is then given, some reflecting Biblical terminology ("God is the same"), and then section II takes up the analysis of naming:

> God is named great according to the greatness proper to itself. (PG 3, 909C)

There follows a description of how this greatness floods and encompasses everything. In section III the origin of the name in question is again broached:

> God is said to be small or fine, because he has left every mass and distance, and because he advances unhindered through all things. Indeed the small is constitutive of, and the cause of all things, for you will find that all has participated in the form of the small. (PG 3, 912A)

Further, Dionysius turns to justify the name "same" in section IV, and in the course of his explanation we find again the language of forms and participation (μετέχειν: PG 3, 912C).

It was noted earlier that the interest in names in late Greek philosophy was associated with the Cratylus, and perhaps with Philo's thought. It seems to me that in the above passages we have a clear allusion to the Parmenides, and the whole background of the theory of ideas and the participation in them of the sensible world. In the first part of that dialogue, a thesis about naming is advanced (130E ff.). The view is that particulars which partake of forms get their names from them, that the names are "eponymous":

> Well, tell me: do you think, as you say, that there are forms and that these other things which participate in them (μεταλαμβάνοντα) take their names from them (ἐπωνυμίας αὐτῶν ἴσχειν), so that things participating in likeness become "like", and those that participate in greatness become "great" . . .?

Socrates agrees with this and the debate follows its course. What Plato has done is to extend the theory of Forms into the world of semantics: the form of Good not only explains cases of goodness in the sensible world, but also

the proper name "goodness", which is named from the form itself. This is a theory about the origins of language. Names come from the forms; they are their "eponyms", or derived names. (There is also an element of this idea in the Phaedo 102C.)

The Areopagite is using a theory of names derived from the Parmenides to establish the existence of these names – not the validity of these names, but their *existence.* It is for this reason that he is able to refer to them as "statues": the names are present to the mind as realities. He has a further task to show how these eponyms for the Forms can be applied to God, and generally he chooses to do this by what might be called the way of positive negation. He establishes firstly the existence of the name "great", as derived from Greatness itself: he then proceeds to show that God is more than great, that his transcendence is not great in the sense that it is *more* great than greatness. God exceeds the chosen concept, but in the manner appropriate to it.

This manoeuvre resembles the positive *via negativa* of Proclus, in that the negation is implied only to allow for a positive statement of transcendence.

Clearly, then, the Dionysian theory of names provides a strong endorsement of theological language, with its ontic grounding as outlined. In this sense the Areopagite is very positive about language, in a way already found in Proclus. Perhaps this is a surprising conclusion to draw about the figure who is, after all, the archetypal Christian mystic and exponent of the *via negativa.* Nevertheless he is far from regarding the divine names as part of the flotsam and jetsam of the human imagination. They are real, and may be sourced to the Real itself. Pseudo-Dionysius' negative theology does not damage this basic confidence in language: as indicated above, it is of the Proclan type. According to Proclus a negation secretes a positive transcendent statement, and implies it.

Turning now to the negative theology proper of the Areopagite, we find in his work the result of the centuries of development which have been studied up till now. He writes in full knowledge of the discussions of the negative which took place in the Athenian School, which we have seen reflected in the work of Proclus and Damascius, and also in that of Aetius and Eunomius. He shows sensitivity to the issues discussed in all these authors: the nature of negation, the relevance of privation, and the positive character of negative statements. His work illustrates the apophatic way at its most highly developed, and constitutes the end of the long voyage from Parmenides through to the closure of the Athenian academy in the sixth century A.D.

It may also be observed that at the hands of the divine Denys the negative way also has an ecumenical function. More clearly than in any other thinker, the negative method of the Areopagite dissolves the differences between the dogmas of various schools. More clearly than elsewhere does the negative reduce that which is affirmed to a common denominator of nescience.

We may begin with the hymn of negatives which opens the fifth chapter of the Mystical theology.

> Ascending still higher we say that it is
> not soul
> not intellect
> not imagination, opinion, reason and
> not intellection . . .
> not life
> not being
> not eternity, not time . . .
> not divinity
> not goodness . . .
> (PG 3, 1045D)

The long collection of negatives continues, systematically annulling any concept which could conceivably be used in relation to the ultimate essence. One notices particularly that He is neither Fatherhood nor Sonship (1048A): this is Dionysius' response to the dogmatic problem of the Trinity. The conflict of the various parties in the Arian dispute over the relation of Father and Son, is resolved by application of the negative to both concepts: thus an act of reductionism is performed on the Trinity. The ideas of Father and Son are put into the form of a negative diptych, exactly in the manner of the classic pairs of negations of Plato's Parmenides. The Father and the Son have by now become standard categories in philosophical theology, and are to be negated as much as any other set of "opposites".

Chapter I of the Mystical theology contains a broad poetic statement of the way of unknowing. Speaking of the mystical summits, the author continues:

> "There the simple, resolved and unchanged mysteries of theology are veiled in the darkness beyond light of the mystical silence . . " (PG 3, 998A)

The mystical silence is the logical conclusion of philosophy for both Damascius, and for the Areopagite. The "beyondness" of the divine takes it outside the realm of the linguistic; the long search of Greek philosophy for the absolute essence of things has finally led it to the view that this essence is inexpressible. One of the themes developed is that of unknowingness, or nescience:

> God is known through knowledge, and through unknowing. (PG 3, 872A)

And a little later:

The most divine knowledge of God is one which knows through unknowing according to the unity beyond intellect . . . (PG 3, 872A)

This emphasis on unknowing (*agnosia*) echoes exactly Augustine's famous phrase *Deus scitur melius nesciendo,* and is part of the apophatic tradition. That the word "unknowing" should carry the alpha privative in Greek suggests that it was being treated as a standard negative, with the same logic as applies to any other "not-predicate". That is, unknowing is probably regarded as a not-knowing, in that it is a higher, and more original form of knowing: in short a negative concept masking a positive one. The unknowing of the initiate into the divine heights is in fact a higher form of knowing.

This is the hypernegation brought into currency by Proclus, who stressed the positive obverse side of the negative statement. That this is what the Areopagite had in mind is made quite clear by what follows:

. . . he was not man, not as non-man, but as from men and beyond men; beyond man he truly became man. (PG 3, 1072B–C)

The Areopagite is therefore able to say that Christ was not man. We must be careful to observe the nuances of this statement; it is not a mere restatement of the docetist position, nor an ordinary denial of Christ's manhood.

The Areopagite denies Christ's manhood with a hypernegation, which does not rob him of manhood (that would be the thrust of a privative negation), but which denies manhood in the sense that the real condition of Christ is thought to be manhood in superabundance. This is the ascending negation of Proclus, which relies on the continuity of the real to guarantee that there will be no rupture when the negation is pronounced. This view of the negative is reiterated elsewhere: the Divine Dark explains that assertions (καταφάσεις) and negations (ἀποφάσεις) are not opposed. The passage does not explain how this comes to be the case, except to say that the divine exists "long before" these assertions, and their subsequent negations.

The word ἀφαίρεσις (abstraction) enjoys a degree of currency with this author which is unusual: it has not been seen with any regularity in the context of negative theology since the Middle Platonists and Plotinus. In this same passage of The Divine Darkness (PG 3, 1000B), it is linked with θέσις (statement, or the "laying down" of something). The two terms are frequently contrasted, with θέσις constituting the act of postulating, or laying down an idea, and ἀφαίρεσις the act of abstracting, or removing an idea. In the present passage the divine is said to be beyond both activities, just as it is beyond assertion and negation. The passage treats them as two couplets, θέσις / ἀφαίρεσις, and κατάφασις / ἀπόφασις.

Postulation and abstraction are linked in other passages: for example in 641A of the Divine Names, a series of contradictions are brought forward as

descriptions of the divine, and included is the claim that he is both the "postulation of all, and the abstraction of all". Elsewhere, the highest principle is said to be subject neither to postulation, nor to abstraction; but there are θέσεις and ἀφαιρέσεις of "the things which come after it" (PG 3, 1048A–B). A more developed contrast between the two terms is found at the beginning of the second chapter of The Mystical Theology. As it is a classic of negative theology, it will be quoted at length:

> In this dark beyond light, we pray to be, to see through unseeing and unknowing, to know the beyond contemplation and knowledge, which does not itself see or know. For this is really seeing and knowing, and lauding hyper-really the hyper–real through the abstraction (ἀφαιρέσεως) of all beings, just as those making a natural statue remove all impediments in the way of the pure contemplation of the hidden, and manifest the hidden beauty itself in the presence of itself, by abstraction alone (ἀφαιρέσει μόνῃ). We must, I think, celebrate abstractions (ἀφαιρέσεις) in an opposite way to postulations. For we postulate beginning from the very first things, moving to the last things through the middle. Then we abstract all things, making an ascent from the last things to the first things themselves, in order that we may openly know that unknowingness which is veiled by all the knowables in all beings, and in order that we may see that hyper-real darkness, which is hidden away by all the light in beings. (PG 3, 1025AB)

The interplay of light and darkness reverses the common-sense understanding of these two states, just as the negative way reverses the usual understanding of how statements are made. Light is considered to hide things on this view: the real object of perception is the darkness which lies behind, or which is "hidden away" by the light. Light does not illuminate: it conceals.

There is a new note struck here. Since Plato's allegory of the cave, light had been the symbol of intellectual enlightenment, so to speak. The language of John's gospel endorses the image within the Christian tradition: Christ is the light of the world. In Middle Platonism, the sun, source of light, is taken as an image for the ultimate essence, and in Plotinus the metaphor of light exercises a certain dominance as an intellectual model. Yet here, the symbolism of light is reversed: it no longer suggests clarification and understanding, but it is the light itself which veils the true object of the search, namely the darkness which lies beyond. Pseudo-Dionysius has decisively reversed the traditional imagery, in a manner not unlike the Gnostic attacks on previous tradition, a mode we have described as "negative dependency". Light is now a symbol of obscurity.

Further, the understanding of *aphairesis* here put forward, reminds us of that suggested by Pappus, and followed by Origen, and discussed on p. 79. The Areopagite takes *aphairesis* as the removal of all things, starting from below and moving upwards to the first principles. What he calls postulation (*thesis*), involves moving from above to below, and these appear to corre-

spond to the *synthesis* and *analysis* of Pappus the mathematician. In other words we have here a classic school formulation of the negative way, which has been familiar since the Middle Platonists, even though the terminology might be different. The lower levels of reality are clouded with beings of a more massive kind: these constitute the objects of knowledge and reason, but they must be got through if one is to "know" the essence which lies behind them, though this will no longer be an act of knowing, of course.

The Areopagite reiterates this distinction between *thesis* and *aphairesis* a little later, in chapter III of the Mystical theology:

> But why, you say, in sum do we make the divine postulates from the very first entity, when we begin the divine abstraction from the last? Because it is necessary that those who postulate that which is beyond all postulation should make their hypothetical assertions from that which is most akin to it; whereas those who abstract from that which is beyond all abstraction, should make their abstraction from things which are particularly removed from it. (PG 3, 1033C)

This statement recapitulates the idea of abstraction enunciated earlier, and which we have seen to be mathematical in origin: abstraction begins with the lowest ontological entities, and progressively removes, ascending towards the more refined.

Vanneste (Le mystère de Dieu . . . 67–8) points out a fine image used by the Areopagite to illustrate *aphairesis,* and notes also that the same image is found in Plotinus (I.6.9). One cannot help wondering whether some Plotinian line leads straight to the Areopagite, given both the revival of the term *aphairesis,* and the use of this image. However the image explains knowledge gained by abstraction, or "removal", on the analogy of a sculpture. The removal of pieces of stone from a block, gradually reveal the form of the sculpture which lies beneath, already there (αὐτοφυές) in a sense. Thus the "hidden beauty" is revealed, by "abstraction alone" (PG 3, 1025B–C). Thus it is that progressive removal can clarify and reveal.

Proceeding now to the idea of privation (*steresis*), it will be noted that certain developments have taken place with the work of this author. It has been observed in relation to both Neoplatonism and Neo-Arianism, that privation posed a problem for the *via negativa*: was the negation carried out thereby a form of privation? If so, the act of negation would seem to imply a diminution. The Areopagite implicitly responds to this problem by declaring that God is "beyond privation" (PG 3, 1000B), as well as being beyond *thesis* and *aphairesis.* In linking these three ideas, he seems to include privation as an epistemological mode (see Appendix I), with the intention of asserting that none of the three (postulation, abstraction, privation) can be used of God.

Yet we also find in Pseudo-Dionysius the clear beginnings of the medieval tendency to limit privation to ontology. The key passage here comes from

the fourth chapter of the Mystical theology. The Cause of all neither is nor has

> alteration, destruction, division, privation, flux, or anything else which is of the sensible world. (PG 3, 1040D)

Privation is here clearly designated to be of the sensible world, and associated with various change-of-state concepts. The answer to the question about privation is being put in such a way as to permanently limit the meaning of the word: henceforth privation will be of states only. It will be confined to ontology, and will become synonymous with the idea of lack-in-being. The fact that its logical expression, through the ordinary negative or the alpha privative, made it resemble the ordinary form of negation, caused it to be linked with ordinary negation from Aristotle onwards. The Areopagite, more than any other figure in classical antiquity, tends to sever the links of privation with logic and epistemology, and to renounce the impression created by the operation of privation within language.

It is here that the notion of privation as a deficient ontological state begins to form, and from here that the medieval notion of privation as evil takes root.

> The Good gives being to the privation of itself, with a view to the whole participation of itself. (PG 3, 721A)

The word οὐσιοῖ (translated as "gives being") is a late Greek verb, no doubt invented to accommodate the Neoplatonist emphasis on the Good as source and nourisher of being: Syrianus' remarks on how being "brings succour" to all things from itself (see p. 89) constitute an example of this trend of thought. In this passage the Areopagite lays the foundation for the Thomist idea of evil as privation of good: evil is understood as an incomplete state, damaged by its lack of goodness. Evil is a "non-complete good" (ἀτελὲς . . . ἀγαθόν). Privation is established here as a form of deficiency, and it becomes the explanation of how good can be diminished without contradicting itself, and of how it can exist in and with evil. This will become a classic part of the Thomist analysis of evil (see Appendix I). Thus the Divine Names:

> Evil is not in bodies. For ugliness and disease are a lack of form and a privation of order. This is not wholly evil, but less beautiful. (PG 3, 728C–D)

This same passage continues to assert the idea of evil as defect, but stresses that privation is not a force warring against the good. A privation does not have power (*dynamis*): any power that might subsist in the defective being must come from the being itself, and its source (PG 3, 729C). In this way pri-

vation explains evil, but it is not reified. It is not identified as a cosmic power: the Manichaean dualism is avoided.

Evil has no being (732D). We have been told that it has no "power", but we are now told that it is "contrary" (παρά) to nature, contrary to the "way" and so on.

> Thus evil is a privation, lack, weakness, asymmetry, failure, non-intention, non-beauty . . . itself in no way being in any way at all. (PG 3, 732D)

The non-existence of evil is again asserted, and the privative negation is again called in to explain it. Evil is the absence of that which endows form and substance: it is a defect in a thing's way of being. One may conclude as follows: privation is now definitively excluded from the epistemology of the *via negativa* and is held to represent deficiency on the ontological level only.

This conclusion is completely at variance with the treatment of privation given by Vanneste (Le mystère de Dieu . . . 101–120). Vanneste uses the term "privative" of virtually every type of negation which occurs in the Areopagite's exposition of the negative way. If the foregoing analysis is correct, then this is a confusion: it is true that any adjective or noun prefaced by the alpha privative may look like a privation, but the fact is that negation and privation were clearly distinguished in late Greek philosophy. It is surely incorrect, as does Vanneste, to speak as follows:

> He has therefore introduced by this third term (ἐν ὑπεροχῇ) a rapid allusion to the exegesis of the privative names of God along the lines of the way of *eminentia* . . . (113)

It is confusing to use the word "privative" in this context: it is negations which are at stake. It is, of course, quite true that Pseudo-Dionysius' negations are to be interpreted as transcendental negations, like Proclus' hyper-negations. But he explicitly excludes privation from this technique, when he speaks of ignorance (non-knowledge) of God:

> . . . we understand this in a transcendent manner (ὑπεροχικῶς) and not in the privative sense (κατὰ στέρησιν) . . . (PG 3, 1065A)

This is an explicit response to the problem of privation as identified in the neo-Arian and later Platonist writings. Another attempt to respond to the problem is made by the Areopagite in the Divine Names:

> . . . for non-intelligence and non-perception are attributed to God by transcendence (καθ' ὑπεροχήν), and not as defects (κατ' ἔλλειψιν). (PG 3, 869A)

Here he explains in other words the problem of privation, and lodges exactly

the same caveat about it as Aetius and Eunomius. Since this was a problem whose significance completely escaped Gregory of Nyssa, whilst it was clear to the Arians and the Neoplatonists, we may assume that the Areopagite did not derive his ideas from the Cappadocian camp; he may have belonged to the Neo-Arian or Neoplatonist tradition.

Thus Vanneste's treatment of the Areopagite's negative way as being virtually a privative way, seems to obscure an important development, namely that in response to the problem posed by privation for the *via negativa,* Pseudo-Dionysius limits its meaning to the ontological, and makes it the centrepiece of a vigorous new philosophy of evil.

The excellent work by Hathaway (Hierarchy . . .) provides us with a very carefully considered commentary on the "letters" of the Areopagite, and there is the strong suggestion throughout this work that there is little Christianity in his writings, that most of the content is traceable to Athenian Neoplatonism, and that the author may even have been one of Damascius' circle. This hypothesis influences the interpretation at most points. We will take some examples, however, which show non-Platonic elements. Firstly, letter III:

> The sudden is that which is drawn out, unhoped for, into the visible from its former invisibility. Theology says this symbolically, I believe, concerning the love of Christ for man, that that which is beyond being has come forth from concealment, taking human substance and becoming visible to us. He is hidden even after his appearance, or to speak more divinely, even in his appearance. This much of Jesus is concealed, and the mystery is reached neither by reason or intelligence in respect of itself, but what is spoken remains unsaid, and what is known, unknown.

This remarkable set of statements is intriguing in many ways: the first sentence is very difficult to interpret, and in particular the idea of the "suddenness" of the divine epiphany (ἐξαίφνης). This term seems to be drawn from Plato's Parmenides 156d, where the "sudden", or the "instantaneous", is said to be the moment between motion and rest. Plato reflects on the "strange nature" of this moment which lies in the interval between mobility and immobility, which is "out of all time": it is both the point of arrival and the point of departure, and Plato's concern is with how the One passes into the state of motion. The One changes in the "instantaneous moment" (μεταβάλλον δ' ἐξαίφνης, 156e; cf. Aristotle Physics 222b15 ff.).

There is a possible allusion to Malachi 3.1 ("suddenly he entered my sanctuary"): Brons (Gott und die Seienden . . . 247) also refers to Isaiah 29.5 ("and suddenly, in an instant, you will be visited by Jehovah Sabaoth"), and comments that the thrust of the Areopagite's remarks here are contrary to the traditional Christian understanding of the incarnation, since he emphasizes the timelessness of the moment of epiphany. This is certainly true, and

one might add that the fact that it is said to occur "unhoped for", or "against hope" (παρ' ἐλπίδα) also runs counter to the usual understanding of the incarnation. Roques refers to several texts which develop Plato's usage of the term ἐξαίφνης, in particular Plotinus Enn. V.7.36; V.3.17; V.5.7 (he also refers to Philo, On the Migration of Abraham 7; see also Beierwaltes, Proklos 199).

Clearly Dionysius is attempting to reconcile the Christian incarnation with the Neoplatonic moment of transformation. In a sense, the problem of transformation from one state into another was no less of a problem for the Neoplatonists than was the incarnation for the Christians. There seemed, to the Neoplatonists, to be a moment in a process of transformation, at which the old state had ceased, and at which the new state had not yet begun. This moment was the "sudden", or the "instantaneous", seemingly outside both processes. The process of change between incompatible states, such as unity and multiplicity, or in the case of Plotinus between separation and union, could be accomplished through this independent medium, the "instantaneous": a stage both in the process, and outside it. Dionysius sees this as a solution to the problem of the incarnation in his own terms. The Biblical allusions do not help our understanding of this passage, since it is not the speed of appearance, but the problem of transformation which is at stake. Dionysius is talking in general terms when he mentions "theology", and he means to offer a demythologised account of Christ's epiphany: it really means (he argues) that there is a moment of transformation from the hidden to the manifest, at which the hidden is both hidden and revealed, and both spoken of and inexpressible.

In this way we find an explanation of the contradictions just referred to. The use of contradiction (hidden and manifest; spoken of and unspeakable) strikes a new note in the philosophy of classical antiquity, and its importance must be stressed. The cornerstone of Western philosophy has been the famous principle of non-contradiction, or the excluded middle.

Edward Conze, in many of his works, has argued that Buddhist philosophy does not respect this principle of contradiction, and therein finds a major difference between its methodology, and that of the Aristotelian tradition. This pattern in the logic of the Indian philosophers may have been observed quite early, and perhaps the sophists travelling with Alexander, through their contact with the Indian sages, were able to contribute some knowledge of this important difference to the body of Greek scholarship. Perhaps also Pyrrho's contact with the Indians informed him similarly (Diogenes Laertius IX, 61).

It has frequently been observed that the use of contradiction is characteristic of mysticism, which often tries to deploy ideas in uncharacteristic ways. The shock of the unfamiliar may serve to take the mind onto a different plane of understanding, and a voluntary contradiction may be able to pro-

duce such a shock. It is well known that many of the Zen Koans contain contradictory ideas. The best known example is the famous response to the question: what is the sound of one hand clapping? The response: a soundless sound. The Zen Koans carry many such puzzles which aim to tease the mind out of ordinary rational patterns of thought – and which infringe the law of the excluded middle. It has become common-place to contrast this use of contradiction in Buddhist philosophy with its refusal in Western philosophy. The difference is profoundly important, but we can of course add the rider that the West does move towards this use of contradiction in its tradition of philosophical mysticism, and the sources of this may go as far back as Heraclitus, though he combines what are often merely contraries to create the appearance of contradiction. But we have in this passage of the Areopagite an example of the tendency to use real contradictions and there are a number of others which may be singled out. In chapter 4 of the Divine Names, for example, God is said to be both ineffable and "many-named", both the "assertion of all things and the negation of all things", "both ignorance and all-known" (PG 3, 641A). He is "united in the Trinity, origin of unity" (ἡνωμένον μὲν ἔστι τῇ ἐναρχικῇ Τριάδι, loc. cit). This entire passage consists of a list of contradictions, or positive negations, such as the introductory "hyper-real reality", "hyper-divine divinity", and "hyper-good goodness". (It should be noted that some of these contradictions get lost in Jones' translation, the Divine names . . ., p. 120.)

Dionysius continues with a justification of these contradictions, in itself most important since it shows that he is aware of his method. It is the analogy of light which comes to his aid, and it will be recalled that Beierwaltes has pointed to the way in which light symbolism becomes more than just an image in Neoplatonism: the image of light becomes a model which actually creates and directs the terms of the analysis. Thus Dionysius seems to be casting his view of contradiction in terms made available, and perhaps even suggested to him by the image of light, so beloved of the Neoplatonist tradition.

> The lights of lamps . . . which are in one room are whole and in each other wholly, but they have an intact and precise distinction which separates them specifically from each other, united in their difference, and differentiated in their unity. (PG 3, 641B)

In this way Dionysius provides a justification for his juxtaposition of contradictories.

This is a decisive step. The problem of the Trinity being both one and three was a problem for orthodox Christianity only insofar as the terms of the discussion were based on the principle of non-contradiction. A religious notion was being spelt out in the terms provided by the philosophy of the day, and this was dominated by certain logical principles, of which the prin-

ciple of non-contradiction was one. Though it never rose to the surface (the most important axioms and presuppositions never do), this principle underlay all attempts to give a rational account (*logos*) of the Trinity. The step of simply assuming the contradiction unity/triad was not taken, as the labour of theology, both Orthodox and Arian, was carried out on the basis of Greek axioms.

Dionysius takes this step. Along with other contradictions, he advances the hitherto impossible "unity/trinity". Not for him complicated arguments about *hypostasis* and *ousia*: he simply asserts both propositions simultaneously, p and not p.

Where does the use of contradictions come from? It is not a familiar part of Neoplatonism, though there are hints of it. Plotinus' On the Intelligible Beauty, for example, comes close to the juxtaposition of contradictories which we have seen above. But there is not the systematic implementation of the method that we see in Dionysius. Again, my own argument about the origins of the contradictions in Letter III, suggests that they developed naturally from the Platonist interpretation of the ἐξαίφνης, the instantaneous moment. This would suggest an evolution in the tradition towards the method espoused by Dionysius.

But it is the Gnostics who most of all exploit the contradiction. Professor Tardieu has indicated to me that the visible/invisible juxtaposition, found in Letter III of the Areopagite, may be anticipated in the Book of the Secrets of John, and his own translation (Ecrits Gnostiques ... 86) indicates that it occurs in both manuscript traditions. It is not absolutely clear that the Gnostic author intended a deliberate contradiction however, since different entities may be envisaged for either epithet. Nevertheless there is an association with the figure of Christ, as in the Letter of Dionysius.

The Gospel of Truth has the contradictory juxtaposition of the invisible and the visible, the manifest and the hidden (38; see my "The Name of the Father ..."). And the Tripartite Tractate lists a series of contradictions:

> He it is whom I call the form of the formless,
> The body of the bodiless,
> The face of the invisible,
> The word of the unutterable,
> The mind of the inconceivable . . .
> (Tri. Trac. 66, trans. Peel, ed. Robinson)

It is this type of writing which brings us closest to the Areopagite, who chooses to solve problems by the simple assumption of a contradiction.

The contradiction arises out of a desire to supersede language, just as the *via negativa* does. Both manoeuvres are examples of speculative philosophy trying to cause language to rise above itself, to move out of its own limits.

When once it has been postulated that the normal rules of discourse place artificial limits on the capacity of the intelligence, then some experiments in the use of language will follow: abnormal forms of discourse will be deployed. Thus the *via negativa,* which seeks to make statements by negations, contrary to the normal way of making a statement; and thus the contradiction, which infringes another fundamental characteristic of making statements, namely that when we assert a thing, we necessarily imply the exclusion of its opposite. Both of these techniques are attempts to interfere with the usual structure of language, in order to cause it to produce different results, to get it to play another tune, as it were.

Contradiction says that the tendency to exclude, which characterizes ordinary statement, is a conceptually dangerous tendency. Contradiction encourages us to retain ideas, where we might abandon them. Contradiction is one more means of overcoming the separative, divisive character of discourse, which always wants to say that a thing is one thing rather than another. Contradiction is holistic in character, forcing us to embrace incompatibilities, rather than to choose between them.

It is also possible to see Scepticism at the heart of this use of contradiction. Its use in Buddhist thought has sometimes been said to illustrate a certain agnosticism about the available answers to the perennial questions; thus Flintoff, in Pyrrho and India, p. 91. In other words, one accepts two contradictory answers in order to declare one's dissatisfaction with either of the available answers taken by itself. And we know that the Greek Sceptics opposed arguments to each other so that they were equally balanced, thereby preventing the possibility of a conclusion. Thus the "equipollence" of arguments, as it was called, paved the way for the suspension of judgment for which Scepticism is famous. And thus we have the possibility of drawing comparisons between Indian and Greek philosophy.

Yet there is more in the art of contradiction than a mere expression of scepticism. Assuming a contradiction cannot be reduced to a simple statement of agnosticism. Contradiction is an attempt to use language: it is more than a rhetorical flourish, a decorative way of advertising one's scepticism; it is a linguistic manoeuvre designed force language to work against itself. It is designed to force language to include, rather than exclude. Language, the only available instrument, is induced to play a new tune, a tune for which it was not designed.

In this sense the *via negativa* and the method of contradiction are similar: both are attempts to swim upstream, to use the medium of language, but against the grain. The Areopagite has, in the end, a profound confidence in the use of language which resembles that of Proclus. His assertion of the existence of divine names, and their implied ontic basis, suggests a strong degree of commitment to language. Linguistic manoeuvres, whether they involve negation or contradiction, are part and parcel of the route to the ulti-

mate essence. Not that these linguistic manoeuvres are part of the customary deployment of language: they are not; they are attempts to force language to act uncharacteristically, against the grain. Nevertheless the epistemology of these techniques is still based on language and its capacities.

Pseudo-Dionysius may well be familiar with the Neoplatonist/Arian debate over privation; as we have seen, one passage links *thesis, aphairesis,* and *steresis.* More than any other figure, he forces privation into a purely ontological framework, and this is probably a reply to the problem which had arisen over whether privation was part of the *via negativa.*

In some respects he appears more radical, and less involved with the orthodox philosophical issues of the Platonists. His use of contradiction takes him closer to the Gnostics. Further, his reversal of the usual light imagery is reminiscent of Gnostic revisionism, that phenomenon of negative dependence on tradition which we have noted elsewhere, whereby the Tripartite Tractate can make logos the principle of ignorance, for example. For the Areopagite light is characteristic of lower beings, and stands in the way of vision. The symbol of real knowledge becomes darkness, and darkness transcends light. This is a decisive change in the tradition of Greek philosophy: it represents a conscious correction of the Greek imagery of light, and its "Lichtmetaphysik". A new current in the language of western mysticism has been created: the concept of the divine dark will henceforth become part of this tradition.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

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Chapter XIII. Conclusion

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Conclusion

Reason was invented by the Greeks. The word "reason" tends to have different connotations in different cultures, and at different times. The Greeks themselves examined their own concept of reason, and laid out for scrutiny the various elements which constituted it. Eventually they rejected it, at least as a tool for the most important epistemological tasks. Thus, at the end of antiquity, the Greek Neoplatonist Damascius, and the possibly Christian Neoplatonist Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, declare the ultimate inefficacy of reason:

The Good Cause of all . . . is without logos. (Pseudo-Dionysius; PG 3, 1000C)

. . . if, in saying that it is unspeakable, . . . and incomprehensible, our logos collapses . . . (Damascius, 4, p. 7 1.4)

Yet a millenium earlier, Parmenides invites us to assess everything by logos. Clearly, the principle of reason discovered in the Presocratic period has been judged and found wanting. This process was immensely slow, unfolding over centuries: not that the decline of logos was a completely regular process. Like the decline of a currency, that of logos had its fits and starts, its temporary revivals, and its sudden crashes. Interestingly, the themes which contribute to the ultimate scepticism over logos are present virtually from the start, with Plato raising many of them. But we can most effectively contrast Parmenides and Damascius, since Parmenides did believe in a transcendent unifying reality, above the realm of perception, and out of the scope of commonsense: yet for this entire metaphysical vision, Parmenides advocated the use of logos, as opposed to common-sense opinion (*doxa*). By the time of Damascius, logos has been rejected as a way of grasping the truly transcendent.

It would be interesting to know what forms a society's concept of reason. It must be stressed that reason is a *culture-specific* concept, meaning different things in different contexts. It is probable that science, or certain assumptions about how science operates, forms our own view of what reason and the rational is. In the present day, the image of the scientist empirically testing hypotheses through controlled tests, is probably the primary contributing factor to the idea of the rational held by most educated people. In the case of developments in the classical world, it has seemed repeatedly that it was the methods of the mathematicians which formed the Greek notion of reasoning. This is particularly so in the case of reasoning about the ontologically ultimate. The actual practice of certain methods by the geometers stimulated a philosophical interest in the general use of these methods in the practice of metaphysics.

The word logos developed a bewildering variety of meanings, including "word", "argument", "reason", "saying", "account", and so on. These meanings find their richest profusion in the work of Philo, who plays constantly on the ambiguity of logos, in a way which introduces a whole host of Jewish concepts.

It was argued that logos/reason found its origin in the idea of collecting and listing. This seems borne out by the philosophy of reason which unfolds. One of the chief doubts about the value of reason is that it divides and fragments. In the case of Plotinus it was noted (see my What is negative theology? ... 11) that this author associates intellect with number: intellect generates number and imposes it across the field of its activities. This explains the multiple structure of the rational process. Any statement or syllogism contains a number of parts; even a short statement such as "the table is red" contains three elements: the table, being, and quality of redness. In the view of Plotinus such a statement is divisive, or fragmenting: whereas one might be inclined to see the grammar of the sentence as having a unifying, or synthesizing effect, Plotinus would rather have us emphasize its dividing effect. The vision of a whole is, by the grammar of logos, reduced into individual parts. The very structure of the subject, verb and predicate instantiates number, and introduces a dividing mechanism into the wholeness of being.

Differentiation is the fundamental technique of discourse: this is the crux of Neoplatonism. This is not the "différance" of Derrida, referred to below, but the creation of segments which can be reassembled in the form of a statement: several statements can be assembled into a syllogism. This divisive activity is seen as working to the disadvantage of the holistic vision of reality which is ultimately dictated by the underlying existence of the One itself. Knowledge is of the One, and it is therefore curious that discourse operates in a mode which disunites objects and facts, by differentiating them into their component parts.

Over the Hellenistic period, logos tended to become an hypostasis, an intermediary principle or being. Thus Stoicism has it as an organizing principle: Philo has it as an envoy, and St John has it as an envoy "made flesh". Once logos has been thus isolated and identified, it becomes an hypostasis, and once an hypostasis, it seems to be drawn towards the lower world of material life. It becomes a function of the material world, and this seems to contribute to its demise. It is probably this downward pressure on logos which renders it able to be assailed as a principle of ignorance in one of the Gnostic documents. Its associations have become too this-worldly, and it consequently incurs some of the disapproval with which the Gnostic regards the material world.

Its hypostatization also leads to its being relegated to a lower epistemological status: once it has been identified as an intermediary principle, it is easier to say that the type of knowledge it provides, is knowledge of a lower kind. Its mechanism is seen to be appropriate to an inferior type of reality.

Further, with the thought of Clement of Alexandria we see a growing tendency to view the word as a kind of mask. Speech is a form of concealment, and Clement develops a play on words between Hermes and hermeneutics, and the implication is that language will require some form of decoding. There is therefore a failure of logos to communicate, which is like the failure of physical reality to be real, or the failure of truth to be manifest in the world of senses. In other words logos is again relegated to the level of lower reality, and like lower reality constitutes a kind of epistemic obstacle for those who would perceive higher things. This is an important step in the career of logos, and a particularly difficult one for a Christian thinker to take, since the word, the flesh, and the historical process are all pivotal concerns in orthodox Christian theology; but it does show how logos comes to be dismissed at the end of antiquity, by both Damascius and the Pseudo-Dionysius.

The same cloud hovers over the idea of thought: in Plotinus it appears to be a lower-level activity. It is an aid "given to beings ... who would of themselves be sightless". Logos is imposed on matter by intellect, but as logos hastens into matter, it suffers a diminution. Thus Plotinus too shares in the tendency to draw logos down towards material reality, and consequently in the tendency to dismiss it as an epistemological tool.

With Proclus we find a new emphasis on the *odis* of the soul, that particularly human anguish caused by the desire to know and speak of the highest principle. We begin to catch a glimpse here of the psychologization of knowledge and language, which is strongly present in Damascius. This really is the final step in the marriage of logos with the material world. On this view knowledge and discourse are simply products of the pangs associated with a sense of emptiness: they have no intellectual value, or epistemological value, in themselves. They are merely signs of our psychological state. Taken to its extreme, this view makes of language nothing more than a gasp of pain. All the immensely complex structures of Greek metaphysics are reduced to mere effects of our state of lack. Discourse does not deal in knowledge or truth: it simply gives voice to our epistemological pain. Discourse is not about knowing, but is simply a sign of the *experience* of ignorance. A heavily sceptical note is sounded yet again in Greek philosophy.

The Cappadocians have gone down in history as the champions of negative theology, and of the mystical tradition in Christianity. Yet in this context they are positively optimistic about the power of language to capture important truths. Though quite prepared to say that God is beyond language, Basil and Gregory also place strong emphasis on the value of theological language as a propaedeutic. This is part of their discussion of the term *epinoia,* the term which denotes the imaginative capacity of the human mind; its ability to generate linguistic structures. It is the Cappadocians who are the champions of the view that language is convention, that its terms are used by common

consent, and are not there necessarily, or *kata physin.* For Gregory, every noun is a sign (*semeion*) symbolising something else, and the activity of using such signs he endorses. He also believes that God is ultimately nameless, but this does not conflict with his positive use of language in certain contexts.

He positively advocates the use of certain 'relations', and regards the development of language as a God-given human activity. The issue which really divides Gregory from his Arian opponents is that concerning the origin of language: for Eunomius, language has a certain mysterious power which results from its givenness. Names come from above, and therefore they possess a strength which is beyond themselves, and in particular which is greater than that of any human device. This view appears to be part of a revived Neoplatonist interest in names, which we have seen developing in Proclus. It is particularly associated with a renewed interest in Plato's dialogue, the Cratylus. It appears that both Neoplatonists and heterodox Christians were interested in this theory of the origin of language, and I have argued elsewhere that the Gnostic Gospel of Truth contains an interpolation which reflects this view of the givenness of names. It is a revival of the old debate over whether names are natural, or conventional. The new view says that names are certainly there, and this not by convention, but they are not exactly natural (*kata physin*). They are bestowed by that which is ontologically prior to them. The Cappadocian position is the reverse, namely that language is a human device, and that it originates from the minds of the ontologically subsequent to the entities being described.

Little of this debate is reflected in the writings of Augustine. However, the same tendency to validate language is there in his writings, again juxtaposed with the claim that God is ultimately indescribable. In a sense it is Augustine who develops most strongly the Christian notion of the value of history; and with history comes language. His view of language is very much like his view of the unfolding historical process, since he sees language as a linear activity. Passages of the Confessions have been alluded to, in which Augustine pictures language as evolving in rows and rows of letters, syllables, and then words: he seems to perceive language as moving in a direct line towards some kind of end. This is his exact view of the progress of humanity: it is Augustine above all who asserts the linear movement through time of the human race towards a certain end. All this is part of Augustine's elevation of the principle of memory into a key faculty of the human race. Memory becomes the principle of continuity, that which connects the beginning to the centre, and the centre to the end. It is that which guarantees the coherence of the personality, and it is that which endows the historical process with its wholeness. Needless to say, it also makes language what it is: the word at the beginning of the sentence has to be linked through its grammatical structure with the word at the centre of the sentence and the word at the end of the sentence: it is memory which enables this linear structure to gather itself to-

gether into one process. The question of the energy which causes us to leap from word to word, from subject to verb to predicate, and therefore to complete our sentences, is also of interest to Augustine. Here he falls back on the Platonic notion of Eros, which he reinterprets in his own philosophy of desire: it is desire for knowledge which causes us to go ahead, to move forward in the pursuit of the end of our sentences. All this is illustrated in Augustine's description of the recital of a psalm: in beginning the recital one pronounces certain syllables which then become words, and these recede into the past. These words are retained in memory and eventually the whole of the psalm is deposited in the receptacle of the memory. As the future is consumed so the past, and the memory, is enlarged. Augustine extends the image of the recital of the psalm into a comment on the whole of history: just as individual syllables, through a linear movement, come to make up sentences, and then a whole psalm, so the individual events which constitute the lives of men, go eventually to make up the whole of human history. Language never quite disappears, but is deposited in the "innumerable palaces" of the memory (Conf. X.8). Discourse is part of the historical process.

Augustine further explores the nature of discourse in the De Doctrina Christiana, together with the whole notion of meaning. A sign is that which signifies something, and the work of the interpreter is to discover its meaning. Signifiers may be found everywhere, including, of course on the pages of Scripture. Many incidental things may contain meaning, and so exegetes may have to be aware of the possible symbolic significance of trees, footprints, and all kinds of events. At times it appears as if Augustine's pursuit of meaning in the pages of Scripture is somewhat like that of the modern literary critic, who by multiplying a series of references and subjective connections, finds a meaning which is far removed from the text itself and any possible authorial intention. Augustine's philosophy of meaning is based on the notion of an author who desires to communicate, and who sets down a certain kind of discourse for this purpose. Though a modern reader of Augustine's great hermeneutical work could gain the impression of some indiscipline in the mode of interpretation advocated, and might possibly see some comparison with the modern deconstructionist approach, in particular that espoused by Derrida with his idea of "différance", it is nevertheless true that the two views are quite dissimilar. Derrida's "différance", discussed in Appendix II, is the capacity to generate a series of connections independently of the text and the intentions of its author: it is the reader who has this capacity and indeed, this is part of his creative role. Augustine, however, assumes always that we are bound by the authorial intention of God himself, though the way in which meaning is conveyed to us may indeed explore the capacity to create an interlocking series of references by the use of certain words. Augustine thus seems to believe in the objective meaning of a text, but he envisages a very loose way of arriving at this meaning. At least, it appears loose, in com-

parison with the literalism of some modern forms of interpretation. Allegorical significances are rife, and it is assumed that one will explore the suggestions of all words and symbols. Like Origen, Augustine lays down certain rules governing allegorical interpretation, but one is nevertheless left with the impression of a deregulated approach to reading, which will allow the mind to roam far more widely than would a literal approach to interpretation. In this sense Augustine is close to Clement of Alexandria, who sees the whole of the universe as impregnated with meaning, and who sees the act of reading as almost synonymous with the process of living in reality. Meaning is everywhere, since the material instantiations of transcendent reality are everywhere. Thus with these two authors, reading *is* the process of generating a series of references, but within the overall control of the Author of meaning himself.

Augustine is the greatest exponent of the value of language in ancient philosophy, whether Pagan or Christian. Because he integrates discourse into his philosophy of history, he is able to give a view of language which benefits from the same analysis as he has provided for the notion of human history. The notion of development in time, and its validation by the incarnation, can equally well be applied to a philosophy of language, and Augustine carries out this manoeuvre. But with Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, we have the final word, as it were, and it is with this author's scepticism that we commence the conclusion. For the Areopagite there is no logos of God. This is the single most important fact of his philosophy of language: there is no attempt to make a place for human discourse, nor any attempt to validate it. There is no philosophy of human activity, nor of the future, such as we find in Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine. The Areopagite's positive use of language is confined to his descriptions of lower levels of reality to do with the souls, intellects, angels, and other derivative beings. Nevertheless, this author did give us a work entitled 'The Divine Names', and there is a certain amount of positive theology in this work. Like the Arians and Neoplatonists discussed above, Pseudo-Dionysius believes in the value of certain names as given from above. These names are virtually *kata physin*, and derive their meaning and their ontological strength from their transcendent sources. This view about the origins of language must have been peculiarly dominant in Platonist Christian circles, coming as it appears to do from a reinterpretation of the Cratylus. It ought to be emphasised that this philosophy of names indicates the presence of a very positive view of language indeed, since on this view meaning and being are coextensive. No relativism at all is possible in such an understanding, because meaning is part of the givenness of reality. It should also be emphasised that this very positive view of discourse comes from those considered to be the most extreme exponents of the *via negativa*: that is, from Proclus and his predecessors, from certain Gnostics, from the neo-Arians, and from the Areopagite himself.

But of course the validity of these words is restricted to a certain level of being. Typically, in the Divine Names, the Areopagite begins his fourth chapter with a lot of language about a lot of lower beings, drawing an elaborate analogy with the rays of the sun. He will talk greatly about the rays of the sun but when, at the end of the chapter, he comes to talk about the sun itself, in Section 7, he relapses into the usual collection of negatives: not coming to be, not passing out of being, not increasing or decreasing, not beautiful to some and ugly to others, and so on. It is interesting to note that at the end of Section 4 of the fourth Chapter, the Areopagite does not take the step which we might expect of a Platonist. Having talked of the rays of the sun which illuminate the world, which give life to plants, and which sustain all reality, the Areopagite does not take the step of claiming that the sun is the Good: he explicitly repudiates this Middle Platonist link between the Sun, the Good and God, in order to substitute a verse of Paul, namely Romans 1.20. To sum up, language for the Areopagite belongs to the lower stages of reality, and those which transcend the latter can only be the subject of negations.

This leads us to the question of the *via negativa* itself. In the first place, some remarks on the subject of silence are necessary. It has been observed throughout this book that interest in silence, as a virtue or an epistemologically useful posture, occurs mainly in the second half of the period covered, that is to say in the late classical period. The early classical period is remarkable for its confidence in the power of logos. It is not at the moment of greatest enthusiasm for the power of logos, the time of Plato, Aristotle, the Sophists, or the Stoics, that we should seek for an interest in the absence of logos or the value of silence. As in the period of the Renaissance, the period of classical Greece was remarkable for its belief in the power of discourse. Language cascaded over the heads of the average Athenian, whether it came from philosophers, from orators, or Sophists. The power of discourse to resolve the questions of political life, and the questions of morality and metaphysics, seemed paramount: naturally there was much discussion over the kinds of logos available and much mutual recrimination between the different types of exponent of this form of activity, but the overall truth remains that the classical period was a period of indulgence in logos. It is with the late Greek writers that we first begin to see an interest in silence.

Silence has a value in Philo, and thenceforth is found with increasing regularity in the later Greek philosophers. It is not simply a moral matter, but silence is recommended as being superior to discourse in the matter of knowledge and its pursuit. Silence is now advocated as an antidote to speech: it is often not clear whether the silence may include that inner form of speech which may take place without articulation. But most often the advocacy of silence is associated with the absence of discourse altogether. This heralds the arrival of a meditative frame of mind, and announces the monastic silence

which develops in late antiquity and the mediaeval period. The value of silence is a difficult thing for a Christian thinker to assert of course, and much less difficult for a Neoplatonist. Despite this, numerous Christian thinkers do assert the value of silence. Origen is one who confronts most clearly the dilemma involved in this new current in Greek philosophy, and its reconciliation with the notion of revelation which is inherent in Christianity. The New Testament story of the dumbness of Zacharias lodges permanently within Christianity the symbol of silence followed by speech, upon the birth of the child Jesus. Origen devotes an entire homily to this symbol, offering an allegorical interpretation according to which the silence of Zacharias symbolizes the state of the Jews prior to God's self-revelation. The silence is broken at the incarnation. For the purposes of the allegory, Origen goes further and argues that Zacharias was devoid of any rational capacity in his mute state. Origen is able to exploit the ambiguity of the Greek word logos, by claiming that Zacharias was devoid of both speech and reason: Jerome's translation makes this clear by the fact that he feels obliged to use two words *ratio* and *sermo* to express the Greek word being employed. But Origen goes on to claim that Christ has now made speech possible, and that silence is the lot of the Jews. This is more or less the orthodox position on the incarnation: it enables speech about God. It is after all clearly stated in the prologue to John's gospel, that the logos became flesh and entered into human history.

But, despite this background, there is still a role for silence in the development of Christian epistemology. Paul's mystical experience as described in II Corinthians chapter 12 includes the inability to communicate what he had seen: if not his inability, at least his unwillingness. Whatever the situation, Origen returns to this frequently and emphasises that Paul's travel through silence is an archetypal spiritual experience. It is the Spirit which teaches truths which cannot be uttered in words. Setting aside the peripheral issue of whether the call to silence was a kind of vow, like the discipline of the mystery religions, a voluntary act required of the believer, it is clear that silence was regarded as a part of the spiritual experience of the Christian, and a part of the highest form of that experience. Thus in the exposition of Christianity given by Origen at least, the assertion of a new communication in language stands side by side with the assertion of the necessity of an experience of silence. Prayer, for example, should be an exercise in silence rather than the delivery of a series of speeches.

Obviously enough, there is a tension building up here between the influence of Neoplatonism and that of orthodox Christian doctrine. Origen appears to be endeavouring to reconcile two contradictory streams. This may be true, but at the same time it is difficult to envisage any religion maintaining that its fundamental truths can be totally apprehended within language. Where the transcendent is at stake, some doubts over the power of language must subsist, since it is clear enough that language is part of every day experi-

ence, and can only do tasks related to that experience. The discovery of silence, which is common to both Christian philosophy and Neoplatonism in late antiquity, is a recognition of the fact that language, though intended to reveal, may in fact conceal. The very instrument of enlightenment is seen as constituting the obstacle to enlightenment. A similar problem applies to the idea of the divine epiphany, or the incarnation, for although Christ is heralded as the revelation, he is also seen as a barrier to a true perception of the divine. This is reflected in some of the discussion of Christ as the face (*prosopon*) of God: the full ambiguity of the Greek word for person is used in such discussion, since this word can refer to both the mask of the Greek actor as well as the notion of the persona. Thus the 'person' of Christ comes to be seen in its externality and the desire for the knowledge of what lies behind is the more urgently present. The very act of revelation in these terms, that is the provision of the person of God in the form of a human face, raises the question of what God would have been like in his own nature. It is the very act of revelation which calls up further questions in the person desperate for knowledge – and this was the temper of the late Greek period. The idea of a revelation in this form must have seemed tantalisingly incomplete. The presentation of the face of Christ simply enhanced the suggestion of the mystery which lay behind such a mask. Thus revelation is ultimately self-defeating.

Oddly enough, the Christian and the Neoplatonist solution to this dilemma were roughly the same. Language and all its works were regarded as constituting a propaedeutic, that is an initial form of teaching or an instruction which could guide the spirit along what might ultimately be the right direction, but which could not assure the certainty of reaching the destination. In Proclus for example, it is silence which actually concludes the majestic commentary on Plato's Parmenides. After all negations have been completed, then negation in general is negated: this last act is followed by ultimate silence. Similarly in Christian thought the advocacy of silence comes after the teaching acquired through Christology, springing from the idea of the divine incarnation, and after the propositional-style theology which develops around this.

Silence is the absence of speech. The mind still functions, but in a non-verbal way. It assumes a mental activity which is not speech-like. The deficiencies of speech have now been well recognized, and these include the notion that speech fragments and diminishes, whereas the meditative act of silence can produce a form of knowledge which transcends these limitations. Refraining from speech allows this kind of exploration to occur, and silence is therefore a kind of gap, which is not an emptiness: it is a positive absence. It has no structure and it will therefore be intractable in the face of any intellectual or institutional discipline which might be applied to it: it cannot be channeled in any way.

It remains to ask what the relationship of silence is with the *via negativa.*

The *via negativa* appears to be a form of non-language, of the absence of language. At first sight the two ideas seem intimately related, since that to say that God is unknowable, incomprehensible, unspeakable, seems to constitute an approach which will perfectly well accommodate the call to silence. But in fact the negative way and the silence of the mystic are not closely related. The use of negatives is over and over regarded as a linguistic technique, that is to say, part of the armoury itself. This is particularly true in the case of Proclus, who is perhaps the foremost exponent of the *via negativa* in antiquity. Proclus asserts over and over again that the negative method produces positive notions, that it is the 'mother of affirmation'. The approach to negation of the modern philosopher will no doubt be different from that of the ancient philosopher, since in modern logic it is often considered that negation is a dispensable form of discourse, in that a negative can be replaced by another type of positive in most circumstances. In late Greek philosophy the way of developing this same problem is located in the specific context of epistemology and transcendental ontology. It is the capacity of the negative statement to *produce knowledge* which is explored in this context. But the negative way is always a part of language: it is a linguistic manoeuvre. Thus, what is negated is almost as important as the negative itself. It is important to note that words to be negated are not just chosen at random: if one were to compile a list of all negative statements made about God in late antiquity, one would find the same characteristics negated over and over by different authors. Festugière has done this for the writings of the middle Platonists, and a similar task could be carried out for the later Platonist and Christian philosophers, though this would not be a particularly revealing activity. It is immediately obvious that the same things are negated over and over again and the net effect of this is the question. Clearly the positive value of the words negated have some importance: otherwise they would not have been selected. A list of negatives attached to a series of positives somehow fix thought in a certain position, or more accurately a certain posture: they point it in a certain direction. Now the fact that these positives are negated does not dismiss them from the mind, or annul them completely. The negative is not like some sort of science fiction machine which causes things to cease to be, to evaporate completely. The negative and the positive are interdependent. Augustine says in the Confessions that God is like a perfume, but which is not borne away by the wind, or like a taste which does not fade in the mouth: he has negated his two images but the aura of the positive concept remains through the negative. It is this interdependence of the negative and the positive which was most fully explored by Proclus and it is this which led him to develop his view of hypernegations, that is the type of negation which is in fact the assertion of something higher and fuller than the positive at first envisaged. On this view then, the positive statement is negated in order to point to a higher and fuller form of existence: if God is said to be unintelligible,

then this means that he is of a higher order intelligibility. The negative, for Proclus, points in a direction of transcendence. There is no negative without a positive: we can have no negative theology without firstly the enunciation of certain statements of positions, and certain images. Negative theology is parasitic on positive theology, and will not be able to function until the assertion of positive statements has been carried out. It will then attach itself to these positive statements and effect its own modification. The question is, what exactly is the modification thus effected? It is Proclus on the Greek side, and Pseudo-Dionysius on the Christian side, who give the clearest answer to this question about the role of the negative: both point to the positive, transcendent significance of negating the traditional epithets about God. The *via negativa* is a second-phase activity, which depends on positive theology for its value.

The negative is virtually a trick. It appears to dismiss or annul a concept while allowing it to remain visible in the linguistic presentation. To say that God is unintelligible is different from saying nothing at all: the negation of intelligibility is different from the absence of any statement. Though one might have negated it, the notion "intelligibility" remains as part of the formula and exercises some influence over the concept formed. The negative does not evacuate the concept of its meaning: it constitutes some form of modification which is not equivalent to complete annulment of the concept. It is for this reason that I stress the difference between the negative way, and the way of silence. For the way of silence is just this total absence of concepts: it is the way of silence which constitutes the complete annulment, which the negative fails to achieve. In this sense the way of silence is a far more radical renunciation of language, than is the *via negativa*: it envisages no props whatsoever, whereas the negated assertion allows a prop to remain. If this were not the case, the same negatives would not continually reappear in the works of the later Platonists and Christian philosophers. It is somehow important that certain specific concepts be negated, not just any concepts, and the negation of these constitutes a linguistic act of a certain kind. If the authors concerned had not wished to retain some aura of the positive concepts which they negate, they would not have asserted these negations: they would simply have refrained from any statement whether negative or positive. It is this ability to communicate despite itself, which constitutes the negative way as explored in late Greek and early Christian philosophy. It is not by accident that the negative way is coupled in its initial formulations, with the way of analogy. The way of analogy first appears among the Middle Platonists, and constitutes a resounding statement of faith in the techniques of language: the *via negativa* is coupled with this as one of the ways to knowledge of the ultimate. It is clearly conceived as a way of working within language.

The way of silence is therefore non-linguistic, but the *via negativa* is a

function of language. It is nevertheless true that the *via negativa* uses language in a way which is unexpected and could almost be said to be anti-linguistic. For the positive concept encloses, but the negative expands the field of understanding. If God is "good" then certain limitations are placed on our picture of him: if he is said to be "non-good", then we have our minds opened up to an infinite number of possibilities. The negation frees thought in such a way as to allow it to envisage a greater range of concepts – all concepts, in fact, except the one negated. This delimiting activity of the negative must surely be part of the attraction of it in the epistemology of late antiquity. The negative de-specifies, so that thought is holistic, rather than fragmented. In this way the negative liberates human thought and opens it up to the vastness of the positive and transcendent concepts envisaged by the later Platonists. The *via negativa* thus has a twofold mode of operating: in the first place the positive concepts selected fix the thought in a certain approach, and in the second place the negative opens it up to the vastness of that same concept in a fuller and more perfect mode. This "opening up to vastness" is an essential part of the function of the *via negativa,* but even in this phase, it is still parasitic on prior affirmations being made.

It is probably for this reason that Damascius, the most sceptical of all the most ancient writers, rejects the *via negativa.* It is too thoroughly a linguistic ploy. Damascius' objection is that after negating a positive concept, we are simply left with the unknown. He advances several arguments against the *via negativa,* and appears to be at odds with Proclus in this: in the end for Damascius we are left with intractable silence, that is to say silence which cannot be made over in any way. Language for him may be of some use but only in the sense that it indicates the way: language is thus reduced to little more than a gesture of pointing. The One "abides in the inner sanctuary of that silence". Damascius, even more than Pseudo-Dionysius emphasises that in the end language terminates in silence. There is in fact a comparative lack of emphasis on silence in the works of the Areopagite, and this is probably because he is closer in spirit to the positive *via negativa* of Proclus. The Areopagite is full of negations but is very intent on framing them: he is not about to suggest that they be abandoned as useless, or that we give up speaking in favour of pure silence. This is probably because he has in view a positive contribution from the *via negativa* and this faith in linguistic activity is like that of Proclus, and in the end rejected by Damascius.

Damascius really represents the turning of the full circle from the period of Parmenides. The discovery of logos by Parmenides has led to its own rejection. Parmenides had thought logos to be suitable for the higher metaphysical tasks, and it is precisely for these tasks that Damascius rules it out. Parmenides wrote with the consciousness of being part of the advance guard, giving expression to the victory of philosophy over common sense and *mythos.* Damascius writes with the benefit of centuries of enquiry into logos,

and makes a sceptical contribution to the last stages of classical Platonism. But there is no new stage offered. Unlike Parmenides, he fails to recommend a new epistemological tool.

As far as the Christians are concerned, the *via negativa* is in fact of little prominence overall. The Areopagite constitutes the exception to this generalization, since with him the *via negativa* attains a kind of climax, but he is atypical, and one may indeed wonder whether he was a Christian thinker at all. As for the general Christian position, even those writers who are normally considered to be the most prone to the emphasis on mystery and on the negative way, the Cappadocians, have been seen to give a thoroughgoing endorsement to language. The Christian thinkers are quite able to reconcile an assertion of the unknowability of God with the general endorsement of language. Ecclesiology must play a part here, since language and ecclesiastical authority go hand in hand. Without the endorsement of doctrine and without the ability to clarify positions, the Church would have failed to maintain its social structure. In the end, the *via negativa* is anti-institutional, and the more radical assertion of silence, much more so. The institutionalisation of Christianity required doctrine, expressed in propositional form, and the *via negativa* is inimical to such a tendency. The *via negativa* opens, rather than closes, options, and it is for this reason that it could not become part of mainstream Christianity. Thus it has been argued that Christianity in the Patristic period has almost no *via negativa*, in comparison with the fullness of its development within Neoplatonism. Augustine was able to assert that God is best known by not knowing, but at the same time he provided the most resounding statement of faith in discourse to be found in antiquity since the classical period of Parmenides and Plato. It is in fact the Christian tradition which maintains and preserves logos, following its discovery by the Greeks. The Greeks become sceptical about it, but Augustine offers, in the Confessions and the De Doctrina Christiana, the most complete statement of the value of discourse and of the function of discourse that we have in antiquity: these statements parallel, and are intimately involved with, his great statement of the value and progress of history in the City of God. Augustine most fully recognises the principle of the word becoming flesh, and logos is caught up with the new Christian validation of history. In a way which could never have been foreseen by Parmenides, logos is preserved by a barbarian religion which has logos disclose itself in the immanent.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

Bond University *Year* 1986

Appendix I.

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Appendix I

The meaning of privation: a reply to J. C. M. van Winden

The review of my Gnosis (I) (an article which appeared in the Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum) offered by the above scholar in Vigiliae Christianae[1], deserves a reply. Van Winden makes certain mistakes about the language of privation and negation in Aristotle. These are important mistakes, and they require a response, since Aristotle's usage of the terms στέρησις, ἀπόφασις, and ἀφαίρεσις lays the foundation for the development of negative theology in both the Neoplatonist and the Christian Neoplatonist tradition. I will turn to this issue last.

In the first place, van Winden makes a criticism which raises an interesting issue. I had claimed (col. 473) that the Jewish scriptures were marked by a tension between an anthropomorphic conception of God, and one which sought to preserve a sense of transcendence, and to emphasise the difference between God and his creatures. It is argued that this is a matter of "holy scripture", and of aprehension by "faith" (p. 70), and that some recognition of these distinctions is necessary.

That may be so, but it is important to recognize that this tradition merged with the Greek philosophical tradition fo form Patristic Philosophy. While the Greeks were seeking the ἀρχή, or first principle of reality, and pursuing the question of how it might be known, the Jews were worshiping Yahweh and either following or diverging from his will. On the face of it, the concerns of the Greeks and the Jews are incomparable, but the eye of history sees them come together in the Christian period. The Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum is precisely concerned with such unlikely syntheses, and so an understanding of Christian philosophy requires a preliminary statement of the philosophical Jewish background. (One might concede the influence of Greek philosophy on pre-Christian Judaism without overturning the general point being made here.) Thus, though the Greek concern with *episteme* contrasts with the Jewish desire for a filial relationship with Yahweh, it is nonetheless true that these two coalesce, firstly in the writings of Philo, and subsequently in the philosophy of the Fathers. One could put it this way: despite the fact there seem to be different ways of thought at stake, God was the ultimate object of concern for the Jews, and the *arche* the ultimate object of concern for the Greeks. The two approaches may seem incommensurate, but it was precisely because they deal with matters of ultimate concern that the fusion occurs. The juxtaposition of the living God with the rational principle of the Greeks finds its most successful expression in Augustine's Confes-

1 36 (1982) 70–75.

sions. The paradox is that Patristic philosophy can only be understood in the light of non-philosophical influences.

Van Winden continues to argue (74) that some error lies in the statement that epistemology is a matter of logic in Stoicism, and that it is in the end based on a materialist view of reality. This is the overall picture of Stoicism that should be retained. Van Winden raises the problem of the *lekton* as an obstacle to my generalization, referring to the incorporeal nature of these semantically significant entities. What is the *lekton*? The ancient sources show some disagreement about the meaning of this word: Simplicius says that the Stoics identified as *lekta* both things uttered, and thoughts[2]. Other sources suggest that this understanding was incorrect, and A. A. Long points to a passage of Simplicius himself which distinguishes between utterances and *lekta*, and thoughts and *lekta*[3]. Sextus Empiricus[4] provides a somewhat different interpretation, which sees the *lekton* as separate from thought, but coexistent (παρυφιστάμενον, possibly meaning "dependent on") with thought. Sextus notes that the sound of the utterance about the object is corporeal, and that the thing itself is corporeal, but the thing signified (σεμαινόμενον), or the *lekton*, is incorporeal.

There are grounds, therefore, for thinking that my claim that Stoicism is controlled by an overall materialism might be only partly true. One might imagine that the *lekta*, if incorporeal, might have had a life of their own, a *metaphysical* life, uninfluenced by the material conditions of other reality. Simplicius' and even Sextus' view, with their disjunction between the *lekta* and *thoughts*, might seem to permit this. I take this to be van Winden's concern when he claims[5] inconsistency in the following words from my text, as translated by Kehl: "Die stoische Erkenntnistheorie gehörte in den Bereich der Logik u. gründete sich auf einer materialistischen Auffassung von der Wirklichkeit"[6].

In an article of this kind one strives to say complicated things briefly, yet accurately: in the above lines it is simply being claimed, as it often[7] is, that Stoicism is in the end a one-principle system; that its monism must be held to

2 In Cat. (CAG.VIII) p.10, 3ff. See B. Mates, Stoic Logic, p.13ff.

3 A. A. Long, Language and Thought in Stoicism, in Long (ed), Problems in Stoicism (London 1971), p.80. See Simplicius, in Cat. p.397, 8ff: Long points to a confusion in Simplicius on this point.

4 Adv. Math. VIII. 12.

5 P. 72.

6 Col. 466.

7 See the article Stoïcisme (by Egli) in The Encyclopaedia Universalis (p.395); or Bréhier, The History of Philosophy (Univ. of Chicago Press edition, 1965, i, p.37): ". . . for the Stoics it is in sensible things that Reason acquires the plenitude of its reality. This accounts for the necessary solidarity of the three parts of philosophy according to which, following the example of the Platonists, they segregated philosophical problems: logic, physics, and ethics . . . [these] are for the Soics inseparably linked . . ." See also F. Copleston. A History of Philosophy, i, p.422–3 on Stoic monism.

be its identifying characteristic, and that materialism constitutes the overall determinant of the system. If this is so, then the apparent freedom of the *lekta* from the material process is a problem: it is indeed a classic problem of Stoic studies, and it seems set to remain so. The relation of the *lekta* to the material process has always been, and will remain an outstanding problem. Benson Mates[8] has the following comment on the issue (quoted without footnotes):

"We cannot attribute the doctrine of lekta to the Stoics without certain reservations. There seems to have been a dispute within the school itself whether any such things existed. This, however, is hardly surprising, since, so far as we know, the prevailing Stoic metaphysical view was pansomatism, the view that only bodies exist. Sextus tells us that some have denied the existence of the lekta and that these are not only men of other schools – for example, the Epicureans – but also some of the Stoics themselves. For instance, Basileides and his followers held that nothing incorporeal exists. Later, Sextus mentions that the battle over the existence of the lekta is unending."[9]

The real issue, as Long perceives[10], is whether the *lekta* have existence, and if so, what the nature of this existence is. A further question is whether the existence of the *lekta* is dependent on, or controlled by, some other phenomenon. This could be suggested by the passages of Simplicius and Sextus quoted above. Long in fact concludes that ". . . no Stoic to our knowledge asserted their independent existence"[11]. If one wanted to pursue the idea that the *lekta* are somehow connected to the material world, one would trace the inter-dependence of *lekta* and thoughts back to the dependence of thought on the *phantasia*, or "presentation", that which imprints itself on the mind or the senses. In this way one could show that both thought and the *lekta* are stimulated by the presentation of an object to the mind – and therefore ultimately operated by external reality.

It would be very difficult to show this, however, and the reconciliation of Stoic pansomatism with the idea of a separate logic of discourse, or of a separate functioning of meaning, remains one of the main problems of Stoic studies. It is clear that the Stoics move away from Aristotle's logical objectivism: for the latter the logic of things determines the logic of thought. Putting this in the context of mind, Aristotle believed in the identity of mind and its objects[12]. The Stoics, in some way at least, severed mental processes from external processes. But in view of the fact that they also emphasized a material-

8 Stoic Logic (Univ. of California Press, 1961), p.15.

9 This difficulty is also felt by Pohlenz (Die Stoa i, p.39); in discussing the *lekta*, Pohlenz nevertheless recalls that "die Stoiker immer in konkreter Anschauung denken", and stresses their corporealist approach.

10 Op. cit. p.90.

11 Loc. cit.

12 On the Soul 429ᵃ 15ff.

ist account of reality, one must suspect that for them the logic of thought is *ultimately* founded in the material process. This is the safest conclusion, despite the difficulties involved, and or this reason my summary of the position in col. 466 stands. In the end, with Stoicism, one has to opt for the primacy of material reality, and the subjective character of logic must be subordinated to this.

Turning now to a more important point, van Winden seeks to define certain key concepts of the negative method of thinking. It is necessary to respond to this and to set right any confusion that may result from his misrepresentation of Aristotelian terminology. It is all the more important to do so since an interest in negative thinking and deconstructionist criticism pervades the contemporary literary scene (see Appendix II), and flourishes in a kind of limbo so far as tradition is concerned. It is important that those of us who are interested in the past should clarify the origins and meaning of the *via negativa*: though of considerable importance in the philosophy of late antiquity, and clearly related to the contemporary literary concern, the ancient concept of negative thinking has never been properly discussed. In particular, its terminology should be isolated, and clearly explained. Van Winden has not helped here.

Stated briefly, the *via negativa* proceeds to refine and transcendentalize thought by removing and negating concepts which are properly part of the sensible world. This purgative process leaves thought in a purer state, and more capable of grasping transcendent entities, whether or not they be divine. Several Aristotelian terms crop up in this context: privation (στέρησις), abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις), and negation (ἀπόφασις). Van Winden wants us to believe that for Aristotle privation is an ontological category[13], negation is a logical category; and abstraction is an epistemological category. Now these definitions do have a kind of clarity about them, and it is unfortunate that they are not also correct. Aristotle seems to have been oversimplified, and probably interpreted through the insights of a sub-Aristotelian tradition.

Anyone claiming a clear separation of logic and ontology for Aristotle is bound to run into trouble very quickly, since the mental world and the real world are inextricably connected. The Stoics did, as we have seen, take logic a step further when they posited the existence of the *lekton,* or "meaning" which was separate from both words and things. With Aristotle however thought did not have its own logic: his account of logic was a realist one, and the dynamics of thought were completely enmeshed with the dynamics of things. This unity between reality and mental processes was something the Stoics seemed to want to attack, in developing their view of the separate world of meaning. With Aristotle, however, logic, epistemology and ontology all interpenetrate each other, and these neat divisions between negation,

13 He surely doesn't mean an Aristotelian "category", since Aristotle had no such category.

abstraction and privation simply will not work. But even if this general point is not conceded, we have to look at the text of Aristotle itself, and an examination of his language bears out the more limited point to be made about the meaning of privation.

Van Winden is perhaps unaware of an important article[14] which, in its time, acted as a corrective for medieval readings of Aristotle. Whittaker, attacking Wolfson[15], and in part Ross[16], showed that privation was on occasion treated as a form of negation by Aristotle. If he is right, then van Winden's neat distinction between logical negation and ontological privation will be misleading: and there is no doubt that Whittaker is right, as the following sentence from Aristotle shows with complete clarity.

ἡ δὲ στέρησις ἀπόφασίς ἐστιν ἀπό τινος ὡρισμένου γένους.[17]
(Privation is negation from some defined genus.)

Aristotle means here that privation is a type of negation, which has as its characteristic the removal of an attribute from something. One can say therefore that privation has a logical sense, but it would be unwise to insist on this, since logic and ontology are systematically run together by Aristotle. This passage is not alone: elsewhere Aristotle refers to privative negation (ἀπόφασις στερητική)[18], and this phrase alone, without commentary, stands as a two-word refutation of van Winden's position. In the same passage Aristotle speaks of negation being "privatively predicated of something". Aristotle happily amalgamates logic and ontology here; the same passage speaks of the equal being opposed to the great and the small as a "privative negation". He is not really interested in the distinction between logic and ontology, though many subsequent interpreters might have wished him to be. And in particular, he shows no desire to separate categorially privation and negation. The fact is that privation is sometimes used by Aristotle of propositions[19].

Some passages of Aristotle have στέρησις used simultaneously in an ontological and logical sense. An example may be found in Met. 1022^b 22ff.: here an object in a state of lack is described, and this lack is said to constitute privation (for example, an eyeless vegetable). Such privation is a matter of states of affairs in "external"[20] reality, and so confirms what van Winden is talking

14 J. Whittaker, Neopythagoreanism and Negative Theology, in Symbolae Osloenses 44 (1969) 109–125.
15 H. A. Wolfson, Albinus and Plotinus on divine attributes, in Harvard Theological Review 45 (1952) 155ff.
16 Aristotle's Metaphysics (Oxford 1924), on Metaph. 1022^b 22.
17 Metaph. 1011^b 19–20.
18 Metaph. 1056^a 24.
19 Whittaker (op. cit. p.120), following Wolfson (op. cit. p.120), adduces a passage of Alexander of Aphrodisias, a later commentator on Aristotle. This passage also treats privation as a form of negation.
20 Aristotle would be dubious about our common-sense idea of external reality.

about: it seems here to be treated ontologically. Yet in the very same passage Aristotle moves to a logical use of στέρησις, when he says[21] that privation *means* as much as the negative alpha *means* (λέγονται in both cases). In this sentence Aristotle makes privation the equivalent of a certain form of negation, and Zeller in fact concluded that privation here was synonymous with negation[22]. I should prefer to say that Aristotle here shows that privation can have both an ontological and a matching logical sense, and that in the latter form it is a sub-class of negation in general. On the other hand, the passage, cited by van Winden[23], does show privation contrasted with ἕξις (state), and does limit it to a state of affairs. The point is that this is not the whole story: privation also has a logical sense, as shown above.

That negation is a logical notion in Aristotle's philosophy, we can of course accept, though maintaining reservations about these so called logical, epistemological and ontological "categories" in the development of his views. There is much to be said about Aristotle's view of negation, and its fundamental importance for the development of Platonist negative theology. I have touched on some of this in a recent article[24], but much more needs to be said on the difference between privative negation and other forms of it. This should be the subject of another study.

That abstraction (ἀφαίρεσις) is an epistemological "category" we may also accept, again with reservations about the artificiality of the distinctions. But it should be stressed that privation comes very close to abstraction, the difference being that abstraction has no ontological use. It was known as a method for conceptualizing abstract truth, and came to philosophy from the activities of the geometers. But it also envisages the removal of qualities or aspects: the mind separates things from their concrete base, and so comes to know them in their purest form[25]. It is this term which is used in the development of negative theology by the Middle Platonists and by Plotinus, though it was not used in this context by the Athenian Neoplatonists: they preferred negation. (Pseudo-Dionysius alone in late antiquity is a strong user of the term "abstraction".) Abstraction has a special development in Aristotle, then, which is related to the mathematical sciences. My presentation of privation makes it close to abstraction, though the two are deployed differently. That they were closely related is indirectly confirmed by the usage of the Sceptics, who seem to observe no real distinction between them[26]. They were apparently so close that they could become interchangeable.

21 1022^b 33.

22 Philos. d. Gr. II. 2^2. 216 n.7: this interpretation was denied by Ross, Commentary II, p.37, but supported by Whittaker (op. cit. p.121).

23 Cat. X, 11^b 19.

24 Fundamentals of the Via Negativa, American Journal of Philology 103 (1982) 429–439.

25 On the Soul 431^b 13; Posterior Analytics 74^a 33.

26 See Adv. Math. III. 37, 51, and Adv. Math. IX. 407. The method Aristotle called ἀφαίρεσις is here referred to as στέρησις.

This information should be sufficient to warn against the oversimplification of the group of terms which provide the basis of the *via negativa.* Where does the idea that privation is a purely ontological term in Aristotle come from? This would be an interesting study in itself, as would the extent to which this view has come to be held: it is widespread, and one suspects that it springs from the influence of Thomas Aquinas. Thomist readings of Aristotle will produce the kind of overschematic interpretation that we have seen here, since this medieval interpreter sought not only to explain Aristotle, but to render his system useable. For this reason more clarity was imported into the explanation of Aristotelian terms than was actually there. It is probably the Physics which dominates Thomas' account of *privatio*[27]. In the Physics Aristotle concentrates on privation as a state of affairs, or rather the absence of one: here he is concerned to explain it in relation to other states of being, such as coming-to-be (γένεσις). Matter and privation are contrasted and the latter is examined: is it the source of evil? Is it the source of non-existence[28]?

These become classic problems in the long Aristotelian tradition, and by the time of Thomas privation has come to be associated with this problematic only, and στέρησις/*privatio* becomes much clearer. In this way European tradition loses sight of the real complexity of Aristotle's own terminology.

Whilst I have by no means offered an exhaustive study of privation, certain developments have become clear. In Proclus (see p. 108) there is evidence of debate over privation, and there were clearly people who claimed that the negations of the *via negativa* were merely privations, and therefore unsatisfactory for discourse about the transcendent. This shows the capacity to treat negation and privation as being at least in the same logical category, and that there was at least the possibility of identifying the two.

Going backwards, in chapter five Syrianus was shown to use the two terms interchangeably, but then to draw a sharp distinction between them (p. 87). The *apophasis* is true of everything except the thing negated, "not-horse" being appropriate to everything except "horse"; but privation implies a certain state of affairs, as when deafness implies the ability or hear under normal circumstances, that is, the logical ability to hear. The question is thus whether there is any logical difference between privation and negation; this question arises out of Aristotle's tendency to run them together, and it is Aristotle's usage which determines the later Platonist view. Thus Proclus speaks of a

27 See Thomas' discussion in his Commentary on the Physics 190^b 23ff. Privation is defined as the absence of form in the subject. See also Summa 1a, 66, 2, where privation is said to be lack of form in something capable of having it. In Thomism the principle of *privatio* becomes the failure of a thing to be fully what it should be. On this see Gilson, Le Thomisme (Paris 1948) p.268: ". . . l'âme est en état de privation, parce qu'elle sent qu'elle devrait être ce qu'elle n'est pas". Privation is now a state of affairs only.

28 Physics 191^b 35–192^b 6. See also 193^b 20, where privation is described as a kind of "form" (εἶδος).

category of negations which are in fact privations (Platonic Theology I.12), and proceeds to define the latter, which appear to be a sub-class of negations, as they are in Aristotle.

It has been shown that privation was of crucial importance for the Neo-Arians, Aetius and Eunomius. Their prime term for the deity, the "unengendered", is not to be taken as a privation, they argue. They reject this form of negation, presumably in the light of Neoplatonist discussions such as those of Syrianus, mentioned above: privation has a kataphatic effect, in that it implies a prior state of affairs which must pre-exist the diminution entailed by the privation. It is not so much the diminution which creates the problem, as the assertion of a prior state which the privation carries with it. A passage of Plotinus (not previously cited) makes clear this necessary link between the privation and its logically prior state: "if things of which they are privations are qualities, then the privations are also qualities" (Enn. VI.3 [44].19,15). Plotinus does not here focus on the positive implications of the *steresis,* but he does make it clear that the *steresis* does have the same status as that in which the privation occurs: the same consequence is present, namely that privation logically entails the existence of a non-deprived state.

Van Winden's distinctions between logic and ontology are not really of any use throughout these discussions, since the writers concerned do not seem to observe them. However, there is one writer who does show a marked advance towards the Thomist position, according to which privation is nothing more or less than a defect in being. Pseudo-Dionysius does at times seem to treat privation as a logical/epistemological notion (p. 233), but also begins to treat it as a characteristic of the material world. As noted in chapter twelve, the Areopagite makes privation the centre of a more or less new philosophy of evil, which we also find in Thomas Aquinas. Privation is lack, diminution, or asymmetry in the material world: it is what happens to the Good as it enters our world. It is not itself a being, or a power for evil: it is simply an absence of certain characteristics, which are the characteristics of pure essence.

It is this development of the use of the word which takes it outside the scope of logic and epistemology, and makes it more rigidly into a matter of ontology. This process probably began quite early, since even Plotinus displays a marked tendency to limit privation to states of affairs[29]. Plotinus discusses privation in clearly Aristotelian terms in Enn. I.8[51].11, as being opposed to form, as lacking existence in itself, and as being a possible source of evil. This is, however, the Aristotle of the Physics, and Plotinus rarely presents privation as a form of negation, or as a conceptual tool: arguably he does so in Enn. II.4[12].14, 19–21, however. In other words, already with

29 See Enn. II.4[12].13, 12, where privation is discussed in relation to qualities, and the classic Aristotelian example of blindness is given.

Plotinus, privation tends to be limited to the terms provided by Aristotle's Physics only: the privation of the Metaphysics has begun to disappear from view. The dominance of the Physics discussion of privation is further enhanced and ensconced by the Areopagite, who develops earlier hints into a fully-fledged philosophy of privation as evil.

However, Aristotle and Aristotelianism are two different things.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

Bond University *Year* 1986

Appendix II.

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Appendix II

The Modern Via Negativa

i. *Sontag*

It is not certain that there is a modern *via negativa,* in the sense that a tradition has perpetuated itself from antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and down to the modern era. There may be no organic link between the modern manifestations of the need for silence, and the deployment of the negative way by the ancient Platonists. This is an historical question which concerns the path leading from antiquity to the modern era, and which would require research into the tradition going from Pseudo-Dionysius to Nicholas of Cusa, the Palamite Theologians, Meister Eckhart, the Cloud of Unknowing, the English Platonists, and European figures such as Kant, Hegel and Heidegger. Hegel's exploration of negation is probably a particularly important link between the past and the present. But this is a matter for another inquiry.

What follows will compare several strands of the present view of things, in the field of literature, aesthetics and theology, with a view to establishing whether there are any common threads.

Susan Sontag's The Aesthetics of Silence, perhaps most of all of the modern writings here discussed, brings us closest to the ancient perception of the barrier of language. She thinks that art is about "spirituality" (4), and includes writing, painting, and music under the term "art". It is claimed that art does seek to transcend its medium of expression, in that it points to something beyond itself. Sontag makes an explicit and quite lucid comparison:

> As the activity of the mystic must end in a *via negativa,* a theology of God's absence, a craving for the cloud of unknowing beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech, so art must tend toward anti-art, the elimination of the "subject" (the "object", the "image"), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence. (The Aesthetics of Silence 5)

She refers to the tendency of the various types of art to turn against themselves, in order to point beyond themselves. This procedure is clear to all in contemporary painting, which appears to consist solely in self-indictment. If Pliny felt that art stopped with Lysippus in the fourth century B. C., and that Hellenistic art was not art at all, one wonders what he would have thought about modern art. Since painters and musicians began the destruction of form, art has continued to make the anti-art statement referred to in the above quotation. Form and structure were attacked, then the notion of the subject, and the object; in painting, representation, and finally the idea of the

image itself were overthrown. Modern art achieved all this through art itself, but was aided by language, in that language articulated and interpreted the gestures made by art. But the question must be asked of it, whether these negations expressed within its own statements are negations which point to transcendent being or experience. There is indeed a possible resemblance between the negations in discourse of the Neoplatonists, and the plastic negations of art.

However it is not clear that the parallel is well founded. Is art's self-criticism directed towards the signalling of the transcendent? It is more likely a message to itself *about itself*, about how the work of representation is to be carried out. It is a self-destruction prior to the building of new representational modes, in which form, matter and medium will presumably have a new relationship. These new modes will harden, then ossify, and will eventually form the subject of a new attack, by art itself. The negation of contemporary art does not go beyond art itself: it is a dialogue with itself about itself. Not that art does not point beyond itself: it does. But its negations are not part of this process; they are part of an intra-art dialogue about how it carries on its work.

However, Sontag develops her view along the lines that art is an attempt to capture the transcendent: spirit seeks "embodiment in art", and clashes with the "material character of art" (loc. cit.). It is the concrete and mediating character of art, she claims, which constitutes a trap for itself. Art in its contemporary expression, whereby it displeases or provokes its audience, is participating in the "ideal of silence" (op. cit. 8).

Art's use of its power to negate brings it closer and closer to this ideal of silence (op. cit. 8). In answer to the practical question of how silence can actually exist in art, a number of answers are given by Sontag. Firstly, silence may be asserted by a decision such as that of the exemplary suicide of certain artists. Secondly, it may exist in the exemplary madness of certain artists, such as Hölderlin or Artaud, and constitutes a punishment meted out by society for the artist's spiritual non-conformity. But most importantly, Sontag argues that silence cannot "exist as the property of artwork" (9). If a work exists at all, then it articulates: silence can only be an element in it. Silence can only ever be suggested or implied, but never fully realised. Further, John Cage is quoted to the effect that there is no such thing as silence: that what we call silence is always invaded by some sound or other. This appears to be true: the therapeutic and restful silence of nature is actually the substitution of different and less invasive sounds than those of city life. But there appear to be some problems here.

In the first place, the broad definition of art as including linguistic, the plastic, and the performance activities, leads to difficulties. Writing and painting, for example, are very different processes, and discourse is a higher order activity than painting, which merely reflects things. The claim of painting

to be grasping after transcendent truths is little more than coquetry; the art of discourse on the other hand is a pursuit capable of abstraction, and continual conceptual refinement.

One can readily see, however, that Beckett's assault on the canons of novel-writing, such as the notion of temporal and logical sequence, or the notion of the omniscient authorial perspective, can be seen as a parallel to the assault on form of Picasso, or to that on the image by de Staël. Thus negative postures are being taken in both writing and the plastic arts, which seem to involve a similar self-criticism. But this intra-art dialogue is nothing to do with either the *via negativa,* or with silence. Such *auteurs* are really making points in the history of ideas through the practice of their craft. They are in fact points which need not be made *ad nauseam,* but which continue to be. They are points which can be equally well expressed in language, in a hermeneutic. The content of a Picasso painting cannot be put into words, by some sort of transmogrification, but his assault on form can. It is the one appeal of his art which can be expressed verbally, rather than merely described. Similarly, the way in which Beckett is at odds with the traditional novel can be expressed in another form of words. These writers are making statements about the need for revolutionary change in the practice of their craft, and their art comes to be dominated by the making of this statement.

The difficulty of the present world of art is that it has taken these points about art to be art itself. A fetishism for these negations of certain artistic canons has developed to such an extent, that such observations about the practice of art have been taken to constitute art. A statement which said: "not this way any more" has led to a host of disciples parrotting "not this way any more", and calling it art. These statements are really laying the groundwork for a new, positive, and forceful vision, but instead of doing so they have merely produced a school of artists who mistook "not-this-way" for art itself.

This has led to the current attempt to find significance in the negative statements implied by modern art. The *via negativa* has been employed to make some sense of what is in fact a stalling of art. In the first place, it should be said that the silence of the mystical tradition is not connected with the *via negativa.* Silence is an abstinence from language, recommended by metaphysicians and moralists. It simply cannot be achieved, or suggested, by speech, painting or anything else. It either is, or is not. Any attempt to create silence through art would be a cacophany. It could be argued that in the interstices between words lies silence; that in the gaps, the visual arts can create silence. But this is never the case. The gaps between words may contain silence, but the words themselves bind with each other and look to each other: the only use for silence here is that it creates the possibility of words. The divisions provided by silence make the creation of words possible, but the purpose of this form of silence is actually the bringing into being of speech! The

mystical silence is a renunciation of all language, and can only exist in the total absence of the linguistic, or of the plastic.

It should also be recognized that the negative way is supremely linguistic. For Proclus, who was its greatest ancient exponent, it represented a use of language. It was an exploration of the logical qualities of the negative, and of how a negative statement could reveal a wider positive concept. In Proclus, systematic negation is succeeded by silence, but these are two separate stages. It is not the intention of the negatives, such as "the One is not knowable", to somehow suggest, or encapsulate silence. It is not the intention of such a statement to produce silence in the mind, or set silence ringing in the ears; but rather to explore the meaning of the negative, with its positive implications. This is the significance of the hypernegation, and this activity is a profoundly linguistic activity.

It is understandable that this confusion has occurred. The negative looks like a denial of language. It appears to be a way of causing a statement to disappear, to be endowed with not-being. However this is not the way it was perceived in the classical *via negativa,* and in modern philosophy too there is some interest in the fact that a negative statement could in fact be expressed positively, were a different form of words to be chosen. It is this possible inversion of the negative which the Neoplatonists seem to be exploring. Thus Proclus claims that "negation is the mother of positive statements"; there is always the sense that a positive statement underlies any negation, but it is also believed that the negative statement is more powerful, and more revealing. But the fact remains that negation is a linguistic act, and the *via negativa* is a development ("exploitation") of linguistic resources.

For these reasons the negative elements in modern art do not resemble the ancient *via negativa.* They are not signs of the transcendent. They are signs of the immanent, and the imminent decay of certain styles of the immanent. They call for "new speech, words that have not been uttered", in the terms of the ancient Egyptian apocalypse. They signal the death of old forms, and the possible emergence of new ones, which we await. The arid character of the present artistic environment results from the failure to move forward, and from the elevation of the burial rites of the old forms, into art itself. The death-throes have been mistaken for a way of life. The negations of art do, like the ancient negations, suggest a positive obverse side, but this is about the practice of art itself: it is not the transcendent, but is intra-artistic.

The difficulty is that art has developed pretentions about itself. Instead of providing a transformed representation of the immanent, it has sought to excel itself, by providing intimations of the immortal. People have led themselves to conceive of the artist as seer, ascribing to him the ancient prophetic role as unveiler of the transcendent. But art is about material life itself and our perceptions of it. It is perhaps indeed the negative character of contem-

porary art which has provoked this explosion of vanity. A fetish has been taken for a statement of transcendental significance. A set of Hegelian categories has been brought in (the "negative", the "other") in order to provide a supporting hermeneutic for this new role which the artist desires to arrogate to himself.

Art has moved into a vacuum created by the absence of actual prophets and metaphysicians, and by the absence of theology from the broad cultural spectrum. However, as Plato pointed out, art simply cannot be called upon to play the role of unveiler: it is about the immanent, or the veil itself. The negations of the *via negativa* always point to the essence; it is not simply that any randomly chosen feature of human experience is negated, but there is a certain tradition of epithets selected for this purpose. These are epithets which purport to describe the transcendent, but which are explored through negation. There is no comparison between this procedure, and the disaffection with certain styles of aesthetic expression.

ii. *Derrida*

Derrida's association with the deconstructionist school of literary criticism may or may not be relevant to the question of the negative way. However he is having an influence over some contemporary theology, whether or not his philosophy bears a relation to the historic western negative theology (see Altizer et al.). And it is clear that he is making an influential contribution to the contemporary understanding of language and literary texts.

His view takes its impetus from three articles on Plato's Phaedrus, initially published in Tel Quel, but now part of the book entitled La Dissémination, and these are worthy of consideration. Plato's suspicion of writing, and his preference for dialogue, is well-known. There is a manifest paradox in the fact that his influence has sprung from the dead word of his writings, rather than the living word of his speech.

We have noted Plato's legend about the invention of writing in volume one. Derrida's long analysis of it is unusual, since the Phaedrus, and particularly this passage at the end of it, is not often discussed. Derrida's interest in it is part of his view that there has been an overwhelmingly strong tendency in the history of Western philosophy to give primacy to logos, the spoken word, or at least the unwritten word, over *graphe,* the written word. His articles, under the title Plato's Pharmacy, set out to examine this tendency in Plato.

Derrida's general intention is to use Plato to buttress his case about the logocentricity of Western philosophy. If we take the following words from p.182–3 (La Dissémination), we may gain an insight into how Derrida approaches the Phaedrus:

> What law determines this "contradiction", this self opposition of what is said against what is written, an utterance which is uttered against itself as soon as it is written, as soon as it writes its self identity and takes its property against this written backdrop? This "contradiction", which is nothing other than the self-relation of diction in opposition to scription, gives chase to itself in pursuing what is properly speaking its bait; this contradiction is not contingent. It is sufficient to note, in support of it that what begins in western literature with Plato does not fail to recur at least in Rousseau, and then also in Saussure. In these three cases . . . the exclusion and debasement of writing must, in the very statement of this, sit alongside.
> (1) a general writing, and in it with
> (2) a "contradiction": the written statement of logocentrism, the simultaneous statement of the being-outside of the outside and of its infamous intrusion into the within.
> (3) The construction of a "literary" work . . . the work of Plato can be read, beyond and independently of its logocentric "content", which is no longer there except as an integral "function", within its anagrammatic texture.

Derrida therefore discerns in Plato a dilemma: his tendency to devalue the written word is riddled with self-contradiction. Writing is necessary to the rejection of writing. There is more than just this logical point however: Derrida believes that Plato uses writing, the incarnate logos, as a clue to the nature of logos itself. In other words, the structure of the written language provides a model for understanding real language, logos itself, what the Stoics will call *logos endiathetos,* or the internal logos. Plato, says Derrida, reasons from the nature of letters and syllables in order to arrive at his understanding of true discourse. Hence the contradiction: the despised *graphe,* writing, leads us to an understanding of logos itself. Thus Derrida's expression: the outsideness of the outside, and its scandalous intrusion into the within. *Graphe* is seen as outside, yet it intrudes in providing a model for the understanding of discourse. This intrusion of *graphe* is a disgrace, but a disgrace which is essential to Platonism, in Derrida's view.

Socrates, at the end of the Phaedrus, tells us a story of Egypt. Phaedrus complains (275B) that Socrates is always making up stories about Egypt, and all sorts of other places, but we will take his story seriously nonetheless. The God Theuth, who invented geometry, astronomy, draughts and dice came to the Pharaoh to display his latest invention. It was the art of writing, and Theuth declares that this invention will make Egyptians wiser, and will improve their memories. "It is", he says, "the elixir of memory and wisdom". The word for elixir is *pharmakon,* or "drug", "potion": the Pharaoh Thamus refers to him as the father of letters, but goes on to claim that they will not produce memory and wisdom, but forgetfulness. People will cease to use their memories, and rely on writing: ". . . their trust in writing produced by other characters outside will discourage the use of memory within them" (275A). (We see here the beginnings of Derrida's dichotomy between the

within and the without.) Lacking practice, therefore, the memory will wither up. The Pharaoh says "You have discovered not the elixir of memory, but of reminding". Not the φάρμακον of μνήμη, but of ὑπόμνησις.

Writing is like a mnemonic: it brings things to mind rapidly, and gives the appearance of wisdom. Socrates goes on to say that writing is completely inert, like the figures in a painting, which cannot be interrogated and cannot respond. There is another kind of logos, he says, which is the authentic logos: it is written with *episteme* in the soul of the learner. It is able to defend itself, and knows when to speak and remain silent. We note again the contradiction to which Derrida alludes. The real logos, the legitimate brother of the bastard logos, in Socrates' words, is in the soul: but it is *written* in the soul. Thus Derrida's "intrusion néfaste dans le dedans" – the disgraceful entrance of the external into the internal.

Now of course there is an ambiguity entertained by Plato himself. The word *pharmakon,* which inspires Derrida's title Plato's *Pharmacy,* can refer to a drug which will harm, or a drug which will cure. It is either a therapy or a poison, and this ambiguity is played upon by the Pharaoh, when he says it is not a *pharmakon* of memory that has been discovered, but a *pharmakon* of reminding, with all its consequences, of the appearance of knowledge, of fraudulent wisdom, and so on. It is this ambiguity which provides the starting point for Derrida's articles.

He notes some uses of the word *pharmakon* early in the dialogue – Socrates says to Phaedrus, for example, "you've found a drug to make me go out" (230D). Is this whetting our appetite for the crucial play on words later in the dialogue, Derrida asks? But true to the deconstructionist method of interpretation, he does not talk of the real meaning of the text, or seek it in terms of Plato's intention as an author. We never find Derrida saying: "what Plato really means is ...", and concluding that this is *the* meaning. The author disappears under this analysis, since all language is in fact written text for Derrida: there is no primary internal logos dictating the collocation of words like a puppeteer dancing his marionettes. Text simply emerges, and Derrida puts the question of these linguistic coincidences like this: Is it by chance or by harmony that these associations occur? (p.81). In a world where all language is text, there are cases of chance groupings of words, and cases of harmonies emerging (presumably by chance also). Language, or text, simply has that character, as it emerges.

Derrida places a great deal of emphasis on the fatherhood of writing. On the one hand the father (the Pharaoh) rejects it (p.86), and writing is therefore always under suspicion. Moreover Socrates says that the logos encased in writing always needs its father to help it, since it cannot reply or defend itself. Derrida thus perceives a sexist model operating within the *logos*/writing dichotomy. Writing is the child of a father, an offspring, an inferior, controlled by and given adequacy by, its father. It is indeed striking that Socrates

uses the model, and it may be that the patriarchal model might lie behind the whole development of logos theory in Greek philosophy, wherever there is a dichotomy between a higher mental, inner, form of logos, and a lower externalised form of it.

The word *pharmakon*, for Derrida, occurs in a chain of meanings, which are more or less systematic. Not that they derive this system from the mind of Plato, but they spring from language and culture itself. Derrida accepts the translation of *pharmakon* by "remedy". But, he says, Theuth turns the word on its "strange and invisible pivot, and presents it under one, the most reassuring one, of its poles". Let us note in passing the peculiarity that Derrida allows Theuth, a character in the dialogue, to have an authorial role in determining the use of words, yet he will not ever say that Plato is turning words on their pivots, or such like. Despite himself, Derrida derives meaning from the intention of a subject. There is a real contradiction here: it is impossible, in speaking of a text with explicit resonance such as this, to escape talking as if choice had occurred, as if a design were being put into effect. Derrida refuses this role to the author, but under the compulsion to admit the subject's choice of words, has to turn to the expedient of having a character in the dialogue make the choice.

The term *pharmakon* for Derrida means a remedy, a therapeutic drug. But, he says (p.110), the reply of the Pharaoh deploys its other meaning. The *pharmakon* aggravates the problem, instead of remedying it. This is a not uncommon point, and Derrida continues with a more or less classical philological analysis. "Remedy", he says, is a translation which obliterates the dynamic virtuosity of the word *pharmakon* in Greek.

Plato uses it (thus Derrida) like the medical writers of Cos, in that the *pharmakon* is seen as something which runs counter to natural life. Even a natural illness should be allowed to develop along its own lines, and to follow its own norms. The Timaeus says that one should not aggravate an illness by the use of remedies (89A–D). Derrida comments that the poisonous character of the remedy, the *pharmakon*, emerges just at the moment at which one seemed able to translate the word in its positive, health-giving sense. The *pharmakon* is something outside the system, a supplement, without which the system is capable of evolving normally towards its proper ends. In other words, *pharmakon* is almost always pejorative. Its treatment is always a rough interference in a natural cycle, a sort of blow to the system, which runs the risk of worsening it.

Thus in Derrida's reading of Plato, the *pharmakon* of writing is always something from outside, an interference in the natural functioning of the inner logos. "... If the *pharmakon* is disgraceful, it's because ... it's not from around here. If comes form yonder, it is external or foreign ..." (p.119). The *pharmakon* assumes the status of a magical power, surrounded by precautions, hopes, fears and superstitions.

Thus Derrida very nearly overthrows the usual way of looking at the *pharmakon* of writing, in that he very nearly unifies its meaning into a single line whereby the *pharmakon* is always a damaging act of violence. (Though there are points at which he talks of the ambiguity, and even the *coincidentia oppositorum* inherent in the two meanings). But by and large he stresses the damaging function of writing, and makes this the Platonic view. This corresponds to a private purpose of Derrida's, namely to attack Plato as the key influence in depreciating writing, and in attributing the prime signifance to the inner logos. For Derrida, all is text, and the paternal logos within is a fiction. He overstresses the Platonic hostility to writing in order to make Plato the first great exponent of phonocentricity, or logocentricity.

Let us look more closely at the text of the Phaedrus, and this famous ambiguity in the word *pharmakon.* In fact it is true that the King rebukes the inventor of writing, and takes up his pharmaceutical image in another way. But he does not dispute the good effect of writing. He merely raises the question of how this effect will be applied. And it will not be applied to memory (*mneme*), as its inventor had suggested. It will merely help us to recall things in a more or less external way. The King raises no doubt about the ability of writing to remind us of things, but he does claim that this will actually cause a decay in real wisdom and in the real faculty of memory. The memory will atrophy from lack of use (275A). And we know the importance of memory in the Socratic/Platonic view of knowledge.

So the *pharmakon* may have a positive advantage for one skill, though over the years it will cause others to lose their effectiveness. The *pharmakon* of writing is like a quick fix, which gives a feeling of instant joy; it causes a lack of activity, which in the long run is harmful.

The extent to which the *pharmakon* image is pejorative is extremely limited. The *pharmakon* does a good job in its limited way. But in the end Derrida's emphasis on the foreignness of writing is a helpful one for understanding the Phaedrus. The cure is from outside the system. If relied on, it produces distortions, and eventual collapse of the intellectual faculties. It is not a natural part of the intellectual cycle.

Derrida's view about the primacy of the mental/spoken word is an accurate reflection of Plato. It is true that this polarisation is operating in Plato. Derrida touches on the patriarchal imagery involved: this is not developed by him, but is capable of development. Greek thinkers considered that life was created by the male, through his semen. Life was complete in the male semen, and given to the woman, who merely provided the place for this semen/life to develop.

It seems likely that these biological ideas constituted a model for intellectual experience: reason was formed whole and entire, secretly and abstractly in the mind, to find a later fleshly development in sound, and eventually a heavier, more material incarnation, in writing. This is how the Greeks

thought of it: the understanding of how life was generated was a very dominant cosmological and epistemological model.

This intuition is confirmed in many ways. One may take two examples. Firstly the Stoic idea of the *logos spermatikos*: the "sperm-reason" lies at the heart of reality and fertilises all existence. Like semen, logos gives its essence to everything, indeed creates everything. We may also refer to the Gnostic Marcus, who said that the beginning of everything was the beginning, i.e. the word *arche.* Each letter generated another word alpha, rho and so on, and levels of voicing were ontological levels. The purest word was the unuttered, vowels or voiced sounds are at a level lower, and consonants or unvoiced sounds, are at an even more material level. This example, no doubt unknown to Derrida, is a strong argument in favour of his case about phonocentricity.

Derrida's writing about the Phaedrus looks like free association: he appears to be saying anything that comes into his head. In this he is guided by his principle of "différance". In part a reinterpretation of Hegel's concept of *Differenz,* Derrida's view adds an element. To begin with, he adds an "a" to the French word difference – "différance". This gives an active meaning: it refers now to the act of creating difference. But "différence" in French means not only differing, it also contains the sense of referring – so "différance" is the creation of references. That is how speech operates: it creates strings of references. And this is how Derrida writes: it looks uncontrolled, but is in fact the exploration of chains of association. "Seme" conjures up the word "semen", for example (Positions, p.62).

Thus the authorial role is diminished – language is not created ex nihilo by the author, but flows into the author. We do not ask what Plato means, but what Greek means.

One difficulty in Derrida's writing here is that he seems to run together "speech" and "reason". "Phonocentricity" and "logocentricity" seem to merge, as the alternative to the written word, and there is a further set of distinctions to be made. It is surely impossible to identify speech with unvocalised reason.

Deconstruction takes us away from the tyranny of the present text (see Derrida, Positions p.62). To this extent it provides a hermeneutic which interrogates and develops the text. The text is regarded as a temporary closure of language, and so it must be reopened by the principle of "différance". The natural relationship of words will be reassumed through this process. Every text can be developed into a proliferation of further texts. This makes the work of the critic and the interpreter crucial: the creative task now falls upon the critic, who must open up the text, exploring the textuality of experience. Text is no longer permitted to be a "closure" of thought, limiting it to a visible confinement.

Much of this understanding of reading can be found in antiquity. Clearly, the allegorical school of interpreters, from Philo to the Alexandrian Chris-

tians, intend to open up the text by their exploration of the "undersenses" of the text. However this exegesis is carried out according to recognized principles: the liberating of the text is a regulated procedure. Further, this form of reading is applied only to texts of sacred significance, thought to be capable of yielding an understanding of the transcendent. We have noted a similar tendency with Augustine, in the De Doctrina Christiana, to advocate a mode of reading the scriptures which enlarges the text, rather than narrowing it down. Yet with Christian antiquity there is always a strong sense of authorial purpose: the science of exegesis is deployed with a view to discovering *what is intended.* Modern deconstructionist criticism shares in the general post-Marxian tendency to make the subject and his purposes disappear.

There is no real comparison to be drawn between the classical *via negativa,* and the contemporary deconstructionist school. The use of the negative in a systematic way is not a part of deconstructionist criticism: the latter relies more on the use of the complete semantic field surrounding a text, than on the negation of a text. Further the *via negativa* concerns itself with ontological questions: the issue of what the essence *is,* preoccupies all genuine users of the *via negativa.*

iii. *Theology and the via negativa*

It should be observed firstly that there is almost no formal *via negativa* in the Christian thought of antiquitiy. Dionysius is of course a clear exception, if he was a Christian writer. Clement of Alexandria at least formulates the technique, though he does not display it at work, in comparison with Plotinus, who uses it constantly, though he says little in a formal way about the procedure. The Cappadocians are only partly aware of what the *via negativa* is, quite apart from using it. The explanation appears to be that the *via negativa* is a technique conceived for Greek intellectual problems, and was only useful to Christianity insofar as it became Hellenized.

In fact the *via negativa* was a technique of abstraction proper to Greek Neoplatonism. It was less highly developed in Plotinus, but reached its peak with Proclus, who enriched it with a thorough examination of the logic of negation, which was partly contributed by his predecessors and their study of Aristotle. The *via negativa* is rejected, avoided or ignored by almost every major Christian philosopher in antiquity, at least so far as the great church is concerned. One locust does not make a summer, and mere statements about the mysteriousness of God do not constitute the *via negativa.*

The absence of the *via negativa* in ancient Christian thought may be explained by the fact that the nature of God is scarcely an issue in Christianity. It is in the character of Greek thought, from its Presocratic origins, that ontological questions predominate; the traditional Greek question is: "What is X?" If one reads the teaching of Jesus as reported in the Gospels, one notes

an absolute lack of interest interest in the question "What is God?" The nature of God is not part of the agenda, and the *via negativa* is really a technique for answering this question. Jesus' teaching is about moral attitudes, but also about transcendent issues: yet he never asks ontological questions. He is scarcely interested in God. Even the teaching about the kingdom of God is more about the subjects within it than the King himself: Jesus' teaching always returns to the spiritual posture of the subject. God is assumed, but never analysed: "If you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive you trespasses" (Mk. 11.26). The point here is really about human behaviour. A possible exception to this is the insistence that God is one God (Mk. 12.29 etc.), and no doubt this is aimed at counter-claims on the subject, but it is nevertheless true that the attitude of the human being quickly returns to become the central concern ("you shall love the Lord your God"). The apocalyptic visions show man poised in time, looking to the future, and at best describe God by his predicted actions alone. Jesus' teaching is highly anthropocentric.

The *via negativa* can scarcely be deployed in relation to the teaching of Jesus, since the latter is almost always directed towards the posture of the subject. It is with the progressive Hellenization of Christianity that questions about the essence of reality come to the fore, and the nature of God becomes an issue. Nothing could be more dissimilar than the Jewish concern with human behaviour and the human spiritual outlook manifested in the teaching of Jesus, and the Greek concern with the essence, definition, and knowing of God in the work of Pseudo-Dionysius.

The *via negativa* is a method inspired by the attempts of the mathematicians to grasp abstract notions, and devoted to the task of declaring God's nature through negations. It presupposes an already existing kataphatic tradition about the issue of God's nature. To the extent that it penetrates Christianity, it is a sign of the Hellenization of the movement through the development of interest in ontological questions. Any modern use of it will have to accept the ontological concern as a fundamental one in theology, or effect a metamorphosis in the conceptualization of the issue.

One example of such a restructuring of the negative approach may be found in an American book published in 1982. Max Myers (in Altizer ed., Deconstruction and Theology..., 142) speaks of theology "reconstructing" thought, and concludes with the claim that religious thinking "is destructive of every idol, every work, or symbol which claims to be the center of a structure of meaning, for the sake of this reconstruction" (loc. cit.). The author therefore sees religious thinking as having the negative force of ancient iconoclasm, in that fixations on temporary structures of meaning are destroyed in order that the reconstructive task may continue. The death of Christ is seen (loc. cit.) as an event of negative significance exactly in this manner, since it constitutes an emptying of Christ's message, and an opening up "to

the hiddenness of God behind its appearance". Myers' object is to visualize a theological activity which allows for continual reconstruction in the face of process, the Heraclitean flux of which time consists. In this way he attributes more of a kataphatic, or positive, value to theology than would his ancient counterpart. Myers' series of negations takes place in order to provide for a new phase of positive theology. He is clearly more concerned about theology's relationship to the changing face of social reality, than with the act of negation itself.

A second example of a modern re-presentation of the *via negativa* is provided by a German work, Negative Theologie, by Josef Hochstaffl. This author actively seeks to mediate between antiquity and the modern day, with a view which offers a constant advocacy of the need to rethink the method if it is to be used in the modern day. He is concerned with history, and the social order. Using an eschatological perspective (236–7) Hochstaffl sees the modern concern as the unfolding of humanity: "History must be kept open to enable the development of a greater humanity" (loc. cit.).

The first part of Hochstaffl's book, to which we have referred earlier, is an historical analysis of the idea and use of negative theology in late antiquity. However in this concluding note, cited above, he clearly indicates that the question for today must not be couched in terms of transcendence. He rightly observes that negative theology in antiquity is to do with the transcendent, and emerges as a consequence of "relative transcendence". Hochstaffl believes however that for a modern restatement of the *via negativa,* a formulation in terms of the "other" will inevitably be a failure. A translation into historical actuality is required. Hochstaffl recommends a negative dialectic conceived in the context of the fulfilment of history. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ constitute the negative moment of historical failure, followed by the positive affirmation of hope for the future. Humanity will be fulfilled by the establishment of the Lordship of the resurrected Christ. It is in the concrete matter of history and society that this fulfilment is to be found.

It is striking to note that in both modern versions of the *via negativa,* it is the death of Christ which is taken as an event of negative character, an event which under this analysis plays the negative/positive role of the alpha privative in the original procedure. The negative method is thus metamorphosed into a reading of history, and is held to provide a hermeneutic for events, in the unfolding social process. Of the two writers Hochstaffl emphasizes the more strongly the need to formulate the *via negativa* in historical and social terms. Both, however, stress the destruction of idols and their replacement, Hochstaffl in particular by arguing that the interest for the modern world of the *via negativa* is its capacity to *emancipate.* Its function is not to legitimize, but to offer an emancipatory/critical procedure, capable of freeing one from the traditional order.

This liberating function of the negative way as perceived by Hochstaffl

certainly accords with the ancient function of the method. It had a conceptually liberating effect, allowing thought to progress towards unity, away from divisively specific theological concepts. Jaroslav Pelikan has pointed (in the Via Negativa..., ed. Mortley/Dockrill) to the way in which such emancipation from theological positions could produce emancipation from ecclesiastical and social divisions, in the time of Nicholas of Cusa.

The value of such re-presentations of the *via negativa* largely depends on the extent to which a post-Hegelian social/material philosophy of human progress is accepted. Many will not wish to write off the ontological and transcendent vision of the Platonist tradition. Modern physics may yet cause us to revive the Platonist ontological vision – not in its exact form of course, since the ontological architecture of a Proclus is far too severely physical for the modern imagination. However the notion of "being" is alive and well in many branches of intellectual life. It may also be observed that a comparison with negating procedures in Buddhist philosophy, itself concerned with the apprehension of "real" reality, makes the *via negativa* appear to be among those intellectual options which are alive today.

The contribution of the *via negativa* is to assert the hiddenness of the divine, both in spite of and because of the revelation of the divine in the face of Christ. The face is a mask for the persona behind it: in revealing it conceals. The *via negativa* establishes the contradiction of revelation, but rather than bearing destruction within itself, it has an enhancing and expanding capacity. Like the breaking of icons, it destroys the narrow focus, and puts an end to theological pharisaism.

From Word to Silence, by Raoul Mortley

From Word to Silence, 2. The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek

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Bibliography and Index

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