THE PRAISE OF GLORY:
APOPHATIC THEOLOGY AS TRANSFORMATIONAL MYSTICISM

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THE PRAISE OF GLORY:

APOPHATIC THEOLOGY AS TRANSFORMATIONAL MYSTICISM

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ABSTRACT

THE PRAISE OF GLORY: APOPHATIC THEOLOGY AS TRANSFORMATIONAL MYSTICISM

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Patristic apophatic theologies were typically written as commentaries on the church’s liturgy and/or as guides to the ascetic struggle for holiness. As such, apophatic theology was Christocentric, Scriptural, liturgical, and experientially mystical. Modern negative theology, by contrast, is often written as philosophical reflections on the limits of language and/or thought. It begins with the doctrine of creation, instead of Christology, and proceeds inferentially, rather than experientially, to determine that language and/or thought necessarily cannot comprehend the Creator. I argue two things about this kind of modern negative theology. First, I use the philosophical logic of Ludwig Wittgenstein to argue that the very idea of showing the transcendence of God by means of a demonstration of the limits of language or thought is fundamentally confused. Second, by contextualizing Patristic apophatic theology with ancient Jewish merkava mysticism I argue that modern negative theology functions as a way for theologians to look away from the revelation of divine transcendence in Christ as the crucified Lord of Glory.
Dedicated to my parents, David and Shirley Smith
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INTRODUCTION:
TWO THEOLOGICAL PICTURES

_The Praise of Glory_ is a confession in the mode of exploring a scholarly question. The question is: Why do contemporary Christian apophatic theologians characteristically argue that human language cannot be squared with the demands of describing the Creator, when Patristic apophatic theologians – such as Dionysius the Areopagite – characteristically wrote commentaries on the liturgy and/or guides for the ascetic struggle for holiness?\(^1\) Answering the question is confessional for two reasons. First, the argument takes the form of assessing primordial temptations bedeviling humanity because of the types of beings we are and how these temptations manifest themselves in the practice theology. The argument is meant not only to answer the question of why we are so tempted, but to expose the apparent allurements to be seductions towards emptiness and

\(^1\) For the rest of the dissertation, unlike this first sentence, I will use “negative theology” and “apophatic theology” in relative distinction to each other. In Western theology these terms are often used interchangeably, whereas Eastern theology often distinguishes between them. For the East “negative theology” names the intellectual enterprise of negating all concepts of God and “apophatic theology” names a mystical theology of the ineffable experience of God. For the East, “negative theology” is always enfolded within and in service to apophatic theology. For clarity’s sake I will use these two terms contrastively. I will use “negative theology” to name the intellectual enterprise of negating all concepts of God apart from any reference to the experience of God, and I will use “apophatic theology” to name both the ineffable experience of God and the negation of all concepts of God as enfolded within experiential mysticism.
diversions of attention away from the revelation of transcendence in the Crucified Lord
of Glory. Second, the argument is a confession because I, as the author, am examining
how certain problematic arguments about divine ineffability have served as temptations
for me in my own theological research and teaching. That is, whereas the analyses which
follow about language, logic, and transcendence apply to the cogency of the arguments in
the texts criticized, the application of these same arguments as a means of comprehending
and defusing temptation is meant primarily autobiographically – to show how and why
these flawed arguments are temptations for me to deflect my attention away from a more
truthful acknowledgment of divine transcendence. At this level, the force of the argument
for a given reader relies solely upon whether the reader feels the force of the same
temptations and if the arguments effectively release the power of these temptations over
the reader’s mind and imagination.

The structure of the argument is inspired in part by the rhetorical strategies
deployed in Søren Kierkegaard’s whole philosophical oeuvre and in Al Ghazali’s *The
Incoherence of the Philosophers*. That is, both Kierkegaard and Ghazali sought to
challenge the way certain philosophies were being used in, or as displacing, theology.
They challenged these mis-uses by entering into the mode of argument at home in these
philosophies and allowed the strict application of their logic to undercut the very

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\(^2\) I will use “transcendence” to mean both “ineffability” and “incomprehensibility” and not merely
“beyond the created world” throughout the dissertation.

\(^3\) For Kierkagaard see especially Søren Kierkagaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*,
see Al Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers, Second Edition*, translated by Michael E. Marmura
(Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1997).
theological use to which they were being put. Similarly, the dissertation’s argument seeks to undercut the role certain philosophies have been given in negative and apophatic theologies by entering fully into their logic and allowing it to reveal itself as incapable of delivering the sought for transcendence. Further, in a somewhat Kierkagaardian fashion, I seek to explore the existential roots of our desire to make philosophy of language to play this incoherent role. The dissertation, therefore, is not an example of apophatic or negative theology, but is a form of fundamental theology testing the intelligibility of certain intellectual strategies in negative and apophatic theology.

As a text in fundamental theology I will not be doing historical work where it has already been done. However, that is not to say that historical scholarship is unimportant for its argument or that my argument is ahistorical. On the contrary, the whole dissertation operates in the conceptual spaces opened up by particular historians of ancient Jewish mysticisms and Patristic theology. While no novel interpretations of ancient texts are presented, the dissertation uses interpretations of Scripture, ancient Jewish texts, and Patristic theology which are much neglected in constructive theology, and virtually unknown in philosophical and fundamental theology. This historical scholarship, I argue, fits better with my rendering than with the theological picture which predominates in contemporary academic theology.

By way of introduction to my argument, I will do three things. First, I will contrast the fundamental theological picture undergirding a great deal of contemporary

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4 Importantly, neither Kierkagaard nor Ghazali were critical of the use, even constructive use, of philosophy for theology. The critiques were entirely aimed at where and how philosophy could be used to distort or displace revelation.

5 Of course, given the heavy usage of philosophical logic in the dissertation, the perspective is not hostile to in depth use of philosophies in theology, but only to the particular use named.
theological scholarship with the picture structuring what, following Christopher Morray-Jones, I am calling Transformational Mysticism. In the course of contrasting these pictures, I will make the case that, from the vantage offered by studies of ancient Jewish Mysticism, much of the New Testament and the writings of the Dionysius the Areopagite are profoundly parallel to each other. Second, I argue that an important implication for the differences between the two pictures is the relative priority their structures allow for Christology. Scholars operating with the first theological model seek to place Christology and negative theology in the conceptual space articulated by the correlative doctrines of monotheism and creation. By contrast, the second picture allows theologians to coherently locate the doctrines of creation and monotheism in the conceptual spaces opened up by a mystical and apophatic Christology. Third, I briefly summarizes each chapter and the dissertation’s conclusion.

Two Theological Pictures

This sections contrasts two theological pictures or models. The first is the prevailing model in contemporary theological scholarship and the second is the picture brought into view by the historical scholarship named above as well as in some forms of ascetico-mystical theology at home in the Christian East. The structuring grammar of the first picture is based in the doctrine of creation (especially creation ex nihilo for the more philosophical and systematic versions) and is articulated by what is often called “the absolute qualitative distinction between God and world.” The second picture, call it

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“Transformational Mysticism,” is structured by the logic of mystical encounter and transformation and makes more fluid and ecstatic distinctions. The numbered points below give the basic contours of the pictures and how they differ, especially for thinking through apophatic theology.

1. The absolute qualitative distinction of the received account.
   a. The model has a two-part grammar of the Creator-creature.
      i. The distinction between Creator and creature is absolute, inviolable, and foundational.
      ii. The model is radically monotheistic (even in Trinitarian forms).
   b. The discovery of divine ineffability or transcendence is inferential – based on logical extrapolations from the doctrine of creation.
   c. Negative theology has its most basic function as smashing conceptual idols.
      i. Augustine’s revolutionary re-interpretation of Biblical theophanies as creatures is an important presupposition for this negative theology.  
      ii. The idol smashing function in contemporary negative theology is marshalled as a response to the modern secular context.

2. Transformational mysticism.
   a. The model has a three-part grammar of Revealer, Revealed, and transformed which is logically prior to the Creator/creature distinction.
      i. The model is always a complex monotheism, if characterized as monotheistic at all.
      ii. All three categories – Revealer, Revealed, and transformed - are ecstatically fluid and permeable.
   b. The basis of the discovery of theological ineffability is experiential encounter.
      i. The model interprets Biblical and extra-Biblical theophanies as uncreated and ecstatic manifestations of the divinity.
   c. Apophatic theology not only exceeds the exigencies of conceptual idol smashing, but one of its ends is the production of animate idols (transformation).

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7 Ibid.

In the following sections I briefly summarizes the two theological pictures in a manner that follows the above outlines.

*The Absolute Qualitative Distinction*

While the first picture is present throughout contemporary Biblical and theological scholarship, its presence in New Testament studies and historically-minded philosophical theology is especially relevant for my argument. Take, for instance, New Testament scholars Richard Bauckham and Larry Hurtado. Each has produced Biblical scholarship of great relevance to theology because of the high Christologies they uncover in even the earliest strata of New Testament literature. Each has also presumed and defended the view that Second-Temple era Jews were by and large strict monotheists for whom the Creator-creature distinction was foundational and inviolable. This background theological assumption, however, has created problems for them. The first problem is explaining how the high Christologies of the New Testament emerged. The solutions provided, Crispin Fletcher-Louis has noted, are curiously modalist, which not only runs afoul Christian orthodoxy and spirituality, but has great difficulty handling the centrality of the relationship of the divine Jesus to his Father throughout the New Testament. The second problem is, as Hurtado has admitted, neither apotheosis nor theosis has any

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11 Ibid., 88-101.
possible place in such Jewish worldviews, which makes the early and widespread Christian soteriology of deification seem mysterious at best, if not downright alien to the New Testament.  

Anglo-American philosophical theology is currently full of brilliant forms of recovery of Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and of Dionysius the Areopagite as interpreted by these Latin theologians. The virtues of these studies are multiple. They combine careful historical retrievals of very sophisticated ancient and medieval theologies and philosophies. These projects constructively integrate ancient theologies with the best of modern philosophy. They are filled with very exacting and brilliant examinations of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the nature of theological language.

However, as in New Testament studies, there exist problems in this philosophical theology. A nearly universal characteristic of this literature, which is subject to criticism

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12 Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003), 91-93. Larry Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God? Historical Questions about Earliest Devotion to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 46. Working in this framework, Michael J. Gorman has attempted to locate both deification and Trinitarian theology in the letters of Paul. However, the force of the frame reduces deification to ethics and narratively constituted identity. See Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul’s Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009).


14 As also noted by Susannah Ticciati in *A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs* (Boston: Brill, 2015), 26ff. Ticciati argues that the doctrine of the incarnation is also central to these projects. However, while all of the negative theologians whose works are criticized in the second chapter are Christocentric scholars, their use of the incarnation in negative theology is primarily a means of reiterating conceptual lessons already inferred from the doctrine of creation by means of the Chalcedonian definition. See Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God*, 216-223, following Herbert McCabe OP. The dissertation argues that in the second model not only is the logic of transcendence first Christological and then creational, but it does not rely on formal rules of theological discourse, i.e. the Chalcedonian definition, to discover divine ineffability but on the apocalyptic “fire” of encountering the body of the Glory of God.
in the dissertation, is the manner in which it combine the analysis of creation *ex nihilo* with philosophies of language to make a case for the necessary transcendence of God beyond the limits of human language or thought. In so doing, this radically monotheistic and creation-based negative theology consistently reverts to its central preoccupation with the divine difference or distinction from creatures. God is therefore a contrasting limit to humanity – even as these theologies develop “non-competitive” ontologies and models of agency – whereby the end of apophatic theology is always, to borrow the language of a recent constructive version of this theology – to “manifest the divine difference” from creatures. In contrast, the dissertation is arguing out of a perspective of Second Temple Jewish mysticism and the mystical theology of Dionysius where the ineffability of God is an erotic lure into a union (*henosis*) where the human being participates in *all* of the divine names and uncreated glory. In this light, apophatic theology is not constrained by limits and difference, but operates in a field of intimate union and limitless/endless transcendence.

Another crucial aspect of these philosophical theologies is their Augustinian character. The relevant point for my argument of Augustine’s theology was his “revolutionary” move in *De Trinitate* to read the Old Testament theophanies as creatures of one sort or another. In so reading the Scriptural theophanies Augustine broke with the previous Christian tradition and with how the tradition developed in the East. Prior

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17 Bucur, “Theophanies and Vision of God in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*.”
to Augustine, the theophanies had been understood as appearances of Christ in his ecstatic divinity, and this interpretation was maintained in the East. However, Augustine faced certain Homoians who claimed that if Christ is visible in his divinity, and the Father is essentially invisible, then Christ was not of the same substance as God and must be subordinate. In order to defeat the Homoian argument, based as it was on traditional readings of the Scriptures, Augustine accepted their non-sequitur conclusion but rejected the traditional reading of the theophanies. For Augustine, to be God is to be invisible. Anything which is visible is a creature. What appears in Biblical visions are either an angel, pre-existing material which angels manipulate in some way, or a corporeal creatures created for the sake of the vision and “discarded” when that purpose is fulfilled.\(^{18}\)

My claim is not that the negative theologies constructed by the first picture treat Biblical theophanies in an Augustinian way. *The point is that they engage in negative theology without mentioning the Biblical theophanies at all.* They are Augustinian in just this way. With the theophanies demoted to creaturely status, the stuttering of an Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) or John of Patmos (Revelation 1), who place all of their descriptions of the Glory under qualification, have nothing to do with the negations of Eckhart, or Aquinas, or Dionysius. The Scriptural visions are separated from the beatific vision (and the Kingdom of God) and apophatic theology even as the beatific vision and apophatic theology are sometimes separated from each other.\(^{19}\)

\[^{18}\text{Augustine, *On the Trinity (De Trinitate)*, 3.10.19.}\]

\[^{19}\text{Even if the latter point is not true of Augustine himself, it is true of a great deal of contemporary negative theology which presuppose his demotion of Biblical theophanies to the status of creatures by the way their accounts of negative and apophatic theology make no reference to the Biblical theophanies.}\]
modern Augustinian-cum-Thomist traditions, is by and large not a response to a vision which constitutes salvation, but an inference drawn from the doctrine of creation and a means of resisting intellectual idolatry. However, it is the unity of Scriptural theophanies, the beatific vision, and apophatic theology which constitutes the alternative picture I am championing, but is rendered problematic so long as an Augustinian interpretation of theophanies stands.

The philosophical theologies of the first model are not only characterized by how they bring together the doctrine of creation ex nihilo with philosophies of the limits of language, and presuppose an Augustinian interpretation of Scriptural theophanies, but by construing apophatic theology as having its primary purpose in the resistance to intellectual or conceptual idolatry. Furthermore, as argued in the second chapter, these modern retrievals of medieval and Patristic apophatic theologies are largely motivated by a kind of intellectual disquiet about life in a secular time and space. The examination of the crucial scholars and texts in the second chapter will reveal the link between concern over secularism and the use of negative theology as a hammer to smash idols. There is no need to go into a deep examination of these theologies here because they will be the subject of extended analysis and criticism in the course of the dissertation.

Transformational Mysticism

In this section I will summarize the basic theological picture of transformational mysticism. I do so by showing the parallels between ancient and Scriptural forms of Jewish mysticism and the theology of Dionysius. The point is that there is a coherent manner of reading Scriptural theology and Patristic apophatic theology which is different
than the dominant model and which displays deep parallels between Jewish mysticism, the Scriptures, and Patristic apophatic theology. Neither the reading of the Scriptural texts in light of Jewish mysticism, nor the reading of Dionysius as illuminated by Jewish mysticism, is unique to the dissertation. The former has been pioneered in different ways by Gershom Scholem and Gilles Quispel, but it has proliferated in the publications of Rachel Elior, April Deconick, Jarl Fossum, Alan Segal, R. A. Morray-Jones, Charles Geischen, Crispin Fletcher-Louis, and Silviu Bunta to mention just a few.20 The latter has been developed by Alexander Golitzin and Bogdan Bucur.21 Nor, for that matter, is any part of the dissertation meant as a direct argument that these texts should be read in this manner. I presume such readings enroute to making my argument in fundamental theology. The summary of Second Temple era Jewish mysticism is necessarily simplified and abstracted – glossing over many differences in particular texts and traditions – but it does so in a manner that attempts not do injustice to the basic theological vision of the texts.

There are two relevant aspects of the picture shared by Jewish mystics and Dionysius and other early Christians. The first is that divinity and humanity are both understood as essentially ecstatic and, therefore, the distinction between them is fluid and permeable.22 God is ecstatic in the mode of revelation and humanity is protologically and

20 See the dissertation’s bibliography.


22 By “ecstasy” I mean an outgoing of one from oneself or a standing outside of oneself.
eschatologically ecstatic in its mode of transformation into divinity-revealed. The second point is that these two modes of ecstasy meet in the utterly divine but anthropomorphic theophany or divine image. That is, God is ecstatically manifest in and as the anthropomorphic theophany and humanity is ecstatically transformed/incorporated into this divine theophany. For the Jewish mystics, this anthropomorphic theophany is known variously as the Glory of YHWH (Kabod YHWH), the divine “body,” and divine “face,” the image (Hebrew – tselem, Greek eikôn), Son of man, the Power, the Heavenly Anthrōpos, etc. Throughout the New Testament the unity of these mutual ecstasies is in Christ as both the pre-existent Glory/Image/Son of Man and the one who incorporates believers into himself and so “glorifies” them. For Dionysius, the human-shaped appearance of God, into which humans are incorporated and deified, is the “theandric energy (energiea)” of Jesus.\(^{23}\) For the Christocentric Jewish mysticism of the New Testament and the Christocentric mysticism of Dionysius, Christ-the-human-shaped-Glory of God and the “theandric energy” of Jesus play the same roles. They are both the divine, ecstatic, and human-shaped revelation of God and they are both the one who deifies by incorporation of humans into himself. For both the Jewish mystics and Dionysius, the encounter with ecstatic divinity leads to ecstatic transformation of humanity into ecstatic divinity. Indeed, for both, the encounter with the former and transformation of the latter is at one and the same time revelation, the salvific vision of

God, and the Kingdom of God/Heaven/the Holy of Holies – all of which are glimpsed in the Biblical theophanies.  

Having stated the parallels between ancient Jewish mysticisms and Dionysius’s theology, I will contextualize and summarize these ideas in greater detail in the following section.

_Transformational Mysticism in the Scriptures_

In order to avoid common misunderstandings, I will sketch these ideas in more detail in the Jewish and Jewish-Christian texts because they are not what one usually associates with ancient Judaisms and yet they are well established in impressive historical work. Furthermore, my criticisms of modern negative theology are offered from the perspective of Jewish and Dionysian Transformational Mysticism, therefore the majority of the introduction is devoted to painting this basic theological picture in order to provide a background and framework for the argument. In this section I will explicate the mutual ecstasies of the Christological mysticisms of the New Testament and Dionysius. In the following section I will summarize the interplay between praise, revelation, and silence in both ancient Jewish texts and Dionysian theology. With the basic outlines of the two pictures in place, I will turn to the significant implication of the relative priority of Christology and Christological transcendence in the two theological pictures.

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It has been argued that much of the Old Testament, even as read by many Second Temple Jewish writers, is not best characterized as monotheistic. While some scholars go so far as to cast doubt on whether these texts and interpretations were monotheistic at all, I follow a slightly more cautious path in maintaining that if one is to use the language of “monotheism” to describe these texts then it is a “complex monotheism.” The monotheism is “complex” in that the divine unity is not opposed to ecstatic multiplicity nor is God conceived as a single (modern) individual. Divinity is essentially shareable by means of glorification or union. The angels, especially the Cherubim and Seraphim, are called “gods” and “sons of God” because they partake in YHWH’s divinity by means of their proximity to the divine presence manifest on the heavenly throne. Certain humans, high priests and the supremely holy, are also given divine or semi-divine status throughout the literature of the period, and in the Torah itself.

Concerning the ecstatic multiplicity of the one God, Alan Segal has noted a widespread manner of reading portions of the Hebrew Bible during the era of the Second Temple. It is well known how, in one and the same narrative, a revelatory and anthropomorphic being is characterized in one instance simply as “YHWH” but

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25 See Fletcher-Louis, Jesus Monotheism, 309-316 for a full discussion of these debates and why “complex monotheism” is an appealing interpretation of the textual evidence from Second Temple Judaism.

26 Ibid.

subsequently as the “angel of YHWH” and so on. Where modern critics detect different theological and literary sources, Segal persuasively argues Second Temple era Jews perceived mystical secrets about divinity and divine revelation. The appearing angel both is and is distinct from the invisible God. Furthermore, Segal and other scholars maintain with the weight of great evidence, this angel who is and yet is distinct from YHWH is read together with a whole host of other figures in the Old Testament: the Glory of God on Sinai, in the Holy of Holies, and filling the earth (Isaiah 6), the angel who leads the Hebrews through the desert and contains the holy name of “YHWH,” the anthropomorphic theophany of visionaries (especially Ezekiel), the second and manifest “I am” of the “I am that I am,” the hypostatic divine “name” and “wisdom” and “power,” the divine “image” (tselem) and “likeness’ (demuth), the “son of man,” the divine “body” and “face,” etc. Regardless of the name used, the point is that the theophanies throughout the Hebrew Bible and New Testament are not creatures, but are ecstatic and uncreated appearances of the invisible God – being both distinct from and identified with God.

This merging and distinguishing of the divinity is especially strong in a thread of Transformational Mysticism running through the Priestly texts of the Hebrew Bible,

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28 See, for example, Exodus 3:1-22 and Judges 13:2-25.


31 Daniel 7.

32 Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 42.
apocalyptic literature, and later esoteric rabbinic traditions and texts known as Merkava (throne) mysticism and Shiur Koma (“the measurement of the stature”). I will refer to these traditions uniformly as Merkava mysticism because all of them are especially focused on the revelation of anthropomorphic Glory upon the chariot throne (the merkava) in heaven and in the Holy of Holies of the temple (which are mysteriously the same for the tradition). Segal summarizes these traditions and their ecstatic view of divinity:

The human figure on the divine throne described different ways in Ezekiel 1, Daniel 7, and Exodus 24 among other places was blended into a consistent picture of a principle mediator figure who, like the angel of the Lord in Exodus 23, embodied, personified, or carried the name of God, YHWH, the tetragrammaton. Yahweh himself, the angel of God, and his Glory (kbwd) are melded together in a peculiar way, which suggested to its readers a deep secret about the ways the God manifested himself to humanity.

Ezekiel’s visions of the anthropomorphic Glory (or the “likeness of the appearance of the Glory of the LORD”), understood as the same as what Moses beheld in the dark cloud atop Sinai and the high priest saw in the Holy of Holies, are especially important for these traditions. These visions usually occur in the midst of liturgical praise and involve transformation of the visionary. But equally important for my argument is the power of the visions to overwhelm the recipient’s use of language, stretching it to the breaking

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33 Shiur Koma mysticism was concerned with the appearance and measurements of the body of the Glory as it appeared on the merkava. Scholars have identified five recensions of the material in ancient literature See Martin Cohen, The Shi’ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983).


point and beyond. As already mentioned, Ezekiel and John of Patmos qualify every predicate used in praise of the Glory, putting all description under qualification:

[A]nd seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like human form. Upward from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all around; and downward from what looked like loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendor all around. Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the likeness of the splendor all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of the Lord (Ezek. 1:26b-28).

Neither Ezekiel nor John will allow any descriptive term to go unqualified (Ezekiel 1:26-28, Rev. 1:12-16). They pile up words of praise of the Glory even as they constantly witness to the inadequacy of their words.

In the Priestly and Merkava traditions humanity is protologically and eschatologically called to become, or be “clothed in,” the Glory of God. Contrary to what is often presumed, these traditions are neither fundamentally aniconic or even an-idolatrous. Rather, the image and cult statue of God – the very divine presence in the world – is humanity. To be the visible presence of God was the original Glory of Adam. This Glory was lost but subsequently recovered momentarily in figures like Moses and Enoch and in the office of the high priest (on the Day of the Atonement). For later formulations of the traditions, transformation into the kabod YHWH is the end of all the righteous.

The ecstatic anthropology of the Priestly and Merkava traditions is best understood in three points. First, the whole created world is a macrocosmic temple and the Adam was placed in it as the cult-statue or idol of the Creator. Second, the Adam

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bodied forth the uncreated Glory of God. The lost Glory of Adam is recovered both by the high priesthood on the Day of Atonement and by certain very holy humans like Moses and Enoch. The third point will bring us to the uncreated anthropomorphic Glory itself which shares in the work of creating the world and is the model and end of humanity (the “image” (tselem) and “likeness” (demuth) of God).\textsuperscript{37} New Testament Christology is largely built upon the recognition of the human-shaped Glory as Christ.

Crispin Fletcher-Louis has made the case of the theology of Divine Humanity running through the throne mysticisms of Priestly and apocalyptic theologies. Concerning the “image” language of the Priestly creation story he writes: “[H]umanity is created to be the one creator god’s cult statue, his idol. ‘Image’ language is cult-statue or idol language. This is how the word tselem is normally used in the Old Testament (for example, Num 33.52; 1 Sam. 6.5; 11; 2 Kings 11.18)…”\textsuperscript{38} He follows Mayer Gruber in explaining a peculiarity of the Hebrew of Genesis 1:26-27:

\begin{quote}
[T]his also explains the otherwise vexing Hebrew beth in the phrase ‘Let us make ’adam betsalmenu . . . and God created the ’adam betsalmo, betselem of God he created him . . .‘ (Gen. 1.26-27). This is best taken as beth pretii which gives the translation ‘And God said, ‘Let us make man in the place of our image… And God created the ‘adam in the place of his statue, instead of God’s idol he created him. . .’\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} The High Priest also shared in the act of creation by how he tended to the temple – the microcosm – just as God had done in creating the cosmos – the macrocosm. In his vision of the Glory upon the Merkava throne, Ezekiel applied the language of tselem and demuth to the anthropomorphic Glory itself. The “image” and “likeness” according to which humans are created is a pre-existent human-like figure who partakes in creation and is both distinguished from and identified with YHWH.


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
All of this makes sense considering that the tabernacle (and later the temple) and the whole creation stand to each other as microcosm to macrocosm. The manner in which God has Moses build the tabernacle in Exodus 40 parallels exactly how God creates the world in Genesis 1. Furthermore, ancient Mesopotamian rituals for turning a mere statue into an idol, into the real and worshipful body of the god in the world, have a striking parallels in the Scriptural creation stories and accounts of the preparation of one for the priesthood.\(^{40}\) Statues were not the presence of the god until priests breathed on them so as to confer the spirit of the god upon them. This is precisely what YHWH does with the Adam in Genesis 2 (not to mention the resurrected Jesus breathing the Spirit on the disciples (John 20:22)).\(^{41}\)

Over against the picture of the absolute qualitative distinction, the theology of humanity as originally the cult-statue and idol of God presents a more fluid picture. Fletcher-Louis quotes Dean S. McBride to the effect that

Adamic beings are animate icons . . . the peculiar purpose for their creation is ‘theophanic’: to represent or mediate the sovereign presence of the deity within the central nave of the cosmic temple, just as cult-images were to do in conventional sanctuaries. [This means that humanity is] an inherently ambiguous species whose temporal existence blurs, by design, the otherwise sharp distinction between creator and creature.\(^{42}\)


\(^{41}\) Fletcher-Louis *Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, 122.

\(^{42}\) Dean S. Mcbride, in Fletcher-Louis, “The Image of God,” 76-77. That Mebride uses the language of blurring the distinction of “creator and creature” is fitting as a commentary on the Priestly creation story. In that story God created the world by tending to it – the macrocosmic temple – precisely the way the high priest is called in other Priestly texts to tend to the microcosmic temple. In other words, by fulfilling the high priestly role of tending to the temple the high priest participates in and bodies forth the divine act of creation. See Fletcher-Louis, “The Image of God,” 82ff.
Ironically, the so-called absolute and inviolable distinction between Creator and creature is breached in the creation narratives themselves. The fact that the creation stories present the Adam as the idol of God makes sense of how later traditions about Adam and Eve, in various ancient versions of *The Life of Adam and Eve*, described them as clothed in or even as the “Glory.” In some versions of the text the angels mistakenly worship the Adam and his cosmos filling body of glory, while in another version the angels are even commanded by God to worship the Adam and the divine Glory he manifests.\(^{43}\)

The place of humanity as the cult-statue and Glory of the invisible creator God was lost with the sin of the original couple according to the Scriptural stories. The apostle Paul says as much when he states that “all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God.”\(^{44}\) However, the Old Testament presents us with moments where the Glory of the Adam is regained. For instance, Moses sees the Glory and is gloriously transformed to the point that his face shines and must be veiled, just as the Holy of Holies must be veiled. Fletcher-Louis has shown how in many Scriptural and extra-Scriptural texts the high priest, at least on the Day of Atonement, recovered the lost glory of Adam – the very Glory of God. For the sake of *Yom Kippur* the high priest was dressed just as the anthropomorphic Glory appears in visions (and just as pagan idols were decorated)\(^{45}\) and had the ineffable name written across his turban. Fletcher-Louis argues that Daniel 7 is a

\(^{43}\) See Fletcher-Louis, *Jesus Monotheism*, 250-292.

\(^{44}\) This theology also explains why the recovery of this Glory at the eschaton results in the freedom of all of the creation (Romans 8). With humanity restored, the Glory of God once again fills the earth and death and decay, therefore, no longer reign.

vision of the Day of Atonement where the “One like the Son of Man” who ascends into heaven simply is the high priest entering into the Holy of Holies (which is heaven). In virtue of this entry, the high priest is transformed and partakes in the Glory (of God and the lost Glory of Adam) and divinity of the “Ancient of Days.” Furthermore, Fletcher-Louis notes the striking evidence that the Jews even appeared to worship God in the figure of the high priest on the Day of Atonement: The high priest who has been dressed as the Glory (and after the manner of adorning cult-statues/idols in neighboring nations), has the Name written on his turban, descends into the portion of the temple representing the earth from the portion representing heaven (the Holy of Holies), in the midst of the clouds of heaven/temple incense.46

The deification of high priests and holy persons, in which they bodied forth an ecstatic and fluid relation between God and humanity, is clear from many ancient Jewish texts, if one has eyes to see it. Priestly theology was always already incarnational in the figures of Adam and the high priest. Consider the following remarks from Philo of Alexandria. Concerning the perfect man, Philo wrote that he exists “on the boundary between the uncreated and perishable nature.”47 Of the high priest who enters the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement Philo wrote of his “belonging as to his mortal nature to creation, but as to his immortal nature to the uncreated God (Dreams 2:231).”48

Finally, the writers of the New Testament extend the Jewish mystical outlook by identifying Jesus Christ as the eternal image/icon of God (the human-shaped revelation of

46 Fletcher-Louis, “The High Priest as Divine Mediator.”

47 Philo, Dreams 2:234, as cited in Fletcher-Louis, Jesus Monotheism, 298.

48 Philo, Dreams 2:231, as cited in Fletcher-Louis, Jesus Monotheism, 298.
God) and the one into whom the righteous are incorporated and so glorified/deified. The various titles in Second Temple Judaism for the theophanic figure became a veritable litany of Christological titles in the New Testament: Glory, Power, Son of Man, Image, Icon/Image, Son of God, Wisdom, Face, fullness that fills all, etc. Jesus is the one enthroned in Heaven according to various Pauline texts and St. John’s Revelation. He is the spiritual Adam according to Paul, the “Heavenly Anthrōpos,” as well as the Glorious New Human who fills the cosmos and incorporates humanity.

As an example, consider Morray-Jones’s interpretation of Merkava and Shiur Komah traditions in the epistle to the Ephesians. Rachel Elior has established the close relationship between Shavuot and the liturgical readings of Moses’s ascent up Sinai to disappear into the theophanic cloud, Ezekiel’s Merkava vision of the Glory (Ezekiel 1), and the Song of Songs.⁴⁹ According to Elior and others, these texts were brought together during the feast and read as perspectives on the same reality: Israel’s praise of, vision of, and union with the kavod YHWH. Not only does Ezekiel describe what Moses saw, but the “beloved” of the song is identified with anthropomorphic Glory.

Morray-Jones has argued that it is appropriate “to regard the letter to the Ephesians as a Christian parallel to the Shavuot sermons about the ascent of Moses from Sinai to the heavenly throne which…were delivered in the synagogues. . . [therefore] the discovery of merkava and/or shiur koma imagery and themes in this letter will come as no surprise.”⁵⁰


Shiur Koma mysticism was preoccupied with measurements of the cosmic-sized body of Glory. The texts describe mind bending measures of various portions of the divine body and were obviously non-literal and meant to be expressive of divine infinity. It was also keenly interested in the revelation of the Name, the Tetragrammaton. Furthermore, the revelation/union of the righteous with this cosmos-filling body was articulated through the erotic language of The Song of Songs.\textsuperscript{51}

All of these elements of the Shiur Koma are present the letter to the Ephesians where the risen Christ is identified with the cosmos-filling body of Glory.\textsuperscript{52} The eroticism of the Song present in both the opening reference to Jesus as the “beloved” and in author’s use of the love between husband and wife as a way of speaking of “the mystery” of Christ and the church. Furthermore, within the first 14 verses of the letter Paul invokes the “praise of glory” three times. This passage, and most of the letter, are filled with language typical of Shiur Koma such as “fullness” (plerōma), “power,” “measure” and “immeasurable,” “filling,” “revelation/apocalypse” etc. Consider the close of the first chapter:

\begin{quote}
…that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of the Glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in fuller knowledge of Him, so that, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, you may know… the immeasurable greatness of His Power unto us who believe… which He worked in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand in the heavenly heights, far
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Morray-Jones, “The Epistle to the Ephesians.”

\textsuperscript{52} Morray-Jones makes the point that throughout the New Testament there appear to be two models of the relationship between Christ and the Glory. In one Christ is simply identified as the Glory of God. In the second, Christ is enthroned beside, utterly filled with, and is the mediator of the Father’s Glory. Morray-Jones believes the latter is the model in Ephesians where a divine Christ is filled with, and so is the body of, the Glory because he is the full gathering of humanity’s praise of God. In this way, Morray-Jones makes my point even stronger. The meeting and union of the ecstatic God with ecstatic humanity is in and through Jesus and his theurgical praise. Although I predominately use the Dionysian language of the “theandric energy” of Jesus in the dissertation, it is worth noting that Dionysius often wrote of the “human theurgy of Jesus” which is profoundly analogous with what Morray-Jones finds in the Christological Shiur Koma of Ephesians.
above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every name that is named...And He placed all things under his feet and appointed him head over all things for the Church, which is his body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.\textsuperscript{53}

Murray-Jones notes that “the immeasurable greatness of His Power” is “almost certainly an echo of the Shiur Koma tradition.”\textsuperscript{54} Clearly, Christ’s resurrected body is the cosmos-filling body of the glory and his name “above every name” is the Tetragrammaton.

Furthermore, the immeasurable power and glorious body of Christ have been revealed in the midst of praise, even as the church is being incorporated into this body. Segal summarizes the latter point well: “Remarkably, Paul reports that believers are already experiencing a transformation into the principle manifestation of God.”\textsuperscript{55}

In short, for much of the New Testament, the ecstatic God and ecstatic humanity enter a profound union in the enthroned Glory, who is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Humanity was created to be the cult-statue of God in the macro-cosmic temple. The Adam was clothed in, and bodied forth the Glory, even as the Adam was made after the “image” and “likeness” of God. Christ is the pre-existent Glory and Image and Likeness. When Christians are baptized into Christ, they are “clothed” in Christ – in the lost Glory of Adam – and are destined to once again become the image, icon, and idol of God. Paul takes this theology of theosis so far that he claims the creation longs for the apocalypse of God’s children: “for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the

\textsuperscript{53}Translation by Murray-Jones in “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” 592.

\textsuperscript{54} Murray-Jones, “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” 593.

children of God…that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the _glory_ of the children of God (Romans 8:19-21).\(^56\)

_Transformational Mysticism in the Dionysian Corpus_

I will be less expansive on Dionysius’s theology in this introduction, because the fourth chapter explores his apophatic theology in more detail. In short, Dionysius shares with the _Merkava_ mystics the idea of mutual ecstasies, divine and human, and a human-shaped revelation of God. Furthermore, Golitzin has already put together a substantial interpretation of Dionysius which offer a full picture of Dionysius’s theology contextualized by the study of Jewish mysticism.\(^57\)

Dionysius devotes the longest chapter of _The Divine Names_ to erotic divine ecstasy.\(^58\) He makes it clear that God is ecstatically drawn out of Godself and into the creation by means of an erotic desire for uniting with creatures. Dionysius articulates erotic divine ecstasy in terms divine processions, powers, and energies.\(^59\) I will develop these ideas in detail in the fourth chapter.

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\(^56\) The deification present in Revelation is no less striking. Christ promises not simply eternal life or God-likeness to those who overcome, but that they will sit on the heavenly throne just as he has sat on the heavenly throne. Eliot Wolfson has made very clear how, in ancient Jewish literature, to be enthroned in heaven is to be enthroned as a god. See Eliot Wolfson, _Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

\(^57\) Golitzin, _Mystagogy_, 1-64.

\(^58\) Dionysius, _Divine Names_ IV.

\(^59\) There is no space to develop the point in the dissertation, but Dionysius also articulates divine ecstasy with the language of “unity” and “distinctions” of the Godhead. See Bogda G. Bucur, “Dionysius East and West: Unities, Differentiations, and the Exegesis of Biblical Theophanies,” _Dionysius_ 26 (2008), 115-138.
Concerning human ecstasy, *The Mystical Theology* speaks of an ascending series of negations. This is an account of ecstatic human movement beyond body and mind and into union with the unknown God. Significantly, Golitzin makes the point that the negations of *The Mystical Theology* are only one aspect of Dionysius’s account of human ecstasy. It is the human experience of God – “suffering divine things” – which motivate and constitute apophatic theology. The negations of the *Mystical Theology* are only preparations for the Christological climax of Dionysian apophatic theology in the *Epistle III*:

The sudden is what is brought forward, against hope; it is brought forward from what is to this time unmanifested into what is now manifested. I believe the theology has declared this in reference to the love of man in Christ: the beyond being had proceeded from hiddenness into a manifest taking on of being in a human way. It is hidden after the manifestation; or, to speak more divinely, it is hidden in the manifestation. For this remains hidden about Jesus: the mystery in him is not brought forward by any logos or intellect. Rather it remains ineffable in being spoken, and unknown in being thought.

Many have noted the Platonic and Neoplatonic provenance of the “sudden” (*exaiphnes*) as the point at which time and eternity intersect. Yet Golitzin has persuasively shown how the “sudden” in the Septuagint, New Testament, Dionysius’s Syrian Patristic forerunners, and in both Greek and Syriac liturgies is consistently and conspicuously used to mark the moment of heavenly revelation, of apocalypse. Furthermore, what is manifest in this climax of apophatic theology, the “sudden” apocalypse of Jesus, is the “hiddenness” of God. It is precisely divine hiddenness that Jesus brings into our presence and reveals.

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Epistle IV, following directly on the heels of the above, brings us to the union of the divine and human ecstasies in Christ.

[T]he one who divinely sees is known beyond intellect such that the affirmations in respect of Christ’s love of man have the power of preeminent denial. That we may speak summarily: he was not man, not as non-man but as from man and beyond man; beyond man, he truly came to be a man. As for the rest he did not do the things of God according to God; he did not do these things according to man. But as having been made man from God he showed us a new divine-human activity [theandric energy].

In the fourth chapter I will point out how, for Dionysius, anything which is “beyond intellect (nous)” is “beyond being (ousia),” and so it is Christ and his love of humanity which is beyond being. The call to praise Christ and his love of humanity, which is beyond being and mind, is what requires apophatic negation (the negation of the negation). The fourth chapter also explains how “energy” is far more than mere “activity.” Rather, “energy” is the ecstatic revelation of being (ousia). In other words, for Dionysius, apophatic negations are the response to encountering the human-shaped divine theophany. Dionysius’s apophatic negations and Ezekiel’s and St. John’s constant qualifications of their descriptions are not merely analogous, but profoundly similar responses to visions of the human-shaped revelation of God.

According to Dionysius, the theandric energy of Jesus is not simply encountered in mystical experience, but deification is incorporation into this energy. Golitzin translates the second half of Epistle IV in a way which brings out the broader theology of deification by incorporation into the divine-human energy of Jesus: “[Christ] did not do what is divine as God, nor what is human as man, but instead [as] God having become

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man, He administered to [or, arranged for] us a certain, new divine-human activity.”

The point I see in Dionysius’s work is not simply that is an approximation of the New Testament Merkava. According to both, the vision of the divine-human theophany transforms one into the divine-human theophany itself. For Dionysius, the theandric energy plays close to exactly the same role as the anthropomorphic theophany of Jewish and Jewish-Christian mysticism. They are both that which bodies forth the ineffability of God and into which believers are incorporated and so deified.

Praise, Revelation, and Silence

I cannot name all of the parallels between the Merkava mysticisms of the Scriptures with the theology of Dionysius. However, it is helpful for my argument to take the space to point out how in all of these the Christological revelation that transforms is also the revelation which is manifest in the midst of praise and ultimately brings all to silence. Whether one considers the human-shaped Glory-Image of the Merkava mystics or the theandric energy of Jesus, the relationships between praise, revelation, and silence are the same. Furthermore, these all take place when the praise of the earthly church/temple/hierarchy are taken up into the heavenly temple/hierarchy and partake of the same theurgic praise of the angels.

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64 A more complete historical account of Dionysius would require an exploration of both the “theandric energy” of Jesus and the concept of “hierarchy” and how these are related to each other in order to draw out in full all of the parallels between theophany and transformation in Dionysian mysticism and Merkava mysticism. Golitzin has argued that the Pauline divine body is present in Dionysius’s account of “hierarchy” and the human sharing in the divine energies made possible by “hierarchy” in Mystagogy, 183-191, 256-257. The insight into the parallels between the Jewish anthropomorphic theophany and the Dionysian theandric energy are my own.
Consider the following extra-canonical forms of Merkava mysticism and an example from the book of Revelation. From the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, at the height of praise and revelation it reads:

Praise God…and exalt him, the Glory in the tabernacle…The Cherubim fall before Him and bless. When they rise, the sound of divine silence [is heard]… In the sound of divine silence, they bless the image of the chariot throne…There is a sound of silent blessing…The sound of joyful praise falls silent, and there is a silence of divine blessing in all the camps of the elohim.65

And from the Shiur Koma we likewise read of the silence when the Glory descends onto the throne of revelation in the midst of praise:

And the angels…encircle the Throne of Glory. They are on one side, the Living Creatures are on the other side, and the Shekinah is in the center. And one living creature rises above the Throne of Glory and draws near to the Seraphim…and says in a loud voice, a voice of silence: “The Throne alone shall I exalt…” At once, the Wheels are silent, the Seraphim are still, the troops of watchers and Holy Ones are thrust into the River, the Living Creatures turn their faces to the ground, and the Youth brings the fire of deafness and puts it in their ears, so that they do not hear the voice that is spoken...66

The revelatory climax of the slain Lamb on the Merkava in John’s Revelation likewise locates the revelation in the midst of praise and as resulting in silence.67

And all of the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and


66 Ibid., 419

67 See also Ephesian 1:1-18 in which Paul three times uses variations on the phrase “praise of Glory” and then mentions the interior apocalypse of knowing Christ as revealed on the Merkava throne of the heart. Morray-Jones has shown how in these theologies the cosmic temple, earthly temple, and temple of the believer’s body all open into the same Holy of Holies in which the divine Image of God is enthroned and revealed. See Morray-Jones, “The Temple Within” 430-431. The manner in which both ancient Jewish mysticism and Dionysian theology are structured by a three-fold temple – the cosmic/angelic temple, the earthly/ecclesiastical temple, and the temple of one’s own body has been wonderfully explored by Golitzin in Mystagogy 15-24.
power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!”...For this reason [the martyrs] are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple...for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd...When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven... (Revelation 7:11-8:1).

Dionysius’s mysticism is fundamentally no different. Golitzin and Andrew Louth have both shown that the setting for Dionysian apophatic theology is cultic and liturgical. The first two treatises in the Dionysian corpus are commentaries on the liturgy of the angels and the liturgy of the church. The more often read Divine Names, Mystical Theology, and Epistles are also situated in liturgical contexts. For that reason Golitzin argues that the Divine Names follows rather than precedes the Celestial and Ecclesial Hierarchies.68 Hence, even the seemingly most philosophical of the texts, the Divine Names, links praise, silence, and revelation as follows:

When we honor what is ineffable with a temperate silence, then we are lifted to the bright light which wholly illumines us in the sacred writings. They guide us in their light toward sacred hymns: we are outworldly illuminated by them and formed toward the sacred [angelic] hymnologies. Thus, we turn toward seeing the thearchic light which is commensurately given to us by them, and toward offering hymns to the good-giving source of every sacred manifestation of light.69

The structure of praise, revelation, and silence runs throughout all of the Dionysian corpus. The high point of praise is – as with Merkava mystics – one and the same as the point of revelation of the Glory (Jesus) in which the incomprehensibility of God is seen so as to reduce the worshippers to silence.


69 Dionysius, Divine Names I, 589B.
The Priority of Apophatic Christology

There remains one last point to make about the conceptual differences between the two pictures. The “absolute qualitative distinction” framework is conceptually monotheistic before it is Christological. The essential characteristic of this monotheism is the doctrine of creation and the Creator/creature relationship. Transformational mysticism is Christological (or “Glory-logical”) before it is even monotheistic, much less before it develops an account of creation.

Both the New Testament scholars cited above and the negative theologians whose writings are criticized in the second chapter start with a monotheism whose grammar is expressed in the doctrine of creation and then move to Christology. The New Testament scholars work hard to fit high Christology into a presumed backdrop of creation-based monotheism. Fletcher-Louis has shown the difficulties this presumption makes for explaining the emergence of a high Christology in a Jewish context. Negative theologians like Herbert McCabe and Denys Turner, both of whom I respect and agree with on many points except this one, establish the incomprehensibility of God based on inferences drawn from the doctrine of creation. Christology is subsequently brought into the space of negative theology by drawing on the implications of the Chalcedonian definition of Christ’s natures. The formal rules for Christological discourse reiterate the same points about divine ineffability and transcendence as the doctrine of creation ex nihilo. In this

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70 The New Testament scholars are Hurtado and Bauckham as already mentioned. The negative theologians are David Burrell, Denys Turner, and Eric Perl.


theology, Christological incomprehensibility is, at best, consistent with the prior revelation of the divine incomprehensibility in the doctrine of creation. This leads to insuperable difficulties, as I will argue in the first two chapters.

Transformational Mysticism, on the other hand, places the encounter with the divine Jesus, with the Glory, logically and historically prior to monotheism and the doctrine of creation. Indeed, Christology is not made to fit into the framework provided by monotheism, but monotheism was adopted into the framework provided by the worship of and encounter with the Glorious Christ. This is true both of the narratives within Scripture as well as the historical and cultic settings in which the Scriptural texts were written and received. Moses encounters the anthropomorphic Glory atop the mountain of revelation, and in the midst of this encounter, he receives the revelation of creation. Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology* likewise begins with Moses’s vision and the Trinity before moving on to negate things of the “First Principle.” Furthermore, these traditions – both of Moses and the creation – were given a place in a cultic setting where people were gathered around and in a tent or temple in which the Glorious manifestation of God upon the Cherubic *merkava* was worshiped and encounter with the Glory was both feared and sought.

In other words, transformational mysticism does not merely point to the Old Testament theophanies, claim these are Christ, and so buy the pre-existence of Jesus and logical priority of Christology on the cheap. Rather, it presupposes the pre-existence of Jesus in the ascetico-liturgical lives of worship, devotion, and praise of a people, and in the structure of religious desire for and expectation of revelation. The later development

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73 Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* I, 997A-997B.
of monotheism, and the narratives of creation, were made to fit into these Christological ("Glory-logical") intellectual, religious, liturgical, ascetic, imaginative, and aesthetic structures, not the other way around. The ineffability of God, then, is not Christological by being based on the formal rules of discourse about the divine Jesus, as consistent with the doctrine of creation, but upon the fiery body of Christological encounter.

The priority of apophatic Christology in Transformational Mysticism is important for my argument because the concern of the dissertation is not merely a proper characterization of apophatic theology, but with the place of apophatic Christology in the whole economy of theology and Christian life. Christian theologians are dependent on the revelation delivered to the prophets and apostles, a revelation which is Christological and ultimately ineffable, even as our lives are oriented towards the same vision/revelation which constitutes the kingdom of God.74

Chapter Summaries

In order to make a positive case for the second picture, I begin by explaining insuperable difficulties with the most sophisticated and influential contemporary examples of negative theology operating with the first picture. These chapters are two parts of the same argument. The first chapter examines the hidden equivocations at the heart of logical psychologism and the second chapter uncovers these equivocations in the arguments in currently influential versions of Anglo-American negative theology.

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74 See each of the Synoptic Gospels where Christ’s claim that “there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom,” is immediately followed by the Transfiguration (Matt. 16:27-17:13, Mark 9:1-13, Luke 9:27-36).
The first chapter, “Fantasies of Transcendence: Part 1,” is a close examination of the problem of psychologism in logic. Psychologism is the view that logic and the necessities of thought are dependent upon some empirical and/or contingent element of humans and their thinking, and, therefore, constitute limitations of human thought. Following philosopher James Conant, the chapter illustrates a clear example of psychologism in Rene Descartes’s philosophy of logic and theology of divine power. The example of Descartes is significant because it exposes the relationship which sometimes obtains between philosophical fantasy and a negative theology in which divine power has been abstracted from the figure of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the first chapter I also examine, albeit briefly, the history of philosophical criticism of psychologism by phenomenologists, critical theorists, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. I then turn to Wittgenstein’s unique philosophy which goes beyond criticism to deftly uncover psychologism’s bewitching attractiveness and the equivocations which haunt all of its forms. The conclusion is that any claim to have thought or named the limits of thought and language is empty and nonsensical. Consequently, any negative theology which tries to articulate the transcendence and ineffability of God in terms of the limits of thought and language is equally nonsensical. The conclusion may falsely appear to readers to necessitate a theology of sheer immanence. That it may do so speaks to just how taken many of us are with arguments about divine transcendence and incomprehensibility which are incoherent at best and

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serve mainly as distractions from the manner in which divine incomprehensibility can be truly encountered.

The second chapter, “Fantasies of Transcendence: Part 2,” is an examination of three historical and philosophical negative theologies which press the logic of the first theological model with great sophistication and rigor: Eric Perl’s reconstruction of Dionysian apophatic philosophy, Denys Turner’s well known retrieval of apophatic theology by way of Thomas Aquinas, Meister Eckhart, and Dionysius the Areopagite, and David Burrell’s massively influential work on the negative theology at the heart of Aquinas’s account of theological language and the doctrine of creation. In each case the analysis shows how the equivocations of psychologism stubbornly reappear as each scholar attempts to demonstrate how the necessities of thought or language function as limitations preventing humans from comprehending or describing the Creator. The presence of psychologistic equivocation in these negative theologies is striking given Perl’s association with phenomenology, Turner’s with “grammatical” forms of theology, and Burrell’s overt reliance upon the philosophy of Wittgenstein. Furthermore, it is arresting how the transcendence of God-qua-Creator functions as a limit and limitation of human intellectual agency in these theologies, given the prominence of the language of “non-competitive” and “non-contrastive” ontologies and models of agency in the literature. The chapter’s analysis of these theologies is sharpened by occasional comparisons to texts in the traditions of “Transformational Mysticism” and how the more


overtly “mystical” theologies are actually less philosophically problematic than the philosophically “sophisticated” negative theologies.

The chapter concludes by linking the human attraction to psychologistic methods with the contemporary use of negative theology as primarily a means of criticizing intellectual idolatry. It does so by pointing out how all three of the philosophers and theologians named in the chapter have written about secularism and/or atheism and have sought to leverage negative theology against the claims and arguments of aggressive secularism and atheism.

Having established the emptiness of the influential accounts of demonstrating the transcendence of the Creator in current literature, I move on in the next two chapters to ask why these empty strategies can remain so bewitching. I do so by situating the existential roots of confusions and fantasies concerning human hiddenness in relationship to why and how humans primordially and perennially seek to evade divine hiddenness. Like chapters one and two, chapters three and four form two parts of a single argument.

Chapter three, “The Gaze of Humility: Part 1,” analyzes how and why humans produce fantasies about the hiddenness of others. The conclusion is that anxiety and fear over the fact of both our availability and hiddenness to each other, and the strong desire to evade the obligations and consequences these place upon us, leads us to fantasize about human ineffability which would relieve of us these burdens. In short, we are almost inevitably tempted by the persuasiveness of fantastical pictures of human hiddenness because we are the kinds of beings who want to be relieved of the pressures and risks involved in the concrete drama of disclosure and obscurity in human encounter. The
chapter draws out this argument in the conversation with the philosophies of Cora Diamond, Stanley Cavell, and Emmanuel Levinas.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on the essential roles of humility and meekness in intelligible human interaction. In so doing, a link is made between these philosophies of encounter and the “Transformational Mysticism” in the Dimitru Staniloae’s *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*. In both Cavell’s philosophy and Staniloae’s formulation of traditional ascetico-mystical struggle for holiness, *loving attention* is of central importance and can only be achieved by means of meekness and humility.

Chapter four, “The Gaze of Humility, Part 2,” argues that the “Transformational Mysticism” common to the New Testament and the theology of Dionysius present the encounter with Jesus as the Crucified Lord of Glory as the heart of apophatic theology. The shift in theological attention from psychologistic models to this one is best laid out in a step wise fashion. First, divine ineffability is not discovered by means of an inference based on the doctrine of creation, but by the world-shattering appearance of the Glory of God. Second, the ineffable Glory is identified as Jesus of Nazareth. Third, both the New Testament and Dionysius put special emphasis on the revelation of the Glory in and as Christ by means of his death. The ineffability of God, therefore, is not first discovered in the simplicity or infinity of the Creator, but in the humility and meekness of the Lord of Glory (the crucified *kabod YHWH*). Finally, the chapter notes that the Glory as a the “Face of God,” and John’s presentation of the enthroned Glory as the slain lamb *covered*

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in eyes (Rev 5:6), further means that divine incomprehensibility is revealed less in gazing upon Christ than in finding oneself being looked upon by the humble and humbling gaze of the crucified Jesus.

The chapter includes an argument about how theology of divine incomprehensibility in the second picture is neither psychologistic nor modelled on a problematic view of human hiddenness. In point of fact, language does not fail, but the prophet/mystic/saint is rendered speechless as finding oneself caught up in the infinite regard of the Meek One.

The two-part chapter concludes with a reflection on why theologians are strongly tempted to look for divine transcendence by looking away from the humility and meekness of the Crucified towards the emptiness of the “limits of thought.” This reflection leads back to the first Biblical appearance of the Glory, walking in the Garden of Eden, and to the primordial human temptation to hide from the Glory’s gaze and how the practice of theology can itself become a way of giving in to the same temptation.

Before moving to a summary of the conclusion, another word is in order about the heavily philosophical tone of the dissertation’s argument in fundamental theology. The philosophical register of the dissertation’s argument is not only due to the argumentative strategy of having the philosophy of logic and language show that it cannot do what theologians and philosophers have tried to make it do. It is also utilized as a means of making intelligible connections between ancient traditions of Transformational Mysticism and the best of contemporary American thought about encounter, logic, and hiddenness in the writings of Cora Diamond, Stanley Cavell, and James Conant. In so doing, this fundamental theology is following the lead of Maurice Blondel and his
method of immanence, wherein philosophy is shown to reach out to and for the revelation of the Gospel. These philosophies, in which loving attention is a quintessentially human task – and failure - and is made possible by humility and meekness, are well suited for a persuasive accounting of human life which is brought to perfection in the humility of God and by transformation into the body of this humility. In other words, the dissertation can be viewed as an argument for the place of Transformational Mysticism in contemporary American theology by means of a Blondelian method of immanence.

The conclusion moves away from the dissertation’s mainly negative task of explaining and weakening the temptations that haunt a particular model of theology by means of applying the model’s logic rigorously and by the vantage offered by what is taken to be a more Biblical, Jewish, and Patristic theological model. Rather, the conclusion begins a case for the fruitfulness of Transformational Mysticism in constructive and philosophical theology. It offers an example of intimate human encounter and union about which, I argue, Cavell’s and Levinas’s philosophies are unable to make full sense. The Priestly and Dionysian accounts of “glorification” and “theosis” offer a grammar and vocabulary which can be projected from the divine-human relationship to human-human relationships in such a way that these modes of human encounter are honored in word and in silence.


80 Stâniloae also utilized Blondel in making a case for a theology which I characterize as a form of “Transformational Mysticism” in his Orthodox Spirituality, 32-42. Although the philosophy used in the dissertation is not Blondelian, the method of deploying philosophy in service to fundamental theology is.
**Concluding Note**

There are a number characteristics of *The Praise of Glory* which might lead the reader to conclude that it partakes in, and has its point as, taking up old arguments between the Christian East and Christian West. In the course of its argument there is a critique of Augustine’s interpretation of Biblical theophanies, a defense of the essence/procession distinction in Dionysian theology, an occasional reference to Gregory Palamas, and the use of Dimitru Stăniloae’s theology. However, this impression is mistaken. On the one hand, the argument mainly appeals to authorities common to the Christian East and Christian West; the Scriptures and Dionysius the Areopagite. On the other hand, the point is not the superiority of one theological system or method to another, but to the placing of the meekness and humility of God and of those who would see God at the heart of the theological enterprise. This orientation is not unique to the East even as it is but one strain of theology which comes from the East.
CHAPTER I

FANTASIES OF TRANSCENDENCE I:

SOVEREIGNTY, LOGIC, AND EQUIVOCATION

In order to draw the limit to thought we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).  

Running up against the limits of language? Language is, after all, not a cage.  

René Descartes thought the Scholastics impious. Allow me to explain. In reaction to what he took to be the medieval failure to honor divine sovereignty, Descartes gave systematic expression to the central topic of this chapter and the next, psychologism. Furthermore, Cartesian psychologism, which I explain below, was intimately connected to negative theology which arose out of his religious zeal for an

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82 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Conversations with the Vienna Circle, recorded by Frederich Waismann (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), 117.

83 James Conant, “In Search of a Logically Alien Thought: Descartes, Kant, Frege and the Tractatus” in The Philosophy of Hilary Putnam, Philosophical Topics, Vol. 20 No. 1 (1991), 115-180. James Conant’s writings on the psychologism and the limits of thought, especially in this article, have had a profound influence over this chapter.
account of divine power totally abstracted from the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. To be clear, Descartes was not the first to write and think in psychologistic terms, nor does one typically link psychologism solely to Cartesian philosophy in the modern era. Yet, in Descartes, we have an especially clear presentation of what can be a subtle matter in many ancient and modern philosophers and we can see the theological roots and implications of this perspective. Psychologism concerns how we picture the whole of thought in an attempt to represent its conditions and necessities. It is not hard to see why the topic of psychologism plays so central a role in a dissertation on apophatic and negative theologies. Should not the negative theologian be preoccupied with the fundamental nature of thought, or of the nature of the descriptive powers of language? Is that not her task, to bring the shape of understanding and expression before the mind’s eye so as to communicate that, why, and how the Creator cannot fit into this shape? One way or another, or so I shall argue in the next chapter, this has been a prominent dimension of recent versions of the via negativa. The goal of this chapter and the next is to release us from the grip of this picture as a way to proceed theologically, and, even, to release the reader from the notion that this is any thought at all which she is being called to give up.

84 Although a great deal of what I argue for in the dissertation is similar to what Jean-Luc Marion has argued in his accounts of apophatic theology – that apophatic theology is experiential, Christological, and involves finding oneself gazed upon by God – a crucial difference already emerges on this point about Descartes. Marion has commented on Descartes’s account of the relationship between the eternal truths of logic and math and God. Where I see a Christian theology of divine power which is problematically abstracted from the figure of Christ and deep philosophical confusion, Marion sees a laudable attempt to protect the transcendence of God in a context where the tradition of analogical speech about God had been disfigured. This difference is closely related to our differences in philosophically accounting for the possibility of ineffable experiences, as explored briefly in the dissertation’s final chapter and conclusion. See Jean-Luc Marion, On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions, translated by Christina M. Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 103-115.
In this chapter I offer an historical and conceptual overview of what I am calling the notes of psychologism. I will then turn to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was extraordinarily careful to resist the temptations of psychologism. In the following chapter I will demonstrate that many of the most influential strategies for securing divine ineffability in contemporary theology are forms of psychologism and that they can be seen to be less than attractive after an encounter with Wittgenstein’s anti-psychologism. Some are so unconsciously and reflexively wedded to logical psychologism that these two chapters may leave them thinking that there is no way forward for apophatic theology.

Another way of looking at this chapter is as steady and thorough critique of the very idea of there being “limits of thought” or “limits of sense.” I make this critique because I take any presence of the “limits of thought/sense” in theology to be at best a diversion and distraction. The direct criticism of “the limits of thought” is only explicitly named in the penultimate section of the chapter. However, the whole chapter exists for the sake of showing how the form of words “limits of thought/sense” are empty. At first sight, some of the analysis may seem remote from this goal, but each section is required to thoroughly banish all of the subtle ways in which the notion of “limits” appear and reappear in various guises. By the end of the chapter, I show the ways in which each section relates to this goal. Furthermore, in the second chapter, I demonstrate the theological fruits of the fine-grained analysis enacted in this chapter.

So what is psychologism and what has it to do with theology? To answer that we must turn to Descartes and his reaction against Scholastic theology. What bothered Descartes so much was a seemingly small matter over omnipotence and logic. Can God
do the logically impossible? Or, is it that even God cannot transgress logic and is limited in this sense? The great majority of the medieval scholastics answered that God could not do the logically impossible like change the past or create mountains without valleys. Indeed, they tended to put it just that way; the logically impossible are things—somethings—that God cannot create. They are limits of divine omnipotence.85

Descartes, in his zeal for divine sovereignty, insisted that the opposite was true. The necessary truths of logic are not limitations of divine power, but are themselves contingent on the divine will. The necessary truths are necessary for us, for our thought, but may have been otherwise due to divine power. It is true, Descartes acknowledged, what it would mean for there to be mountains without valleys or for the past to now be changed is unknown and unknowable to us.

I do not think we should ever say of anything that it cannot be brought about by God. For since every basis of truth . . . depends on his omnipotence, I would not dare to say that God cannot make a mountain without a valley, or bring it about that 1 and 2 are not 3. I merely say that He has given me such a mind that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, or a sum of 1 and 2 which is not 3; such things involve a contradiction in my conception [italics added].86

In other words, our minds are hardwired by God with the necessities that we know as logic, math, etc. We cannot understand a different logical order, but because we know that God’s power is infinite we know that there can be such a world, i.e. one with mountains and no valleys, even if we cannot understand such a world or say what it would be like.


With benevolence, the Lord granted that we live in a world whose necessities are one and the same as the necessities of our thinking – logic and the structures of the world coincide. The law of non-contradiction not only governs our capacity to conceive, but also the realm of possibility for the world we inhabit. It is by trust in divine benevolence that we can be assured that we have been given minds whose necessary structures are a fit with our world. With our finite minds contingently fitted to comprehending our world the relationship of these minds to divine sovereignty and worlds it could create with a different logical order is one of mere apprehension of possibility, not comprehension.

I know that God is the author of everything and that these [necessary] truths are something and consequently that He is their author. I say that I know this, not that I conceive it or grasp it; because it is possible to know that God is infinite and all-powerful although our mind, being finite, cannot grasp or conceive Him. In the same way we can touch a mountain with our hands but we cannot put our arms around it as we could put them around a tree or something else not too large for them. To grasp something is to embrace it in one's thought; to know something, it is sufficient to touch it with one's thought.\textsuperscript{87}

Our finite thought, with its contingently necessary structures, cannot comprehend the infinite power of God, but merely “touch” the fact that it is, and so cannot comprehend a different logical order, but merely “touch” the fact of its possibility.

In Descartes view, then, not only are the necessities governing our thought contingent, but they are limitations. Logic, as that which marks off the way our thought is as opposed to other ways it might possibly be, is the marker of finitude and of limitation. The necessities of our minds being what they are, there are things we cannot do, namely, comprehend divinity or possible worlds with different logical orders. We cannot comprehend mountains without valleys, though they are possible because of God’s

\textsuperscript{87} Descartes, \textit{The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume 3}, 25.
omnipotence. With minds created by God to be less finite or finite in another way there
would have been thoughts we could have entertained that are impossible to us now.

Thus, against the view of the scholastics, Descartes exalts divine sovereignty by
way of stressing the finitude and contingency of human thought. Logic is, in Descartes
view, a boundary marker of finitude; it is a limit to what the human mind can think and
thereby excludes some things from the realm of the thinkable. By it he marks off the
created mind from the possibilities of divine power and exalts the transcendence of divine
sovereignty by claiming that there is that which we necessarily cannot think or
understand. That there is such an outside to our thought which marks us as limited can be
established insofar as we distinguish the outside which we can only “touch” with
understanding, from the inside of thought with its objects which can be “comprehended.”

Though Descartes is not currently in favor amongst philosophers, much less
theologians, I contend that most negative theology in our era is psychologistic in ways
deeply analogous to Descartes philosophical theology, or else to Immanuel Kant’s
irresolute resistance to psychologism. In this chapter on psychologism and negative
theology I will outline the basics of psychologism as it appears over and over again in
western thought and then turn to Wittgenstein’s resistance to it. I will conclude the
chapter with a provocation to make the point of how radical my criticisms may be for
negative theology. I show the deep confusions with what passes as a theological truism in
theological conversations: “God is not an object.” In second chapter I will show how
many of the most sophisticated and influential negative theologies in current literature are
not only psychologistic, but psychologistic in the name of resisting Cartesianism or
Kantianism and by way of invoking Wittgenstein.
Psychologism

Descartes is but one clear example of psychologism in the history of western thought and he shows us how theology and philosophy are often bound up together in the articulation of psychologistic conceptions of the mind. However, there are many examples of psychologism, some of which are far more subtle and hard to detect. In this section I offer a brief conceptual summary of what psychologism is and adumbrate three characteristics of it which are relevant for my overall theological argument.

Psychologism, in short, is the view that the necessities of human thought and language are best understood through the inductive methods of psychology, or sociology, or linguistics, or anthropology. That is, the necessary structure of human thought is a contingent empirical fact about how humans, or some population of thinking beings, are constituted. The structures of judgment and logic are best understood, in a psychologistic view, from the third-person perspective and known/justified via induction. ⁸⁸

There are many different forms of psychologism in the history of western theology and philosophy. Some are theological, others naturalistic, and still others cultural and linguistic. Descartés’s was theological. God created the human mind to necessarily run along certain grooves and situated us in a world with the same necessities. Analytic philosophy is rife with naturalistic psychologism in which the structures of thought are specific to the type of embodied minds that we are as determined by the course of biological evolution. Cultural relativism is yet another type of psychologism in

⁸⁸See Stanley Cavell, Must We mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). In the first three chapters Cavell argues for the importance of the first person perspective for ordinary language and grammatical philosophy, and for philosophy as an “arm chair” discipline, against the reductivism of a purely third person/empirical perspective.
which the necessities of thought are analyzed from a third person perspective as contingent to this or that language or this or that community and culture. Many, though not all, claims to incommensurability between peoples are expressed in psychologistic vocabulary.

For the sake of the argument of this and the following chapters I will specify three notes that tend to mark psychologistic philosophies and theologies. My overview of this perspective operates at certain distance of abstraction from particular thinkers, though I will reference a few such as Descartes and Kant. The abstraction is fitting to the argument, however, because it provides a synoptic synthesis which has three functions. First, it will show how these three characteristics are bound to each other and how committing one psychologistic error will lead, almost invariably, to the others. Second, it will allow Wittgenstein’s criticisms to be seen in all their radicality and clarity, despite their initial non-intuitive nature. Third, it will allow me to show, in the second chapter, how particular negative theologies are psychologistic and, therefore, less persuasive than they usually appear before an encounter with Wittgenstein’s critiques. The three notes are:

1. Psychologism construes the necessities of human thought (logic, mathematics, geometry, etc.) to be more or less contingent facts about the psychology of some population of thinkers.

2. Psychologism construes the propositions of logic as true, informative, and general.
   a. Judgments of “logical impossibility” exclude something from the world and/or the realm of the thinkable.

3. Psychologism construes the meaning of words and propositions to be determined by some psychological fact (intention, grasping a universal, etc.).
Allow me to briefly explicate each of these in turn and show their connections with each other. After that I will detail Wittgenstein’s response, which is scattered throughout his writings and lectures from all periods of his work. In the course of detailing the Wittgensteinian resistance the inter-relationships of the three notes of psychologism will come out with even greater clarity.

Contingent Necessity

As I have already said, Descartes’s philosophy is a clear example of the first note as are naturalistic accounts of logic and cultural-linguistic accounts of logic and grammar. Our minds think, and our words represent, along certain necessary grooves. These grooves, however, are contingent upon the constitution of our minds, either as God so created them, or evolution so effected them, or how we are socialized into a culture or some combination of these. The reason I cannot think of a mountain without a valley or of an object that is and is not an apple is due to the contingent constitution of my mind. The necessary structures of my thinking, therefore, serve as a limitation on what is thinkable for me. Thus what one does in investigations of logic or of the grammar of some population is trace the limits of sense for those so constituted. Logical and grammatical investigations tell us, amongst other things, what we cannot do.

The “Science” of Logic

Note 1 may seem more or less plausible depending on the angle from which it is approached. However, note 2 and 2a seem to be intuitively true. Gottlob Frege, a great hero of anti-psychologism and influence over Wittgenstein, drew Wittgenstein’s ire by
holding this notion. It appears to be clearly true that a statement of the law of non-contradiction such as “no object can be $x$ and not $x$ at one and the same time,” or an extension of logic into the broader necessary structures of thought such as “one cannot be in two places at once,” are true and informative. Not only are they true, but they appear to be generally true of all empirical objects. That such a view seems to be common sense and deeply compelling is brought out in Cora Diamond’s quotation of philosopher Gilbert Harman:

> As far as I can see, no serious objections have been raised to the view that logic is a science, like physics or chemistry, a body of truths, with no special relevance to inference except for what follows from its abstractness and generality of subject matter.

The propositions of logic are true, informative, and hold generally. That “no object can be $x$ and not $x$ at the same time” is true and informs us about what is the case for all empirical objects.

Not only does note 2 seem to true, but it also appears to inform us of the necessary shape of possibilities for objects, or else for objects of thought (more about this distinction below). That is, it informs us of what is logically possible and what is logically impossible to obtain in thought and/or the world. It functions like a statement of empirical possibility and impossibility, only more so, because, as the modal logician would tell us, it informs us of what is and is not the case in all logically possible worlds whereas statements of empirical (im)possibility inform us only of our own and similar

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worlds. Whereas empirical propositions inform us about the way particular things contingently are, logical propositions inform us about the way all objects can and cannot be.

Notes 1 and 2 fit together naturally, and when brought together can give rise to what might appear to be deep forms of wonder and anxiety. If the logical structures of our minds are contingent then our thought is necessarily this way as opposed to some other way. The same can be said for note 2. If logic is true and informative, then it informs us about the way we necessarily think as opposed to some other way. As Aristotle pointed out long ago, knowledge of the truth of a proposition and its contradiction are one and the same. Being informed about what is the case is logically bound to being informed about what is not the case. If our thinking is necessarily this way, then there is some illogical or extra-logical or differently-logical way that it is not (for example, Descartes’s world that divine power might create which we can only “touch” in thought). Empirical truths and that which is inductively justified always stand over against something which is not the case or is not justified. Psychologism, with its inductive methodology and commitment to the empirical, is therefore committed to treating the necessities of thought as over against some other (ineffable?) possibilities exceeding the boundaries thought. Given that propositions of logic are true, informative, and general - yet contingent - they deliver either the universal and necessary structure of human thought or of human thought and the world. If human thought necessarily runs along the groves of logic, and logic informs us of the way thought is as opposed to

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another way, and if it is these necessary grooves are themselves contingent upon our
collection, then there is a real issue over whether the necessary shape of thought
matches the shape of the world and its objects. Thus, the propositions of logic inform us
of a way of being the case for the necessities of our thought and the world only if divine
benevolence and/or evolution and/or socialization has so suited our minds and world to
coincide. We can think of mountains only with reference to valleys, and in no other way,
because of the contingent constitution of our minds. For the realist like Descartes the
contingent necessities of thought and world coincide whereas for the anti-realist or
idealist we can never know if that is the case since we cannot “jump out of our own skin”
to see if the structure of the world matches the logical structures of the mind. We may not
be able to draw or imagine or think a mountain without a valley, but the idealist can
maintain, that is simply the contingent necessity of our constitution and says nothing of
what can or cannot be the case of things-in-themselves.

Thus, when notes 1 and 2 of psychologism are brought together the
epistemological projects of the Enlightenment make sense. Descartes was not the only
philosopher to display anxiety over whether or not human thought can obtain reality.
Indeed, he was the first of a tradition of Enlightenment thinkers who would finally evoke
faith in the benevolence of God to bridge the gap between the contingent necessities of
thought and true representations of the world. Yet, it is not merely Enlightenment
epistemologists who evince such attitudes commensurate with the idea that logic is an
informative body of true propositions. Correlative to epistemological anxiety is theistic

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92 See Descartes’s appeal the divine benevolence in René Descartes, *Meditations on First
wonder and apologetics concerning the miracle that the contingent structures the mind
match up with the world’s most basic structures of possibility and intelligibility.\footnote{See Alvin Plantinga’s argument against naturalism in Alvin Plantinga, \textit{Warrant and Proper Function} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also David Bentley Hart, \textit{The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 230-231.}

Ironically, theologians have put forward accounts of theology or doctrine which
are overtly psychologistic, and have done so in the name of Wittgenstein. In \textit{The Nature of Doctrine} George Lindbeck puts forward a “cultural-linguistic” view of religion and
document which is a form of cultural/linguistic psychologism, and then offers an aside
about how he personally holds that the subject-object structure of a sentence mirrors the
ontological necessities of reality which is an example of metaphysical psychologism.\footnote{George Lindbeck, \textit{The Nature of Doctrine: Religions and Theology in a Postliberal Age} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 32-41, 106.}

\textit{Meaning as Psychological Fact}

At this point in my argument I will briefly summarize note 3 and say a little about
how it relates to notes 1 and 2. That it is, and that this counts as a reason for resisting
psychologism on the whole, will come out below.

The third note of psychologism instructs us to look for the real meaning of a word
or sentence in a psychological fact or process in the speaker or writer. The history of
thought is littered with any number of such psychological facts: authorial intent, intuition
of forms, attaching some psychological process or consciousness to a word, ideas in the
mind of the speaker, etc. Whichever psychological fact one chooses, words spoken or
written on a page serve as mediums for the listener or reader to postulate or guess which
idea or intent or form is meant to be communicated to them.
Excursus: Versions of Anti-Psychologism

Resistance to psychologism is a central element in a number of significant post-Kantian philosophical projects and schools, though theologians rarely home in on the issue in their narratives of modern thought. Kant took great issue with Descartes’ logical psychologism, but Hegel took Kant to fall into psychologistic error himself in his formulation of the transcendental conditions of the possibility of experience and knowledge.\(^{95}\) Gottlob Frege followed Kant in his anti-psychologism and his criticism of Edmund Husserl’s earliest publications led Husserl to break decisively with the psychologism of his mentor, Franz Brentano.\(^{96}\) Anti-psychologism thus became a central plank in Husserlian and post-Husserlian phenomenology. Theodore Adorno agreed with Husserl in not reducing logic or the necessities of thought to empirical and inductive contingency, but charged that Husserl lapsed back into Platonic error by separating logic from the human and material.\(^{97}\) Adorno’s materialist anti-psychologism resonates strongly with Wittgenstein’s anthropocentric anti-psychologism. Much like Adorno’s

\(^{95}\) Whereas Kant took the idea of logic as a positive science, and as imposing limits, to be false, he, nevertheless, thought there are limits to knowledge about “objects” which are delimited by the categories. Thus, for Kant, synthetic \textit{a priori}\ propositional have content, and delimit the concept of an object as such, and therefore have intelligible negations. Wittgenstein, as I will show below in the second half of the chapter, did not hold to either logical or transcendental limits of thought, did not take any \textit{a priori}\ propositions to be informative or have intelligible negations, and so – as will prove crucial – he took talk of a “concept of an object as such” to be logically equivalent to gibberish.

\(^{96}\) For the history and anti-psychologisms and the relationships between Frege and Husserl see art Kusch, \textit{Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge} (New York: Routledge, 1995), 30-62.

relationship to Husserl, Wittgenstein took Frege’s anti-psychologism to be correct, but as having lurched back into a problematic Platonism.\textsuperscript{98} Thus, Wittgenstein stands in relationship to, and reaction against, the influence of Frege in a way deeply analogous to how Frege’s effects play out in the line of thought that runs from phenomenology to critical theory.

Cora Diamond’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s much misunderstood line, “realism without empiricism, that is hardest thing,” will help us get a preliminary grip on Wittgenstein’s thinking in this area. Following Diamond, we can wax Wittgenstein’s comment this way: “Necessity as human, but not contingent, that is the hardest thing.”\textsuperscript{99} One way of getting this into view is the famed notion that at the bottom of all our language and judgments, when we run out of ways to convince people of the rightness of this or that, we can only say “This is simply what I do.”\textsuperscript{100} One way of understanding these words is that the contingency of human life runs deeper than all our thinking and so even the necessities of logic and mathematics are contingent insofar as they are founded in life, in “what I do.”\textsuperscript{101} However, against a hallmark of Wittgensteinian method, this interpretation would not “leave everything as it is” as it imposes a philosophical thesis of

\textsuperscript{98} See especially \textit{Wittgenstein’s Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics}, where he distances himself from the psychologism of the British empiricists as well as the Frege’s and Russell’s philosophical and mathematical Platonisms. The tensions between empirical psychologism and Platonism is dramatically displayed in the lectures in Wittgenstein’s give and take with Alan Turing.


\textsuperscript{101} For instance, Richard Rorty, \textit{Consequences of Pragmatism} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).
the radical contingency of everything against our ordinary ways of speaking. Rather, the point of “simply what I do” is to gesture towards the look, or “physiognomy,” of life which includes logical and mathematical necessity. There is nothing deeper to ground or guarantee these necessities, nor is there the absence of a required ground which entails that necessity is an illusion. Rather, there is human life, and it includes logical and mathematical necessities which no more require justification than life itself. This may initially seem mysterious, but the effect of explaining Wittgenstein’s anti-psychologism should reduce the sense of strangeness.

Wittgenstein’s Anti-Psychologism

In some discussions of this matter empiricist psychologism is set against Platonism, but I have opted to describe all sides of these debates as psychologistic because the commonalities between these tendencies of thought, which are the bases of the disputes, are the targets of my critique. Furthermore, because theological appropriation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy has tended in the direction of sociological or anthropological psychologism, in this chapter I am not as focused on the irreducibly

102 However, this statement might be taken to imply that Wittgenstein was a “common sense” philosopher. Such a view misunderstands the manner in which philosophy as grammatical investigation is meant to bring our understanding in line with itself. Our common sense views of things can be just as infected with philosophical and metaphysical error as professionalized philosophy. Our language repeats misleading analogies over and over to us and it is itself the source of metaphysics in the pejorative sense. Rather, it is our concrete ways of intellectually comporting ourselves towards this or that in the course of our lives which constitutes grammar, and it is the very difficult work of bringing our philosophically reflective understanding into harmony with this comporting which is an aim of grammatical investigations. “Common sense” often embodies confused relationships between ourselves and our understanding.

human dimension of logic and language, which is crucial to his and Adorno’s work, as with resisting psychologistic pictures of the material and human base of logic.

Nowhere does Wittgenstein set out an anti-psychologistic thesis, much less some kind of agenda. Rather, his arguments and strategies are diffuse throughout his work. I will, therefore, engage in synthesis in this chapter by naming three notes of Wittgenstein’s anti-psychologism, as I will be drawing from diverse texts and lectures. For the sake of my overall argument in the dissertation, I am concerned with the ways negative theologians use psychologistic pictures of logic in order to demonstrate that God necessarily transcends language and thought. It is this interest which determines those elements of Wittgenstein’s philosophy which I bring together here. To that end, the guiding principle of my critique is Wittgenstein’s claim that in logical and grammatical investigations “[t]he great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one could not do.”\textsuperscript{104} The implication, of course, is that insofar as one construes logic, or grammar, or conditions of sense as limiting us, even as limiting us from comprehending or naming God, one has run into confusion. All three of the following notes of Wittgenstein’s response to psychologism are required to show how logical and grammatical analysis do not end up implying that there is something we cannot do, or that there is some specifiable limit of thought.

\textsuperscript{104} Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations} §374. Unless one resists this temptation in reasoning about logic, grammar, syntax, etc. she will run headlong into the incoherence of delimiting the boundaries of thought.

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1. Context principle: Words have meaning in the context of a sentence.
   a. Expansion of the context principle to include practical contexts: Words and sentences generally have the meaning that they do because of the use we give them on particular occasions.

2. Logic is not a science and logical propositions are not informative (they do not represent states of affairs).
   a. “Logical impossibility” does not exclude anything.

3. The “idea” of a specifiable limit of thought is not merely false, or impossible to name, but no thought at all.

I explicate each of these in turn after a brief word on judgment.

As it turns out, each of these points and their inter-relationships depend on the priority of judgment and its structure.\textsuperscript{105} The structure of judgment as articulated by Frege, on which Wittgenstein premised a great deal of his thinking, may be summarized something like this: A sentence with a subject/predicate form, when understood, presents some content to the mind which may be true or false. Logically speaking, before one moves on to say yes or no to what is asserted one must grasp this content. To grasp this content is to understand what it would be for it to state what the case is just as one must understand what it would be for the content not to be the case. In other words, understanding the content of the assertion just is knowing what would render the assertion true and what would render it false. “To understand a proposition means to know what is the case if it is true. (One can understand it, therefore, without knowing whether it is true.)”\textsuperscript{106} Sentences which express judgments are fundamentally about asserting something or informing someone of what the case is, and, therefore, are

\textsuperscript{105} Thomas Ricketts “Frege, the Tractatus, and The Logocentric Predicament,” \textit{Nous}, XIX (1) (March 1985).

\textsuperscript{106} Wittgenstein, \textit{Tractatus}, §4.024.
inferentially tied to an intelligible negation or an imaginable otherwise. If a judgment is true, we know by inference something that is false. Thus, when one judges that a proposition is true one knows both what is and what is not the case of some matter.\footnote{See Conant, “Logically Alien,” 26, and Ricketts, “Logocentric Predicament,” 10-11.}

**Context Principle**

Concerning the context principle, Wittgenstein took inspiration from Frege when he wrote “Only ask for the meaning of a word in the context of a sentence.”\footnote{Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §3.3.} In his later work Wittgenstein expanded the principle to include pragmatic context. That is, the pragmatics of a sentence’s use on a given occasion not only establishes whether using those words is fitting, but positively determines the sense the words have in that utterance.\footnote{See James Conant, “Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use,” in *Philosophical Invesitigations* Volume 12 (3) (July 1998), 222-250.} Both aspects of the context principle follow from the view that judgment – as expressed in a sentence - is the basic logical unit of thought and meaning. Such a view Wittgenstein inherits from Frege and Kant, but as Bernard Lonergan, David Burrell, and Gregory P. Rocca have pointed out, he could equally have learned such a lesson from Aristotle or Aquinas.\footnote{See David B. Burrell C.S.C., *Aquinas: God and Action*” (Scranton and London: Scranton University Press, 2008), Bernard J. F. Lonergan S.J., *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), and Gregory P. Rocca O.P., *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology*” (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004).} Nicholas Lash put this insight memorably in his *Believing Three Ways in One God* when he wrote that words are not containers of meaning, but have the
meaning they do “by the company they keep.” For Lash, the company a word keeps is fellow words and the use they are given by a human being wielding those words.\footnote{Nicholas Lash, \textit{Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostle’s Creed} (South Bend, University of Notre Dame press, 1994). Significantly, Lash was one of the first theologians to take note of the work of Stanley Cavell.}

On the one hand, the context principle flies in the face of the common sense view of words having the meanings they have all by themselves, say as defined by the dictionary. These meanings are then added one to another until one gets a sentence. What words each word may be combined with, and the uses to which one may put these words, is a function of their prior determination of sense as codified in the dictionary-style definition. This view, however “common sense” it may seem, is deeply problematic. The arguments against it have been made too many times for me to rehearse them here.

On the other hand, the context principle seems to most academics who work in the humanities as a truism too obvious to mention (unless one labors under the influence of certain forms of analytic philosophy). Yet, it can prove difficult to bring the radical implications of the context principle into view. We are tempted to lapse into some idea that the literal use of a word in this sentence and that are the same because both are in accordance with the dictionary definition. This is especially the case when we get to the issue of limits of thought, as will appear below, wherein we are deeply tempted to insist we mean a word in the same way on two occasions, but in which we have surrounded that word with a fundamentally different contexts. Consider, for instance, “The area is mostly empty space,” when a teacher of nuclear physics points out a mountain to her students versus when the same sentence is said about the same mountain by an air traffic controller in response to pilot asking what lies ahead. Or consider, “these pretzels are
making me thirsty” as when stated by someone at a gathering of friends versus at a company taste-test where the participants are testing different types of pretzels to determine which give consumers a drier mouth. In both sets of examples all of the words are used straightforwardly to mean what we find in the dictionary. But, the sentences as a whole have different meanings, they have different inferential relations to other sentences, they have different practical and social consequences. “Word meanings and concepts are not propositional components but propositional differences. They are distinguishables, not detachables; abstractibles, not extractables.”

In other words, picturing the meaning of words and their relationships to other words in a sentence by way of an analogy with puzzle pieces is misleading. Rather than analogizing words with puzzle pieces which have the shapes they have prior to being fitted together, and which shapes determine if they can be fitted together, different words, concepts, phrases, etc. in a judgment constitute the meanings of one another the way the left side of the body partially constitutes the right side of the same body as the right side.

Wittgenstein’s understanding of how context, occasion, and use constitute meaning grew ever stronger throughout his life. In his last work, *On Certainty*, he pressed the logical implications of the expanded context principle with great force, but it is hard not to lapse into ignoring his insights.

I know that a sick man is lying here? Nonsense! I am sitting at his bedside, I am looking attentively in his face. – So I don’t know then, that there is a sick man lying here? Neither the question nor the assertion makes sense. . . [I]t is only in use that the proposition has its sense. And ‘I know that there is a sick man lying here,’ used

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in an unsuitable situation, seems not to be nonsense, but rather seems to be matter-of-course, only because one can fairly easily imagine a situation to fit it…

Conant has shown how easy it is for philosophers to miss the point. Interpreters of the above passage have tended to lapse into thinking the idea is that when there is not an occasion for one to use such words - such as being on the phone at a hospital to inform one that the family hypochondriac has checked himself into the hospital for good reason - that we know what the words and sentence mean, but we just do not see the significance of uttering it in that situation. But Wittgenstein’s point is that without an appropriate context the words are just idling. Indeed, we only take them to mean something because it is so easy to imagine appropriate contexts of use. Without the context, however, we have not settled on any of the possible things we might mean by this sentence. Consider the difference of the “I know” of the sentence when uttered in the above example of the hypochondriac versus one wherein it is said by the sick man interjecting into a conversation when those sitting around him are speaking as though he will not act in a manner that properly acknowledges that he is sick. What such “knowing” is and what follows from it differs in these cases. Thus, until a practical context is present we do not know what is meant by the words at all as the flexibility of language presents us with too many possibilities. Philosophers, especially in debates over skepticism, often take a form of words as stating what is patently obvious when in fact there is not the appropriate context for any one determinate thing to be meant by them.


114 See especially Conant, “Wittgenstein on Meaning and Use.”

Logic is not a Science

Note 2 is more challenging to articulate and defend. Both note 2 and 2a run against what is intuitively suggested by the surface grammar of relevant sentences. Consider how natural it is to understand as true the proposition, “No x is p and not p in the same sense at the same time.” It appears to be true and truly telling us what the case is with all objects, namely, that they do not and cannot exemplify contradictory characteristics. Consider also how statements of logical impossibility seem to exclude things from the realm of the possible in sentences such as “it is impossible for a two-dimensional shape to be both a square and circle at the same time.” This statement appears to clearly exclude something from the realm of possibility, the possibility to exist or to be thought by us. Yet, the anti-psychologistic traditions of philosophy have pushed against such notions with ever greater clarity, resulting finally in Wittgenstein’s insistence:

All theories that make a proposition of logic appear to have content [gehaltvoll] are false. . . Indeed, the logical proposition acquires all the characteristics of a proposition of natural science and this is a sure sign that it has been construed wrongly.116

And just as counter-intuitively:

we make the mistake of thinking that [a statement of logical impossibility] is a proposition, though it is not; and we would never try to say it if we were not misled by an analogy. It is misleading to use the word ‘can’t’ because it suggests a wrong analogy. We should say, “It has no sense to say…”117

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116 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, §6.11.

However unintuitive these claims, they serve as powerful means of bringing our life with logic into clear view when contemplated carefully.

In order to see what Wittgenstein is up to we must consider a couple matters of vocabulary. By “thought” he means something which can be true or false. “Thought” is not in this instance a psychological term about a process or happening in someone’s brain or mind, but means simply that which is about something, that which states something to be the case. “Thought” has “sense” insofar as it has this content which may be truly or falsely said about something. A string of words in the form of a sentence may either have sense, or be nonsense, only apparently having sense or being a thought.118 “Nonsense” has no logical function, it is not inferentially related to any other sentence or judgment and it represents nothing.119

In the Tractatus, Wittgenstein says of logical propositions neither that they have sense nor that they are nonsense.120 Rather, they are sense-less (sinnlos), and by the time of the Philosophical Investigations he claims something similar – though not identical - about logical propositions, now a much expanded category to include “grammatical remarks.”121 In other words, they have functions, but not that of stating what is or is not

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118 Wittgenstein saw a great deal of philosophical propositions, especially those of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics to be insoluble precisely because, as nonsense, they are only apparently thoughts at all.

119 Although nonsense can have all kinds of different psychological significance, all nonsense is logically equivalent to gibberish.

120 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, §6.1 and §6.11.

121 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations §§251-252. In the Tractatus logical propositions are sinnlos because as tautologies they are not used to inform of states of affairs. Grammatical remarks are not limited to tautologies as they are more like Kant’s notion of synthetic a priori judgments. However, unlike Kant, they share a great deal in common with logical propositions such as statements of the law of non-contradiction.
the case. Or, as grammatical, they are not about what the words in the proposition appear to about after the manner of an empirical or experiential assertion, but are about the use of those words themselves.\textsuperscript{122} In either case, logical propositions/grammatical remarks are preparations for thought.

Wittgenstein follows Kant and Frege in taking thought to be fundamentally a matter of judgment.\textsuperscript{123} Recalling the structure of judgment articulated above, logical propositions, and grammatical remarks, do not hold up to the pressure of judgment for at least two related reasons. The first, which I will not dwell on here, is that logic is part of the very means by which we go about determining whether a proposition is true or false and what does and does not count as following from it. Logic and grammar are that by which we make judgments. As that which determines propositions to be either true or false, and as determining the inferential relationships between propositions, how does one entertain the possibility that they are false and what would follow from this falsity?\textsuperscript{124}

The second reason, which is related to the first, is that logical propositions – as well as grammatical remarks - do not have intelligible negations. There is nothing they tell us is not the case, therefore, there is nothing they inform us of being the case. In other words, they make no difference to our knowledge of states of affairs. In the \textit{Tractatus} Wittgenstein rightly pointed out that statements of the basic “laws” of logic are tautologies, are analytic \textit{a priori}, therefore, their negations are contradictions. Being

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item This is not to say that grammatical remarks are not about the objects named in the sentence, though it is not about them after the manner of an assertion or as telling one what is and is not the case. As part of a grammatical investigation, grammatical remarks by used to disclose the essence of something by allowing us to see the very space of sense, or possibility, in which we speak of this something.
\item Ricketts, “Logocentric Predicament,” 11.
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contradictory, as stating that something is p and not-p, these “negations” are meaningless. The law of non-contradiction, or the law of identity, etc., in all of their guises do not tell us that something is the case and something is not, they do not inform us of anything, not even of something that is always the case. When entertaining a logical proposition, therefore, we are not presented with the yes or no question of the truth of some state of affairs. The grammar of logical propositions may be superficially similar to assertoric statements, judgments constituting a body of truths, but their use shows that they are not informative and do not comprise a science. To be more true to Wittgenstein’s mature thought, and in order to make what I am saying here clearer, I should say it is not so much that logical propositions are not informative, but that we do not use them to inform anyone of anything.  

Allow me to venture forth a sample of the use of logical/grammatical propositions in the course of our lives concerning logical statements about a physical body not being in two places a once. Imagine a scenario in which a person, call him “Maurice,” is on trial for murdering his roommate in their Dayton, Ohio apartment. The defense’s strategy to have Maurice acquitted is to argue that he was in different city, Springfield, at the time of the murder. The defense lawyer at one point or another says each of the following three sentences.

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125 Though, as Wittgenstein explores in On Certainty, some sentences we use at one point as grammatical, or as descriptive of our use of language, and at another as informative. This bolster my point in that insofar as we use these sentences to inform someone about something we do not classify them as grammatical/logical and insofar as we use them without assertoric force we classify them as grammatical/logical.
A. Maurice was in Springfield at the time of his roommate's murder in Dayton.

B. Maurice cannot be in two places at the same time.

C. Maurice can only be in one place at one time.

I can imagine the lawyer saying A to the jury in order to inform them of Maurice’s whereabouts and he might present evidences and arguments in support of the sentence. In so doing he would also be informing them where Maurice was not at the time of the murder. Because A is true, Maurice was not in Dayton at the time the crime was committed.

But what about B or C? Who could the lawyer be informing by way of B or C, or what would he inform a jury member of by these sentences? Is there anything these sentence say that is not the case? What arguments or evidences would the lawyer present to jurors in support of them? If he were to try to persuade the jury that B and C are true how would argument and evidence differ from the argument and evidence for A? Again, supposing a lawyer did launch into a philosophical defense of B or C in the midst of a murder trial, how would we or the jury respond? Would we and they agree, disagree, ask for further evidence or think something was wrong with the lawyer? It seems to me that B and C do not inform anyone of anything about Maurice, but could serve as reminders of the grammar of our words about bodies. That is, that we would most truthfully interpret these sentences as "it does not make sense to speak of Maurice (or anybody) being in two places at the same time" or "we make sense only by speaking of Maurice being in one place at once." Given the context principle, supposing we found a way to speak of Maurice in two different places at the same time, a supposed negation of B and C, we would either be engaging in nonsense, or else using “Maurice” or “place” or both to mean
something different than we do with B or C. Thus, insofar as we give “Maurice can be in two places at once” sense it will not serve to negate B or C. There is nothing they tell us is not the case.

B and C do not function in the above scenario to inform anyone of something being so in the manner that A does. This is precisely what I mean by saying that sentences like B and C are logical or grammatical remarks.126 One might very well be tempted to say the lawyer does not inform jurors of anything by way of stating B or C because what they mean, their truth, is just so incredibly obvious. Yet, that is to look away from what is revealed in the above analysis and what is suggested by the questions I asked. If B and C were too obviously true to inform anyone, then they would still have intelligible negations, however far-fetched these sentences would be. Recall the above discussion of the extension of the context principle to pragmatics.127 If we were to try and specify non-grammatical and assertoric use of B or C we would not inform anyone of anything by them not because what they mean is so obvious, but because the situation

126 Again, this is not to state that these grammatical remarks are not “about” Maurice. In fact, these grammatical remarks, though not informing us of something being the case as with empirical assertions, may disclose the essence of the matter. See Philosophical Investigations, §90, §92, §254, §371, §373. I use the term “disclose” as a way of signaling how close an anti-psychologistic ordinary language philosophy comes to phenomenology. However, I do not mean by “disclose” some reinstatement of the say/show distinction wherein the essence of things are fact like truths which cannot be said. By “disclosure” I mean simply to register the difference and dis-analogy between grammatical remarks and how they are about and communicate the essence of things from empirical propositions and how they represent states of affairs.

127 “Maurice cannot be in two places at once” is not a judgment we make, but that by which we make inferences between judgments. It is the rule by which we infer from “Maurice was in Springfield at the time of the murder,” to “Maurice was not in Dayton at the time of the murder.” It is not, as modal logicians would have it, that the truth conditions of Maurice being in only one place at one time are fulfilled in all logically possible worlds, that its truth conditions are fulfilled in all logically possible worlds. It has no truth conditions. The modal logician ignores the differences between logical and empirical propositions as explored above and below. It is, as grammatical, a “preparation” for thought, judgment, inference, etc.
does not allow us to see the point – the one determinate meaning – of their use in that context.\textsuperscript{128}

Moving on to note 2a, as I will detail on the following chapter, negative theologians not only utilize psychologistic pictures of our life with logic in order to arrive at some “idea” of divine transcendence of thought, but they capitalize on a closely related picture of logical impossibility excluding things from the realm of what is possible. In one way or another, theologian after philosopher, attempt to argue that the Creator of all is logically impossible to comprehend or know by the power of human judgment or the descriptive range of language, and they mean by that to exclude something determinate. That is, such arguments mean to show that when it comes to the necessities of thought and language, logical and grammatical investigations reveal something that we cannot do. I have already mentioned that Wittgenstein thought it a deep, though tempting, mistake to construe logic or grammar as showing us something we cannot do and that he took saying something to be logically impossible not to be a proposition at all. In the quote above he said that such talk was a case of being misled by analogy. What is the analogy and how do we loosen the grip on our minds that it holds? It is to these matters that I now turn.

Wittgenstein understood common sense and philosophical uses of the language of logical impossibility to lack mindfulness about our judgments by way of a misleading

\textsuperscript{128} But what about the bi-locating bodies of saints and the one body of Jesus on so many Eucharistic altars? On the one hand, we should notice that “body” is being used in an extended sense when it comes to the Eucharistic body of Christ, and, on the other hand, that the bi-locating bodies of saints partake of that form of bodily-ness. Theologically, we should emphasis both the analogous and dis-analogous relation between such bodies and the bodies of our world. That encountering such bodies forces us to go outside the grammar which typically characterizes for us the essence of “body” (that is, such circumstances forces one to use a sentence which is typically grammatical/essential as though it were a contingent description), should alert us that not only do such bodies exist in a different world, but that their presentation to us manifests a point of contact between two worlds, and that the very essences constituting our world may be refigured in such a meeting.
analogy with examples of physical impossibility: “logical impossibility … seems of the
same order as…physical impossibility, only more impossible…I want to destroy this
seeming similarity.” Consider how we commonly understand sentences asserting
something to be logically impossible, and how this understanding is extended by analytic
philosophers. We come out with words such as, “A two-dimensional shape cannot be
square and circle at the same time.” In such cases we think we know what we mean, and
why it – what it is we mean - is logically excluded from the realm of the possible. We
imagine this example to be like the claim that “human beings cannot jump 100 feet up
from the surface of the earth.” In the first case since we know what the individual words
“shape’, “square”, and “circle” mean, we are confident that we mean something specific
by “a shape that is both a square and circle” just as we do with “jumping 100 feet up from
the surface of the earth.” The difference between our “logically impossible” example and
our physically impossible example appears to be one of extent. In possible worlds
semantics we would say of our physically impossible example that it is not possible in
this world or any world with relevantly similar laws of physics. With our “logically
impossible” example we would say they are things which are excluded not only from our
world and relevantly similar worlds, but from all logically possible worlds.

We thus run head long into Wittgenstein’s worry that we are misled by analogies
with physical objects and run afoul of his warning that in the course of logical and
grammatical analysis “[t]he great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there

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were something one could not do."\(^{130}\) If we do not attend carefully to the differences in the two cases we will construe logic as a cage for what is possible and logic as necessary limitations of thought – we will represent the matter as if there is something we cannot do.

Consider again the structure of our judgments. First, there is the proposition which provides the content about which we judge whether it is true or false. Upon understanding the meaning of the proposition, what it is proposing to be the case, we affirm or deny of the content whether it is true. Consider:

D. It is possible for humans to jump 100 feet up from the surface of Earth.

E. It is possible for a 2-dimensionals shape to be a square and circle at the same time.

F. It is possible to pull yourself up by the bootstraps.

No doubt we will judge all three statements to be false. In the case of D we know very clearly, indeed can even imaginatively picture, what it is we judge not to be physically possible. Although we cannot perform the act we can imagine it, draw it, animate it in films, etc. However, in the case of E, the trouble is that there is no picturing or imagining what it would be like for a two-dimensional shape to be both a square and circle at the same time. Whereas with D we know what it is to jump in the air 100 feet, but know also that we lack the requisite strength to do so, in the case of E we judge it to be impossible precisely because we cannot make out what it would be at all. In the case of D we judge about the content delivered by the proposition that it cannot obtain in our world, but in E we come out with no content at all and so in our judgment of impossibility we stand in a

fundamentally different relationship to our words and the world. Indeed, to the extent that someone comes up with a clever way of meaning these words as imaginable, say with a hologram which looked at from different angles is now a square and now a circle, we say that that is not *what* we want to call impossible.

Our judgment about D is about the world and about us. It clearly delineates something we cannot do. It names a limitation. However, our judgment about E is not at all about the world or our abilities and so does not name a limitation. It excludes nothing. If one were to assert otherwise, I would ask just *what* is being excluded? Because there is no determinate content we will accept for “a two-dimensional shape that is a square and circle at the same time” there is nothing to exclude. Our judgment is about how we, by using these words, fail to mean anything and so our judgment does not say anything about what cannot be or cannot be thought, about something being impossible. Logic is not a cage. It places neither the world nor thought under any limitations. The common sense view manifests a lack of mindfulness about our life with words and logic, and possible-worlds-semantics systematizes and obscures this lack of mindfulness.

Are our common sense views about “logical impossibility” hopelessly confused? Perhaps not. F appears to be somewhat closer to the case of D then E, and so prove a counter instance to my argument. After all, pulling oneself up by the bootstraps appears to be both “logically impossible” and yet have content, as it seems to be imaginable. Surely this is something which is excluded from the realm of the possible by the logic of the matter. It is something we cannot do.

Wittgenstein himself was confronted with a similar contention when he was lecturing on the meaning of impossibility proofs in mathematics which he took to be
analogous to cases of so-called logical impossibility. In the lectures he was arguing that proofs of the sort that one “cannot” trisect an angle by way of the methods of Euclidean geometry do not exclude anything, but, rather, help one see more clearly what one’s methods are, and, therefore, help one see that in searching for a way to trisect an angle with these methods one was in fact searching for nothing at all. The search for the trisected angle by means of a compass and a straight-edge are an “insistent emptiness.” Such proofs lead us not to the fact that something is geometrically excluded as impossible, but to “cutting out” phrases like “trisecting an angle” from our language for “very good reasons.”

An auditor objects by offering a scenario like F. Wittgenstein points out that in the apparent case of “bootstrapping” that there are two possibilities. Either the person pulls on her bootstraps and nothing happens, and so we have not yet given any content to bootstrapping for logic to exclude, or else she pulls on the straps and floats into the air. Wittgenstein asks if the second picture is what the auditor had wanted to say was impossible. The point is that the imagined event is not what we typically mean by “lifting” as that usually includes the movement of our arms relative to our bodies, which does not happen in the floating example. Thus, we have yet to give content to lifting ourselves by our bootstraps and so have yet to exclude anything by stating that F is impossible. We could take these words in such a way that some sort of machine is used such that when we pull on our bootstraps it results in our being lifted. But, in that case we

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have reinterpreted the phrase to name something possible and so have still not given any content to this phrase in which it is used to pick out something determinate which is “logically impossible.”

And this is precisely the crux of the matter: to the extent that we are willing to call something “logically impossible” we will not have any content to exclude as impossible - we say nothing in such cases, and to the extent that we take the form of words as expressing content we will not take them to be expressing what we feel we want to say is logically impossible.133 Saying that something is logically impossible “is not a proposition” – it expresses nothing: “When you tell someone he is not able to do a certain thing a muddle arises if he thinks you have told him what he is incapable of doing.”134 As we will see, this applies equally for “It is logically impossible to think God-qua-simple, infinite, or absolutely other, etc.” as it is for square circles, bootstrapping, mountains without valleys, and changing the past.

At this juncture we can already defuse some of the argument between Descartes and the scholastics as concerns puzzling about omnipotence and logic (not that this puzzle is the real target of this chapter). Can God create a world in which there are mountains and no valleys? It seemed as though if we answered “no” then divinity was limited by logic, but if we, like Descartes, answered “yes,” but admitted we cannot

133 See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* §5.61, “Logic pervades the world: the limits of the world are also its limits. So we cannot say in logic, ‘The world has this in it, and this, but not that.’” For that would appear to presuppose that we were excluding certain possibilities, and this cannot be the case, since it would require that logic should go beyond the limits of the world; for only in that way could it view those limits form the other side as well.” Of course, this statement is but a very high rung on the ladder that Wittgenstein would have us throw away as nonsense insofar as it still uses the language of “limit” and “cannot.”

understand what it would be like, then our powers of thought are limited by logic. Yet, now we can see clearly by “mountain without a valley” we mean nothing at all (or, as I point out below, we unconsciously hover between two mutually exclusive ways of taking those words). Whether one answers yes or no she is in the thrall of psychologism. Using the word “mountain” outside of a context with “valleys,” and claiming that one is using the term to mean what it usually means is a breach of the context principle. How then does the word “mountain” have the same sense it usually has when not used with its typical and constitutive relationship to “valley? By “meaning it,” or by “intending it to,” or by “just knowing that it does,” or some other psychological fact? Indeed, the vey phrase, “mountains without valleys,” in the role it plays in this debate embodies equivocal desires towards that form of words. We want one or more of those words to mean what it means as constituted by a certain context, and we want to it to mean that outside of the context. We want “mountain” to both mean the kind of thing it usually means and not mean that kind of thing at the same time. When in the thrall of this psychologistic puzzle, we are unaware of our equivocal desires.

*Beyond the “Limits of Thought”*

The issue of logic brings us to the third and final note: the “idea” of a limit of thought is sheer nonsense – no thought at all. Given the hearsay accounts of Wittgenstein often encountered in theological literature it may be somewhat surprising that this philosopher of “finitude,” “limits,” and being hemmed in by “conditions of sense” sounds remarkably similar to a figure such as Hegel in his animadversion against limits that opens the *Tractatus:*
in order to draw the limit to thought we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense.\footnote{Wittgenstein \textit{Tractatus}, 3.}

Or, once again, from his mature thought in the \textit{Philosophical Investigations}: “The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one could not do.”\footnote{Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical investigations}, §374.}

The quotation from the \textit{Tractatus} appears \textit{prima facie} to suggest that although one cannot “think” the limits of thought, one may “draw” the limit “in language.” However, as has been powerfully argued in a series of publications by James Conant and Cora Diamond, nonsense for Wittgenstein is always logically equivalent to mere gibberish.\footnote{See especially, James Conant and Cora Diamond, “On Reading the Tractatus Resolutely,” in \textit{The Lasting Significance of Wittgenstein’s Philosophy}, edited by Max Kolbel and Bernhard Weiss, (New York: Routledge, 2004). Wittgenstein wrote, “When a sentence is called senseless, it is not as it were its sense that is senseless. But the combination of words is being excluded from the language, withdrawn from circulation.” Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §500.}

Thus, the “simply nonsense” which is “what lies on the other side” of the limit is not some domain “touched-but-not-comprehended” by language or thought, but a complete failure to name, refer to, or think anything. There is no outside, as Wittgenstein is using the grammar of “limit” and “nonsense” as an immanent critique of the notion of a limit to thought or a domain outside the bounds of sense.

Equivocation again rears its incoherent head. The desire to name some limit of thought is not “purity of heart” in Kierkegaard’s terms. It is not to will one thing. Again, the philosophical fantasy of the limit – or boundary, or necessary conditions for the possibility, etc. - is an equivocation of desire which, when in its grip, we are unaware of,
and in virtue of this equivocation there is nothing determinate we want; nothing which
will give us satisfaction. For, we want our words both to inform us of where thought and
sense come to an end, but in so doing, in telling us that thought/sense is necessarily this
way we also want it to tell us that it is not some other way – a way which would have to
both be and not be beyond thought and sense. “[I]n order to draw the limit to thought we
should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be
able to think what cannot be thought).”¹³⁸

If logic is a science, if logical propositions are informative, and if logical
impossibility excludes determinate things, then logic is the boundary, the limit, which –
as informative – has intelligible negations, but as the boundary of sense has no
intelligible negations because those negations would be outside of the boundary – outside
of thought. There will be, we will name, those logically impossible things which we
cannot think, and so delimit language and thought, be it with a square-circle, a valley-less
mountain, or even a private language or inexpressible fact. We both want and do not want
there to be an imaginable otherwise. Saying of any of these things that logically they can
or cannot be, can or cannot be thought or said, is to engage in fantasy and indulge in
equivocation. In each of these occasions, on close scrutiny, there is simply no it there to
be or not be possible, or by which language and thought may be bound.¹³⁹ We have failed

¹³⁸ Tractatus, 3.

¹³⁹ It is further evidence of Lindbeck’s psychologizing of Wittgenstein when he writes of
“Wittgenstein’s contention that private languages are logically impossible.” Nature of Doctrine, 38. I will
later put forward a non-psychologistic view of these arguments, but the present chapter has already made
clear why Lindbeck’s reading of the private language argument must be deeply flawed. At present it is
worth mentioning that Lindbeck uses this line in the midst of his argument that there is something
determinate “that we cannot do,” namely a “pre-linguistic experience,” rather than argue that it makes
no sense to speak of “pre-linguistic experience” in the manner that “experiential expressivism” demands.
That he writes thus, and, as I argue in the next chapter, that an analogous argument repeatedly reappears in
to give such words a single determinate sense as we waver from now this to now that mutually exclusive meanings.

Likewise, if the necessities of thought are contingently necessary, as an empirical fact about some population, then they do and do not have an outside. Insofar as one holds to notes 1 or 2 of psychologism, one will be committed to the gross equivocations, the mere form of words, of a “limit of thought.”

**Kant’s Irresolute Anti-Psychologism**

Finally, we may see how deeply intertwined the three notes of psychologism are, and how hard it is to escape this confusion, by considering Kant’s philosophy. Much of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of logic is anticipated by Kant. Wittgenstein was following Kant in his claim that logical propositions are neither true nor false.\(^{140}\) Kant considered logical propositions anything which counted as analytic a priori to be empty of any content, and so there was nothing which counted as a negation of any such propositions. He propounded this idea as one part of his own resistance to Descartes’s psychologistic philosophy of logic.

However, Kant did not extend this analysis to the necessities which constitute his famed synthetic *a priori* judgments (transcendental logic). While synthetic *a priori* judgments constituted necessities of knowledge and experience, they did not constitute necessities of thought. That is, whereas is it impossible for a human being to know and/or

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experience anything contrary to the necessities articulated by synthetic a priori judgments, the human mind can entertain what it would be for these judgments to be false. These necessities are necessities of our world, as we are constituted as a judging being. The system of synthetic a priori judgments articulated the concept of an object as such, the limits of what the rational judging being can know and experience qua rational judging being.\textsuperscript{141} The concept of an object as such is hence correlated to the inside limit of the phenomenal world. This anthropological limitation of the world gave rise to the possibility of that which is not an object, is not humanly knowable, and so to the problem of the noumenal and skepticism about the noumenal realm. Those more resolutely committed to anti-psychologism than Kant, such as Hegel and Wittgenstein, have been unconvinced by Kant’s transcendental boundaries. We should not be surprised that in his rejection of this aspect of Kant’s philosophy Hegel reproached Kant as having become an “empirical psychologist.”\textsuperscript{142}

Kant took geometrical truths to be synthetic a priori judgments.\textsuperscript{143} When discussing how it is impossible for us to construct a cube with more or less than eight corners he noted that he had established a necessity for human thought. We may paraphrase his discovery as, “The converse of an impossibility is a necessity.” All three

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{141} Ibid., First Division, book II, 138.
  \item \textsuperscript{142} See Robert Pippin’s treatment of this point in his Hegel’s Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 91-115 and 277.
  \item \textsuperscript{143} Kant thus differentiated the truths of geometry, math, and the categories from logic. The former, as synthetic a priori, are informative and have intelligible negations which are thinkable but impossibilities for the human mind to affirm as true. Wittgenstein suggested that all necessities of thought which are a priori did not have intelligible negations. See Philosophical Investigations §251.
\end{itemize}
notes of psychologism come together here.\textsuperscript{144} By claiming that necessity is established as the converse, or as the negation, of an impossibility, he is claiming that what is impossible for judgment has content. That is, geometrical impossibility is about something which is excluded from the humanly intuited world. Thus the necessities of geometry are informative of judgment necessarily being this way rather than some other way. This is possible, according to Kant, because the synthetic \textit{a priori} necessities of knowledge are limited by the contingent constitution of the judging mind. In the case of synthetic \textit{a priori} necessities, we clearly have the deep intertwining of notes 1 and 2 (and both the general point about logic and the particular point about impossibility). Note 3 is manifest in that the only way of saying there is something which is impossible for us, constructing a 7 or 9 cornered cube, is by way of denying the context principle. That is that "cube" means what it means not by a constitutive relationship to words such as "eight corners," therefore it can be combined with "seven corners" and mean what it always means (whether we say this a possibility or impossibility). How then does it mean, if not by relationship to other words? Intention? Intuition of meaning/form? Thus one will be committed to note 3 if one tries to argue for there being something determinate we cannot do, or that logic or grammar are informative about thought being this way (rather than some other way).

\textsuperscript{144} Conant made an analogous, but different, point with reference to Frege’s arguments with the philosopher Benno Kerry. See James Conant, “Elucidation and Nonsense in Frege and Early Wittgenstein,” in Alice Crary and Rupert Read eds., \textit{The New Wittgenstein} (New York: Routledge, 2000), 174-198.
Excursus on the Philosophy of James Conant

At this point in the argument an aside will prove illuminating. Theologians have taken greater note of the philosophy of Cavell and Diamond than of the major influence over my interpretation of Wittgenstein in this chapter, James Conant. One of the reasons his work is not often used by theologians is because of subtle misunderstandings of his arguments and because theologians are committed to just the problematic picture of divine ineffability whose intelligibility I impugn in the second part of this chapter. Espen Dahl’s otherwise excellent exposition of Cavell’s relationship to theology in his Stanley Cavell, Religion, and Continental Philosophy is marked by these misunderstandings in the following footnote:

> Conant’s influential reading of the Tractatus does indeed invite silence – as the end of nonsense, religious nonsense included. Despite his invocations of Kierkegaard, it is hard to see that his reading preserves the religious sense that, no doubt, was an abiding impulse in Wittgenstein’s intellectual life. If one holds that divine ineffability means that the truth of God lies outside the limits of sense or of thought – if one believes it is logically impossible to comprehend divinity, then it is not hard to see why Conant’s readings of Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard would seem so problematic, even approaching positivistic. After all, in the article Dahl cites, Conant does attack as exegetically and conceptually flawed the reading of the Tractatus which takes the say/show distinction to mean that there are ineffable truths which the logic of language debars us from saying. This is the standard reading, and, as I show in the second part of this chapter, is a central plank in the negative theologies of so-called Grammatical Thomism. Indeed, Conant writes of his temptation to “instruct” the

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ineffabilist commentators on the *Tractatus* “to read these texts in a different light and to say to them: there is no particular thing that cannot be said. The ‘what’ in ‘what cannot be said’ refers to nothing.”¹⁴⁶ This is no doubt troubling for those who want the “what” in the “what cannot be said” to be God. Insofar as one wants to speak of transcendence or divine ineffability as outside the limits/boundaries of sense, and the world immanent to that sense, that one should perceive my arguments as attempt to unveil such “transcendence” as an illusion and sheer fantasy.

I want to add that I am tempted to write at this point, “There is nothing that is logically - or grammatically - impossible to think or express.” However, that would be a mistake. If it is not false that “something is logically impossible to think” but meaningless, then its apparent contradiction, “there is nothing that is logically impossible to think,” is equally meaningless. Herein lies an indication of the difference between immanentizing critiques of the limits of thought as false and my Wittgensteinian critique of them as nonsense, and it makes all the difference in the world if one wishes, as I do, to defend traditional and mystical apophatic theology.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion I want to proleptically gesture towards the implications of my analysis for negative theology as it is currently practiced. Therefore, before launching into a critique of the *via negativa* in current literature in the second part of this chapter, I will take aim at the use of a sentence which is heard often enough in theological

conversations wherein some dualism is being summarily rejected, be it intelligent design, or the new atheism, or analytic philosophies of religion. This sentence is what appears to be a common place truism to many: “God is not an object.”

In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argues that saying of any x that “x is an object” - as this proposition gets used in philosophical discussions about what can be thought or of the conditions of the possibility of intelligibility - is confused nonsense.\(^{147}\) As with all sections of the *Tractatus* the arguments are syncopated. However, Wittgenstein says in essence that in such cases we want “object” to do the work we call on it to do when we use it, as we usually do, as a variable in sentences such as “There are three objects in the box,” but that we try to use it as concept by which we predicate something. The implication is that the work of a variable and the work of predicate nominative or concept are mutually exclusive, though he does not elaborate.

Conant has expanded on this point.\(^{148}\) In this case we immediately run into problems if we try to say what an object (in-this-supposed-sense) is, or, more importantly, if we want “x is an object” to inform anyone of a necessary condition for thought about x. Once again we stand with equivocal desires towards the work we want our words and concepts to do. As Wittgenstein pointed out, the term “object” is typically used as a variable as in the “the red object in my hand is an apple” or “there are four objects in the box.” In the case of “x is an object” we remove the context which delineates a specific range, or the kind of thing the variable stands for, such as “in my

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\(^{147}\) Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* §§4.1271-4.1272. Wittgenstein’s example is that we cannot say “there are objects” in the same manner that we say “there are books.”

hand” or “in the box.” We want simply the kind of thing that is picked out by “object” alone, without a genitive. This is to say we do not want to pick out a kind of thing as we want it to stand for everything (or, at least – everything that can be thought) and picking out a kind of thing essentially involves excluding other kinds of things; that is just the point.

Nevertheless, we do want it to pick out a kind of thing, namely the kind of thing that is available for thought and description – the kind of thing of which we predicate concepts. Equivocation begins to appear then, in wanting the “object” to pick out a kind of thing and not pick out a kind of thing, or at least not a kind of thing that is different from any other kind of thing we can think. But the equivocation is even more intractable as Diamond has shown. Consider how we wanted “x is an object” to inform us of the necessary conditions of thought about x being met. Consider again the structure of judgment. Before the judgment is passed one must understand what is being proposed to be the case, and therefore one must understand what is being proposed as not the case, or what would make the proposition either true or false. Thus if “x is an object” is true, and gives the necessary conditions for thought about x, then we want its negation “x is not an object” to be both intelligible and unthinkable as what it is we know is not the necessary fact of the matter. If “x is an object” is the necessary condition for thought about x, then “x is not an object” renders x impossible to think. But in taking “x is an object” to inform about what is the case such that x is thinkable, we want it to be inferentially bound to, and thereby committed to the intelligibility of, “x is not an object.”


150 In the Philosophical Investigations §§134-138 Wittgenstein tackles this same problem from the angle of the proposition. Instead of trying to name what it is that renders something representable by a
“X is an object” is a form of words that we can give any number of uses. However, when we tell ourselves we want it to delineate what it is that makes x available for thought, we hide from ourselves the incoherence of our desires. We want, in this case, “object” to be and not be a variable, to pick out and not pick out a specific kind of thing, and we want and do not want “x is an object” to have an imaginable otherwise. Nothing will satisfy these desires as we want mutually exclusive work to be done by one and the same form of words. The negative theologian, captivated by a commonly used phrase in theological conversation, might then have to confront the fact that she is dealing in the realm of fantasy and incoherent desires when he speaks of divine transcendence in certain terms. For, if “x is an object” is meaningless, then “x is not an object” is equally meaningless, even if that x is God.

_proposition, the idea is that there is a general form of propositions-as-such (a form of words already critiqued in the _Tractatus_) with a certain expressive range. Wittgenstein again points out whatever we take to be “the form of the proposition” will be a variable. We are thus, again, caught trying to use something both as a variable representing a certain kind of thing and as not picking out a kind of thing.

151 As with case when we insist someone or something “is not an object,” meaning, they are an agent and should not be basely defined solely by the wants, desires, and concepts of another.

152 Again, if one means that God is not an empirical object, or not available as data, or any number of ways then this sentence can make sense. The point is only for the sake of those who take this form of words to be relaying that, for whatever reason, God resides outsides the determinate bounds of the thinkable or of sense.
CHAPTER II

FANTASIES OF TRANSCENDENCE II:
AGAINST THE PSYCHOLOGISMS OF NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

The great difficulty here is not to represent the matter as if there were something one could not do.153

Despite the problems with psychologism demonstrated in the first chapter, and despite the forces of phenomenology, critical theory, and grammatical philosophy arrayed against it, psychologism is a powerful force on the modern intellectual scene. Many analytic philosophers, and even some theologians, actively defend it.154 Psychologism is also implicit in a great deal of neuro-science and research in artificial intelligence.155 Likewise, empirical and “evidence-based” methods are often invoked as the only viable methodologies even in the human sciences and the humanities; a view which is inherently

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psychologistic.\textsuperscript{156} It seems natural for theologians to try resist these habits of thought which tend to be reductionistic. This is especially true of theologians who are both negative theologians, insisting on the transcendence of God and human beings, and practitioners of grammatical and/or phenomenological forms of philosophy. Yet, in this chapter, I argue that a great deal of Anglo-American negative theology is reflexively psychologistic, and that the confusions and equivocations of logical psychologism are manifest in these theologies precisely where they attempt to demonstrate divine transcendence and ineffability.

In this chapter I situate three negative theologies in relationship to my criticisms of psychologism. Each of these three theologies have an analogous logical structure. Some divine attribute, positive or negative, which is known by way of inference from the doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo}, is said to be incommensurate with thought or sense based upon a philosophical analysis of the conditions for the possibility of thought or language.\textsuperscript{157}

The type of negative theology which I criticize in this chapter has a widespread influence in the world of theology – historical, constructive, and philosophical. Indeed, whether or not other theologies are directly influenced by the three analyzed below is of little concern because all three embody sophisticated variations of the move to the ineffable which is the dominant method for securing divine transcendence of thought and

\[\textsuperscript{156}\text{See Rupert Read, \textit{Wittgenstein among the Sciences: Wittgensteinian Investigations into the \textquote{Scientific Method}}, edited by Simon Summers (New York: Routledge, 2012).}\]

\[\textsuperscript{157}\text{In dissertation’s conclusion, another influential strategy in apophatic theology is both appropriated and criticized. This type of apophatic theology, most influentially in the works of Jean-Luc Marion, argues that what is manifest of God in this or that locus of encounter exceeds the proper conditions for the possibility of experience (i.e. intentionality, conceptuality, horizon, etc.) and so invokes the experience of the impossible.}\]
language in current Anglo-American theology. These three theologies, and, by implication, all theologies with similar arguments and positions, draw from psychologistic pictures of thought and language such that divine transcendence is always correlative to “something we cannot do.” “God” becomes the very name of human limit and limitation. The simplicity and/or infinity of God is the marker of the composition and finitude of our minds and thought as lack. Divinity is beyond us because we are sealed in by the logic of language or the structure of thought. Furthermore, psychologism not only introduces a deep incoherence at the heart of negative theology (or worse, introduces the mere illusion of sense at a crucial juncture), it also deflects the theologian’s gaze from where the ineffable and transcendent can be truly found.¹⁵⁸

The scholars whose works are examined are not necessarily those most guilty of theological distraction, quite the contrary, but they provide the most compelling accounts of the move to the ineffable by which many theologians – me for one – are easily distracted. Indeed, Eric Perl, Denys Turner, and especially David Burrell are three of the strongest influences on this dissertation, and their influence is deep and wide in philosophical, historical, and systematic theology. I take this influence to be felicitous in all three counts. I have chosen their texts to criticize because they constitute the strongest case for the common strategy. Furthermore, it is precisely the psychologistic elements of their work which are often used by theologians when they wish to indicate how it may be argued that God is ineffable, how language necessarily fails to describe God.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ See the dissertation’s introduction and fourth chapter on the Christological site of the revelation of transcendence.

¹⁵⁹ See, for instance, Susannah Ticciati in A New Apophaticism: Augustine and the Redemption of Signs (Boston: Brill, 2015).
In the conclusion of the chapter I turn briefly to the historical, social, and political setting of each of these three scholars. What is disclosed is the manner in which the temptation to psychologistism is driven by anxiety over aggressively secular and purely immanent pictures of human life and thought. I show how modern anxieties structure these projects of recovery of ancient apophatic and mystical theologies by according too essential and constitutive a role for the critique of idolatry. In the next chapter I turn to more existential and primordial sources of intellectual temptation to psychologistic transcendence. In the final chapter, I articulate the Dionysian and Merkava sources of acknowledging divine ineffability – though, in this chapter, I occasionally gesture towards the Dionysian/Merkava alternative when responding to Perl and Turner since they are interpreters of Dionysius.

Allow me to briefly summarize the findings of the first chapter to serve as an aid to understand the arguments of this chapter. The three notes of psychologism are:

1. Psychologism construes the necessities of human thought (logic/grammar, mathematics, geometry, etc.) to be more or less contingent facts about the psychology of all thinkers.

2. Psychologism construes the propositions of logic as true, informative, and general.
   a. Judgments of “logical impossibility” exclude something from the world and/or the realm of the thinkable.

3. Psychologism construes the meaning of words and propositions to be determined by some psychological fact (intention, grasping a universal, etc.).

The three notes of Wittgenstein’s anti-psychologism are:

1. Context principle: Words have meaning only in the context of a sentence.
   a. Expansion of the context principle to include practical contexts: Words and sentences generally have the meaning that they do because of the use we give them on particular occasions.
2. Logic is not a science and logical propositions are not informative (they do not represent states of affairs).
   a. “Logical impossibility” does not exclude anything.

3. The “idea” of a specifiable limit of thought is not merely false, or impossible to name, but no thought at all.

I reproduce these to serve as a reference for my analysis of certain aspects of negative theologies in current literature. The point is not that psychologism has been refuted and so insofar as the negative theologies are shown to be psychologistic they have been rendered problematic. Rather, the point is that when one sees these notes emerge in the accounts of divine ineffability it is worthwhile looking to see if characteristic equivocations exposed in the first chapter are also embodied in the arguments and positions of these negative theologians. It is my argument that the equivocations do so appear in each project.

**Negative Theologies and Psychologism**

*Eric Perl’s Dionysius*

Eric Perl is a rigorous philosopher and sophisticated historian of philosophy. He is an American exemplification of a typically French phenomena: an historically minded Neoplatonist who is influenced by phenomenology. His book, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, has strongly influenced this dissertation. He contends that Dionysius is often content to invoke common Neoplatonic ideas and vocabulary, but leaves the philosophical argumentation out of his texts. Perl fills in the gaps by showing conceptual connections between this and that laconic passage by way of supplementing the Dionysian texts with the arguments of Plotinus and Proclus.
Perl’s method of interpreting Dionysius is helpful. However, the question he never appears to entertain is whether there are substantive reasons for this or that omission of philosophical argumentation by Dionysius. For instance, in one crucial instance Dionysius evokes the Neoplatonic theories of causality to justify praising the Creator with all names of created beings, but, strikingly, turns aside from this theory when it comes to saying why and how the Divinity surpasses all names:

Thus, they call it nameless when the godhead itself, in one of the mystical sights of the symbolic manifestations of God, rebukes him who says “What is thy name?” by saying “To what end do you ask me my name, for it is the most wondrous of all (Judges 13:17-18)” and leads him away from knowledge of the divine names. For is not this truly the most wondrous name: the nameless name beyond all names (Philippians 2), which is placed beyond “every name which is named either in this age or in the future (Ephesians 1:21)?”

The very theory of causality which justifies giving the Cause (Aitia)-of-all every name on the basis of being Cause-of-all can also provide justification for saying the Cause is nameless. For, just as the Cause of all pre-contains all perfections named of creatures, it does so in a preeminent manner beyond all knowing and naming. Yet, Dionysius does not turn to causality as philosophically articulated, but, like a Merkava mystic, he invokes to the twin themes of theophany and the ineffable name.

As previously argued and in keeping with the Merkava mysticism of the New Testament, the bearer of the nameless name is none other than Jesus. Most obviously he quotes Ephesians 1:21 which is not only a divine name-Christology, but as Christopher Morray-Jones has compellingly argued is a case of Christian Shiur Komah in which Christ is the pre-existent and uncreated body of Glory which fills the cosmos: “[Christ

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who was raised] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named…and [God] gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:21-23).”161 Not only does Dionysius quote a passage of divine name-Christology in Ephesians 1, and allude to another in Philippians 2, his use of the anthropomorphic theophany of Judges 13 is carefully chosen and Christological. That passage itself is the background to the Emmaus road appearance of the resurrected Lord and therefore profoundly weaves together Merkava mysticism of the manifest Glory and ineffable Name with visions of the resurrected Jesus in the Eucharist.162

The absence of consideration of why Dionysius is laconic in his philosophical arguments, and why he opts instead to wax mystical in ways analogous to Jewish mystics, I contend, leads the very careful philosopher and exegete, Perl, into psychologistic confusion. This is so, because, he interprets Dionysius as basically a Neoplatonic philosopher of the First Principle. As such, Perl is committed to understanding the source of Dionysius’s claims to divine ineffability to be inferences from the notion of the First Cause.

However, it appears that Perl sees the problem of psychologism. He seems to interpret Dionysius in a non-psychologistic way in contrast to Paul Rorem. Perl quotes Rorem’s overtly psychologistic view, “Negation is a human concept and thus cannot


162 In Judges 13 YHWH/the angel of YHWH is at first unrecognized, initially refuses the offer of hospitality, disappears when recognized, and disappears in the context of flame imagery. All of these things can be said of Jesus in this clearly Eucharistic text of Luke 24:13-35.
capture an infinite and transcendent God…Negation is negated and the human mind befuddled, falls silent [italics original].”

Perl’s reply appears to assuage fears of human thought being limited because it is human or because it is this kind of thought versus some other kind of thought: “God is not merely beyond ‘human thought’ or ‘finite thought,’ as if there were some ‘other’ sort of thought that could reach him, or as if his incomprehensibility were simply due to a limitation on our part, but is beyond thought as such, because thought is always directed to beings, and hence to that which is finite and derivative.”

Perl argues for divine transcendence as “beyond-being” not based on thought being peculiarly human, nor on the idea of a different kind of thought. Nevertheless, he has still put forward a psychologistic conception of thought and its limits-as-limitations. Concerning Plotinus as the source of the Dionysian notion of God-beyond-being (and therefore God-beyond-thought), he writes, “If Plotinus, very occasionally, uses expressions which suggest the One in some sense is, this is simply an impropriety, in that thought and language necessarily treat whatever they treat as beings.”

In other words, there is a truth about God which the necessities of language will not permit us state.

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164 Ibid., 13. Italics mine.

165 Ibid. 12. Significantly, Perl states, “Dionysius’ doctrine is, of course, drawn more immediately…in the case of his extreme negative formulations, from Damascius, than from Plotinus…[H]owever, we may pass directly from Plotinus to Dionysius because, while Dionysius’ formulations may be drawn more from…Damascius than from Plotinus, the philosophical argumentation by which these doctrines are reached is already fully present in Plotinus. The examination of Damascius as a textual source for Dionysius would thus contribute little to a philosophical understanding of his position (119, n20).” I follow Sara Rappe and John D. Jones who argue that Damascius, and therefore Dionysius, hold to a position about the ineffability of the One, and the nature of language “about” the One, as being different from Plotinus. See chapter 4.
The psychologism of such a position can be shown by his desires that certain statements about “thought,” “being,” “finitude,” and being “derivative” function in two mutually exclusive ways. He wants “being,” “finitude,” and being “derivative” as the formal objects of “thought” to deliver the essence of thought, thereby marking its limits. Yet, he wants such statements to be informative – implying what is not the case concerning thought – which requires that there be some imaginable otherwise to thought as essentially about finite and derivative being. That is, he wants being, finitude, and the derivative to mark the very space in which it makes sense to speak of thought, and yet he wants such a statement to function like an assertoric statement which tells us what is the case and what is not the case – thought being about the infinite and uncreated beyond-being.\(^\text{166}\) But if being about “being” is the very space in which it makes sense to speak of thought, if being-directedness is the essence of thought, as Perl maintains, then “thought can be directed to the infinite beyond-being” is not a viable negation or imaginable otherwise, but a failure to say or think anything at all – like a “square-circle.” What appears to be a negation, as what we are told is not the case, thereby rendering the statement of thought’s essential directedness as informative, is logically equivalent to gibberish. “Thought is essentially about finite being” makes sense, and might even be said to be true, but it is not informative like experiential statements, it does not tell us what is and is not the case, what we as thinkers can and cannot do.\(^\text{167}\) However, by

\(^\text{166}\) It would be possible to say of thought that it is essentially about the finite. But in so doing one would be making a grammatical remark about “thought” which has no imaginable otherwise that would show the necessities of thought to be a limitation. However, Perl wants this sentence to function like an informative assertion, and his insistence of the infinity of God as necessarily incommensurable with thought shows his desire to the name the limits of thought.

\(^\text{167}\) Importantly, by pointing out these equivocations I am not making the argument that stating “God is beyond-being” or that “God is ineffable” that Perl is committed to the gross equivocations of speaking as though God both exists and does not exist or is guilty of the performative contradiction of
insisting that language can only treat of God as a being, and that that is to introduce inadequacy and falsehood into our descriptions, Perl has presented language as a cage of limitation. The infinity of God does merely overwhelm a human being’s ability to describe or comprehend, but marks the essential boundaries and limits of sense and thought.

In other words, Perl wants such statements to both state what the logical space is in which it makes sense to use the word “thought”, and to have such statements function as informative by having a thinkable otherwise which makes sense and yet is outside of the essential conditions of sense. We can make this a bit more fine-grained by asking what work Perl wants the word “finitude” and “derivative” to do? Do they have contrast terms? There is a puzzle if we reply “infinite” and “underived” because we are told that such things are beyond thought. If they are beyond thought, then how do they function for our thinking to be that which we are told thought is not and cannot be about? Thus, Perl’s desire that these statements mark the limits of thought as limitations embodies equivocation between mutually exclusive meanings. He wants the proposition “thought cannot be about the infinite” to both make sense and be nonsense just as he wants the proposition “thought is only about finite and derived being” both to delimit the bounds of sense and yet, being informative, to imply some other way of being thought that happens not to be the case. “[I]n order to draw the limit to thought we should have to be able to

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speaking about God so as to tell us that the divine is ineffable. Perl is very aware of such gross equivocations and artfully defuses such worries.
think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought).”

Why does Perl arrive at psychologistic conclusions by way of reading the Areopagite? Dionysius himself suggests an analogy which can very easily mislead his readers: “For if all knowledge is of beings…then that beyond every being is apart from every knowledge.” Dionysius himself wrote about the beyond-being as beyond the formal object of the intellect by an analogy with formal objects of this or that faculty. Thus being stands to the intellect as light to the eyes, and God-as-beyond-being stands to the intellect as aroma to the eyes. Whether this is psychologistic turns on if we take it in a first person or third person perspective. If we, as Perl does, literalizes the analogy and say thought (third person) has a certain range – that of being – and divinity is “outside” that range the way the taste of a tomato is “outside” of sound, we are saying thought is some particular way – has a specific kind of content - opposed to some other way, then we arrive at all of the equivocations already named. We can specify the range of sight by

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168 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness and introduced by Bertrand Russell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 3. This point can also be explained in terms of the modern history of the “logical meaning” of a sentence as traced by Robert B. Brandom in his *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Descartes and the empiricists, Brandom claims, believed sentences in isolation have the meaning they possess, and, therefore, have the inferential relationships they have to other sentences on the basis of that already established meaning. According to Brandom, a train a thinkers running from Spinoza to Leibniz to Kant and the absolute idealists to the pragmatists and, finally, to Heidegger and Wittgenstein thought the opposite. A sentence’s logical meaning is constituted and articulated by its inferential relationship to other sentences. In the former view, a sentence such as “Thought is necessarily about being or finite beings” can have the same logical function as an informative empirical statement which has thinkable contraries and contradictories. It just happens to be the case that this thought, about the essential limits of thought, does not have any such inferential relations of negation, but it already possess the same logical structure and meaning as any informative statement. On the latter view, this is hopelessly confused. A sentence’s logical structure and meaning are constituted by its inferential relations to other statements. The claim that one sentence with no inferentially contradictory or contrary sentences has the same logical meaning or function as a sentence with inferential contraries and a contradiction is itself a contradiction.

way of the formal object of light because we also have access to the formal objects of the
other faculties. That there is such a perspective on thought by way of thinking is an
illusion and is being misled by an analogy with the faculties and their formal objects.

But, if we say that whenever we (first person plural) think of anything we think in
terms of being, that we find we do not think or say otherwise than by way of judgments
utilizing “is” or “is not,” and that that – any manner of being which we know how to
affirm or deny - is not what we want to affirm or deny of the Creator, then we need not
take the analogy as leading to psychologism. That is, there is nothing in terms of being, in
terms of how we find we affirm or negate anything, which says what we feel would do
justice to the subject matter. In other words, such a position would call for going through
anything and everything we know or think of and saying neither this nor its negation is
fitting: not this nor its opposite, not this nor its opposite, etc. If that were the direction
Dionysius wanted to point us in with the analogy then we would expect to find him
saying very little about the nature of thought and how it works so as to indicate what its
specific range of content is. Although he does borrow some language from Neoplatonic
epistemology which does this kind of work (though, as Perl points out, he does not
typically make any such argument), when one turns to the Mystical Theology one does
not find epistemology, or, for that matter, metaphysics. Rather, Dionysius goes through a
cosmos of names, their affirmations and negations, and says not this, not this, not this,
etc., is what we want to affirm or deny of God. With such a strategy there is no need to
name the limits of thought, nor for one to affirm that there are any such limits, nor claim
that there is something we cannot do.
Given the non-psychologistic reading of these passages, though, there is the question about why we should say such things about theological language. An inference from God being the First Cause will not, on this construal, do that work all by itself. Any such inference to ineffability would necessarily re-instantiate all of the problems and equivocations named because it would require the drawing of a necessary boundary. Thus we can ask, on the non-psychologistic construal of Dionysius’s negations, why would one feel that none of the affirmations or negations she knows how to make will do justice to the one she praises? Although Dionysius does write about God as the Cause-of-all (aitia) in the Mystical Theology, the text begins with the revelation of the Trinity and the transformational vision of the Glory to Moses on Mt. Sinai. For Dionysius, apophatic theology begins and ends (so much as there is anything one might call an ending) with “suffering divine things” and the liturgical/theurgical/mystical revelation of Jesus, not with inferences drawn from the doctrine of creation. In short, Dionysian apophaticism is experiential and phenomenological before it is metaphysical and inferential.  

_Denis Turner’s Negative Theology of Difference_

Denys Turner’s book *Faith Reason and the Existence of God* is a rigorously argued case for the position that St. Thomas held that natural reason may be used to demonstrate the existence of God and that such a position is theologically important. Given Turner’s prior work in the history of mystical theology as well as the pervasive

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influence of Herbert McCabe’s severely “apophatic” readings of Aquinas, Turner sets out to prove not only that robust natural theology is consistent with negative theology, but that in natural theology reason demonstrates the existence of One-that-it-does-not-comprehend and that the One cannot be comprehended by reason. Natural theology ends not only in demonstrating that the Source-of-being exists and is unknown but demonstrates that it is unknowable by the light of that selfsame reason. Turner’s book, and all of his work, has deeply influenced this dissertation. The critique offered here should therefore be understood in the light of much greater appreciation.

The focus of my critique is a narrow, but crucial, issue over how Turner expositsthe Dionysian claim that God is “beyond similarity and difference” and Meister Eckhart’s claim that God is “distinct by indistinction.” He interprets these phrases to indicate the infinite qualitative distinction of the Creator from creation and he reads Aquinas as arguing for essentially the same thing. Following David Burrell, Turner takes Aquinas’s argument about the identity of essence and existence in God – simplicity - to be the mark of absolute otherness and ineffability of divinity. In short, Turner takes Dionysius, Eckhart, and Aquinas to be drawing logical conclusions about the ineffable differentiation of God from creatures since God must be completely other to any creature as the radical Source of all. There are two summary statements of how Turner reads the Mystical Theology which signal the psychologistic equivocations at the heart of his

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172 Ibid. To be clear, I am not objecting to the idea that natural theology concludes to the existence of the unknown Source of all. Nor do I object to the separate claim that the Source is incomprehensible. Rather, as the argument will show, what is problematic is that there are or can be arguments which inferentially determine that the Creator must be incomprehensible. The need for a psychologistic, or sideways on view, of language or thought to make that case cannot be satisfied – not because it is impossible – but because it is nothing.

173 I will use “difference” and “otherness” as synonyms throughout the chapter.
argument: Concerning the apophatic methodology of the *Mystical Theology* he concludes that “we step off the very *boundary* of language itself, beyond every affirmation and every denial, into the ‘negation of the negation’ and the ‘brilliant darkness’.”174 And we are forced to discover just why God cannot be different from, nor therefore similar to, anything at all, at any rate in *any of the ways in which we can conceive of similarity and difference*; or else God would be another, different thing...Therefore...there can be no language of similarity and difference left with which to describe God’s difference. In short, for the pseudo-Denys, only the otherness of God could be ‘totally’ other, and that otherness of God is, perforce, indescribable...175

Although these sentences obviously appear to invoke the problematic notions of language being delimited and their being a determinate something we cannot do or conceive, Turner’s arguments full argument can be tempting.

Turner points out that when we make distinctions about the difference of two objects such judgments are always made in the context of some similarity or common term.176 We only do and *can* differentiate A from B with reference to C which is common to A and B. He illustrates this point by saying that the more two things have in common the more we can say by way of their otherness to each other. Because of their shared humanity there is a great deal that can be said by way of the differences between two people. They differ in disposition, virtue and vice, sense of humor, personality, etc. in ways that makes no sense to speak of the difference between a human being and a cat. In other words, we do not take the time to say of someone that unlike the cat she has a


175 Ibid., 157.

176 Ibid., 150-168 - The summary here is more directly taken from Turner’s treatment of Eckhart than Dionysius, but the logic of the argument is the same in both instances.
great sense of humor, though we find ourselves saying such things about the differences between persons. Because of the shared common background of being animals we can say a great deal of the difference between a cat and a mouse, though less than we would say about the differences between two cats or two humans. Finally, there is far less that we can say about the difference between a piece of cheese and 11:30 in the morning.\textsuperscript{177} Because a cat and mouse are both physical objects we can differentiate their color, size, etc. and as both are animals we can differentiate their species and eating habits and so on, whereas there is far less to say of the difference between a piece of cheese and 11:30 in the morning. Harder still, indeed impossible according to Turner, is the ability to say or think anything of the difference between any creature and her Creator as the Divinity is completely other.\textsuperscript{178}

Turner elaborates these points with an articulate account of the different kinds of differences we note about creatures. Against Jacques Derrida’s claim that “tout autre est tout autre” (“all otherness is complete otherness”) Turner’s exegesis of Dionysius’s \textit{Mystical Theology} draws the reader into a careful attending to the variety of ways we go about differentiating this from that.\textsuperscript{179} For Turner, and Turner’s Dionysius, the various kinds of difference are internally related to the variety kinds of similarity or sameness we note between creatures, as explained above. The difference between any two creatures is

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 163.

\textsuperscript{178} Admittedly, this summary leaves out much that is rich and wonderful in Turner’s analysis of different forms for difference and negation and how they are related to sameness, similarity, and affirmation. However, the summary provides enough detail to show how beguiling is the notion that attention to the structure of the grammar of difference(s) can reveal that there is something we cannot do and how this grammar is a limit of thought and language.

always articulated in an internal relationship to the sameness or similarity between them. Negation is logically tied to affirmation. However, when it comes to the radical Source-of-all-things we move beyond the realm of sameness and similarity and so into the negation of the negation. Only in the case of God do we have an example of the “tout autre.”

The difference between God and all else is “infinite,” because the Creator has no common feature with anything. As beyond similarity and, therefore, humanly thinkable difference, the Creator is beyond affirmation and negation, according to Turner. Apophatic negation is the “negation of the negation.” That is, not only does God-qua-infinitely-different elude our affirmations, but our negations also do not reach divinity. Different and distinct from creation and all creatures God indeed is, we are told, but there is nothing we can say or think about that difference because the necessary structure of human judgment, being the way it is (as bound by similarity), will not allow it. For Turner, it seems, we may touch the difference and distinction of God from all else, but we necessarily cannot comprehend it.

It appears that Turner’s argument engages in equivocation as it is torn between wanting the “completely other” to be both determinate and indeterminate – or at least just determinate enough to render intelligible the claim that it, what God must be as inferred from the doctrine of creation - is indeterminate. The confusions are of the kind Wittgenstein identifies in the following passage:

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181 Of course, I am not arguing that we can comprehend the divine difference and that what Turner says about God and the human mind is false. Rather, the point is that his attempt to name the necessary boundary of thought is empty and equivocal.
Let us compare “It is impossible to get from this room to the next without going through the open door” with “It is impossible to catch one’s own thumb”. In the first case you can describe both beginning and end and the condition without which the next room cannot be reached. In the second case, you have not said what it is that is impossible, i.e. what you are not going to succeed at doing, for there is no describing catching one’s thumb. When you tell someone he is not able to do a certain thing a muddle arises if he thinks that you have told him what he is incapable of doing.\textsuperscript{182}

Turner’s argument seems to equivocate between wanting the impossibility he names to be like Wittgenstein’s first and second example at the same time. Since it is logically impossible to name the divine difference, he wants the impossibility to be like the second kind because there is no thinking what it is that is impossible for us – it is, after all, beyond thought. But insofar as he has inferred this divine difference from the doctrine of creation, and inferred that there is this difference which we cannot think, he wants it to be like the first example where there is something determinate we cannot do. However, why cannot Turner just respond that making judgments about the impossibility of understanding the totally other is like the impossibility of catching one’s thumb: there is nothing we would call understanding or making a judgment about the totally other just as there is nothing we would call catching one’s thumb? Would not that suffice perfectly well for the transcendence Turner seeks?

The crucial difference is that on the one hand catching one’s thumb is a form of words built up from analogies of catching this or that with one’s thumb, and, in the case of catching one’s thumb, we merely extend the use of these words beyond the contexts in which it makes sense to use them. But, on the other hand, in Turner’s case the “totally other” has been inferred from the doctrine of creation. It is not that words have merely

been extended along a continuum and then beyond the relevant context. In Turner’s argument that the Creator is totally other it is not that we have simply extended a form of words about difference or otherness beyond the contexts in which they are at home, but God being totally other is deduced from the truth of the world as created from nothing. That deduced otherness is then shown to be incommensurable to the essential structure of our judgments and descriptions about otherness. According to the logic of Turner’s argument “God is totally other” must and must not make sense. It is a fact deduced from a doctrine – and so is intelligible – and it is beyond what is essentially the case about our ability to render judgments – so is unintelligible.

When we say “you cannot catch your thumb” there is nothing described as impossible and, therefore, nothing excluded from the realm of the possible. But with “we cannot understand the totally other” Turner does and does not want something to be excluded. That he wants something to be excluded is seen from the fact that the “otherness” of God is inferred from the doctrine of creation and so he wants there to be “something” that a logical and grammatical analysis of differentiation reveals “cannot be done” – the very thing Wittgenstein said was hardest temptation to resist. Yet, as concluding to the logical impossibility of understanding the differentiation of God from all else we do not want there to be a determinate something that cannot be done. God must be totally other, and yet all talk about God as totally other must be nonsense, including the talk that constitutes the first phrase of this sentence.\footnote{A further, conceptually related, equivocation could be pointed out over whether or not Turner wants his claims about difference being bound to similarity and sameness to function as grammatical remarks about the nature of judgments of difference. If they are acknowledged as a grammatical remarks, then there is no imaginable otherwise and so difference at all which is beyond thought. This would not serve his purposes. Or, if he wants these to operate as assertions with an imaginable otherwise, then they would not carry the force of demonstrating that the “totally other” must be beyond all thought.} Or, is Turner saying
that inferences from the doctrine of creation deliver the sheer fact of the existence of the completely other, the existence of which we can “touch” in thought, but which we cannot “grasp” or comprehend on account of it being completely other? But that would repeat precisely Descartes’s psychologistic arguments about divine power and extra-logical possibilities, and all the problems associated with them as argued in the first chapter.

Turner adds much rigor and nuance to his account. That said, there is nothing in the considerable amount of argumentation which alters the relevant point of my argument. Turner has articulated views in which the logic of differentiation serves as a boundary of thought that limits us from comprehending or describing the completely other – as though “cannot think the ‘completely other’” can be a thought when its predicate is unthinkable (which would run counter to the context principle). He has named a certain boundary marker of thought – similarity - and, by way of inferences from creation of ex nihilo, argued that God-as-absolutely-different is beyond the boundary. He has thus made three moves. First, he has delimited the necessary limits of human judgment. Second, he has argued that the Creator is beyond those limits and therefore shown those limits to be necessary limitations. And, third, he has done so by way of the meaning or content of that which has been shown to be logically impossible – that is, he has argued that something determinate has been shown to be logically impossible to comprehend. The equivocations of psychologism, and the manner in which all three notes tend to implicate each other emerge in Turner’s argument under the light of analysis.

Extending my response to Perl above, note Gregory Palamas’s interpretations of the relevant passages of the The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology. Consider

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184 By invoking Palamas I run the risk of my argument being seen as part of tired arguments between Eastern and Western theologies. That is not my aim, nor am I trying to enter into inter-church
the following representative passage central to many of the arguments of *The Triads*, interpreting the Dionysian claims of God as “beyond affirmation and negation,” “similarity and difference,” “being and non-being.”

The human mind…will attain to that light and will become worthy of a supernatural vision of God, not seeing the essence, but seeing God by revelation…One sees not in a negative way – for one does see something – but in a manner superior to negation. For God is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond unknowing…[F]or that vision, being not only incomprehensible but also unnameable, is…beyond negation…for the vision itself is ineffable, and surpasses all expression [emphasis added].

In Palamas’s hands the Dionysian negation of the negation is not arrived at by “inferences” about the essence of the First Cause based on equivocations of naming the limits of thought. It is an expression of the experience of undergoing the very presence of the uncreated Glory of God like unto the prophets suffering the theophanies of the Old Testament. Apophatic theology is a theology of encounter. Neither “language” nor “thought” fails by way of their essential structures, but the saint undergoes an experience so profound that anything she can think to say, even negations, will not do it justice.

Far from being incoherent, as is often claimed by metaphysicians, Palamas’s account of apophatic theology and divine transcendence in *The Triads*, by way of appeal to the essence/energies distinction and the uncreated Glory, is a mystical doctrine which, though not a philosophical account at all (nor does it require philosophical legitimation),

polemics. Rather, my argument here is part of the move to suggest the fruitfulness of a mystical theology of divine humility and meekness which connects the Scriptures and the Fathers and may speak to the theological present. Palamas helps my case at this point insofar as he situates Dionysius in an ascetico-mystical context.

185 Gregory Palamas, *Triads*, introduced by John Meyendorf, translated by Nicholas Gendle, in *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 32-33. Interestingly, in the this passage the vision Palamas names in none other than the theophany to Manoa and his wife in Judges 13 which is the bases of the Emmaus road encounter with the Risen Christ and which Dionysius himself cites as mentioned above.
is less philosophically objectionable than many modern negative theologies. The prophet and/or saint undergoes an experience about which she finds herself powerless to describe or even articulately express with any of the words or concepts she knows. Language does not fail, whatever that means, but the saint is speechless. Indeed, I can think of few 20th century theologians who sound more anti-psychologistic than the “Neo-Palamite” theologian Dimitru Staniloae when he situates Dionysian negative theology in an eschatological framework of the eternal movement into God: “Negative theology…requires a continual raising of the scaffolding of reason; then on the higher steps, the limitless divine ocean can appear to us in a vision which will thrill us even more. Negative theology, far from forever insisting on the renunciation of rational concepts, longs for their growth.”186 For Dionysians such as Staniloae and Palamas there is no need to posit a “something we cannot do” to secure divine transcendence. No, the fact that there is no specifiable limit to our conceptualizing powers is celebrated and the ever more profound appearances of God, to wax Dionysius, is as an erotic draw to more life with thought, language, and even concepts. To quote John Meyendorf: “because God remains absolutely transcendent in His essence, man’s communion with Him has no limit.”187 And this communion incorporates all of the human, from beyond-the-intellect to the intellect, heart, and body – yes, even the life with the conceptualizing mind.


David Burrell’s Thomist Negative Theology

David Burrell is one of the most pervasive influences on this dissertation and its writer. His interpretation of Aquinas’s account of analogy is subtle, inspirational, and anticipates much of, and perhaps goes beyond, what theologians have only recently discovered by reading Stanley Cavell’s philosophy about the projectability of words and how this is related to desire and value. Furthermore, his extensive explorations of the doctrine of creation and the interrelationships between Islamic, Jewish, and Christian theologies of creation have shaped most of the chapters of this dissertation in ways too diffuse to cite. Nevertheless, in his classic *Aquinas: God and Action* he puts forward a highly influential account of how language necessarily falls short of describing the Creator which is psychologistic, or so I argue.

Consider the specifics of how Burrell argues for the transcendence of God to thought and language in his constructive recovery of Aquinas’s theology. In short, Burrell uses Aquinas and Wittgenstein to argue that the all human judgment is an exercise of composing or dividing subject and predicate and has as its formal object – so to speak – that which is in some way or another composed. He then follows Aquinas to argue that whoever or whatever is the Source-of-all-that-is cannot be composed in any of the ways that creatures are, and which render them objects of thought and expression. God is simple. Thus, even when offering true analogous names of God there is something

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that logically speaking “our propositional syntax will not permit us to state."\textsuperscript{190} We cannot, given the logical necessities of the structure of judgment, entertain or express thoughts about the Creator which do not distort the un-composed reality of God.

Burrell offers this account as an interpretation of the opening sections of the \textit{Summa Theologiae}, in which Aquinas argues that all we can know and say of God is dependent upon what we know and say of material creatures which are composed of a minimum of form and matter as well as existence and essence.\textsuperscript{191} Because of this, Aquinas states, the very form of our judgments and descriptions about any subsistent being, God included, will inevitably signify that being as though it were in some way composed. Indeed, because our bodily thinking is bound to the material world we either make judgments about subsistent beings, but the very form of those judgments express a minimum of distinction between existence/essence and form/matter, or else make judgments about simple universals which are not subsistent realities (for example, “the good is what all things seek.”). Thus, Aquinas insists, and Burrell follows, we must use both forms of judgments about God in order not to imply that God is composed of parts or is not a subsistent reality. That is, we say both that “God is wise” and that “God is wisdom” in order to speak in the least misleading ways possible. The first proposition is true but misleadingly suggests God is composed of substance and attribute, while the second is true but misleadingly suggests God is a non-subsisting universal idea.

Burrell asks us to be mindful of what we do whenever we entertain thoughts that can be true or false of something. He points out, claiming to follow Wittgenstein’s

\textsuperscript{190} Burrell, \textit{God and Action}, 80.

\textsuperscript{191} Aquinas, \textit{Summa Theologiae}, 1.3.
*Tractatus*, that all such judgments, as embodying a subject-predicate structure, are composite.\(^{192}\) It is of the very essence of thought that it operate in this compositional way. Just try to come up with a true or false claim that cannot be put into such a form.

Burrell, further follows Eddy Zemach’s reading of the *Tractatus* by claiming that if our language is to truthfully represent the reality it is about, there must be a “formal isomorphism” between the logical structures of the syntax of the language used and the ontological structure of the objects it is about.\(^{193}\) Thus, in Burrell’s Thomist adaptation of Zemach’s reading of the *Tractatus*, the subject-predicate structure of judgment can adequately represent created beings because all subsistent created beings correlative exemplify a minimum of Aristotle’s composition of form and matter and Aquinas’ composition of existence and essence: “whatever is possessed as knowledge must be articulated. The form of that articulation reflects and displays the ontic composition in question: subject: predicate:: matter: form ::potency: act.”\(^{194}\) This is a crucial point in Zemach’s and Burrell’s understanding of the relationship between language and world. The subject-predicate structure of judgment embodies both the logical form of language and the world of objects that language is about.

According to Burrell’s Zemach-inspired reading of the *Tractatus* composition is not a property all objects have, but is what Zemach calls a “formal feature” of all things we can speak about intelligibly. Such “formal features” are not facts about all things we


\(^{194}\) Burrell, *God and Action*, 16-17.
can think, but the “factuality” of these facts. They are the logical form which must be isomorphically correlated between language and world in order for language to be about the world. As such, as that which is a necessary condition for the possibility of propositions being true or false of the objects of the world, these “formal features” cannot be expressed in language. Any attempt to explain or articulate these features will already presuppose them and so will not drill down deep enough, so to speak, to bring them to expression. So while it must be true that all intelligible language is “composed” just as all objects of the world are “composed,” there must be a deep problem in these statements as they attempt to say that which, as a condition for the possibility of language use, cannot be said.

But what could that mean? The argument appears terribly abstract, and we may fairly ask what is the problem with saying this or that or everything is composed? Burrell does not say and Zemach is of little help. However, consider the difference between the following sentences:

195 Zemach “Wittgenstein’s Philosophy of the Mystical,” 40-43. Some have glossed Burrell’s appeal to the “formal features” of God-talk as though these features constitute the grammar by which any object is located in thought as the kind of thing it is. However, “formal features” do not constitute run-of-the-mill grammar, but are, so to speak, supposed to be the grammar *überhaupt* of objects of thought as such. Burrell’s desire to distinguish God from all that we may speak about by means of a grammatical investigation necessarily invokes grammar as “formal features” of objects and not as “grammar” is used in the philosophical investigation of more mundane matters. As we will see, Burrell is keen to argue that “God is not an object.”
1. This car is composed of metal parts.

2. All objects are composed.

3. All rods have length.

Sentence 1 simply predicates of a particular car that it is made up of metal parts. It can be experientially verified or falsified. Sentence 3 is a classic example of a grammatical remark. It is neither experientially verified nor do we know what would make it false as having length is one of the essential features of being rod. In other words, anything that does not possess length is not a rod in the same sense. Although it does not name something that may or may not be true of a particular rode, it may be used to pick out which objects are or are not rods.

Sentence 2 is neither a proposition stating a truth, nor a grammatical remark, but an example of Zemach’s and Burrell’s “formal features” of all objects of thought and description. Because it is supposed to be about of all objects it cannot even be used like a grammatical remark to pick out one kind of object from another kind, just as it does not pick out this property as opposed to that property which objects possess. What work in logical space can sentence 3 do if it does not pick out one property from another or one kind of object from another? Consider, further, how strange the sentence is compared to our more typical uses of “composed” where “composed” is almost never used as a stand-alone predicate, but is typically joined by an “of” to words supplying further specification, such as “of metal parts,” “of vegetables,” “of crude comments,” etc. What are the criteria for being “composed” as such?

These considerations do not appear to worry Zemach and Burrell. Indeed, they positively embrace the fact that “formal features” “cannot” be expressed truthfully in a
proposition. This is why Burrell reverts to Zemach’s understanding of Wittgenstein’s say/show distinction. Since composition is that which is presupposed to all thought, it is not surprising that we cannot put it into linguistic expression without problems arising. How can a predicate express what “composition” is if it is the very logical form of the relationship of every predicate to its subject in all intelligible discourse? For Zemach and Burrell, ontological composition is thus only shown in the subject/object structure of the sentence rather than said by way of the content of any sentence, because the essential relationship between a subject and a predicate cannot itself be expressed by a predicate alone (i.e. Composition is X). The logical form of the subject-predicate relationship has a fact-like content, but that content is expressed by no predicate because it is the very relationship to a subject which is constitutive of the predicate that we want the predicate alone to express. If only we could get “all objects are composed” to say what we want it to say, it would be true – indeed it would say the very essence of the world, its objects, and language. However, we cannot say this, and so must attend carefully to what is shown in the subject-predicate grammar of all discourse.

Before moving on from this point it worth noticing just how negative Burrell’s negative theology is.

Although a formal feature cannot be used to identify an object [like a grammatical remark] or be part of its description [like a predicate], it is everywhere displayed – provided we are sensitive to what our language shows us as we are to what it says.

If whatever we can say about something reflects the formal features of compositeness, anything lacking it will lie quite beyond the range of our linguistic tools. The minimal structural isomorphism will be wanting…The upshot is…to announce that all statements formed of subject and predicate – that is to say, all discourse – will falsify the reality which is God…God is not an object. Ordinary

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196 Burrell, God and Action, 16-17
objective discourse, which is presumed to display the mode of being of the subject in question, betrays rather than displays God’s way of being [emphasis added].

It is not the case for Burrell that we cannot say what God is but only show what God is. Rather, the transcendence of God is registered by how what it is that can only be shown is the composition of the world and its objects, whereas God-as-simple cannot even be shown. Indeed, we cannot say what God is not, only show what God is not. As utterly simple, God is otherwise than what is unsayably shown in all intelligible discourse.

Indeed, Burrell reads the articles of the Summa on divine simpleness as going through the various ways composed creatures necessitate that we bring subject and object together to refer to them adequately, and showing how whatever is the Source-of-all-things cannot be composed in any of these ways. The Creator, as whatever is radically first, cannot be composed of anything more basic than God-self, and therefore is not composed of form and matter, essence and accidents, existence and essence, etc. Human thought being what and how it necessarily is – compositional/articulating - there is something that we cannot do, there is that which is logically impossible to think or say or even show, God-qua-simple: “In the measure, then, that our language embodies a subject/predicate…grammar (or any analogue thereof), no description can succeed in identifying a trace of divinity.”

I think it is clear that when Burrell moves from his compelling Thomist arguments that God is one who is unknown to us, unknown even when we use words that are literally-if-analogically true of the Creator, to arguing that, how, and why this divinity

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197 Ibid., 28.
198 Ibid., 70.
necessarily cannot be expressed by language he has moved into the realm of the first two
notes of psychologism. What is more, he is clearly trying to do what Wittgenstein warned
was the hardest temptation to resist; using logical analysis to reveal that “there is
something we cannot do.”\textsuperscript{199} As already quoted above, Burrell states that in analogous
discourse there is a sense suggested which “our propositional syntax will not permit us to
state.”\textsuperscript{200} That he uses grammar to make such a move is internally related to the fact that
he clearly means to display, or show, the limits of language, thought, and the world.
Indeed, for him transcendence is precisely located by what we cannot do and how the
world as a whole can be set into relief as a \textit{limited} whole whose limit is the composition
of all its metaphysical furniture. Furthermore, this limiting of thought, and tracing the
essence of the world as a limited whole by way of an unsayable formal feature, is had by
way of the third note of psychologism. That is, as I explain below, when it comes to
“composition” he takes away the contexts in which the term has its life and yet wants the
term to do the same work regardless.

Concerning the limits of thought and world, and using grammar as way to delimit
these, we have already seen just how opposed Wittgenstein was to any such argument
and, more importantly, the compelling reasons why. But, given that Burrell invests so
much in the logical form shown by the subject-predicate structure of propositional
language, Wittgenstein has even more pointed things to say. And he does precisely so his


\textsuperscript{200} Burrell, \textit{God and Action}, 80. Note that there is no problem with the claim that analogous
discourse suggests a sense that we do not know, or are not masters of, but only with the claims that
grammar, logic, and language are a cage whose necessities - as being a certain way - limit us from possibly
knowing or expressing this sense.
work cannot be misunderstood as engaging in the fantasy of delimiting the world or thought:

The fact that we use subject-predicate propositions is only a matter of our notation. The subject-predicate form does not in itself amount a logical form and is the way of expressing countless fundamentally different logical forms. ‘The plate is round’, ‘The man is tall’, ‘The patch is red’, have nothing in common.\textsuperscript{201}

Wittgenstein offers this as a conclusion to an argument by analogy in which he asks us to imagine different methods of projecting a shape from one plane onto another. In one method we determine that no matter what the shape is on plane $I$ it is to be a circle on plane $II$. He then compares trying to discern what it means for a figure on the first plane that it appears as a circle on the second plane to trying to understand what it the case about all objects given that we can say true things about them using subjects and predicates: “But the mere fact that a figure is represented on $II$ as a circle will say nothing. – It is like this with reality if we map it onto subject-predicate propositions.”\textsuperscript{202}

That Wittgenstein concludes this about propositions is less important than why and how it relates to psychologism. The suggestion that all things expressible in descriptive language are necessarily composed commits Burrell to equivocations about “composition” and “simplicity” which, as explored in the first chapter, are typical of psychologistic pictures of language and logic.

Burrell hopes to show the world to be a limited whole by way of his claims about compositeness as a formal feature. Divine simplicity, as outside this compositeness, is


\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., §93, 118-119.
what puts the world and all of its objects into relief as limited. There is no escaping the
problems of trying to limit thought and world by claiming that simplicity is purely
negative as just meaning “not-composed.” Psychologistic equivocation emerges here
anyway. Burrell does and does not want there to be an imaginable/thinkable otherwise to
being composed. Or better, he does and does not want claims to divine simplicity to make
sense to us, just as in the equivocations above with Perl about “infinity” and Turner about
“difference.” Yet Burrell wants to intellectually secure the fact of divine transcendence
by limiting world and thought by way of the composition shown in all intelligible
discourse, as opposed to the transcendent simplicity inferred from the doctrine creation.
Again, equivocations abound. For, if “simplicity” cannot be said, or even shown, how can
it be used to indicate anything beyond the world or be inferentially bound to
“composition” so that the world itself may be represented as a limited whole?
Wittgenstein himself wanted no part in such intellectual fantasies: “Time and again the
attempt is made to use language to limit the world and set it in relief – but it can’t be
done.”

Burrell’s use of “formal features” – and its problematic presumption that the
subject/object structure of propositions shows the structure of the created world and its
objects as “composed” – is, nonetheless, often invoked in theological texts. Turner quotes

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203 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Remarks*, §47, 80. Of course, given what has already been
said about the nature of logic and impossibility, we should not interpret Wittgenstein as saying that there is
some determinate idea of “setting the world in relief”, but that it cannot be done or expressed. Rather, in
accordance with the first chapter, we should not interpret this “cannot” as analogous to physical
impossibility, but as stating that “there is nothing we would call setting the world into relief.”
Burrell to this effect, Lewis Ayers does as well, as does Susanahh Ticciati in her recent work on apophatic theology.\textsuperscript{204}

Beyond the equivocations of the work Burrell wants “composition” and “simplicity” to do relative to each other, he invokes “composition” in yet another equivocal manner. Consider the following lines from the \textit{Philosophical Investigations}.

“‘The question ‘Is what you see composite?’ makes good sense if it already established \textit{what kind of complexity} – that is, which particular use of the word – is in question.”\textsuperscript{205} It is possible to read the \textit{Summa Theologiae} as saying that the Creator cannot be composed \textit{of} this, or \textit{of} that…and going through all \textit{kinds of composition} for which we have established criteria and finding each of these as incompatible with what we want to say of the absolute Source. But Burrell’s argument does not settle for such a conclusion. He is moved to argue that the Creator necessarily/logically exceeds the descriptive range of language. Thus, in order to secure the relevant necessity, he must appeal to the logic of language and \textit{what} it prohibits. His argument cannot settle for now this and now that kind of composition being negated. Rather, he needs composition-as-such to be that by which all language works and so any \textit{kind of composition} – any composition bound to particular criteria - will not do the work of securing transcendence and delimiting of the world of immanence.

The issue with Burrell’s reading is an equivocation between criteria-bound senses of composition and a notion of composition which is not a \textit{kind} of composition at all.


because it is absolute and undergirds all language use, is the condition of the possibility of all linguistically expressed criteria. He wants “composition” to do the work it normally does in a context which is typically signaled by genitives and yet he wants it to do the self-same work outside this constitutive context: without criteria, but as though with criteria.

It will be no help to retort that Burrell appeals to being composed of parts and so does invoke the context of a genitive. This simply moves the problem from the use of “composition” to the use of “parts.” What are the criteria for “parts” when that includes arms, matter, form, color, duck-billed, extension, act, potency, essence, and existence? Indeed, what criterion picks out precisely everything, as that is the burden one wants “parts” to carry? Again, the argument demands two mutually exclusive uses of “composition” or “parts”: one in which the meaning is constituted as picking out this kind of thing as opposed to that kind of thing and an as yet unspecified use which demands it be free from the relativization of being of this kind of thing as opposed to that kind of thing. It is no mere coincidence that the argument at this point sounds so much like the argument in the conclusion of the first chapter about the concept of an object as such. It is not merely that both here and there I am arguing against psychologism, but that Burrell’s arguments are precisely an attempt to come up with a concept-of-an-object-as-such by means of “composition,” and claim that “God is not an object” through “simplicity.”

How then does “composition” do this work if not by means of context? By “meaning” it that way with a psychological act of intending? By accompanying the use of the word “composition” with same act or intuition or experience of consciousness it has

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206 Burrell, God and Action, 28.
in more typical contexts? Is there any way to recover the uses of “composition” in Burrell’s text as intelligible without expecting to be saved from non-sense by the third note of psychologism? Shouldn’t we conclude that “All objects are composed” merely idles in that it neither picks out a kind of subject, nor predicates anything of a subject (as Burrell and Zemach admit both), and that “composition” is used in an irreducibly equivocal manner wherein one and the same context is \textit{required} both to be and not to be present?

Cora Diamond puts very well what I mean to say:

The \textit{Tractatus} does not hold that we have a genuine conception of what it would be for language to be “adequate” and of what it would be for a language to be “inadequate,” and that language \textit{is} the former, not the latter. The idea of language being “inadequate,” for example by there being simple objects which are linguistic resources do not enable us to reach, itself is incoherent.\footnote{Cora Diamond, “Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in his Box?: The Private Language Argument in the \textit{Tractatus}” in Alice Crary and Rupert Read eds., \textit{The New Wittgenstein} (New York: Routledge, 2000), 290, n. 34. It is interesting that Diamond cites Wilfrid Sellars as an example of someone with such a view. Sellars was the major philosophical influence over Victor Preller when he wrote is influential \textit{Divine Science and the Science of God: A Reformulation of Thomas Aquinas} (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1967). Preller’s book has exercised a strong influence over Burrell.}

Although the “simple objects” of the \textit{Tractatus} are not the same thing as Burrell’s utterly simple Creator, his position and argument are paralleled to what Diamond calls incoherent. Burrell needs language-as-such to be “inadequate” to what we \textit{infer} to be the case of the radical Source and End of all things. The very “idea” (or better, form of words) of language being “inadequate” has yet to be given a singular coherent sense, and combining that with some sense of inferred-but-incomprehensible-simplicity only makes it harder to see how anything coherent could be meant by these words that satisfies the desires for transcendence which motivates their use.
Burrell has articulated views in which grammar and logic are limits of thought preventing us from comprehending or giving expression to thought about God. He has named a boundary marker of thought and world, composition, and, by way of logical extrapolations from creation *ex nihilo*, argued that God as simple is beyond the boundary. He has thus made three moves: first, he has delimited a necessary limit of linguistic description and judgment. Second, he has argued that the Creator is outside the limit and therefore exposed this limit as a limitation. And, third, he has done this by way of the meaning or content of that which has been shown to be logically impossible – that is, he argues that something determinate has been shown to be logically impossible and thereby secures divine transcendence of human thought by way of the content of what is excluded as logically impossible, indeed beyond language. Burrell’s use of Aquinas and Wittgenstein is a bold attempt to say what we cannot do.

**Conclusion**

The theologians and philosophers whose works are analyzed above have more in common than a psychologistic picture of transcendence based upon the doctrine of creation. All three of them, and Marion, who is a major influence over Perl at precisely this point, are much exercised over what Charles Taylor calls the “immanent frame.” Whether it be aggressive secularism, the specter of the death of god, or the zeal of the “new atheists,” all four theologians and philosophers have taken the time to respond in writing. Indeed, I am arguing here that each of them is sorely tempted by the

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psychologistic move to transcendence, and reconstructing this or that aspect of the apophatic tradition on psychologistic grounds, because of the problem of the “immanent frame.” The pressure this frame explicitly and implicitly places on each of their projects is displayed in how the resistance to conceptual idolatry is allotted a central and defining role in their negative theologies. Idol smashing often appears to be the fundamental point of negative theology. In contrast, my argument, which acknowledges that negative theology can be used to resist conceptual idolatry, is based less on the idea of humans as fundamentally idolaters and more on the Priestly and Pauline theologies of humanity as protological and eschatological idols of $YHWH$, the *Kavod YWHW*.\(^{209}\)

I include Marion in this list because he gives perhaps the most powerful account of how negative theology is marshalled against the death of god. Furthermore, as I argue in the conclusion to the dissertation, even though his phenomenology and theology have all the conceptual tools needed to resist it, his writing occasionally lapses into psychologism with his desire to critique the twin idolatries of modern theism and atheism.\(^{210}\) I quote Marion here from an early text of his, and which appears in its entirety in the beginning of Perl’s book which is a reconstruction of Dionysius’ so-called philosophy.

The distinctive feature of modernity does not at all consist in a negation of God… Modernity is characterized in the first place by the annulling of God as a question… What then is found set in play in a negation or affirmation of God? Not God as such, but the compatibility or incompatibility of an idol called ‘God’ with the totality of a conceptual system… Theism or atheism bear equally on an idol. They remain enemies, but brother enemies in a common and insurpassable idolatry.\(^{211}\)

\(^{209}\) See the dissertation’s introduction.

\(^{210}\) See the conclusion to the dissertation.

Theism versus atheism is an irreducibly modern fight over whether or not an idol exists in reality or merely in the mind of the religious. I do not disagree with the point so much as want to indicate the pressures to which it is a response and how this response shapes the psychologicistic reconstructions of negative theology as essentially a matter of smashing conceptual idols.

Marion’s statement makes sense when one considers the intellectual milieu in which he came of age as a leading French phenomenologist. With post-structuralism in its ascendancy in the 1970’s and 80’s, a radicalized interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche was at the heart of the most significant philosophical projects in France, and so the “death of god” was a ubiquitous presence in philosophical culture. Marion’s early text *The Idol and the Distance* shows his early preoccupation with the death of god and so the turn to apophatic theology as a means resist atheistic and theistic idolatry. Furthermore, Marion’s continued deployment of negative theology, and the reception of Dionysius, has developed in dialogue and argument with Jacques Derrida. Marion’s disputes with Derrida have led Marion to recover traditional apophatic theology in a manner which makes it appear that the overriding concern of the apophatic tradition is to insure that no conceptual idol is ever erected.²¹²

An early essay by Burrell displays a sensitive and deft response to American scholars trumpeting the death of god.²¹³ Furthermore, most of his subsequent work on

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theological language and theologies of creation *ex nihilo* manifests a near constant concern that Christian theologians and philosophers not construe the Source and End of all things as merely “the biggest thing around.” That is, he wanted to distance theology from affirming what it was that modern secularists were denying; theism in which god was but one more thing in the world. Burrell’s context at Notre Dame is significant. His joint appointments to the theology and philosophy faculty meant that he was in contact with the renaissance of analytic philosophy of religion which was largely centered in the philosophy department at the university. The philosophers of that movement have and do rigorously defend precisely the theism which modern atheists deny, and which Marion and Burrell rightly insist was no part of the ancient tradition.214 Most such philosopher have denied the eternity of God, some the simplicity of God, and most do not think theological language must be either metaphorical or analogous, much less do any of them show much concern for negative theology.215 Thus Burrell has long linked modern atheism to the modern theism of a theology where there is some god who is “the biggest thing around.” He, Marion, and Perl have constructed negative theology as outside of the mutually antagonist idolatries of atheism and theism. In so doing, they have constructed negative theologies which are constitutively hammers for smashing conceptual idols.

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214 The footnotes of Burrell’s historical and theological reconstructions of figures such as Aquinas often serve as a running criticisms of and argument with modern analytic philosophers of religion. See especially, David Burrell C.S.C., *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992).

Turner is no exception. His inaugural lecture as the Norris Hulse Chair of Theology at Cambridge University was entitled “How to be an Atheist.”\(^\text{216}\) In the lecture he brilliantly argues that when one looks at the specifics of the “new atheist’s” denials one can see how theologians such as Aquinas have already denied these things and much more. Turner cannily suggests that the new atheists would do well to read ancient negative theology to see how much more work they would have to do in order to negate what it is Christian theology is talking about when it uses the word “God.” His argument is that the so-called atheists have only denied the existence of an intellectual idol, and Christianity has long engaged in the same project under the name “negative theology.”

Turner’s recoveries of medieval and patristic theologies, and the manner of his appropriation of the theology of Herbert McCabe, are almost always directly or indirectly tied to negative theology and the pressures of the “immanent frame.” He, like Marion, Perl, and Burrell reconstructs negative theology as placing the Christian theologian outside of and beyond the kinds of debates that exist between modern secularists and Christian theologians less influenced by the ancient apophatic traditions. Thus, the guiding impulse in the recovery of the apophatic tradition is the construction of a theology foreign to the modern idolatries of theism and atheism.

To be clear, I do not disagree with the critiques of modern theism and atheism. I think all four scholars are correct and profound in what they say. However, my concern is how the specifics of this task have distorted the picture of what negative and apophatic theologies were for the ancient Christians. Anxiety over life in the “immanent frame” or intellectual expressions of the frame produces a reductionistic picture of apophatic

theology, and tempts the theologian with the promise that the transcendence everywhere
denied in modern idolatrous thought and practice – even by “theism” - can be
intellectually secured with the force of a logical “must.” Returning once again to
Wittgenstein, consider how the truth of the following is amplified in the contexts just
named: “And what’s more, [naming the limits of thought] satisfies a longing for the
transcendent, because insofar as people think they can see the ‘limits of human
understanding,’ they believe of course that they can see beyond these.”217

I am arguing that the very move by which these theologians and philosophers
wish to differentiate their negative theologies from modern idolatry is itself an expression
of modern anxiety. In other words, the construction of a negative theology with a nearly
exhaustive function of resistance to conceptual idolatry is correlative to felt pressures of
modern secularism and has distorted the recoveries of the ancient theologies. Negative
theologies structured by a constitutional relationship of difference from the idolatries of
modern theism and atheism is likewise modern.

I do not intend the labeling of these theologies as modern as a criticism. No doubt
this dissertation is itself modern and embodies some forms of anxiety over the topic of
theology and the relationship to the tradition. It is meant, rather, as a way of seeing why
and how the psychologistic temptation have so strongly marked negative theologians. A
structural worry about being locked into the “immanent frame” may produce the desire to
round on the world and set it in relief with a transcendence secured by philosophical logic
precisely because one fears one’s context, life, and experience betrays any robustly

217 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value, translated by Peter Winch (Chicago: University of
theological transcendence to be a chimera. I reiterate, this is the dominant method in Anglo-American philosophical theology for approaching divine transcendence and/or negative theology. Something inferred from the doctrine of creation, whether it be divine simplicity, infinity, etc., is said to resist the workings of language and/or thought. God’s existence is thus, as with Descartes, touched in thought, but necessarily not comprehended, and we know why it is necessarily incommensurable with thought or language.\textsuperscript{218} This method for arriving at divine ineffability can be approached in a variety of sophisticated and creative ways, but the demonstration of the necessity of ineffability of the Creator as based on a philosophical accounting of the possibilities of thought, or the conditions of the possibility of description, will always embody the equivocations of psychologism.

Relatedly, I point out this modernism as a way of distinguishing what is revealed by a reception of ancient apophatic theology attuned to developments in the study of ancient Jewish and Christian mysticism. Once we set Dionysius and his theology in the context of Transformational Mysticism we can see how deeply related such apophatic theology is to Scriptural apocalyptic as well as the theologies and practices surrounding the second and even first Jewish Temples. Furthermore, apophatic theology is thereby reintegrated into the liturgical and ascetic life of the Church. Finally, all of this is had without recourse to attempting to intellectually secure, and possess, divine transcendence by means of limiting the human mind. That temptation to psychologistic transcendence is not merely intellectual. No, as I will lay out in the following chapters, it is a deflection of

\textsuperscript{218} My criticism does not apply to accounts of knowing God which state that God is truly known but not comprehended by us, but which does not attempt to tell us why our thought must fall short of God and so construct a determinate limit of thought.
our attention from the sites in which transcendence may be found and an avoidance of
ascetical demands which are constitutive of attention to this transcendence.
CHAPTER III
THE GAZE OF HUMILITY I:
THE INNER HIDDENNESS AND ITS HIDING

The final two chapters are analyses of certain types of philosophy and theology as forms of temptation. It is also as a presentation of possibilities beyond these temptations, particularly in the practice of Dionysian theology as Transformational Mysticism. I argue that metaphysical, epistemological, and linguistic philosophies and theologies of logically necessary human and divine incomprehensibility arise from anxiety and fear over the revelation and manifestation of genuine human and divine hiddenness and are attempts to deflect our attention from this transcendence as found in the expressive faces and bodies of our neighbors and our God.

These two chapters, therefore, play a crucial role in the overall argument of the dissertation. They bring into focus why modern theologians and philosophers do not practice negative theology like the ancient apophatic theologians. The chapter show this by exposing the desires which impel us towards equivocation, misunderstand our equivocations as profundity, and deflect our attention from that which is obscured by means of our philosophies and theologies. Furthermore, the argument shows how the direction of our attention to what truly satisfies our desires is what heals, transforms, and perfects the life of beings who are constitutively open to these same temptations. The conclusion of the final chapter, therefore, brings the theologian at one and the same time
before the gaze of the God hung upon a tree and the primordial evasion of this same tree-
divinity in the Garden of Eden.

Since the analysis of temptation is meant as a means of demonstrating the
relevance of ancient traditions to modern American readers this chapter thinks alongside
two of the most important American philosophical voices concerning human hiddenness
and the temptations to obscure this hiddenness, those of Stanley Cavell and Cora
Diamond. In the next chapter I turn to Dionysius’s distinction between the divine essence
and processions. Common ways of understanding the distinction not only repeat the
psychologism critiqued in the previous chapters, but repeat the errors concerning human
hiddenness by projecting these confusions onto God. Against such a reading of Dionysian
theology, I argue that interpreting his works in the light of Transformational Mysticism
shows how Dionysius’s theology is helpful for attaining clarity in theologizing
hiddenness because his theology is Christocentric and experiential. That is, just as Cavell
and Diamond help us see how our philosophy often functions as fantasy which aids and
justifies our avoidance of the demands placed on us by the gazes of others, so Dionysius
may help us see more clearly the demands placed on us by the gaze of God. The final
chapter concludes by considering why a negative theology which equivocates over the
limitations of thought is so tempting for the kind of beings we are.

In short, I argue that metaphysical, epistemological, and linguistic accounts of
human transcendence and hiddenness give expression to a deep temptation to sublime the
truly mysterious dimensions of human persons and deflect our attention from the
hiddenness revealed in the faces of others. Similarly, the equivocations of negative
theology, critiqued in the previous chapters, arise from the temptation to secure divine
transcendence apart from, and as deflecting our gaze from, the humble and humbling
gaze of God in Christ.

Diamond and Cavell are uniquely attuned to the quintessentially human tasks of
attending to others and rendering oneself intelligible to them, and the ways in which
certain aspects of the philosophical tradition can and do obscure both. Diamond focuses
on solipsism as it appears throughout the Wittgensteinian corpus from the *Tractatus*
to the private language argument of *The Philosophical Investigations*.219 Her thought
amounts to a powerful critique of philosophies in which there is a region of the human
being which is necessarily hidden from view of others. The targets of her critiques are
often readings of Wittgenstein which are not radical enough for destroying the illusion
that the other is a necessary limit of one’s thought, experience, and ability to name. That
is, her critique regarding the form of words masquerading as the “idea” of the limits of
thought is leveled against the “idea” of the experiences or inner life of another person as a
necessary limit of one’s own thought and experience.

Cavell’s project is analogous, but, his focus is not so much about the limits of
thought as it is about skepticism about other minds. Unlike Diamond, he does not set out
to show how his target is logically empty. He uses various dimensions of Wittgenstein’s
analysis to enact something akin to a Nietzschean Genealogy of the existential sources of
skepticism. Skepticism has a truth, even if it is not what the skeptic takes it to be and
even if the truth is obscured by skeptical philosophy. In this chapter I think alongside

219 See especially Cora Diamond, “Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in his Box?: The Private
Language Argument in the *Tractatus” in Alice Crary and Rupert Read eds., *The New
and the Limits of Sense” in Osakari Kuusela and Marie McGinn eds., *The Oxford Handbook
Diamond’s and Cavell’s philosophies as a means of gaining clarity about anthropological hiddenness.

I begin with a lengthy quote from Cavell’s *The Claim of Reason* concerning the private language argument of *The Philosophical Investigations*.

The fantasy of a private language, I suggested, can be understood as an attempt to account for, and protect, our separateness, our unknowingness, our unwillingness or incapacity either to know or to be known. Accordingly, the failure of the fantasy signifies; that there is no assignable end to the depth of us to which language reaches; that nevertheless there is no end to our separateness. We are endlessly separate for no reason. But then we are answerable for everything that comes between us; if not for causing it then for continuing it; if not for denying it then for affirming it; if not for it then to it. The idea of privacy expressed in the fantasy of a private language fails to express how private we are, metaphysically and practically. ²²⁰

There is a great deal in this passage; too much to unpack in one chapter. However, it serves well as a tour guide for thinking along with Cavell and Diamond over the relevant matters. The chapter will move through three related items mentioned in the passage: the picture of the other as a limit to one’s thought and words and the overcoming of this picture, the idea of “separation” that Cavell finds central to both the truth and evasions of skepticism, and the moral demands separation places on human beings and why we engage in philosophy as a means to evade these obligations.

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Diamond’s and Cavell’s Analyses of Hiddenness

The Standard View

First, why does Cavell point out that “there is no assignable end to the depth of us to which language reaches”? What is the notion that there is such an end and how is this notion to be overcome? Cavell takes aim at the picture of the inner life or soul as hidden by or underneath or within or behind the body. He claims that Wittgenstein was obsessed with displacing the picture of the body-as-a-veil obscuring soul. One way of grasping this picture is by seeing what this view represents as known immediately and what is known either by the mediation of inferences or else is completely unknown.

According to the picture of the body as a veil what each person knows immediately is her own “inner life” or what she has direct conscious awareness of: her thoughts, experiences, or sense data such as pain; whatever constitutes her stream of consciousness. She cannot fail to perceive, be aware of, and know such things because of her direct acquaintance with them. Just as one perceives and knows the physical objects of her immediate environment by means of the senses, so one knows such items of the inner life, only with greater certainty, immediacy, and veridicality. It is possible to doubt the existence or knowledge of physical objects, but we cannot doubt the existence and our knowledge of our own consciousness, experiences, pain, etc.

In the received view what each person has a mediated knowledge of is the inner life of others. Whereas each person directly perceives or is acquainted with her own inner

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221 Cavell, The Claim of Reason, 361-370. Cavell’s use of “veil” is fundamentally different than the conception of “veil” in the transformational mysticisms of Second Temple Jewish Mysticism and Dionysian theology. Cavell principally means “something that obscures” in a straightforward fashion, whereas “veils” in transformational mysticism are part of a more dynamic relationship of mystery, disclosure, and hiddenness.
life, there is no direct access to that of others. Each person is directly acquainted with her own thoughts, feelings, and sense experience, but others are not and cannot be. It is impossible for one person to have the pains or thoughts or experience or consciousness of another in the sense of numerical identity. Each person is directly aware of their own pain. Others, however, only have access to it by means of their expressions of pain which are something other than the pain itself. People cannot, therefore, doubt their own pain just as others can never reach a point where all doubt about it can be excluded. Each directly perceives their own pain, others infer its existence from their behavior. Thus, in this picture, the essence of everyone’s experience or consciousness is, unlike theirs bodies, hidden from view and only known to others by means of surmise. You cannot experience another’s pain and so cannot obtain the certain knowledge of it that she has. Cavell summarizes by saying that whereas skepticism of the external world operates under the impression of each of us as sealed in by our own experiences, skepticism about other minds operates under the impression that each person is sealed out from the experiences of others.\(^{222}\)

One’s inner life, the theater of consciousness, is not something that ever does or could enter into the realm of someone else’s consciousness or experience. The inner life, unlike the body, is hidden from view and can never be brought out to be directly manifest to the perceptions and experiences of another. Only on the basis of one expressing the private happenings of her inner life does anyone else have any basis for knowing that and what is going on within her. This knowledge, furthermore, is at best inferential. Skepticism about the minds of others is at home in such a picture and solipsism may be

\(^{222}\) Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, xxv.
its logical end. Diamond characterizes the overall picture of the received view as holding that the inner lives of humans are necessary limits on the experience and thought of all others and beyond the capacity for others to name directly.223 Experiencing the experience of others, or knowing their inner lives as they do, is something we “cannot do,” and we cannot do so with hardness of a logical must (“you cannot have this pain”).

The inner and outer, according to the standard picture, are therefore structured by interrelated matters of direct and indirect access, correlated levels of epistemic certitude, and limits to thought and experience. The inner life of each exists outside the limits of experience and direct consciousness of all others. One may guess or infer or hypothesize the existence of the inner life of others and what it is like, but there is no direct experience or certain knowledge of that life. The experiential life of each is limited by and a limit to the experiential world of all others. There is, therefore, no epistemic certainty to be had about the inner life of another. The body of each is present in the experience, thought, and knowledge of others. From one’s ability to perceive and name the body of others, and their expressions, one may be able to inductively infer the existence and states of their inner lives. Whether or not one takes such inferences to be reliable is precisely what skeptics and anti-skeptics argue about. Either way, the same background picture remains of the merely inferential approach to the inner lives of others based on the direct acquaintance with their bodies.

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223 Diamond, “Does Bismark Have a Beetle?”
Criteria and Symptoms

One way of understanding how the picture of the body as a veil of the soul arises, and how we might get to the notion of the body as a “picture of the soul,”\textsuperscript{224} where “there is no assignable end to the depths of us which language reaches,” is to consider Wittgenstein’s account of criteria and symptoms. Diamond has argued that, according to Wittgenstein early and late, anything for which we have only symptoms, and no imaginably satisfiable criteria, is nothing to us.\textsuperscript{225} Likewise, Cavell’s interpretation of Wittgenstein begins with, and hinges almost entirely upon, the matter of “criteria.” It is, therefore, crucial to point out what criteria and symptoms are. Stephen Mulhall succinctly summarizes Cavell’s path-breaking interpretation of Wittgenstein’s notion of criteria:

> [Criteria] are the linguistic specifications in terms of which competent speakers judge whether something falls under a specific concept; they therefore link human beings with one another and with the world. But criteria do not simply control the way we talk about objects: they determine their essential nature. Many things we wish to know about the world can only be unearthed by empirical investigation, but any such endeavor presupposes the prior alignment of words and world that criteria facilitate; in their absence, we would not know what to look for in our investigation of the facts.\textsuperscript{226}

I explicate below Cavell’s account of the alignment of human to human and human to world, and the logical priority of criterial determination to empirical investigation.

Symptoms are those things the knowledge of which justifies one in making an inference,


\textsuperscript{225} Diamond, “Does Bismark Have a Beetle?”

\textsuperscript{226} Stephen Mulhall, “Introduction” in Stephen Mulhall ed., \textit{The Cavell Reader}, (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 5. Mulhall moves directly to counter the notion that the upshot of understanding the nature and function of criteria thusly necessitates linguistic idealism or anti-realism, “…since criteria determine what it is for something to be water, a boat, a chair and so on – since essence is expressed by grammar, as Wittgenstein has it – a grammatical investigation can tell us as much about the world as it does about language.” Mulhall, “Introduction,” 6.
oftentimes a causal hypothesis, to the truth of that for which they are symptoms.

Sentences about symptoms are inferentially related to sentences about the phenomenon, generally, because the symptoms are causally related to the phenomenon. Symptoms and the inferences they enable are part of the aforesaid empirical investigations which are logically dependent upon criteria.

First, I will consider how skepticism arises from thinking that we are in a situation of being necessarily limited to perceiving or experiencing only symptoms of something and so only having access to that thing by (inductive) inferential activity. Second, I will show how this is confused. Finally, I will turn to the crucial matter, that of the logical priority of criteria over symptoms – and so the logical priority of experiential acquaintance over inferential belief or knowledge. By applying these reflections to our knowledge of others I will show that the picture of the body as a veil for the soul is not false, but empty and misleading, and that the notion of the body as a picture of the soul is enlightening.

Wittgenstein introduced the usefulness of the model of symptoms and criteria in his *Blue Book*.\textsuperscript{227} In the book he considered the phenomenon of angina.\textsuperscript{228} It presents with a number of symptoms, such as an inflamed throat, by which one may surmise, by means of a causal hypothesis, that someone has angina. The causal and inferential connections between the symptom and angina may or may not be necessary and therefore may or may not confer certainty. Either way, it is possible to imagine angina without an inflamed

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\textsuperscript{228} “Angina” was the name for a throat infection in Wittgenstein’s time in Britain.
throat. The connection between an inflamed throat and angina is established by observation and correlation, therefore, the nature of the connection may be undermined by further observation.

There is also the criterion of angina which, in Wittgenstein’s illustration, is the presence of a certain bacillus in the blood. If someone has this bacillus in her blood then she has angina, not because the bacillus has a necessary inferential and/or causal relationship to angina, but because having the bacillus in the blood is what it is to have angina. In other words, saying that having this bacillus in one’s blood is criterial for angina is another way of saying that “angina” is what we call having this bacillus in the blood. It is established by convention and definition, not by observation and inference, and therefore cannot be undermined as criterial by means of observation, at least not in the manner that a symptom may be undermined as a symptom. To observe that someone has this bacillus in her blood is to observe that she has angina.

The angina illustration is a good way to understand the basic differences between criteria and symptoms, but it is not a felicitous route into the application of this model to skepticism or inter-subjective encounters. In Wittgenstein’s example, the bacillus in the blood is the criterion for angina itself. However, with the phenomena which constitutes the “inner self” the criteria for recognizing them in another are better said to articulate the

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229 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §354, and Wittgenstein *Blue and Brown Books*, 25. Hence, Mulhall’s summary of Cavell, quoted above, in which he points out that criteria establish both human to human connection (what we call…) and human to world connection (what we call…).

230 Further observation may show how a supposed symptom is not causally related to a phenomenon and so is not a symptom at all. Since criteria are established by means of conventional definition, further observation may undermine our criterial determinations by showing that they are unnatural, or un-useful, or dangerous, or inhibit eloquence and fine grained distinction, etc.
appearances of the relevant phenomena.\textsuperscript{231} Wittgenstein thought that skepticism often arises when one takes the fallibility present in our perception of criteria – the fact that appearances may turn out to be false appearances - to mean that with respect to certain phenomena we necessarily have nothing better to go on than symptoms and, therefore, only inductive inferential-based belief.

Consider: experience teaches us that there may be rain when the barometric pressure falls sharply. Because of the observed correlation, and inductively established causal connection, we are able to infer that it is raining when the barometer shows a falling pressure. A falling barometric pressure is a symptom of rain. The criteria articulating the appearance rain are cold and wet sensations and the sight of falling drops of water. Skepticism rears its head when we notice that there is no guarantee that the presence of these criteria means that it is raining. We might hallucinate wet and cold sensation in certain contexts or we may not see that the falling drops of water are the product of a sprinkler system. From this it is a short, albeit non-sequitur, step to treating sensations of wet and cold as mere effects or symptoms of rain from which we infer that it is raining. The skeptic and anti-skeptic can then argue over the strength of these inferences. Is this not one of the points of the philosophical invention of “sense-data”; the wholesale conversion of criterial appearances into symptomatic effects? Sense experience is not perception of “external” phenomena, but of symptoms of “external” phenomena by

which we may or may not be able to infer the existence and presence of these phenomena.  

Treating fallible criteria as logically equivalent to symptoms, however, is deeply confused, and not just because it presents insoluble problems for anti-skeptics and realists. The confusion involved in the elision of criteria has three inter-related characteristics. First, this philosophical characterization of the truth of endemic human fallibility obscures the logical differences between being misled by fulfilled criteria and being misled by symptoms. Second, being misled by fulfilled criteria is a matter of suffering from an illusion or deception of some kind and not a matter of inferential error. Third, and crucially, criteria are logically prior to symptoms, are conditions for the possibility of symptoms being recognized as symptoms of something determinate. Or, to put the point in terms more congenial to principled anti-psychologism, the insistence that concerning some phenomenon we can only have symptoms of its existence and presence is empty because it is only by means of at least imaginably satisfiable criteria that we have a determinate concept of the phenomenon at all.

Given the manner in which we learn to connect the presence of symptoms with the existence of a phenomenon, discovering that one has incorrectly inferred the existence of the phenomenon in response to observing the symptom could lead to a number of responses. If one noticed that there are many times the barometric pressure falls but it is not raining one may reassess the reliability of the barometer as symptomatic of rain. The meteorologist may then engage in statistical analysis to ascertain the

232 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §354. The price for this move may be irrefutable skepticism, but the risk is taken out of the desire to see even philosophy subsumed under the fantasized omni-competent powers of empirical and scientific methodology.
percentage of the time that the pressure falls and it is raining. Or, hypothetically, one learns that the barometric pressure is not a reliable indicator of rain and is in no way causally connected. In that case, one stops treating the barometric pressure as a symptom of rain. In either case, the alteration of how dependable we treat one thing as a symptom of something else, or even if we abandon the use of it as a symptom, the concept of the phenomenon remains unchanged. Rain is rain whether a falling barometer is a highly symptomatic, weakly symptomatic, or not at all symptomatic of rain.

Encountering misleading criteria, however, is different. Suppose one looks out her window and sees drops of falling water. She steps out the door and feels wet and cold sensations on her skin. Turning to a companion she says, “The rain is wonderful.” Her companion responds, “It isn’t raining. Look over there, the sprinklers are on.” Would the person fooled by the sprinklers therefore suppose that the sight of falling drops of water and wet and cold sensations are only of questionable value for inferring the presence of rain, or even that she has to infer the fact that it is raining from their presence?

What if the above situation happens just as described before, but this time the woman’s companion responds, “It’s not raining. Let me check your temperature again.” Despite the fact that the woman has perceived the criteria for rain, it is not raining. She has hallucinated rain due to a high fever. Does it follow that the sight of falling drops of water and the sensations of wet and cold are not the appearance of rain, but are casually related symptoms of rain about which we may or may not be justified in inferring that it is raining? A crucial point about answering the question is that the fever has caused a hallucination of rain just as before the sprinklers had created the illusion or deceptive appearance of rain. In the case of the barometer, whether it is always reliable as a...
symptom, sometimes reliable, or never, when one looks at the barometer one does not see rain. Conversely, whether it be an illusion or an hallucination our imagined person has perceived \emph{what we call} the appearance of rain – and that is precisely why we conclude that she is either hallucinating or being fooled by an illusion, not that she is inferring irresponsibly. The connection between the sight of falling water droplets and sensations of wet and cold is not typically one of observation, correlation, and causal hypothesis – as with symptoms - but of conventional definition. It is just such things that we have been taught to call rain, or the appearance of rain.\footnote{Witherspoon, “Wittgenstein on Criteria,” 484.} Even when our judgments that it is raining are wrong, we must retain the concept of rain under the form of hallucination or illusion to describe the experience. When the barometer falls, and it turns out there is no rain, there is no need for the concept of rain or its appearance to characterize the experience.

Another way of making the same point is that even if it turned out that there is no causal relationship between rain and the barometer, if the barometric pressure was not a symptom of rain, the concept of rain would remain unchanged. However, if it turned out that we could not use the sight of falling water droplets or the sensation of wet and cold as criteria for rain, then it is hard to see how the concept of rain would remain at all, much less be unchanged.\footnote{Even in the case of living one’s whole life in the Matrix, and so always being misled by the satisfaction of criteria for the appearance of rain, the concept of “rain” would be retained, which is why we conclude that one has been misled – not simply stupid - all of her life. That this is imaginable is one reason Cavell rightly contends these reflections are not refutations of skepticism, even as they correct our vision from the distortions brought on by skeptical pictures of knowledge.}

Thus we can see how symptoms and criteria differ. Criteria articulate the appearance of the phenomenon in question and are established by convention and
definition. By the satisfaction of criteria we know and experience the phenomenon without the mediation of inferences. Symptoms are causal correlates of the phenomenon in question and are established on the basis of observations which enable inferences.

We are now in a position to see why it makes no sense to claim ourselves as necessarily limited to having access to some kind of thing only on the basis of symptoms. It is a point of logic that criteria are prior to, and conditions for the possibility of, symptoms. A particular kind of thing about which we necessarily have only inductive or inferential knowledge is nothing to us. Were it otherwise, the something which can only be known by inference, would be metaphysically and logically outside some sort of limit or boundary of experience. There would be that which we could not do, namely, perceive or experience phenomena about which we can only ever be acquainted with its symptoms. If there is some such domain, say, the inner life of others, then there would be – contra Cavell - an assignable end to the depths of us to which language reaches.

Diamond has pointed out why Wittgenstein took the “idea” to be empty of a something which we can only know by means of inferences from symptoms. In short, we

235 “How do I know this is really the color red? It is enough to say that you speak English” – Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §381. How do I know this really is the appearance of rain? It is enough to say that you speak English.

236 However, even in the case of seeing something because we see the criteria for it as being fulfilled, inferential relations do play an essential role. It is partially by means of inferential relations, by the kinds of things that we recognize as counting as evidence for symptoms of the phenomenon, that the concept of it is articulated. The difference I am getting at in the body of the chapter, therefore, is that in the case satisfied criteria one does not know that something is the case in the basis of inferential activity, whereas when one observes symptoms of some phenomenon, one can only know that it is the case in the basis of inferences.

must know what something is a symptom of if we are to know that it is a symptom at all. We need to have some idea of what it is we are looking for, there must be words we use about this something with some sense, if we are going to recognize something else as a symptom indicating its existence or presence. But, if it is the case that we need some determinate grammar - or criteria of the phenomenon in question - if we are ever to ascertain that something else is a symptom of it. Consider: “Asking whether and how a proposition can be verified is only a particular way of asking ‘How d’you mean?’ The answer is a contribution to the grammar of the proposition.”

Cavell, therefore, links grammatical investigations with criteria by claiming that a grammatical investigation is an imaginative convening of our culture’s criteria for the application of a concept or concepts.

Before explaining these ideas it is worth briefly considering how they might appear too dangerously close to verificationism, or even logical positivism, for a theologian. We are close to the same conceptual region as at the end of the first chapter in which the critique of the form of words “limits of thought” seemed to threaten an ontology of pure immanence. Seeing the errors in this way of taking these arguments will prove crucial below for getting our way to an unconfused and Christological conception of human and divine transcendence. The fact that I am working with a philosophical mindset far different from logical positivism is clear by the fact that mystical/visionary experience, itself beyond any of the five senses, is essential to the theology for which I

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238 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §353. It is worth noting that the next section of the Investigations, §354, concern the error in mistaking criteria for symptoms. Importantly, the issue is not over whether one has criteria currently available for satisfaction, but criteria which we are possibly satisfied in the sense that we can imagine what it would be for them to be satisfied.

239 Cavell, Claim of Reason, 125.
am putting philosophy into service. The point stands, however, that the ineffability of God is discovered or attested to on the basis of experiences, not inferences. In other words, Merkava mysticism’s insistence on the uncreated body and face which the humble (Moses) and hospitable (Abraham) may encounter makes more philosophical sense than the picture of an utterly invisible essence reachable only by means of inductive inference to a first principle.

Are Wittgenstein and Diamond right that we must have some idea of what it would be to verify the existence or presence or some phenomenon if we are to make sense of inferring the phenomenon’s existence and presence by means of symptoms? Consider experimental neuro-scientists on a quest to verify the hypothesis that certain brain states are causally responsible for particular thoughts. They set up an experiment in which a brain scan detects activity in the relevant part of the brain, including the specific activity they hope to prove is causally related to thinking through the cardinal numbers from 1 to 10. The idea is that whenever the subjects of the experiment count from 1 to 10 in their minds the hypothesized brain states are detected by the scan, and when they think about anything else or nothing at all the same brain states are not detected. By means of these observations they hope to prove the causal relationship between these particular thoughts and the relevant brain states so that they are eventually able to reliably infer that the subject is counting from 1 to 10 when they observe these brain states by means of the scan.

In order for the experiment to work, in order for the scientists to arrive at the point where they can confidently infer the thoughts of the subjects by means of causal hypotheses, they must have some criteria by which they know more directly – non-
inferentially – that the subjects are entertaining the relevant thoughts. That is, the scientists need satisfiable criteria by which they know whether the subjects are counting from 1 to 10 in their minds if the scientists are to have any hope of knowing whether certain brain states are symptoms of those thoughts. The most likely criteria are the same as our everyday criteria for knowing what someone else is thinking to themselves; the subjects tell the scientists what they are thinking. Only by means of the subjects telling the scientists that they are in fact counting are the scientists able to conclude that the hypothesized causal connection is in fact the case. The scientists may reach a point where they are able to reliably infer the thoughts of the people by means of the brain scans, but that ability is logically dependent upon the presence and mastery of discerning satisfied criteria (and mastering the capacity to read and verify criteria for the inner life of others is a much different skill set than accurately inferring by means of hypothesis, see below).

The story brings out a couple of points. First, satisfiable criteria are logically prior to symptoms. Second, the need for criteria is not primarily a matter of certainty, but sense: we must have some sense of what something counts as evidence for if we are to treat it as symptomatic. Although judgments based on criteria are often more certain than those based on symptoms, this need not be the case. By extending the story above we can see why the logical priority of criteria is more a matter of sense than certainty. Imagine that the scientists considerably extend their powers of discerning the thoughts of subjects by means of brain scans so that there is a wide range of thoughts which they are reliably

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240 Of course the subjects could lie about whether or not they are counting. The need for criteria is not the same as a supposed need for absolute certainty.
able to detect and identify. Suppose further that their nation descends into civil war and the government hopes to leverage the sophistication of the scientist’s technology to their advantage. High level rebel prisoners of war are brought to the scientists in order for them to discover what the rebels are planning and what they know. No doubt, the rebel prisoners will insure the fact that the traditional criteria for identifying what they are thinking are misleading as they will lie to their captors. The scientist’s technology allows them to bypass the untrustworthy criteria and trust the more certain and reliable causal hypotheses based on brain scans. However, this does not change the fact that the experimental knowledge gleaned from scans is logically dependent upon verifiable criteria as these were deployed in the initial stages of developing the technology. How else could they have determined if their hypotheses are generally reliable? How else could they determine what it is they are trying to discern outside the definitions and conventions which count as criteria for individuating and identifying this thought as this thought and that thought as that thought?

*The Hidden and the Open to View*

What has the argument about the logical priority of criteria to symptoms to do with the picture of the body-as-veil-of-the-inner versus that of the body-as-picture-of-the-soul? The more customary picture of the body-as-veil not only trades on the equivocal idea of a specifiable limit to experience and sense, but is equally problematic by its insistence of there being a domain of the other person (her soul or inner life) about which we can only encounter symptoms of its existence and states. It does not merely get the logical relationship of criteria and symptoms backwards, but claims we know some
phenomena solely on the basis of symptoms and never by direct acquaintance (satisfied criteria). The picture makes us think like this: Someone is in pain and does or does not express this pain by means of bodily behavior. We are in no way directly acquainted either with the pain itself or with the other’s experience of pain, but believe or infer it to be the case on the basis of bodily behaviors. There are two facts or objects in the view: the pain itself, or the experience of pain as undergone by the other person, and the bodily behavior which serves as a symptom of pain. We have no direct access to the pain itself or the other’s experience of it. We are, in Cavell’s words, “sealed out from the other’s experiences.”241 We do, however, have experiential acquaintance with its bodily expression which is a symptom of the pain. From these symptoms, moans or exclamations, we infer that the person is in pain.

On the standard account, how do we know what it is these behaviors are symptoms of, we may ask? One appealing answer is that we know what pain is in our own case, and when we observe behaviors analogous to those of our own which are caused or occasioned by pain, we inductively surmise the other to be in pain. As tempting as this may be, there is a long list of problems with this picture. There is no space to develop them all here, but I will summarize the kinds of responses characteristic of Wittgenstein, Diamond, and Cavell.

A crucial point is that what there is, and what there is to see, is not the pain itself nor the immediate experience of pain, but the other person in pain. There are not two things (person and pain itself) but one (the person in pain). In other words, although my pain and my self are not identical, neither are they separable. They may be abstractable

241 Cavell, Claim of Reason, xxv.
from each other for analysis, but not extractable as isolable existing objects of perception or experience. The very forms of words “pain itself” or “the other’s experience-in-itself of her pain” construed as designating a subsistent thing about which this other has a direct acquaintance/perception of and we have only symptomatic evidence are empty. The other person in pain neither learns of her pain more directly than I do, nor has a superior epistemic position from all others with which to know she is in pain. The point of saying that the other “learns” something is that she moves from ignorance to cognizance.242 Saying of the other that she “knows” something – in the sense of epistemic certainty - only does work, only has a point, where ignorance is possible.243 In the case of being in pain, however, no one is ignorant of their own pain, in the relevant sense, and so the other does not learn or know she is in pain (again, in the relevant sense).244 Hence, there is no epistemic position the other has which is superior to mine, which would show my position to be limited via-á-vis her pain.245 Rather, she is in pain, and that is something I can perceive directly and know non-inferentially – even if fallibly – by means of bodily and linguistic expression serving as the very criteria for the appearance of her in pain (or grief, or joy, etc.).


243 Ibid.

244 Ibid. The negation of this sentence is analogous to negations in apophatic theology called “remotion.” The denial that the other “knows” she is in pain is not an affirmation of its contradictory – that the other is ignorant of her own pain – but a removal of the subject of the other’s relationship to her pain from the logical space constituted by the contradictories of knowledge and ignorance. Analogously, when the apophatic theologian denies that “God is good” she is not affirming the contradictory that “God is evil.”

245 Ibid.
There is not some internal subsistent thing, pain, distinct from the bearer of pain. Rather, there is one phenomenon and fact, the person-in-pain. I may be directly acquainted with this fact. When someone doubles over and moans this just is what we call the appearance of “stomach ache.” Such bodily behaviors are the criteria we recognize for applying the concept “stomach ache.” We may be wrong. She may be acting, or we may be stupid or inattentive, but this experience of fallibility only makes sense in terms of “stomach ache” in a way incongruous with such behaviors being merely symptomatic for something else we call a “stomach ache.” The concept is retained—say, one is pretending to have a stomach ache - even as we point out the fallibility of our judgments when criteria are satisfied. All of this is to say that the body is inherently expressive of the inner life (even when someone is lying or feigning), not as a mere instrument which is related to inner experiences via causation or occasion, but bodily behaviors are themselves the very criteria which constitute and articulate the appearance of pain, joy, grief, etc. The body is a picture of the soul.

Wittgenstein’s difficult example of the “beetle in the box” helps clear away “thought” of inner experiences such as pain as internal phenomena which are isolable from their bearer and so being a something hidden from the direct view of all others. Wittgenstein begins his example “Now someone tells me that he knows what pain is from his own case!---- Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a ‘beetle.’” He fills out the picture by saying that “no one can look into anyone else’s box” and everyone claims to know what a “beetle” is on the basis of her own “beetle.”

246 Recall the arguments above about the symptoms and criteria of rain.

247 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §293.
Wittgenstein muses that in the supposed case everyone could have something different in their box, or nothing at all, or it could be ever changing. He concludes that if the word “beetle” were to have a use in the people’s language that it would not be the name of a thing and that the “thing in the box has no place in the language game at all; not even as a something…”248

Keeping with the principled anti-psychologism of the dissertation, I suggest the conclusion of a “beetle” not being a “something” redounds back on the opening line “suppose everyone had a box with something in it…”249 Hence, what the reader initially takes to be a thought experiment is nothing at all, as the “scenario” is itself equivocal because we try to imagine a “beetle” which is and is not a “something.” Nothing is envisaged here as any number of words in the scenario have been given either equivocal sense, “beetle,” or no determinate sense at all. Consider: in what sort of box could one have where “no one can” look in it? For the so-called scenario to work as it must these words need to indicate the necessity of a logical must, as anything else, such as a culture in which it is impolite to look in another’s box, will not do. It does not appear that there is any “box” imaginable which could serve the purpose of this form of words being a coherent and relevant thought experiment. Anything we can think of as falling under the concept “box” just is the kind of thing that anyone in the appropriate situation can look into. So far, “beetle” and a “box no one can look in” have no determinate meaning, and it appears unlikely we know how to give these words any sense which would do the

248 Ibid.

required work. Hence, it is not as though there could be such a “beetle” and such a “box,” but that in such a case we could not speak of the “beetle.” Rather, we have imagined nothing at all.

Wittgenstein applies the lesson of the merely apparent case of the “beetle in the box” to the “idea” of the phenomena of the inner life as so many objects isolable from their bearers in the following way: “if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.”²⁵⁰ Paralleling “sensation as object” to “beetle in the box,” it – the “sensation as object” - is irrelevant because it is nothing at all, not even a “something.”²⁵¹ Wittgenstein’s point is not that the sensation is a something, and that it would be impossible to talk about or directly encounter it were it an isolable object. Rather, his point is that the picture of pain or any sensation as an object directly perceived and known by its bearer, but necessarily hidden from direct view by all others, is empty because this form of words is shot through with equivocation and indetermination – these words say nothing determinate for us to even consider as possibly true or false.²⁵² As Cavell coyly asks, given the picture of the body as veiling from us direct access to the pain of others, what would count as the impossible or non-actual state of affairs of seeing

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²⁵⁰ Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §293.

²⁵¹ If we try to think if the body functioning as the kind of box which no one can look into, such that the pain-object is hidden by it, we see that it is just as difficult to understand how a body could hide something in this way as it is to imagine a “box no one can look in.”

²⁵² Consider, further, how the “box” was meant as a parallel to, and model of, the body conceived as a metaphysical veil of the inner life. Does the emptiness of the form of words “box no one can look in” suggest the emptiness of the picture of the body necessarily hiding something from view?
through the body to the pain itself?253 If there is nothing we can imagine, then just what is
it the body is hiding – something we cannot imagine – and how is it hiding that? But,
then, what is bodily behavior – say, wincing - a symptom of?

The point is not that if we understand sensation and pain language on the model
of object and designation then we will have indissoluble problems, or that sensation or
pain would be ineffable, but that such language is idle and empty. The decision, then, is
between the pictures of pain itself, or the experience of pain itself, as facts others cannot
be directly acquainted with versus the picture of the fact-that-is-there, namely, the other
person in pain – and such and such bodily behavior is what we call the appearance of the
other person in pain. The first picture arises from seemingly common sense reflections on
the important truth that we often do not know the inner lives of others, nevertheless is
empty. The second picture – however unintuitive – helps us makes sense.

Furthermore, the argument that one knows what pain is on the basis of her direct
acquaintance with her own pain, which is then analogically projected into the other when
observing expressive behavior symptomatic of pain, is problematized by other
reflections. Wittgenstein famously quipped “an inner experience stands in need of
outward criteria.”254 Many have misunderstood this as a form of behaviorism – as though
pain behaviors were identical with pain, rather than the criteria articulating the sense of
someone in pain. Others have simply regarded these words with puzzlement. Cavell has
rightly noted how the point is that if I am to understand my experiences as experiences of
this or that – of what we call “pain,” or “grief,” or “anxiety,” or “jealousy” – I must be

253 Cavell, Claim of Reason. 368.

able to locate my experiences with reference to the application of criterial determination for others. It is not that “I know that I am in pain” the same way I know someone else is in pain, on the basis of pain behavior, but that in order for me to individuate and identify what I am feeling as what we call “pain” I must be able to apply the concept of pain correctly, and, therefore, must have a mastery of recognizing outward criteria – wincing, crying, exclaiming “ouch,” etc.

In the case of the first person experience it is not that it is by means observing fulfilled criteria that I know I am in pain. Rather, it is by means of the mastery of discerning the presence of criteria that I know that I wince in pain, is the appearance of what we call “pain.” In the case of anxiety, it is not that I learn that I am fidgeting about or unable to eat on the basis of outward criteria, but it is based on the mastery of recognizing these outward criteria that I see these behaviors add up to what we call “anxiety.”

Again, the point is not that I know I am in pain the same way I know my neighbor is in pain, by bodily behavior. I do not learn of my pain on the basis of my bodily behavior as I do with others. To repeat, I do not, in the relevant sense, learn or know I am in pain at all. Rather, I am simply in pain. The point is that I am able to individuate, locate, and name my inner experiences by means of mastering the same skill of applying outward criteria by which I know that another is in this or that state. I have a world, my inner experience is intelligible to me as part of my world, by means of outward criteria. So, it is not that I know what pain is in my case which makes me able to project that

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255 Cavell, Claim of Reason, 107-108.
experience into the other based on their analogically similar bodily behaviors.\textsuperscript{256} Rather, it is by being taught that when someone cries it is because they are in “pain” that I am able to locate my inner experience as one of “pain.” Self-knowledge is had on the basis of having a world, and having a world cannot be separated from being given a world by means of being educated into the recognition of shared criteria.

In short, the picture of the body as a veil of the inner life, blocking others from directly perceiving what one is experiencing, is empty. It gives expression to (widespread and common) experiences of isolation, incomprehension, and ignorance. But it transforms these experiences into a metaphysical puzzle and confused form of words. The human body is naturally expressive and revelatory of the inner life as criterial of the open-to-view appearances of the soul and its states.\textsuperscript{257} The seemingly “logic-chopping” argument above about the priority perceiving satisfiable criteria to inferring from symptoms has dramatic existential and anthropological implications. Consider two of Wittgenstein’s summaries on these points:

“We see emotion.” – As opposed to what? – We do not see facial contortions and make the inference that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe the face immediately as sad radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features. – Grief, one would like to say, is personified in the face.\textsuperscript{258}

Consciousness in another’s face. Look into someone else’s face and see the consciousness in it, and a particular shade of consciousness. You see on it, in it,

\textsuperscript{256} Of course we do project our own experiences of pain onto others in the case of sympathy, and because of this we better respond to the pain of others. The point is that such psychological projection does not and cannot do the needed logical and epistemic work.

\textsuperscript{257} Which is not to deny that one’s thoughts, emotions, or inner states can be hidden, but, rather, that in order for them to be hidden, by and large, we have to learn to hide them. See Cavell, Claim of Reason and Mulhall, Wittgenstein’s Private Language.

joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor, and so on. The light in other people’s faces. Do you look into yourself in order to recognize the fury in his face?259

What Cavell says is true, if unnerving, “there is no assignable end to depths of us to which language reaches.”260 Similarly, what Diamond indicates is also true and disturbing: Anything which resides necessarily outside the bounds of experience or direct acquaintance – outside the sphere of imaginably satisfiable criteria - even the inner lives of others, is nothing to us.261

Cavell and Separation

The Existential Charge

Cavell is distrustful of the arguments in previous section if they are taken as defeaters of skepticism. Typically, in Wittgensteinian circles, one hears about countering the dichotomy of skepticism and metaphysical anti-skepticism by means of a therapeutic dissolution of the whole problem. Cavell, however, worries that the therapeutic dissolution continues the errors of metaphysical anti-skepticism by failing to challenge skepticism at a deep enough level. That is, the therapeutic third way continues the philosophical fantasy that skepticism about other minds, the difficulties in knowing another, is an intellectual puzzle. The therapist happens to think we can make the puzzle

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260 Cavell, Claim of Reason, 369.

261 Diamond, “Does Bismark Have a Beetle.” Of course, the upshot of this chapter and the reflections on logic in chapter one means there is no “sphere” of the verifiable and/or thinkable and so no outside either. We should not, then, take Diamond’s argument to conclude that such things are nothing to us because we cannot fathom them or know whether or not they exist, but that with the words “a thing which resides necessarily outside the sphere of verifiable criteria” we have said nothing determinate, and so there is nothing which we have therefore concluded which is unknowable or even nothing to us. There is no fixed limit of or to thought or experience.
disappear with the right point of view. Cavell calls the so-called therapeutic dissolution of the problem of skepticism responding with the “voice of correctness.” In other words, the skeptic is giving voice to real experiences of frustration or anxiety or exhilaration, sublimes these experiences as metaphysical or epistemological puzzles (“intellectual lack” in Cavell’s words), and the philosophical therapist equally obscures the existential and moral roots of the experience by merely “dissolving” the intellectual problem. This hides, for Cavell, what he labels the “truth of skepticism” which is that it is ultimately a practical and moral problem whose possibility resides at the very existential roots of language use itself; human finitude and the fact of separation.

It appears that Cavell’s resistance to the typical Wittgensteinian response to skepticism puts him at odds with the arguments of the dissertation in the first chapter and its presentation of an anti-psychologism. Cavell seemingly appears to suggest contra-Norman Malcolm and Cooke that the skeptic is right to insist that there is “something we cannot do.”

But there is someone who knows, there is a position which is totally different from mine in the matter of knowing whether he is in pain, different not only in being better…but in being decisive, making the best position I can be in seem second hand: namely, his position. . . I think everyone recognizes the experience which goes with it, that it is some terrible or fortunate fact, at once contingent and necessary, that I am not in that position; the skeptic merely comes to concentrate upon it. And it is not obviously invalid.

263 Cavell, Must We Mean, 263.
265 Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging,” 259.
Further, responding to Cooke’s insistence that “being unable to feel another’s sensation” is not a circumstance and does not describe an inability on one’s part because it is a “general fact of human nature,” Cavell contends: “But why can’t a general fact of human nature be thought of, accurately, as a circumstance, a permanent circumstance? The circumstance is, I feel like saying, him.” He adds, further, “I would express my feeling, rather, simply as one of inability; that is, one of being powerless. And I do not see that I have to accept the question, ‘Powerless to do what.’”266

What is Cavell getting at, especially since he allows that there is nothing we can imagine which we would call having “the same feeling, feel his pain, feel it the way he feels it”?267 How can what he says be squared with anti-psychologism whose hallmark is that grammatical and logical investigations do not reveal that “there is something we cannot do”? If what the skeptic contends, however poorly expressed, is indicative of a circumstance – of a manner of being the case – and a “powerlessness,” then it would seem to fly in the face of Cavell’s own claim that *The Philosophical Investigations* is Wittgenstein’s attempt to “de-psychologize psychology.”268 Finally, what is the significance of the turn to existential language – “the circumstance is…him,” “express my feeling…of being powerless,” etc. - at this point of the argument?

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266 Ibid.

267 At least, he allows that the only way to imagine that the words “he feels her pain” having sense which is not merely compassion or sympathy is to imagine that she is not “other” to him in the relevant sense.

268 Cavell, *Must We Mean*, 91.
Consider the following two sentences.

1. She cannot draw a mountain without a valley.

2. No one else can feel my pain, this pain.

Both sentences are examples of logical impossibility whose surface grammars suggest a misleading analogy with various types of physical impossibility, but which are typically used (whether the speaker realizes it or not) as circumlocutions for nonsense. Both sentences are accurately restated as “there is nothing which we would call ‘drawing a mountain without a valley’ or ‘someone else feel my pain, this pain.’” However, the way the parts of these sentences are usually used, and why they do not come together in these typical ways, is different in the two cases.

Consider the first sentence. We know in most contexts what is meant by “draw.” However, we do not have any typical use, even an imaginable use, for “a mountain without a valley.” In the end, we do not even know what “drawing” amounts to because we cannot see how it connects with the rest of the predicate. There is no “drawing” which is not drawing something, even if only scribbles. But “mountain without a valley” names nothing and so we have not yet assigned a meaning to “draw.” There are parts of the sentence which have potential uses we know, parts of the sentence which have no known or imagined uses, and therefore the sentence as a whole has no clear meaning. We may know what it is to “draw” in many contexts, but we have no sense of anything that amounts to “drawing” which would be “drawing a mountain without a valley.” The indeterminate part of the sentence renders the whole indeterminate (at least logically and referentially speaking).

Our relationship to sentence 2 is different. We have normal uses for all parts of the sentence. There is nothing strange or empty in “feel my pain” or “feel this pain” the
way there is with “mountain without a valley.” That is, the predicate has typical and
imaginable uses for us. Likewise, the subject, “no one else,” is perfectly in order. The
logical and referential emptiness of the sentence, or the manner in which we fail to give
sense to it, therefore, is unlike sentence 1. In the first sentence the predicate was
meaningless and so rendered the whole sentence meaningless (context principle). The
problem for sentence 2 is that given the imaginable ways we can use the subject and
predicate there is no way to bring the two together to say what it is we feel we want to
say is impossible. We know perfectly well what it is so speak of “someone else” even as
we know what it is to “feel this pain.” We can even bring the subject and predicate
together in such a way as to mean something along the lines of the uniqueness of one’s
experience rendering them beyond the pale of anyone having sympathy for them. No one
else has suffered that kind of pain. But when we say this sentence in a way which we
want to gloss it as “No one else can experience my experience of this particular pain”
there is nothing determinate we imagine not being the case. What would count as it being
actual or possible? Can we describe what we have said cannot be?

Of course, as argued above, sentence 2 is unintelligible and so dis-analogous with
sentences such as “She cannot juggle four tennis balls.” In the case of the first and second
sentence we might say to an interlocutor, who says someone is “unable” to do what these
sentences say cannot be performed, “and what is it that they are unable to do?” In the
case of the first sentence our interlocutor would most likely be at a loss to give any
content to what cannot be done. With the second sentence she might also be at a loss to
say what would add up to “someone else feeling my pain” or she might point to an
example of someone else feeling pain, give an example of her feeling pain, and say that
that is what the other person cannot do, feel the exact same instance of pain as she felt.

True, she has not shown us what “someone else feeling my pain” means, and so has not shown us a circumstance that cannot obtain or an act someone is unable to accomplish, but is she as confused, and are her words as expressively empty, as someone who insists the first sentence has content and that she is thereby limited and powerless?269

We might say that in the second case her expression of someone else’s “inability” is not perfectly accurate, but it does express real experiences of isolation and powerlessness.270 Furthermore, we might even say that there is a circumstance which she has identified as permanent and necessary. However, the circumstance is not one of an act she cannot perform or an experience someone else cannot have, but is her herself and the other person as other. She is not separate from herself the way we are separate from her. Would it be wrong to respond to an experience of one’s relationship to another using the language of “inability” and “powerlessness” just because there is no particular thing one cannot do? These words do not do the same logical work they do in cases of physical limitation, but they do express experiences of our finitude and separation. And, they partially express the existential charge to our grammar of oneself and others. That is, they bring to the surface the manner in which the “general facts of human nature” and our interests, natural reactions, and desires relative to these facts conspire to produce our

269 We might say that whereas sentence 1 and 2 are logically equivalent as meaningless they are not psychologically and expressively equivalent.

270 In a context such as this Cavell argues that the “therapeutic” characterizations of first persons claims such as “I know I am in pain” as empty is itself problematic. He agrees with the “therapists” that such sentences are not claims to certainty, or are empty as such, but he adds that the therapists miss the fact that they are expressions of pain. In other words, a child cries because she is in pain and so an adult teaches her words like “ouch” to express her pain with greater articulation. Further along the spectrum, and deeper into an articulate world, one’s expressions of pain grow even more sophisticated with sentences like “I know I am in pain.”
grammar of self and other, to give human voice to the logical necessities of our psychologically and existentially charged worlds.

In other words, for Cavell, the fact of our separation is, in a sense, transcendental. We live in a world of fragile and, therefore, socially dependent bodies. The roots of mind, language, and world reside deep down in the infant’s expressive cries of hunger, pain, and delight, to which we are naturally attuned. Such cries are extended to words like “ouch” and then to words like “stabbing and intermittent.” In the process, socialization renders the attunement to expressive bodies more fine-grained and differentiated. Expression and recognition give us an intelligible world of entailments – I should comfort her because she winced - because they are constituted by a charged field whose poles are separation and dependence. And this dependence is intimately bound to seeking pleasure and avoiding pain – in short, our inbuilt resistances to the threat of death. In other words, if one were asked why we are expressive beings – why we have intelligible worlds - a partial answer could be “we are separate and we are dying.” Hence, when confronted with the endless possibilities of isolation and suffering – and all this might entail - we lament “No one else can feel this pain!” The skeptic and anti-skeptic alike mutilate such expressions of finitude and separation into logical puzzles, but the philosophical therapist is no better who merely insists that with these words there is nothing which has been specified that cannot be done.
The radicalism of existentially charged separation cannot be overstated, according to Cavell. He does not intend hyperbole when he writes of the other as “absolutely different, separate from me, I would say, wholly other, endlessly other…” In order to avoid misunderstanding, I should first indicate that by “absolutely different” and “wholly other” Cavell does not mean to say that there is always or ever a situation in which two beings do not share some properties or qualities or characteristics in common. Rather, his point is that what lies between us as separated beings – those distances which can be spanned by expression and recognition - is nothing that cannot be misunderstood. There is neither a universal mind we all participate in, nor self-present mental phenomena which fix word-meaning (say, mentalistic “intentions”), nor universals which are intelligible in themselves, etc. What exists is you and me in our bodily expressions and their material extensions into signs, symbols, and language. All of these things are possibilities for expression precisely because they can be reused in further contexts to say the same, similar, or different things. However, this means that any expression or word or rule or formula or sign can be understood otherwise than it is in any given use. There is no absolute guarantee of meaning or of recognition. Distance and unintelligibility always loom as a possibilities and, hence, so does tragedy.

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271 Cavell, “What is the Scandal of Skepticism,” 146. Significantly, Cavell penned these words in an essay exploring the relationship of his understanding skepticism to that of Emmanual Levinas.

272 Cavell, Claim of Reason, 19, “there is no appeal beyond us, or if beyond us two, then not beyond some eventual us.”

Consider: someone asks which way to go to get to a certain location. I point north. However, it is possible that the people then go south because they understand the direction indicated to flow from the point of my finger toward my shoulder. It is easy to imagine any such scenario for words as well, just as it is possible for any rule we might give for an intellectual or practical activity. Anything we provide as a means of communication can be imagined to indicate something else, and can be used to do so in some other context. This gives rise to the idea that what we need are both these physical signs and some interpretation that fixes their meaning. However, supplementing one physical or conventional sign with another will not do because any such sign as interpretation also carries with it the possibility of being understood in multiple ways. This thought, in turn, has given rise to various metaphysical notions which are supposed to fix the meaning of physical signs because they are in themselves taken to be perfectly intelligible, the aforesaid self-present mental phenomena which fix meanings (i.e. platonic forms, “intentions,”274 universals, etc.). Cavell has gone to great lengths, following Wittgenstein (and Jacques Derrida), to show that these metaphysical entities are fantasies which, even if they did exist, would not do the work of guaranteeing the intelligibility of one person’s expressive behaviors to another.

Contra Derrida and Richard Rorty, it is not as though there is some missing metaphysical or epistemological fact about us, our thoughts, or our expressions which

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274 The scare quotes around “intention” indicate that the relevant use of “intention” is the metaphysical notion of an auto-intelligible mental object which is like a word in having content, but unlike a word in that is not depending on anything else for its content to be intelligible. There are also everyday uses of “intention” to clarify that someone has not discerned the reason one has employed a certain word which is not problematic.
would, if they existed, guarantee our meanings and their communication to others. The various forms of metaphysical guarantees are not missing, but nonsense. From nonsense, nothing follows, especially not the inference that with nothing to secure our meanings we are adrift in an interpretivist sea of free play a la deconstruction or social-pragmatic verificationism. We speak wrongly to say that the essential “iterability” of all that may be used to express and communicate means that absolutely secured and fixed meanings between us are impossible. There is our attunement to and agreements with each other, even though that is all. Rather, outside the fragility of our expressive bodies and their extensions, and our equally fragile resonances with these, there is nothing. We are neither condemned to necessary limitation nor granted access to a paradise of sheer transparency, not because these are impossible, but because they are nothing. Wittgenstein and Cavell, therefore, go some way with post-structuralists contra various forms of realism. However, Wittgenstein and Cavell do not believe that we are therefore condemned to the conditions for the possibility of language use undermining some fantastical pure meaning, nor that there is some imaginable – but non-actual - state of communicative existence which

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276 Cavell is quick to correct the view of agreement as “contractual”: as though what he and Wittgenstein mean by agreement were pervasively acts of voluntary will. Rather, he has in mind those agreements as basic in as the pace at which human walk, the separation of where one eats from where one defecates, what is funny, what is odd, what a threat, etc. See Cavell, “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” in his Must We Mean, 4-72.
shows ours to be limited. We may have no metaphysical guarantees, but equally we are without metaphysical excuses. “We are endlessly separate for no reason…”  

We are, therefore, separate and endlessly so as the vital – often-times desperate -work of making ourselves known to others is never ending just as is the responsibility of coming to recognize the other. The need for skill in expression and recognition has no end in human life because we are constitutively without guarantee or excuse. There is no metaphysical fact upon which such activity and passivity may find some final peace. However, because there is no fact that is missing, or renders communication futile or less than it could otherwise be, we are endlessly responsible for the distances between our separate selves. The threat of misunderstanding is not merely always present, but an essential dimension of intersubjective encounter. However, because skeptical and deconstructive fantasies about the absence of what makes communication possible or pure are empty, we are not metaphysically discharged from the burden to try to make ourselves known and to know others.  

We are not absolved of responsibilities to express and acknowledge by metaphysical guarantees or epistemological lack. “We are endlessly separate for no reason. But then we are answerable for everything that comes between us…”  

“Endless separation,” being “wholly other,” is not at odds with the fact that “there is no assignable end to the depths of us to which language reaches” because, these ideas relocate our hiddenness apart from formal and necessary features of thought, language, or

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278 Of course, neither does Derrida or Rorty conclude that we are so excused from the labor of understanding and making ourselves understood.

279 Ibid.
anthropology to concrete exigencies of encounter. That I may be at a loss for words before you, or have no idea what is going on “inside your head,” is not a function of metaphysical or epistemological necessity or impossibility, but a function of my inattention, or stupidity, or we do not share sufficient context, or you are lying to me, or you are unskilled at making yourself known, or – significantly – because the sheer flood tide of revelation pouring forth from your gaze to mine is more than I am willing or able to acknowledge. We are separate and so you may resist any of my determinations of you and vice versa.  

Cavell summarizes well what it means to say that separation both gives rise to skepticism and is that which is obscured by skepticism and anti-skepticism: “Something this means to me is that skepticism with respect to the other is not generalized intellectual lack, but a stance I take in the face of the other’s opacity and the demand the other’s expression places upon me; I call the skepticism my denial or annihilation of the other.” There are two points about skepticism’s powers of obscuring worth mentioning. First, the picture of the body as veil obscures from view the demands the appearance of the expressive body of the other places upon me. Second, the psychologism of the picture of the body as veil obscures the “other’s opacity.” It is not merely genuine knowledge of the other that we hide, or the ways the other is actually

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280 In the argument about verifiable criteria above the world looked all too available and certain, now the world – our attunement to the world which is always already attunement to others – looks all too tenuous, even miraculous.

281 Cavell, “What is the Scandal of Skepticism,” 150. Cavell first used the language of “intellectual lack” as skepticism’s own mischaracterization of itself in his celebrated “Knowing and Acknowledging.” There he wrote, “But I am filled with this feeling – of our separateness, let us say – and I want you to have it too. So I give voice to it. And then my powerlessness presents itself as ignorance – a metaphysical finitude as an intellectual lack.” Cavell, Must We Mean, 262-263.
known. We also try desperately to avoid the genuine hiddenness manifest in the visage of the other. We posit the transcendence of the other in a metaphysical realm hidden by the body in order to avoid acknowledging her transcendence of ourselves in the sheer fact of her separation and its manifestation in her expressive body – and the claims this hiddenness places upon us: “In making the knowledge of others a metaphysical difficulty, philosophers deny how real the practical difficulty is of coming to know another person, and how little we can reveal of ourselves to another’s gaze, or bear of it.”

Appearance and Obligation

Seeing a face as a face – as the central locus of a soul’s expressive appearance – is a practical and moral affair. Mastery of the recognition relevant to seeing pain in the wince of another is not first an intellectual matter, just as recognizing a body as a body – as animated by and picturing a soul – is not a metaphysical but practical problem. Recapitulating the argument above, if the soul’s existence were merely hypothesized and surmised as that which explains bodily behavior, and never itself appears before us, then it is nothing to us. Recognizing the soul of another is not first an inferential skill. “My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the opinion that he has a soul.”

Mastering the ability to recognize fulfilled criteria of the inner life of others, a mastery Wittgenstein says is evinced in an “attitude,” is prior to, and a condition for the possibility of, inferential activity about the consciousness, soul, or inner experiences of the other.

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282 Cavell, Claim of Reason, 90.

What does the mastery of recognizing fulfilled criteria for pain or other phenomena of the inner lives of others look like? Cavell’s word is “acknowledgement.” When someone else writhes in pain we are not taught or expected simply to name the behavior as “pain,” to intellectually tally the fact of an instance of pain. Rather, we have mastered the concept of pain when we comfort the other, or when we understand our inaction as callous. To display skill in recognizing the appearance of pain, in knowing the concept of pain, is to show in action that one comprehends obligations the expressive body of another places upon us. If above the argument showed how epistemic notions of knowledge-as-certainty has no application to first person experiences and expressions of pain, and only tenuously to second and third person perspectives, here the claim is that knowledge-as-acknowledgement applies in all cases.

If mastery of recognizing the criteria which articulate our concept of pain is displayed in acknowledgement such as sympathy, comforting, or callousness, then there is nothing, or very little, which we would call understanding-that-another-is-in-pain which does not automatically place one under obligation. Knowing another as in pain is not like knowing a barn is red. The mastery of the concept pain comes with it the connection that to know another is in pain just is to recognize oneself as compassionate, or callous, or sympathetic, etc. There is not, as it were, the fact of another person in pain or the intellectual knowledge of this fact, to which one adds her own acknowledgement or moral obligation. There is no room for a fact/value dichotomy. Acknowledging others is essentially bound to self-knowledge and revelation. The cry of pain from another

284 Cavell does not consider callousness as an instance of a failure to acknowledge because acknowledgement is a category, or even genus, in which one understands all those reactions which count as reactions to expression, in this case of pain. See Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging.”
places me under obligation and my acknowledgement is irreducibly a revelation of
myself as compassionate, cold, weak, brave, etc. Empirical investigations may reveal one
as a precise logician, determined, insightful, etc., and may even display moral virtues
such as honesty and open-mindedness. Mastery in seeing the criteria of the inner life of
another is constitutively a revelation of character, i.e. of patience, humility, meekness,
etc. Hence, when another makes herself known in expression, I am obliged to make
myself known as well. There is no escaping this; to see another in pain is to have one’s
moral character exposed. Hence, not only is there no escaping the moral dimension of
intersubjective encounter, there is no escaping revelation of oneself to others and oneself
– and this revelation is often-times painful and frightening.

*Encounter and Fantasy*

Cavell takes it that the impulses behind skeptical and anti-skeptical sublimations
of our hiddenness of one to another are driven by the existential charge surrounding the
fact that “there is no assignable end to the depths of us to which language reaches,” that
we are nevertheless “endlessly separate for no reason,” and therefore we are answerable
for all that does come between us.\(^285\) As humans we strongly need and desire to make
ourselves known to others and to come to know others, just as, at times, we need and
desire to remain unknown and even unknowable. Yet, burdens and desires attending our
relationships to the distances between us are shot through with the paradoxical fears and
anxieties over failures of intelligibility and/or inevitable exposure.

We fear that we may never be able to make ourselves or experiences or points of view known/knowable to others just as we fear we may fail desperately to come to know or even be capable of knowing certain others. As said above, there is no guarantee that the distances between separate beings will ever be bridged. We are, therefore, sorely tempted to locate a metaphysical excuse in order to avoid the troubles of endless vigilance of attention to the other. We want to know it has to work out or else we want to have a reason to rest from our labor. The practical and moral difficulties of alienation, loneliness, exposure, etc. are, therefore, rarified by metaphysics and epistemology into logical puzzles which deflect our attention from these difficulties.

Furthermore, the fact that there is “no end to the depths of us to which language reaches” is utterly terrifying. Who amongst the human race feels they have nothing to hide? How comforting is the picture of an inner self which is not only unknown to all others, but necessarily unknowable to all others? Who does not desire a domain the inside of which is necessarily inviolable and unapproachable? But all such wishes are fantasies. The fact that hope for ever deepening intimacy is never dashed is necessarily correlative to the fact that the threat of exposure has no end.

Confronted with the reality that we are endlessly called to tasks of knowing and making known where nothing is guaranteed, that there is no excuse for giving up on the moral demands the face of another places upon us, and that the threat of exposure has no limit or end, we are the kinds of beings who are endemically tempted to a picture of human encounter and hiddenness which satisfies two desires. We want to shut our eyes to others and we want to shut their eyes to us.
We do not want to have to look and see what there is in the other, what demands that places upon us, and what we have to reveal of ourselves in acknowledging the other. We also do not want to confess our incapacity to make sense of the other, to allow for and make known our powerlessness before the look of others. We want to close our eyes. Likewise, we fear the never ending task of making ourselves intelligible, we recoil from the loneliness which may never be overcome, just as we fear the unveiling of our inner secrets. We want to close the eyes of others to ourselves.

Conclusion

The picture of inner experiences and sensations and consciousness as blocked from view by the body is empty precisely because we cannot conceive what it would be to see through the body – and its expressive behaviors – to the inner objects themselves. Would a picture of nerve endings firing do the work? But if there is nothing this picture is telling us is not the case, if there is nothing it is telling is a “something we cannot do,” then it is doubtful these words are useful. Indeed, it is precisely when in its grip that we feel the compulsion to confuse our equivocation about the inner for profundity. No, if we are to do justice to our hiddenness to each other we will need the other picture.

Cavell argues that the hiddenness of the inner life is not due to the covering of the body but to the fullness of the expression by the body. The inner life may be hidden as something totally present is hidden. He compares the hiddenness of the inner to how in Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit the duck is hidden by seeing the rabbit and the rabbit by seeing the duck. The simple drawing presents to the mind more than it can take in at once. We, by associating the picture with other pictures of rabbits have the aspect of the
duck hidden from us. That is, it is by the activity of my mind that I cannot see what is before me, not because it is not there to be seen.\footnote{286 Cavell, \textit{Claim of Reason}, 354-357.} Similarly, before the face of another we may be inattentive, fooled, mistaken, or simply overwhelmed. In short, “The block to my vision of the other is not the other’s body but my incapacity or unwillingness to interpret or judge it accurately, to draw the right connections. . . I suffer a kind of blindness, but avoid the issue by projecting darkness upon the other.”\footnote{287 Ibid., 368.}

Cavell’s presentation of Wittgenstein’s alternate picture of “The human body as the best picture of the human soul” locates his and Wittgenstein’s philosophy surprisingly close to that of Emanuel Levinas.\footnote{288 Søren Overgaard has explored the parallels between Levinas, Wittgenstein, and Cavell. He notes that for all three, despite their vehement opposition to the view that the inner lives of others are like objects under a veil, the transcendence of the inner life to the knowledge and thought of others is also central.\footnote{289 For Levinas on these points see Emmanuel Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Interiority}, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 212.} \footnote{290 Wittgenstein, \textit{Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology}, Volume II. 170.}}

Consider the following line from late in Wittgenstein’s life.

In general I do not surmise fear in him—I see it. I do not feel that I am deducing the probable existence of something inside from something outside; rather it is as if the human face were in a way translucent and that I were seeing it not in reflected light but rather in its own.\footnote{290 Wittgenstein, \textit{Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology}, Volume II. 170.}
Overgaard draws attention to the language of “light.” He argues convincingly that the “light” of “its own” is akin to Levinas’s sense of transcendence of the other as shown forth in the epiphany of the face.\footnote{291 Levinas, \textit{Totality and Infinity}, 212-214.} To see the face, or the body, as expressive is to allow that I can, in my interpretations and responses, always be refused or resisted or duped or shown up as inattentive or stupid or overwhelmed by that other whose expressions I see.\footnote{292 Ibid., 51.}

That same face has an autonomy from me which I do not control or master. Every conviction I have about the other may be overturned by her in the sheer flood tide of expressions emanating from her face and body. The face of another has a light of its own because it is the picture of a soul who is “separate” from me (Cavell and Levinas) and so “transcendent” of my thought/knowledge (Levinas).\footnote{293 Ibid., 48-52.} In other words, one only sees a face as a face insofar as one acknowledges that one does not see all there is to see and that one is not in control of what one sees.

If one can only see a face as a face, as the most intensive point of the body’s picturing a soul, by acknowledging that there is more to see (that the face is transcendent as having a “light of its own”), then of all the virtues required for intersubjective encounter to be something other than tragedy, humility and meekness are peculiarly essential. If one is not humbly and meekly docile before expressions of another, if one measures the features of a face like an empirical object in order to infer the state it is
expressing, then one is not acknowledging the “light of its own.” In such cases the possibility for error is profound and the illusion that one has seen all there is to see – like knowing the length of an empirical object – will be manifest. Without humility we project our desires upon the other and do not allow her to qualify our knowledge and ignorance of her. Intelligible encounter is only possible by a manifold of meek and humble attitudes acknowledging that one is dependent on the expressive other to know her, that the other may not only surprise one but even challenge all of one’s ways of making sense of her, and that there is always more to the light streaming from her face.

Dumitru Stăniloae, in his classic *Orthodox Spirituality*, sees humility and meekness as the preconditions rendering one capable of attending truthfully to the world as constituting so many words of God uttered in the One Word. Pride, the passionate vice opposite humility and meekness, fans the flames of egotism by which one determines all things in accordance with one’s immediate desires, not letting them be and say what they are. Pride renders one incapable of attending truthfully to the natural world, and this is especially true of the capacity to attend truthfully to the look of the neighbor in her separation from one’s self and ego-centric projections. Therefore, for Stăniloae, without the virtues of humility and meekness one is not able to receive the gift of vision of the Face of God in its absolute self-determination and its demand that one always

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acknowledge its transcendent-ever-more. The encounter with the neighbor and with God (as will be explored in the final chapter) are preconditioned by humility and meekness precisely because of the analogous intertwining of revelation and hiddenness (transcendence) in both. The conditions of the possibility of intersubjective encounter beyond isolation and tragedy are no less than the interplay of expression, humble acknowledgement of the one expressing, and humble acknowledgement that there is ever more to acknowledge hidden in the bodily revelation of a soul.
CHAPTER IV
THE GAZE OF HUMILITY II:
THE SEVEN EYES OF THE CRUCIFIED

I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (Gen. 3:10).

As one from whom others hide their faces…we held him of no account (Isaiah 53:3).

It is useful to recapitulate what has been established in the previous chapters. The first chapter gave an overview of the history of modern psychologism, a view which holds that the necessities of thought are determined by the contingent psychological make up of human beings. The chapter demonstrated the inter-connected confusions which give rise to these equivocations. Furthermore, the chapter noted the internal connection between Descartes’s zeal for an abstract (non-Christological) concept of divine power and his empty “conception” of divine transcendence. The second chapter argued that modern and postmodern negative theologians, who do not allow mystical experience a role in their accounts of divine ineffability, and thereby rely on inferences drawn from the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, are consistently drawn to the confusions of psychologism. The third chapter explored the ways in which we are tempted to psychologistic equivocations about how and why humans are hidden from each other. The philosophies of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Cora Diamond, and Stanley Cavell showed that the existential
reasons for our draw to anthropological psychologism is the strongly human desire to hide the other from ourselves and to hide ourselves from the gaze of the other.

In this chapter I take a closer look at what is shared between the apophatic theology of Dionysius and the Transformational Mysticism of the New Testament so as to offer an answer to the guiding question of the dissertation. I argue that non-mystical negative theologies may embody a primordial human temptation to deflect attention away from what Dionysius calls the “theandric energy” of Jesus and what the New Testament texts express by equating Christ with the glorious anthropomorphic theophany. The chapter takes a circuitous route to this end. It starts with an analysis of how Dionysius’s distinction between the essence and processions of God gives rise to an account of divine ineffability which is not psychologistic. The course of this argument shows that, for Dionysius, divine transcendence is discovered experientially and is thoroughly Christocentric. This argument leads to the parallels between a merkava vision at the heart of Dionysius’s apophatic theology and the merkava mysticism of St. John’s Revelation. In both of these, I argue, we encounter a mystical theology of the humility and meekness of God and of those who see God. Finally, from the vantage point of an apophatic theology of humility and meekness, I will confess why I am so tempted to engage in a fantastical and equivocal negative theology of the limits of thought and sense.
An Apophatic Theology of the Humble Gaze

The Essence/Processions Distinction

John D. Jones has analyzed the relationship of Dionysius’ conception of divine existence to the henotheism of pagan Neoplatonism, the Eastern Orthodox distinction between essence and energies, and the theologies of medieval scholasticism. He concludes that Dionysian theology is much closer to earlier eastern theologians, such as the Cappadocians, and later Byzantine fathers such as Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas, than to either Plotinus and Proclus, or Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. That is, Dionysius has some notion of the transcendent and unknowable essence of God and the utterly divine, but immanent, processions which reach down to creatures and reveal divinity. Dionysius announces this distinction near the beginning of the Divine Names: “It is not the intention of our discourse to manifest the beyond-being being (hyperousias ousia) as beyond-being, for this is ineffable, and unknown and completely unable to be manifest and surpasses unity itself, but to hymn the being-producing (ousiopoios) procession of the divine source of being into all beings.”

For the Cappadocians, Maximus, the Damascene, and Palamas it can be rightly said that, whether speaking about a rational creature or about the Creator, “every essence has an energy that naturally goes forth from it and is distinctive of it.” In other words,

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298 DN 5.1. 816B.

299 John D. Jones, “(Mis?)reading the Divine Names as Science: Aquinas’ Interpretation of the Divine Naes of (pseudo) Dionysius the Areopagite,” in St. Vladimer’s Theological Quarterly 52, no. 2 (2008), 143172. See also David Bradshaw, Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
the energies of any being are revelatory of that being’s essence. More strongly, the energies are the essence as ecstatically manifest, or as going out from itself into availability to others. As human beings, we each have energies that manifest our nature, such as speech, laughter, mourning, bodily appearance, etc. However, your speech and mine, never fully discloses the fullness of our being. Thus, for creatures and the Creator alike, the energies are known, and make the ousia known in a certain sense, but the ousia is beyond any revelation and so remains unknown even in and through the energies. That is, the ousia both exceeds what is revealed in the energies and may even be revealed as ineffable in and through the energies.

Dionysius has one of the most differentiated vocabularies in the tradition for ecstatic manifestations. The general name for these are processions (proodi). But he also called them powers (dynamos) and energies (energiea). Golitzin claims that each of these terms names a progressively more concrete realization of divine ecstasy and revelation. He says that in these three terms for God we have something analogous to the progression of humans from “essence to potential to expression.” He argues further, that procession, power, and energy are the divine analogues of creaturely essence (ousia), power, and energy. Notice that the divine analogue for human ousia is not divine ousia, but proodi.

Jones shows why the divine analogue of human ousia is divine processions rather than divine ousia. He points out that there is a difference between Dionysius and many of his Orthodox counterparts. Or, at least, Dionysius is further along a spectrum than others

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which leads him to avoid some common formulations of the tradition.\textsuperscript{301} As I said, the analogue to creaturely \textit{ousia} is divine \textit{prooidi} as any talk of analogy with God – or as I argue below, any talk at all – is about the divinity only insofar as it is about divine processions, powers, and energies.\textsuperscript{302} Whereas much of the tradition speaks of divine and human essences and energies, although always with extreme qualification and reservations, Dionysius is far more reticent to say anything at all about a divine essence or nature.\textsuperscript{303} I will explain this point in the following section and why it is important for my argument.

\textit{An Apophatic Theology of Processions}

If one follows standard views of Dionysius which maintain that the ecstatic processions make possible cataphatic theology, and its affirmations are about the processions, and the unknowable essence necessitates apophatic theology, with its negations being about the unknowable essence, then psychologism looms. On this view, it is tempting to model the play between the cataphatic and apophatic in theology on the confusions about and evasions of human hiddenness analyzed in the previous chapter. There is something that created thought and/or language “cannot do,” comprehend or even name the inaccessible divine \textit{ousia}.\textsuperscript{304} Recall that a principle mistake of psychologism is that it takes logical or grammatical analysis of thought and/or language

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{301} Jones, “An Absolutely Simple God?” 393.
\item \textsuperscript{302} Goltizin, \textit{Mystagogy}, 81.
\item \textsuperscript{303} Jones, “An Absolutely Simple God?” 393-394.
\item \textsuperscript{304} Recall that one of the chief confusions of psychologism is idea that it can be shown that logical or grammatical analysis shows us “something we cannot do.”
\end{itemize}

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to show us “something we cannot do.” Furthermore, recall that all of the equivocations of psychologism follow from this confusion.

On this mistaken view, we may infer that there is an inaccessible ousia on the basis of the powers and energies proceeding out from it, but the ousia itself marks a limit to knowledge, thought, sense, and experience. Just as the psychologistic picture mistakes the inner life of the human other as sealing us out with the hardness of a logical must, so the inner life of God supposedly does the same. Negative theology, in this case, becomes a kind of resignation to the fact that we can never reach the theistic beetle in the cosmic box.

However, Jones notes that Dionysius says next to nothing about a divine nature. Rarely does he write anything about a divine nature (physis) and when a divine ousia is mentioned the reader is constantly reminded of the following: “If we should call the super-essential hiddenness by the name of God, or life, or light, or reason, we in fact conceive of nothing other than the powers proceeding out to us…” Jones insists that most modern readers of Dionysius do not interpret such sentences resolutely enough to be historically, theologically, or philosophically accurate.

I noted in the second chapter how Eric Perl claims that Dionysius’s formulations of how the nature of divinity transcends thought is terminologically more indebted to the last great Neoplatonic Scholarch, Damascius (458 c.e. - 550 c.e.), than to Plotinus or Proclus. Nevertheless, Perl states, the arguments and positions of the three pagan

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306 Recall Wittgenstein’s argument in *Philosophical Investigations* §293 as discussed in the previous chapter.

307 DN II.7 645A.
Neoplatonists are the same and so Dionysian transcendence can be understood by appeal to the philosophies of Plotinus and Proclus. Jones follows Sara Rappe, and others, who argue that Damascius breaks with Proclus, and even Plotinus, on this and other matters. Jone’s point is crucial for my case that Dionysian apophatic theology is non-psychologistic.

Concerning the One and the ineffability of the One, Damascius’s philosophy is neither speculative nor systematic, but aporetic. He does not shy away from naming revered Neoplatonic formulations as self-contradictory and equivocal. As I briefly outline below, Rappe concludes that for Damascius “‘The Ineffable’ is a term that does not possess a meaning in the ordinary sense, since it has no semantic function. It is not a term such that its deployment in language conveys nothing at all to the reader or listener.” If her analysis holds, then, for Damascius “the ineffability of the One engulfs the metaphysical enterprise, infecting it with non-sense, with in-significance.”

Rappe notes that Damascius calls philosophical discourse “peritrope” which reverses itself and so is ultimately empty of semantic and logical significance. He does not cast aside the revered language he criticized, but self-consciously used it towards extra-logical and pedagogical ends. Speaking through peritrope, saying something then

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311 Ibid.

312 Damascius is thus doubly like Wittgenstein in wanting to distinguish that language which has logical significance from merely psychological force and has a positive pedagogical use of language which is logically and referentially empty, but psychologically expressive. See Diamond, “Ethics, Imagination
negating it in the same exact sense, has no logical or referential function but is a form of “endeixis” (often translated “indication”) which merely “captures features of the psychology of the inquiry…” Damascius (in ways not unlike Wittgenstein) was worried that talk about the limits of thought in his own tradition conflated language having only psychological effect with that which is logical and referential. In the *Peri Archon* he argues at length that any attempt to reach the One-as-Ineffable by way of inference is doomed to equivocation, much like my arguments in the previous chapters. Such inferences, and any discourses arising from them, are no more than “vain rhapsodies.” The new extra-logical use Damascius gave traditional language about the “Ineffable” was to direct his students to the weakness of their thought and to give expression to “the subjective experiences of aporia and misapprehension that arises in connection with the One, and that not even clearly…”

Jones argues that Dionysius follows Damascius and uses language in the form of *peritrope*. Dionysius almost never uses the vocabulary of “nature” (*physis*) in connection with God and even avoids using any form of “*ousia*” when speaking of the shared divinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. When Dionysius does speak of “*ousia*” he does so with phrases such as “*hyperousios ousia*.” Most readers, including Medieval Latin

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313 Rappe, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 211.

314 Ibid.

315 Ibid.

316 Though, Dionysius, unlike Damascius, makes no arguments about the emptiness of language in relation to the divine essence.
commentators, take “ousia” to be a noun referring to the divine essence in itself which is characterized as “beyond-essence,” typically meaning that there is a divine essence which is beyond created and finite essences.\textsuperscript{317} By contrast, Jones reveals how Orthodox theologians like Palamas took Dionysius to be using “ousia” to refer to God as essence-producing, (ousiopoios) procession. That is, the language of “ousia” as applied to God names the ecstatic divine power as “Cause” (aitia) of all essences. Hence, it is this ecstatic power which is “hyperousios” – as beyond all essences/being. Jones also suggests that perhaps hyperousios merely “indicates” (like Damascius’s endeixis) a hiddenness beyond the essence-producing-power.\textsuperscript{318} Either way, Jones summarizes by saying “it is not clear that Dionysius accepts a divine ‘essence’ (ousia) except in the sense of a divine being-producing (ousiopoios) power.”\textsuperscript{319} I will assume Jones’s reading throughout this chapter.

By following Jones in claiming that for Dionysius all talk of the divine essence or nature is peritrope, logically and referentially empty, there are a few things which I am not saying. First, I am not saying there is a divine essence, but all talk about it somehow fails to refer or make sense. Nor is the point that there really is no divine essence and all


\textsuperscript{318} Jones, “An Absolutely Simple God?” 391-392. This last suggestion may or may not follow through resolutely with Jones’s claim that all talk of divine ousia or physis is semantically and referentially void. What follows is my attempt to take seriously the logical and referential emptiness of Dionysius’s peritrope about essence and nature – somewhat after the style of Diamond’s and Conant’s readings of Wittgenstein’s Tractatus. However, as a mere “indication” the point of the peritrope of hyperousios ousia is not to say something about whatever is beyond the processions, but serves to highlight the processions as processions, as ecstatic.

\textsuperscript{319} Jones, “(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as Science?” 163. However, this should not be taken to mean that Jones or I take the distinction between God in Godself and God as ecstatic to be unreal or merely semantic for Dionysius. It is very important for the argument that this distinction is real and that, although Dionysius is at an extreme end of the spectrum, he is in basic continuity with Palamas and Maximus.
such talk is somehow a veiled means for denying the existence of the divine nature or essence. No, all such talk really is semantically and referentially useless. By it we neither affirm nor deny anything at all. Rather, the pragmatic and mystagogical point of overt *peritrope* in the rare mention of divine *ousia* or *physis* is to throw us back upon, and solely upon, the free and ecstatic processions, powers, and energies of God. Negative and apophatic theologies are every bit as much dependent upon and “about” the divine energies as cataphatic theology. Not only are we directed back to the processions, but as Dionysius claims over and over, to the processions as experienced: to “suffering divine things.”

If we take Jones’s reading to be determinative, then close attention to Dionysius’s language reveals how often summaries of the essence/energies distinction are inaccurate. Typically one reads that there is the transcendent essence and the immanent energies. The ineffable essence is beyond-essence or being (*hyperousios*), and, therefore, beyond mind (*nous*), requiring an apophatic theology. The energies, then, are named in the cataphatic theology. However, in the Dionysian corpus, we find that it is the various figures of the processions which are most often named as “beyond-essence/being” or “transcendent” or “infinite” or “ineffable.” Consider just one of many examples from *The Divine Names*:

[T]he *cause* itself of all beings – by the beautiful and good *eros* of all and through the throwing forth of *erotic* goodness – comes *outside of itself* and into all beings through its *providences* and is, as it were, charmed by goodness, *eros*, and *agape*.

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320 Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 648B

321 Recall that, for Dionysius, *ousia* and *nous* are correlative.
In an *ecstatic power beyond being*, it is brought down out of separation from all and beyond all, to what is in all [emphasis added]…

It is impossible to miss the piling up of terms which refer to or are synonymous with divine processions; “cause,” “providences,” “power,” or terms characterizing these processions, “erotic,” “ecstatic,” “outside of itself,” “brought down.”

How does Dionysius characterize this ecstatic power of God being outside of Godself and present in and to the creation? The erotic ecstasy and power, not the divine “ousia,” is “beyond being.” Such characterizations of the divine processions – which are encountered and experienced by creatures - with the language one usually thinks of as reserved for the ineffable essence is seen everywhere throughout the corpus once one looks for it.

Although theology speaks and reasons about the divine processions – providence, ecstasy, creation/cause, etc. – the energies are also encountered and experienced. Praising his mentor Hierotheus and his theology as especially appropriate and truthful about these matters Dionysius writes:

[H]e learned from the sacred writers, whatever his own perspicuous and laborious research of the Scriptures uncovered for him, or whatever was made known to him through that more mysterious inspiration, not only learning but also experiencing the divine things…he was perfected in a mysterious union with them…

Hierotheus wrote exceptional theology, not only due to his diligent labors, but because he had truly suffered what it is that apophatic theology is about, the ineffable appearance of and union with the ecstatic manifestations of God. Hierotheus and Dionysius then, did not engage in attempts to delimit the necessary boundaries of thought and sense, but were

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323 Concerning the ecstatic processions as erotic, see below.

324 Ibid., 648B.
attuned to, and called others to be attuned to, the experience of divine presence which
overwhelms one’s ability to affirm or even negate.

Furthermore, the negations of *The Mystical Theology*, even the claim that God is
beyond affirmation and negation, is said of God as the “cause” (*aitia*) of all. That is to
say, the deepest point of apophatic silence is aroused by and is about the *divine
procession of God in ecstatic movement towards creatures in the act of creating them.

*The play between cataphatic and apophatic theologies is not between the energies and
essence of the God, but between ways of praising and being united to divine energies.*

What has actually to be said about the *Cause* of all beings is this. Since it is the
*Cause* of all beings, we should posit and ascribe to it all the affirmations we make
in regard to beings, and, more appropriately, we should negate these affirmations…Now we should not conclude that the negations are simply the opposites of the affirmations, but rather that the *Cause* of all is considerably prior to this, beyond privations, beyond every denial, beyond every assertion [emphasis added].

Thus, just as it is not the case for Dionysius that theological affirmations are about the
divine energies and negations are about the essence, so the negation of negations is itself
a response to the energies.

All of this means that anything said or unsaid truly of God is a response to and is
about the encounter with the intentional and ecstatic divine movement into revelation.

There is absolutely no aspect of any true affirmation or negation which is not entirely

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325 The passive language of “being united to” is more accurate than a more stylistically appropriate active “uniting to” because this union is an act of sheer divine grace.

326 Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1000B, as translated by Colm Luibheid.

327 See the opening of *The Divine Names* in which Dionysius claims that all things said truly of God must based on revelation. Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 588C,
dependent upon the free act of God.\textsuperscript{328} There is no sneaking up on God unawares, so to speak.

The familiar summary of the essence/energies distinction that the “shapeless takes on shape” is a way of saying something about what we find when God ecstatically emerges into availability to our grammar of whatness, even as that which forces us to negate all affirmations and negations. To say that is not at all to speculate about the inaccessible essence or interiority of God, hidden behind the manifest and revealing energies. Rather, the point is that what can be said of God is always on the basis of and about the ecstatic movement of God into experiential encounter with the speaker. One cannot speak of God as one does an inanimate object, or even as a person who is present, in some sense, and can be spoken of apart from their expressive movement towards us (by measuring someone’s face, for example). With God there is no access and no word, no finding and no discussing, other than on the basis of and about the ecstatic irruption into - and disruption of - our worlds of sense; whether as Cause, Provider, Good-Beyond-Being, or in a meal or vision. There is no God to speak of or be silent about apart from the One who freely and gently approaches. “Providence is God so far as the creature is concerned.”\textsuperscript{329} Dionysius would agree with Origen:

Can a person or a thing, regarded in its solidity, avoid being seen when it comes before our eyes? The higher divine realities on the other hand, even when they are in front of us, can be perceived only with their consent. . . . The eye of the heart

\textsuperscript{328} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{329} Golitzin, Mystagogy, 83.
itself did allow Abraham to see God, but the grace of God was offered spontaneously to the gaze of that righteous man.\textsuperscript{330}

Consider how this differs from humans. Although we reveal ourselves to each other through expressive and intentional activity, there are ways in which we are available to the perception and knowledge of others apart from this activity. Our bodies can be treated as merely empirical objects. They can be measured and described in such terms. We look, smell, feel, taste, and sound certain ways apart from our expressions and actions. Indeed, it is precisely these modes of physical presence to another that we inflect in now this and now that way so as to show ourselves as living and incarnate spirit. Our personalities are revealed in and through these expressive inflections of our prior availability to the grammar of whatness.\textsuperscript{331} According to Dionysius, this is not so with the Triune God. There is no aspect of the being or essence or energy or anything at all of the Lord which is available to us apart from free and intentional disclosure. Whereas as spirit we inflect what is already available for experience, thought, and knowledge, God is – so to speak – pure inflection, or inflection inflecting no anteriorly available substrate.\textsuperscript{332} God is Spirit, and is manifest as the “spiritual body.”

This point returns us to the connection of the Eastern Christian insistence on the uncreated energies of God to the exegesis of the Scriptural theophanies as appearances of God-\textit{qua}-ecstatic-God, contra the Augustinian exegesis of the theophanies as created


\textsuperscript{331} This “priority” is merely logical. It does not imply that a reductionist view of what language about personality ultimately means. Nor does it mean that we must first master the language of empirical givenness before that of intersubjective encounter.

\textsuperscript{332} Of course this language is highly metaphorical and is being extended almost to a breaking point.
symbols of divinity. Dionysius affirmed the standard eastern approach in statements such as “God is revelation of himself, through himself.”

Even when there is a created medium of revelation, especially in the Transfiguration, the medium is entirely subsumed as the pure inflection (revelation/theophany) of divinity without thereby ceasing to exist. The medium mediates not as an epistemological go between God and creature, where the creature can then infer or interpret the divine presence and intention in the medium, but as the “place” of the appearance of divinity-qua-ecstatic divinity – the uncreated energies and glory.

It is as bodies with faces, voices, and eyes, inflected now this way and now that way, that we express ourselves to each other. It is with these same bodies that we attend to and recognize the other – yet always only partially and always with labor, risk, self-revelation, etc. What, then, is the nature of the call to recognize the One who is pure inflection?

In order to be more truthful to the language of Dionysius, all of this stress on free and intentional activity of God to characterize the ecstatic processions is better said in the

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333 Dionysius, Divine Names, 592C.


335 “Place” is an important term in all of the relevant traditions. It refers variably to the site of divine revelation on Mt. Sinai, on the heavenly throne, in the Holy of Holies, in the Holy Person, in Christ, in the heart, etc. Golitzin has treated the extensive biblical, liturgical, and mystical resonances of “place” in these traditions in his, “A Testimony to Christianity as Transfiguration: The Macarian Homilies and Orthodox Spirituality,” in S. T. Kimbrough ed., Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality (New York: Crestwood, 2002), 129-156.

336 Hence, in a number of Eastern Orthodox liturgies the often repeated refrain, “Let us attend.” Furthermore, asceticism in ancient Syria and the Egyptian desert had less to do with satisfying divine justice or wrath than with the losing the taste of the worlds so as to develop a taste for the things of God – it is training in attention.
language of the erotic. The longest chapter of *The Divine Names* is devoted to the topic of divine eros. 337 Whereas it is true that God is for us as pure inflection, it is more accurate to say that, for Dionysius, God is for us pure seduction. Recall that for Dionysius the whole divine-human drama is one of reciprocal and erotic ecstasies. 338 The divinity is “beguiled by goodness” so as to erotically pass out of Godself to create, rule, reveal, save, and unite to the creation and creatures. 339 Likewise, the journey into God is an erotic movement out of oneself into union (*henosis*) with the divine ecstasy where one is ecstatically “neither oneself nor another.” 340 It is often claimed that this eroticism is due to Hellenism generally and Neoplatonism especially. While the language of eros is present in Neoplatonism, it is important to point out how radically different Dionysius’s account of eros is from the pagan Neoplatonists. None of the Neoplatonists predicate erotic ecstasy of the Good. 341 While they write about divine processions, they meant by this the procession of all things *from* the Good, rather than, as for Dionysius, where procession can also mean the procession *of* the divine outside of God and into creation by means of the uncreated energies and glory. 342 Furthermore, the philosopher Dionysius is most often criticized as too influenced by, and who he quoted extensively, Proclus,

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338 See the dissertation’s introduction.


340 Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1001A.


explicitly denied eros of the One. But, for Dionysius, creaturely eros is itself brought into existence by the divine eros. It partakes in the divine eros as the creature is lured out of itself by the vision of ecstatic divine energies and as powered by the erotic movement of these energies in providence and grace (“providence saves nature”). The move out of oneself and into union with God is in and through the movement of the return of the divine ecstasy to God.

If Dionysius did not take his account of divine and human eros from Neoplatonism, or at least radically modified what he found in it, then where did it come from? Even though some Jewish thought was more or less reluctant to use the language of eros in reference to God, in the following Hekhalot texts the language of divine and human encounter is portrayed in overtly erotic language.

(§ 163a) You are blessed by me…you who descend unto the merkava, if you tell and declare unto my sons what I do at the time of morning prayer, and at afternoon and evening prayer, each and every day, each and every time that Israel say before me: ‘Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord of Hosts!’ (Isa 6:3)

(§ 163b) Teach them, and say to them: Raise your eyes…when you recite before me: ‘Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord of Hosts!’ For I have no joy in all my worlds that I have created, save at that time, when your eyes are raised towards my eyes, and my eyes are raised towards your eyes, at the time when you recite before me: ‘Holy! Holy! Holy is the Lord of Hosts!’ For at that time the breath issues from your mouths, swirling and ascending before me like a sweet sacrificial aroma.

(§ 164) And bear witness to them of what you see of me: what I do to the countenance of Jacob, your father, which is engraved (חקוקה) by me on the throne of my Glory. For at the time when you recite before me: ‘Holy! Holy! Holy . . .,’ I bend down towards him and caress him, embrace him and kiss him, with my hands


344 Dionysius, Divine Names, 733C.

345 Ascent to the divine throne of revelation, the merkava, is sometimes described as “descending.” There is uncertainty about why this is so, though Morray-Jones argues that ascent to heaven and descent into one’s own soul/body is one and the same journey to the “place” of revelation in transformational mysticism. See his “The Temple Within.”
upon his arms, three times, corresponding to the three times at which you recite the 
kedusha before me..."346

Notice, that the erotic encounter is itself in the context of, and constituted by, praise and
the singing of hymns. Erotic ecstasy and union are occasioned by praise. Exactly the
same is true for Dionysius who writes openly of theurgy and theurgical praise. Indeed,
the Divine Names as a whole is Dionysius’s attempt to “hymn” the ecstatic processions of
divinity which are God erotically lured out of Godself.347

It is doubtful that Dionysius ever read a Jewish text such as the one above.
However, it partakes in a set of traditions which no doubt influenced Dionysius. He was
almost certainly familiar with Origin’s allegorical reading of the Song of Solomon as
about Christ and the church, which was itself indebted to Jewish readings of the Song as
being about the divine Glory and Israel.348 As mentioned in the dissertation’s
introduction, The Song of Solomon was read in the liturgies of synagogues only for
Pentecost. That same day the other texts which were read were of Moses disappearing
into the cloud atop Sinai as he approached the theophany of God (the same is invoked at
the beginning of the Mystical Theology) and Ezekiel’s vision of the Glory enthroned on
the merkava recorded in Ezekiel 1.349 Recall that Morray-Jones has noted how all of these
themes are present in the letter to the Ephesians where the author speaks openly of Christ

346 As quoted by Christopher R. A, Morray-Jones, “The Shiur Koma and the Angelic ‘Youth’” in
Christopher Rowland and Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism

347 Dionysius, Divine Names, 712B.

348 Christopher R. A. Morray-Jones, “The Epistle to the Ephesians,” in Christopher Rowland and
(Boston: Brill, 2009), 581-610.

349 Ibid. Rachel Elior, The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism, translated by
and the church in terms of the love between a husband and wife and where in the first half of the first chapter he links “praise” and “glory” three times.\(^{350}\)

Like Merkava mysticism and much of the New Testament Dionysian apophatic theology is centered on erotic encounter of the ecstatic and uncreated glory and theophany of God. In this experiential mysticism ineffability is not first a matter of “language” failing, but of the seer being bedazzled and unable to find words to adequately express her experience. This differs greatly from the inferential and psychologistic negative theologies about the failures of language to be adequate to the First Principle. Golitzin summarizes well: “Apophasis is not a [philosophical] ‘trampoline.’ It is instead the discovery and declaration of a presence surpassing speech.”\(^{351}\)

*The “Theandric Energy” of Jesus*

Once we understand the *peritrope* of Dionysius’s talk of divine *ousia* and that both the cataphatic and apophatic theology are a response to and about the divine processions, we are able to see the Christo-centrism of his theology. Despite all of Dionysius’s reflection on what should be affirmed and negated of God on account of being the creator in the *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*, it is the case that even his apophatic theology begins and ends with Christological encounter. Furthermore, following Golitzin, we can now see the importance of the *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and *The Epistles* for any sound interpretation of Dionysius’s

\(^{350}\) Morray-Jones, “The Epistle to the Ephesians.”

theology. Most references to Dionysius, or appropriations of his work in contemporary theology, come from and seem only to know *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*. However, even a casual reading of these other texts reveals the centrality of the figure of Jesus for all of Dionysius’s thought. I will not explore all, or even most, of the roles played by Christ in the Dionysian corpus. I will only bring up the texts which show how the encounter with Jesus plays the role for the apophatic theology which it is typically assumed to be played by the logical consequences of God being the first principle of all being. The most important text for my case is *Epistle IV*.\(^{352}\)

[H]e who looks with a *divine vision*, will know *beyond mind*, even the things affirmed respecting the love towards man [*philanthropia*], of Jesus, --things which possess the force of *preeminent negation*. For, even, to speak summarily, he was not man, not as not being man, but as being from men was beyond men, and was above man, having truly become born man, and for the rest, not having done things Divine as God, nor things human as man, but exercising for us a certain new *theandric* energy of God having become man [emphasis added].\(^{353}\)

There are two of things to notice about the revelation of Christ as named in the letter.

First, that which is both “beyond mind” and requiring “preeminent negation” – or the negation of the negation – is encountered through vision of Jesus, not from inference about God as the first principle of creation. Second, this vision of Jesus is of nothing other than his divine-human energy, encountered as love.

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\(^{352}\) Dionysius’s letters were not written to anyone of his actual contemporaries. Rather, he addressed them to figures of the era of his name sake, the Apostle Paul’s convert at the Areopagus. Golitzin argues that the first five epistles continue the work of elaborating the theme of apophatic theology from *The Mystical Theology*. According to Golitzin, the first five epistles form a chiasm, with the climax of the apophatic theology occurring in the “sudden” revelation of Jesus in the third epistle. The fact that epistles three and four are completely devoted to expounding the transcendent revelation of Jesus is further proof of the Christo-centrism of Dionysius’s theology. See Golitzin, *Mystagogy*, 41-49.

The implications of the Areopagite’s choice of words are immense. In his Neoplatonic vocabulary “mind” or “nous” and “being” or “ousia” are correlative. “Being” is that which is known by “mind” and “mind” is that which knows things which “are.” Whatever is beyond mind, therefore, is beyond being. But notice that in Dionysius’s case it is the theandric or divine-human energy of Jesus which is beyond mind and, therefore, beyond being. Similarly, in the third chapter, Dionysius wrote, “and the mystery with respect to [Jesus] has been reached by no word nor mind, but even when spoken, remains unsaid, and when conceived unknown.” This means that it is the philanthropic and theandric energy of Jesus which requires not only negations but the apophatic negation of the negation. The deep “mystery” of God is Jesus’s divine-human love of humanity as seen and experienced.

Going further, despite the fact that Dionysius wrote very little about the death of Jesus, it is clear that for him the philanthropia of Christ is most intensely displayed in his death. And this love is encountered in the liturgy, especially the Eucharist. When these considerations are brought together with those above concerning eros, we can see how fitting it is for Dionysius to quote the beautiful words of his Syrian forerunner, St. Ignatius of Antioch: “My eros is crucified.”

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355 Ibid.

356 Dionysius, *Epistle III*, 1069B. Translation by Parker. In this letter, Dionysius also speaks of the “mystery” of Jesus as his “philanthropy.”

357 Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1000B


359 Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 709B.
Below, I explore *Epistle VIII* where Dionysius focuses his Christocentrism on the divine-human attributes of meekness, humility, mercy, and love. For now, I note Dionysius is not only a Christocentric theologian, but a theologian of the cross. Therefore, the divine-human energies of love, mercy, humility, and meekness are more central to the acknowledgement of divine ineffability than are the attributes of simplicity and/or infinity.\(^{360}\) It is Jesus’s humble and meek love for humanity which is beyond mind (*nous*) and being (*ousia*) and which moves the theologian to negate every affirmation or negation she knows how to make. Dionysius negates even his negations for the same reason Ezekiel and John qualify all of their descriptions as similes (“like” and “as”); they wish to do justice to the world shattering appearance of the humble One crucified “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). The human-shaped theophany – be it called the *kabod* YHWH or the *theandric* energy – is beyond anything we know how to say or unsay *because* these have always been the appearance of the One “gentle and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:29).

But can one really make sense of the negation of the negation or, say, the traditional language of the “coincidence of opposites” in this Christological and experiential apophaticism?\(^{361}\) In contemporary scholarship much focus on the coincidence of opposites has attended to those elements of theology which represent a Christianization of Neoplatonism, and the Areopagite is certainly a central figure in that

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\(^{360}\) See Dionysius, *Epistle VIII*, for how the philanthropy of Jesus is meek and merciful. See below for a discussion of these themes and *Epistle VIII*. Of course, divine infinity and simplicity play crucial roles for Dionysius’s theology.

\(^{361}\) The phrase “coincidence of opposites” was first used by Nicholas of Cusa and does mark a development of certain themes in negative theology. However, the basis of the doctrine in divine simplicity and a Neoplatonic modern of causality are widespread in the tradition prior to Cusa.
tradition. Typically, this idea is cashed out in terms of Neoplatonic theories of causality. In brief, because the reality of an effect pre-exists in the cause in a more eminent manner than in the effect, and because the cause-of-all-must be simple and infinite as cause-of-all, those perfections and characteristics which exist within creatures as finite, separate, and even opposed must pre-exist in the Creator in a manner that is infinite and simple. Though the names of separate and opposing perfections and attributes mean different things than each other, even when naming their subsisting in God, they do refer to one and the same utterly united reality in God. How that is, what the unity and coincidence of opposites in the Source of all is is unknown to us.

Such a view is significant and important, but for Dionysius, it makes sense only as enfolded within a prior Christological and experiential Transformational Mysticism. After all, the creation of the world was revealed to Moses in the midst of a theophany of the Glory in which Moses’s own face was made like unto the Glory (thus Transformational Mysticism). It is precisely this event which occupies the opening lines of *The Mystical Theology* before it goes on to praise the “Cause of all” as beyond-being and requiring apophatic negation. For the New Testament and most of the Patristics, including Dionysius, the content of Moses’s vision in which he learned of creation and was deified was nothing other than Jesus, the “light of the Father.”362 Indeed, we are close to the heart of the Christological *Merkava* mysticisms of the New Testament by insisting that the coincidence of opposites which defeats the human attempt of comprehension is first the revelation/apocalypse of ultimate reality, of the Creator of all worlds, in and as a property-less Jewish man crushed and cast aside as garbage by the

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362 Dionysius, *Celestial Hierarchy*, 121A.
powers.363 The highest, indeed the one off the scale of high and low, is manifest in the lowest class of a subjugated people.364 Alongside debates about whether or not the first word in acknowledging divine ineffability is simplicity or infinity, I submit that we listen to the apostles, prophets, and mystics and recognize that first and foremost it is the manifestation of the crucified Glory, the *humility* of God, which resists (and yet elicits) our thoughts and words in praise.

We may pursue the Christological coincidence of opposites further by attending to Dionysius’s stated master, Paul the Apostle. The coincidence of opposites is first acknowledged in Christological encounter by the manner in which the divine body of the *kabod YHWH* not only makes peace between ethnic groups, social classes, and genders, but is itself the coincidence of Jew and Greek, slave and free, female and male (Galatians 3:28). Segal has shown how this coincidence of opposites for Paul, especially that of the genders, is rooted in a Jewish matrix of discourse using the language of “glory,” “body,” “likeness,” “image,” “Adam,” etc. wherein the ambiguous Hebrew language of Genesis 1:26-28 is taken to mean that the original Adam, the likeness of God and manifestation of the Glory, is male and female – hermaphroditic.365 The ineffable coincidence of opposites is found in Christ because he is the eternal body/Image/Glory of God in which all of creation is contained in peace. The vision or apocalypse of this divine body in which opposites peacefully coincide also occasions the transformation and incorporation into

363 On the coincidence of opposites, and the overcoming of duality, in the vision and practice of Pauline Christianity in Galatians 3, see Alan Segal, “Paul’s ‘Soma Pneumatikon’ and the Worship of Jesus” Carey Newman, James Davila, and Gladys S. Lewis eds., *The Jewish Roots of Christological Monotheism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 258-276


365 Ibid., 266.
the body of unity and peace. Neoplatonic inferences about the First Principle pre-containing all of its effects in a preeminent manner may be a helpful way of elaborating upon this vision, but, cut off from its roots in Jewish Transformational Mysticism, it is bodiless and bloodless.

The Humble Gaze

This constellation of ideas forming the apex of Dionysius’s apophatic theology bring us, once again, into close proximity with the Christological Merkava mysticisms of the New Testament – especially the letter to the Ephesians and Revelation. All three texts are concerned with the revelation of the transcendent and uncreated and anthropomorphic theophany. All three construe one’s relation to this revelation as erotic. And, finally, all three not only identify the enthroned Glory – beyond being, beyond mind, beyond words – with Christ, but explicitly with the crucified Jesus. The sheer inflection and pure seduction of God are seen and unseen in the crucified Lord of Glory.

The similarities between Dionysius’s mystical apophaticism and the throne vision mysticisms of the New Testament go beyond the parallels already named. The Dionysian corpus itself contains a throne vision. Epistle VIII is the one of the longest of Dionysius’s letters and, and for my purposes, one of the most important. In the letter, Dionysius reports a throne vision by a Bishop named Carpus, and does so in the course of praising the meekness and mercy of God and the correlative meekness and mercy of those who see God. In this section, therefore, I consider Epistle VIII alongside one of the most overt instances of Merkava mysticism in the New Testament, St. John’s Revelation.

In Epistle VIII Dionysius is addressing a monk named Demophilus over an incident in which the monk overstepped his bounds in reproving a priest for offering the
Eucharist to a notorious sinner. There is no need to explore the finer points of the incident or Dionysius’s historical reasons for constructing this letter. What is relevant is the manner in which Dionysius goes about praising various Biblical visionaries for their combination of meekness, mercy, and love even towards their enemies. Moses was “deemed more fit for vision of God than all the prophets” on account of his great meekness.” Indeed, he is praised for his “preeminent imitation of the Good. For he was very meek…” David is praised as the “father of God,” “friend of God,” and one “after God’s own heart” because of his care for even his enemies and because he gave a “generous injunction…to care for even one’s own enemy’s beasts of burden.” Dionysius goes on to praise Job’s meekness and Joseph’s refusal of seeking revenge on his brothers. In short, the meek may be granted a vision of the Meek One whereby they are perfected in their meekness.

Furthermore, Dionysius offers Christological corrective to any hermeneutic which justifies violent or judgmental religious zeal, vengeance, or retributive justice. He anticipates that Demophilus may defend his actions by citing the violence of Phineas, who is the only person in the Old Testament other than Abraham who was said to be “justified,” or by way of Elijah’s slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Having already cited

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366 Golitzin, Mystagogy, 8-9.
367 Dionysius, Epistle VIII, 1085 A. translated by Luibheid.
368 Ibid.
369 Ibid.
370 Ibid., 1085C
371 Ibid.
Christ’s displeasure with the disciples’ desire to judge the Samaritans “without mercy” for rejecting him, Dionysius goes on to say.

‘[Jesus] shall not strive nor cry, and is himself meek, and himself propitiatory for our sins’ so that we will not approve your unenviable attacks, not if you allege a thousand times your Phineas and your Elias. For, when the Lord Jesus heard these things, he was displeased with the disciples, who at that time lacked the meek and good spirit. For, even our most divine preceptor teaches in meekness those who opposed themselves to the teaching of Almighty God. For, we must teach, not avenge ourselves upon, the ignorant, as we do not punish the blind but lead them by the hand.\(^{372}\)

In short, the Scriptures exist within the economy of mystagogy which has its end in the instruction of *theomimesis* (imitation of God) and *theosis*. For Dionysius, the end of the Christian life is no mere copying of the virtues of Christ, but incorporation into the human-shaped theophany of God, the *theandric* energy of Jesus. Any reading, teaching, or obeying of Scripture, therefore, which makes of one anything other than gentle, meek, merciful, and loving is to be rejected. In the crucified Christ, God has been revealed to be meek, merciful, and loving from all eternity. Hence, in the *Transformational* Mysticism of Dionysius, the meek, merciful, and loving see God and those who see God are perfected in meekness, mercy, and love (Matthew 5:8).

Significantly, this letter, which has the meekness of God and those who see God at its core, is the same letter in which Dionysius reports a *Merkava* vision. Indeed, the throne-vision is itself the climax of his argumentative case for the practice of meekness in imitation of God. The subject of the vision is the Bishop Carpus. He is reported to be a holy man who never celebrated the mysteries without first having a divine vision. However, a beloved and recent convert of his had apparently left the church under the

\(^{372}\) Ibid., 1096C
influence of another man. One night Carpus went to sleep in a foul mood over the whole affair. He rose in the middle of the night to pray. Being frustrated at the convert and the one who led him astray, Carpus “besought almighty God, by some stroke of lightening, suddenly, without mercy, to cut short the lives of them both.”\(^\text{373}\) At that moment, “suddenly,”\(^\text{374}\) Carpus saw his home rip in two and above was a vision of Christ and the angels, but below him were the two men perilously close to falling off a ledge and being dragged by serpents into a chasm. Carpus delighted in the vision of the men and even tried to aid the serpents in getting them to fall. When he did not succeed in this endeavor he “was irritated and cursed.”\(^\text{375}\)

Dionysius carefully describes the nature of Carpus’s attention, first on the heavenly vision of Jesus, then on the two falling into the chasm, and then again on Christ above: “And Carpus said, that he himself was glad whilst looking below, and that he was forgetful of the things above.”\(^\text{376}\) In order for Carpus to look at another human being in judgment and with zeal for vengeance he must “look below” the vision of Christ, and he was not even able to “remember” the heavenly vision while desiring judgment and trying to mete it out. His failures in meekness, mercy, and love rendered him ignorant of the Kingdom of God appearing above him.

But that was not the end of the vision.

And, when with difficulty he raised himself, he saw heaven again, as he saw it before, and Jesus, moved with pity at what was taking place, standing up from his super-celestial throne, and descending to them, and stretching a helping hand and

\(^{373}\) Ibid., 1100A.

\(^{374}\) On the significance of the “sudden” see Golitzin, Mystagogy, 41-49.

\(^{375}\) Dionysius, Epistle VIII, 1100C.

\(^{376}\) Ibid.
the angels, co-operating with him, taking hold of the two men, one from one place and another from another, and the Lord Jesus said to Carpus, whilst his hand was yet extended, “Strike against me in future, for I am ready, even again, to suffer for the salvation of men... But see whether it is well for thee to exchange the dwelling in the chasm, with the serpents, for that with God, and the good philanthropic angels.”

There are a number of things to say about how Christ appears in the vision. First, we see that visions of heaven are, as with Jewish Transformational Mysticism, typically visions of the enthroned Glory. Second, the meek and philanthropic character which Christ showed in his earthly incarnation is not cast off to assume some position of grandeur and judgment in heaven. Rather, from all eternity, he is the enthroned Image and Glory of God because he is ever the meek and humble who “descends” even to his enemies to “run to them, and serve them,” and “make excuses for them,” and “embrace their entire selves and kiss them.”

It is the “sudden” vision of this One on the divine throne which makes of Dionysius’s theology an apophatic theology. That the enthroned Creator of all being is the humble one who makes excuses for his enemies is more than we can comprehend. Recall that in the Epistle IV it was just this “philanthropy” which Dionysius praises as requiring “preeminent denial.” This theandric energy of Jesus is beyond being and mind, not because its formal features – say simplicity and/or infinity - cannot square with the conditions of the possibility of thought, but because the encounter with such humility,

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377 Ibid. The angels as examples and teachers in the way of theomimesis is important in Dionysian theology, but there is no space to develop it here. The philanthropy of Christ is taught and mediated by the philanthropy of angels. Hence, in theosis one becomes not only God-like but angel-like. This is tied to how the worship of the church is mystically united to the worship of the angels in heaven.

378 Ibid., 1088A.

379 Ibid.
meekness, and love outstrips all of our cognitive, moral, and imaginative abilities – even as it elicits their eternal growth into this same energy.\(^{380}\) Before such humility and mercy we are speechless. And it is into Christ’s energy of meek *philanthropy* that Carpus is invited to participate.

Finally, Jesus identifies with not only the one who falls away from the faith and the church, but even with the one who actively pulls people from the truth: “Strike against me…”\(^{381}\) Carpus loses sight and even remembrance of God in Christ in his desire for justice and vengeance for those who oppose the Gospel. But, more than that, in the end of the vision Christ invites Carpus to see in those who fall away, and even in the “enemy” of the church, Jesus himself – the revelation of the God-beyond-being. If in striking and judging these men Carpus is striking and judging Christ, then in his love for them he is loving Christ. Unless and until Carpus can perceive God – the lure of the hiddenness of God - in the face of his antagonists he cannot see the kingdom of God. So, in the end, it is less that Carpus is transformed because he has seen Christ, but because he comes to perceives that the meek Jesus has seen him in his desires and actions towards these two men. Transformation before the gaze of the Meek One enthroned in heaven brings us to St. John’s Revelation.

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\(^{380}\) For a philosophical defense of the idea that we may undergo experiences for which all of the words we use to describe them are felt to be too weak to say what we feel we want to express, see Cora Diamond, “The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy,” in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, Stanley Cavell et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 98-116. Diamond’s account differs from Jean-Luc Marion’s “saturated phenomenon” in that it is not a philosophical theory about the formal conditions of experiences which may so overwhelm one’s ability to comprehend and describe. Marion’s philosophy is an invocations of the limits of thought, sense, or experience, in order to liberate the *phenomena* from the subject. It is a philosophically determined account of “what we cannot do.” Diamond does not invoke any idea of the limits of thought or sense. She simply describes how it is that we may undergo experiences for which we find there is nothing we know how to say which will do it justice.

\(^{381}\) Dionysius, *Epistle VIII*, 1100D.
Revelation is a text that revolves entirely around visions of the *merkava*. As shown in the introduction, the ineffability of God is manifest in the book by the appearance of Christ, in the midst of praise, on the heavenly throne. Furthermore, in the light of the scholarship summarized in the dissertation’s introduction, especially in light of the Jewish correlation of the liturgy of heaven and the temple, it is not hard to see in Revelation a window into the heavenly liturgy which is also a Eucharistic liturgy. Just as the heavenly divine throne was understood by ancient Jews to be manifest in the holy of holies in the temple (Psalm 11:4), so in Revelation the throne is manifest on the Eucharistic altar. In that sense it is like Dionysius’s *Epistle VIII* and his whole theology. However, in another sense, it seems that Revelation is very different than Dionysius’s letter. Is not John’s vision brimming with the desire for vengeance?

David Barr has convincingly argued that many of the violent and vengeful themes of ancient apocalyptic literature and commentary are subverted in Revelation. He mentions three figures of violence and how they are turned upside down in the text. I will work backward from the last in the text to the first because that will bring us to the Christological *Merkava* vision.

In the nineteenth chapter Christ appears as the heavenly or cosmic divine warrior who arrives on the scene to wage the final eschatological battle. This figure is not unknown in other apocalyptic literature. The divine warrior typically arrives and slays the

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383 Interestingly, the portion of the sanctuary set aside for the Eucharist Dionysius refers to as the “holy of holies” in Epistle VIII.

enemies of both God and Israel. However, in Revelation, Christ shows up as the divine warrior armed only with the sword coming out of his mouth (truth) and he is already covered in blood, his own. He is said to “tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God almighty (Revelation 19:15).” Barr points out that the wine press of wrath has already appeared in 14:19-20 and that it was located “outside the city” which was an ancient Christian way of speaking of the death of Jesus who was crucified “outside the city.”

In other words, the divine warrior, his weapons, and his wrath are nothing other than Christ’s own truth and suffering. The cosmic warrior overcomes in a way no different than the Jesus of the Gospels, by his cross.

Second, there is the war in heaven between Michael and Satan (Revelation 12:7-9). In the war Satan is cast down from heaven to earth. The war in heaven is also known in ancient literature and it was symbolic of real or hoped for wars. One would expect the war against Satan in heaven to have an earthly corollary of the godly warring against and destroying their enemies. But in Revelation, the earthly corollary to Michael’s war and victory is nothing other than the martyrs and their martyrdom (Rev. 12:10-11). Just as the divine warrior is armed with nothing but the witness to the truth and his suffering, so the people of God overcome the world and Satan by partaking in the same.

Finally, there is the figure of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. I end on this figure not only because it brings us to a throne vision, but because it is what makes sense of the two other reversals of apocalyptic expectation and desire.

The appearance of the Lion is especially important because at the end of chapter three Christ promised “To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Chapter four opens with a visionary journey into the throne room of heaven. Anticipation builds throughout the chapter as the reader desires to see the Great Glory revealed upon the throne. However, the throne and throne-room are described, but not the one on the throne. Then, in chapter five, it is announced that the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is mighty enough to “open the scroll” and so reveal the mystery upon the throne. In the context of ancient apocalyptic texts one would expect the Lion to do what lions do, kills. But when the Lion appears, he is the “a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth” (Rev. 5:6).

The revelation of the enthroned kabod YHWH is nothing other than the slain Lamb. Who and what God is revealed to be on the eternal heavenly throne is humble and meek; crucified. The conquering by the divine warrior and by Michael and the martyrs are what they are because from all eternity God is the prince of martyrs who conquers in the humility of his unarmed truth. So the throne-vision of Revelation and Dionysius’s Epistle VIII are not so different. Each subverts the judgment and violence of religious zeal and vengeance by a Merkava vision of Jesus, even as that same vision displays the ineffable transcendence of God. Recall that the climax of the revelation of the Slain Lamb results in all of heaven falling silent (Rev. 5:6, 8:1).

But why is the slain Lamb covered in eyes? It is worth considering how in Transformational Mysticism the kabod YHWH is so often called the “Face” or the
“Body” of God. Faces and bodies are not only things which we see, but the kinds of things that see and are aware of us. Perhaps this is why the Lamb appears as covered in eyes. As much as the slain Lamb is there to be contemplated, he appears as one whose gaze is impossible to evade. John says of the seven eyes that they are “sent out to all of the earth.” So what is manifest is not simply the Crucified as the Glory, but the manifestation of the Glory in finding oneself looked upon by the Crucified. But what does the “Slaughtered Lamb” refer to exactly? These words refer to the executed body of Jesus of Nazareth, its presence on the Eucharistic table, and perhaps to the “least of these” with whom Christ identified in Matthew 25. In short, Revelation presents the world shattering apocalypse of the Glory of God, in the experience of finding oneself looked upon by God in and as the crucified body of Jesus, in its presence on the Eucharistic table, in the least, and – as Carpus’s learned - even in one’s enemy.\(^{386}\)

Just as Carpus is transformed in the visionary encounter with the meek Jesus, and made to see that he cannot enjoy the fullness of the Kingdom without seeing in even his enemies the regard of God, so in Revelation one cannot see aright until one has found oneself caught in the gaze of God in the many loci of the revelation of the crucified Jesus. It is this revelation which brings all of heaven to silence and forces the theologian to negate even in her negations. Extending my points from above concerning the ineffability of the meek Jesus, we could say that it is not merely the meekness of God which overwhelms us, but finding that God looks upon us in the meek and the humble of the

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earth: “God chose what is low and despised in the world, things which are not, to reduce to nothing things which are” (1 Cor. 1:28).

In short, one lesson to be learned from the throne visions of Dionysius’s *Epistle VIII* and Revelation is that unless and until one can see the erotic draw of divine ineffability looking at oneself in the hiddenness of the Eucharist, the neighbor, the least, and the enemy one will not see the transcendent hiddenness of God. Unless and until the strangeness of the stranger, the refugee, the outcast, and the enemy is understood not as something threatening and repulsive, but as something to be approached in meekness, humility, and mercy the transcendence of God will not appear to us. The mystery of God is not known and unknown by theories and arguments, but is experientially encountered in the liturgy and the looks of any and all human beings. If the eschatological vision of the *kabod YHWH* is one and the same as the “fullness of Him who fills all and all”—the new humanity – then perhaps this is why the ammas and abbas of the desert insisted that a chief goal of asceticism is to be one who learns to see all others as gods and as one: “Blessed is he who regards every human as God, after God…”387 “An elder said, ‘I have spent twenty years fighting to all human beings as only one.”388

Recall from the last chapter that before the expressive face and body of another we are called not to epistemological models of knowledge but to knowledge-as-acknowledgement. We have mastered the concept of pain less by when we are able to intellectually tally an instance of pain, than by when we comfort the one who winces. The

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moral and existential difficulties with this knowledge are manifold. The drama of encounter is fraught with the risks of isolation, exposure, self-revelation, etc., even as it is the place where we may truly come to know another or come to know that another is an inviting mystery to us. When one encounters another in pain we are ineluctably revealed as compassionate, or cold, or attentive, etc. Consider, then, the difficulty of coming to acknowledge and recognize the face and body of God. I noted in the last chapter that one of the difficulties of encountering another may be the sheer floodtide of revelation pouring forth from her gaze. How much more are these dynamics amplified in the gaze the One who is sheer and infinite inflection, especially when this infinite inflection comes ever from the look of the Crucified? Before this One I am utterly exposed, revealed, and called to total conversion. Without humility and meekness one cannot withstand the infinite regard of God. Both the ineffability of apophatic theology and the evasions of modern negative theology may be explained in the light of the revelation of the Crucified as the Face of God.\(^{389}\)

I conclude that Dionysian theology, understood as continuing the tradition of *Merkava* Mysticism in the New Testament, uncovers the ineffability and transcendence of God in the humble and humbling gaze of God in and as the Crucified Jesus. Furthermore, both the incomprehensibility of the revelation of God and the strong desire to evade this revelation in the practice of some types of negative theology are due to the particularity of this revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. I turn now to the temptations to

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\(^{389}\) See Marion, “The Icon or the Endless Hermeneutic,” and Manoussakis, *God after Metaphysics*. The work not done by Marion and Manussakis or myself, and which the dissertation suggests should be done, is not merely a phenomenology of the gaze, the icon, or the *prosopon* as such, but of the meek and the crucified. In other words, we need a phenomenology of the specificity of the gaze of God in Christ which possibilizes Christian existence and transformation.
evasion in negative theology. In short, the kind of beings who strongly desire to hide from the gaze of others will also be tempted to evade the pure inflection (the seven eyes) of the divine gaze in and as the Crucified.

**Negative Theology and Evading the Gaze**

I need look no further than my own heart and theological practice to illustrate these claims. The following points, as confessions and diagnoses of temptations, therefore, are necessarily written in first person perspective.

*Pride*

Why do I find so attractive the very negative theology I critique, which is to say as exercised as an inference from the doctrine of creation to the necessary ineffability of the Creator? Why have I spent far more time as a researcher and teacher going over and over these positions and arguments than considering what it would mean to meet the gaze of the Crucified in the many loci of his appearing? I take it to be a matter of my own pride and of the play between pride and humiliation in certain forms of theologizing which account for my own evasions.

Consider the mix of pride and humiliation in certain ways of inheriting negative theology as an inferential activity concluding to the necessary transcendence of God. According to this view, Divine sovereignty and being humiliate the human by being a limit and limitation of what she can comprehend. God forever stands before the human mind as the boundary, the line which cannot be crossed, and so as the one who exposes
human finitude as lack. For Dionysius, in contrast, apophatic theology is part of the life or praise which may expand ever more into the infinite life of God.

Why then is this mode of theologizing attractive? Why do I seek to prove my own lack? I am tempted to become a negative theologian in this mode because to do so, paradoxically, is to overcome the peculiarly human humiliation of the mind and occupy a superhuman perspective on thought. For, whoever can think the limits of human thought can think beyond those limits. Implicit in the claim to have delimited human thought is the claim that one’s thinking is beyond the limit and is superhuman. Although, as I have shown, this form of words is ultimately empty, they are attractive to me in a way that corresponds to my own pride. The pride of the superhuman perspective creates a god in its own image which humiliates the finitude of mere human judgment. The transcendent god may become a projection of one’s own pride and the correlative desire for the humiliation of others.\(^{390}\)

How different is this from the vision of Christian Merkava mysticism in the New Testament and Dionysian mystical theology? Instead of the god who transcends humanity in the manner of his humiliating the human mind, there is the encounter with the humble and humbling One who withholds nothing either in the meekness of the divine gaze upon us and or in the transformation given to us. An apophatic theology of humble to humble is a theology of deification. God does not humiliate human thought by being a limit and limitation, but the humility of God is hospitable and shares all that it is. Why is it tempting to look away from a vision of infinite growth into the life God and towards the

\(^{390}\) I am not saying that anyone who so theologizes must or does do so out of such desires. However, I am claiming that such desires are reasons I have found this empty path almost irresistibly attractive.
mixture of pride and humiliation? Again, the answer, for me, is pride. The prideful desire to be superhuman by delimiting human thought as such cannot bear the humbling gaze of the Crucified Lord of Glory. Having one’s pride dismantled before the Humble and Meek One sounds like judgment to the mind mired in pride, even if it is blessing and life.

_Fear and Grasping_

Even after understanding the emptiness of many forms of negative theology, and seeing that it is my own pride which turns me away from the many eyes of the Crucified, I still find myself profoundly tempted to find a way to take hold of the transcendence of God with the hardness of a logical must. I want to see that there is that which necessarily exceeds the limits of human thought the same way I see that it is logically impossible to square the circle. Why? Fear. Like many Christians living in a milieu of pervasive secularism, I fear that my faith is in vain, and that divine transcendence of our world is a mere chimera. I fear that attending to the Crucified and his gaze upon me in the Eucharist, in the least of these, in prayer and praise, etc. will not deliver what I want. The humility of the Meek One seems a risky way of seeking to satisfy the desire for transcendence and so I turn to the certainties of logic and thrill of philosophical speculation. Logic and philosophy demand less of me – they do not humble me and do not make a claim on my loves and possessions – even as they promise certainty. Conversely, the Crucified appears weak and dead and asks for conversion.

One of the things I am arguing is that the temptations which we confront in the normal run of life also appear in the act of theologizing. In other words, those vicious habits by which I evade the gaze of others each day, especially those in whom I might encounter the gaze of the Crucified, manifest themselves in my scholarship. I theologize
like I negotiate the social geography of our cities: Fearfully avoiding the Crucified spaces and despairing of transcendence, I cling to fantasies which demand little, promise much, and deliver emptiness to be consumed. Fear and anxiety haunt theology just as they fragment home solidarity.

_Sham and Hiding_

Cavell has rightly written, “shame is the specific discomfort produced by the sense of being looked at, the avoidance of the sight of others is the reflex it produces…under shame what must be covered up is not your deed, but yourself.” We are the kind of beings who desperately desire to close our eyes to others and close their eyes to us. In the third chapter I explored why this is the case: the obligations the look of others place on us, the risk of exposure and isolation, the pain of self-revelation, etc. These characteristics of encounter, which produce the desire to hide in shame, are particularly strong when one considers God, especially the crucified God. If it is exposure and responsibility in the look of another which humans seek to evade, how much more is this the case when the infinity of divine energy streams towards us in the look of the one hanging on the cross? Exposure, self-revelation, and the call to conversion have no end.

If it is true to say that we live much of our lives evading the look of others and especially avoiding the look of God in Christ and his appearances in the world, then it is

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391 Stanley Cavell, _Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays_, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 278.

392 Hence, psychologism is not only a philosophical confusion, but a problem for Christian mysticism and eschatology. The endless journey into the life of God makes no sense if the human mind has hard limits and limitations.
also true of the activity of theology. I have pursued negative theology, sought the intellectual *grasp* of divine transcendence, apart from the Face of God, for all of the reasons named in the above paragraphs. In short, theologizing has been an occasion for me to hide from the regard of God in the looks of the Crucified and his appearances. Theology, especially negative theology, therefore, may be practiced as a reflex of shame.

*Negative Theology in the Garden*

In the traditions of Jewish and Christian Transformational Mysticism the first appearing of the Great Glory is in the Garden of Eden. In other words, for Christians, the first appearance of the humble and meek One, “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), is in the temple of the garden. In that place, primordial humanity was overcome with the very temptations haunting the practice of theology as I have named them. The first pair gave in to pride, the temptation to take hold of divinity by illicit and apparently certain means, and their fear drove them to hide in shame from the gaze of God. At this point in my argument, both revelation and modern American philosophy have converged. Humans are primordially the kind of beings who are tempted to hide from the gaze of others, whether the other be God or human. The Scriptures teach this in Adam and Eve as so does Cavell’s analysis of the existential roots of skepticism. The primordial temptations confronting humans do not disappear when one writes or teaches theology. On the contrary, if the goal is to place us before the hyperbolic gaze of God in the Crucified, these temptations are only heightened in acts of theologizing. Theology may either be complicit with the evasion of the others or it may help make us people of humility who stand before the slain Lamb’s many eyes “sent out into all of the earth” (Rev. 5:6).
Conclusion

Given Stanley Cavell’s existential genealogy of skepticism, and how I have used it to diagnose the roots of temptations haunting contemporary negative theology, it is worth returning to a climactic moment in his monumental *The Claim of Reason*:

Accordingly, the failure of the fantasy [of private languages] signifies; that there is no assignable end to the depth of us to which language reaches; that nevertheless there is no end to our separateness. We are endlessly separate...The idea of privacy expressed in the fantasy of a private language fails to express how private we are, metaphysically and practically.393

In the course of the dissertation I have argued that a theologically attentive and philosophically coherent apophatic theology, one which I find in Dionysius’s writings, as it parallels the *Merkava* mysticisms of the Scriptures, may be paraphrased as follows: The failure of the fantasy of the logical impossibility of describing the divine essence signifies that there is no assignable end to the depth of divinity which human naming reaches; that nevertheless there is no end to the depth of divine mystery. The idea of mystery expressed in a philosophical theology of the divine essence and the essential limitations of language fails to express how mysterious God is in the Christological revelation, and the concrete manner in which the Crucified Lord of Glory loosens our grip on our concepts and brings us to the end of all words. It may appear that I am taking away something deep, insight into divinity via the necessary failure of language to describe the essence of God, but I am claiming that Dionysius and the Scriptures point us to the concrete ways humans fall silent before the Face of God.

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The evasions we are drawn to before the look of other human beings, and when pondering their mysteriousness and hiddenness from us, are heightened before the glorious divine-human theophany. Likewise, pride lurks with greater subtlety and more seductive false promises in negative theology than in philosophy. But, the promise of deliverance is likewise greater. If we are truly the kinds of beings who are “condemned to expression, to meaning” and yet constantly failing fully to acknowledge others, then Christological Transformational Mysticism may succeed at naming human salvation.

If our endemic failures to fully acknowledge the other are truly failures of love, as Cavell has argued, even as our lives as human are constituted by loving acknowledgement, then our salvation must come by means humility and meekness. For, the kind of love that makes us attentive to the other and her expressive and fragile body and soul is made possible only by meekness and humility. Consider, again, the reflections on the relationship between meekness, love, and truth by Dumitru Stăniloae:

By meekness we approach love, which stands at the very top of the virtues. If love is the opposite of egotism, manifested by the passions, by meekness we reach the doorstep of love. The meek person has removed from himself all the causes which maintain his separation from his neighbors. . . [H]umility, which seems to lower us, carries us up to the highest steps, and takes its place as the virtue immediately before dispassion and love. If pride as egotism is the source of all passions, humility is the concentration of all virtues. . . If pride deforms judgment and darkens the right contemplation of reality, humility reestablishes the proper view of things.

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394 Ibid., 357.

395 See Cavell, “The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear,” in Must We Mean What We Say?, 267-353.

396 Dumitru Stăniloae, Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar, translated by Archimandrite Jerome (Newville) and Otilia Kloos, with a foreword by Alexander Golubov. (South Canaan: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2003), 180. For the manner in which Transformational Mysticism opens up the possibility to see beyond Cavell’s “endless separation” see the dissertation’s conclusion.
Without meekness and humility our capacity to attend to others truly is impossible. The love that attends faithfully to the other, her expressions and hiddenness, is impossible with the egotism of pride which reorders everything around the self. If what Cavell and Stăniloae say is true, then the figure of Jesus, the figure of the meek and humble divinity-humanity, is a profound hope for us.

If the life of God is infinite, loving, meek, and humble gaze, and that gaze can incorporate the one looked upon into the life of God, then, if nothing else, we have established that the salvation described by apophatic theology as Transformational Mysticism is most fitting for the kinds of beings we are. Consider the opening sermon of the Syrian predecessor of Dionysius, Pseudo-Macarius, in his famous Fifty Homilies.397 The sermon is a commentary on the Scriptural heart of Merkava mysticism, Ezekiel 1. In but a few words Macarius brings together all of the themes of Transformational Mysticism and the call to attention to the Other/other.

For the prophet was viewing the mystery of the human soul that would receive its Lord and would become his throne of glory. For the soul that is deemed to be judged worthy...[to become] his throne...becomes all light, all face, all eye...For that soul is in every part on all sides facing forward...Thus the soul is completely illumined with the unspeakable beauty of the glory of the light of the face of Christ...It is privileged to be the throne of God, all eye, all light, all face, all glory...398 To see the enthroned Glory is to become part of the merkava revelation itself and even to become Glory. Being the throne and the Glory is characterized as facing forward on all sides and being “all eye.” In other words, by grace and ascetic struggle one learns of the

397 On Macarius’s influence over Dionysius, see Golitzin, Et Introibo, 373-385.

attention by which one may meet the gaze of Christ in the many loci of his appearing. To see the Meek One and to be perfected in meekness by catching his gaze, is nothing other than perfection for the lives of those who are “condemned to expression.”

Finally, I would like to note where my argument began and where it has ended. I began with the negative theology born of Descartes’s zeal for divine sovereignty – completely abstracted from the person of Christ - which limits and humiliates the human mind. Descartes’s zeal led to confusions of logic as well as both philosophical and theological fantasies of transcendence. The argument has come full circle and I have returned to an apophatic theology of the power of God. However, by “power” of God, I do not mean some abstract ability to do whatever one wills. No, by divine “power” I mean one of the names for the eternal Glory of God. With St. Paul “we proclaim Christ crucified…Christ the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:23-24).

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399 Cavell, The Claim of Reason, xv.
CHAPTER V
IDOLATROUS UNION: *HENOSIS* BEYOND IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE

For I have no joy in all my worlds that I have created, save at that time, when your eyes are raised towards my eyes, and my eyes are raised towards your eyes…

Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit and is unable to speak…have pity on *us* (Mark 9:17, 21)!

One may worry that the dissertation’s argument is anti-intellectual. Have I not argued that sophisticated philosophical negative theologies are hopelessly equivocal and trade in fundamental human temptations of evasion? Have I left only the life of prayer, ascetical struggle, and vision? It is true, the burden of the dissertation’s main argument has been deconstructive, seeking to uncover theological evasions of Christ – and the concrete *loci* of his appearance/revelation – and to make these evasions less tempting. In order to show that this criticism is not the whole story, I conclude by suggesting one aspect of the intellectual promise this paradigm offers for constructive and philosophical theology. I argue that there are moments of human intimacy that cannot be made sense of by means of philosophies of “separation” or “otherness” or “difference,” but which can

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be by means of theologies of “animate idols,” “glorification,” and “union” from Jewish and Christian Transformational Mysticism.

By philosophy of separation I mean Stanley Cavell’s philosophy as described in the third chapter where our world is transcendentally constituted by “endless separation” and the fear of death. The philosophy of otherness is Emmanuel Levinas’s, as also mentioned in the third chapter, and the subsequent rise of “difference” and “distance” in the work of figures like Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida. 401 Concerning “distance” and “difference” in Marion and Derrida, Levinas’s philosophy of the other is the root and abiding influence. Furthermore, all four philosophers work with and are influenced by theological and religious traditions. Levinas’s philosophy, clearly marked by its relationship to traditions of rabbinic Judaism, and its influence over Marion’s Christian and apophatic philosophy and theology is especially relevant to the dissertation in general and the conclusion in particular.

Although the conclusion will work with the vocabulary from Cavell’s philosophy, I need to say a few things about the philosophies and theologies of Levinas and Marion in order to situate my argument theologically, philosophically, and historically. Levinas’s and Marion’s projects are characterized by two relevant points. First, although neither derives divine transcendence by inferences from the doctrine of creation, but from the experience of seeing and being seen by the other, both situate the resistance to idolatry

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close to the heart of apophaticism. Brilliant and fruitful as these analyses are, particular aspects the anti-idolatrous apophaticism of the other often sounds very close to the view Cavell shows to be empty (not false): The idea of the other’s experiences being something I can never have (or directly perceive) and so the picture of the other’s hiddenness residing in the fact that I am non-contingently sealed outside of her experience. Furthermore, Marion has articulated his celebrated notion of the “saturated phenomena” – experiences so rich in intuitive input that the subject’s categorically constituted intentional horizon cannot comprehend them – by means of a philosophical determination of what thought cannot do and experience cannot be. In short, in some

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402 Levinas’s monotheism is a strict monotheism for whom both incarnation and theosis are impossible, and there appears to be little reflection on how Marion’s Catholic thought relates to Levinas on this point. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961), 79. Levinas’s early claims about how the human other does not and cannot incarnate God is, tellingly, in the chapter of *Totality and Infinity* entitled “Separation and Discourse” where he articulates views on “separation” and language which are strikingly similar to that of Cavell.

403 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), xv. See Marion’s use of Michel Henry’s account of “flesh” in the *In Excess* where he writes of the “flesh” as “absolved of all relation” and about how this notion figures in his account of the “icon” as saturated phenomenon. Furthermore, he wrote, “Intuition presents flesh well and truly, nevertheless, but precisely as physical body – it makes me see what I can feel. As for what feels (and feels itself feeling), no intuition can make it seen to any look. . . The look of the other person remains unable to be looked at.” Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, translated by Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 114-115.

404 See Marion, *In Excess*. I am purposefully not offering an alternative theory or philosophical account to Marion’s “saturated phenomena.” My objections are not that his account is wrong, but that it is a philosophical determination of what we cannot do or think or experience at all. I wish, rather, to simply acknowledge that human beings are often rendered speechless before and within certain experiences and unable to comprehend or make sense of them. The introduction of a philosophical accounting of where and how one passes beyond the ability to make sense is problematic both philosophically and eschatologically/mystically. First, an account of what knowledge or thought or experience cannot be is inevitably a reintroduction of the equivocations of the “limits of thought” and psychologism. Second, a philosophical determination of such limits is not consistent with an eschatology of the eternal growth into the life of God.
aspects of his arguments about the transcendence of phenomena, including of revelation, it appears that psychologism has re-emerged.

I do not pretend that the above paragraph is an argument suitable to establish the presence of problems in Marion’s phenomenology and theology or even proof that he is guilty of psychologism. Rather, I mean only to bring out the difference between my philosophical analysis and his and the resultant difference in how we go looking for theological and anthropological transcendence. I have sought to resolutely refuse any notion of transcendence – divine or human – which is correlative to “something we cannot say.” In other words, we are dealing with two apophatic theologies and philosophies of the face: Marion’s, in which there is a region of other human beings which can never be directly reached in experience or knowledge, and mine, where I resolutely refuse any such form of words. Relatedly, Marion’s apophatic theology resists idolatry from beginning to end and mine operates with the concept of the union of humans with God which produces animate idols.

The second point has to do with the Levinas’s and Marion’s way of embodying post-Kantian and phenomenological forms of Neoplatonism. Wayne Hankey has correctly said that with these thinkers we have a modified Neoplatonism in which the “ineffable is immediately present” in the phenomena of experience. Furthermore, Levinas and Marion creatively appropriate Eastern versions of Neoplatonism with its priority and transcendence of the Good beyond Being. In a phenomenological context

this means that metaphysical mind (*nous*) and its desire to reduce beings to identity with its own categories is always already dependent upon and surpassed by ethics (the Good). Levinas’s and Marion’s point is that ethics always moves within and respects the difference and distance of others to ourselves – the relation to the other is irreducible. To use the language one encounters in these arguments, these thinkers refuse the metaphysics of reducing the different to the same (the identity of mind and Being), by elevating the ethical task of relating to the other. Hence, difference and distance are never to be overcome and reduced to identity. Ethics is neither founded in nor reduced to metaphysics, because that founding or reduction would be a denial of the Good-beyond-Being as beyond-Being.

The positions I have taken in the dissertation are sympathetic to Levinas and Marion at this point. Although it is not the terminology which I have used, much of what I argued in the third chapter could be characterized as arguing for the priority of the Good to Being.\(^{406}\) However, in the conclusion I am arguing that beyond the smashing of metaphysical idols to make room for the irreducibility of ethics and separateness, there are modes of human encounter and intimacy which surpass ethics and separation. Following Dionysius’s description of theosis, I contend that there is intimate union or *henosis* beyond both Being and the Good. Or, to use the language of *Merkava* mysticism and Priestly theologies, we may come to stand rightly to each other as animate idols of each other’s transcendence, even as we are corporately destined to become the animate idol of God. Beyond the zeal to destroy idols and honor the endless separation of others

\(^{406}\) This is implicit in my argument about the logical priority of criteria to symptoms, and therefore attunement of words to world and of person to person as logically prior to the empirical methods of the sciences.
one can see the possibilities of mystical union Dionysius describes as being “neither oneself nor another.”

Intimacy Beyond Separation

Inner Lives and Expressive Bodies

In the Philosophical Investigations Ludwig Wittgenstein entertains a case in which a philosopher may come to be puzzled about the way a verbal sound or ink mark can so much as be about a sensation of pain. As the philosophical interlocutor gets himself wrapped up into a trap of illusions, Wittgenstein responds by suggesting that there is no puzzle in the following: A small child hurts herself and cries out in pain in accordance with natural human reactions and expressiveness. Adults come along and teach her to replace the inarticulate cry with “ouch.” As she grows older she is taught words like “stabbing,” “throbbing,” and “aching.” Stephan Mulhall points out how this is the beginnings of the process of giving the child a world, our world, and of giving the child a differentiated and structured inner life. In this way one’s highly complex world of experiences and inner life are born of the body’s natural expressive capacities and the willingness of others to offer the gift of words and concepts.

407 Dionysius, Mystical Theology, 1001A.


The unity of being-in-pain and direct-expression-of-pain, as described in chapter three, is expanded by the social gift of words, and the unity is unbroken in this expansion. One’s pain may appear as directly in words as in cries. Just as I do not surmise or infer your pain from a wince, but see the singular fact that you are in pain, so I may know that you have a stabbing pain in your body because of your words. Even as your world of experience has been expanded, grown more complex and subtle, etc. by the gift of words so has the possibilities for my ability to see directly in you all of these things.\footnote{Of course, part of this gift includes that you may hide these things going on with you. That does not land us in a skeptical position, or in a situation where we necessarily can only infer your experiences or only have access to symptoms of them. The relevant logical point is that you must hide them for them to be hidden.}

\textit{Inner and Outer Decoupled}

For the sake of the conclusion let us stick with the phenomenon of pain. Our concepts of pain, and those related to pain, are highly complex. Not only is our world largely determined by the public dimension of these sprawling concepts, but one’s inner sense of self and world are shot through the literal, metaphorical, and analogical applications and projections of various concepts of pain. The complexity of one’s world and inner life, therefore, is initially correlative to one’s mastery of public expressions of these words and concepts. However, experiencing a complex and differentiated world, need not, and sometimes does not, remain correlated with one’s skill in and ability for expression. Our bodies are frail, and those aspects of them which enable articulated expression can be shut down in a variety of ways without us, thereby, losing our ability to know or experience the world in those same differentiated ways. Consider the
phenomenon of Parkinson’s Mask. Those who suffer from Parkinson’s Mask lose the ability to use the muscles of facial expression. When confronted with this symptom one sees how much communication is carried by the skill of our faces. Nevertheless, despite the incapacity to express oneself with all the fine shades distinctions of a healthy adult, the sufferer may still experience a world of the same, and maybe more, frustrations, joys, fears, expectations, etc. Although her ability to give expression to these is largely diminished, her worlds of experience are not correlative diminished or simplified.

Or, consider the isolating and muting power of pain. Extremely intense and/or long term pain has the capacity to shut down one’s ability to communicate. The same pain which is experienced as “stabbing” because others have gifted us with that concept in place of our inarticulate cries may now render inoperable our ability to name our pain as “stabbing.” One’s sensation of pain is still experienced in all the differentiated and intentional categories made possible by our naturally expressive bodies and the social gift or words/worlds, but that same pain has eliminated the ability to give expression to it.

*Intimacy, Mortality, and Expression*

Consider more concretely, a father and son walk into a room of the neurology ward of a hospital. They do not yet know what is wrong with the father, but he has suffered a stroke, has pancreatic cancer, and his expressive capacities have been permanently impaired. The father and son are close, having an intimacy born of shared living quarters, experiencing the pain of losing the father’s father together, a life of shared prayer, and a father-son relationship which was also a baseball coach-player relationship.
The father is either unaware of, or has not admitted he is aware of, his recent strange behavior. Yet, in the course of a serious of verbal question and answer tests, he is suddenly and unavoidably conscious of his incapacity to communicate his own thoughts and experiences. He turns from the doctor and nurse, his eyes are raised to meet his son’s eyes and his son’s eyes are raised to meet the father’s eyes. In the gaze of his father’s expressionless face the son is immediately attuned to the fear blanketing his father’s experiences. The diagnostic test moves from assessing the presence of impairment to the extent of its effects in the man’s life. The doctor courteously looks at the man when asking questions, but turns without pause to the son as soon as the question is asked. For, the father, affected by bodily damage and fear, is at that moment incapable of communicating his pain, fear, and disability in the public life of bodily expression and recognition. Staring into the face of the father, the son immediately gives the answers concerning the father’s life and experiences. From the son’s mouth and facial expressions flow the immediate, direct, and only expression of the father’s experiences into the shared world of recognition. The son plays this role only because the many years of intimacy between the two of them has, at that moment, made the son immediately attuned to his father’s world, even unmediated by the father’s expressions.\(^4\)

Examples could be multiplied: two intimates where constant and isolating pain means the one’s experience of pain is only recognized in any public realm by the other’s words. Or the man with Parkinson’s Mask whose visitors can see nothing in his blank stares, but whose long-time spouse, deeply attuned to her expressionless loved one, gives

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\(^4\) Of course Levinas has profound reflections on intimacy. See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152-162. However, Levinas’s account of intimacy is in service to his articulation of “separation,” where I will argue below that there are modes of intimacy which transcend the category of “separation.”
immediate expression of his world and experiences. In all of these examples, the sufferer undergoes rich and differentiated experiences, even as their abilities to express them has diminished or disappeared. Despite this lack of expression, the attentiveness of an intimate other is still aware of their experiences and gives voice to them. I ask: Is this “separation?” Is this “complete otherness?” It certainly is not numerical identity of essence. But, if what constitutes Cavellian separation is that, on the one side, you have and directly express your pain, whereas, on the other side, I primarily acknowledge it in response, then neither is this “separation” or a case of being “completely other.”

Furthermore, recall that “separation” is constituted by the fact that between two persons there is only the fragile toil of bodily expression and recognition or acknowledgement. This toil of separation is the whole story, for Cavell, because there is no guarantee of intelligibility between two persons – in universals, or psychologistic intention, etc. – nor any necessity of hiddenness. But, in my examples, “separation” is no longer inviolable. For, the son no longer needs his father’s expressions to know his inner life and experiences. His body has become the only, direct, and immediate appearance of his father’s pain in the public realms of expression and recognition. Using theological language to characterize inter-subjective encounter in the manner of Levinas, your transcendent experience of bodily pain appears in - is made immanent to - the public world in my expressive body.

Recall that in Cavell’s philosophy they are an identity-constituting unity, being (in pain) and expressing (one’s pain), and the bridge between these unities to another person is only expression and acknowledgement. But, in these cases, the fact of your pain is recognized in the shared world only by means of my body. Furthermore, the son no
longer needs the bodily expression of the father to be aware of what would otherwise appear in his expressions. He has become the body of the father’s fear appearing – directly - in the public realm. The doctor need not infer the inner states of the father from symptoms. He can hear and see the man’s states in the body and voice of the son. The separate being of the father, constituted by the dyad of his being-in-pain-and-giving-expression-to-it, is riven in two and now includes his son. Those things which characterized the separation of “others” now spans two bodies. Perhaps separation is not “endless.”

Recall the Wittgensteinian and Cavellian critique of the picture of one individual and her private object of pain and the difficulty of another person coming to know that private object. It was the picture of the body as a veil: Your body, my body, and your body’s private object which you know directly and I can only guess or infer its existence. That whole picture of three things – the two bodies and the private object - fell away as nonsense. What we were left with is the person and the single fact of her-being-in-pain which is truly open to view in her bodily expression, and the other person who may directly see the other’s pain in it. Bodily and verbal expression are not merely symptoms of someone’s pain or fear or joy, but criterial appearances of pain or fear or joy. Others can see our pain, fear, or joy in our expressive bodies. The person isolated – rendered expressionless - by pain, or Parkinson’s Mask, or the debilitations of cancer and stroke are not necessarily condemned to a private world of experience known by others only by symptoms and inference. But the criterial appearance of their being (in pain), experiences, and inner lives in the public world is now a task which can only be undertaken by the attentiveness of an intimate.
It does not appear that a Levinasian philosophy of complete otherness or a Cavellian of endless separation possess the conceptual tools to describe who and what we are to each other in these examples. It is telling, too, that Levinas’s theological roots reside precisely in a strict form of monotheism which sees in silence and negation primarily the resistance to idolatry. According to his philosophy there is an idolatry of the Other/other which is problematic because it attempts to take hold of the transcendence of the Other/other. While there is much to be praised in this, and the dissertation is greatly influenced by it, the exaltation of anti-idolatry as the _raison de être_ of apophatic philosophy of the other/Other leads to Levinas making it very clear that neither incarnation nor theosis are actual or possible. Correlative to the putative impossibility of incarnation and theosis, I contend, is the view that all otherness is “complete otherness.” The otherness of deity and of human beings is total, making ethics and its responsibilities endless and infinite. In such a world what place is there for our examples where the difference and distance of ethics has been breached by such profound union and intimacy?

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412 Levinas, _Totality and Infinity_, 79.
Henosis and the Intimate Idol

I argue that the traditions of Transformational Mysticism described in this dissertation offer us words and concepts by which we may intellectually honor these unions with greater sensitivity than can contemporary philosophy. In all of the encounters above the distinctions marking separation or complete otherness have been cut through. The bearer of pain is not the primary expresser of pain. The intimate companion of the one in pain does not first recognize this pain, but is the direct and immediate bodily appearance of pain – that is her form of acknowledgement. This is neither identity nor difference or separateness. I contend that the Priestly mysticism of animate idols and Glory, as well that of the apophatic theology of incarnation and deification, are curiously able to describe what is going on in these examples. In short, the logic inherent in Dionysius’s description of the deified person as “neither oneself nor another” is capable of being projected into the inter-human sphere to make sense of the son and father in the hospital. The phenomenology of this encounter and the Dionysian “neither oneself nor another” resist characterization by the logic of strict difference, even as these unions displace the world constituted by separation and the fear of death. In short, the beings meant for union or henosis with God are capable of analogous union or henosis with each other – or, better, the union with God and neighbor are two parts of a single whole.413 We may become the cult statues of each other’s hidden and transcendent lives.

413 The Christian tradition is essentially uniform in its claim that union with God and each other are connected. Consider especially how, in the Pauline corpus, incorporation into the divine anthropomorphic theophany is at one and the same type incorporation into a single cosmic person constituted by all humans.
Being, Expressing, and Cult Statues

In Priestly theology, humans are intended to be animate idols of God (tselem Elohim), being the very bodily presence/appearance of the divinity; called to constitute the ecstatic and divine revelation of God. Although there is no numerical identity between God and humans, in the ecstasy of both God and human there results the utterly divine and yet human image/idol. As summarized in the dissertation’s introduction, this animate idol is described by its Priestly, apocalyptic, and mystical adherents as an uncreated “body,” “face,” and “Glory.” This body and face and Glory were and are God outside of Godself in ecstatic revelation, not creatures or created effects. The anthropomorphic Glory is completely divine and yet a distinction is made within the divinity. For example, the language of the Torah flits back forth between naming theophanic figures now as “Angel of YHWH” and now simply as “YHWH.” Similarly, Ezekiel allows for an identity and distinction between God and the divine appearance when he describes his vision of the “the appearance of the likeness (demuth) of the Glory of YHWH” (Ezekiel 1:28).

Second Temple era Jewish texts present the Adam as “clothed” in God’s Glory, where “clothing” is a Jewish (and Syrian) metaphor for bodily being. In other words, although the Adam was not identical to YHWH, his bodily presence was, in some sense, also the uncreated appearance and revelation of God. In some texts God even commands the angels to worship the Adam because he was the appearance of God’s own uncreated

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In the literature of the New Testament, not only is Christ the pre-existent Image of God, but by coming to be “in Christ” or “clothed in Christ” the whole of humanity will be incorporated into the ecstatic divine body/image/glory of God (Gal 3:27-28, Eph 1:17-23).

In these theologies, humans were intended and are destined for a mode of union with God wherein they are neither identical with nor separate or different from God: the Adam was meant to be no mere effect or symptom of divine being and agency, but the criterial divine-human appearance of the ecstatic God. All of creation was to see God in the Adam just as one can see joy or pain in a body. Humanity as a whole is called in its bodily and expressive life to be the very divine anthropomorphic theophany, to be the appearance of the uncreated body of the Lord. In this Jewish theology of “glorification” humans exist for the sake of a union with God which neither difference/separation nor identity describe. The immanence of the transcendent God is bodied forth in humans, and not merely as created symbols (or effects/symptoms) of divinity, pace an Augustinian interpretation of Biblical theophanies.

Recall the example of scientists inferring the thoughts of subjects via brain scans. The technology depended on the appearance of the thoughts of the subjects in their words. The words were not necessarily identical to the thoughts, just as a wince is not identical to someone’s pain, but they are the criterial appearance of these thoughts in which the thoughts can be seen (like pain in the wince). Human’s become the criterial appearance of God – and God’s ineffability – because they are incorporated into the eternal appearing of the Father, the Word. The Word is neither identical to the Father, nor a mere symptom of the Father, but the Father’s appearance – the “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Jesus is the eternal divine image/appearing, the *kabod YHWH*, and the human race was created to be one in that image/appearing of God.

Nor should one suppose that this Jewish theosis is somehow a mere ethical god-likeness, or a sharing in analogous moral virtues as God possesses. The deification of glorification in the Priestly theologies (and derivative traditions) are as disturbing to the strict monotheism as Eastern Orthodox mysticism. The high priest, on *Yum Kippur*, was apparently worshipped and is even described as creator because of his work of tending to the cosmic microcosm, the temple.\(^{416}\) Furthermore, upon seeing the enthroned Glory, Enoch is recorded as saying,

I was enlarged and increased in size until I matched the world in length and breadth. . . When the Holy One, blessed be He, took me to serve the Throne of Glory, the wheels of the Merkabah and all the needs of the Shekinah, at once my flesh turned to flame, my sinews, to blazing fire, my bones to *juniper* coals, my eyelashes to lightning flashes, my eyeballs to fiery torches, the hairs of my head to hot flames, all of my limbs to wings of burning fire, and the substance of my body to blazing fire. On my right – those who cleave flames of fire – on my left – burning brands –

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\(^{416}\) See Fletcher-Louis, “Worship of the High Priest.”
round about me swept wind, tempest, and storms; and the roar of earthquake upon earthquake was before and behind me.\footnote{3 Enoch 15:11 in C. R. A. Morray-Jones, “Transformational Mysticism in the Apocalyptic-Merkabah Tradition” \textit{Journal of Jewish Studies} 43.1 (1992), 11.}

Murray-Jones notes that the above quotation has probably gone through a redaction to reduce the original sense of Enoch becoming the Glory itself.\footnote{Ibid.} Furthermore, Eliot Wolfson has argued that enthronement in heaven is theosis in Jewish mysticism.\footnote{Eliot R. Wolfson, \textit{Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).} In the book of Revelation, Jesus - appearing as the enthroned Glory - promises “To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Rev. 3:21). Of course, for the book of Revelation, the perfected image of the Glory is the humility of the Slain Lamb.

In short, for Jewish and Jewish-Christian \textit{Merkava} mysticism humans are protologically and eschatologically beings created for an intimacy with God so profound that they are to be the very bodily appearing of God – just as the son’s words were the appearance of his father’s experiences and being (in pain). The end of our humanity is just such an intimate union. This union with God is also union with each other as most of these traditions understand the \textit{whole} of humanity as the image-idol of God. It is no surprise then, that mystical unity and union with God manifests itself in the same kind of intimate unity and union between humans. In the example above, the son has become the body of revelation and manifest image/idol of his father. There is no numerical identity of essence between God and humanity or human and human, but we become the very revelation and appearance of each other’s transcendence. The criterial appearance of
one’s being, or being-in-pain in our example, may be in and through the bodily expression of another.

*Henosis and Energetic Appearance*

A similar grammar is at work in Dionysius’s “theosis.” Recall that at the conceptual heart of this theology is the *ousia/proodi* distinction articulating an account of ecstatic being and revelation of God and creature.\(^{420}\) Instead of the anthropomorphic theophany, humans are called into the *theandric* energy of Jesus. In theosis, although there is no identity of human and divine *ousia*, the ecstatic and completely divine energies of God pour forth from humans. This is so much the case that *all* of the divine names, which are used for the praise of divine energies, are predicated of deified humans in the tradition running from Dionysius to Maximus the Confessor to Gregory Palamas.\(^{421}\) The expressive life of deified humans is the very *theandric* revelation of God. In the words of St. Paul, “I no longer live but Christ lives in me.”

St. Maximos the Confessor developed Dionysius’s theology and made clear how, in the end, human energies enter into Sabbath rest and the divine energies flow through human bodies, souls, and spirits. The bodily life of humanity becomes the mediator of

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\(^{420}\) There is a parallel between Dionysius’s distinction in identity between *ousia* and *proodi* and a Wittgensteinian distinction in identity between being/experience and expression. Although the *proodi* are not identical to *ousia* they are the appearance of the *ousia*. In other words, the *proodi* are no mere effects and symptoms of the *ousia* by which one may infer its existence or states. Rather, the *proodi* are the criterial appearance of the *ousia*. This is almost exactly the same relationship as I established between pain and its expression in the third chapter.

divine presence and revelation, not by being a created go-between, but being the “place” – the *locus* - of uncreated appearing.

The soul becomes god and rests from all its mental and physical works by participation in the divine grace; at the same time will all natural operations of the body rest with it. They are deified along with the soul in the proportion to its participation in the deification, to the extent that then only God will be visible, through the soul as well as through the body; the natural attributes are conquered by the overabundance of glory.\(^{422}\)

Just as the human Jesus is the very place of revealing the divine hiddenness (*Epistle IV*), so the revelation of one human to another is taken up into the Christic revelation of God and so becomes revelatory of the divine ineffability. Likewise, the transcendent hiddenness of the human is not only revealed in the overabundance of the expressions/energies pouring forth from her body and soul, but also possibly from her intimate companion.

Consider again the relationship between the father and the son in the hospital. Even as the father’s ability to communicate is silenced, so the son’s energies rest from giving expression to his own *ousia*. Rather, the son’s energies ecstatically reveal the father’s *ousia*, his *being-in-pain-and-fear*. The son’s words and gestures are the appearing of his father’s experience and inner states in the public world. There is no identity of *ousia* between the father and son, nor is there Cavellian or Levinasian separation or otherness between them. Rather, because the energies of the son have become the energies of his father – just as one’s energies become those of God in theosis - so the

\(^{422}\) Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Knowledge* 2.88, as quoted in Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality*, 368.
father and son are best said to be “neither oneself nor another.” Theirs is an intimate union otherwise than separation or identity.

**The World of Union and Resurrection**

Recall that in chapter three I showed how, for Cavell, we are not only endlessly separate, but that separation functions transcendentally. It is the fact of this separation which gives rise to the need for expression and communication – for articulated thought. Hence, our wording of the world is transcendentally constituted by separation.

Furthermore, I argued, the need for expression between those who are separate is rooted in the fact of our separate bodies being frail, socially dependent, and dying. The body’s natural “fear” of death is manifest in its desires to avoid pain and seek the pleasures of food, sex, dominance, etc. The natural expressions of these are precisely what the social gift of words extend.

It is my contention that examples of union, with God and with others, show that separation and the fear of death are transcendental only according to a contingent picture. This picture – at least as determined by “separation” – is common to both radical monotheism and secular western philosophy. However, the examples above, seen in the light of Transformational Mysticism, show the possibilities of a different world, even if only in glimmers and usually only in the face of death. This is fitting because the elusive new world is eschatological. It is the reign of God, constituted by union and resurrection, which invades and displaces the world of separation and death (Mark 3:27). St. Isaac the
Syrian put it well: “Therefore one who lives in love receives from God the fruit of life. He breathes, even in this world, the air of the resurrection . . . Love is the kingdom.”

Why in the face of death? Why are all of my examples of grave situations? I must admit that I have no answer to this question in terms of theodicy. I acknowledge that the intimacy made manifest in these grave situations is alive in other points of life, but the confusion of the categories of identity and difference is typically most apparent in the face of death, disease, pain, etc. I do not know why this is how our worlds are, or why this is the place that the worlds of separation get displaced by union. I only know that it is the case for beings like us and aim to offer some comments about its fittingness.

The examples and their gravity fit the story of the Gospel. Recall how the Merkava mysticism of the New Testament differed from its forerunners and contemporaries. It was not in terms of cosmology or epistemology or even in terms of incarnation and vision. Rather, what is striking about the New Testament is how the world-shattering appearance of the enthroned anthropomorphic Glory was and is the crucified Jesus. It is the vision of the Crucified which converts vision into transformational vision. The erotic draw of God into the divine life, for the letter to the Ephesians, is the crucified Jesus. Likewise, Dionysius described the vision of God as an erotic seduction into the divine-human energy of Jesus. If it is when we confront the dying of loved ones that we are moved – compelled - to transform our intimacy into mystical-union-beyond-separation by becoming the body of their expressions and energies, then should we be surprised that Dionysius proclaims “My Eros is

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crucified”?

Is it incomprehensible that, being who and what we are, we are called into *henosis* with God – of being the body and *expression* of uncreated energies of Jesus - by the vision of the Crucified plunging into the silence of the Father?

I do not know why we are such that we usually enter into union in this way, but I do know that we are. The gaze of the silenced and dying can be an erotic draw to become “neither oneself nor another,” to enter into a union with them which transcends separation and the world it constitutes. The intimacy and attentiveness necessary to become the manifest idol of another’s being, however, is not won through the mere fulfillment of ethical or moral responsibilities to someone completely other. No, the union with the other is won through a struggle which moves from ascetical humility and meekness – of denying oneself and making space for the other in one’s self – to love and mystical *henosis*.

The gravity of the examples are also fitting of the Gospel insofar as the world constituted by separation and the fear of death is overcome in intimate union had in the face of and through death. The Lord of Glory, the *kabod YHWH*, destroys death by entering into it. That is, death had been the epitome of separation from the God enthroned in the Holy of Holies of the temple. Not only was no dead body allowed in the temple, but there were strict regulations about how long someone had to wait once touching a corpse before they could enter into the presence of God in the temple (Numbers 19). Indeed, much of what is banned from the temple and the holy place has to do with death and how those things were related to death. God is revealed and present on the Cherubic throne in the Holy of Holies and death *was* alienation from this kingdom.

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424 Dionysius, *Divine Names*, 709B.
But, in the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus, the *kabod YHWH* – the one enthroned in the Holy of Holies - walks around Palestine and enacts very specific healings. A great deal of the maladies he heals are precisely those things which speak of death and so of separation from the God of the temple (compare Numbers 19 and Leviticus 21 to the Synoptic Gospels). As himself the Glory, wherever he is is temple and holy place. The blind eyes, withered limbs, skin diseases, issues of blood, and corpses banned from the temple are healed in his presence. And after walking through the world, turning the spaces he touched into the holy place, he – the *kabod YHWH* – entered into death. Death now houses the Glory of God. Death is now temple and holy place and even Holy of Holies as the light of the Glory shines there. Death is no longer separation, but a place of union, and so Matthew points out that death releases its dead “at the moment” Christ dies (Matt. 27:51-52). Union overcomes death and separation by the Glory’s intimate solidarity with the dead and dying.

The same is true for those being incorporated into the *theandric* energy of Jesus. The world transcendentally constituted by separation and the fear of death is overcome by intimate union in and through death. To render aid and comfort to the dying by entering into loving union with them is already to breath “even in this world, the air of the resurrection.” This is a truth as difficult as it is terrible and beautiful.
Reprise

I have argued throughout the dissertation that when viewed through the lens of ancient Jewish and Christian Transformational Mysticism and the best of contemporary American philosophy of logic that a great deal of contemporary negative theology embodies a temptation to emptiness. The opening chapters showed how the inferential strategies for concluding to the necessary transcendence of God are shot through with the equivocations of psychologism. I have further argued that Christian Transformational Mysticism sees apophatic theology as rooted in the humble and humbling gaze of the crucified and resurrected Jesus. When one considers what both my theological and philosophical resources have to say about the nature of humans before the gaze of others, the existential roots of the evasions of Christ in our theologizing became understandable. In both the Garden of Eden and the analysis of the existential roots of philosophical skepticism it is revealed how much we are the kind of beings who desire to turn our eyes from others and to turn their eyes from us. In so doing I have sought to answer the question with which I opened the introduction: Why are contemporary Christian apophatic theologies characteristically philosophical arguments that human language cannot be squared with the demands of describing the Creator, when Patristic apophatic theologies – such as Dionysius the Areopagite’s – were characteristically commentaries on the liturgy and/or guides for the ascetic struggle for holiness?

Beyond answering this question and exposing the temptations of negative theology to be temptations to emptiness I have sought to make connections between current American philosophy and ancient Christian Transformational Mysticism. In both the critique and the establishment of connections the arguments of the dissertation are
firmly rooted in the discipline of fundamental theology. I have argued that intelligibility has problematically broken down in certain forms of negative theology. And, I have explored possibilities of intelligibility and connection between ancient Transformational Mysticism and contemporary American philosophy. Although unnamed, except in the introduction, in the search for connections between philosophy and revelation the influence of Maurice Blondel and his method of immanence are pervasive throughout the dissertation.425

My variation on the Blondelian method of immanence came to fuller fruition in the conclusion. I have argued that the analogous and complementary philosophies of “separation” and “otherness” of Cavell and Levinas respectively reach a point at which they can both go no further and yet truth demands that they do. The phenomenology of human intimacy reaches moments which go beyond ethics and its ultimacy of separation and difference. I have shown that the revelation of human beings as protologically and eschatologically the animate idol of God in the macrocosmic temple of the cosmos is able to make sense of human union at the edges of our world; where death is faced and the new world breaks in. Dionysius described this union as being “neither oneself nor another” and I have argued that what he meant by that, how those ideas are fleshed out in terms of being and expression (ousia and proodi), is able to describe what happens in those grave instances where intimacy goes beyond the logic of separation. Human possibility and divine-human possibility exceed what the philosophers can make sense of,

whereas apophatic theology as Transformational Mysticism is able to honor it appropriately with both praise and silence.
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