

«'ERE THE WORLD BEGAN TO BE»:
DESCRIPTION BY NEGATION IN COSMOGONIC LITERATURE

Alcman fr. 5.2.ii 9 ff.: λ[έγει] οὖν ὁ Ἀλκμὰν τὴν ὕλην πάν[των τετα]ραγμένην καὶ ἀπόητον..., 22 ff.: διὰ τὸ μηδέπω μήτε ἥλιον μήτε σε[λ]ήνην γεγονέναι ἀλλ' ἔτι ἀδιάκριτ[ο]ν εἶναι [τ]ὴν ὕλην.

The tendency of Greek cosmogonies to describe the original state of things, prior to creation, in markedly negative terms, has been commented on by several scholars, in particular M. L. West (1). The thought-processes involved might be thought too obvious and uninteresting for a detailed consideration to be particularly rewarding. But the idiom in question can be set against a wider background than is generally realised, and important principles are thereby raised as to how, for instance, one 'describes the indescribable', conceptualises what one has never seen.

The particular specimen of 'description by negation' which inspired Professor West's observations was part of the commentary on a lost poem of Alcman published from P. Oxy. 2390 = Alcman fr. 5.2.ii, cited above. The probability (2) that this phrasing derives entirely from the anonymous commentator, and not the poet he is professing to expound, does not alter the value of our passage as a specimen of an interesting and wide-spread idiom. An early instance of this idiom occurs in the cosmogony of Anaxagoras (59 B 1 DK): οὐδὲν ἔνδηλον ἦν. Likewise in the cosmogony given at Ar. Av. 694 (= Orpheus A 12.2 DK), we are told γῆ δ' οὐδ' ἀῆρ οὐδ' οὐρανὸς ἦν, but rather Erebus and Night. And in two papyrus fragments from the early fourth century A.D. (3) we find a similar picture: in the one οὕπω κύκλος ἔην Ὑπερίονος οὐδὲ καὶ αὐτὴ | [εἰλι]πόδων εὖληρα βοῶν <έτινασσε> Σελήνη, | [νὺ]ξ δὲ διηνεκῶς ἄτερ ἡματος ἔρρεε μούνη and in the other (more lacunose) account πρόσθε γὰρ .. οὔτε τα< | γαῖα καὶ ἡρι[γ]έγεια λ[| οὕπω ἀκοιμήτοιο φορὰ [δίνευσσε Σελήνης] | οὐδ' αὐτὸς Φαέθων ἀν[έλαμψε.

In Latin a similar mode of presentation is to be found at the beginning of

(1) "CQ" 17, 1967, 2 f. with nn. 4-5.

(2) For which see G. W. Most, "CQ" 37, 1987, 1 ff. the most recent (and, in my view, the most illuminating) study of the fragment in question.

(3) E. Heitsch, *Die griechische Dichterfragmente der röm. Kaiserzeit*, 24 (verso) 1-4 and 46.6-10 respectively.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.7 ff.): *Chaos rudis indigestaque moles | nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem | non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum. | nullus adhuc mundo praebebat lumina Titan, | nec nova crescendo reparabat cornua Phoebe, | nec... nec...* which may be echoed by Silius Italicus 11.453 ff.: *iamque chaos, caecam quondam sine sidere molem*. Previously Lucretius had painted a similar picture (5.432 ff.): *hic neque tum solis rota cerni lumine largo | altivolans poterat nec magni sidera mundi | nec mare nec caelum nec denique terra neque aer | nec similis nostris rebus res ulla videri, | sed nova tempestas quaedam...* With these we may compare a passage from Heraclitus' *Allegoriae (Quaestiones Homericae)* 65.2 (p. 70 Buffière) (4): παλαιοὶ γὰρ ἦσαν ποτε χρόνοι, καθ' οὓς ἀτύπωτον ἢ ὑπόλιμνον ἦν, οὐδέπω κεκριμένοις χαρακτῆρσιν εἰς τέλειον ἤκουσα μορφῆς. οὔτε γὰρ γῆ τῶν ὅλων ἐστία κέντρον ἐπεπήγει βέβαιον οὔτ' οὐρανὸς περὶ τὴν αἰδίδιον φορὰν ἰδρυμένος ἐκυκλεῖτο κτλ. (more negatives follow).

Of such passages W. Spoerri (5) has claimed: "Der Gedanke, den Urzustand auf diese Art zu schildern ('Was vor der Schöpfung noch nicht da war?' ...) wird wohl auf Empedokles zurückgehen". The reference is to 31 B 27 D.-K. (Plut. *De fac. lun.* 12 = *Moral.* 926E): 'ἐνθ'... θάλασσα', ὥς φησιν 'Ε., οὐ γῆ θερμότητος μετεῖχεν, οὐχ ὕδωρ πνεύματος, οὐκ ἄνω τι τῶν βαρέων, οὐ κάτω τι τῶν κούφων, ἀλλ' ἄκρατοι καὶ ἄστοργοι καὶ μονάδες αἱ τῶν ὅλων ἀρχαί κτλ. But the idiom in question is so ubiquitous that to talk in terms of simple derivation or specific literary borrowing is probably misleading. Spoerri himself cites numerous later examples. For instance, the pre-creational chaos envisaged by Plutarch (6) is characterised by such negative concepts as ἀταξία (7), ἀκοσμία and ἀμορφία. And there is an analogous picture in the philosophy of Posidonius (fr. 92 Edelstein-Kidd = 267 Theiler): τὴν τῶν ὅλων οὐσίαν

(4) This passage is quoted by Most, *sup. cit.* (n. 2) p. 11 as a parallel for the misleadingly specific misrepresentation of an author's content which he supposes we have in Alcman fr. 5. It is also cited by W. Spoerri, *Späthellenistische Berichte über Welt, Kultur und Götter*, Basel 1959, 69 ff. as a parallel to the description at the start of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Spoerri carefully analyses the relationship between the two passages).

(5) *Sup. cit.* (n. 4) p. 23, n. 24; cf. p. 70, n. 1: "Die Art, den Urzustand zu schildern, indem man anführt, was noch nicht da ist, kommt bereits bei Empedokles... und Aristophanes vor" (=Av. 693).

(6) For references to the relevant Plutarchean passages see Spoerri, *sup. cit.* (n. 4) p. 75, n. 1.

(7) For other passages presupposing ἀταξία before creation see Spoerri, *sup. cit.* (n. 4) Index of Words (IVa) s.v. "ἀταξία, ἄτακτος (kosmisch)" (p. 244). Of course the ἀταξία is regularly followed by some sort of διάκρισις or separation into constituent parts: see Spoerri *ib.* s.v. διακρίνειν, -εσθαι, διάκρισις.

καὶ ὕλην ἄποιον καὶ ἄμορφον εἶναι, καθ' ὅσον οὐδὲν ἀποτεταγμένον ἴδιον ἔχει σχῆμα οὐδὲ ποιότητα καθ' αὐτήν (cf. id. fr. 5 = 257 τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν – τὴν ὕλην).

A similar picture emerges from some late Orphic fragments (8), e.g. fr. 66b Kern: οὐδέ τι πείραρ ὑπῆν, οὐ πυθμήν, οὐδέ τις ἔδρα. And from Clement of Rome (9) in the first century A.D. we have (*Recognitiones* 10.30.3): *hoc sane ipsum chaos non tenebras dicit esse* (scil. Orpheus) *non lucem, non umidum, non aridum, non calidum, non frigidum, sed omnium simul mixtum et semper unum fuisse informe.*

Spoerri is also aware of the existence of "Analoges im Alten Orient" and refers to a collection of relevant material by W. Zimmerli (10). In fact much more could be said about the primeval formula "When there was not yet..." that characterises so many creation stories throughout the world. A large number of instances, with primary but by no means exclusive reference to ancient Egyptian literature, was assembled by H. Grapow (11). We may begin with some of this Egyptian material (12).

As in the Greek specimens cited above, the absence of day and night is often specified. But for variety's sake let us quote a slightly different approach from 'the Book of the destruction of Apophis':

Many were the beings which came forth from my mouth,
Before heaven came into being,
Before earth came into being,
Before the ground and creeping things had been created in this
place (13).

(8) Cf. M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence: la métis des grecs*, Paris 1974, 141 ≡ *Hommages à Marie Delcourt* (Collection Latomus 114, 1970), 44 f. ≡ *Cunning intelligence in Greek culture and society*, 1978, 145.

(9) Cf. W. Burkert, "Antike und Abendland" 14, 1968, 107 and n. 36.

(10) *I Mose 1-11, Die Urgeschichte*, Zurich 1943, 130 f.

(11) *Die Welt vor der Schöpfung*, "Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde" 67, 1931, 34 ff. For further material see (with particular reference to the Old Testament's *Proverbs* 8.23 ff. [cf. below p. 19]) H. Donner, *ib.* 82, 1957, 9 ff.; E. Würthwein, *Chaos und Schöpfung im mythischen Denken und in der biblischen Urgeschichte*, 'Zeit und Geschichte', R. Bultmann Festschrift, 1964, 317 ff. For useful general bibliographies of the relevant cosmogonies see Mircea Eliade, *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses* ≡ *A History of Religious Ideas* 1.395 ff. (Babylonian), 402 ff. (Egyptian), 441 ff. (Indian).

(12) On which see (in addition to the more general studies cited in the previous note) Erik Hornung, *Die Eine und die Vielen*, Darmstadt 1971, 169 ff. esp. 170 ff. ≡ *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt. The One and the Many* 172 ff. esp. 174 ff. on what he ingeniously terms the challenge posed by describing the non-existent.

(13) Pap. Brit. Mus. 10188, 26, 22 = *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old*

Likewise the pyramid text from Heliopolis dating from the Old Kingdom (14) relates how the god Pharaoh Pepi was engendered by the god Atum:

Before the sky existed, before earth existed,
before men existed,
before the gods were born,
before death existed.

Transition to Babylonian and Sumerian comparative material (15) may appropriately begin with the epic *Enûma Elis* which itself begins with a fine example of the 'When there was not yet...' formula: (when)

The heaven had not been named,
Firm ground below had not been called by name,

...

No reed hut had been matted,
No marsh land had appeared (16).

A Babylonian account of the creation of the world by Marduk (17) begins with nine lines that enumerate all the things that did not yet exist:

A holy house, a house of the gods in a holy place, had not been made;
A reed had not come forth, a tree had not been created;
A brick had not been laid, a brick mould had not been built;
A house had not been made, a city had not been built;

and so on.

The similarities between such Babylonian creation stories, particularly that of *Enûma Elis* and the Old Testament's *Genesis* 1.1-2.3 have long been recognised (18). Even when restricting ourselves to passages that treat

*Testament*³, ed. J. B. Pritchard, Princeton 1969, 6 (this volume is henceforward referred to as *ANET*³). The translation is by J. A. Wilson.

(14) Pyr. 1466: R. O. Faulkner, *The ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Oxford 1969, p. 226 (whose translation I quote). Further examples of negative descriptions of the world before creation in Egyptian literature are assembled in W. Beyerlin, *Religionsgeschichtliches Textbuch zum Alten Testament* \cong *Near Eastern Religious Texts relating to the Old Testament*, p. 6 (tr. H. Brunner).

(15) Apart from the general discussions listed in n. 11 above, Alexander Heidel's *The Babylonian Genesis*², Chicago 1951, provides a useful collection of the various Babylonian creation stories (in English translation).

(16) *ANET*³ p. 60 f. (tr. E. A. Speiser).

(17) Translation from Heidel (sup. cit., n. 15) p. 62.

(18) A still useful account of general parallels between the Old Testament and Sumerian or Babylonian creation literature is that of Heidel, sup. cit. (n. 15) 82 ff. As regards *Genesis* in particular, the introduction to volume 1, 1974 of Claus Westermann's three volume commentary (English translation, 1984, 8 ff.) is indispensable and has a very full bibliography (translation 69 ff.). See also the commentary on *Gen.* 1.1-2.4^a (pp. 93 ff.) and cf. W. G. Lambert, *A new look at the Babylonian Background of Genesis*,

of the world before creation, as it were, we cannot fail to recognise close parallels with passages quoted above. So *Gen.* 1.2 tells us "the earth was without form, and void", which in the Septuagint is rendered ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος (19). Another instance of the motif occurs at *Gen.* 2.4f. (20) though this fact does not emerge anything like so clearly from the translation offered by the Authorised Version. What the original intended was the notion that when God created the earth and the heavens there was not yet any plant on the earth nor any shrub (for God had not yet sent any rain) nor any man to till ground.

The motif has also left its trace upon parts of the Old Testament that lie outside *Genesis*. Consider, for instance, the second verse of *Psalms* 90 where God is thus addressed: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God". And at *Proverbs* 8.23 ff. personified Wisdom gives vent to her feelings in this manner: "I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. I When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. I Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: I While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world" (21). Finally, I cite an example from the Old Testament's *pseudepigrapha* (22): in the Fourth Book of Ezra 2.6.1-6 we encounter a lengthy series of clauses that date events "In the beginning of the terrestrial world I before ever the heavenward portals were standing, or ever the wind-blasts blew; I before the rumblings of thunderings did sound, or ever the lightning flashes did shine". And so on.

Much of interest has been written on ancient Near Eastern influences upon early Greek cosmologies (23). It would probably be wrong, however,

"Journal of Theological Studies" 16, 1965, 287 ff.; S. H. Hooke, *Middle Eastern Mythology*, London 1963, 103 ff. Pp 43 ff. of Westermann's Introduction (cf. 62 f.) discuss the general principle behind the formula "When not yet...".

(19) For this passage as a representative of the general idiom under discussion see Westermann *ad loc.* (sup. cit., n. 18) 93 ff.

(20) For details see Westermann *ad loc.* (sup. cit., n. 18) 197 ff. who also deals (186 ff.) with the problems posed by the different authorship behind *Gen.* 1 and 2-3.

(21) Cf. Donner, sup. cit. (n. 11).

(22) Translated by R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Oxford 1913, 2.574. See also J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1, London 1983, 53 ff. for translation and commentary.

(23) See, for instance, M. L. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, Oxford 1971 (p. 207 f. argues for Egyptian and Semitic influences on the Alcmanic episode in the light of some of the passages we have been examining), or W. Burkert in *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (ed. J. Bremmer, London 1987), 19 ff. Note the latter's closing

to extend any such explanation to the similarities considered above. Grapow chose to see the formula in question as partaking of something which is fundamental to humankind: basic related ideas and their expression in words. Such an approach will also help us understand why the formula can be pursued further afield to areas where any notion of simply defined influences must seem improbable.

A famous hymn from the Indian *Rg Veda* (10.129) poses, in its first two strophes, the question how Being could have come out of non-Being, since in the beginning neither Being nor non-Being existed, for in that time there existed neither Death nor non-Death, only One. Nothing else existed (24).

Icelandic literature offers several examples of the device. Thus from the *Prose Edda's* account of *Gylfaginning* (or *Gylfi's deception*) (25):

It was at the beginning of time, when nothing was;
Sand was not, nor sea, nor cool waves.
Earth did not exist, nor heaven on high.
The mighty gap was, but no growth.

The *Voluspa* (*The Volva's Prophecy*) has a like episode (26): when Ymir lived, there was neither sand nor sea, neither earth nor heaven. There was only Yawning Gap. A very similar passage (given a Christian interpretation) occurs within the specimen of Old High German known as the *Wessobrunn Prayer* (*Das Wessobrunner Gebet*): (27)

This I heard tell among men of marvels the
greatest, that earth was not, nor sky above, nor tree...
nor hill was: (there was) not any... nor did the sun
shine, nor did the moon give light, nor the fair sea.
Then there was nought of ends or boundaries, and then
was the one almighty god.

remark (p. 30): "the 'origins' of myth are not to be sought in East or West, Bronze Age or Neolithic, but in a more common human ancestry".

(24) For a translation see R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu Scriptures*, 1966, 11 f.

(25) Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, Oxford 1982, p. 9, 4, 12 ff. The translation used is that by Faulkes (Everyman Classics, 1987) p. 9.

(26) Cf. K. Schier, *Die Erdschöpfung aus dem Urmeer und die Kosmogonie der Voluspa*, in 'Märchen, Mythos, Dichtung', F. von der Leyden Festschrift, Munich 1963, 303 ff.

(27) See J. Knight Bostock, *A Handbook on Old High German Literature*, Oxford 1976²: revised by K. C. King and D. R. McLintock) 127 ff. The translation here given is that printed on p. 129 of this study. The similarity between this passage and the preceding has persuaded H. R. Ellis Davidson, for instance, "that a similar tradition to that in the *Voluspa* existed among the continental Germans" (*Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, London 1964, 197 f.). Once again the explanation may presuppose too specific a cause.

A large number of other instances from more recent times and more exotic climes could be cited. Without indulging in a Frazerian ecstasy of parallel-citing (28), I may be allowed to draw attention to one or two particularly suggestive cases for which there exists relatively up-to-date documentation. So from Peninsular Malaysia (29) comes a report of belief in that familiar group from folk-tale and popular superstition "The original people", who are recorded as having always existed: "They were there before Earth was made, before plants, animals, and humans". From Polynesia we learn of a Tahitian cosmology (30): "There was no sun, there was no moon, there was no land nor mountain, all was moving in the void. There was no man, no fowl nor dog, no living thing; there was no water, salt or fresh". By contrast, from central Brazil (31), an informant on behalf of the Shavante tribe, makes up in assertiveness for what is lost in variety: he reports that the creator Aiwamdzu began work: "The world was empty then... The world was created because in the beginning there was nothing... At that time the world was empty, empty. The world was truly empty". Finally, from Australia, the aboriginal Karadjeri tribe relate the myth of Bagadjimbiri (two brothers in charge of creation): "Before their appearance there was nothing at all - neither trees, nor animals, nor human beings" (32).

The very universality or this negative idiom compellingly leads us in the

(28) Quite a few instances of the idiom under discussion occur among the vast array of stories of the creation of man assembled by J. G. Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament* 1.3 ff. For instance, the Kawakipais or Diegueno Indians of western California "say that in the beginning there was no earth or solid land, nothing but salt water, one vast primeval ocean" (p. 25 ≡ T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament*, 1969, 16).

(29) See S. Howell, *Society and Cosmos. Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia*, Oxford 1984, 66. The same part of the world provides a fascinating partial parallel, partial contrast: see K. Endicott, *Batek Negrito Religion. The world-view and rituals of a hunting and gathering people of Peninsular Malaysia*, Oxford 1979, 33: "In the beginning, it is said, there was only sea... where the land is now... Both the sun and the moon were in existence, though the sun was not yet as hot as it is now".

(30) See A. Alpers, *The World of the Polynesians seen through their myths and legends, poetry and art*, Oxford 1987, 51. Compare the tradition preserved in E. G. Traube, *Cosmology and social Life: Ritual Exchange among the Mambai of East Timor*, Chicago 1986, 42 where the Ancestors (an equivalent of "the original people") are reported as complaining: "The sky has even soared on High/ The earth has even sunk down low/ Yet the moon does not beam/ The day does not shine".

(31) See D. Maybury-Lewis, *Akwe-Shavante Society*, Oxford 1974, 284 f.

(32) Cf. Mircea Eliade, *Australian Religions: an Introduction*, London 1973, 53. Compare S. Hugh-Jones, *The Palm and the Pleiades. Initiation and Cosmology in Northwest Amazonia*, Cambridge 1979, 267 ("no earth and no trees... no people. Sun but no night, no beginning and end to day" etc.).

direction of one particular explanation. In the words of Claus Westermann (33): "A formula which is so widespread and of such long standing must say something very important about the idea of creation. The act of creation is understood as a transformation, as a changing of chaos, or nothingness, ... into the world as it now is... This way of speaking about transformation prevents the world and its existence from being taken for granted: the world in its contingency is traced back to an event which transcends it, namely the act by which the creator brought about change".

As well as locating the ancient Greek "when not yet..." formula in a wider context so that it clearly emerges as but one part of a universal idiom (as it were), we should perhaps return now to the sphere of Greek literature in order to compare the general principle of "description by negation" as it is to be found in contexts other than cosmogonical. This too is instructive. For just as cosmogonic poets were faced with the difficulty of describing the non-existent, so those writers who set themselves, for instance, the task of recreating man's earliest history had a similar problem which they resolved by similar means: they characterised this earliest history in terms of the absence of those features (34) which render life as it is now lived recognisable. Here, for example, is the third century dramatist Moschion (*TrGF* 1 [6] 3 ff.):

ἦν γάρ ποτ' αἰὼν κείνος, ἦν ποθ' ἡνίκα
 θηρσί(ν) διαίτας εἶχον ἐμφερεῖς βροτοί...
 ... οὐδέπω γὰρ ἦν
 οὔτε στεγῆρης οἶκος οὔτε λαῖνοις
 εὐρεῖα πύργοις ὠχυρωμένη πόλις·
 οὐ μὴν ἀρότροις ἀγκύλοις ἐτέμνετο
 μέλαινα καρποῦ βῶλος ὀμπνίου τροφός,
 οὐδ' ἐργάτης σίδηρος εὐιώτιδος
 θάλλοντας οἴνης ὀρχάτους ἐτημέλει,
 ἀλλ' ἦν ἀκύμων † κωφεύουσα ῥέουσα γῆ (35).

That is an instance of an approach to the past that has been dubbed (36) anti-primitivism', in contrast to idealising treatments which conceive of the past as some sort of 'Golden Age'. But this latter approach is no less characterised by negative description, as the earliest extant specimen

(33) Sup. cit. (n. 18) 44.

(34) For a general treatment of the idioms involved in description through negation see my article in "Prometheus" 13, 1987, 265-284.

(35) For other comparably negative treatments of *Kulturgeschichte* see PV 447 ff., 'Critias' *TrGF* 1 (43) F 19.1 ff., Diod. Sic. 1.8.5; Davies, sup. cit. (n. 34) 279 ff.

(36) By, e.g., Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*, Baltimore 1965.

eloquently proves (Hes. *Op.* 111 ff.):

οἱ μὲν ἐπὶ Κρόνου ἦσαν, ὅτ' οὐρανῷ ἐμβασίλευεν·
 ὥστε θεοὶ δ' ἔζων ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἔχοντες
 νόσφιν ἄτερ τε πόνου καὶ οἰζύος· οὐδέ τι δειλὸν
 γῆρας ἐπῆν, αἰεὶ δὲ πόδας καὶ χεῖρας ὁμοιοὶ
 τέρποντ' ἐν θαλίῃσι κακῶν ἔκτοσθεν ἀπάντων.

Here again the poet is remarkably inexplicit as to the positive joys of the Golden Age, which is rather conceived in terms of the absence (37) of those features which make life as we know it so tedious and grim. Numerous other instances could be quoted. The same is true of those authors who prophesy a future Golden Age (38) - once more the stress is on the disappearance of those irksome and deplorable features that make the present existence wretched and miserable.

Another class of literature in which 'description by negation' is particularly at home is the description of fabulous lands and peoples with remote and exotic connotations (39). The line here stretches from Homer (e.g. *Od.* 4.86 ff. on the Libyans: τρὶς γὰρ τίκτει μῆλα τελεσφόρον εἰς ἐνιαυτόν· ἰένθα μὲν οὔτε ἄναξ ἐπιδευῆς οὔτε τι ποιμὴν ἰ τυροῦ καὶ κρειῶν οὐδέ γλυκεροῖο γάλακτος, ἰ ἄλλ' αἰεὶ παρέχουσιν ἐπηετανὸν γάλα θῆσθαι) to Herodotus on the Persians (1.132.1): θυσίη δὲ τοῖσι Πέρσῃσι περὶ τοὺς εἰρημένους θεοὺς ἦδε κατέστηκεν. οὔτε βωμοὺς ποιεῦνται οὔτε πῦρ ἀνακαίουσι μέλλοντες θύειν· οὐ σπονδῇ χρέωνται, οὐκὶ αὐλῶ, οὐ στέμμασι, οὐκὶ οὐλῇσι. τῶν δὲ ὥς ἐκάστω θύειν θέλη, ἐς χῶρον καθαρὸν ἀγαγὼν τὸ κτῆνος... κτλ.

A final set of analogies is provided by descriptions of the Afterlife, be it in the Elysian Fields or some other blissful locale. Here once more the content is negative (e.g. οὐ νιφετός, οὔτ' ἄρ χειμῶν πολὺς οὔτε ποτ' ὄμβρος, ἰ ἄλλ' αἰεὶ ζεφύροιο λιγὺ πνεῖοντος ἀήτας ἰ Ὠκεανὸς ἀνίησιν ἀναψύχειν ἀνθρώπους to quote *Od.* 4.566 ff.) and for reasons very closely related to those cited above in the case of cosmologies. A recent study (40) "On the imagery of Paradise" compares the treatment of the

(37) See, in particular, Bodo Gatz, *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen*, 'Spudasmata' 16 (1967), *Conspectus Locorum s.v. Loci Communes... absentia*; cf. Davies, sup. cit. (n. 34), 272 ff.

(38) See, for instance, Marianne Wifstrand Schiebe, *Das Ideale Dasein bei Tibull und die Goldzeitkonzeption Vergils*, 'Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Latina Upsaliensia' 13 (1981), 44 ff. on "die immanente Goldzeit"; cf. Davies, sup. cit. (n. 34), 275 ff.

(39) See Davies, sup. cit. (n. 34), 280 ff.

(40) "Indogermanische Forschungen" 85, 1980, 151 ff. The notion of a "Proto-Indo-European poetic description of Paradise" is implausible for various reasons: note, for

afterlife in the Odyssean passage just cited, in Hes. *Op.* 167 ff. and in Pind. *Ol.* 2.61 ff. with analogous (and analogously negative) descriptions from "the literature of other Indo-European peoples", primarily Celtic, Iranian and Indian (from the *Rg-Veda* and *Mahabharata* in particular) and concludes that we may infer a "Proto-Indo-European poetic description of paradise: a realm without heat or cold, snow or rain... a realm in which appear none of those things which make this world unpleasant... [Paradise] is so totally unlike our own mortal sphere that our very language and normal set of images is thoroughly inadequate for the task of describing it". The relevance of this last sentence to the question of negative cosmologies should be obvious: as Walter Beyerlin (41) has commented on these: "non-being can only be described with language which rests on the experience of existing entities". Perhaps the study of negativities may strike some as itself excessively negative. But, in fact, a great deal can be learned about human psychology and perception from the enquiry. As its popularity throughout the world proclaims, no more economic or effective way of describing the indescribable, of trying to convey knowledge of the unknowable, has been devised than the description by negation.

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instance, the negative Paradise of the Sumerian Epic of Emmerkar [cf. *ANET*³ p. 38 (S. N. Kramer), Beyerlin (sup. cit. n. 14) p. 86 (H. Schmökel)], or that in the Sumerian myth of Enki and Ninhursanga (see *ib.* 85 f.).

(41) Sup. cit. (n. 14) (English translation).