December 1986

Chapter VIII. Arian negative theology: Aetius and Eunomius

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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” (χρονίται): 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” (ἔπομαι), 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 χρονῶτα, 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 “homoiou-sion” 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 τὰξις 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
ontological hierarchy: but the word “incomparable” (ἀσύγκριτος) is interesting. Things which are different cannot be compared, Aetius seems to be saying. I take this to be an allusion to the refusal to argue by analogy, or comparison, which emerges quite clearly in Eunomius. It will be seen that Gregory of Nyssa rejects this (p.183), but analogy and identity are clearly connected (and dismissed) by Eunomius (see p.151). I have elsewhere suggested that there was a dissident group in the Neoplatonist schools around the time of Proclus, who rejected analogy as a tool of metaphysics. This view culminated in the rejection by Damascius of both analogy and negation. But further, the incomparability of things is part of Eunomius’ (and probably Aetius’) philosophy of language: a word designates an object; either objects are different from one another, in which case the words which label them will be different from one another, or they are not. There is no middle way (see p.186), such as comparing things would seem to be. Things are what they are, in their own way, and at their own level. As Gregory complains about Eunomius, this seems to leave no room for “various relations and juxtapositions” (see p.187). On Eunomius’ view, words appear to be atoms, which have a necessary relationship with their objects, but no interrelationship: and this is surely what Aetius is getting at when he finds the Father and the Son to be incomparable.

The next thesis which is relevant to our subject is in fact a joke on Aetius’ part: thesis 12 says that if ingeneracy does not in fact represent the substance of the deity, but is the result of human abstract thinking (ἐπίνοια; see p.151), then “God is grateful to those who thought the name up, since through the notion of ingeneracy, he has transcendence in name, but not in essence”. There is scarcely a serious point here, but a touch of humour in the face of the relentlessly vituperative orthodox: the serious point is developed in what follows, where the origin of names is discussed, and a generally Philonic line taken (see p.149).

Thesis 16 is of crucial importance. It reads:

If ingeneracy is revelatory of essence, it is reasonable for it to be contrasted with the offspring’s essence. If ‘ingeneracy’ has no meaning… (trans. Wickham)

The Greek begins: εἰ τὸ ἀγέννητον οὐσίας ἐστι δηλωτικόν… This is an important expression for understanding Aetius’ background. Wickham refers us to Cratylus 422D, but closer to home we find a very similar expression in the Neoplatonic commentator, Dexippus. Discussing Aristotle, Dexippus says that one can define “the truest essence of a thing” by negation (… ἴνα διὰ τῆς ἄποφάσεως αὐτῶν τὴν κυριοτάτην οὐσίαν δηλώσῃ: CAG IV2, p.44; see our p.92). The juxtaposition of οὐσία and δηλόω should be noted, and compared with Aetius’ οὐσίας … δηλωτικόν.

The problem is drawn from Aristotle’s Categories, of which the first part concerns the problem of how to designate essence (οὐσία), and Dexippus’
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κυριωτάτην is drawn from the language of Aristotle about οὐσία (Cat. 3a1; 1b11). However the word δηλόω, or δηλωτικὸς, 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 (stereisis). 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-
peror Julian, which was very close (Bidez, Vie de Julien, pp.90–93), would have required the maintenance of an intellectual front on the Neoplatonist side. He probably fought battles on two fronts, and the discussion of privation is evidence of his dialogue with the Neoplatonists. For it has been seen that Proclus and Damascius provide evidence (see also Eunomius below, where this point is developed) that there was a party of Neoplatonists who attacked the via negativa, on the ground that its negations were nothing more than privations. Both Aetius and Eunomius respond to this debate and take up a position on it: Basil and Gregory are unaware of the issue, and seem to wonder why they are having to deal with it.

Thus, addressing the other set of respondents, Aetius advances arguments in theses 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25, against the view that his negative definition of God is in fact a privation. The issue in fact takes up a large part of Aetius’ discussion. The notion of privation has been discussed in greater detail in relation to Eunomius, where texts from Syrianus and Alexander Aphrodisias are adduced to show that privation was seen to be a form of negation which carried a covert affirmation about the state (ἐξίς) of the entity. All this comes from an interpretation of Aristotle, from whom the term ἐξίς is derived. This is the term used by Aetius (thesis 20), and again it is probable that Aetius is influenced by a mediated, or Neoplatonized form of Aristotelianism. The problem, in brief, is this. The privation presupposes a ἐξίς (or “state”), which is deprived of something. This entity has logical priority over the state of deprivation. If ingeneracy is a privation, then we are obliged to suppose the existence of a prior state, subsequently deprived of generacy. This would necessitate an antecedent to God, which is impossible. Therefore ingeneracy is not a privation.

Thus thesis 24:

If ingeneracy is privation, and privation loss of state (ἐξίς), and if the lost is entirely destroyed or changed into something else, how can a state which is in process of changing or being destroyed be called the Deity's essence by the title of “The Ingen erate”. (trans. Wickham with the substitution of “state” for “condition”)

Clearly the logic of privation is inappropriate to this negation, since in broad terms, privation suggests defect, and the sequential notion that goes with the idea of defect; this is that there must have been something prior, which was whole, to suffer the loss of some characteristic. Blindness is a privation, and it is a defect which is subsequent to the original state of seeing. Thesis 24 makes it clear that it is this element of loss which makes privation inappropriate to the deity.

Thesis 20 introduces options for the meaning of privation:

If privations are abstractions of states, ingeneracy in respect of God is either a priva-
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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 τι στερήσεις ἐξεύγεισεν ἡθομόν ἡθομόν ἡθομόν. It may be noted that this is a slightly unusual use of the word ἡθομόν, 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 (Ἀπόσομα) of a thing in the *Metaphysics* 1004a, 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 προσῶν): 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".
Neither of these things would seem to entail superiority, especially since *epinoia* is really an after-the-event development of artificial concepts. Nevertheless we note the notion that superiors give names, like Philo’s Adam who has the task of naming all things except himself. With Eunomius we see the same principle: names come “from above” (see p.149).

The same kind of conundrum comes up on thesis 26, where it is implied that people exercise power over being by the names they use. Even false names, one wishes to ask? The text reads as follows:

If “The Ingenerate” is a mere name with God, but its mere utterance elevates the substance of God over against all the generated beings, then the utterance of men is qualitatively superior to the substance of the Almighty, since it has embellished God Almighty with incomparable transcendence.

It is difficult to grasp a philosophy of naming which allows for this power of names over being. But Aetius seems to be saying this (in fact the key lies with the word καλλωπίσσα, “embellished”): either God’s essence causes the name, or the name causes his essence. It would be an intolerable position if it were the language of men which enhanced the deity: they would then be the superior entities, since they bestowed God’s essence upon him. Possibly it is the orthodox confidence in theological discourse which Aetius is concerned with: he seems to imply that some people are so concerned with religious language that it is as if they want to *make* the deity, to enhance, or to “embellish” him. Whatever Aetius is saying, it may be noted that he seems to imply that those who give names have some superiority over those to whom names are given. This is clearer in thesis 13.

If external observation ascribes ingeneracy to the Deity, the observers are superior to the observed, having furnished him with a title (δόμος) superior to his nature.

Once again, the assumption that ontological power lies with the act of naming, is present. Aetius’ point here is that the name “ingeneracy” must come not from the external observers, *even if they accurately observe the ingeneracy to be present*, but from ingeneracy itself. In other words this name comes from reality, not from human mental activity: it is κατὰ φύσιν. These points will be further developed in relation to Eunomius, Gregory and Basil, since the controversy over names comes to the fore with these authors.

The philosophy of Aetius provides an essential introduction to that of Eunomius. It is the first example of the Aristotelianism that we find in Eunomius. It has been suggested that this is a mediated Aristotelianism, according to which Aristotle is read through the eyes of the Neoplatonic commentators. Aetius and Eunomius are much more easily understood if we read them in the light of what might be called the “lost generation” of Neoplatonists,
Syrianus, Dexippus and Alexander of Aphrodisias. They lie behind Proclus, and probably behind Aetius and Eunomius as well. The latter are in no way odd, if seen in this company.

But most importantly for the history of the *via negativa*, thesis 16 of Aetius offers a direct development of Aristotle’s *Categories* in terms of the *via negativa*. Dexippus had spoken of revealing the essence of a thing by negation, as if to add to what Aristotle had said about how to signify essence, and Aetius now offers a negative description to perform this role in theology. God is ingeneracy. He is not only not generated, he is ingeneracy itself. He is not to be understood as an absence of generation, but as a positive ingeneracy. Just how an apophatic concept can be a kataphatic concept is shown by Proclus, but Aetius develops at length the view that this negation is not a privation, that it is not the sign of a defect. And we find all this reiterated in Eunomius, to the mystification of Gregory and Basil. They are mystified because the Anomeans are not actually addressing them when they raise this issue: they may be addressing Gnostics, but more probably they are addressing the Neoplatonists, who now use Aristotelian logic for their transcendentalist ends, and for whom privation was therefore a thing to be considered.

We proceed now to Eunomius, through Eunomius’ own writing, and through the responses of Basil and Gregory, and an effort will be made to reconstruct his thought through these sources. Eunomius’ reputation in antiquity is attested by the strength of the replies to his work. Not only Basil, but also Gregory of Nyssa, and Theodore of Mopsuestia devoted a great deal of attention to it. It is a pity that we have so little of Eunomius himself, since what remains appears ingenious and interesting, and he emerges, in our view, as an important exponent of the *via negativa*. He lived till 394, and was a disciple of Aetius.

Basil complains that Eunomius expresses his view in a form which all Christians could recognize, and to which they could all subscribe:

Eunomius: We believe in one God the Father almighty, from whom all things come, and in one only-begotten son of God, God the Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things come. And in the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. (Against Eunomius PG 29, 512A)

This appears unexceptionable, but is actually misleading to the unwary in Basil’s view (PG 29, 513B), since when Eunomius comes to expound this, he unveils other ideas which are not scriptural, but come from the “syllogisms of Aristotle and Chrysippus” (PG 29, 516B). Basil’s complaint here is that the ordinary words of the creed come to have other meanings than those provided by their face-value; that a philosophical interpretation is held by Eunomius to provide the real meaning of these words; that a kind of philo-
sophical reduction has been carried out on the traditional and inherited words of scripture. For this reason Basil prefers the traditional word “Father” for God, rather than the philosophical substitute “the ingenerate”; Basil suggests the absurdity of rephrasing Matthew 28.19 as follows; “Go forth and baptize in the name of the Ingenerate”. The difficulty felt by Basil is somewhat akin to that felt by Origen in relation to Celsus, namely that whilst the philosophical description of reality and transcendent reality may have had a plausible sound, the language of the Scriptures was the only language which could be safely used. Whilst Eunomius claimed to be expounding the philosophy underpinning the theology, Basil wants to adhere to the theological language as self-significant, that is as requiring no hermeneutic framed in the logic of some outsider such as Aristotle. (Of course he is unable to do so, in that he himself is attracted by the philosophical reduction offering at the time).

The centrepiece of Eunomius’ case is that God’s essence (ousia) is his ingeneracy (agenesia). Thus he identifies the ousia of God, and does so by a negative noun. The negation expressed by the alpha privative is ambiguous, and we shall return to this point later, as Gregory of Nyssa makes something of it. Eunomius’ text, which was subjected to intense scrutiny by Basil and Gregory, goes as follows:

We profess that God is one, then, in accordance with natural thinking (φυσικήν έννοιαν) and according to the teaching of the Fathers. Nor does he come into being from himself or from another: these alternatives are equally impossible, since the truth would demand that the making principle should precede that which comes into being, and that that which is made should be secondary to that which makes. Nor can it be prior or posterior to God Himself, nor can there be anything else prior to God. For that which is prior to the secondary would have the standing of divinity. For it could truly be said that that which comes into being by the agency of something else, would be ranked among the class of generated things, and would justly be classified among that which has come to be at the hands of God. 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 of this. Rather, he is ingenerate essence (οὐσία ἐγέννητος). It will probably appear redundant to some to develop the ideas preferred by many as if they are in doubt. Because of those who consider wisdom to be a struggle against the plain truth, or who are trained in calumny and sophistry, we must give a more accurate consideration. When we say “ingenerate”, we consider it necessary to magnify God not only by name, in accordance with human concepts [ἐπίνοιαν: perhaps human “invention”], but also to repay in truth the most necessary debt to God, namely the confession that he is what he is. For that which is said in accordance with [human] concepts, by names alone, and which has its existence in pronunciation, is capable of being dissipated with the sound of voices. Whether these are silent, or articulated, or are generated, God, before the genesis of being, was, and is ingenerate. But not by privation, where indeed privations are privations of things in respect of their nature, and are secondary to the states (ἐξετα). For generation was not God’s by
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 1011b19, 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 predicking 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 δευτέρου, 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 secondaryness, 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 (14a 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 (1b 13). 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-
ly term which does not apply to the Son and the Holy Spirit. It applies to the Father only, and therefore serves Eunomius in his Arian desire to assert the supreme transcendence of the Father over the other two members of the Trinity. We shall return to this issue later, since more probing into Eunomius’ philosophy must be done in order to establish the basis of this interesting point: it is clear enough that from the orthodox trinitarian point of view, what is said of one of the three must be said of all, but what is the real substance of Eunomius’ argument? Proclus’ Commentary on Euclid’s Elements may again help us here.

We turn now to Gregory of Nyssa’s critique of the privation argument. It is interesting to note that Gregory discusses the question of the priority of the Father over the Son in isolation from the privation issue. His first attack on Eunomius limits itself to a different approach to the issue (Contra Eun. I, 354 ff. Jaeger). The general thrust of Gregory’s argument at this point is that only in relation to the created world can we speak of priority and posteriority, and that any attempt to do so in relation to the divine nature would be absurd. The Trinity is out of time, and thus Gregory, somewhat similarly to Augustine, removes the Trinity from the level of time and becoming, in short, of normal material concepts. This is a somewhat more effective argument than that of Basil, in that it really does confront Eunomius with a different philosophical structure, and therefore has an understanding of the real basis of Eunomius’ own view.

However, Gregory does turn to privation in his answer to Eunomius’ second book, Eunomius having written a reply to Basil. Though full of the required abuse, Gregory’s reply here demonstrates a more serious desire for understanding than is present in Basil. It is interesting that he returned to it after so many words spent on Eunomius, and also interesting that he did not pick it up as an important issue in the early stages. Perhaps he came to see it as important, as a later development.

Gregory’s quotation of Eunomius’ response to Basil is interesting, since Eunomius reportedly refers to the “culpable caution” (ἐναπάντησιν... ἐπιλήπτων: Contra Eunomium II.565 Jaeger) of his Cappadocian opponents. We do not have the text of Eunomius’ reply, but from Gregory’s quotations it seems that the “culpable caution” of the Cappadocians refers to their unwillingness to dismiss completely the use of the idea of generacy in relation to God. Eunomius is quoted as follows:

Some have said that the Deity is ingenerate through the privation of generacy, but we say, in refutation of these, that neither this word nor this idea is in any way whatever applicable to God. (Contra Eun. II, 565 Jaeger)

This is a curious fragment, because one cannot see against whom it is directed. It cannot be directed against Basil, since Basil did not insist on this point.
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 (Ὑπερ της ἀπολογίας ἄπολογία) 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 two-fold: 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” (ἀφαίρετικό), calling them what they
like. We yield the teaching or learning of such matters to those who are desirous of it, and we consider the intellect only, as to whether it lies within a proper and appropriate concept of divinity, or not. (Contra Eun. II, 480 Jaeger)

In other words Gregory recognizes the class of words focussed on by exponents of the *via negativa*, but refuses to become involved in the logical questions. He avoids these by bypassing language, and concerning himself with the quality of the thought involved. Now the logic of these negative terms was of course crucial to the Greek exponents of the *via negativa*, and what Gregory is doing is refusing to get involved with Neoplatonist negative theology. A further interesting point is this: Gregory introduces the term *aphairesis* (abstraction), a term which we have not seen used in the context of negative theology since Plotinus' time, apart from the passing use in Aetius. Where does it come from? Certainly not from the Neoplatonists, or the late commentators on Aristotle. We shall return to this question with Pseudo-Dionysius.

Having refused the terms of the discussion, so to speak, Gregory proceeds to develop an analysis of his own, a new appraisal of what were really very well discussed logical issues, at least among the Neoplatonists. He now says that we *must* use "separative" names of God, where these remove from him some inappropriate quality: of course, Gregory says, we must call God "imperishable", or "unending". Here he uses an unusual term, which we have translated as "separative": χωριστικοις. Gregory is trying here to remove himself from the terminology of the other party, so he fails to use the natural word for the concept he is after, namely στερητικοις. It is a situation where the use of a technical word would draw him into a technical debate on someone else's ground, and his aim is to establish a new format for the discussion. In fact it is clear that he has not understood Eunomius' point at all, probably because of lack of familiarity with contemporary Greek philosophy. Eunomius meant that privation carries a covert statement with it, so that to say that God is "imperishable", where this is regarded as a privation, is to imply that his nature is of such a kind as to be logically capable of perishability. This is the point Gregory fails to understand, and this is why he is non-plussed by Eunomius' statement. Gregory does not know of the kataphatic implications of a privative negation. He now advocates what are really privations.

A caveat should be lodged here: the word χωριστός is used by Aristotle in a context which is somewhat similar to this. For example, in Metaphysics 1026a9, Aristotle says that it is not clear whether mathematical objects are immutable and separable (χωριστῶν) from matter. There are other such cases, and it is just possible that Gregory is using the technical Aristotelian vocabulary at this point. But there is no real sign of a close adherence to the language of Aristotle in these passages, and in any case the point is that Gregory
seems unprepared to deal with a debate going on in the philosophy of his own time. He simply does not deal with the real logical problem of steresis.

However Gregory’s real point here is that God is “beyond every name”. This is a verse of Scripture (Philippians 2.9: Contra Eun. II, 587 J.), and Gregory is using it to assert the transcendence of the deity. The negative names used reveal what he is not, but not what he is. We may turn to positive names (such as “Judge”, and “Just”), but in the end we are unable to give expression to such things. He is beyond names:

That He transcends every movement of thought, and that he is outside the process of being discovered by name, constitutes a proof to men of his ineffable majesty. (Contra Eun. II, 587 J.)

By a different route therefore, Gregory arrives at the crucial postulate of negative theology, namely that God transcends thought and language. He is therefore shrouded in mystery, and this principle is the one for which the Cappadocians are known. It is important to realise, however, that Gregory makes this statement while dismissing all contemporary discussion of the logic of the via negativa, at least as it was practised in Neoplatonist circles.

Eunomius’ next point, as quoted by Gregory, is the typical riposte of the negative theologian:

For what could one say to a man who declares that we “attach more weight to the form of the names than to the value of the things being names, and that we give pride of place to names over realities, placing unequal things on a par with each other”. (Contra Eun. II, 588 J.)

The Arian complaint that the members of the Trinity are not in fact equal with each other is reflected in the last words, but the first part of the above quotation is concerned with the real grievance of the apophatic theologian against orthodoxy. His view is that there is an excessive interest in language among his opponents, and a desire to use words far beyond their capacity to provide accurate information. There is a concentration on a spurious precision in theological language, and this false sense of correctness can only distract attention away from the things which are subjected to these maladroit attempts at nomenclature. Eunomius singles out an aspect of orthodoxy which is indeed an oddity, the concern for exactitude of language in relation to the mysterious and inexpressible, and this concern for language is a hallmark of the this-worldliness of the orthodox strand in Christianity.

However, Gregory again takes up the subject of privation in what follows, and returns to the word steresis. It arises from an odd point, attributed by him to Eunomius (Contra Eun. II, 590 J.), according to which Eunomius is claimed to have said that there is a difference between the immortality (athana-
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” (*ἀνεπιστήμων*) (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 (*ἀντιδιαστέλλω*) to the incorruptible, and that the abstracting indicator (*ἀφαιρετική σημασία* = the a 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
are inklings in Eunomius, but appear well-developed in Proclus, and this is the case with the use of negatives. Daniélou does however provide a useful background: he notes (p.428) that Eunomius was a disciple of Aetius, who was close to the emperor Julian, a noted Neoplatonist. Gregory also testifies to the relations between Aetius and the imperial court at Antioch. (Against Eunomius I, 45–51 J.: see also J. Bidez, Vie de Julien, pp.90–93). With these data, Daniélou fills out very convincingly the picture of the Neoplatonist bona fides of Eunomius. He is not however on the right track with Plotinus:

“Thus the system of Eunomius is related to Neoplatonist schema. But he does not merely reproduce Plotinus. This is an original doctrine”. (Daniélou op. cit. 428)

Daniélou further proceeds to talk of the “mystical Aristotelianism”, and where it came from. He finds it in Eunomius, and concludes that it preexisted Proclus, and again turns to the circle of Iamblichus for the answer. As shown above, we have also been tempted to consider Eunomius’ system somewhat original in his use of negation, but the real background lies with Aetius, and with the precedents in Syrianus and Dexippus. These provide the real explanation of Eunomius, at least on the issue under discussion. But the overall fact remains: probably the best way to understand Eunomius would be to write a philological commentary on him, treating all his vocabulary as if it came from Proclus, Syrianus and Dexippus.

We return now to the exposition of Eunomius’ view. It has been noted throughout that Eunomius was concerned with the issue of names and their applicability. The passage translated earlier shows that he believes that naming God correctly does him some sort of honour, because it is confessing what he actually and essentially is. We have here a very strong philosophy of names, which is again reflected in the following passage.

We say therefore that the Son is a begotten creature (γέννημα), according to the teaching of the Scriptures, not conceiving of his essence as something other than this, as if something else beyond it were referred to, but that it itself is the existence (ὑπόστασις) to which the name refers, the noun bringing out the truth of the essence. (PG 30, 848 B)

Naming was an Arian issue: elsewhere an attempt has been made by me to interpret the interest in names of the Gospel of Truth as a response to the Arian debate (“The Name of the Father is the Son...”), and Eunomius was cited in this regard. When the Gospel of Truth makes the Son simply the name of the Father, it seems to be relying on the identification of name and essence, which Eunomius comes close to. We may even go so far as to wonder whether the Gospel of Truth became, in a later redaction an Arian gospel. Not that Eunomius could agree with it, but the principle of the Gospel
Eunomius and names

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 θεσιν 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 (ἐπίνυω), 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 (ὄνοματοποιία) 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 (Daniérou, Eunome... 427) and this received an elaborate exegesis from Philo (De confusione linguærum). Further, Gregory asserts that Eunomius borrowed from Philo (Contra Eun. III, 8 J.). But in any case Daniérou (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 (δόμημασί) 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 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 (ἐπινοεῖν, 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 14:

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 καὶ ποὺ πάντως ἔδει παρὰ τοῦ ἀκριβῶς τοῖς ὀνόμασι χρωμένοι εἰς τὴν ἐπινοιαν ἡμᾶς προσαχθῆναι) (CAG IV, p.17, l. 11)

Dexippus uses it again (CAG IV, 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 ψυλῆ is used, “conception pure”: this expression is also found in Ammonius’ commentary on the Categories (CAG IV, 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 IV, 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 ὑπόστασις and ἐπινοια, 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 IV, 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 IV, p.161, l. 26), where Syrianus claims that man grasps things “by concept, on the basis of abstraction from sensible objects” (κατ’ ἐπίνοιαν ἀνθρώπος ἡ ἀφαίρεσις τῶν αἰσθητῶν ... τὴν ὑπόστασιν εἶλησι). 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
meaning “abstraction”, which we have found in Syrianus, Dexippus and Ammonius.

Here we have the kernel of the word, a word which is capable of meaning both “fiction” and “science”. The weakness of ἐπίνους lies in its status as a posterior reaction to a given reality: this is what Eunomius emphasizes, since his name for God is prior. Thus he stresses the fiction-manufacturing capacity of ἐπίνους. Its strength comes from the positive achievements of this mental afterprocess, which does make some epistemological progress, and this is what is stressed by Gregory. Both authors are at different spots in the continuum of the permissible meaning of the word.

Returning now to the above quotation of Eunomius by Gregory, the burden of Eunomius’ thought here is that the names brought forward by Basil and Gregory are fictions; names not taught by the apostles. But amidst the abuse of Gregory there is another important point: that analogy is impotent as an instrument in theology. Gregory seems ignorant of the meaning of Eunomius’ remark: indeed he lets it drop after the usual complaint that the term “analogy” is not to be found in the writings of Moses. Gregory makes no serious attempt to consider the view that religious concepts may be developed through analogy, despite the fact that earlier Christian philosophers had advocated it (such as Clement; see my Connaissance religieuse...). The future importance in medieval and Thomist philosophy of the method of analogy is, of course, well known. Eunomius again shows himself to be aware of the Neoplatonist tradition, and Gregory to be ignorant. The Middle Platonists, Greek and Christian, had advocated the via analogiae as well as the via negativa, as means of forming concepts of the transcendent (see my Connaissance...). Plotinus continued this (see p.53). But when we come to Proclus, the story is different: Proclus refers to a group who appear to reject the value of analogies. The Platonic Theology II.5 refers to some who oppose the via negativa, and who appear to dismiss analogy also, “by defining analogy as an identity of concepts”. The passage is cryptic, but it appears to mean that some tried to reduce negation to privation, and analogy to homonymy, in order to argue that these methods offered no help in developing highly abstract concepts. We have noted that Damascius attacked both negation and analogy, the latter because it tried to assimilate the known and the unknown (see p.121), and Damascius must have represented the party which confronted Proclus on these two issues. Eunomius shows himself to be aware of the debate, and he too rejects the via analogiae: in this respect he allies himself with one party in the Neoplatonist tradition, against another. He has no specifically (Christian or Judaic) reasons for rejecting analogy, but rather participates in a revisionist trend in Neoplatonism. Eunomius regards thinking by analogy as the tendency of an “eager intelligence”; like Damascius, he considers that our desire to form concepts of the transcendent outstrips our capacity. Analogy is an after-the-event gesture of an enfeebled intelligence.
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
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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 particu-
larly by Proclus' commentary on the Cratylos. 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 Cratylos, an accusation brought by Gregory
of Nyssa (II, 404) as we saw above. But Rist asks, do we know that Euno-
mius had actually read the Cratylos, or a commentary on it? It seems likely to
me that the mention of the Cratylos is just a form of 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 Catego-
ries? In my view Eunomius may have read a Neoplatonist commentary, and
Basil neither Aristotle nor a commentary. Today one could use the expres-
sion the "means of production" without ever having read Marx: it's part of
the climate, so to speak, and one can well imagine a gibes 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 Eunomius' attitude to Marx as well. Overall then, the
claim about Eunomius' dependence on the Cratylos or its commentaries
ought not to be pressed at all. And as Rist points out (p.186), "mystical" the-
ories 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 wid-
er and deeper tendency to include language within the scope of ontology.
For a fuller development one would have to pursue the term onoma in Pro-
crus, 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 num-
ber, which are there to be known as much as any hypostasis. These, for Pro-
crus, are revealed to men by the daimons. Eunomius' position is very similar,
Eunomius' philosophy

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 hypo- totize 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 υψωμα and γενομενα). 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 (ἀκολούθει τούτω τὸ ἀγέννητον) as meaning that it follows temporally, or physically. But ἀκολούθεια can have a logical sense, as Anastos points out (see also my Connaissance religieuse..., p.102-108, and Daniélou, Ἀκολούθεια 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 (ἀκολούθεια) 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.