STOIC AND PLATONIC REFLECTIONS ON NAMING IN EARLY CHRISTIAN CIRCLES: OR WHAT'S IN A NAME?

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The changing landscape of the philosophical world of antiquity between 100 BCE and 100 CE has been the focus of the conference for which this chapter was prepared. In the late Hellenistic and early imperial periods, Stoicism played a major role in the intellectual life of Greeks and Romans concerned with philosophical issues. By the third century of the common era, Platonism was at center stage. Although the extent of the shift may be debated, that the center of intellectual gravity had moved is clear. This chapter examines a series of texts that stand at the margins of the philosophical debate, but that provide evidence of the appropriation of philosophical categories as tools for the presentation of religious claims. They illustrate in various ways the increasing importance of Platonic concepts, intellectual resources particularly suited to the claims these texts were making about how God might be known. The texts also share a common heritage in the encounter between Hellenic intellectual traditions and the religious communities that transmitted the heritage of ancient Israel.

PHILO'S STOIC PLATONISM

The first-century CE Jewish philosophical exegete Philo is well known for his appropriation of Greek philosophy in the effort to make the scriptures of Israel relevant to Alexandrian, and perhaps Roman, Jews.[1] The philosophical framework that Philo used had a strong Platonic cast, but it included important Stoic elements, both in its metaphysics and ethics.[2]

One of Philo's foundational convictions, more Platonic perhaps than Stoic, is the unnameability of the Existent One.[3] The theme is a way of expressing the transcendence of the First Principle, whose

[1] For Philo's philosophical heritage, see Dillon 1977: 139-83; Dillon 2008; Winston 2001; Calabi 2008; and Hadas-Lebel 2012. For Philo's project within its general cultural context, see Van Nuffelen 2011.
[2] In addition to the treatment in Dillon 1997, see Reydams-Schils 1995. On the problems with a simple "Middle-Platonic" description of Philo, see Runia 1993b.
[3] The theme is especially prominent in *Mut*. 10-15, on which see Runia 1988. On Philo's theology in comparison with that of Plutarch, see Hirsch-Luipold 2005.

existence, but not essence, can be known.[4] Standing in tension with that transcendent unnameability is the quest that also pervades Philo's work, especially the treatises comprising his Allegorical Commentary, to attain with the eye of the soul a vision of God.[5] That quest is complex, as many scholars have noted.[6] It always seems to fall short of complete knowledge or "vision" of the essence of the Existent, but it does provide some approach to his reality, depending on the capacity of the quester.[7] If one cannot see God, one might get a glimpse, or God might reveal a glimpse,[8] of one or more of his "Powers," those aspects of his being or perceptions of his action in the phenomenal world.[9] Those powers do bear names, God (θεός) and Lord (κύριος), the Septuagint translations of the divine names אלוהים and יהוה, referring, to his "creative/beneficent" or "royal/ruling" powers.[10] Getting a glimpse even of them is not a simple matter.[11] "Vision" comes in various forms, including, paradoxically *hearing* the "many named."[12] The word that is heard is embedded in nature, embodied in the "living laws" of the patriarchs, especially Moses, and made present through the words of the written law revealed to him.[13]

Philo frames his position on God's unnameability within the context of the linguistic theories of Hellenistic philosophers, who worried about the relationship between signifier and signified, nouns and their referent. Philo knew the position, articulated by Socrates in Plato's *Cratylus*, that there might be a "natural" relationship involved.[14] In such a relationship a name would convey something about the reality of the thing named. The signifier pointed to or revealed the essence of the thing signified. Like

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[4] *Praem*. 38; *Spec.* 1.32, 43-4, 49; *Leg all*. 3.100-3. See Calabi 2008: 7-8.
[5] *Spec*. 1.37-8, 49; *Praem*. 40-6, *Legat.* 4-6. Other texts speak of some sort of "vision" of the soul or mind: *Vit. Mos*. 1.273; *Abr*. 121, 200; *Migr*. 169; *Somn*. 1.64-7; *Post*. 13-16, 166-9; *Deus* 62; *Spec*. 1.49; *Praem*. 36-46; QG 4.1-2; *Fug*. 164-5.
[6] On the tensions in Philo, see Birnbaum 1995 and Birnbaum 1996. Tensions are evident in passages such as QG 4.2, where God is visible only through powers and 4.4, where Abraham sees God "in his oneness." See also Calabi 2008: 86-7.
[7] *Mut*. 13-14. *De Deo* 1; *Op*. 69-71; *Fug*. 163-5; *Fug*. 95-101. Cf. Calabi 2008: 90.
[8] *Somn*. 1.232, *Migr*. 34-5, where Philo speaks of his own ecstatic experience. Much in this treatise deals with issues of religious epistemology. At 43-52, Philo notes that revelation comes to the contemplative; at 81 that God prompts the human mind; at 84 he describes prophetic ecstacy; at 187-94, he uses the motif of climbing the chain of being; at 197, he stipulates that the goal of life is contemplating Him that is.
[9] At *Spec. Leg* 1:41, Moses asks to see God, recalling Exod 33:13-23. He is told at *Spec. Leg*. 1:45-6 that the vision of God's essence is impossible, but he might catch sight of his potencies. The vision of Abraham at Mamre, treated at *Abr.* 119-22, is also an important text, as will become clear.
[10] *Abr*. 121.
[11] *Somn*. 1.232, on Gen 18: QG 4.1-2; *De Deo*.
[12] *Conf.* 146.
[13] The topic is ably explored by Fraade 2008.
[14] The issue was further discussed in Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation*. Among later Platonists, not only by Philo but also in Plutarch, *On the Decline of Oracles* 421e, *De Iside et Osiride* 379c.

most philosophers of the Hellenistic and early imperial periods, Philo doubted that the conditions for such “naming” normally obtained.

Plato’s dialogue playfully explores the art of etymology as well as of the general phenomenon of signification. Several arguments relate to Philo’s treatment of signification. Socrates, for instance, offers an etymology of the divine name Zeus, as a sentence describing who this deity really is.

> The name of Zeus, who is his alleged father, has also an excellent meaning, although hard to be understood, because really like a sentence, which is divided into two parts, for some call him Zena, and use the one half, and others who use the other half call him Dia; the two together signify the nature of the God, and the business of a name, as we were saying, is to express the nature (*Crat*. 369b).[15]

Despite the playful etymology, Socrates proceeds to articulate a kind of apophaticism, suggesting that human beings do not know, and therefore by implication, cannot rightly name, the divine. But the gods have given themselves names, which must function as names should:

> Yes, indeed, Hermogenes; and there is one excellent principle which, as men of sense, we must acknowledge, that of the gods we know nothing, either of their natures or of the names which they give themselves; but we are sure that the names by which they call themselves, whatever they may be, are true (*Crat*. 400d).[16]

A corollary of this understanding is that names such as divine patronymics might be used in prayer. They may not be perfect, but they are all that human beings have. Whatever may be the case with gods, human beings do not finally have access to names that automatically reveal the nature of what they name. Names are like pictures assigned to objects. “Naming is an art, and has artificers” (*Crat*. 428e). Names assigned by human agents, though they may try to imitate their objects in some

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[15] συντιθέμενα δ᾽ εἰς ἓν δηλοῖ τὴν φύσιν τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃ δὴ προσήκειν φαμὲν ὀνόματι οἵῳ τε εἶναι ἀπεργάζεσθαι. Translations are from Hamilton and Cairns 1961, here p. 438.

[16] Ναὶ μὰ Δία ἡμεῖς γε, ὦ Ἑρμόγενες, εἴπερ γε νοῦν ἔχομεν, ἕνα μὲν τὸν κάλλιστον τρόπον, ὅτι περὶ θεῶν οὐδὲν ἴσμεν, οὔτε περὶ αὐτῶν οὔτε περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἅττα ποτὲ ἑαυτοῦς καλοῦσιν. Δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι ἐκεῖνοί γε τἀληθῆ καλοῦσι. Translation, Hamilton and Cairns 1961: 38.

way, may be true or false (*Crat*. 431a). The quest for knowledge cannot simply rely on an analysis of words, but must look to the things themselves (*Crat*. 439a-b).

The issue of how names work was of interest to Stoics, too, although Diogenes Laertius reports that "In regard to the 'correctness of names,' the topic of how customs have assigned names to things, the wise man would have nothing to say."[17] Some Stoics defended a position about the relationship between signifiers and their referents that appears more like the final result of Plato's dialogue. Scientific names in particular, i.e., "definitions" (ὅροι), must reflect an *analysis* of the realities that they designate.[18] Origen, however, suggested that a Stoic would indeed have something to say and that there was some natural connection between names and things named. In *Contra Celsum* 1.24 he contrasted Aristotle and the Stoics:

> Are names as Aristotle holds, the product of convention? Or, as the Stoics believe, of nature, the primary sounds being imitations of the things of which the names are said? This is the basis on which they introduce some elements of etymology.[19]

Stoics in fact delighted in etymological exploration. A brief example of their approach appears Diogenes Laertius, 7.147 where the name Zeus is connected both with the prepositional phrase "on account of whom" (δι᾽ ὅν) and with the word for "to live" (ζῆν), an etymology that echoes what was proposed by Socrates in *Crat*. 369b.

The most impressive example of Stoic theological etymologizing in the first century CE appears in the *Compendium theologiae graecae* of the Roman Stoic, Lucius Annaeus Cornutus.[20] Cornutus presents himself as recording the names given to gods by people of old. He thereby plumbs the insights that they provide into deities as cyphers for natural processes. All divine names provide some insight into "nature" (φύσις) in general or the "nature" (οὐσία) of things. Thus for example Zeus, the

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[17] Diogenes Laertius, 7.83 (SVF 2.130): περί τ᾽ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος, ὅπως διέταξαν οἱ νόμοι ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔργοις, οὐκ ἂν ἔχειν εἰπεῖν, from Long and Sedley 1987: I,184; II,187.

[18] For Stoic "definitions," see Diogenes Laertius, 7.6-62; Long and Sedley 1987: I,190-91; II,193-94. Long and Sedley (1987: I,195) make the point well: "His [scil. Plato's] conclusion is that names are indeed to some extent descriptions, but too inaccurate to provide a route to knowledge, which implicitly must come from dialectical study of the essences of things themselves. This seems to be exactly the position adopted by the Stoics."

[19] SVF 2.146; Long and Sedley 1987: I,192; II,196.

[20] Two important works on Cornutus are Ramelli 2003 and Nesselrath 2009. Citations are from Nesselrath's which contains text, translation and useful interpretive essays.

soul of the universe, a fiery, aetherial substance, "lives" (ζῶσα) and is the cause of life (αἰτία … τοῦ ζῆν) for all else (2.1), a now traditional etymological play. Hera (Ἥρα), the wife of Zeus, is connected with air (ἀήρ) (3.1), which clings to her husband and produces offspring by their mutual interaction. The names of their parents, Rhea and Kronos, say something about the process by which natural substances have come to be, either, in the case of Kronos by referring to the measured units of time (i.e., χρόνος) through which generation occurs or, in the case of Rhea, by referring to the process of separation and recombination, i.e., the flow (ῥεῖν/ῥύσις) through which matter is produced (3.2).[21] They etymological plays here are so obvious that Cornutus does not need to make them explicit in his initial treatment.[22]

The reflection on these particular divine names illustrates another feature of Cornutus' approach. While the etymology of divine names has a stable *realm* or *range* of referents, i.e., natural substances and processes, any particular name may have more than one etymological explanation. So after offering several options for Kronos and Rhea, Cornutus settles on the "most likely" (πιθανώτατον), that aether and air come to be when nature (φύσις) moves from a primoridal fire to "create" (κραίνειν) and "complete" (ἀποτελεῖν) whatever is. This explanation at least suggests a reading of Kronos, but is not quite as helpful with Rhea. Or again, the name of Poseidon, who is the "creative power of the water in and around the earth" (ἡ ἀπεργάστικὴ τοῦ ἐν τῇ γῇ καὶ περὶ τὴν γῆν ὑγροῦ δύναμις) may derive from the act of drinking or providing drink (ἀπὸ τῆς πόσεως), or it may be "the principle according to which nature sweats" (λόγος καθ᾽ ὅν ἰδίει ὁ φύσις [i.e., = φυσιιδίων]), or it may be connected with Poseidon's earthshaking habits (πεδοσείων). Many etymologies, however curious, are possible; all point to something in the realm of the natural order for which Poseidon stands.

Etymological analysis of religiously significant names continues in much ancient literature, in part at least influenced by Stoicism. Philo certainly falls into that category. He famously provides an etymology of the name of his people Israel, as "the one who sees God," which shows at least a rudimentary knowledge of Hebrew.[23] Philo also spends a good deal of time on the meaning of the names of key Biblical characters, especially when their names are changed in the sacred story.[24]

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[21] See Nesselrath 2009: 32 and Ramelli 2003: 18-82, and for a useful collection of parallels, her notes on pp. 302–8.
[22] At 6.1 Cornutus makes the connection of Ῥέα and ῥύσις explicit; at 6.5 the play on Κρόνος and χρόνος.
[23] *Abr*. 57–59.
[24] See especially his treatise *De mutatione nominum*.

While Philo's plays on etymology have a formal resemblance to the compendium of Cornutus, they are not committed, as he was, to finding a reference to the world of nature in his Biblical names. Philo also differs from the Stoics in his exploration of the issues addressed in the *Cratylus*. He is particularly sensitive to the principle articulated in the case of divine self-naming, that the gods get their own names right. That scenario is not found in Cornutus or other Stoics who explore divine etymology. Their attention is focused on the insights found in names that human beings apply to deities. Philo finally denies that even a "proper name," spoken by God himself, reveals anything of his essence.

Philo refers to the theory that names disclose the underlying nature of the named in his description of Adam's naming of creatures in the Garden of Eden.[25] At least Adam's names functioned as names should, according to the theory that Socrates initially defends in the *Cratylus*.[26] But what of names for God found in Scripture? The most common, used of the "powers," are not true or proper names. They do not describe or delineate the essence of the unnameable, unknowable Existent. They could only direct the seeker to him but not provide adequate comprehension of him. All of this is ironically true of the ordinary names of God, because one of them, Κύριος ("Lord," the Septuagint equivalent of יהוה) cannot possible be a κύριον ὄνομα or "proper name." The ordinary names of God are, as noted by David Runia,[27] examples of "catachresis," or misnaming. Philo applies this category at *Mut*. 27, where he sees the Biblical phrase "I am your God," as a designation of God *in relation* to someone, as "by a certain figurative misuse of language rather than with strict propriety." By appealing to Aristotelian categories, Philo notes that this name obviously cannot be a κύριον ὄνομα, pointing to the true nature of the named. God cannot be defined by his relationships.

Despite this reticence about the proper naming of God, which reflects the doubts about "natural" names shared by the final position of the *Cratylus*,, Philo on at least one occasion does identify the "proper name" of God. On this point he follows the hypothetical suggestion made by Socrates in the

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[25] *Conf*. 134, 136, 139; *Op. mun*. 149-150: Adam "devised names for them with great felicity and correctness of judgment, forming very admirable opinions as to the qualities which they displayed, so that their natures were at once perceived (ὡς ἅμα λεχθῆναί τε καὶ νοηθῆναι τὰς φύσεις αὐτῶν) and correctly described by him." On other cases of language getting to the essence of things, noted by Runia 1988, see *Leg*. *all*. 2.15; *Cher*. 56; *Somn.* 1.230, QG 4.194.

[26] Philo may well have agreed with Plato that "initial" names could have been corrupted in the process of their transmission. "The original names have been long ago buried and disguised by people sticking on and stripping off letters for the sake of euphony, and twisting and bending them in all sorts of ways, and time too may have had a share in the change" (*Crat*. 414c).

[27] Runia 1988.

Cratylus regarding names that gods give themselves. Socrates did not think that we have access to those names; Philo did, although the result of that access is somewhat paradoxical.

In discussing the strangers who visit Abraham at the oaks of Mamre (*Abr.* 121), Philo refers to one as "the Father of all, who in the holy scriptures is called by his proper name (κυρίῳ ὀνόματι), 'The One who is (ὁ ὤν)'." This name resembles the divine names discussed in Plato's dialogue. Like the fancifully etymologized Zeus, it is a predication, and like the names the gods give to themselves, it is the name given by the Existent One himself. Thus it may be God's "proper name," but, in conformity with Philo's basic epistemological position, it does not reveal anything of the divine essence. This name only identifies the fact that God exists.

Philo's formulation holds in tension divine transcendence and immanence, the knowability and the unknowability of God. It also provides a psychagogical framework for advancing, insofar as a human being can, to the "vision" of God. One early Christian writer knows something like Philo's position, makes use of many of its components, and ultimately transforms it. Yet in his work there remains a kindred psychagogic instinct that is so much a part of Philo's complex reflection on naming God.

NAMING AND KNOWING GOD IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The Christian writer concerned with naming and knowing God is the author (or perhaps authors)[28] of the Gospel according to John, probably written around the end of the period on which this volume focuses.[29] That there is some relationship between Philo and the Fourth Gospel has been often defended and often denied. The major pieces of evidence are familiar. The opening words of the prologue, celebrating the Logos and its relationship with God and the world, invites a comparison with Philo's famous intermediary.[30] Peder Borgen has called attention to the evangelist's midrashic technique evident in the Bread of Life discourse (John 6:31–58), as well as motifs of that discourse with

[28] Theories about the development of the Fourth Gospel abound, positing various stages of development. For two recent examples, see Von Wahlde 2010 and Siegert and Bergler 2010. Whatever the process by which the gospel came to be, it is worth exploring whether the final product has some degree of literary and conceptual coherence.
[29] Dating the Fourth Gospel remains a matter of debate. For a review of proposals from the last two centuries, see Porter 2015: 15-18. Most scholars currently date the definitive form of the text between 90 and 120 CE, although portions such as the "Pericope of the Adulteress" (7:53–8:11) were probably added later. For the history of that passage, see Knust 2006.
[30] For the Johannine Logos, its relationship to Philo and its afterlife, see Colpe 1979; Tobin 1990; Cordero 1993; Carmichael 1996; Leonhardt-Balzer 2004; Siegert 2004; and Engberg-Pedersen 2012.

intriguing parallels in Philo.[31] Among the recent explorations of Philonic echoes in John, Gitte Buch-Hansen has argued that Philo's appropriation of the Stoic notion of *anastoicheiōsis*, or elemental transformation, illuminates John's pneumatology.[32] Volker Rabens has found Philo's appropriation of Stoic ethics useful for analyzing the ethics of the Fourth Gospel,[33] and Stoic theories about "passions" may be involved in the Johannine treatment of the emotional displays of Jesus.[34] Numerous other scholars have found intriguing parallels and have argued for some form of dependence of John on Philo.[35]

While some acquaintance with Philo on the part of the evangelist is likely, it is not necessary to defend that claim for the purposes of this chapter. The evangelist may have had other sources reflecting intellectual developments in Hellenized Judaism from which his distinctive motifs and moves came. At the very least, Philo is an interesting *intertext* to contemplate in thinking about the Fourth Gospel.

What the evangelist does with the motif of the Divine Name and motifs associated with it is directly relevant to our theme. At the end of his prologue (John 1:18) stands an affirmation, with which Philo would certainly agree, that "no one has ever seen God" (θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πώποτε). Immediately following is something that Philo would find parallel to his own epistemology yet quite challenging, that "the only Son, who is at the Father's bosom has made him known" (μονογενὴς θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς, ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο). Two things are of interest in this verse, the denial of the possibility of a direct vision of God and the affirmation that knowing God is possible but through some form of instruction, implied by the verb "ἐξηγήσατο." A translation such as "made known through a process of textual explication," would reflect the word's etymology, and, interestingly enough, Philo's position on the role of the Torah.[36]

The dialectic between seeing and hearing runs through the Gospel as a whole. Seeing the Son with the eyes of faith is the way to see the Father, as Jesus says, with some exasperation, to Philip (14:9). The eyes that the Gospel trains to be faithful are focused on the cross, the sight of which is

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[31] Borgen 1965 and Borgen 1983.
[32] Buch-Hansen 2010b.
[33] Rabens 2012.
[34] See Attridge 2010; Buch-Hansen 2010a.
[35] See Meeks 1976; Downing 1990; Fuglseth 2005; and Bekken 2014, which explores Philonic texts expressing a judgment on vigilantism.
[36] For the play on "seeing" and "hearing" in Philo, see Fraade 2008. On the theme in the Fourth Gospel, see Koester 1989 and Miller 2006.

supposed to be attractive (John 12:25) and healing (3:14). But making eyes see properly requires hearing the speech of the one who is the Logos. What he speaks are words of many and diverse kinds. Some are "parables" (the shepherd of ch.10 and the vine of ch. 15); some are accusatory speeches (John chs. 5, 7-8); some are Torah-like commandments (13:31); some are gnomic bits of wisdom (15:13). Some words fall on deaf ears; some are heard with delight. Some hearers are blinded by the dazzling light of the words (12:39-41); some have their eyes opened by a healing word (ch. 9). Much depends on the character of the hearer, who is challenged to make a decision about those words and what they reveal. Some respond in love (12:3-8); some love other things (9:41; 12:43). The words of the Gospel story, like the incarnate Logos it describes, do the work of "exegesis" and thereby make God, in some fashion or other, "visible" in the tale of the Son who is his Logos.[37] Like Philo's Logos in *Quis Heres*, the Gospel's words also divide, but that is another story. All of this dialectical play on themes of seeing and hearing has analogies to Philo's psychagogic program.

The Fourth Gospel famously plays on the divine name revealed to Moses by God himself according to Exod 3:14.[38] Philo also prizes the text from Exodus well and it serves, along with elements of his philosophical heritage, as the foundation for his way of referring to the transcendent God, i.e. the One who is. The Johannine play on Exod 3:14 lurks in the background of some of the "I am" statements by Jesus.[39] Most such statements affirm that he is to be understood as one thing or another, the Light of the World (8:12), the Resurrection and the Life (11:25), the Way and the Truth (14:6), the Good Shepherd (10:11), the Bread of Life (6:35), etc. The kind of naming that goes into those statements merits further reflection, but the important sayings for the purposes of this chapter are a subset of the "I am" statements. Many "I am" statements appear with symbolic predicates; some, without a predicate, involve a perfectly colloquial, "it's me; C'est moi." These include Jesus' identification of himself as the Messiah to the Samaritan woman at 4:26 and the comforting word spoken to the storm-tossed disciples on the Sea of Galilee (6:20). Three others do more work. Two appear in the contentious dialogue with the Jerusalemites. The first, at 8:24, might be construed without reference to Exod 3:14, as another "It's me" statement, but the dramatic pronouncement toward the end of the dialogue (8:56) is unambiguous, "Before Abraham was, I am." Jesus here uses of himself the

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[37] For an attempt to explore the gospel's complex aesthetics, see Attridge 2006.
[38] Among the many treatments of the theme, see recently Roukema 2009.
[39] On these texts in general, see Ball 1996.

language by which Yahweh refers to himself on Mount Horeb and does so in a way that puts him on the same eternal plane as the Father.

The dramatic claim of this verse, reminiscent of the prologue's affirmations about the relationship of Father and Word "from the beginning," is tied to a claim that Abraham rejoiced because he somehow "saw" Jesus' day (John 8:56). Linwood Urban and Patrick Henry long ago[40] found in this text a very close parallel with Philo's exegesis of Genesis 18:1, "The Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre," in *Abr*. 70-1 and *Mut.* 7-17. As already noted, Philo could not take the text as evidence that Abraham actually saw the unknowable and unnameable Existent One. No, what Abraham saw was one who bore his name.

In *Abr*. 70 and 71 Philo recounts the event:

> In this creed Abraham had been reared, and for a long time remained a Chaldean. Then opening the soul's eye as though after profound sleep, and beginning to see the pure beam instead of the deep darkness, he followed the ray and discerned what he had not beheld before, a charioteer and pilot presiding over the world and directing in safety his own work, assuming the charge and superintendence of that work and of all such parts of it as are worthy of the divine care. And so to establish more firmly in his understanding the sight which had been revealed to him, the Holy Logos follows it up by saying to him, "Friend, the great is often known but its outlines as shown in the smaller, and by looking at them the observer finds the scope of his vision infinitely enlarged. Dismiss, then the rangers of the heavens and the science of Chaldea, and depart for a short time from the greatest of cities, this world, to the lesser, and thus you be better able to apprehend the Overseer of the All."

And in *Mut*. 16-17, offering an allegorical interpretation of Abraham's vision in terms of human noetic perception or "vision" of the divine:

> While our mind pursued the airy speculations of the Chaldeans it ascribed to the world powers of action which it regarded as causes. But when it migrated from the Chaldean creed it recognized

[40] Urban and Henry 1979-80. See also Hagner 1971.

> that the world had for its charioteer and pilot a Ruler whose sovereignty was presented to it in a vision. And therefore the words are "The Lord (not "The Existent") was seen of him."

Abraham at Mamre saw "The Lord," the Logos that bears the Name of God.

Philo's reading of Genesis, with the premise of a transcendent God known only through the "vision" of an intermediary being/power/presence, a power connected to God's name, matches the dynamics of John 8. Philo's exegesis, or something very close to it, would provide a precedent for the evangelist's claim that Abraham had a "vision" of the day of the Lord (8:56). Added by the evangelist is a specification that Jesus, or more precisely, the Divine Logos incarnate in Jesus, was the intermediary of Abraham's vision.

The play on Exodus 3, which reaches its climax in John 8:56, identifies Jesus, or the Logos incarnate in him, with the name of God. If the evangelist is working from a Philonic framework, he has not followed it fully, or, rather, he has undermined it by pushing it to its limits. In Philo's interpretation, Abraham encountered the power or aspect of God that itself bears a name that points to, but is not, the proper name of God. Catachresis is at play.[41] According to the evangelist, Abraham encountered the name that God himself spoke to Moses. According to both Philo and the evangelist, the visionary auditor (or insightful hearer) can approach the unnamable "One who is" through an intermediary who bears his name, but the visionary cannot quite get to the Transcendent himself. In both cases, there is a real, but mediated connection to the Existent one. The Fourth Gospel pushes that connection beyond Philo's limit.

The play on Jesus' use of the Divine Name, which reaches a climax in the polemical dialogue of John 8, resumes at the end of the Farewell Discourse, when Jesus offers a final prayer to his heavenly Father (John 17:1-26).[42] That prayer is a complex composition, which does many things in the economy of the Gospel. It signals its connections with major motifs of the second half of the book in its opening line, when Jesus proclaims that "the hour has come" and asks the Father to "glorify the Son," so that the Son might glorify the Father. The prayer's first petition (17:1-5) continues to develop the motif of "glorification." Jesus has "glorified" the Father by his work on earth (17:4). The work, and the "glorification" that flows from it, is intimately connected with making God known. As v 3 stipulates,

[41] For other references to catachresis, noted by Runia 1988, see *Sacr*. 101, *Post.* 168; *Mut.* 11-14, 27-8; *Somn*. 1.229; *Abr*. 120, *De Deo* 4.
[42] For analysis of some of what the prayer accomplishes, see Attridge 2013.

from that knowledge flows "eternal life," which the Gospel has been promising since Jesus encountered Nicodemus (3:36). This first petition, then, sounds familiar Johannine themes.

The first petition continues (John 17:6-8) with a statement that provides a warrant or ground for the claim that Jesus had "glorified" the Father and thus, implicitly at least, made him known. The ground consists (v 6) of a claim that Jesus has "manifested the Father's name" to the people whom the Father gave to Jesus. They in turn responded with belief, focused on Jesus (vv 7-8). This claim seems to be a clear reference to Jesus' use of Exod 3:14 earlier in the Gospel. The "manifestation" of God's name did not involve any revelation about some new name of God; it consisted rather in identifying Jesus with a very well-known name.

The move that the Fourth Evangelist makes has parallels in other early Christian sources. The most famous is the "hymn" embedded in Paul's epistle to the Philippians, 2:6-11, which celebrates the process whereby Christ, though in the form of God, "emptied" himself, taking on human form, indeed the form of a slave, and died on the cross. As a result, exalted to heavenly status, he was given the "name that is above every name." The mysterious name is disclosed in the final stanza, which proclaims that every knee should bend and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Κύριος), the word used to translate the Tetragrammaton in the Greek Bible and one of the two named "Potencies" in Philo.

The overall "kenotic" Christology of the hymn may be known to the Fourth Evangelist, who echoes it in the last supper scene where Jesus takes on the form of a slave.[43] However that may be, the hymn's affirmation that the exalted Jesus somehow bears an awesome divine appellation is related to the claim of John 17. But like so many other parallels of the Fourth Gospel with other early Christian traditions, our evangelist ups the ante, here within a framework recognizable from Philo. The transformation of the "naming" tradition in this Gospel consists in the fact that the evangelist is not content with talking about Jesus as "Lord" or "God," catachretic names that, as Philo insisted, do cannot attain the ultimate reality of God. The evangelist will use those names or titles for Jesus. They appear on the lips of characters at various points in the Johannine pageant, most dramatically when combined in the confession of the doubting Thomas at 20:28. But for the Fourth Gospel, and the Fourth Gospel alone among early Christian testimonia, Jesus embraces as his own the words that God uses to reveal Godself to Moses.

[43] On this point, see Attridge 2014.

This move is hardly surprising in a Gospel that advances the New Testament's most elaborate claims for the significance of Jesus. Insofar as the Gospel has some awareness of Philo's treatment of divine names, the move also makes a claim challenging Philo's foundational principle about knowing and naming the Divine. By choosing as the major revelatory "name" God's own words in Exodus, which Philo recast to designate the ineffable "One who is," the evangelist claims that knowing God in the most intimate of ways is indeed possible. A corollary to that claim is that a direct and immediate relationship with the "One who is" is possible. By knowing the name one knows the life-giving truth. As a result of that knowledge, both Father and Son/Name will dwell or "abide" with the believer, as Jesus affirms in his Farewell Discourse (14:23). From that indwelling flows the "eternal life" of which the prayer speaks.

The final prayer of Jesus thus recapitulates the "naming" motif from the first half of the Gospel and connects it with the promises of the Farewell Discourse of a continuing relationship with God, despite, or even paradoxically because of, the absence of Jesus. The connection of naming with intimate relationship undergirds the next allusion to the divine name in Jesus' prayer, at John 17:12, where he says that he "kept his disciples in (or by) the name" that the Father gave him. There may be a gesture to some perceptible fact, that the audience envisioned by the Gospel shares some group designation, "Christians" perhaps, but exactly what the evangelist had in mind is of little moment. As in the case of Philo, what is important is not τὸ ῥητόν, but ἡ διάνοια, the deeper sense. That sense and its significance have already been made as clear as the Gospel ever makes anything clear. Seeing Jesus – crucified, resurrected, and exalted – with eyes trained by his words, enables one to see him as the Divine Name, indeed the κύριον ὄνομα of God, giving intimate access, knowledge of, and ongoing relationship to God's very being. That relationship is further expressed in the unity that believers share with one another and with Father and Son (17:22-23). *This* name of God takes the one who hears it to a place that Philo did not think possible.

In sum, many philosophers in the first century used etymology as a way of gaining insight into the nature of things. Stoics like Cornutus, night hedge their bets on any given etymology, recognizing that what was involved in the exercise was a reading of the insight of human beings into the way the world works. One had to know cosmological theory in order to see what names of gods might be getting at. Philo it appears took seriously the challenge posed at the literal level of the *Cratylus*, that at least gods would know what they were doing when they named themselves. He also took seriously the

theoretical challenge that the dialogue poses, questioning whether any name is a truly "natural" name of the God of Israel, i.e., a name that would reveal the divine essence. His response was (a) God did name Godself and therefore provided a "natural name" and (b) that name did not in fact reveal the nature of God, only the fact of his existence. The author of the Fourth Gospel works precisely within that Platonic framework in developing his motif of the Divine name and, as he so often does, he "bends" the structure of the analysis in his own way.[44] (a) God did indeed name Godself; (b) that name is embodied in a person by whose actions the essence of God is revealed. An ironically Platonic, not Stoic, framework for thinking about the name of God serves as a foundation for the Gospel's distinctive epistemological claim.

NAMING GOD AMONG SECOND CENTURY "GNOSTICS"

Although this volume focuses on philosophical developments of the period 100 BCE to 100 CE, it is useful to move beyond the latter boundary to win some perspective on the Fourth Gospel. This chapter has argued that the Fourth Gospel shaped its claims about the significance of Jesus in part, at least, on the basis of philosophically framed debates in Hellenized Jewish circles about how God might be known. The framework for those epistemological debates was probably primarily Platonic, particularly in the notion, articulated in the *Cratylus*, that names that deities use, especially of matters divine, should have a "natural" relationship with the thing named. The exploration of the reception of the Gospel in the second century will test whether that Platonic/Philonic framework was apparent to some of the work's early readers.

There is evidence from the second century that reflection on the subject of divine names continues. One work in particular focuses on the issue in a dramatic way. The author of this text certainly knows the Fourth Gospel[45] and also probably knows Philo. The text is the *Gospel of Truth*, an anonymous homily from the Nag Hammadi collection.[46] The homily was written originally in Greek by a member of the Valentinian school,[47] labelled by heresiologists such as Irenaeus as heretical

[44] For the technique of the evangelist to play with the forms that he uses in his gospel, see Attridge 2002.
[45] See J. A. Williams 1988.
[46] For the text and the translation used here, see Attridge and MacRae 1985: I,55-122.
[47] On the Valentinians, see Thomassen 2006 and Dunderberg 2008.

"Gnostics."[48] Some scholars believe that the *Gospel of Truth* was composed by the founder of the school, Valentinus himself. Originally from Alexandria, he was active in Rome in the middle of the second century, roughly contemporary with Justin Martyr.[49] Other scholars see differences between the Gospel and the fragmentary remains of Valentinus and attribute the *Gospel of Truth* to a later member of the school, perhaps dating from the early third century.[50] The homily was translated into Coptic sometime in the third or fourth century, then buried with the other Nag Hammadi texts until their discovery in 1946.[51]

Philo was clearly known and used by Christian theologians such as Clement of Alexandria somewhat later in the second century and Origen in the third.[52] It is also probable that he was used by Valentinus or his intellectual descendant who authored the *Gospel of Truth*. Like many other works from the second century, this Gospel wrestles with the question of epistemology forcefully framed by Philo.[53] The *Gospel of Truth*'s development of the theme of naming reflects and depends on some of the moves made by the Gospel of John. The combination of what may be described as Philonic and Johannine motifs in this text lends support to the argument that Philo's philosophical concerns are an important part of the Johannine mix.

Apart from the theme of naming and knowing God, other features of the *Gospel of Truth* clearly evoke Johannine and Philonic elements. The text begins by celebrating the gospel that is a joy for those who have come to know the Father through "power of the Logos," "who is in the thought and the mind of the Father." The sending of this divine salvific Word overcomes the problem caused by the utter transcendence of the one whom the Gospel calls "the incomprehensible, inconceivable one, who is superior to every thought" (17,8-9; cf. 19,32).

The *Gospel of Truth* thus shares with Philo a notion of divine transcendence and unknowability, overcome to some degree by the Word. But this homilist is clearly a Christian and the Word is connected with Jesus Christ. As soon as *Jesus* appears (18,16) the text echoes the Gospel of John, saying of him that he "enlightened those who were in darkness," recalling the Gospel's prologue. The

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[48] On the general phenomenon of Gnosticism and the problems with the use of the category "Gnostic," see M. A. Williams 1996 and King 2003. For defense of its utility, see Pearson 2007; Brakke 2010; and Van den Broek 2013.
[49] See Layton 1987: 250-2.
[50] A thorough critique of authorship is offered by Markschies 1992: 339-56.
[51] For a detailed account of the discovery and the history of its publication, see now Robinson 2014.
[52] See especially Dawson 1992 and Runia 1993a. On Philo and Origen, see Van den Hoek 2000.
[53] For a general survey of passages from relevant Nag Hammadi texts, see Luttikhuizen 2006, which does not, however, treat the *Gospel of Truth*.

Gospel of Truth continues: he "showed them a way and the way is the truth that he taught them" (18,17-20), echoing the Farewell Discourse.

The homilist adds a further complex allusion to scripture, Christian ritual practice, and probably to the notion of the indwelling of the divine in the believer prominent in the Gospel's Farewell Discourse. Jesus was, says the *Gospel of Truth*, "nailed to a tree and he became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father" (19,25). When this fruit was eaten, unlike the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden of Eden, those who consumed it "become glad in the discovery, and he discovered them in himself and they discovered him in themselves" (19,28-31). This passage links together important elements of the Fourth Gospel, its focus on the Cross as a revelatory moment (cf. 26,25), its Bread of Life discourse that interprets the Christian ritual meal in terms of knowledge, and the motif of mutual indwelling prominent in the Farewell Discourse. The homily's manifold combinations of scripture and tradition, cosmology and psychology, plain meaning and deeper sense merit exploration, but not in this chapter.

Late in the homily the Valentinian teacher, reflecting on the process of revelation and restoration of the ignorant by the Father's subtle embrace, comes to the issue of naming the unnameable (38,7). Reflections about this major concern develop over several pages (to 40,23). The opening salvo echoes the major, but implicit, affirmation of the Fourth Gospel, "Now the name of the Father is the Son" (38,7), or more specifically, "He gave him his name which belonged to him" (38,12). The name itself is not identified; the homily specifies that "the Father's name is not spoken" (38,22), a clever gesture toward the identity of the name as the Tetragrammaton (Exod 3:13-15). Recall that in the Fourth Gospel, it is also through a gesture evoking Exodus that Jesus names himself.

The dialectic between sight and sound that appeared in slightly different ways in both Philo and the Fourth Gospel reappears in the *Gospel of Truth*. Developing the notion that the divine name is ineffable, our homilist says, "the name … is invisible because it alone is the mystery of the invisible which comes to ears that are completely filled with it by him" (38,16-21). The invisible name, the name that is not spoken, "becomes manifest" through a Son. The Coptic verb here (ϥⲟⲩⲁⲛϩ … ⲁⲃⲁⲗ) is probably the equivalent of the Greek verb, φανερόω, used by Jesus about his manifestation of the divine name in his final prayer (John 17:6, but also ἐγνώρισα in 17:26). Our homilist obviously delights in paradox, in a way that is reminiscent of, but to a degree that certainly exceeds, the Fourth Evangelist. To paraphrase slightly: the unspoken invisible name names the unnameable, invisible one.

Ineffable invisibility is overcome in the process of naming, because the true and effective name is visible in the Son and it fills with knowledge the ears of those who listen to him.

Our theological homilist explores the naming process that reveals something about the relationship of Father and Son (38,24-39,28). This whole section owes much more to the Gospel and its development of the Father-Son relationship than to anything in Philo. The reflection sets up, in very personal terms, the intimacy of relationship between begetter and begotten, where naming is a primordial, pre-creational act, “before he [the Father] brought forth the aeons” (38,35). This Christian author explores territory that would be strange to Philo, despite the fact that the Alexandrian could call the Logos God’s son. Here emerges a theological world produced by Christians who contemplated the relationship between the eternal Father and the Son who was the instrument for shaping (1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:3) or head of (Col 1:18) his created order. The exploration of the Father-Son relationship is rooted in the Gospel of John and the other early Christian texts on which the *Gospel of Truth* relies. Yet this meditation is related to a principle that lies at the heart of Philo’s reflections on naming.

Our homilist gives a hint that he is thinking about the theory of signification in the middle of his reflection on the Father-Son relationship, when he says, “The name is not from (mere) words, nor does his name consist of (ordinary) appellations.” He adds, “it is invisible.” Hearers of the homily, of course, already know that, but it is a reminder that the kind of naming about which our homilist is talking is not part of the ordinary connection of signifier and signified. The point is further developed in the next stage of the reflection, which the homilist formally introduces, saying “it is fitting for us to reflect on this matter: What is the name?” He argues “It is the name in truth; it is not therefore the name from the Father,” which apparently means that it is not arbitrarily applied by the Father. “It is,” he continues, “the proper name” (ⲛⲧⲁϥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲉⲧϣⲟⲟⲡ ⲛ̄ϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲣⲉⲛ, 40,8-9), where ϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲣⲉⲛ is a literal translation of κύϱιον ὄνομα. For emphasis he repeats the point in slightly different terms, “he did not receive the name on loan, as (do) others, according to the form in which each one is to be produced. But this is the proper name (ⲡϫⲁⲉⲓⲥ ⲛ̄ⲣⲉⲛ). There is no one else who gave it to him” (40,9-14).

Our homilist insists on the character of the Name, and at the same time on the importance of the Father-Son relationship, arguing that at least in this one case there is indeed a natural relationship between signifier and signified. The situation envisioned by Plato in the *Cratylus* obtains in the relationship of the Father and the Son who is his mysterious name. The limitation that had inspired Philo to insist on the impossibility of naming the One who is, that there is no way to comprehend or

express its essence, has been, as it was in the Fourth Gospel, overcome. That One has expressed his own essence in the Name that is the Son.

That our homilist is deliberately developing Platonic/Philonic categories here is reinforced by one other creative interpretation of a New Testament passage offered earlier in the homily. This interpretation also evokes the play on seeing and hearing prominent in Philo. At *Gos. Tr*. 20,15-27, while discussing, in good Johannine fashion, the significance of the cross of Christ as a revelatory event, the homilist introduced a motif probably derived from the Epistle to the Hebrews. That formidable homily (Heb 9:15-16) using a pun (or technically an *antanaclasis*) also found in Paul (Gal 3:17-18), identified the "covenant" (διαθήκη) promised by Jeremiah with a "testament" or "will" (also διαθήκη) by which one leaves an inheritance. The Valentinian author of the *Gospel of Truth* has recourse to the same trope, but with a slightly different twist. He says, "Just as there lies hidden in a will, before it is opened, the fortune of the deceased master of the house, so with the totality…" The word for "fortune" here is the Greek loanword οὐσία, which, of course, can also mean "substance" or "being" of the Father. The homilist goes on to say that on the cross, Jesus "appeared for this reason; he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father."

The point is very much in line with the Fourth Gospel's interpretation of the death of Jesus as revelatory. It is also connected with the semantics of Jesus as name of the Father. As the *κύριον ὄνομα*, the true and proper name of the ineffable Father, the Son *can* disclose the Father's essence and does so at a truly crucial moment.

The *Gospel of Truth* is not the only evidence for the presence of a theory of natural names in second and third century Christian sources. The function of heavenly names is a theme in another of the texts from Nag Hammadi, the *Apocryphon of John*,[54] a primary witness to what has come to be labelled as "Sethian" Gnosticism.[55] In that text, the primordial principle is "the unnameable One since there is no one prior to him to give a name to him."[56] Lesser divine beings, archons under the sway of the Demiurgic Ialdabaoth, also have names. These names function as divine "proper" names should. They

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[54] For the critical text of the four witnesses to the text, see Waldstein and Wisse 1995; for analysis, see King 2006.
[55] On the "Sethian" tradition and its relationship to Platonism, see Turner 2001 and Burns 2014. On the corpus of texts, most from the Nag Hammadi collection, that have come to be labeled "Sethian," see Turner 2007, and Rasimus 2009. The "Gospel of Judas" is another text with "Sethian" elements. On that work, see Schenke 2008.
[56] πιατϫⲱ ⲙ̄πεϥραν ϫε ⲛ̄ϥϣοοπ αν ⲛϭι πετϣοπ ϩατεϥεϩη ε† ραν εροϥ. BG 24,4-5, paralleled in NHC II,1; 3,15-17; IV, 1; 4,27-28. The translation is that of Waldstein and Wisse 1995: 22.

"truthfully reveal their [scil. the archons'] nature."[57] While these passages add nothing to the point being scored in the *Gospel of Truth*, they confirm the presence in "Gnostic" circles of the second and third century of the semantic and epistemological theories prominent in Philo and echoed in the Fourth Gospel and the *Gospel of Truth*.[58]

CONCLUSION

Jewish and Christian theologians of the first centuries of the common era confronted a problem in some ways created by their embrace of philosophy. God, identified as the transcendent "One who is," cannot be fully known, just glimpsed through extensions of his beneficently creative and judgmental, ruling presence in this world. There is in the estimation of Philo, inspired by Platonic reflections, no "natural" name for that One, no name that comprehends the essence of the One who is. At least two early Christians took up the challenge presented by that Philonic position. The Fourth Evangelist, with distinct gestures toward Philo, argues that God's Son, who identifies himself with God's self-revelation as the Logos seen by Abraham, has by his very presence made God's name known and thereby granted to recipients of his revelation life with and within him. The Valentinian homilist closes the circle begun by Philo. Repeating the claim made by the Fourth Gospel about the nameability of the unnameable One, he does so by a direct appeal to something like the semantic theory used by Philo. There is, claimed this homilist, a "natural" name of the incomprehensible One and that natural name discloses the One's true οὐσία.

The philosophical resources used by early Christians to wrestle with this question of religious epistemology come primarily from the Platonic tradition. The earliest stage of the process, Philo, knows and uses Stoic ideas and the moves that he makes in reflecting on knowing and naming God could be seen as compatible with a Stoic semantic theory, which was, after all quite compatible with the final position of the *Cratylus*. Nonetheless it is the Platonic framework, positing a sharp distinction between God and creation that frames the problem of divine knowability and sets the stage for the distinctive Christian solution to that problem, that God has made his name, and therefore his essence,

[57] ⲛⲁⲓ ⲇⲉ ⲕⲁⲧⲁ ⲧⲙⲏⲉ ⲉⲧⲟⲩⲱⲛϩ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ ⲛⲧⲉⲩⲫⲩⲥⲓⲥ. BG 41,5-6; cf. NHC II,1; 17,10-12. Translation Waldstein and Wisse1995: 66.

[58] Yet other Nag Hammadi texts worry about the issue of naming the divine. See, e.g., *Tri. Trac*. NHC I,5; 55,2–55,28; *Gos. Phil*. NHC II,3: 53,23–54,13.

known in Jesus. Whatever other attractions Platonism had for thinkers of the second and third century, its suitability for Christian theological epistemology must have been part of the reason for its domination of the late antique scene.