

ON WHAT CANNOT BE SAID

*Apophatic Discourses
in Philosophy, Religion, Literature,
and the Arts*

VOLUME 1. CLASSIC FORMULATIONS

Edited with Theoretical and Critical Essays by

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PREFACE

Apophasis as a Genre of Discourse

This book brings into comparison some of the most enduringly significant efforts within Western culture to probe the limits of language—and perhaps to exceed them. All tend to delineate regions of inviolable silence. A certain core of readings is made up of classic expressions of negative theology—the denial of all descriptions and attributes as predicated of God. For negative theologies, it is possible to say only what God is *not*. These attempts to devise and, at the same time, disqualify ways of talking about God as an ultimate reality, or rather ultra-reality, beyond the reach of language, are juxtaposed to (and interpenetrate with) philosophical meditations that exhibit infirmities endemic to language in its endeavor to comprehend and express all that is together with the grounds of all that is. Such philosophical reflections expose necessary failures of Logos that leave it gaping open toward what it cannot say. Likewise, poetry and poetics of the ineffable drive language into impasses, stretching its expressive powers to their furthest limits—and sometimes even beyond.

All these discourses are in various ways languages for what cannot be said—languages that cancel, interrupt, or undo discourse, languages that operate, paradoxically, by annulling or *unsaying* themselves. They manage to intimate or enact, by stumbling, stuttering, and becoming dumb—sometimes with uncanny eloquence—what they cannot as such say. The traditional term for this sort of self-negating discourse—as well as for the condition of no more discourse at all, upon which it converges—is “apophasis.” In fact, a total cessation of discourse may be considered the purest meaning of the term, but in practice this state is approachable only through some deficient mode of *discourse* that attenuates and takes back or cancels itself out. Thus apophasis can actually be apprehended only in discourse—in language insofar as it negates itself and tends to disappear as language. The many different sorts of discourses that do this may be considered together generically as “apophatic discourse.”

In its original employment, “apophasis” is simply the Greek word for “negation.” It is used by Plato and Aristotle to mean a negative proposition, a denial. Neoplatonists, followed by monotheistic writers, extend the term to

mean the negation of speech vis-à-vis what exceeds all possibilities of expression whatsoever: for them, apophatic discourses consist in words that negate themselves in order to evoke what is beyond words—and indeed beyond the limits of language altogether. The word “apophasis” thus eventually takes on a stronger sense of negation, not just of the content of specific propositions, but of language and expression per se. Since ancient times, therefore, and again as revived in contemporary discourse, the tag “apophasis,” beyond signifying logical negation, also carries a more potent, theological sense of negation that is informed ultimately by the divine transcendence: it indicates an utter incapacity of language to grasp what infinitely exceeds it, a predicament of being surpassed irremediably by what it cannot say. “Apophasis” reads etymologically, moreover, as “away from speech” or “saying *away*” (*apo*, “from” or “away from”; *phasis*, “assertion,” from *phemi*, “assert” or “say”), and this points in the direction of *unsaying* and ultimately of silence as virtualities of language that tend to underlie and subvert any discursively articulable meaning.

The ultimate apophatic expression is silence, a silence that stretches in tension toward . . . what cannot be said. Only this negation of saying by silence “says” . . . what cannot be said. Nevertheless, apophasis constitutes a paradoxically rich and various genre of discourse. The methods and modes of silence are legion, and numerous new forms of expression of it burst forth in almost every period of cultural history. The irrepressible impulse to “speak” essential silence is a constant (or close to a constant) of human experience confronted ever anew with what surpasses saying. While what is experienced remains inaccessible to speech, there is no limit to what can be said about—or rather from within and as a testimonial to—this experience which, nevertheless, in itself cannot be described except as experience of . . . what cannot be said.

For apophatic thinking, before and behind anything that language is saying, there is something that it is not saying and perhaps cannot say, something that nevertheless bears decisively on any possibilities whatsoever of saying and of making sense. In fact, only linguistically is this “beyond” of language discernible at all. Language must unsay or annul itself in order to let this unsayable something, which is nothing, no *thing* at any rate, somehow register in its very evasion of all attempts to say it. Only the *unsaying* of language can “say” what cannot be said. This predicament is commonly encountered at the limits of linguistic expression, but certain interpretations emphasize, or at least illuminate, these limits as operative in the form of enabling conditions throughout the whole range of linguistic expression. In this way, the encounter with apophasis becomes pervasive and ineluctable. We begin to perceive the ubiquitous presence of the unsayable in all our saying. All that is said,

at least indirectly and implicitly, testifies to something else that is not said and perhaps *cannot* be said. This state of affairs motivates the sort of freely ranging study that the book in hand undertakes.

The discovery of unsayability and of its correlative languages of “unsaying”—leading to an appreciation of gaps, glitches, and impassés as constitutive of the sense of texts—is part and parcel of a major intellectual revolution that has been underway now for several decades and, in fact, if only somewhat more diffusely, for at least a century. But just as important is the discovery of long-standing precedents for this revolution in reading. The exigency of bringing out what all discourse necessarily leaves unsaid but which, nevertheless, by its very elusiveness, teases or discomfits discourse, features conspicuously and more or less consciously in a loosely defined lineage of writers across the entire trajectory of the Western intellectual tradition. All produce distinctive languages that, in various ways, withdraw and efface themselves. On this basis, it is possible to define attempts to deal with the unsayable as a sort of cross-disciplinary genre spanning a great variety of periods and regions even within just Western culture. Of course this, like all genre definitions, and perhaps more so than others, can be no more than heuristic. In fact, as a condition of sense for all genres, or a discourse indirectly articulating the silence from which any generic discourse needs to set itself off in order to be perceptible as such, apophasis is more like a genre of genres in general.

Apophasis is not itself a traditional genre or mode or discipline. By its elusive nature it has remained hitherto marginal to all systematic rhetorics of the human sciences. Only the obsessions of our contemporary culture have produced the need—until quite recently mostly latent—to delineate apophasis as a distinct corpus of literature. Indeed, apophasis has become—and is still becoming—a major topic in all the disciplines of the humanities, with philosophy, religion, literature, and criticism of various arts in the lead. An impressive range of contemporary thinkers, authors, and artists distinguish themselves as drawing from and transforming traditional apophatic currents in remarkable new ways. This situation renders imperative the present attempt to assemble writings drawn from widely divergent cultural and historical contexts and from different disciplines, but all bearing fundamentally upon, and originating in, the experience of the unsayable, of what resists every effort of speech to articulate it.

This project, with its assemblage of seminal texts, aims to sketch some historical parameters, and so to give a certain contour to a topic that all too easily can become nebulous and diffuse for lack of any general map of the field such as the present volume attempts to provide. Of course, such a map cannot but

be porous and provisional. It is nonetheless necessary, given the overwhelming perennial interest of this topic and the paucity of previous attempts to try and survey it as a whole. Until recently we have had only the vaguest idea of how various discourses of apophasis fit together and little conception of the historical parabola of this problematic (even in the West alone). We are now in the throes of an explosive proliferation of studies in all areas based on variously apophatic paradigms of the production and interpretation of texts. Although we may fail to realize it, due to the widely disparate provenance of discussions of what cannot be said, the most evasive of all topics, its ineluctable and ubiquitous presence at the heart of our creative and critical endeavors across disciplines is breaking ever more conspicuously into view.

Just as language is fundamental to all possibilities of experience, the limits of language, where the unsayable is encountered, are implicit in and impinge upon every utterance in its very possibility of being uttered. I have selected discourses that concentrate on the unsayable and generate discourse deliberately out of this experience rather than simply those discourses (really all discourses) that are in effect touched or structured by what they cannot say. There is in each of the readings presented here some more or less explicit meditation on impasses to articulation as the generative source of the discourse itself. There have been many different kinds of positionings vis-à-vis the unsayable, and I want to give a sense of the range of responses that have developed. The anthology attempts to illustrate the principal modes that have characterized apophatic discourse by selecting from among its most historically influential and intellectually challenging instantiations.

An enormous spectrum of authors are candidates for inclusion, since apophasis in the sense defined here is clearly a fundamental feature of their work. Perhaps few, if any, great writers or artists, in whatever genre or discipline or form, do not at some point reach the limits of the possibilities of their linguistic or expressive means. An apophatic border or lining can be discerned, even if it is not rendered explicit, in perhaps any significant discourse and in any expressive medium whatsoever. If, indeed, all discourses, at least covertly, pivot on what they cannot say, in the end no author could be absolutely excluded from candidacy. Consequently, I have attempted to determine which discourses most directly and provocatively avow, or illuminate, this inescapable predicament of speech and script. Of course, one can always find an unexpressed negation, a recursive self-questioning, lurking in every expressed affirmation. So whether any given discourse is adjudged apophatic or not depends on how it is read. The authors selected here are ones for whom I believe the unsayable demonstrably becomes an indispensable originating source of their writing or creative expression.

I have, furthermore, chosen not only from among those writers for whom the unsayable is programmatically implicated in everything they say, but also from those who have an emblematic value as writers who most bend our attention in this direction. Representing its many avatars, from Greek to Latin, from Hebrew to Arabic, from German and Spanish to French and American (to selectively indicate just a few major regions corresponding to pivotal phases of this history), these authors have opened up for consideration the field of apophasis—which is generally overlooked, neglected, and even suppressed—as fundamental to the discourses of Western culture. Of course, apophatic modes of discourse are also present and pertinent in Eastern cultural traditions. Thus a companion volume of selections beginning with Hindu, Buddhist, and Tao sources and following the history of their inspiration and effects through modern literatures would be an auspicious complement to the present effort.¹

One outstanding problem is to situate apophasis with relation to mysticism. Saints and mystics describe their ultimate experience consistently in terms of its ineffability. Mystic writers press language to the limits and expose its utter inadequacy in order to direct readers' gazes beyond language toward some "deeper," "greater," "other" "reality" or "experience" of the "divine" (all, naturally, inadequate expressions). Mystic discourse, in cancelling itself out as discourse by "double propositions," each unsaying the one before it in a "linguistic regress" (Michael Sells) or in oxymorons and "cleft units" (Michel de Certeau), is meant to suggest this "beyond" of language.² Examples are to be found everywhere in mystical literature.³ Many mystics, nevertheless, keep apophasis more at the outer limit than at the source and center of their experience—so far as what they say is concerned. And we cannot definitively judge what they do not say, though this admittedly is all-important. Mysticism presents one of the avenues followed by apophasis, though to say by not saying, or not to say by saying, are not necessarily mystical operations and can even be given an anti-mystical turn, especially by modern writers like Samuel Beckett and Georges Bataille.

1. Among recent studies taking a cross-cultural approach to apophatic traditions are J. P. Williams, *Denying Divinity: Apophasis in the Patristic Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *Ineffability: The Failure of Words in Philosophy and Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

2. Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Michel de Certeau, *La fable mystique 1: XVIe et XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

3. I particularly regret the omission of Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, Book V, as well as the rapsodies on ineffability in Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs (for example, *In cantica* 41).

To return once more now to our central problematic, “what cannot be said” tends by its nature to remain imperceptible, and apophasis, perhaps because it subtends all genres, has rarely been identified as a distinct genre of discourse. This modified form of anthology interprets classic and contemporary texts in order to construct apophasis as a quasi-genre (or genre of genres) and theorize its modes. It is an anthology-cum-history-and-theory that proposes an original outlook on what cannot be said through reflecting on a selection of ground-breaking texts in the apophatic vein. The texts are often recognized classics in various fields, though their cohering together as a genre or mode of discourse has not generally been evident. Placed in the interpretive framework of this book, these texts—and along with them large areas of discourse—may for the first time be fully disclosed as concerned essentially with what cannot be said. The preface has attempted to discern and define theoretically such a field of discourse. A historical introduction outlines its evolution, and interpretive essays introducing each selection trace ways in which the selected texts and authors are linked by common concerns and conceptions, rhetorical strategies, speculative insights, and spiritual or characterological affinities. These characteristics, however, are prone to flip over into their opposites, since diametrically opposed significances in this domain are only alternative expedients for gesturing beyond the range of significant discourse altogether. Accordingly, no systematic typology of apophatic discourses has been ventured.

Instead, I have invented groupings of selections that highlight patterns of connection. I do not propose them as anything more than heuristic constructs. Nevertheless, it seems historiographically as well as pedagogically helpful to recognize new paradigms that emerge into clarity and prominence with certain authors, who are then followed in their basic assumptions by various constellations of consolidators, developers, revisers, and rebels. I do not mean to suggest that there are any neat divisions into discrete epochs, but I prefer not to completely erase all sense of historical succession—or regression—of apophatic modes and models.

This project has required me to learn the art of making a mosaic. I have had to play with the pieces until they somehow fit together, selecting them from a pile of often incongruent possibilities. Some fit on some sides, at certain angles, and others on other sides, in particular positions. In the end, some kind of image was framed of this most imageless of visions. It could then reflect light upon the whole composition and beyond it onto the stratified landscape of the traditions from which these pieces were crazily cut.

A problem as pervasive as that of “what cannot be said” in Western tradition can best be treated at the intersection between disciplines, in particular,

between philosophy, theology, literature, and the arts. Furthermore, this problem is not the property of any one national tradition, nor is it peculiar to any historical period; it demands the wide-ranging comparative treatment that this project undertakes. Bringing together these different disciplinary and cultural backgrounds is part of a design to catalyze open dialogue on “what cannot be said” lurking as an ineluctable provocation perhaps in all discourses.

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The idea for this anthology and critical-theoretical project emerged from a number of graduate seminars in comparative literature at Vanderbilt University beginning in the late 1990s. Seminars on “The Unnameable and the Sublime” (team-taught with Marc Froment-Meurice), “On What Cannot Be Said,” “Hegel and the French Connection,” “Rhetorics of Silence: Mystical Literature from Plotinus to John of the Cross,” and “The Writing of Silence in the Post-Holocaust Poetry of Paul Celan and Edmond Jabès” provided the threshing-floor on which many of these texts were tested and winnowed. Their potential for answering to the problematic of the unsayable was sounded out in dialogue with the participants in these seminars, comprising two or three generations of graduate students in comparative literature, philosophy, religious studies, French, German, Spanish, and occasionally other disciplines as well. This is the anonymous work out of which this project developed and to which it remains indebted.

I proposed the seminars because my research interests had led me in this direction. After publishing *Dante’s Interpretive Journey* in 1996, it was clear to me that I needed to write a sequel on the Ineffable in the *Paradiso*. The culminating segment of Dante’s poetic odyssey pushes the possibilities of interpretation in poetic language to, and even beyond, their limit: it opens up the question of the beyond of interpretation and the beyond of language, precisely *l’ineffabile*. In short, I have come to this topic out of a prolonged, concentrated grappling with the problem of apophasis at the heart of my own scholarly specialization—and at the price of a temporary suspension of my project on ineffability in the *Paradiso*.

To a greater extent than can be said, I picked up innumerable suggestions from many others along the way. Leonardo Distaso and Azucena García-Marcos participated in the process of thinking through the project with me at different stages of its formation and development. I am also mindful of specific contributions or assistance from a number of friends and

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NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

In quoting foreign language texts, I generally prefer to translate quotations directly from the originals, even where English translations exist; unless specific English language editions are cited, the translations are my own. The original language editions cited in my introductions are ones that I have used in the preparation of each volume, not necessarily those from which the translators have worked.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Lineaments of Apophasis

I

Apophatic discourse, that is, language which negates and unsays itself, is ubiquitous. Particularly our contemporary culture has become saturated and more and more obsessed with it. “Apophasis,” the Greek word for “negation,” may be viewed as inherent in the phenomenon of discourse per se. In fact, a word *is not* what it names or signifies—indeed, to function significantly as word, it *cannot* simply be what it means—and this tacit negation, accordingly, may be found lurking covertly in every word that is uttered. There is increasingly a tendency today to recognize an implicit presence of the unuttered and even the unutterable as a necessary presupposition underlying every utterance. This secret, silent matrix of the unmanifest and inexpressible has, to an extent, eluded explicit theorization throughout the history of Western culture, for this culture has been, by and large, subject to the domination of the Logos—the word, which manifests and speaks beings. This unspoken, unmanifest secretly, almost imperceptibly, escapes the Logos, which tends consequently to deny and exclude it even as a possibility. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern currents of thought in every age that adhere to a wordless abyss or recess of speech that logical discourse cannot reach. Indeed, it is possible to identify a series of classic texts that constitute touchstones for what, after all, forms a loosely coherent tradition of discourse in the apophatic vein—discourse that is more or less explicitly and deliberately about what cannot be said.

The first systematic developments of apophatic thought are found within the ambit of Neoplatonic philosophy. Specifically, the doctrine of the so-called *via negativa* emerges as a way to render possible a discourse about transcendent realities, especially “the One,” for which all positive expressions are found to be inadequate. It is possible to say only what the One is not, hence to talk about it only by negations. The seminal text for this universe of discourse and speculation is Plato’s *Parmenides* and in particular its first two hypotheses, namely, “If the One is One . . .” and “If the One is . . .” The problem is that if the One *is*, it cannot be one, for *being* adds something to it, and as a result it is

no longer perfectly and simply one. If, conversely, the One is strictly One, then it cannot *be*, since, again, to be would add something to the One pure and simple. In fact, even just to say “One” is to go wrong, since this is already to make the One into two—itsself and its name. By such reasoning, we are landed in a situation of utter unutterability.

This logical unsayability of the One is interpreted in an ontological sense and developed into a full-fledged metaphysics by Plotinus. Plotinus’s metaphysical transmogrification of Plato’s aporetic logic of the One becomes the search for a mystical experience of the One, that is, of oneness and of union with the supreme principle in silence. This unity can be achieved only by negating all finite determinations and stripping away (*aphairesis*) everything that is articulable and sayable. This line of Greek negative theology, pursued following Plotinus by the Neoplatonic school, reaches a certain culmination in Proclus. Proclus elaborates the negative way into a full-scale mystagogy of the One, turning it into an object of cultic worship. He seems to have practiced incantatory evocations of the One, using the formulas of Plato’s *Parmenides* as if it were a divinely inspired text.

The whole Neoplatonic outlook, with its ardent devotion to the One as ineffable and unique “principle” of all, is exquisitely and lyrically expressed in a hymn very possibly authored by Proclus himself—who produced metaphysical poetry and hymns on a daily, or rather nightly, basis most of his life, according to Marinus, his biographer and immediate successor as head of the Academy at Athens.¹ It appears in the guise of an overture at the beginning of this volume.² Regardless of whether Proclus actually penned it, the hymn admirably embodies his conception of and sentiment toward “the one,” which is equally “not one.” In his *Commentarium in Parmenidem*, Proclus speaks pre-

1. Marinus’s “Life of Proclus” can be read in a translation by the eminent English Platonist Thomas Taylor (1758–1835), chief transmitter of Platonism to Romantics from Shelley to Emerson, in *Essays and Fragments of Proclus the Platonic Successor* (Somerset, UK: Prometheus Trust, 1999), pp. 217–244.

2. The attribution to Proclus goes back to Albert Jahn, *Eclogae e Proclo de philosophia chaldaica sive de doctrina oraculorum chaldaicorum. Nunc primum ed. et commentatus est A. J. Accedit hymnus in deum platonius uulgo S. Gregorio Nazianzeno adscriptus, nunc Proclo Platónico uindicatus* (Halle a.S.: Pfeffer, 1891), pp. 49–77. Werner Beierwaltes, *Platonismus im Christentum* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1998), pp. 55–56, accepts this attribution, since the hymn’s citation by non-Christian authors such as Ammonios Hermieu (ca. 445–517) and Olympiodoros (second half of the sixth century) argues for a pagan provenance, whereas Saffrey, in Proclus, *Hymnes et prières*, finds its poetry not up to Proclus’s standard and considers it more likely the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

cisely of “raising up to the One a single theological hymn by means of all these negations” (VII, 1191).

In his commentary on the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, Proclus concludes that the One is beyond all definition and description, and therewith exposes the utter inefficacy of the Logos to articulate the ultimate principle of reality. This conclusion sums up Neoplatonic and ancient Greek thought generally. It was to be embraced programmatically by Damascius, Proclus’s student, who was the head of the Academy at Athens when it was definitively closed by Emperor Justinian in A.D. 529. Thus the era opened at the dawn of Greek philosophy by Parmenides’s enthusiasm for the Logos as capable of articulating and revealing all things—expressed emblematically in the exhortation of fragment 7, “Judge by reason (λόγος)” —concludes in silence. This completes a first cycle of Western rational thought, which leads from the confident cultivation of the word to the ultimate apophysis of silence.³

Plotinus’s—and consequently the Neoplatonists’—metaphysical interpretation of the *Parmenides* has been said to be a “complete misunderstanding.”⁴ Indeed, some such judgment has enjoyed wide consensus among scholars of the dialogue. For example, W. C. K. Guthrie writes, “But that the dry antithetical arguments of the *Parmenides* about the One . . . should have been seen as an exposition of the sublimest truths of theology, is surely one of the oddest turns in the history of thought. Yet the Neoplatonists claimed to see in the One their own highest, ineffable and unknowable God, and as such it passed into medieval and later Christianity.”⁵ The Plotinian interpretation is probably best viewed as a “misprision” that opens Plato’s text toward a new horizon of thought. In any case, Plotinus’s reading of the dialogue spawned a tradition of commentaries on the hypotheses of the second part of the *Parmenides* that came to form a flourishing genre of philosophical thinking in its own right. Interpretation of the *Parmenides* became a channel for original speculation on the One and its ineffable transcendence in the Neoplatonic school throughout the entire course of development.⁶

3. This arc of development of Greek thought is lucidly traced by Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 1, *The Rise and Fall of Logos* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986).

4. E. R. Dodds, “The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic One,” *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 129–142; citation, p. 134.

5. W. C. K. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 33–34.

6. For readings of Neoplatonism as originating in and revolving entirely around the interpretation of the hypotheses of the second part of the *Parmenides*, see Jean Trouillard, “Le ‘Parménide’ de Platon et son Interprétation Néoplatonicienne,” in *Études*

This speculation is of the greatest significance, for it not only effects a metaphysical transmogrification of the Platonic source text but also reframes metaphysics, exposing its ground, or rather groundlessness, in a way that is generally hidden by the drive of thought and language to thematize and objectify, which means also to hypostatize and reify. What is really at stake in metaphysical discourse is something that eludes all modes of representation. Speculation concerning the ineffability of the One brings this out in an exemplary fashion whenever such speculation expressly recognizes that it is about something that cannot be said. An apophatic reversal thereby takes place within metaphysics that turns it completely upside down and inside out. For all that metaphysics says in so many words is taken back and exposed as having been said for the sake of what it does not and cannot say. This rereading of metaphysical discourse as implicitly based on an ineffable principle that cannot come to explicit articulation and theorization, a principle that by its intrinsic nature cannot be made directly the object of argument and analysis, radically shifts our perspective for understanding the entire metaphysical tradition from antiquity to medieval and even modern thought.

Recognizing the ineffability of a supreme principle that is beyond being, yet gives and sustains being, has in fact been key to the viability of metaphysical and monotheistic traditions of thought all through their history in the West, with its many vicissitudes. Neglect of this apophatic element or aspect has led to taking statements at face value and, consequently, to merely superficial understanding of metaphysical teachings that infirms them, rendering them indefensible and eventually even unintelligible. Metaphysical statements inevitably mean something different from what they are able to say; only by recovering the apophatic sense, or rather nonsense or more-than-sense, behind these statements will we be able to see what made such traditions so compelling for so long.

An indirect indication that this has perhaps always been sensed to be the case might be found in the widespread belief in antiquity, especially among the Neoplatonists, that Plato had a secret doctrine that he imparted only orally. There are indeed many hints and allusions to this unwritten tradition in the dialogues themselves, as well as in Aristotle and in the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic sources. This popular notion expresses an awareness that the publicly stateable propositions of metaphysics might systematically distort

Néoplatoniciennes (Neuchâtel: À la Baconnière, 1973), pp. 9–26, and H. D. Saffrey, “La théologie platonicienne de Proclus, fruit de l’exégèse du ‘Parménide,’” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 116 (1984): 1–12.

and lead away from the doctrines' true meaning. According to this view, which has recently been vigorously revived and taken as the fulcrum for reinterpreting the dialogues as pivoting on what they do not say, Plato's deepest thinking on the questions discussed in the dialogues would be far more subtle and elusive than any fixed formulas and can only be surmised from the words he sportingly committed to text.⁷ Of course, even if there was oral communication directly in the presence of the master, it is irretrievably lost forever afterwards: its later significance is, to this extent, fundamentally to be missing. The emphasis thus falls upon what must be understood without being put into words, simply by "seeing." So much is indeed axiomatic to the very cast of Plato's thought, which thereby preserves a space for what cannot be adequately or definitively expressed in words. It is out of this mysterious space that Neoplatonism and its philosophy of the ineffable issues.

II

A new configuration, marrying the ancient Neoplatonic heritage of the negative way with biblical revelation and theology, takes what will become canonical shape for the whole of the Christian Middle Ages at about the turn from the fifth to the sixth century A.D., with the *Corpus Dionisiacum*. In these writings of the author known today as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the same logic of negating all predications is applied, just as in the Neoplatonic *via negativa*, but it is no longer simply the One that is unsayable so much as the Creator God of the Christian Scriptures, the Trinity. This new negative approach to theology had been prepared for well in advance by Christian predecessors, such as Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407).⁸

All of these Church fathers worked within the context of the encounter of biblical revelation with Greek religious and gnostic culture. And even

7. See Hans Joachim Krämer and his Tübingen school of philologically oriented interpreters, especially Krämer's *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics: A Work on the Theory of the Principles and Unwritten Doctrines of Plato with a Collection of the Fundamental Documents*, trans. John R. Catan (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) and Konrad Gaiser, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre: Studien zur systematischen und geschichtlichen Begründung der Wissenschaften in der Platonischen Schule* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1963).

8. For the latter, see John Chrysostom, *Περὶ ἀκαταλήπτου*, ed. Jean Daniélou, *Sur l'incompréhensibilité de Dieu* (Paris: Cerf, 1951). Greek text of *De incomprehensibili Dei natura* from *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, vol. 48.

before the Christians, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria had already fused the teaching of the Jewish Scriptures with Middle Platonic philosophy and underscored their agreement on just this point of the unutterability and unnameability of the ultimate principle of either system. On such bases, the divine ineffability had been routinely acknowledged ever since the earliest stages of Christian theology. There is, moreover, a voluminous Christian Gnostic literature, beginning in the second century A.D., that likewise multiplies all manner of negative formulas in relation to an utterly (and unutterably) transcendent God. Each of these various forms of negative theology was shaped by Neoplatonic philosophy and Judeo-Christian Scriptures alike, and in each the limits of finite human intellect are experienced as leading up to revelation—but equally occultation—of the supreme deity as that which cannot be said.

The reinterpretation of the ineffable Neoplatonic One in terms of the transcendent God of monotheistic religion continued its ferment, acting as intellectual leaven throughout the Middle Ages. Although the three monotheistic, Abrahamic religions present very different understandings of revelation, they each recognize a God who remains essentially inaccessible to thought and speech, even while revealing himself in and by his Creation. The creationist framework of these monotheisms, however, radically transforms the problematic of unsayability, since it concerns no longer an impassively remote One approached intellectually by abstraction (*aphairesis*) but a living, caring, engaged, personal Creator, who is present everywhere in existence, yet in an ungraspable, unsayable way that infinitely transcends every creature and every creaturely apprehension and expression. This channel of thought pullulated with fecund inventions in the Jewish Kabbalah, with its esoteric interpretations and elaborations of the Torah, as well as in the mystic effusions of Islamic tradition known as Sufism.

Both the Kabbalah and Sufism invent rich symbolic systems for interpreting the inner life of the Godhead that is in principle beyond all possible perception and representation. Only a mystical link can exist between the manifest world and this inner, secret “region” or divine “reality.” Paradoxically, however, total transcendence turns out to be tantamount to total immanence. These discourses declare the unmanifest to be, in itself and as such, absolutely beyond any sort of manifestation in experience. But, at the same time, they interpret the whole manifest universe as mysteriously about, and as incessantly evincing and betraying, by *not* saying and *not* showing it, this inaccessible realm of pure Existence or higher Truth. The connection is no longer logical, and so it can be made only in silence rather than in speech. Therefore, typically, these discourses programmatically annul or retract themselves as dis-

course by talking in contradictions. God reveals himself, but what he reveals is *not* himself. He is revealed in everything everywhere, but nowhere *as* Himself.

Christian mystical theology and apophatic philosophy likewise developed the vision of a Creation directly dependent on a supreme God transcending all that can be known or said but nevertheless active and immanently present in all that is. On the strength of God's apparent self-definition in terms of his own being in Exodus 3:14—*Ego sum qui sum* ("I am who I am")—the Christian fathers identified God and Being. Already the Greek-speaking fathers of the first four centuries—albeit somewhat in tension with the Latin-speaking fathers, from Tertullian to Jerome—had prepared the ground for Augustine's apprehension that God, as eternally immutable, is being itself: *ipsum esse*.⁹

The idea that God is one with Being and is Being itself becomes a reigning paradigm of philosophical thought across monotheistic faiths in the Middle Ages, and this idea is inextricably linked with the ineffability of the divine essence as it is understood in these traditions. Here, again, a divergence arises with respect to most Neoplatonic sources, for which God, the One, was emphatically *not* Being and was transcendent precisely because "beyond Being" (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας), as Plato had written of the Good in the famous formulation of the *Republic* 509b. Indeed, this might be taken to be a major line of demarcation between the Neoplatonic and the Christian worldviews—except that it does not hold in an apophatic perspective, in which all such logical, conceptual dichotomies collapse. In a startlingly Christian-like formulation, Porphyry, contradicting his teacher Plotinus, identifies the One with the pure act of being (αὐτὸ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν καθ'αυτὸν) and with Being in its infinity (as expressed by the infinitive form: εἶναι). The divide must rather be apprehended more subtly as a matter of sensibility and outlook and ultimately of modes of relationship. Inevitably, verbalization eventually renders the explicit differences between these historically differentiated traditions merely general and conceptual.

Whereas Plotinus's highest One, his "first hypostasis," based on the "first hypothesis" of the *Parmenides*, is absolutely relationless, the God of Abrahamic monotheistic religions is intimately in relation with all things: he

9. See Émile Zum Brunn, "L'exégèse augustinienne de 'Ego sum qui sum,' et la 'métaphysique de l'Exode,'" in *Dieu et l'Être: Exégèse d'Exode 3.14 et de Coran 20.11–24*, ed. Paul Vignau (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1978), pp. 141–164. Further essays in this volume I also draw on include Marguerite Harl, "Citations et commentaires d'Exode 3.14 chez les Pères grecs des quatre premiers siècles," pp. 87–108; Pierre Nautin, "Je suis celui qui est' (Exode 3, 14) dans la théologie d'Origène," pp. 109–119; and Goulven Madec, "'Ego sum qui sum,' de Tertullien à Jérôme," pp. 121–139.

creates and providentially sustains them in being. Relationality is essential to the Being of this God. This is most patent and pronounced in the Christian Trinity, internally constituted by relations among the divine persons in which it consists. On the Plotinian, Neoplatonic model, in contrast, relationality is relegated to lower ontological levels beneath the One—to Intellect and Mind (*Enneads* V.i.8). Even Porphyry's supreme God, the One that *is*, has no concern for any of the things that are, the beings that come after him. This is emphatically not the case for the Christian divinity, who is a God of love. He is wholly given over to relationality: his most intimate being consists in a relation between the Father and Son in Love, or the Holy Spirit. And even the internal relations of the Trinity can be articulated only in relation to the economies of creation and salvation, while in themselves they remain strictly unsayable and opaque.

This strict unsayability of God according to his essence, versus the prolix languages about him in relation to the created universe, was worked out near the beginning of the Christian Middle Ages by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in terms that have remained normative for negative theologies ever since. For Dionysius (or Denys), God is, in an absolute sense, above being and nameless and without analogy, so far as his essence is concerned. No name touches the unsayable God. There is a lower ontological level of primordial beings—divine ideas or angels, named “Being in itself,” “Life in itself,” and so on—that are properly named and participated in by lower beings, but these and all other names are indifferently improper as names for God. Any such positive attributions are in Dionysius's view merely propadeutic to the rigorously negative way, in which God is admitted to be absolutely unknowable and utterly unutterable. Thus Dionysius accords priority to the negative way, which proceeds upward from lower beings to higher, negating more and more attributes at each step of the way, and ultimately negating being itself in the movement beyond being altogether into the darkness of the unknowable God. As he writes in the *Celestial Hierarchy*, chapter 2.3, “the way of negation appears to be more suitable to the realm of the divine,” since “positive affirmations are always unfitting to the hiddenness of the inexpressible” (141A).¹⁰

In the *Mystical Theology*, chapter 3, the specifically apophatic character of this negative way is made even more explicit: “The fact is that the more we take

10. Dionysius's works are cited from *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987). Greek texts are from *Corpus Dionysiacum*, 2 vols., Patristische Texte und Studien, ed. K. Aland and E. Mühlenberg (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990–91).

flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short [συστέλλειν] of words but actually speechless [ἄθεγρος] and unknowing” (1033B–C). This means that the actual encounter with God, the end of theology, can transpire only in silence beyond words. The failure of language is necessary to the success of precisely the theological purposes it serves: “But my argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable” (1033C).

From near the other end of the arc of development of Christian medieval thought, Thomas Aquinas agrees with this in substance.¹¹ According to Thomas, we can know God only indirectly from the lower things of which he is the Cause, and he is clearly recognized as a cause that transcends what it causes rather than standing in a continuous series with it. God can meaningfully be said to be Being only to the extent that he is the cause of being in the sensible things that we must experience in order to form a conception of being. The difference is that for Thomas, God’s causality consists in his being participated in by beings, whereas all participation in the substance of the transcendent God seems to be excluded by Dionysius. The ontological gap between Creator and creature remains for Dionysius, apparently, without mediation or likeness of analogy. For Thomas, the preexistence of all things in God is grounds for actual kinship with him. God has transcendence but not total alterity in relation to the things of Creation. Thus for Thomas, certain divine names—those for intellectual perfections, like “one,” “good,” “true,” and of course “being”—can and do name the being itself of God. There is a language, an analogical language, for talking about God. Dionysius, on the other hand, negates all possibility of such a language affording a scientific knowledge of God. Granted, God is source and supreme Cause of all that is, so a certain basis for kinship between God and creatures may exist even in Dionysius’s universe. Nevertheless, it is beyond the pale of any possible knowledge.¹²

11. A crucial intermediary between the Greek patristic and medieval Latin traditions is John Damascene (ca. 675–749). His *Expositio fidei* (*De fide orth.*) formulates “the impossibility of saying God according to his essence” in terms taken up by Thomas: ὡμῶς ἐπὶ θεοῦ, τί ἐστίν, εἰπεῖν ἀδύνατον κατ’ οὐσίαν (*Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Migne, vol. 94, p. 800).

12. Such lines of distinction are drawn, for example, by Gislain Lafont, “Le ‘Parménide’ de Platon et Saint Thomas d’Aquin: L’analogie des noms divins et son arrière-

And yet, subjectively, analogy does play a role in Dionysius's affirmative theology—with which his negative theology is always inextricably intertwined. God is rightly praised “according the analogy of all the things of which he is the cause” (κατά τὴν πάντων ἀναλογίαν ὃν ἐστὶν αἴτιος, *Divine Names* 872A). To this extent, Dionysius shares Proclus's vision of a positive use of the *via negativa*. He combines it with a way of analogy based on faith in language and its techniques taken to their limits, especially in prayer, in order to achieve a kind of indirect access to the Transcendent. This is bound up with a view of language as possessed of ontological density and intrinsic truth that can be traced back ultimately to Plato's *Cratylus*. Such is the basis for the positive, “kataphatic” theology that is actually inseparable from the negative, “apophatic” theology for which Pseudo-Dionysius has become known and with which his name has become associated by antonomasia. Raoul Mortley goes so far as to say, “The Areopagite has, in the end, a profound confidence in the use of language which resembles that of Proclus. His assertion of the existence of divine names, and their implied ontic basis, suggests a strong degree of commitment to language. Linguistic manoeuvres, whether they involve negation or contradiction, are part and parcel of the route to the ultimate essence.”¹³

In Dionysius's vision, the meaning of names derives ontologically from a transcendent source. Although language is never adequate to that source, it is derived from it and, in fact, causally connected to it, just as all being is causally dependent on Being. A relation of ontological dependence makes language not an adequate concept circumscribing its object with the sure revelatory capacity of the Logos, but rather a fragment or reflection. It can testify to what it does not comprehend yet nevertheless contacts uncomprehendingly, in unknowing.¹⁴ We enter here a dimension of experience that is no longer purely intellectual, or at least no longer purely an activity and a knowing, but is also a

plan néoplatonicien,” in *Analogie et dialectique: Essais de théologie fondamentale*, ed. P. Gisel and P. Secretan (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982). The relation of Thomas and his views on analogy to the tradition of Dionysius and John Damascene are probed in detail by Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004).

13. Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2, *The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1986), pp. 240–241.

14. On the multifarious manifestations in images that do not represent, but nevertheless mediate a relation to God for Dionysius and his tradition, see Werner Beierwaltes, “Realisierung des Bildes,” in *Denken des Einen: Studien zur Neuplatonischen Philosophie und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1985), pp. 73–113.

passivity and a suffering—*pathein* rather than *mathein*, “not only learning but also experiencing the divine things” (οὐ μόνον μαθὼν ἀλλὰ καὶ παθὼν τὰ θεῖα, *Divine Names* 648B; see also *Epistle* 9). Dionysius thus describes a “theopathic state” in which one is in immediate contact with God.¹⁵ And in expressing this, language does seem to have an analogical capacity for intimating God—albeit only in his operations upon us, not in his own essence or nature.

The key distinction made by Dionysius, as by Cappadocian fathers such as Gregory of Nyssa before him, between God in himself, or the divine essence, and his manifestation in the world by his *energeia* has remained the supporting arch of Orthodox theology ever since.¹⁶ The question is how this radically transcendent God can be talked about at all. Granted, all things are gathered into transcendent unity in God, through whom and by whom and in whom alone they “preexist,” and in this sense “all things are rightly ascribed to God” (*Divine Names* 980B). However, no qualities or characteristics can be attributed to God according to his essence. It is even the case that the words for things that are most unlike God (“worm,” “mud”) make the best names for him, since they cause less danger of idolatrous identification: “the sheer crassness of signs is a goad” forcing us to look above that which is literally and concretely named to its transcendent cause (*Celestial Hierarchy* 141B).

This is the fundamental paradox on which the Dionysian doctrine of the nameless God of many names pivots. God is absolutely unknowable in himself (“we cannot know God in his nature, since this is unknowable and beyond the reach of mind or of reason”), yet all that we do know about anything is in some way a knowledge of God, inasmuch as he is the source and sustainer of all things and their order: “But we know him from the arrangement of everything, because everything is, in a sense, projected out from him, and this order possesses certain images and semblances of his divine paradigms” (*Divine Names* 869D). Accordingly, “the being of all things is the divinity who is above being” (τὸ γὰρ εἶναι πάντων ἐστὶν ἢ ὑπὲρ τὸ εἶναι θεότης, *Celestial Hierarchy* 177D).

As becomes even more evident and programmatic in Dionysius’s brilliant follower Eriugena, the ineffable God beyond Being is present as Being per se in everything that is. Although Being is made thereby neither knowable nor sayable, it is indistinct from all things’ being as such—even while remaining

15. Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1989), p. 107.

16. A passionate re-actualization is proposed by Christos Yannaròs, *Heidegger e Dionigi Areopagita* (Rome: Città nuova, 1995).

absolutely distinct from any thing's being definably *this* or *that*. This, then, is being that is completely unqualified; it therefore can be neither known nor said. This unqualified, pure being as such is also indistinguishable from the absolutely transcendent principle, "the One." Thus in Dionysius's God the first two hypostases of the *Parmenides* have been collapsed back together: the One-beyond-being (ὑπερούσιον ἓν) and the One-that-is (τὸ ὄν ἓν) have become indistinct—but now each has become equally indefinable and unsayable.

The purely transcendent One and the existing One are actually a unity in Dionysius—like the negative and affirmative methods of theology, which necessarily work together. The two, the One-beyond-Being and the One-that-is, are only different aspects—the dark side and the face, so to speak—of one and the same God. It is precisely the unthinkable, unsayable aspect of this unity that is made conspicuous by the blatant contradiction of a One that is at once beyond Being and is also pure Being itself (the same must be said of the doctrine of the Trinity: three, yet one). Dionysius's teaching points toward the unsayable not because God is simply One—this, too, is inadequate since "He transcends the unity which is in beings" (*Divine Names* 649C; cf. 977C–D). Indeed, all designations whatsoever are inadequate because any qualification belies God's absolute transcendence as infinite and therefore indefinable. Apophatic discourse about God cannot designate anything that positively is, but in negating every such designation it can nevertheless project an infinite transcendence of being and oneness, as well as of goodness, truth, and other "perfections," as they are commonly known and said.

Projected to infinity, any of these "attributes" of God becomes inconceivable and therefore also unsayable. Apophatic theology, even in its contemporary revivals, for example, by Levinas, enfolds a philosophy of the infinite. This idea of the infinite is key to thinking past the aporias of the One and Being thought according to the Logos in the *Parmenides* and to attaining the perspective of apophatic thought, where all definitions converge upon the infinite and indefinable. The idea of an infinity that cannot be conceptually comprehended is a fundamental principle of negative theology that can be traced back to Plotinus, who first ventures to base thought and being programmatically on a principle, the One, that is infinite. In this, too, Plotinus stands at the historical threshold where logic melts into metaphysics and even mysticism.

Plotinus has been widely recognized as the first Greek to conceive of the One and Good as infinite (ἄπειρον), as divine infinity that is not merely vagueness and indeterminateness, vapid formlessness, or an abhorrent nothing. (We should not forget, however, that Plotinus is, in effect, reviving certain aspects of Anaximander's teaching on the *apeiron*, the non-limited, as the pri-

mal principle or original matter of all things.) According to Hilary Armstrong, “Plotinus is the first Greek philosopher to try to work out with any sort of precision the senses in which infinity can be predicated of the Godhead, and to distinguish them from the evil infinity of formlessness and indefinite multiplicity.”¹⁷ For Plotinus, formlessness, being beyond form and therefore beyond all determination, is precisely what enables the One to be the transcendent ground of all that is. Plotinus’s exegesis of *Parmenides* 142d–143a, where the One itself is said to be infinite (*apeiron*), envisages an infinite that cannot be conceptualized except negatively, where to speak negatively of the One means “to speak of it from the things that come after it.”

John Heiser underlines the properly negative theological import of Plotinus’s expressions, their “transcending negative sense,” as he terms it: “This, I submit is a *negative*, not a positive sense of the infinite, it is ‘knowing the One from the things that come after it,’ by denying their limits.”¹⁸ Plotinus explains this speaking of ineffable infinity in terms of the things after it as a negative theological approach that provides no positive conception of infinity: “The expression ‘beyond being’ does not call it a ‘this,’ for it is not an affirmation, nor does it give it a name. It conveys nothing but the negation of such talk.” There is thus no attempt to “encompass” the One in its infinity.¹⁹ For Plotinus, this infinity cannot be conceived except negatively, that is, by thought’s opening itself infinitely in self-negation. Infinity is experienced only in the insatiable desire for what transcends comprehension.

Plotinus held that experience of the supreme principle must necessarily be a suffering, not a knowing in the sovereign sense of classical Greek intellectualism. In Plotinus, we see Greek thought discovering, from within, the intrinsic negativity of thought and language. The attempt to think the infinite, or rather to open thought to the infinite as what it cannot think, can thus be recognized as an inheritance of Neoplatonic philosophy. Neoplatonists, beginning with Plotinus, found the ultimate ground and goal of thinking and being in an infinite principle that could not as such be thought, or even be. This was audacious and revolutionary—an apophatic revolution. The transmission of this insight from Neoplatonism to Christianity was assured by the direct influ-

17. Cf. A. Hilary Armstrong, “Plotinus’s Doctrine of the Infinite and its Significance for Christian Thought,” in *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1979), V.47.

18. John H. Heiser, “Plotinus and the *Apeiron* of Plato’s *Parmenides*,” *Thomist* 55 (1991): 80.

19. *Enneads* V.v.6. Embedded quotations from *Enneads* V.iii and V.vi in Heiser, “Plotinus and the *Apeiron*,” pp. 56, 72–73.

ence of Proclus on Dionysius. What the Neoplatonists did not generally conceive, however, and what *is* found in the Dionysian paradigm, is precisely Being as this infinite, incomprehensible principle. For the Neoplatonists, the infinite and unsayable principle is generally “beyond being.”

Yet even this insight into the equivalence of the infinite and unsayable with Being and even, in some sense, with God was not fundamentally out of reach for Neoplatonism. In fact, immediately after Plotinus, Being is accorded the same sort of infinity as the One, not as being *anything*, any *this*, but as indeterminate and unknowable. Plotinus’s most outstanding pupil, Porphyry, develops the idea that as infinite the One is also Being—infinite Being which cannot be defined or said. This conception of Being as infinite made it possible to revive the Aristotelian idea of the supreme divinity as the pure act of being (or equivalently, pure act of intellect) within negative theology. Aristotle had conceived of God as pure act and therefore also as finite in being: to be actual is to have perfectly definite form without any potency. But the Neoplatonists’ idea of infinity as only negatively definable, and as not having in itself any positively knowable sense or essence, made it possible to conceive of an act that is infinite.

The idea of infinity was generally repugnant to classical Greek thinkers: for Aristotle, anything actual, including God, is necessarily finite. The revolution of Neoplatonic thinking that made it so congenial to monotheistic theologians is most clearly signalled by Plotinus’s daring to think of the One, the supreme principle of reality, as infinite. Combined with Aristotle’s thought of God as pure act, this leads eventually to thinking of God as pure being, the infinite act of being, “being itself”—*ipsum esse*, in Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart.²⁰ Being in its infinity is unsayable and indistinct from the ineffable One. This identity of the One itself and Being itself—beyond every qualified, concrete mode of being—was to be pursued all through later Christian Neoplatonism down to the Renaissance, signally by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and beyond. In *De ente et uno*, Pico aimed to unite in Being itself Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of God as the One beyond being and as the Supreme Being.²¹

20. The key role of Plotinus in this development, which passes also through Augustine, is emphasized by Patrick Madigan, S.J., *Christian Revelation and the Completion of the Aristotelian Revolution* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1988).

21. Cf. Werner Beierwaltes, “Das seiende Eine: Neuplatonische Interpretationen der zweiten Hypothese des platonischen ‘Parmenides’ und deren Fortbestimmung in der christlichen Theologie und in Hegels Logik,” in *Denken des Einen*, pp. 193–225.

The idea, first found in Porphyry's commentary on the *Parmenides*, that being itself, as an act rather than an object or concept, is what infinitely transcends all knowledge and saying has great importance in the history of negative theology. In terms of the *Parmenides* commentary tradition, this means that the second hypothesis—"if the One *is*"—acquires priority in indicating the limits of any conceptualization of divinity and, consequently, of everything else. Not only Porphyry, but Proclus, too, taking cues from his teacher Syrianus, begins to accord a certain primacy to the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* concerning the One-that-is. The emphasis is no longer exclusively on the transcendence of the One-beyond-being, but is also on the immanence of the One-that-is—in fact, on the complete dialectical mediation of the two.²² In both directions, immanence and transcendence, the One proves to be inconceivably infinite and to exceed saying.

Accordingly, not even the radical transcendence of the One and its incompatibility with Being is what finally distinguishes pagan Neoplatonic from revealed monotheistic thought. Indeed, this very polarity of transcendence and immanence collapses in an apophatic perspective that is common to both worldviews. The One transcends being not by being something definitely, definably other than Being. That would make the two—the One and Being—external to each other and therefore also comparable, side by side, each limiting the other, and therefore neither of them would be strictly infinite. Instead, the One transcends Being by being infinite and therefore indistinct from being—that is, from Being without qualification, "Being" which cannot be said. Total transcendence and complete immanence are both ways of exceeding the boundaries of identity in terms of which things are defined and said. These different ways consist in total lack of relatedness, versus total relatedness—either of which equally exceeds saying. Saying cannot but divide in order to articulate, and so necessarily misses such inarticulably pure conditions as in-finite and in-definable being and oneness.

Neoplatonist negative theologies, Porphyry's excepted, generally negated Being as a positive determination that the One had to transcend. This is be-

22. This compenetration is an overarching theme of Beierwaltes's *Platonismus im Christentum*. Neoplatonists' attention to the second hypothesis is also highlighted by Beierwaltes in "Das Seiende Eine. Zur neuplatonischen Interpretation der zweiten Hypothese des platonischen *Parmenides*: Das Beispiel Cusanus," in *Proclus et son influence*, ed. G. Boss and G. Seel (Zurich: Grand Midi, 1987). For an exegesis of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* by Proclus and Syrianus as leading to the theory of divine *henades* that bridge transcendence and immanence, see Proclus, *Théologie platonicienne*, vol. 3, ed. H. D. Saffrey and L. G. Westerink (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1978), pp. xl–li.

cause they typically interpreted all being as *this* or *that* being, as determinate rather than as infinite and indefinable being. A genuine monotheism becomes thinkable only when being itself is conceived as essentially infinite and its supreme, unifying principle as transcendent to anything that is *something*. Neoplatonic thinking opened the way for a strictly monotheistic conceptual-ity by thinking the infinite transcendence of the One, but it did not at the same time generally think the unity of this One with Being. It did not think Being as infinitely transcendent of everything that is *something*. While reaching the thought of the infinite, Neoplatonism was not doctrinally obliged or motivated to segregate this thought from anterior, pantheistic modes of thinking. It did not need to rigorously separate the oneness of being, or the One that it recognized as the supreme principle of being, from the diffuse presence of divinity in the multiplicity of beings. Indeed, in an apophatic perspective even these opposites coincide.

However, as infinite, the One cannot be distinct from Being, not when the One is thought concretely and no longer only in the intellectualized manner characteristic of the classical Greeks. The unity of the One with Being is entailed by its infinity, since if there were something else besides it, the One would not be infinite. It is crucial to realize that this One which is infinite is not *only* an idea. Infinity is taken to be the reality, or ultra-reality, that precedes and encompasses every thought, including the thought of infinity itself. The infinity of the One, if it is the principle of reality, entails unity with Being and even the unity *of* Being.²³ Of course, this unity of being, which turns up as an infinite principle (the One) in all beings, is likewise apophatic. It cannot be scientifically understood or expressed, though it can be observed over and over in experience in ways that evade all rational account and grounding. The unity of being is based on a principle that withdraws from all attempts to know and express it.

The miracle of all things hanging together and cohering as somehow *one* world, a *universe*, must be observed ever again with wonder and be acknowledged to be incomprehensible: the reason and necessity for it cannot be demonstrated or even be properly expressed. This contingency of the togetherness and connection of all things, inexplicable to us and to any finite intelli-

23. Jean-Luc Nancy lucidly defines monotheism as entailing not just that there is one God but that all being is one, inasmuch as all beings are dependent for their very being on a unique ontological principle, "the excellency of being." "Des lieux divins," in *Qu'est-ce que Dieu? Hommage à l'abbé Daniel Coppieters de Gibson (1929–1983)* (Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires Saint-Louis, 1985).

gence, is perennially rediscovered in philosophy. It becomes paramount, for example, in Enlightenment philosophy with David Hume. As with the One itself, all accounts and grounding for such unity fall into contradiction. Any principle which is alleged to ground unity will never turn out to be identical with a principle that can be known and defined and said. Still, the unity of the One and Being is presupposed by every thought, since thought itself is inherently a synthesis. It is just that this unity that operates in every thought is graspable and expressible by no thought—it is itself the apophatic aporia par excellence. The unity of being cannot be proved or understood or even be adequately said, but we can nevertheless experience this very impossibility. In experiencing purely the connectedness of things and the unaccountability of this connectedness, we experience what fails to be adequately conceptualized as the metaphysical unity of being.

The fundamentally negative status of our knowledge of all things and their ground—thus negative theology—was discovered by Neoplatonists in a predominantly intellectual register. This primordial negativity infiltrates a broader spectrum of faculties and relational modes that are exercised in revealed, monotheistic, and especially biblical, historical religion, which becomes more reflective about the negative status of all its knowledge through this interactive contact with the ineffable God. A negatively theological monotheism was, in effect, already thought by the Neoplatonists. Their supreme principle is totally transcendent and also totally immanent, in the sense of being presupposed by all beings in their very being. This Neoplatonic God, however, is not active, not consciously and willingly engaged in relating to beings. That engagement could only be *revealed*—by history and through experience; it does not belong as such simply to the thought of the unity of being and its necessary transcendence of every finite being.

These are the essential pagan precedents that render philosophically conceivable a God who *is* essentially what cannot be said, that is, the God of monotheism. From these premises develop, especially in revealed traditions, ever more complex and historically differentiated experiences of the abyss of existence, which philosophy first identified as a theme that could be reflectively contemplated. The One and Being are no longer incompatible and no longer intellectual forms or determinations. They are mutually interpenetrating aspects of an unsayable infinity beyond any determination as reality or even as divinity, if this is taken to be some essential, specific kind of being. The mutual exclusiveness of the One and Being inherited from the *Parmenides* falls away and, in effect, is dissolved in the course of the *Parmenides* commentary tradition. Both principles are redefined as inadequate determinations *not* of

the Indeterminate but of a living, pro-active, always relating divinity that cannot be humanly or temporally or linguistically determined or comprehended. This . . . inexpressible “divinity” is not any object accessible to the approach of knowledge, but rather can be encountered only to the extent that it comes to meet us and disembarasses us of all our antecedent conceptual structures and language.

This collapsing together of the Neoplatonic hypostases of the One and Being in monotheism opens the field of experience in time in the direction of an absolute which can become real as event and revelation in history. But still the supreme principle of all historical reality and experience—the One or Being in their indifferentiation—cannot be conceptually circumscribed or said without being immediately belied in its absoluteness. The consequence is that all that can be said and perceived and positively experienced turns out to be dependent on what cannot be known or said. “Reality” and “truth” as such are relinquished to the zone of the ineffable. Human knowledge and language are reassessed as fundamentally negative in nature due to their difference and distance from absolute reality, which is more positive than “positivity” or any other expression can signify. The supposedly stable, stateable structures of “this world” are undermined and have, in some sense, become a lie.

The view of apophasis here espoused makes it both metaphysical and anti-metaphysical at the same time—indeed, the coincidence of these opposites. The One must be discovered as radically beyond being but also as identical with being, once being, too, has been identified with (or rather dissolved into) infinity. The contemporary philosophical polemic that targets metaphysics, as if getting rid of this type of thinking would cure Western culture of its pluri-millenary sickness, is itself another symptom of the tendency to reify and isolate elements by their objective manifestations and to abstract from and forget their deeper roots that reach into the unsayable and unknowable. This oblivion comes from wishing to adhere to the surface of what can be said and be verbally persuasive and reassure us that we know the grounds of our knowing and doing—when actually these things lie submerged in unknowing that reaches into the fathomless.

III

On the basis of these developments in thinking the One and Being as infinite and unsayable, especially in the *Parmenides* commentary tradition, the late medieval Christian problem of speaking about God, that is, the problem of his

“names” or predicates, and of which if any of them can be attributed to him properly, reaches tremendous levels of subtlety. However, there is another crucial wellspring for negative theology that still needs to be taken into account. It is thanks also to an impulse from Jewish thought that the most deeply negative theology of Being was incorporated into the culminating medieval speculations on the divine transcendence of whatever can be said. Moses Maimonides insisted that all statements concerning God were to be interpreted as having a purely negative meaning: to say God is one means that he is not many, to say he is good means that he is not evil, and so forth. No positive meaning can be attributed to any of the divine Names. Maimonides’s thinking, in effect, renders vain any *discourse* of being with the realization that God has no definable essence apart from his existence, which cannot be conceived or uttered.

Building on this insight, Thomas Aquinas, contrary to certain oversimplifying interpretations of his position, recognizes indescribability and even radical anonymity as necessary to God. Thomas’s analogical language for talking about God is not one that in the end yields knowledge in any scientific sense. What words like “good,” “wise,” and “true” mean as applied to the perfections of God is completely beyond our comprehension. We know only what finite goodness, wisdom, and truth are, and that they are derivative from an infinite, self-sustaining goodness, wisdom, and truth. In *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 13, arts. 9 and 11, Thomas admits that from the point of view of the object named, the unsayable four-letter *Tetragrammaton* (YHWH) signifying God’s incommunicably singular substance is even more proper a name for God than “Being” or *Qui est*. This admission recognizes the priority of the unknowable and unsayable in God’s own nature. Even Being, *esse*, as it exists in creatures, must be denied of God, with the result that “the Being of God is unknown” (“*Esse dei est ignotum*”).²⁴ This realization already verges on the deeply apophatic outlook that will be developed by Meister Eckhart.

Eckhart, who brings to its full maturity the apophatic theological speculation of the Christian Middle Ages, makes peculiarly palpable the fundamental transformation of apophysis in a direction that has sometimes been conceptualized as a species of Christian existentialism. This outlook decisively relocates God as the unsayable in the midst of existence rather than beyond and

24. *Quaestiones disputate: De potentia*, q. 7, art. 2, ad 1um, in *Opera omnia*, ed. S. E. Fretté and P. Maré (Paris: Bibliopolam, 1871). That Thomas fully assimilated the radical negative theology of Dionysius is shown by É. Jeuneau, “Denys L’aréopagite promoteur du Néoplatonisme en Occident,” in *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale*, ed. Linos G. Benakis (Belgium: Brepols, 1997), pp. 20–22.

outside being. God is inexpressible not because he is “beyond being,” as the Neoplatonic tradition insisted in unceasing echoes of the *Republic* 509b, and as Eckhart himself repeats in Sermons 6, 9, 53, and 83, and in other works; God is inexpressible precisely because he is identified with being as such.²⁵ It is no longer an intellectual abstraction, such as the One at some level cannot help being, or even a hypostatized, personified God, but existence or being in its infinity—and in the infinitive, *esse*—that confounds comprehension and exceeds the furthest possibilities of discourse. Being itself, even in the most negligible of creatures, like the fly, becomes incomprehensible and unsayable.

Eckhart synthesized the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic tradition of Being as Intellect with the new discovery of being in its infinite actuality in the Gothic age, especially as articulated in the theology of Thomas Aquinas. Eckhart was also educated, however, by the affective piety of great female mystics, and especially by the Beguines writing in the vernacular in the thirteenth century—notably, Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207–1282), who authored *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* in Middle Low German, and Marguerite Porete.²⁶ Reflecting also these approaches, Eckhart made his intellectual revolution fully experiential in all the dimensions of human existence. Negative theology is not just metaphysical speculation but is lived out in the diverse spheres of intellection, connotation, emotion, and sensation. On the basis of this new valorization of the existential world as inhabited by and answering to an unspeakable absolute, one that had become no longer a detached principle or indifferent origin but was infinitely active and present in conscious life, the later Middle Ages and Renaissance were to develop a broader understanding of *spirit* as the element in which what cannot be said or grasped or mastered by any human faculty is nevertheless encountered and experienced, so as to become effectual in every human act and apprehension.

Eckhart’s philosophy flourished in the Rhineland, influencing Johannes Tauler and Heinrich Susa, as well as Jan van Ruusbroec in Flanders. Their

25. Vladimir Lossky, in *Théologie négative et connaissance de Dieu chez Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Vrin, 1960), p. 22, points out that Dionysius maintained that God is unnameable because he transcends every being and even being itself, whereas for Eckhart, God is unnameable because he *is* Being itself.

26. See contributions to *Meister Eckhart and Beguine Mystics: Hadewich of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994). A “Hadewijch II” is sometimes posited as the authoress in Medieval Dutch of the powerfully apophatic *Mengeldichten* 25–29. See the contribution by Paul A. Dietrich, “The Wilderness of God in Hadewijch II and Meister Eckhart and his Circle,” pp. 32ff.

writings served as channels through which the posthumously condemned teaching of the master surreptitiously survived and was transmitted. Thanks to them, the spirit of Eckhart was fostered in subsequent centuries, coming to expression most originally in Nicholas of Cues (Cusanus) among the Renaissance humanists, in Jakob Böhme and Silesius Angelus in the Baroque period, and again in German idealist philosophy during the ages of Classicism and Romanticism. It is still at work in Heidegger, as well as in apophatic revivals today. We go on struggling in various ways to inherit and assimilate this legacy of the medieval apophatic tradition. This history forges some of the indispensable links leading from medieval metaphysics to modern, transcendental phenomenologies of experience. The possibilities for apophatic insight throughout this history very often hang together with the fate of analogical thinking—with interpretations of its legitimacy and limits.

From Augustine and Dionysius on, medieval Christianity sought to account for knowledge and naming of God in terms that do justice to divine transcendence and at the same time acknowledge God's self-revelation. His self-revelation occurs not only in Scripture and in Christ but also in every creature, as part of the general revelation whereby "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20). The analogical relation of creature to Creator affirmed in these terms had also, at the same time, to be denied or qualified by the absolute disproportion between the infinite and the finite. Analogy, in fact, for Dionysius, gives no knowledge of God's essence but rather illuminates his operations in and around us. This also holds for Eckhart, with his wisdom of luminous unknowing, and is thought through rigorously by Cusanus, building directly on Eckhart, in his doctrine of "learned ignorance."

Cusanus polemically rejects any analogical knowledge of God by proportionate analogy, such as Thomas Aquinas at least formally postulated. He argues that God alone is infinite: there cannot be two or more infinities, for they would limit each other. But there can be no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Consequently, finite creation can offer no objective means of conceptualizing an infinite God. Nevertheless, this infinite disproportion between God and everything else can itself be instructive, for it can teach us our ignorance. The wisdom of learned ignorance entails a bursting and opening of all finite knowledge toward its ground—or groundlessness—in an ungraspable infinite. This state of unknowing, moreover, can coincide with a theopathic state of being affected by, and to that extent being one with, God. Such a state is the ultimate instance of Cusanus's coincidence of opposites, of the finite with the infinite.

There can be, then, some knowledge of the right ways of relating to and even of speaking about God, though they can give us no objective information about him. Analogy gives no scientific knowledge of God as an object. And yet our ways of experiencing our own limits vis-à-vis the infinity of God are revealing of the God we do not know but relate to—precisely in encountering these limits and, simultaneously, in abandoning our pretensions to knowledge. While there can be no knowledge of God, our knowledge of creatures as inadequate analogies for him can lead to unknowing, that is, to Eckhart’s *unwizzen* and Cusanus’s *docta ignorantia*, which is greater than any knowing of an object could be, for it is a mode of oneness with the unknown and uncircumscribed and infinite. The analogies operate, then, really as disanalogies: it is not their content, but rather the spilling over of all bounds of content, their *uncontainment*, that conveys something, some inkling, of God.

This experience of excess and inadequacy is instructive about God, about his infinite and therefore incomprehensible and ineffable nature in relation to our finitude. Even Thomas Aquinas’s theory of analogy—understood as pivoting in the last analysis on *disanalogy*—falls essentially within the bounds of this project.²⁷ Although Thomas gives the impression of trying to preserve a way of knowing and talking about God scientifically by analogy, in the end only God is capable of making sense of the infinite term of the analogy. As Thomas admits, theology or *sacra doctrina* is ultimately God’s own self-knowledge; its principles are not themselves known to us but are known to God and to those enjoying beatific vision in God. Ultimate human wisdom concerning God (“ultimum cognitionis humanae de Deo”) is to know that we ignore him (“quod sciat se Deum nescire”), inasmuch as we know that what he is exceeds all we can understand of him (“inquantum cognoscit, illud quod Deus est, omne ipsum quod de eo intelligimus, excedere”).²⁸

A distinct approach to mediating between God’s absolute transcendence and the claims of revealed human knowledge of him and not just of his creations can be traced through Orthodox tradition to a high point in Gregory Palamas. On the basis of an Eastern monastic spirituality, with its origins in the fourth-century desert fathers of Palestine and Egypt, and in continuity with Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysius, Palamas witnesses to an experience of

27. David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1979) denies that Thomas has a theory of analogy at all, and indeed it is rather Thomas’s practice of analogical reasoning and use of analogical expressions that counts for showing God’s ultimate unknowability. Burrell further maintains, provocatively, that Thomas has no doctrine of God, thereby confirming God’s unknowability. See pp. 56–77.

28. *Questiones disputate: De potentia*, q. 7, art. 5, ad 14.

God that is superior to negation. It is beyond knowing, but also beyond unknowing. This vision of God (though not of the divine essence) relies on neither the senses nor the intellect. It transpires in the Spirit, transcending the natural conditions of human cognition. It is, nonetheless, embodied. This type of contemplation transfigures human beings, mind and body, transforming them by the divine energies communicated in the light of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Gregory's more experiential, less dialectical approach to divine transcendence brings to the fore the positive aspect of the apophatic that is, in effect, crucial to its motivation throughout the whole course of its development as a family of discourses. As in Augustine, Neoplatonic ascent by abstraction joins hands with its opposite: the uncreated is experienced as incarnate. Apophasis is not simply a negative way, though of course the surplus of this more-than-positive experience remains quintessentially unsayable, sealed in silence.

IV

We have now attained a vantage point from which it is possible to individuate a number of historical matrices that take the lead in shaping the problematic of apophasis, that is, of what cannot be said, in intellectual history: initially, Plato and Platonism, as leading up to the crises of the Hellenistic period and the collapse of philosophy based on Logos, with the ensuing proliferation of Gnostic religions and theosophies that typically fostered cults of silence and secrecy; then, with heavy indebtedness to the Neoplatonic school, medieval Christianity from Dionysius to Eckhart, paralleled by Sufism in the Islamic Middle Ages and Jewish Kabbalist speculation. In each case, apophatic reflection belongs particularly to periods of crisis, when confidence in established discourses crumbles, when the authoritative voice of orthodoxies and their official affirmations—and even affirmative, assertive discourse per se—begin to ring hollow. Toward the end of the Hellenistic Age, when Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and Christianity arose, and again with the impending collapse and aftermath of the Roman Empire during the lifetimes of Damascius and Dionysius, new expressive modes had to be sought out or invented to supplant a Logos that was infirm and foundering. Something similar happened again in the Late Middle Ages of Porete, Eckhart, and Dante, with the cracking of the Scholastic synthesis. The words of traditional discourses could no longer be believed in as such. The passion of belief that had previously been invested in them looked beyond to what they did not and could not say.

It is such moments of critical reflection that produce the straining beyond all constraints of rational discourse and discipline into mystic and other logically, as well as oftentimes socially, transgressive modes. The Baroque mysticism of Jakob Böhme and Silesius Angelus, together with their Spanish Carmelite counterparts, Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross, emerge under circumstances that fit this same pattern. There are strong homologies, furthermore, with the Romantic revolt of the late Schelling and Kierkegaard against the Hegelian System. All these movements produced certain characteristic forms of apophatic discourse. But with German idealism we have arrived at the threshold of the last two hundred years of this history. This period is taken up in the ensuing volume, where this historical outline of apophasis is pursued further and completed.

One issue that will become more sharply focused in the second volume is that of the divergence between Jewish approaches to apophasis, which insist on an insuperable gap of absolute difference, and the Plotinian ideal of a unity transcending all dualities of language and signification. Indeed, from Plotinus on, the elimination of differences, *reductio ad unum*, had been prescribed for generating union with the undelimited and inarticulable principle of all. This great Neoplatonic current collides, at least to all appearances, with the Hebraic exaltation of difference as the royal road of apophasis. The idea of apophatic *union* with God, as it develops through the Middle Ages, comes to a certain culmination in the mysticism of the Spanish Carmelites, which parallels and to some extent depends on the German mystical tradition. However, this introverted experience of oneness can also be turned inside out, so as to coincide with its opposite: God is experienced equally as absolutely Other. This view is not peculiarly Jewish, yet it has been the constant emphasis of Jewish views about God (whose influence can be documented in the backgrounds of both Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross), and it has become so more intensively and insistently than ever in contemporary Jewish thought.

Already in Maimonides, God is other than all positive conceptualizations. I have noted that Maimonides's negative theology, as it was absorbed and modified by Thomas and Eckhart, revolutionized medieval philosophy. In Eckhart, particularly, the negation of all language as applied to God led to a conception of God as absolute negation. Yet ultimately this entails that God is also the negation of negation, the non-other (*non aliud*, as Cusanus was to put it), and at this level absolute difference turns out to be indistinguishable from identity or oneness—though it is unity as negated in any of its verbal expressions, such as, *infinite*, *undefined*, and *unsayable*. In the end, identity and difference alike are not definable or sayable. It is only the different *approaches* to this in-difference that resolve into clear distinctness.

The claims of difference have been pressed by modern and contemporary apophatic thinkers and writers, and especially energetically by those working within or in relation to Jewish currents of tradition. This strain can be followed through the Renaissance to modern Jewish authors such as Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Celan, and Edmond Jabès. Difference has been exalted to the status of a shibboleth by Derrida and company, just as unity was so often the watchword of Platonizing metaphysics and negative theologies. The originally Hellenic and Hebraic approaches to the unsayable seem to be going in exactly opposite directions. Yet are they, after all—after all dichotomizing conceptions fall away—only different as ways of approaching what resists all our constructions of unity and difference equally? If the two approaches are reconcilable, it cannot be in words, but only beyond the reach of Logos in a striving in tension that joins them in adversarial unity. Exactly this may be the vocation of the apophatic (even if we cannot positively say so). Positive claims about reconciliation and unity, of course, would be inconsistent and foolish, but to deny them would be equally fallacious; denial assumes that these relations are decidable in terms of sense, whereas they are realized only in exceeding sense—which requires difference, but also its erasure. For difference registers and is articulated only as it is also being erased by the very *making* of the difference. Inevitably this making is a constructing of difference out of the *indifference* of the inarticulable.

The peculiar, dialectical, necessarily self-contradictory character of the apophatic demands that apophasis be ambiguous as to whether it entails an experience of total union in the indistinctness of the One or rather the shock of absolute alterity. Indeed, both forms of configuring the apophatic moment organize vast currents of discourse that follow in their train. Unity and difference each furnish the motive and the motto for apparently divergent strains of apophatic experience and reflection: they can even be ranged into opposing camps of a seemingly intractable ideological divide. However, precisely as supposedly characterizing the apophatic, these cleavages can no longer be positively articulated and asserted. History demonstrates repeatedly that the conflict sharpens to a breaking-point—and then self-destructs and disappears. In apophasis, which empties language of all positive content, absolute difference cannot be positively distinguished from absolute unity, even though the respective discourses of difference and unity nominally stand at the antipodes. Both configurations, unity and difference, are exposed as relatively arbitrary and, in the end, equally inadequate schemas for articulating what cannot be said.