

THE VOCATIVE OF *DEUS* AND ITS PROBLEMS

A surprising amount of uncertainty has surrounded the vocative of *deus* in classical Latin. Allen and Greenough, for example, remark, "the vocative singular of *deus* does not occur in classical Latin, but is said to have been *dee*."¹ The note in Gildersleeve and Lodge is only slightly less bewildering. "In solemn discourse," they assert, "the *-us* of the Nom. is employed also for the Vocative. So regularly *deus*, 'God!'"² The word *deus*, however, does not appear in the passage they cite (Livy 1.24.7, the Fetial formula),³ nor do they set forth a definition of "solemn discourse."⁴ Ernout, in contrast, argues that the classical vocative was neither *deus* nor *dee*, but rather *dive*, since both *deus* and *divus* linguistically derive from the form **dēwos*.⁵ Other scholars, meanwhile, have asserted categorically that the vocative did not exist. Friedrich Neue, for example, declared that, although the vocative of *deus* was common in the Latin Bible and in the Church Fathers, the Romans themselves had no vocative for "god" either in the form *deus* or *dee*.⁶ Neue was clearly attempting to counter the commonly held notion that the classical vocative was *deus* by arguing that this was an unreflective projection of Christian usage back onto the classical period. Jacob Wackernagel,⁷ in a wide-ranging article first delivered as a public lecture in 1907, cites Neue with approval, and argues, partly on the basis of Greek parallels, that the Christian form *deus* was a Hebraism created out of the necessity of repeatedly rendering a form that had no earlier parallel in Latin.⁸ This view is supported by Einar Löfstedt,⁹ who argues that because the Romans were polytheistic addresses to "god" without specification were unnatural, and that the attributive *dive* consequently took on the function of the vocative.¹⁰

The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, however, report that the vocative of *deus* did exist and that it was *deus*,¹¹ citing "o bone deus," which occurs in the medical writer, Scribonius Largus (fl. 50 A.D.), in chapter 84

1. J. B. Greenough, G. L. Kittredge, A. A. Howard, and B. L. D'Ooge, *Allen and Greenough's New Latin Grammar* (Boston, 1888), sec. 49 g.

2. B. L. Gildersleeve and G. Lodge, *Gildersleeve's Latin Grammar*³ (London, 1895), sec. 33 r. 2.

3. The form they refer to is *populus Albanus*. R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), 111 sees this as a self-conscious archaizing reconstruction of ancient formula that is perhaps based on the Greek, "ὁ πᾶς λεώς."

4. R. Kühner and F. Holzweissig, *Ausführliche Grammatik der lateinischen Sprache*² I (Hannover, 1912), 447–48, also discuss solemn discourse ("feierlicher Sprache"), but they see it as a rarely occurring phenomenon, mostly confined to poetry.

5. A. Ernout, *Morphologie historique du latin* (Paris, 1927), 49. In usage *divus* and *deus*, of course, are not only different words, but also different parts of speech. A. Sihler, *New Comparative Grammar of Greek and Latin* (Oxford, 1995), 183a, stresses the distinction between **dēwos*/**dēwom*, which yielded the regular paradigm *divus*, and the nominative singular of this, **dēos*, which gave rise to *deus*.

6. F. Neue, *Formenlehre der lateinischen Sprache* I (Berlin, 1866), 83.

7. J. Wackernagel, "Über einige antike Anredeformen," *Kleine Schriften* II (Göttingen, 1959), 3–32.

8. Wackernagel, "Anredeformen," 11–13.

9. E. Löfstedt, *Syntactica Studien und Beiträge zur historischen Syntax des Lateins*² (Lund, 1956), 92–96.

10. Löfstedt, *Syntactica*², 94–96. The polytheistic argument fails to explain the fact that *dea* was commonly used in the vocative. Wackernagel ("Anredeformen," 21–26) addresses this by positing that the vocative *dea* is a poetic imitation of the Homeric θεά, which itself reflected a gender distinction between the vocative γυνή (= θεά), which was used to address any woman, and ἀνὴρ, which was used only by a woman to address her husband. Löfstedt rejects this, and holds that *deus* alone had been supplanted by *dive*, an argument, by the way, that is fundamentally different from Ernout's.

11. A view held by H. J. Roby, *A Grammar of the Latin Language from Plautus to Suetonius*³ (London, 1876), Part I sec. 346.

of his *Compositiones*. The TLL and OLD, however, give only this one citation, and there is apparently only one additional example of the vocative of *deus* in pre-Christian texts. This is *Carmina Priapea* 42.2:

Laetus Aristagoras natis bene vilicus uvis
de cero facta dat tibi poma, deus.
at tu sacрати contentus imagine pomi
fac veros fructus ille, Priape, ferat.

Two instances of a form are arguably a weak basis upon which to draw conclusions about usage, and it would accordingly appear that the question of the classical vocative of *deus* involves a serious problem of evidence. What is perhaps less clear, at least to those who have attempted to answer the question, is that serious methodological problems are involved as well.

Usage by its nature is imprecise and mutable; it is essentially meaningless to insist that a given form was the only one that was, or the only one that could have been, used. And yet when modern scholars make their various claims concerning the vocative of *deus* they seem to treat usage as a discrete reality that can be completely determined and completely known. As Otto Jespersen observed, when discussing what we would now call speech-acts, there is a tendency among scholars who work primarily with written texts to treat the language as a “natural object” rather than as a dynamic interaction between a producer and a recipient, whether in print or orally.¹² This quasi-scientific approach to usage, however, breaks down in a rather spectacular fashion when it is forced to address an unattested or weakly attested form such as the vocative of *deus*. This is what makes the surprising uncertainty over the vocative of *deus* more than just a curiosity. As I hope to show, this positivistic view needs to give way to a recognition of a fundamental indeterminacy that results from the fact that Latin was once a living language. The conflicting (and sometimes dubious) assertions about the classical vocative of *deus* reviewed above arise from a failure to acknowledge this indeterminacy, and this failure, in turn, results in a mishandling of the evidence.

I

The first step in addressing the problem of the vocative of *deus* is to determine the value of the Scribonius passage. Wackernagel rejects it, arguing that Scribonius’ “o bone deus” was a neologism that had no discernible influence on later usage.¹³ Löfstedt agrees, and adds that since the *deus* in question here could only be the emperor, Claudius, “o bone deus” lacked sincere religious feeling, and hence had no real force in terms of usage.¹⁴ Such arguments, however, actually fail to address the evidence, for it would seem that, neologism and insincerity aside, the examples from Scribonius and the *Carmina Priapea* show at the very least that the vocative of *deus*

12. O. Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar* (New York, 1924), 17.

13. Wackernagel, “Anredeformen,” p. 4, n. 2.

14. Löfstedt, *Syntactica*², p. 92, n. 2. Scribonius refers to Claudius three times as “deus noster Caesar”: *Epist. ded.* 13; c. 60 and c. 163. The vocative *dee*, which is used by both Tertullian (*adv. Marc.* 1.29) and Prudentius (*Harmat.* 931–32), is, like Scribonius’ “o bone deus,” dismissed by Löfstedt as insincere, *Syntactica*², p. 94, n. 1, although it was probably influenced by the Greek, θεός; see W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1979), θεός (ad init.), and F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (Chicago, 1961), sec. 44.2 and 147.3.

could be used, making it impossible to claim as Neue, Wackernagel, and Löfstedt do, that the vocative did not exist and that Christian writers could not have availed themselves of it as a model for the later usage that became so common.

Two serious areas of uncertainty, however, remain. The first is the one that actually seems to trouble Wackernagel and Löfstedt. This is the irremediable problem of the thinness of the evidence supporting a classical vocative of *deus*; it would seem reasonable that if the vocative was used we would hear more of it. The second problem is inextricably tied to the first, but is far more serious. This involves problems in the transmission of the texts that contain the two surviving examples of the vocative of *deus*.

The phrase “o bone deus” appears in a section of Scribonius’ *Compositiones* that deals with the control of hemorrhages. Scribonius cautions in strong terms that the patient not be allowed to move the affected limb, because contraction of the muscles creates pressure that forces more blood through the wound. This is based on a principle of hydrostatics that Scribonius illustrates with the example of a bladder of liquid that is cinched in the middle (“sicut utrem si quis medium laqueo constrinxerit . . .”). The failure of incompetent physicians to understand this, and their consequent attempts to blame their own failure on the art of medicine, rather than on themselves, arouses Scribonius’ anger (*Comp.* 84):

merito itaque manifeste quidam iugulantur genere quodam incitata eruptione sanguinis ab eiusmodi hominum imprudentia. et, o bone deus, hi sunt ipsi, qui imputant suam culpam in medicamentis quasi nihil proficientibus. sed ad propositum revertamur.¹⁵

The entire digression, from “sicut utrem” to “ad propositum revertamur,” which includes the phrase “o bone deus,” was rejected in 1655 by an early editor of Scribonius, Iohannes Rhodius, on the grounds that it does not appear in Marcellus Empiricus, *De Medicamentis*, which is an important exemplar of Scribonius’ text. The *De Medicamentis* of Marcellus (who is also known as Marcellus of Bordeaux, fl. 400) is a verbatim reproduction of Scribonius’ *Compositiones*, complemented with a few additions from other sources, and antedates the earliest surviving manuscript of Scribonius, **T**, the codex Toletanus (ca. sixteenth century), by a millennium.¹⁶ The other principal source for the text of Scribonius is the editio princeps published by Iohannes Ruellius in 1528, which relied on a number of other manuscripts, some no doubt related to **T**, that are now lost.¹⁷ Thus the manuscript tradition, which, aside from parts of *Compositiones* 97–107, is represented by no exemplar earlier than the sixteenth century, includes the digression, and the phrase “o bone deus,” but the *De Medicamentis*, which is based on manuscripts from the ninth through the eleventh centuries, goes directly from the words “quandoquidem omnis constrictio . . . exprimit venam”¹⁸ to “faciunt et composita,” which begin the next section, omitting the digression and the words “o bone deus” completely.

15. “It is accordingly completely clear that some patients are in a certain way murdered by a hemorrhage of this kind brought about from the ignorance on the part of these people. And these are the very ones, o good god (“o bone deus”), who attribute their own error to the method of treatment as though it had no effect. But let us return to our topic.”

16. S. Sconocchia, *Scribonii Largi Compositiones* (Leipzig, 1983), vii–ix.

17. Sconocchia, *Compositiones*, ix.

18. The text of Scribonius here, as reported by **T** and by Ruellius, reads “exiget aequae subiectam materiam.”

There are, of course, a number of possibilities that could account for this situation. The first and most obvious is that the digression is spurious, having perhaps crept into the text from a marginal gloss meant to elucidate Scribonius' discussion of hemorrhages. In this case, "o bone deus" would almost certainly have to be regarded as post-classical. On the other hand it is also possible that the digression is genuine and that Marcellus (or a later copyist) omitted it as unnecessary. Marcellus does in fact skip over other parts of Scribonius' text,¹⁹ but these cases are always defined by topic and involve entire sections or groups of sections, the *compositiones* upon which Scribonius organizes his work.²⁰ Marcellus' practice seems to have been to include all the material contained in the individual sections he decided to use.

The condition of Scribonius' text thus raises nagging doubts about the authenticity of "o bone deus." But even if the digression itself could be accepted as genuine, the situation does not improve, for the near uniqueness of Scribonius' "o bone deus" makes it vulnerable to any number of possible accidents of transmission. Under these conditions it seems we are forced to set Scribonius aside as a non liquet. This leaves *Carmina Priapea* 42.2 as the only arguable instance of the vocative of *deus* outside Christian sources. But here too, there are textual problems, for the line containing the vocative, "de cero facta dat tibi poma, deus," is obviously corrupt,²¹ and even if one were to argue that *deus* itself may be unaffected, we are brought back yet again to the problem of the absence of parallels, and to the question of whether a single instance can in any sense be taken as evidence of usage.

There is, however, one other possible piece of evidence for the classical vocative of *deus*. This comes from the work of the Latin grammarians themselves, as recorded by the author of the *Ars Anonyma Bernensis* (Keil VIII 99.29–100.5),²² who claims that the "ancients" used the vocative form *deus*: "Item vocativus in us finitus invenitur, sicut grammaticus dicit: Veteres dicebant o deus reus pius, pro o dee ree pie."

This would seem to lend strong support to the otherwise uncertain evidence from Scribonius and the *Carmina Priapea*. Wackernagel, however, dismisses the testimony of the *Ars Bernensis*, a compilation dating from the tenth century, on the grounds that its author was a Christian and hence was voicing Christian usage, even though the author explicitly states that the "ancients" ("veteres")—not contemporaries—used the vocative form *deus*. Wackernagel supports this position by pointing out that the *Ars Bernensis* is contradicted by the earlier grammarian, Probus (fl. 450), who claimed that the correct form of the vocative was *dee* (Keil IV 127.9–13). According to Wackernagel this lack of consensus among the grammarians proves that a classical model for the vocative of *deus* could not have existed.²³

This type of argument sees the *Ars Bernensis* and Probus as presenting two opposing and irreconcilable facts, the one that the vocative was *deus*, and the other that

19. The passages are collected by Sconocchia, *Compositiones*, p. viii, n. 6.

20. "Primum ergo ad quae vitia compositiones exquisitae et aptae sint, subiecimus et numeris notivimus, quo facilius quod quaeretur inveniatur" (*Epist. Ded.* 15).

21. G. Heraeus, *Petronii Saturae et Liber Priapeorum*, rec. Buecheler⁶ (Berlin, 1922), 288. Heraeus notes the artificial lengthening of final syllable of *facta*, the use of *cero* in place of *cera*, the change in number from *poma* in line 1 to *pomi* in line 2, the reappearance of the dedicatee in line 4, and the oddity of *deus* itself, which Heraeus notes receives no modification, and which he feels is at odds with usage elsewhere (e.g., *Carm. Priap.* 53.5, "dive minor").

22. H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini* (Leipzig, 1855–1880).

23. Wackernagel, "Anredeformen," 3–4.

it was *dee*, and it attempts to use this contradiction to determine yet another fact, namely that the classical vocative did not exist. This exemplifies the sort of positivistic reasoning that has given rise to the contradictory claims concerning the vocative of *deus* that appear in modern grammars. In addition, it attributes to the grammarians the empirical approach to usage that has tended to dominate twentieth-century scholarship. The Latin grammarians, however, never believed that usage could be determined simply by ascertaining the objective “facts” of the language. Their approach was frankly prescriptive and based upon systematic rules of usage that determined what forms should be used. A better understanding of this prescriptive element holds the key to what has gone wrong in modern discussions of the vocative of *deus*.

II

Probus and the author of the *Ars Bernensis* were not immediately interested in the vocative of *deus* itself. Rather, they both were addressing general questions concerning the proper declension of nouns, which in due course touched on the vocative of the second declension masculine singulars. Unlike the singulars of other declensions, which formed their vocatives as a *rectus casus* identical to the nominative, the second declension masculine vocatives of nouns ending in *-us* declined, sometimes ending in *-e*, sometimes in *-i*. The generally accepted rule for determining which ending should be used was that proper nouns ending in *-ius* formed the vocative in *-i* (as for example, *Terentius*, *Terenti*), while all others, including those ending in *-ius* that were not proper nouns, ended in *-e*, with the single exception of *filius*, which formed its vocative, *fili*.²⁴

Nouns and adjectives ending in *-ius*, however, posed a special problem that centered on whether the final *-i* should be regarded as vocalic or consonantal.²⁵ In response to this issue, Varro enunciated a rule that the vocatives of all such nouns should have the same number of syllables—and the same form—as their genitive singular.²⁶ Varro’s suggestion that *-ius* vocatives should be identical to the genitive failed to win the day, but the parity of syllable rule was generally accepted, and this rule is what ultimately stands behind Probus’ assertion that the vocative of *deus* should be *dee*.

Probus’ comment on *deus* is actually a corollary to a discussion he presents earlier in the *Instituta Artium* concerning the vocatives of Greek proper nouns in Latin. Such nouns normally retained their Greek forms. Thus, “Pentheus,” for example, would be disyllabic, and form its vocative with a diphthong, “o Pentheu.” Probus, however,

24. The rule is conveniently stated by Servius, *Comment. in Artem Donati* (Keil IV 409.10–16): “vocalivus enim singularis secundae declinationis tunc in i exibat, cum nominativus singularis in ius fuerit terminatus in genere masculino in proprio nomine, ut hic Mercurius o Mercuri. . . si autem nominativus us terminatur, ut hic doctus, vocativum facit o docte; et si appellativum sit, licet ius terminatur, ut hic impius o impie facit, hic egregius o egregie. sed huic regulae contrarium est hic filius o fili.”

25. The most extended discussion of this question is presented by Priscian (Keil II 302.19–304.10), who argues that the *i* should be consonantal because it is not sounded in the vocatives of proper nouns such as “Pompeius” / “o Pompei.” The pedantry of this debate is satirized by Gellius in his anecdote concerning two grammarians who nearly come to blows over the question of whether the vocative of *egregius* should be *egregi* or *egregie* (NA 14.5).

26. Varro’s rule is noted by Charisius (Keil I 78.4–7): “nomina quae ante u habent i duplici i genetivo singulari finire debent, ne necesse sit adversus observationem nominum nominativo minorem fieri genetivum; idque Varro tradens adicit vocativum quoque singularem talium nominum per duplex i scribi debere.”

felt that these proper nouns should be Latinized, resolving the *-eus* termination into two syllables. As a result, the vocative could no longer end in *-eu*, because it would be one syllable shorter than its nominative, and hence violate the parity of syllable rule. Probus illustrates this with the example of “Ilioneus,” which he argues should take the form “Ilionee,” with a double “e” in the vocative (Keil IV 103.16–28). Probus also observes that the parity of syllable rule applies to all other masculine singular second declensions nouns that form their nominatives in *-eus* (“sic et alia generis masculini nomina . . . ad exemplum Ilionei per omnes casus declinantur,” Keil IV 103.19–22), and later he presents the vocative of *deus* as an illustration of this (Keil IV 127.9–13):

Quaeritur, qua de causa vocativo casu numeri singularis o dee per duas e litteras scribatur. hac de causa, quoniam quaecumque nomina ablativo casu numeri singularis o littera terminantur et nominativo casu numeri singularis eus litteris definiuntur, haec excepto genetivo casu numeri pluralis per ceteros casus pari numero syllabarum oportet scribi.

It is clear that Probus is here not so much concerned with the immediate problem of determining the vocative of *deus* as he is with establishing the parity of syllable rule, which in his view holds that all vocatives, including those of nouns ending in *-eus*, whether Greek, such as Ilioneus, or Latin, such as *deus*, should have the same number of syllables as their genitive singular (“oportet scribi”). There is no confusion in Probus’ remarks, no searching after a nonexistent form that resulted from the lack of a classical model, as Wackernagel believed. It is equally clear that Probus’ approach here is prescriptive and not historical. It really didn’t matter to him whether the classical form (if there was one) confirmed the rule that he sets forth or violated it. Because of this, Probus’ remarks on the vocative of *deus* cannot be used to make deductions about classical usage, any more than his argument concerning Greek nouns can somehow be used to prove that the vocative of Ilioneus was one form or another, or that the vocative in fact never existed because a subsequent grammarian advocated a different form.²⁷

The prescriptive element is no less prominent in the *Ars Bernensis* than in Probus, but here the question of usage is approached from a different direction. Rather than asserting the regularization of forms from the top down, as it were, by the application of a given rule, the author of the *Ars Bernensis* begins by considering forms that violate the rules, and then attempts to construct an argument that will accommodate them.

As a vocative form, *deus* is a clear violation of established norms. The grammarians occasionally encountered apparent examples of such vocatives in the texts they taught, and they explained them either by invoking the figure of antiptosis, in which the “correct” case is replaced by another,²⁸ or by appeal to the concept of *euphonia*, which allowed that some forms dictated by the rules could be avoided because they struck the ear as unpleasant, or, in the case of poetic texts, by arguing that the regular vocative could not be used because of metrical restraints.

27. Priscian, in fact, mentions Probus’ argument concerning Greek proper nouns, and rejects it, noting that he was unable to find any example of vocatives such as “Ilionee” in use (Keil II 301.14–16). Such explicit testimony, unfortunately, is lacking in the case of the vocative of *deus*.

28. For a discussion of the role of *figurae* in the grammarians’ explication of classical texts, and of antiptosis in particular, see R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarians and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1988), 174–76.

But by far the most common argument was that in these instances “ancient” usage simply differed from that of contemporary speech. It is important to realize that the “ancients” in question here were not archaic Latin writers, but classical authors whose works had become canonical in the schools.²⁹ Virgil is a prime example. On three occasions in the *Aeneid* (8.77, 11.464, and 12.192) Virgil employs what are apparently second declension masculine vocatives ending in *-us*. The most influential of these, and the one that is cited again and again by the grammarians (frequently in conjunction with Lucan, 2.116) is *Aeneid* 8.77, *corniger Hesperidum fluvius regnator aquarum*. Probus, for example, who argues strongly for the regularization of forms in contemporary speech, observes in his work the *Catholica* (Keil IV 4.14–18) that *fluvius* here is an ancient form of the vocative. The same observation is made by Cledonius (Keil V 13.31–12.2), and by Servius in his commentary on *Aeneid* 8.77,

FLUVIUS vero vocativus antiquus est: qui apud maiores in omni forma similis erat nominativo, sed modo aliter est in secunda tantum forma. . . . plerumque tamen poetae euphoniae causa antiquitatem sequuntur.

Servius’ note here shows that arguments for ancient vocative forms could sometimes be coupled with appeals to the principle of euphony (“plerumque tamen poetae euphoniae causa antiquitatem sequuntur”). This leads to the next stage in our story of the vocative of *deus*, for a version of the argument for euphony that was later articulated by Priscian is an important and complicating factor behind the claim in the *Ars Bernensis* that *deus* was a classical vocative.

III

Priscian regarded euphony as one of the cardinal principles of usage, and like Servius he makes a connection between euphony and instances of irregular forms in classical authors. Priscian, however, differed from Servius in that he did not envision ancient forms as preexisting variants that poets could turn to when convenient; instead he held that the irregular vocatives were themselves the creation of euphony.

Priscian states this principle clearly in the *Institutio de Nomine et Pronomine et Verbo* when, after reviewing the normal formation of second declension vocative singulars, he observes that classical authors sometimes avoided these forms and used the nominative in place of the vocative for reasons of “euphony or meter” (“veteres tamen aliquando vel metri vel euphoniae causa nominativis utuntur pro vocativis,” Keil III 447.34–448.2). Priscian accordingly does not regard *fluvius* at *Aeneid* 8.77 or *populus* at Lucan 2.116 as actual vocatives, but instead treats them as examples of antiptosis (Keil II 305.16–21).³⁰ He repeats this explanation of *Aeneid*

29. See Kaster, *Guardians*, 183.

30. *Fluvius* at *Aen.* 8.77 is also treated as antiptosis by other grammarians who saw in Virgil’s avoidance of the vocative a recognition of what had for them become the hotly debated issue of the consonantal *i*, as shown, for example, by the comments that appear in the *Explanaciones in Artem Donati* attributed to Sergius: “vocativus secundae declinationis aliquando in *i* exit, aliquando in *e*. denique in hoc casu ambiguitatem vidit Vergilius et antiptosim fecit, pro vocativo nominativum posuit . . . et hic usus veterum fuit” (Keil IV 498.17–22). A similar interpretation of *fluvius* is presented by Servius himself in his *Commentarius in artem Donati* (Keil IV 409.15–18), and by the grammarian Phocas (Keil V 429.15–18).

8.77 at two places in the *Partitiones* (Keil III 487.10–19 and 511.31–512.3).³¹ The second passage is of special interest, for here Priscian draws a parallel between Virgil's use of *fluvius* and the vocative of *deus* (Keil III 511.31–512.1):

euphoniae tamen causa vel metri est quando nominativis utuntur pro vocativis, ut *deus* pro *dee* et *fluvius* pro *fluvie*, ut Virgilius in VIII Aeneidos, “corniger Hesperidum *fluvius* regnator aquarum,” et *populus* pro *popule*, ut Lucanus in secundo, “degener o *populus*, vix saecula longa decorum.”

Priscian's argument is essentially ahistorical. He presents *deus* here as a contemporary form, one that is familiar to students and that can be used to illustrate the violation of grammar that occurs at *Aeneid* 8.77, because, in his view, the *veteres* employed antiptosis for reasons of euphony in just the same way contemporary speakers did (“ut *deus* pro *dee* et *fluvius* pro *fluvie*, ut Virgilius in VIII Aeneidos”).³² Although Priscian never actually claims that *deus* was a vocative, or that it was used as a vocative by “ancient” authors, his analysis of euphony in classical texts has the effect of making an association between *deus* and classical usage.³³

The author of the *Ars Bernensis* was profoundly influenced by Priscian, and he absorbed Priscian's ideas about euphony and ancient usage in general. When discussing the declension of nouns, for example, he notes Priscian's observation that classical authors (again, “*veteres*”) occasionally formed the genitive singulars of nouns such as “*Antonius*” with a single *-i*, and he goes on to mention Priscian's argument that the letter *i* was consonantal in the vocatives of these nouns.³⁴ The author also repeats Priscian's observation that older authors (“*antiquissimi*”) sometimes formed the vocatives of these nouns with an *-e*, as in “o Virgilie, o Mercurie.”³⁵ And he fills out this discussion of Priscian's views on classical usage by repeating verbatim Priscian's argument that *fluvius* at *Aeneid* 8.77 is an example of antiptosis made for reasons of euphony and meter (Keil VIII 104.24–28 = Priscian, Keil II 305.16–21). The author also expands on the relationship between euphony and classical usage by quoting Donatus, who held, as Priscian did later, that euphony explained the violations of rules that were sometimes encountered in classical authors.³⁶

The author's own comments on the vocative *deus* grow out of these discussions of antiptosis, euphony, and classical usage. However, he departs from his predecessors

31. At *Inst.* XVII (Keil III 487.10–19), however, Priscian interprets *fluvius* (and, again, Lucan's use of *populus*) as a Grecism, without broaching the argument of euphony or meter.

32. Priscian himself was a Christian, as shown by his statement: “*noster praeceptor Theocritus . . . cui quidquid in me sit doctrina post deum imputo*” (Keil II 238.5–7); see Kaster, *Guardians*, 348.

33. Priscian also applies euphony to explain the vocative of *meus*, which was clearly classical: “*notandum tamen, quod 'meus', cum secundum regulam vocativum deberet facere 'o mee', euphoniae causa duas e breves in i longam convertit*” (Keil III 11.4–6). Other grammarians, however, saw the vocative of *meus* in historical terms. Charisius, for example, posits the ancient form *mius*, which he then treats on analogy with *filius* to explain the vocative *mi*: “*veteres mius dicebant, ut merito et vocativus secundum regulam manserit, ut sit o mi*” (Keil I 159.17–20; cf. Diomedes, Keil I 331.13–15).

34. Keil VIII 104.12–19 (= Priscian, Keil II 302.19–304.10 and 301.17–302.9).

35. Keil VIII 104.19–21 (= Priscian, Keil II 301.17–302.9). The example that Priscian quotes is “*Laetie*,” from Livius Andronicus, which he notes is an echo of Greek practice that was not followed by later classical authors, whom he distinguishes here by the term “*juniores*.”

36. “*Donatus dicit . . . scire debemus, multa quidem veteres aliter declinasse, ut ab hac domu harum domuum his dominibus et ab hoc iugere iugerum iugeribus. Verum euphonia in quibusdam dictionibus plus interdum valere invenimus quam analogiam vel regulam praeceptorum*” (Keil VIII 126.30–35).

in regarding *deus* as an actual vocative and not merely an illustration of how a nominative might be preferred for the sake of euphony. He makes this claim in the course of discussing the number of terminations of the second declension nominative singular. The author seeks to improve upon Priscian's observation that the second declension had six terminations in the nominative (Keil VIII 99.19–24 and III 444.5–6) by arguing that there were in fact ten: *-er*, *-ir*, *-ur*, *-us*, *-ius*, *-eus*, *-uus*, *-vus*, *-um*, and *-ium*, a number that he arrives at by ignoring the possibility of any consonantals and by counting *-ius*, *-uus*, *-vus*, and the neuter *-ium* as four additional terminations to add to the six recognized by Priscian. The author uses *puer*, *trevir*, *satur*, *doctus*, *filius*, *Orpheus*, *fatuus*, *servus*, *donum*, and *gaudium* to illustrate these nominative endings, and then proceeds to what he presents as the related question of the terminations in the vocative, which he holds are fifteen in number (Keil VIII 99.29–32):

Item quaeritur: vocativus singularis secundae declinationis quot terminationes habet?
 Hoc est quindecim: er ir ur us ius eus uus um ium e ee ei i u: er ut o puer; ir, ut o vir;
 ur, ut o satur; o pelagus, o filius vel o fili, o deus, o fatuus, o servus vel o serve, o tem-
 plum, o gaudium . . . o lignee . . . o Orpheu.

The author at this point cites *deus* as a vocative, but he does not claim that it or any of the other vocatives he lists were classical forms. In fact, he is not really interested in questions of historical usage, but instead is dealing with a problem of syllabification: Do potential semi-vowels such as *i*, *u*, and *v* count as consonantals when juxtaposed to vowels such as *e*, as sometimes occurs in vocative endings? The author's position is that they do not. He regards the letters *i*, *u*, and *v* in *filius*, *fatuus*, and *servus* as vowels, and hence treats them as part of the termination. What is more important, the author attempts to address ambiguities that might arise in the forms of words containing such semi-vowels by regularizing them according to the rule of analogy, and treating their vocatives as examples of the *rectus casus*, as is the case in the other declensions. This allows him to present the vocatives "o puer" and "o vir," which normally are *rectus casus*, on the same level as "o fatuus" and "o servus," which are clearly not standard.

The author's argument thus depends on an exact correspondence between these "nonstandard" second declension vocatives and their nominatives, but the very way he has defined the nominative terminations makes it impossible for him to do this. By his own method of syllabification, for example, he is unable to adduce a vocative in *-us* without a semivowel that is parallel to the nominative *doctus*, and so he somewhat disingenuously substitutes the neuter, *pelagus*.

A more serious problem emerges with the vocative of *deus*. When discussing the nominative endings, the author follows Priscian in counting the *-eus* of Greek nouns as a separate termination (e.g., Orpheus vs. *doctus*), but he also follows Priscian (Keil II 304.14–16; III 447.34–448.5), against Probus, in accepting that the corresponding vocative of this nominative termination is *-eu*, as in "o Orpheu." This leaves an empty slot for the vocative in *-eus*, and the author fills it with *deus*. It seems that the author perceives this lack of consistency, and attempts to address it near the end of his discussion by discussing the vocatives of words that end in *-eus* as a separate class. He begins again with the Greek vocative *-eu*, which he again

illustrates with the example “Orpheu,” this time quoting Virgil, *Georgics* 4.494, *quis . . . me . . . miseram et te perdidit, Orpheu?* (Keil VIII 100.1). He then considers vocatives ending in *-ee* by repeating the example, “o lignee,” which he now attributes to the Christian poet Sedulius (fl. 470), “*ee terminatus invenitur, sicut in Sedulio legitur: ‘lignee ligna rogas, surdis clamare videris’*” (Keil VIII 100.2–3). This leaves vocatives ending in *-eus*. At this point, however, the author does not adduce any text, but instead appeals to the well-established grammatical tradition that recognized that vocatives ending in *-us* occurred (“*invenitur*”) in classical authors (Keil VIII 100.3–5):

Item vocativus in us finitus invenitur, sicut grammaticus dicit, “*Veteres dicebant o deus reus pius, pro o dee ree pie.*”

Two points deserve notice. First, the unnamed grammarian who is cited here is not defining the vocative ending as *-eus*, which is what the author is arguing, but rather as *-us*, as the author’s own introductory comment reveals, and as is obvious from the example of *pūs*. Second, it appears that this grammarian is essentially repeating a version of the argument advanced by Priscian, and earlier by Donatus, that explained irregular forms in classical authors—and in particular irregular second declension vocatives—in terms of euphony. The importance of euphony is implied by the contrasts *deus/dee*, *reus/ree*, and *pūs/pie*. There is nothing to indicate that the grammarian quoted here regarded *deus*, *reus*, and *pūs* as the classical vocatives of these words, or that they were conspicuous examples of irregular forms. In short, the historicity of the claim that classical authors used the vocative form *deus* cannot be separated from the possibility that the grammarian in question was framing the same sort of argument that was advanced by Priscian in the *Partitiones* when he used *deus* as an illustration of the effect of euphony in Virgil. The possibility does remain that we have here an actual record of classical usage, but the nature of the testimony is such that it can be neither affirmed nor denied.

IV

This is a perhaps frustrating conclusion, but it is rooted in the very nature of usage and in the interrelationship between usage and rules. Both Probus and the author of the *Ars Bernensis*, like all the Latin grammarians, saw usage in terms of rules and exceptions to rules, and they recognized that their task was to instruct students in the proper use of Latin in accordance with the notions of elegance and order that were embodied in those rules.³⁷ The grammarians may project an image of inflexibility and pedantry, but they were very much aware of the limits of their prescriptive enterprise. They knew that the rules of usage that they promulgated did not constitute the facts of the language itself. This sense of limits, for example, appears in Donatus’ argument that classical usage in particular sometimes responded to factors that lay beyond the control of *regulae*. It also appears when the rules produce forms that are impossible or absurd. The author of the *Commentum Einsidlense in Donati Artem Minorem*, for example, shows that it is possible to use the rules, and the system

37. For a discussion of the authority and social position of the grammarians, see Kaster, *Guardians*, 32–95.

that the rules embody, to generate vocatives of the third person pronouns, even though logically these vocatives could not exist.³⁸ In a similar vein Priscian himself acknowledged that the “nature” of the Latin language in a fundamental sense existed apart from the grammarians’ system of *regulae*, and that the rules had an inner logic of their own that was foreign to the language.³⁹

The grammarians accordingly never conceived of their rules in terms of scientific “theories” that expressed the underlying truth of the language. They recognized an open-endedness to the language that was given only a tentative order through the prescription of rules, which arguably could be valid and defensible even when in contradiction to each other. Thus when Probus argued that the vocative of *deus* should be *dee*, he was not claiming that it had to have been that form because it was in the nature of the language; rather, he was presenting a rule that attempted to regularize usage. This is also what the author of the *Ars Bernensis* was doing when he applied analogy to vocatives that might have been felt to be awkward. And this is what Priscian and all the grammarians were doing when they tried to explain oddities in classical usage.

Modern scholars approach Latin in a very different way. Our authority does not rest on opinions of proper and improper usage, but rather on a precise and objective knowledge of the corpus of Latin literature. For this reason, we frame the question of usage as a historical and factual one, rather than as a prescriptive one. An excessive confidence in this methodology, and in the seemingly elementary nature of the question of the vocative of *deus*, have led those who claim that the classical vocative did not exist, or that it was *dee*, or *deus*, or *dive*, to gloss over problems with the evidence, and also to confuse their own notions of the rules and behavior of Latin with the language itself. The example of the Latin grammarians shows that it makes no sense to point to a given form and assert that this form must have been “the” usage, or again to a rule, and claim that the rule can be used to derive the “true” usage. Modern scholars, however, tend to make such claims, and to present as objective, sometimes almost self-evident facts, what are actually prescriptive arguments, no different from those of the Latin grammarians themselves, but much weaker because they are not recognized as prescriptive. They are, in fact, compromised in the very act of being made, not only because they ignore the uncertainties of the evidence, but also because they take a question that by its nature is normative and make it absolute.

The vocative of *deus* thus raises a number of issues that go beyond the usage of a particular word and that involve basic problems of methodology. Can a single instance of a form, for example, coming from a perhaps questionable text, be taken as evidence of an established usage? Can two? At what point is the evidence abundant enough to draw a conclusion, and what force would such a conclusion have? Can these one or two examples then be defended by a grammatical concept, such as sol-

38. “Vocativus in tertia persona non est, sed, ne locus eius vacuus remaneret, ponitur o” (Keil VIII 249.16–17).

39. “Itaque quod deest Latinitatis linguae naturaliter, completur iuncturae ratione. multa tamen in his quoque, quae regula exigit dici, sive euphoniae causa deficiunt sive quod in usu non sunt, sicut et in aliis partibus orationis” (Keil II 565.21–24).

emn discourse, which is actually nothing more than a rule of our own creation? Or can this question of usage be answered by adducing an alternative form, such as *dive*, on the basis of linguistic factors of which the speakers themselves were unaware?

Questions such as these serve to illustrate the problems inherent even in a seemingly simple question of usage and the corresponding limits of our own authority as scholars. But if we are to ask again, "What was the classical vocative of *deus*?", how are we to respond? The examples are few and uncertain, but this is no basis for claiming that the vocative was not occasionally used in classical times. Nor is there any way to determine whether *deus* was preferred over *dee*, or whether both were used. The form *dee* does appear, though infrequently, in early Christian writers. *Deus* was overwhelmingly favored in the Latin Bible and later Latin, but neither can be used to reach conclusions about usage in classical times. In the end it is necessary to recognize that for all the armament of scholarship that can be brought to bear upon it, the vocative of *deus* is a question that must be left open. All that we can do is say what the vocative of *deus* might have been. We cannot say what it was.⁴⁰

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THEMISTIUS AND THE SPEECH TO THE KING

Writing about Themistius nearly thirty years ago, Gilbert Dagron spoke of a revival of interest in this philosopher and orator of the fourth century. That process was strongly spurred by Dagron's own study of Themistius' political thought, and since he wrote there have been many other contributions, including the completion of the Teubner edition and John Vanderspoel's recent study of Themistius in relation to the imperial court.¹

If Themistius has a favorite model, it is Dio Chrysostom; though in those places where he mentions Dio, he does so merely as one of several philosophers who received favors from kings.² The other author of the Second Sophistic whose work has survived in bulk, apart from its historian Philostratus, is Aelius Aristides, and Themistius speaks of him only once, in a passage that does not suggest a high regard: under attack from rhetorical critics, he complains about the misfortune of having to listen to the progeny of Aristides, and not being allowed to listen to Plato's.³ Nonetheless, Dagron recognized Themistius' debt to one work of Aristides, the speech

1. G. Dagron, "L'Empire romain d'Orient au IV^e siècle et les traditions politiques de l'hellénisme," *TM* 3 (1968): 1–242; G. Downey and A. F. Norman, eds., *Themistii Orationes*, vols. 2 and 3 (Leipzig, 1970, 1974; vol. 1, by Downey alone, appeared in 1965); John Vanderspoel, *Themistius and the Imperial Court* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1995). I am grateful to a reader for *CP* for very helpful comments.

2. 5.63d; 11.145b; 13.173c.

3. 26.330c. H. Kesters, *Plaidoyer d'un Socratique contre le Phèdre de Platon* (Louvain, 1959), has contested the attribution of this work to Themistius.