Vero Nomine: The Philosophical Analysis of Cult and Divine Names as Context for Book XI of

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

The purpose of this essay is to speculatively sketch the religious and philosophical background to the conception of names, and in particular divine names, implicit in Book XI of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. As we will see, the nature and correctness of names was a key concern of ancient philosophy as a whole. While ancient cult and popular religion made use of multiple names in relation to a single deity, with an emphasis on the exotic and unusual, ancient philosophers took keen interest in discerning the principles behind these practices, and in particular the divine names employed in them. This interest begins with Plato and his dialogue *Cratylus*, and produced, by the time of the Neo-Platonic philosopher Proclus in the 5th century AD, an extremely worked-out hierarchical system of divine names, divided based on their origin either in the divine or the human realm, and assessed according to their usefulness for gaining access to truthful knowledge of divinity and, ultimately, ascending philosophically to the divine itself. In addition, the renowned antiquity of Egyptian religion gave the cult of Isis and other Egyptian divine names a special validation, one that led philosophers such as Plutarch to treat Isiac cult and myth, and the names involved in it, as a legitimate source for philosophical analysis.

Lucius' encounter with Isis, then, and the personal revelation of her true name to him, thus takes on a specifically philosophical tinge, and can be situated within the larger context of philosophical analyses of cultic practices and names, itself a part of the larger discourse around names, words, and divinity within ancient philosophy.