STUDIA CLASSICA ANNIVERSARIA

Прилози од меѓународната научна конференција одржана
по повод 70 години од Институтот за класични студии,
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BEING BEYOND WORDS:
SOME APOPHATIC APPROACHES BEFORE PLOTINUS

Abstract: The article briefly examines the reluctance to name reality perceived as superior to the profane one, be it considered a sacred realm, overwhelming divinity, or God's being beyond man's capabilities of comprehension and definition. It offers a short account of the issue of difficulty or impossibility to name Being itself, the highest reality, God, in the stances of Plato from three of his dialogues, chosen parts from several works by Philo of Alexandria, and a passage from Basilides. It briefly explores the problems of naming the gods, the impossibility of knowing and defining God, and the need for ineffability and not-even-ineffability of Being.

Key words: apophatic, ineffable, Plato, Philo, Basilides, name(s), God

When the belief in the sacred and/or the divine is constructed and construed as faith in the exteriorisation of a power by a reality which is ontologically and axiologically superior to the ordinary quotidian one, it is conceived as mysterious and tremendously fascinating, awe-inspiring and frightening, on the one hand contagious (has the power to proliferate, that is, to transform the non-sacred, the profane), on the other hand, susceptible to influences from the profane, and thus intensely fragile, corruptible, in need of protection. The inferior profane sphere can desecrate it, render it unholy, rob it of its otherworldliness, and this is why there needs to be a clear separation between the two.[1] Just as the sound of uttering the holy is sacred, in specific rituals sacred is the silence. If a person is sacred, their name, by being in a direct relation to them, is as sacred, and therefore should not be used in profane circumstances, and in this particular sense, sacred names are taboo.[2]

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[1] The sacred needs to be protected, which is why a positive and a negative cult differentiate in religion. The negative cult, based on the need for the protection of the taboo (the sacred, by being prohibited, is also tabooed), determines the levels and manners by which the sacred is guaranteed its safety. Sacred names, for instance, must not be pronounced outside of the controlled domain of the cult, because the profane should not manipulate (with) the sacred. The rules against establishing contact, according to which the profane should not touch the sacred, are perhaps the most important ones, affirming the characteristics and nature of how the believers perceive the sacred. Durkheim considers these as primary taboos, claiming that all the others are their specific variations (435, 438).

[2] The tetragram *JHWH* in Judaism (used over 6800 times in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*) is a pretty famous example of the rule, along with other substitutions for God's name, like the *One who Is* (*I am who I am*) from Exodus 3.14 (although the tautological manner may be there to deflect from the question, in the "never you mind who I am" sense), *Adonai* (lord or master) in prayers, *Elohim* (gods, deities, heaven-

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The apophatic (or negative) approach involves abstaining from words, or negating nouns and adjectives for the reality or for the deity one is trying to describe. The basic assumption is that the knowledge for the superior (and sacred) reality is insufficient to affirm any sort of predicate. The overwhelming power, majesty, perfection, infinity and eternity of the superior reality (the sacred realm, or God almighty, for example), are beyond the possibilities of our limited cognition, which lacks mechanisms of cognition and definition. When there is no knowledge of what x is, minimum knowledge that there is, is what x is <u>not</u>. This way x gets described and confined (if to define means to limit) through negation.[3] Before the strong tra-

ly ones), *El* (might, omnipotence, but also as a transformed variant of the milder Canaan deity), *Shekhinah* (the dwelling of God on earth, its manifestation among humans), etc. In non-sacred usage, the name of God is substituted by *the Name* (*HaShem*). For a succinct account on the names of God in the Old Testament see Armstrong 14-15.

God's name is not to be spoken in vain, although it may have apotropaic or auspicious powers even outside prayers, if in the right context. The name of the devil is quite tabooed, as well, for it is believed that the utterance invites his presence, hence the many adjectives depicting its qualities as a substitution for the name. Names of chieftains, rulers, high priests etc., are taboo, because they pertain to a "higher" domain, and should not be tarnished. Certain superstitions, which have vacated the sacred, and inhabited the profane sphere, are based on apophatic rules for the sake of protection and avoidance of trouble – some folkloric or professional beliefs in the "unluckiness" of certain names (in theatre, for example, the famous "Scottish play"; some profane political and quotidian metonymies; the omitting or switching the name due to fear – excellently brought closely to children in the *Harry Potter* series, where 'He Who Must Not be Named' is the standard taboo form for 'Voldemort', which J. K. Rowling uses properly, following rules of sympathetic magic, also as a Taboo spell that breaks protective enchantments; and many more examples from pop-culture).

[3] Aristotle defines negation (apophasis) as a statement of something away from another (affirmation, kataphasis, being a statement affirming one thing or another, *On Interpretation* 17a25). The negation is quite non-specific, there is an openness to it: non-x can be anything that is not x. The problem of the affirmation of non-knowledge (lack of knowledge), is methodological: just as straightforward agnosticism carries self-contradiction (if one knows that one knows nothing, one does not know that, either), the point de départ of apophaticism may suffer from inner inconsistency. If one affirms not knowing God, because of God's attributes being way beyond the cognitive abilities of (the religious) man, then how can one affirm any substantiated knowledge about what he is not? To negate x, or certain aspects of it, there has to be a minimum knowledge of what x is, so it can be denied that it is it (or like that). In this sense, the negative approach is not a way into the positive through elimination (one denies everything that can plausibly be denied, and what remains must be affirmed), but an approach on its own, significant because of its characteristics and implications. Sometimes through the negative way affirmations are reached, and sometimes sublations, or the transcendence of one stance in order to achieve a new one - negation (in this way) is used in order to affirm the impossibility to affirm (*not* becomes *not* in the sense of *too much*).

In different approaches, different levels can be spotted: claiming indescribability can be done by claiming that God is ineffable, or that he is not ineffable (which does not result in double negative, i.e. affirmative), in the sense that he is beyond ineffability. What is called 'ineffable', is already somewhat 'effable', as it was limited in that description (it is not, therefore, absolutely ineffable). The truly, absolutely ineffable is beyond any name which can be explained through terms of privation and negation – to say that God is ineffable can have a privative meaning, in the sense that God has a name, but beyond our ability to know it, and to say that God is not ineffable would mean that God has no name because he is beyond even the category of names, cannot be put together with the notion and

dition of apophaticism, represented by Plotinus, Proclus, Pseudo-Dionysius, John Scotus (Eriugena) and others, some attempts at both silence, negation, and privation were made to show the impossibility to name, define, and convey the highest realities, the nature of the world, the essence of god. These explorations of the ways of negation were perhaps not systematic, nor were they at the basis of ontological constructions, but the starting points in the need for silence (or abstaining from definition) used some of the mechanisms the subsequent (in the sense of tradition) authors used. A transcendent reality, a non-verbal area, being beyond the possibility of words, cannot be expressed, communicated, encapsulated – wording the non-verbal would use as object the non-conveyable, the absent, so, non-wording it seems like the right way to go. A "suspicion of discourse" and the belief that silence, and not words, could convey the deepest meanings sought, developed somewhere in the history of Greek thought (Mortley 115). The Presocratics did not elaborate notions of the absence of language as intellectually helpful, and the topic of silence was, thus, tackled later, which, as Motley puts it, can be expected of a "group of thinkers whose primary concern was the development of the new logos-style account of reality" (111).

There are some elements in Plato which are undoubtedly mystical[4] and it may seem easy to claim that he has sometimes been regarded as the father of apophasis (Carabine 21), but the question remains whether he can be regarded as a founder of the negative way, or even a "fully fledged apophaticist". It might be true that, as Carabine claims, his "ideas provided the spark from which the principles of negative theology were eventually derived" (21).[5] Plato's ontology distinguishes between the only true being (the Forms) and the becoming, but there is no notion of an absolute transcendent being: Forms are Being distant, but not disconnected from the Becoming (as there are ways in which they participate in the Becoming,

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[4] need of naming (on this see Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides" 151-156).

[4] For this see Festugière and Taylor's *Introduction* to Proclus (Taylor/Proclus).

[5] It may be claimed that theology (albeit without its name) exists in its full development in Plato, who might be called the first systematic theologian (see Carabine 32) or, at least someone to whom all our theology can be traced back (Caird 58). Caird finds that Plato grasped the idea that lies at the root of all religion, and made it the "centre of his whole view of the universe" – that which underlies all forms of religion, from the highest to the lowest, is the idea of god as an absolute power of principle (32). While this may be true in a way, it seems more attenuated (and easily substantiated) to claim what Wolfson suggests, that his theology has the peculiar characteristic of dwelling more on what may be considered the subordinates of god, than God himself ("The Knowability and Describability of God in Plato and Aristotle" 233). Wolfson tries to show that Plato described God in affirmative, that he is effable (for his rebuttal of criticism from peers on the matter, see "Answers to Criticisms of My Discussions of the Ineffability of God" 186-188). He also underlines this elsewhere, in claiming that Philo of Alexandria, using Scripture and philosophy, was the first who arrived to the conclusion that God is unknowable and unnameable, ineffable, in the sense that he cannot be defined in terms of genus and species, and that no one else had arrived to this idea of god as ineffable prior to Philo (counting Plato) (*Philo* 94-126, especially 111-118).

and in which the ephemeral strives to participate in them).[6] The general stance is not what we find later in Plotinus, unless we read it through neo-platonic prism (like Plotinus and others did), especially when it comes to examinations of the One as unknowable, transcendent reality in *Parmenides*, for example.[7] If there is a One, then it must be defined as absolutely One, claims Plato, and from this he derives the possible negations, in order to either prove the hypothesis (if there is a One, or if there is not a One/if it exists or it exists not), or establish its negation to be true, so the negations of the One include: that if the One exists it cannot be many (*Parmenides* 137c); if it has no parts, it can have no beginning, middle or end (137b); that it is without form (137b); that it has no share in being at all (141e); and, especially relevant, that the One has no being, even as One (141e); and no name, no description, knowledge or perception of it (142a). We find here, what Carabine calls a "very forceful Platonic distinction between what is real and knowable on the one hand, and what is unreal and, therefore, unknowable, on the other" (Carabine 23). According to the first hypothesis, the One (a whole with no parts, 137d) is unknowable and unspeakable and there can be no logos of it, no science (episteme), no perception (aisthesis), nor opinion (doxa) of it (142a), which entails the impossibility to name it or to give it predicates. In the second hypothesis the One is shown as something to have perception and opinion about, and it would be, therefore, knowable. In determining the difficulty in distinguishing what Plato does and does not advocate himself in the many ensuing contradictions, Mortley summarises the hypotheses, and in regard to the unknowable character of the one, several intricacies can be extracted (128). The One has being (it both "is", and "is one"), and by having two characteristics, has an (infinite number of) parts, has a shape, is topical and is subject to time, and, what is more, has a logos, has a name, can be spoken of, can be named (129). In the fifth hypothesis, the statement "the One is not" is taken as having meaning (in the sense that the One may not exist, but it may partake of many relations, and it is in this respect that predication is possible); even if the One is not, it has "is-ness" (for "is not" to be true), so it simultaneously is and is not (everything can be simultaneously predicated and denied of the One which does not exist); while in the sixth hypothesis, being must be completely denied of the One,[8] and does none of the things from the One of the previous hypothesis (did and did not, moved and moved not, changed and remained), has no relations, there can be no perception or opinion of it, no logos. In the *Cratylus*, discussing the names of the gods (naming being a means to achieving episteme), Socrates is written to claim that we know nothing of the gods, neither of them, nor their names.

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[6] For Plato, the real is knowable, the unreal is unknowable, which is important when understanding the unlimited as non-existent (non-real).

[7] If we read the second part of *Parmenides* as Plotinus did, "with the single eye of fait", we would find in the first hypothesis "a lucid exposition of the famous 'negative theology'" (Dodds 133).

[8] Mortley labels this as the purely and simply non-existent principle of the Gnostic Basilides – to be briefly tackled a few paragraphs further in this text.

There is also the distinction between whatever names the gods call themselves (*Cratylus* 400d), and the claim that while the divine nature cannot be discussed, it would not be impious to discuss the names of gods given by the humans (401a).[9] In the *Timaeus*, it is stated that human nature is ill-equipped to fully grasp the nature of things, unable to understand matters concerning the gods and the generation of the universe, that it is a difficult task to discover the maker and father of the universe, and to declare him to all, impossible (27c-29d), which means that even if cognition is possible for some, conveying the knowledge is not.[10]

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[9] "All the axioms of the theologic science appear in perfection in this dialogue", so that there is nothing but the celebrated generation of the gods, and the procession of every kind of being from the ineffable and unknown cause of wholes (Proclus Book I, ch. 7). According to Proclus (commented by Taylor), Socrates in the *Cratylus* thinks fit to unfold "in a remarkable degree the rectitude of names in divine natures" (ibid), as Parmenides, who in the first hypothesis (*Parmenides*) denies of the One everything else that is known, and denies of it name and language. However - and here he abandons *Cratylus* after one sentence and goes on to *Parmenides* – the second hypothesis states that the One has a name and may be spoken of, and that in short, therefore, must be admitted that the first, most principal and truly divine names are established in the Gods themselves, but that the second names, which are the imitation of the first and which subsist intellectually, are of a demoniacal allotment – and, Proclus continues, "we may say that those names which are the third from the truth, which are logically devised and thus receive the ultimate resemblance of divine natures, are unfolded by scientific men …" (Book I, ch. 29).

In the respect of refusing to talk of the gods, lest they be brought down to mortal level, Carabine feels that Socrates is not so far removed from authors like Plotinus, Pseudo-Dionysius and others who advocate silence about the divine nature (27).

[10] Wolfson believes that the meaning of the passage is not that God cannot be declared (that it is indescribable), but that he cannot be declared to all men, and that only in Christianity, after the church fathers adopted some of Philo's views on the ineffability of God, that this statement gave rise the questions whether it was meant to assert or deny it ("The Knowability and Describability of God in Plato and Aristotle" 238-239).

In considering the Becoming process and the possibility of designating it, an accent can be put on Plato's consideration of the plausibility of naming: "if Being is all that exists, then names are nothing and apply to nothing; if all is flux, then names are fraudulent attempts to demonstrate a piece of the process" (Mortley 96-97).

Despite labeling the key formulation about the impossibility of finding and convening God ("Now to find the maker and father of this universe [*to pan*] is hard enough, and even if I succeeded, to declare him to everyone is impossible" - 28c) as a part of a "celebrated text little used?", Runia considers it one of the most widely used passages drawn from Plato in the writings of the Platonic and Christian apologetic tradition. Runia establishes the most important contexts and purposes in which it was used, offering suitable references which are here omitted: to support negative theology, which affirms that God is unknowable, or even if kataleptos for a few, certainly indescribable; to support the contention that God's transcendence makes it difficult to be discovered; to support the Arcanum – God's nature is not to be revealed to the unqualified to receive it; to support the claim that since Plato declares the demiurge not impossible to find, he cannot be talking of the highest, supremely transcendent God; as an apologetic device of depicting the Greeks as aware of a one true God (111). Plato's description of the demiurge as a craftsman and as a maker and father was an issue in Middle Platonism, and there are three suggestions that Platonists gave to what Plutarch mused about in *Platonic Questions* (1000E-1001C) about the double description of the highest god: God is the father of gods and men, maker of beings; 'father' is used metaphorically; Plato distinguishes between genesis as being and genesis as birth, and in birth God involves itself, it is the father of the cosmos as a living being (Runia 109).

Philo of Alexandria has no explicit remarks on the methodology of negation (apophasis), or explicit use of 'privation', but he remarks on the subject of abstraction (linked with 'addition', prosthesis). The lack of use of alpha privative in his expositions, and his negative adjectives for God are in order to dispose of usual anthropocentrisms and to push along his varied definitions of the Logos. For him, the essence of God is unknown, due to the limitations of men's cognitive abilities (men are ignorant of the nature of the essence of their own souls, they cannot possibly have notion of God, as the soul of the universe (*LA*. I, XXIX, 91). However, his doctrine of the Logos allows for God to be somewhat (infinitesimally) available, if pondered as manifested in the world, through the immanent Logos. The soul manages to derive a proper notion of God, only through his inspiration and by his power, as human intellect is too humble to be able to comprehend it himself (*LA*. I XII, 38). God is essentially nameless (*Mut*. II, 11), while the Logos (and Moses, to that matter) are multi-named (*Conf*. XXVIII, 146; *Mut*. XXII, 125).[11] Most men, not knowing the nature of things, necessarily make mistakes in the matter of giving names, and since God's nature is known to God only, he alone can make statements concerning himself, as he alone is in the position of knowing himself.[12] Mortley notices that Philo does not suggest the method of abstraction as a means of gaining knowledge of the transcendent, or the divine, nor does he say anything of the allied methods of negation and privation, which were to become principle instruments in the Neoplatonic and Patristic metaphysics (156).

According to the Gnostic Basilides (in Hippolytus), we must rise to that stupendous intuition of Deity, which transcends even Being, and which to the narrow minds of earth seems pure nothingness. It is beyond time, space, consciousness, beyond Being itself. There was when nothing was, and even "that 'naught' was not aught of things that are (even in the world of reality)". There was not even the One, however, and when he uses 'was' it is not in the sense that is was in any state of being, but to give some suggestion of what he wishes to indicate, he uses 'there was absolutely naught' (Hippolytus, *Haer*. VII, 20 PG 16 in Mead 257). That 'naught' (nothing) is not simply the so-called Ineffable, it is beyond that, for that which is really ineffable is not named 'ineffable', but is superior to every name that

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For the sake of brevity, other interesting passages from *Philebus*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic* etc. will not be part of this short overview.

[11] In Philo, the use of negative attributes in the description of God, like invisible, incomprehensible, unnamable, ineffable, is presented only as a way of expressing the scriptural principle of the unlikeness between God and all other beings (Wolfson, *Philo*, II 98, 126, passim; "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides" 145).

[12] See the episode of Moses speaking in a ceaseless stream of words to God, and God responding with silence clearer than speech (Moses 1.66; Conf X. 37 – silence, just as speech, is a faculty, as it controls words and uses them appropriately, arranging what is said with reference to time). See Mortley about Philo on the identity of being and being named (from 103 on). On Philo and the value of silence, Mortley stresses that there is a tendency in Philo to equalise silence and speech, depending on contexts (119).

is used (Ibid). The names people use are insufficient, they fall short for even the manifested universe (which is outside the world of real being), because it is so diversified. Much less, Basilides continues to argue, can we find suitable names for beings of the world of reality, and it is completely impossible to give names to that which transcends even reality. Hippolytus summarizes the condition of non-being, which transcends all being: according to Basilides, naught was, neither matter, nor substance, voidness of substance, simplicity, impossibility of composition, inconceptibility, nor imperceptibility, neither man, nor angel, nor god. There was not anything at all for which man has ever found a name, nor any operation which falls within the range either of his perception or conception. The state of non-being was that much, and more, removed from man's powers of comprehension, when (if we can talk of 'when' in a state beyond time and space) the Deity beyond being, without thinking, feeling, choosing, determining, desire or compulsion, willed to create universality (Hippolytus in Mead 258).[13]

The nothingness is "not even ineffable", because "ineffable" is a name, whereas the nothingness he speaks of has no name. About the use of the phrase, "not even ineffable" Wolfson is on the substantiated opinion that in all the discussions of attributes, from Philo to John of Damascus, an affirmative proposition, in which the "god" is the subject, and an adjective prefixed by the alpha privative (or by its Latin equivalent "in-") is the predicate, has the value of a negative proposition in the sense of the exclusion of the subject from the universe of discourse of the predicate. This means to them that one can say "God is not effable" or "God is ineffable", in which (latter) case the meaning "would be the exclusion of God from the universe of discourse of effability" ("Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides" 153). When Wolfson gives an account of Basilides' statement (that which is ineffable is not absolutely ineffable, and that which is not even ineffable is above all names), he shows Basilides as represented agreeing with other 'proper' apophaticists (Plotinus, the church fathers) that any term predicated to God must be predicated as a negation in the sense of exclusion of that predicate from the universe of discourse, and also that such a negation may be expressed by affirming God as above some particular predicate, but disagreeing as to whether

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[13] Daniélou notices how Gnostic vocabulary puts forward expressions of transcendence over cognition. The archaic character of (the employment of) these expressions makes him think that it was closer to (and possibly taken from) the Middle Platonism and Philo, and not the apologetic Christians. The Gnostics use a specific philosophical language which is used to designate the unknown character of their First God, he claims, and they push the affirmation of the absolute transcendence of God to extreme consequences (400-401). It is, therefore probable that, while apologetics tried to show Gnosticism as heresy, they managed to promote it, but that the ways of negative theology were less radical. Daniélou suggests that some negative terms used by some Gnostic writers may have been borrowed from Platonic sources (400). The "negative theology" of Basilides is not what would be found later in Plotinus, but it is plausible that some Gnostic approaches have contributed to the development of negative theology in the later Platonists (Basilides would have preceded Plotinus by around seventy years, Carabine 91).

such a negation can be expressed by an affirmative proposition with a negative predicate. A negation such as "God is ineffable" does not stand to mean "absolutely ineffable", and therefore "not even ineffable" should be used. An affirmative proposition with a negative predicate is, according to Plotinus and the Fathers, an equivalent of what Aristotle called a 'negative proposition', for Basilides it is the equivalent of what Aristotle called a 'privative proposition' (Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides" 154). When other apophaticists use affirmative propositions with predicates negative in form, they take them to be negations, and as such, they have the meaning of exclusion from the universe of discourse (God is excluded from the universe of effability). When Basilides does not allow for such use of "ineffable", he probably takes it to be a privation, and as such it would imply that God, who by his nature could be effable, happens to be ineffable, and this would not mean that he is absolutely ineffable, which is why 'not even effable' is a better choice.[14] According to Wolfson, Basilides interpreted the term as a negative proposition (apophasis), not as a private (steresis), which means that he could not even dare to use the ordinary alpha privative. Whittaker claims total irrelevance of the problem of positive and negative propositions to the theory of Basilides. He believes that Basilides was not inspired by logic, but was trying to outdo his forerunners in the field of negative theology, and must be seen as 'contribution to the terminology of transcendency' (368). Ineffable (a*rreton*), if considered a privative proposition, should have been accompanied by adverbs used by him with "not-even" as prefix, but it seems that he did not treat other words the same way, because he regarded only *arreton* as a name. Basilides admits the use of these terms simply because they are adverbs and not names applied to the supreme principle, Whittaker suggests (370). God is not even effable, not because to claim him ineffable would be a privative proposition implying that he might have been effable, but happens to <u>not</u> be, but rather because to say that god is ineffable is to give him a name, and in Hippolytis there is no indication that Basilides was concerned with the issue of propositions, but the matter of correct names, or the lack thereof (368-9). Carabine thinks that Whittaker is right in pointing out that there is no reference to propositions in Basilides' text, but rather to correctness of language (86). According to Whittaker, we cannot see a suggestion in Hippolytus that Basilides knew the distinction between privative and negative propositions, nor can we see that he considered *arreton* as a privative term. For Basilides to call God ineffable meant to give him a name, which he does not allow, and the privation-negation issue is irrelevant, "the emphasis is on names, with no suggestion that Basilides was concerned with the possible privative aspect of the pertinent terms" (369-70). Carabine is not convinced that Basilides was consciously operating within the context of Aristotelian negation or privation (87).

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[14] Using Wolfson's explanations Daniélou agrees that for Basilides a name would mean a determination, and since God is limitless and nameless, determinations should be omitted (God is not even effable because the category of names is foreign to him, 402).

Wolfson keeps stressing that before Basilides 'ineffable', was only used by Philo (*Philo*110 pass; "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides." 156 pass). Whittaker takes issue with Wolfson singling Philo out as the one who first used 'ineffable' in relation to God, claiming that the application of the term was commonplace in his contemporary speculation (using the Hermetic Poimandres with references from *Corpus Hermeticum*), not later in date than Basilides' career, the Middle Platonic speculation, and a Neopythagorean work ascribed to Lysis, describing god as ineffable, again, not later than Basilides (368). Wolfson answers to this by pointing out that if a work is composed "no later than Basilides", then it is composed about a century after Philo (and besides, *The Corpus Hermeticum* is acknowledged to show both Philonic and Christian influence); and that Whittaker himself places Lysis after Philo ("Answers to Criticisms of My Discussions of the Ineffability of God" 189). Wolfson is right in stressing this chronological fact, but Whittaker seems to give these instances of the use of 'ineffable' to suggest that since they were common before Basilides, they would have been quite common around the time of Philo as well. Basilides' motive might have been to oppose Philo of Alexandria (Wolfson, "Negative Attributes in the Church Fathers and the Gnostic Basilides" 367-368), but there are opinions that the usage of 'ineffable' (*arreton*) for God was widespread, and, as Basilides shows, it was used almost as an affirmative term, a name, so it could have been not someone in particular that he was disagreeing with, but the methodological problem in general (Carabine 85). The explicit denial of 'ineffable' as a name can be seen as originating in a typical Gnostic anti-Jewish stance (Jufresa 2). Jufresa locates the idea that names are related to their object by nature and not by convention as shared by Platonists, Stoics and Pythagoreans at the time, and the conclusion that, assuming the majesty of the Supreme Being, no name can define it suitably, which leads to the conviction that names are only given to it because of the human necessity to understand in Philo, Albinus, the Hermetic texts, Asclepius (god has no name, or better yet, he has all of the names), and in some Gnostic tractates (2). Jufresa refers to Wolfson and Whitakker, who have pointed out that Basilides is trying to oppose someone before him (Philo according to Wolfson, general Middle-Platonic environment according to Whittaker), and asks why Basilides felt like he needed to oppose the Platonists, as he seems to share some of their most important concepts, and proposes to consider "not even ineffable (God)" as a specific Gnostic move, in order to differentiate between Basilides' Supreme Being and the God of the Bible (Jufresa 3). The expression "Ineffable Name", claims Jufresa, came forth from the Jewish people after the second destruction of Jerusalem's Temple, in which was conserved, written, the sacred Name of God, pronounced once a year by the Great Priest in a solemn and magnificent ceremony (3). This seems plausible, as it was believed that, with the destruction of the Temple, the correct manner of pronouncing God's Name was lost. The Jews have since referred to him as the "Ineffable", both due to the disturbance of the cultic actions, and in a more theoretical sense, alluding to the

material impossibility of pronouncing God's Name due to his infinite excellence above all created beings. Jufresa believes that this interpretation seems confirmed by the fact that Basilides further designates as "Ineffable" the Great Archon of the Ogdoas, whom we can in some aspects identify with the biblical God (3). Carabine seems enthusiastic about this suggestion, and continues with what Jufresa proposed - further along in Basilides the Great Archon of the Ogdoad is described as "more ineffable than the ineffable", while the Archon of the Hebdomad, the demiurge and world ruler, who is almost certainly identified with the God of the Jews, is described simply as "ineffable". Later, however, the Great Ruler of the Ogdoad is "ineffable" according to Basilides, and the Ruler of the Hebdomad, the God who had spoken to the Jews, is "effable" (87). Carabine agrees that Basilides was motivated by the wish to strengthen Gnostic speculation on the divine matters, clearly distinguishing it from Judaism and Christianity, and suggests that he must have been reacting to the Platonic ideas close to the Christian ones. Referring to the 'not being (god)', she places it as a reaction in the form of an anti-thesis of "I am who (i) am", in an attempt at "dethroning the God of the Jews" (89).

Mortley believes that Basilides' transcendence statements seem to reflect some knowledge of the *Parmenides* (157). On the issue of the "not-(even)-ineffable", Mortley finds Basilides alert to the fact that such a negative adjective can be the vehicle for a statement, but perhaps feels that by attaching privations, he is positing some other form of existence on which privation may operate. Mortley does not dwell on the nature of this doubt, and merely claims that Basilides sees a problem with the privative adjective, given the (pure and simple) non-existence of God. According to Mortley, the reason for this insistence on what kind of non-existence God has, must lie in the differences of "the One is not" from the hypotheses in *Parmenides* (157).

This brief account of some (if any) apophatic aspects in three of the dialogues of Plato, the strong insistence on the ineffability of God in chosen statements from several of the works of Philo of Alexandria, and the not-even-ineffable construct from a passage by Basilides, shows the approaches to the ineffable reality, the impossibility to name the overwhelming being (or divinity), and the similarities and differences in the perspectives of these authors.

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Marija TODOROVSKA

EL «SER» MAS ALLA DE LAS PALABRAS. ALGUNOS ENFOQUES APOFATICOS ANTERIORES A PLOTINO

(Resumen)

Este artículo estudia brevemente la aversión a nombrar la realidad percibida como superior a la profana; ya sea considerada como propia de lo sagrado, como realidad abrumadora, o el ser de Dios, que van más allá de las capacidades de comprensión y definición por parte del hombre. Además, ofrece un breve relato en tres autores sobre el problema, ladificultad o imposibilidad para nombrar al «Ser» mismo, la realidad suprema, Dios, en tres diálogos de Platón, en algunas obras de Filón de Alejandría, y en un pasaje de Basílides. Por último, estudia brevemente los problemas por nombrar a los dioses; la imposibilidad de conocer y definir a Dios; y la necesidad paradójica del «Ser», tanto su carácter inefable como «ni-siquiera-inefable».