

К 130-ЛЕТИЮ СО ДНЯ РОЖДЕНИЯ А.Ф. ЛОСЕВА¹

TO THE 130TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF A.F. LOSEV

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Алексей Лосев о трактате Плотина «О числах»

Аннотация. Рассматривается историко-философская деятельность А.Ф. Лосева, оригинального мыслителя XX века. Предлагается комментарий к работе А.Ф. Лосева «Диалектика числа у Плотина» (1928 г.). Перевод, комментарии и исследование трактата Плотина «О числах» («Эннеада» VI.6) рассматриваются лишь в качестве примера деятельности А.Ф. Лосева как историка философии, который показывает глубину его историко-философской мысли.

Ключевые слова: Эннеады, философия числа, метафизика Плотина, диалектика Лосева, неоплатонизм, античная философия

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Aleksei Losev on Plotinus' treatise «On Numbers»

Abstract. This article considers the historical and philosophical activity of A.F. Losev – an original thinker of the twentieth century. The author's investigation focuses on Losev's work "The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus" (1928). The translation, commentary and analysis of Plotinus's treatise "On Numbers" ("Ennead" VI.6) are considered only as an example of A.F. Losev's activity as a historian of philosophy, which reveals the depth of his historical and philosophical thought.

Key words: Enneads, philosophy of number, Plotinus' metaphysics, Losev's dialectics, Neoplatonism, ancient philosophy

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Глубочайшие философы, особенно на вершинах своих размышлений, всегда тяготели к спекуляциям над числами.

П.А. Флоренский

The deepest philosophers, especially at the peak of their research, have always turned to speculation over numbers.

P.A. Florensky

One work in particular reveals Aleksei Losev's interest in Plotinus' philosophy of mathematics: it is his translation of and comment on Plotinus' "Treatise on Numbers" (as Porphyrius named *Ennead* VI.6), entitled *The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus* (1928).² This is also one of the so-called "Octateuch", i.e. the first eight works that Losev wrote and published during the 1920s.³ Although this book may belong to Losev's output as a historian of ancient philosophy rather than as a philosopher himself, it certainly reveals the way in which his academic scholarship is deeply connected to his own philosophical view. Through this "scholarly work", in fact, it is possible to grasp a number of interesting clues on many hidden metaphysical premises of Losev's philosophy.

When Losev translated and commented on Plotinus' *Treatise on Numbers*, he acknowledged he was facing something nobody in history had ever taken up seriously, as well as – he wrote – "the most difficult topic not only in the history of Greek, but also of world philosophy".⁴ Indeed, these words foreshadow a titanic task for Lo-

² A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina: Perevod i kommentarii traktata Plotina "O chislakh"* (The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus: A Translation and Commentary on Plotinus' "Treatise on Numbers"). Moscow: Izdanie Avtora, 1928. In this article I am using the following edition: A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina*, in *Mif, Chislo, Sushchnost'*. Moscow: Izd. Mysl', 1994, pp. 713–876. All translations from Russian in this article are mine.

³ These eight volumes were all published in Moscow between 1927 and 1930: *Antichnyi kosmos i sovremennaya nauka* (The Ancient Cosmos and Modern Science, 1927), *Filosofii imeni* (The Philosophy of Name, 1927), *Muzyka kak predmet logiki* (Music as a Subject of Logic, 1927), *Dialektika khudozhestvennoi formy* (The Dialectics of Artistic Form, 1927), *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus, 1928), *Kritika platonizma u Aristotelia* (Criticism of Platonism by Aristotle, 1929), *Ocherki antichnogo simvolizma i mifologii* (Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology, 1930), and *Dialektika mifa* (The Dialectics of Myth, 1930).

⁴ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (1994), cit., p. 714. This seemingly out-of-line statement – which Losev uses as a coup de théâtre in the opening sentence of the book – might find, at least partly, a confirmation in the difficult fate of Plotinus's *Treatise on Numbers*, whose reputation for being obscure and incomprehensible have always relegated it to a backseat in Neoplatonic scholarship. As Losev declared at the beginning of his book, he immediately realized in approaching Plotinus' text how few studies there have been over the centuries on this subject and that, to the best of his knowledge, he was the first in the world to *fully* deal with that topic (*ibidem*). The situation did not change much during the 20th century: some scholars discussed Plotinus' view of numbers within larger frameworks or in relation to other authors, but the first full study on it appeared only in 2009: S. Slaveva-Griffin, *Plotinus on Number*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. As Slaveva-Griffin observes in her book, Losev's study "is virtually unknown to the Western world" but it is, in fact, a highly valuable contribution to which

sev, which could only have an equally important purpose. The *Treatise on Numbers*, however, is not the first attempt that Losev made to translate Plotinus' work, since in 1924 he had already translated other parts of the *Enneads* that subsequently appeared in his works.⁵ But why, among many topics of Plotinus' work Losev could pick, did he specifically choose this "neglected" and "secondary"⁶ part of his philosophy for such a demanding and difficult work? Losev did not state clearly the reason for this choice. However, Plotinus represents a crucial figure for Losev already in the 1920s when he studied in depth the tradition that leads from Plato to medieval mysticism up to Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. In fact, in those years Losev wrote the book *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Dialectics*, in which Plotinus appears, and translated Cusa's treatise *On the mind*, where much attention is paid to the nature of number as the "prototype of everything."⁷

In many ways, translating the *Treatise on Numbers* was also "scholarly challenge", as if it were the desire to tackle something that no one had ever done before. At the beginning of his book, Losev reports a long and impressive survey of all the Russian and European scholars who had tried to approach such a difficult subject but who had mostly failed or given up, and concludes that he is the first to have taken up the matter seriously.⁸ Yet, more probably, Losev aimed at finding a reliable source on a very thorny problem – which the metaphysics of number undeniably is – that had systematically caused so much trouble to all ancient philosophers, from the early Pythagoreans to Plato and Aristotle up to Middle Age philosophers.

In many places in Losev's philological analysis on Plotinus' *Treatise on Numbers*, there is also room for his own views – starting from the very title, in which he, with a non-obvious choice, applies the term "dialectics" to Plotinus' investigation on

she referred "with great satisfaction" (ibid., p.11, note 35). Nevertheless, apart from this short praise, Slaveva-Griffin does not take into account Losev's study in her work.

⁵ Cf. Plotin, *Enneads*), in *Antologija mirovoi filosofii: v 4 t. T. 1, part I: Filosofija drevnosti i srednevekov'ia*. Translated by A.F. Losev Moscow: Mysl', 1969, pp. 538–554. Translations: I 3, 4–5; II 4, 2–8; III 8, 10; IV 8, 3.4.7.8.11; V 2,1.2; VI 9, 9. Furthermore, volume 6 of Losev's *History of Ancient Aesthetics* includes a number of translations of Plotinus' treatises "On the Beautiful" (I 6), "On Intelligent Beauty" (V 8), "On Eros" (III 5).

⁶ If one considers some of the main studies on Plotinus from the last few decades, his philosophy of mathematics is barely or not mentioned at all. As a notable example of this lack, in which the number is not even listed in the "Index of Names and Subjects", see: L.P. Gerson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. The gap was actually filled with Svetla Slaveva-Griffin's contribution in the new edition of the volume: S. Slaveva-Griffin, *Plotinus on Number*, in *The New Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*. Edited by L.P. Gerson and J. Wilberding. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022, pp. 136–162. However, in her volume on Plotinus' philosophy of numbers, Svetla Slaveva-Griffin believes – in the same way as Losev does – in the centrality of *Ennead* VI.6 for Plotinus' entire metaphysics (see: S. Slaveva-Griffin, *Plotinus on Number*, cit., pp. 3–8).

⁷ On the history of Losev's lost book *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Dialectics*, see: E.A. Takho-Godi, A.F. Losev o Nikolae Kuzanskom i srednevekovoi dialektike, in *Voprosy filosofii* 9 (2016), pp. 98–104.

⁸ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (1994), cit., pp. 715–717. This list includes notable scholars such as: K.H. Kirchner, A. Richter, D. Tiedemann, J. Barthélemy-Saint-Hilaire, J. Simon as well as the Russian scholars P.P. Blonsky and M.I. Vladislavlev.

the nature of number.⁹ With the quest for a solid theory of the number, he probably hoped to add valid support to his philosophical system and to the investigations he was already carrying out in the same period on name, on music, on logic, on art, and on mythology. In this sense, Plotinus – who was well-acquainted with Aristotle’s view on number theory and actually used it to defend Plato from the Stagirite philosopher’s attacks¹⁰ – also offered a tempting prospect for a sort of reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle (with such a reconciliation being firmly in favour of Plato, however). Moreover, Losev must have heard a lot regarding the ancient mathematics from his “mentor” Florensky. Along with Pythagoras, Plotinus is a crucial thinker for Florensky’s metaphysics: in his book *The Meaning of Idealism* (Smysl idealizma, 1915), he writes that Plotinus is «the unifier of ancient philosophy» as «all ancient culture converged toward Plotinus», including St. Paul and Christianity, and to a certain extent even medieval philosophy arose from his thought.¹¹ For Florensky, Plotinus (along with Porphyrius) is a pinnacle and a point of confluence of a whole ancient Pythagorean/Platonic thought on the theory of ideas affirming the fundamental antinomic nature of number. In an introduction entitled “The Pythagorean Numbers” (1922) and written for the never finished book *The Number as a Form* (Chislo kak forma), Florensky sets out the importance of the Pythagorean number for modern science.¹² Given Losev’s close acquaintance with Florensky, he was likely well aware of Florensky’s mathematical thought (as is also demonstrated by one of Losev’s later

⁹ See Losev’s programmatic statement at the beginning of his book: “My goal is to convey an in-depth analysis of the idea of number and how it relates to Plotinus’ dialectics in general” (ibid., p. 718).

¹⁰ This is, in fact, one of the main theses of Slaveva-Griffin’s book.

¹¹ Cf. P.A. Florensky, *Smysl idealizma* (The Meaning of Idealism), in *Sochineniia v chetyrekh tomakh*. Vol. III/2. Edited by Andronik (Trubachev), M.S. Trubacheva, and P.V. Florensky. Moscow: Mysl’, 2000, pp. 76–77 (see also the English edition of this text: P. Florensky, *The Meaning of Idealism*. Trans. by B. Jakim. Brooklyn, New York: Semantron Press, 2020, p. 16). This is one of the few explicit affirmations of this kind regarding Plotinus in the entire Florenskian oeuvre. The author generally tends to refer more to Plato rather than to Plotinus or to Neoplatonism as his main source: but, in fact, what he has in mind is more the latter than the former, as I demonstrated in a recent study (cf. A. Oppo, *Platone e Kant nell’epistemologia di Florenskij* [Plato and Kant in Florensky’s Epistemology], in S. Tagliagambe, M. Spano and A. Oppo (eds.), *Il pensiero polifonico di Pavel Florenskij*, Cagliari, PFTS University Press, 2018, pp. 383–413). With regard to Plotinus’ “hidden Christianity” and the “systematic comment” he would offer on St. Paul’s speeches, Florensky explicitly quotes a well-known 1903 study by François Picavet (F. Picavet, *Plotin et les Mystères d’Eleusis*, in *Revue de l’histoire des religions* (June–July 1903) (cf. P.A. Florensky, *Smysl idealizma*, cit., p. 77).

¹² “Absolutely and imperceptibly for itself, science returns to the Pythagorean idea of the expressibility of the whole by a whole number and, consequently, to its essential characteristic of the whole – its own number” (P.A. Florensky, *Pifagorovy chisla* [The Pythagorean Numbers], in *Sochineniia v chetyrekh tomakh*. Vol. II. Edited by Andronik (Trubachev), M.S. Trubacheva, and P.V. Florensky. Moscow: Mysl’, 1996, p. 635). For a general view on Florensky’s philosophy of number, see Vladislav Shaposhnikov’s excellent article: V.A. Shaposhnikov, *Kategoriia chisla v konkretnoi metafizike Pavla Florenskogo* (The Category of Number in Pavel Florensky’s Concrete Metaphysics), in *Chislo: sbornik statei*. Edited by A.N. Krichevets. Moscow: MAKS Press, 2009, pp. 341–367. The book *The Number as a Form* was edited by Viktor Troitsky and published for the first time in 2021: P.A. Florensky, *Chislo kak forma* (The Number as a Form). Edited by Viktor P. Troitsky. Moscow: MTsNMO, 2021.

recollections¹³): he also had a good knowledge of *Imaginaires in Geometry* (Mni-mosti v geometrii, 1922)¹⁴ – a text that not many had read in Russia when it first came out. Undoubtedly, Losev’s main conception as far as this subject is concerned originates from Florensky and it combines the mathematical philosophy of Pythagoreans, of Plato, and of Plotinus within a whole theory on cardinal numbers (or “substantial numbers”, to use Plato’s terms).

This is not the place to go further into Florensky’s thought, which certainly strongly influenced Losev’s view but nonetheless does not coincide with it.¹⁵ Suffice it to say that Plotinus certainly offers a good compromise and a suitable synthesis of the Pythagorean/Platonic tradition for what Florensky calls the “antinomy of number”, which Losev *translates* into the “dialectics of number”. In other words, all this is about the duality, contraposition and coexistence of the *monadikos arithmos* (monadic number), which simply “counts” and enumerates individual things, and the *ousiôdês arithmos* (substantial/ideal number), which is the activity (*energeia*) of substance and a power (*dynamis*) of being – a number that is eventually “itself by itself” (to use a Losevian expression). This argument of the contraposition and coexistence of the “two numbers” was by no means alien to Plato’s and Aristotle’s thought. But Plotinus treats it differently from them, as he had two exigencies that neither Plato nor Aristotle had.¹⁶ The first is to «regulate» on a metaphysical level a discontinuous view of reality in the totality of its hypostases. This fundamental discontinuity in Plotinus is marked by a substantial *leap* between a Supreme level of creation and a lower level of all that is created. The second exigency Plotinus had – which Plato partly manifested only in his *Timaeus* within a mathematical and cosmologic frame – was that of stressing the dynamic nature of number, i.e. the “vital dialectics” that expresses the life of the Spirit. What Plotinus adds to the already existing ancient philosophical view on number can then be summed up in two words: *antinomy* and *dialectics*. As one can easily deduce, the first aspect attracted Florensky’s interest in particular;

¹³ A.F. Losev, P.A. Florenskii po vospominaniiam Alekseia Loseva (P.A. Florensky in Aleksei Losev’s Memoires), in Pavel Florenskii: pro et contra. Edited by K.G. Isupov. St. Petersburg: RChGI, 2001, pp. 174–179.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁵ On Losev’s disagreement with Florensky see a chapter of his work: *Ocherki antichnogo simbolizma i mifologii* (Essays on Ancient Symbolism and Mythology), Moscow: Izd-e avtora, 1930, pp. 694–706. What Losev generally rejects of Florensky’s thought is the predominance of intuitionism and the magic over a logical and phenomenological knowledge (cf. *ibid.*, p. 703). Losev maintains that the nature of myth is above all of a “transcendental-phenomenological-dialectic” type, and, as he concludes, “no Florensky can change my mind about the uselessness for a philosopher of a purely logical point of view” (*ibid.*, p. 706). In some way, I would suggest that they also differ in their conception of the *symbol*, which is more inclusive in Losev with respect to the *discontinuous* view Florensky has of it.

¹⁶ On this complex and very specific subject even for specialists of ancient philosophy, see in particular: J.J. Cleary, Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato’s Theory of Form Numbers, in J. Dillon, B. O’Byrne, and F. O’Rourke (eds.), *Studies on Plato, Aristotle and Proclus. Collected Essays on Ancient Philosophy of J.J. Cleary*. Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 415–439; I. Bulmer-Thomas, Plato’s Theory of Number, in *The Classical Quarterly* 33/2 (1983), pp. 375–384; and the classic study by Pierre Hadot: *Plotin, Porphyre: Études néoplatoniciennes*, Paris: Les Belles Lettres 1999.

the second was decisive to Losev's philosophy. Along with Plotinus, both Florensky and Losev were actually concerned with a *vital view* of number as detached and at the same time intertwined with our historical and human reality.

The references Losev makes to Plotinus from the rest of his output¹⁷ as well as to number theory in ancient thought¹⁸ are not taken into consideration here. However, the analysis of the book *The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus* alone allows us to find several significant answers to understand the beginnings and foundations of Losev's philosophy of number, which would be available to readers only in his posthumous work *Chaos and Structure* (Khaos i struktura, 1997).¹⁹ Overall, Losev takes up the Pythagorean idea that "everything is number" as a model-regulator of all existence. In an interesting and broad analysis that connects modern mathematical conceptions with ancient thought, Viktor Troitsky summarizes Losev's philosophy of number as a synthesis between Aristotle and Plato, via Plotinus, in terms of an extension of the law of non-contradiction, which finally comes to include its own negation within a broader horizon of reality than the one considered by Aristotle.²⁰

In *The Dialectics of Number in Plotinus*, Losev focuses mainly on two aspects of Plotinus' theory of number, so that most of his explanation of Plotinus' text hinges on a clarification of these two notions. The first is the dialectics between the "two numbers" (i.e. the quantitative and qualitative number, on the one hand, and the substantial and monadic one, on the other), which, in an extended meaning, is also the dialectics between *eidos*/form and *meon*/unlimitedness. The second notion Losev focuses on in a particular way is the capacity of this dialectics in generating our true reality, far from any kind of psychologism or subjective idealism.

With regard to the first point, Losev agrees with Plotinus that "only such combination into one thing of its sameness and difference from the primary unicity

¹⁷ This is actually a task that would require a larger number of pages than this study can offer. However, from a number of comments taken from his other writings on ancient philosophy about the mathematical views of the later Neoplatonists (such as Iamblichus and Proclus), it is clear that Losev cannot easily come to terms with those views, whereas he considers Plotinus' position as a reliable yardstick for this matter. On this matter, see in particular volume 6 and 7 of Losev's *History of Ancient Aesthetics* in which he deals with Plotinus' and the thought of the other Neoplatonics: A.F. Losev, *Istoriia antichnoi estetiki* (v 8 tomakh) (History of Ancient Aesthetics [in 8 Volumes]). Vol. 6, Vol. 7. Khar'kov: Folio; Moscow: AST, 2000.

¹⁸ This work has already been carried out by Viktor P. Troitsky in the volume on Losev edited by Elena Takho-Godi: V.P. Troitsky, *Filosofiiia chisla A.F. Loseva* (A.F. Losev's Philosophy of Number), in Aleksei Fedorovich Losev. Edited by A.A. Takho-Godi and E.A. Takho-Godi. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2009, pp. 119–137. Troitsky is, to the best of my knowledge, the scholar who has most thoroughly addressed Losev's relationship with mathematics. Among his works concerning this aspect, see in particular: V.P. Troitsky, *Metamatematika Alekseia Loseva* (A. Losev's Metamathematics), in A.F. Losev, *Dialekticheskie osnovy matematiki* (Dialectical Foundations of Mathematics). Moscow: Academia, 2013, pp. 761–788; and V.P. Troitsky, *O smysle chisel* (On the Meaning of Numbers), in A.F. Losev, *Mif, Chislo, Sushchnost'*, cit., pp. 894–903.

¹⁹ A.F. Losev, *Khaos i struktura*. Moscow: Mysl', 1997. This book is a collection of a number of writings on logic and mathematics that Losev wrote around the 1930s and 1940s.

²⁰ See V.P. Troitsky, *Filosofiiia chisla A.F. Loseva*, cit.

[единичность] makes this thing conceivable”.²¹ The dialectics of the two principles works above all towards the creation of meaning and not towards the identification of the separate existence of some external reality: “Let us not forget that for Plotinus all these are only dialectic principles forming this or that purely dialectic connection. This is what Plotinus reminds us about putting aside the crude and naively metaphysical view”.²² Our reality – Losev seems to say, speaking on his own behalf, as he comments on Plotinus’ text – is *meaningful* precisely because of such a dialectics, and not because some “being” exists somewhere outside us. The meaning of reality is given by a dialectics of opposites that is generated by “movement” and the “becoming” that joins together principles (such as shape and shapelessness, limit and the unlimited) which otherwise could not be linked in any way. In Losev’s view, even the most transcendent and mystic aspects of Plotinus’ philosophy must be considered as firmly grounded in such dialectics.²³ Once again, that which for Florensky is an “antinomy” for Losev becomes a “dialectics”. The meeting point between the opposites, i.e. the *symbol*, which for Florensky is a discontinuous threshold that still “discontinuously” connects the two (always heterogeneous) worlds,²⁴ for Losev is a third element (the becoming) that puts the two opposites to work in a single process that is the meaning of our world. But *before* and *inside* all this – actually for both Florensky and Losev – there is the number, as number is the origin of any process.

The second point that Losev highlights about Plotinus’ argumentation is, in fact, the role of number in the process of reality. In the same way as for Plato (Losev quotes Plato’s *Parmenides* here), also in Plotinus’ view “it becomes clear that the number is not something accidental, but it is an indispensable definition of the substance itself”.²⁵ It does exist, as a *hypostasis*, which is an opposite view with respect to a “naïve empiricism”.²⁶ For Losev “it is absolutely necessary to identify a difference between the *being* and the *quality* in a substance, so that *we can talk about essential differences and qualitative differences*, which are semantic differences on the one hand and material differences on the other hand [...] The former “meanings” [смыслы], which *create the substance* and thus are absolutely essential, while the latter are just the derivative phenomena of the former. The former are *pure substance* while the latter are its *affection*”.²⁷ And further still: “The true substance is the *eidos* and *eidos is the meaning*

²¹ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (1994), cit., p. 722.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 733.

²³ Not unlike what Losev says, in his excellent study on the logic of Neoplatonism A.C. Lloyd considers Plotinus’ dialectics not merely as an “instrument” but as “the most valuable part of philosophy”, since Plotinus’ mysticism itself “would lose its philosophical interest were it not for the logical structure” (A.C. Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p. 166).

²⁴ Cf. on this: A. Oppo, *Conceptualising Discontinuity*. Pavel Florenskii’s *Preryvnost’* as a Universal Paradigm of Knowledge, in *Russian Literature* 130 (2022), pp. 69–93.

²⁵ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (1994), cit., p. 736.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 737 (Losev’s emphases). For a thorough analysis on the status of “quality” in Plotinus’ metaphysics, see the recent work: R. Chiaradonna, *Ontology in Early Neoplatonism: Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023, pp. 9–28.

(*logos*)”.²⁸ Then, he continues: “The pure meaning, inherent in this energy, takes possession of its specific element to produce the other-being which is the beginning of a *new* qualitiveness [окачествованность], of some trace, and of some shadow and reflection of a purely eidetic quality. That is why the pure *eidos* is the *prototype* of the other-being quality, and the latter is the *accident* of the *eidos*. Being *semantically* identical, they are absolutely different in terms of the *substrate*: the *eidos* can never become the quality and the quality cannot become the *eidos*”.²⁹

Significantly, Losev concludes his argumentation in this way: “The number as meaning is conceivable in itself. The number as a quality is only conceivable as meaningful from the side of number as meaning”.³⁰ In this regard, Losev observes: “Plotinus here is a sharp opponent of any spiritual and naturalistic metaphysics, rejecting every slightest hint of psychologism. His arguments are as always simple but irrefutable”.³¹ At this point, Losev states the real nature of the problem: “What does this argument mean and what is its strength? Plotinus sets here the main objection to any psychologism. In fact, let us ask ourselves if there is anything subjective and mental in the very idea of number. Any reasonable person should say: there is not. If I express some kind of mathematical assertion – for example, $a + b = c$ – have I just expressed any aspect of my psychic life, e.g. that I am hungry, happy, smart, stupid, or that I have dark or blonde hair, have or do not have a wife and children etc.? Of course, I have not. This assertion only states the eternal and perfectly mental, intelligible nature of the number, and nothing more”.³²

For Plotinus, just as for Losev, the existence of intelligible/substantial numbers is the first and most decisive proof against subjectivism and even against any subjective idealism. From the substantial number – whose existence in itself is irrefutable both for subjectivism and subjective idealism – it derives, by analogy and by means of an intrinsic adherence of number to any being, the objective existence of a “meaningful concept”. As Losev writes: “Let us assume that all our notions are a mere product of our psyche and that, objectively, nothing corresponds to them. Let us ask then: how did you know that concepts are something subjective? After all, in your opinion, there is nothing objective at all. Can the subjective then be subjective? In this case, it is the only one that exists and the category of objectivity or subjectivity could not be applied to it. *Then, there is no non-existence*”.³³

Leaving aside the complexity and technicality of many parts of this matter – a difficulty that Losev himself acknowledges – the question of the philosophical nature of number, as is posed in this Pythagorean/Platonic way and brilliantly taken up again by Plotinus, leads to a major and decisive question about a common metaphysical basis for human knowledge, which in turn raises the issues of “sameness” and

²⁸ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (1994), cit., p. 738 (Losev’s emphases).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 738.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 739.

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 740. Losev’s emphasis.

“identity”.³⁴ For Plotinus, as Losev explains, this paradoxical antithesis of the two numbers, i.e. the one that has meaning and exists in itself (the one, or substantial number) and the one that counts the “things” of the world (the other, matter, or monadic number), demonstrates the existence unequivocal of a third principle, that is, of the energy that makes them coexist in our reality, since they depend on each other.³⁵ This third and new principle, for Losev, is “their unity, their inner mutual penetration and, so to speak, a new indivisible wholeness”.³⁶ This principle, in fact, which is neither “one” nor “multiplicity” but the union of them, is the *number*, i.e. the energy of the existing beings, or the process and method of such unification. In Losev’s words, it is “the intelligible “how” of the construction of meaning”.³⁷ The latter happens through the generations of the five Platonic *megista gene* of the pure intellect: *existence, rest, movement, identity and difference*. Finally, the one, the meon (the matter), and the number are the three main principles of the existence. But the number regulates all the process by virtue of its energy. For Plotinus, as Losev puts it, the number has a very high place, which neither physical nor psychic nor intelligible. As he says: “It is almost the One itself. It is in the middle between the One and the Intellect”.³⁸ But to understand the nature of number even more deeply, which is symbolic but even more mythical, for Losev it is necessary to read Proclus, who, as he states, is on the same line as Plotinus on this point. With the mention of Proclus, Losev closes his analysis of the number in Plotinus and refers to his other publications on the culture of the ancient world, in particular *The Ancient Cosmos and Modern Science* (1927).

In conclusion, Losev’s interest in Plotinus’ *Treatise on Numbers* demonstrates at least two things. The first is the unequivocal influence of the Neo-Platonic metaphysics in his thought. This is only partially evident, since in the 20th century the tendency to reduce all Losev’s questions to Hegelian or Husserlian phenomenological motifs was often found in critical interpretations of his thought.³⁹ The second is that such an interest may define the specific nature of his dialectics, which has an original metaphysical

³⁴ Cf. this passage: “It seems most clear for non-philosophers to think this way. There are things I can count. If I count them, I use the concept of number and quantity. If I do not count them, where are the numbers? They do not exist. Take away the things, and the number will disappear. Start counting and the number becomes available. No, that means there is no number without things. This is the opinion which Plotinus rejects. He reasons like this. Let “one man” be the same as simply “man”. Then “one bull” is the same as simply “bull”; “one horse” is the same as “horse” simply. But what do a man, a bull, a horse, a nut, a tree, a city, the sun, a kilometer, etc. have in common?” (ibid., p. 745).

³⁵ On this crucial point concerning the nature of number, Losev comments in particular on *Enneads* VI, 6, 9, which is in fact a key passage in Plotinus’ argument (See Plotinus, *Ennead VI. 6–9*. Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1988, pp. 33–37).

³⁶ A.F. Losev, *Dialektika chisla u Plotina* (1994), cit., p. p. 799.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 807.

³⁹ Cf. from example N.O. Lossky, *History of Russian Philosophy*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1952, p. 292. In this regard, Vladimir Marchenkov pointed out the importance of adding, within the fundamental sources of Losev’s thought, an original Platonic and Byzantine frame to Hegel and to Husserlian phenomenology (cf. V. Marchenkov, *Aleksei Losev and His Theory of Myth*, in A. Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*. Trans. by V. Marchenkov. New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 16).

basis (as his interest in Plotinus and the use of his categories would demonstrate), in which “metaphysics” does not mean a “transcendent being” but, in this case, a “numeric structure of meaning”. In this regard, in my view, the same pattern for how Losev reads the dialectic relationship of the qualitative and quantitative number would provide a useful frame to understand the development of his subsequent dialectics – first of all in his famous work *The Dialectics of Myth*, which he published shortly afterwards (1930). Although the demonstration of the presence of Plotinian themes in that work does not come within the scope of this article, it is likely that the balance of this dialectics of number could work, at a hidden and deeper level, as a basis and support for his explanations of myth and of history, in the same way as for Plotinus the metaphysics of number works “from behind the scenes” in the generation of beings in his cosmology. I am sure that taking such a metaphysical basis into account would help give a better understanding of Losev’s dialectics, and would also avoid any purely historical or phenomenological reduction of it. As emerges from Losev’s analysis, Plotinus’ “dialectics of number” lies indeed at the heart of any other dialectics. It is hard to say whether this is really the “most difficult topic” in the history of world philosophy, as Losev stated. But it is highly significant that Losev believed this, since it is probably the most crucial point for his own philosophical system.

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Реферат

Когда А.Ф. Лосев перевел и прокомментировал трактат Плотина «О числах» («Эннеада» VI.6), он решил заняться, по его собственным словам, «самым трудным предметом в истории философии». По мнению Лосева, никто до середины 1920-х годов серьезно не относился к этому тексту. В своем анализе он обнаруживает, что учение Плотина о числах позволяет непосредственно прийти к самой сути диалектики греческого философа. Предлагая комментарий к общему смыслу книги Лосева «Диалектика числа у Плотина» (1928 г.), в данной статье мы отмечаем принятие Лосевым, вероятно, под влиянием идей П.А. Флоренского, метафизики Плотина как своей собственной метафизики.

В начале своей книги Лосев приводит длинный и впечатляющий обзор сочинений русских и европейских ученых, которые пытались подойти к такому сложному вопросу, касающемуся взглядов Плотина на числа, но по большей части потерпели неудачу, и заключает, что он первый, кто серьезно взялся за этот вопрос. Однако, что более вероятно, Лосев стремился найти надежный источник по очень сложной проблеме (коей, несомненно, является метафизика числа), которая систематически доставляла столько хлопот всем древним философам, от ранних пифагорейцев до Платона и Аристотеля, вплоть до философов Средневековья.

В своем филологическом анализе трактата Плотина «О числах» Лосев высказывает и свои собственные взгляды на диалектику чисел, начиная с самого названия, в котором он использует термин «диалектика» к исследованию Плотина о природе чисел. В поисках основательной теории числа он, вероятно, надеялся найти действительную поддержку своей философской системе и исследованиям, которые он проводил в тот же период в области имени, музыки, логики, искусства и мифологии. В этом смысле Плотин, который был хорошо знаком с взглядами Аристотеля на теорию чисел и использовал их для защиты Платона от нападок Стагирита, также предлагал заманчивую перспективу своего рода примирения Платона и Аристотеля (причём такое примирение было именно в пользу Платона).

Лосев был хорошо знаком с математической мыслью Флоренского. Он также хорошо знал «Мнимости в геометрии» (1922 г.) – текст, который мало кто читал в России, когда он впервые был опубликован. Несомненно, основная концепция Лосева по этому вопросу исходит от Флоренского и объединяет математическую философию Пифагора, Платона и Плотина в единую теорию кардинальных чисел (или «субстанциальных чисел», выражаясь языком Платона). Плотин предлагает хороший компромисс и подходящий синтез пифагорейско-платоновской традиции для того, что Флоренский называет «антиномией числа», а Лосев переводит в «диалектику числа». Все это о двойственности, противопоставлении и сосуществовании монадического числа

(*monadikos arithmos*), которое просто «считает» и перечисляет отдельные вещи, и субстанционального/идеального числа (*ousiôdês arithmos*), которое есть активность (*energeia*) субстанции и сила (*dynamis*) бытия, – число, которое в конечном итоге «само по себе» (по выражению Лосева).

Анализ книги Лосева «Диалектика числа у Плотина» позволяет определить несколько существенных моментов, необходимых для понимания истоков и основ философии числа Лосева, которые будут доступны читателям только в его посмертном труде «Хаос и структура» (1997 г.). В целом Лосев принимает пифагорейскую идею о том, что «все есть число», как модель-регулятор всего существования.

В заключение следует отметить, что интерес Лосева к трактату Плотина «О числах» демонстрирует как минимум две вещи. Во-первых, это однозначное влияние неоплатонической метафизики на его мысль. Во-вторых, такой интерес может определить специфическую природу его диалектики, имеющей первоначальную метафизическую основу, в которой «метафизика» означает не «трансцендентное существо», а в данном случае – «числовую структуру значения». В этом смысле та же самая модель прочтения Лосевым диалектических отношений качественного и количественного числа могла бы стать полезной основой для понимания развития его последующей диалектики – прежде всего в своей знаменитой работе «Диалектика мифа» (1930 г.).