Praising the Unsayable: An Apophatic Defense of Metaphysics on the Basis of the Neoplatonic Parmenides Commentaries

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ABSTRACT: This essay represents a contribution to rewriting the history metaphysics in terms of what philosophy never said, nor could say. It works from the Neoplatonic commentary tradition on Plato’s Parmenides as the matrix for a distinctively apophatic thinking that takes the truth of metaphysical doctrines as something other than anything that can be logically articulated. The hymn is taken to epitomize the kind of discourse that arises in the wake of apophatic negation and witnesses to what the Logos cannot say. The essay contends that metaphysics as a discourse of the unspeakable may prove more viable than any purely logical system could.

"Ὑμος εἰς Θεόν"

"Ὤ πάντων ἐπέκεινα· τί γάρ θέμις ἄλλο σε μέλπειν;
Ὡς λόγος ὑμνήσει σε; Ὑ γάρ λόγῳ οὐδεις ῥητός.
Μοῦνος ἐών ἀφράστος· ἐπεί τέχνης οὐσα λαλεῖται.
Ὡς νοὸς ἀθρήσκε σε; Ὑ γάρ νόῳ οὐδεῖν ληπτός.
Μοῦνος ἐών ἀγνωστός· ἐπεί τέχνης οὐσα νοεῖται.
Πάντα σε καὶ λαλέοντα, καὶ οὐ λαλέοντα λιγαίνειν.
Πάντα σε καὶ νοεόντα καὶ οὐ νοεόντα γεραιέρει.
Ξυνοι γάρ τε πόθοι, ξυναὶ δ' ἄθληνες ἀπάντων

"Ἀμήλι σε' σοι δὲ τὰ πάντα προσεύχεται· εἰς σε δὲ πάντα
Σύνθεμα σοι νοεόντα λαλεῖ συγώμενον ὕμνον.
Σοι εἰς πάντα μένει· σοι δ' ἀθρόα πάντα, καὶ θάζει.
A poplular discourse that is "luggage that negates and unfairly itself..."
epigraph to this essay.4 Regardless of whether Proclus actually penned it, the hymn admirably embodies his conception of and sentiment towards what it manages to avoid naming even “the One.” In his Commentarium in Parmenides, Proclus speaks precisely of “raising up to the One a single theological hymn by means of all these negations” (VII 1191).5

In his commentary on the first hypothesis of Plato's Parmenides, Proclus concludes that the One is beyond all definition and description, and therewith exposes the utter inefficacy of the Logos to articulate the ultimate principle of reality. This conclusion sums up the destiny of Neoplatonic and ancient Greek thought generally. It was to be embraced programmatically by Damascius, Proclus's student and eventual successor as head of the Academy at Athens when it was definitively closed by Emperor Justinian in A.D. 529. Thus the era opened at the dawn of Greek philosophy by Parmenides' enthusiasm for the Logos as capable of articulating and revealing all things—expressed emblematically in the exhortation of fragment 7, “Judge by reason (λόγος)”—concludes in silence. This completes a first cycle of Western rational thought, which leads from the confident cultivation of the word to the ultimate apophesis of silence.6

Plotinus's—and consequently the Neoplatonists'—metaphysical interpretation of the Parmenides has been said to be a “complete misunderstanding.” Indeed, some such judgment has enjoyed widespread consensus among scholars of the dialogue. For example, W. C. K. Guthrie writes, “But that the dry antithetical arguments of the Parmenides about the One... should have been seen as an exposition of the sublimest truths of theology, is surely one of the oddest turns in the history of thought. Yet the Neoplatonists claimed to see in the One their own highest, ineffable and unknowable God, and as such it passed into medieval and later Christianity.”8 The Plotinian interpretation is probably best viewed as a “misprision” that opens Plato's text towards a new horizon of thought. In any case, Plotinus's reading of the dialogue spawned a tradition of commentaries on the hypotheses of the second part of the Parmenides that came to form a flourishing genre of philosophical thinking in its own right. Interpretation of the Parmenides became a channel for original speculation on the One and its ineffable transcendence in the Neoplatonic school throughout the entire course of its development.9

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

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

An indirect indication that this has perhaps always been sensed to be the case might be found in the widespread belief in antiquity, especially among the Neoplatonists, that Plato had a secret doctrine that he imparted only orally. There are indeed many hints and allusions to this unwritten tradition in the dialogues themselves, as well as in Aristotle and in the Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic sources. This popular notion expresses an awareness that the publicly stateable propositions of metaphysics might systematically distort and lead away from the doctrines' true meaning. According to this view, which has recently been vigorously revived and taken as the fulcrum for reinterpreting the dialogues as pivoting on what they do not say, Plato's deepest thinking on the questions discussed in the dialogues would be far more subtle and elusive than any fixed verbal formulas and can only be surmised from the words he sportingly committed to text.10 Of course, even if
The idea that God is one with Being and Being itself becomes a profound principle of philosophical thought across monotheistic faiths.

God, eternally immaterial, is being itself, inscrutable, ineffable. This principle is foundational for the development of religious thought in many monotheistic traditions. It serves as a starting point for understanding the nature of God and the relationship between the divine and the material world.

The monotheistic principle of the inchoate, unreflective core of religion is central to the understanding of God in monotheistic faiths. This understanding forms the basis for the development of religious thought and practice in these traditions.

Christian mysticism, theology, and philosophical thought intersect to create a comprehensive understanding of God and the world.

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An Apologetic Defense of Metaphysics

William P. Lane
In the context of the above discussion, it becomes evident that the concept of 'God' is not an independent entity in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a manifestation of the collective consciousness of sentient beings. The existence of 'God' is thus relative to the existence of the beings that perceive it.

Furthermore, the idea of a transcendent entity like 'God' implies a notion of omnipotence and omniscience. However, the limitations of human perception and understanding mean that such an entity can never be fully comprehended by any individual or collective consciousness.

The concept of 'God' is thus best understood as a metaphor for the collective consciousness of humanity. It serves as a unifying force that binds people together and provides a sense of purpose and direction.

In this sense, the concept of 'God' is not a literal being, but rather a symbolic representation of the interconnectedness of all things. It is a reminder of our shared experience and the universal nature of human emotions and experiences.

In conclusion, the concept of 'God' is a powerful tool for unifying humanity and providing a sense of purpose and direction. It is a metaphor that reflects our collective consciousness and serves as a reminder of our interconnectedness as a species.
An Argument of Metaphysics

William Franke
pupil, Porphyry, develops the idea that as infinite the One is also Being—infinite Being which cannot be defined or said. This conception of Being as infinite made it possible to revive the Aristotelian idea of the supreme divinity as the pure act of being (or equivalently pure act of intellect) within a negative theology. Aristotle had conceived of God as pure act and therefore also as finite in being: to be actual is to have perfectly definite form without any potency. But the Neoplatonists’ idea of infinity as only negatively definable, and as not having in itself any positively knowable sense or essence, made it possible to conceive of an act that is infinite.

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

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

In both directions, immanence and transcendence, the One proves to be inconceivably infinite and to exceed saying.

Accordingly, not even the radical transcendence of the One and its incompatibility with Being is what finally distinguishes pagan Neopla-

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

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

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

The miracle of all things hanging together and cohering as somehow one world, a universe, must be observed ever again with wonder and be acknowledged to be incomprehensible: the reason and necessity for it cannot be demonstrated or even be properly expressed. This contingency of the togetherness and connection of all things, inexplicable to us and to any finite intelligence, is perennially rediscovered in philosophy. It becomes paramount, for example, in Enlightenment philosophy with David Hume. As with the One itself, all accounts and grounding for such unity fall into contradiction. The principle which is alleged to ground unity will never turn out to be identical with any principle that can be known and defined and said. Still, the unity of the One and Being is presupposed by every thought, since thought itself is inherently a synthesis. It is just that this unity that operates in every thought is grasitable and expressible by no thought—it is itself the apophatic aporia par excellence. The unity of being cannot be proved or understood or even be adequately said, but we can nevertheless experience this very impossibility. In experiencing purely the connectedness of things and the unaccountability of this connectedness, we may experience what fails to be adequately conceptualized as the metaphysical unity of being.

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

These are the essential pagan precedents that render philosophically conceivable a God who is essentially what cannot be said, that is, the God of monotheism. From these premises develop, especially in revealed traditions, ever more complex and historically differentiated experiences of the abyss of existence that philosophical thought first identified as a theme that could be reflectively contemplated. The One and Being are no longer incompatible and no longer intellectual forms or determinations at all. They are mutually interpenetrating aspects of an unsayable infinity beyond any determination as reality or even as divinity, if this is taken to be some essential, specific kind of being. The mutual exclusiveness of the One and Being inherited from the Parmenides falls away and, in effect, is dissolved in the course of the Parmenides commentary tradition. Both principles are redefined as inadequate determinations not of the Indeterminate but of a living, pro-active, always relating divinity that cannot be humanly or temporally or linguistically determined or comprehended. This . . . inexpressible “divinity” is not any object accessible to the approach of knowledge, but rather can be encountered only to the extent that it comes to meet us and disembarasses us of all our antecedent conceptual structures and language.

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

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

III

We have now followed metaphysics, the knowledge and discourse of being, to its source in unknowing and unsaying vis-à-vis an infinite “reality” that can neither be qualified by language nor be known and that is, to this extent, ab-solute, absolved from speech and concept, and so from the grasp of the knowing subject. Thus we have admitted that metaphysical “truth” is unsayable, yet it must also have some form of expression, if it is going to register at all. As proponents of negative theology from Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite to Denys Turner concordantly insist, every negative theology presupposes and is inextricably interwoven with a positive or kataphatic theology.28 Dionysius writes of the inexpressible (ἀρρητόν) being woven together (συμπεπλεκτα) with the expressible (τὸ ῥητό). I wish to return to the hymn cited as the exergue to this essay in order to explore briefly how this poetic and prayerful form gives positive verbal expression—or perhaps we should say witness—to what cannot be expressed in terms of conceptual knowledge, or knowledge to which the Logos can be adequate. This final movement of the essay, then, deals with the positive theology that always doubles and indirectly lends voice to the otherwise inaudible negations of apophatic theology. This is crucial for understanding how apophatic thinking does not entail exactly an overcoming of metaphysics (as in Heidegger’s “Überwindung der Metaphysik”) but rather an ungrounding of its language, in order that it can work to evoke what cannot be said. On this interpretation, metaphysics turns out to be a poetic discourse and even a sort of religious witness to a reality transcending objective expression and articulation.

Understood apophatically, metaphysics consists in unknowing and unsaying, and for the Neoplatonists working in the Parmenides commentary tradition this negation of language registers discernibly by being expressed especially in the form of the hymn, which is thus valorized as an indispensable vehicle for metaphysics. In fact, the Parmenides itself was taken by these commentators to be essentially a hymn. We have already noted that Proclus calls the first hypothesis of the Parmenides

“a theological hymn by way of negations to the One” (ὑμνον διὰ τῶν ἁποφάσεων θεολογικῶν εἰς τὸ ἐν. In Parmenides VII. 1191. 34f). Again in Theologia Platonica III. 23. p. 83, 22ff., Proclus writes of the One of the first hypothesis, the First in which there can be no participation, as “being hymned” (ὑμνηται). The second hypothesis, too, is interpreted by Proclus in Theol. Plat. I. 7, p. 31, 25–27 as a “theogony,” that is, a hymn celebrating the generation of the gods.29 Plato’s own dialogues define themselves at key junctures in terms of the hymn. Timaeus 21a1ff. introduces the tale of Atlantis told by Critias as a panegyric in praise of Athena as if it were a hymn (οἱ θεοί ῥηματας ἐκκοιμάζειν) offered on the occasion of the panathenaean festival in which the dialogue is set. Phaedrus 265 c1 calls Socrates’s recitation in the second part of the dialogue a “mythical hymn” (μυθικὸν το νῦν ῥυμον). Phaedo 61a3ff. classifies philosophy among the musical arts, indeed, as the greatest of them. Proclus infers from this that human philosophy consists basically in the imitation of the hymns of Apollo:

By means of this art [namely, philosophy] the soul is able to honour all things human and to sing hymns to the gods in a perfect way, while imitating the Leader of the Muses himself, who hymns his Father with noeric songs and keeps the cosmos together with indissoluble fetters while moving everything together, as Socrates says in the Cratylus.

(Rem publicam commentarii, I 57, 11–16)30

Thus Proclus is following Plato in describing philosophical discourse as hymnic in nature, and it is not implausible to extend this to metaphysical discourse generally, in its highest and deepest reaches. The most inspired discourses of the Phaedrus and of the other dialogues on love especially have an easily recognizable hymnic cadence and character. In Proclus’s understanding, Platonic metaphysics is quite generally to be understood as a matter of composing hymns to the gods. R. M. van den Berg develops in detail the thesis that philosophy and particularly its metaphysical discussions were understood by Neoplatonists, especially in the Athenian Academy, as a matter of singing hymns to the gods and thereby assimilating oneself to divinity. Through careful philological examination of Proclus’s hymns, as well as of his use of the word “hymn” in his Platonic commentaries, Van den Berg comes to the conclusion that, “The distribution of ὑμνεῖ and related forms in Proclus’s oeuvre squares with the suggestion that for him metaphysical discussions are as it were hymns to the gods. Such verbs are virtually absent from works that do not primarily deal with metaphysics” (Van den Berg, p. 27).

It must be admitted that the word ὑμνεῖ as it occurs, for example, in the second verse of the “Hymn to the Transcendent God,” the ῥυμος
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An Apprehensive Defense of Metaphysics

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However, even though Delos's proposal for a new system of phonetic philosophy has been met with enthusiasm by many, its practical application has been limited. The reason is that the system is based on an abstract concept of relations, which are difficult to grasp and apply in real life. Delos's system is more theoretical than practical, and it requires a high level of intellectual understanding to be fully comprehended. Moreover, the system is not easy to use in everyday life, as it requires a deep knowledge of the principles behind phonetic philosophy. Therefore, it is difficult for many people to apply Delos's system in practical situations.

On the other hand, Kickers's philosophy of phonetic philosophy is more practical than Delos's system. Kickers's system is based on the idea that phonetic philosophy is not just a theoretical concept, but rather a practical tool that can be used to improve people's lives. Kickers's system is easier to understand and apply in everyday life, as it is based on simple principles that can be easily grasped. Therefore, Kickers's system is more popular than Delos's system, as it is more practical and useful in real life.
stammer. Pickstock develops in particular the deployment in Christic discourse of “asyneton,” that is, the omission or removal of connecting syntax, to create structures open to incommensurability. And actually Derrida is anything but averse to noticing such breaks and ruptures in every kind of discourse.

However, Derrida does argue that no hymn or prayer is actually free of predication concerning the God it praises. He distinguishes the moments of apostrophe and of encomium in the prayer (or hymn) but suggests that in the end they cannot be separated. Prayer is never completely pure apostrophe; it always also presupposes some conception or description of the divinity it praises, and so is to a degree idolatrous. From (and in fact simultaneous with) its first moment of pure apostrophe to the indescribable Other, prayer inevitably slips into a language of predication, assigning some attributes to the one that it praises. Hence, for Derrida, prayer “preserves an irreducible relationship to the attribution” (“Comment ne pas parler,” p. 572).

Even if Derrida is right about this (and he may not be), nevertheless it is not what the hymn says that counts, but what it cannot say. The spiritual movement of opening towards an Other that cannot be comprehended, yet must be praised, has a kind of existential and not a cognitive content, and this makes it a link to a transcendence that cannot be said. Like the Derridean trace, then, the hymn would have a referential structure, yet no referential content. Referring to what never was nor ever could be purely present, it is nevertheless an effecting of presence, a tracing or arrival of transcendence within immanence. Radical Orthodoxy and deconstruction marvelously agree on this point. At this apophatic point of that which cannot be said, the effect of presence is perhaps indiscernibly theological and thanatological, indiscernibly a manifestation of divinity or an intimation of death, either one as the Impossible.36 This, at any rate, is the point I have wanted to bring out into the open by returning to the Neoplatonic matrices of apophatic thinking and in particular to its hymnic realizations that have been taken in contemporary philosophy in opposite directions, as either compromising philosophical rigor vis-à-vis ineluctable nothingness or as manifesting and materializing the positive gift of revelation. My purpose is to recommend adherence to the apophatic insight that is neither the one nor the other, but that which opens and gives both of these perspectives.

I believe that godlessness might be a state potentially as open and revealing of the religious as singing the liturgy and pronouncing orthodox declarations of faith. It would seem that Derrida best of all manifests this in his tears and prayers, increasingly in his later works.37 Pickstock’s critique of Derrida and the secular city and its nihilism and death fetish seems to be based entirely on his early work, particularly on “Plato’s Pharmacy,”38 and takes little or no account of what Derrida was doing the 1980s and 1990s, at which time his texts provide the fulcrum for the turn of philosophy to religion that can be traced in elaborate detail across the numerous texts of this period.39 Especially pivotal Derridean texts for this purpose, in addition to the one already cited, are “D’un apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie” (1981), “Donner la mort” (1992), Sauf le nom (1993), and “Foi et savoir” (1996). These texts leave the question of religion undecided. Radical Orthodoxy affirms religion on the basis of the breakdown of secular reason, which is taken to be the enemy of religion. Striking is how these ideological opponents, each with their radical challenges, converge upon the apophatic currents within the metaphysical tradition. The rewriting of the history of Western philosophy proposed in this essay from the point of view of what logical language cannot say, the apophatic, is the ineluctable margin where even radical orthodoxy and radical deconstruction cannot exclude each other but find themselves contaminated by one another. Both these antagonists demonstrate indirectly how viable metaphysics in the Neoplatonic tradition has become once again, once we learn to take its affirmations apophatically, which gives priority to their poetic and religious registers, as in the hymn.40

NOTES


2. Throughout, where translations are not attributed to other sources, I have provided them myself. A somewhat different translation of the first several verses of the hymn is offered by Deirdre Carabine, The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition, Plato to Erigena, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, vol. 19 (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1995), 162.

3. Marinus’s “Life of Proclus” can be read in a translation by the eminent English Platonist Thomas Taylor (1758–1835), chief transmitter of Platonism to Romantics from Shelley to Emerson, in Essays and Fragments of Proclus the Platonic Successor (Somerset: Prometheus Trust, 1999), 217–44.

4. The attribution to Proclus goes back to Albert Jahn, Eclogae et Proclo de philosophia chaldæica sive de doctrina oraculorum chaldaicorum. Nunc pri-
mum ed. et commentatus est A. J. Accedit hymnus in deum platonicus vulgo S. Gregorio Nazianzeno adscriptus, nunc Proclo Platonico uindicatus (Halle a.S.: Pfiffer, 1891), 49–77. Werner Beierwaltes, Platonismus im Christentum (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1998), 55–6, accepts this attribution, since the hymn's citation by non-Christian authors such as Ammonios Hermiæ (ca. 445–517) and Olympiodoros (second half of the sixth century) argues for a pagan provenance, whereas Saffrey, in Proclus, Hymnes et prières, finds its poetry not up to Proclus's standard and considers it more likely the work of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.


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


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


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

25. Cf. Werner Beierwaltes, "Das seierende Eine: Neuplatonische Interpretationen der zweiten Hypothesis des platonischen 'Parmenides' und deren Fort-


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


40. Versions of segments of this paper were delivered and discussed publicly: “Negative Theology in the Neoplatonic Parmenides—Commentary Tradition and as Revived in Contemporary Apophatic Thinking” at the 2003 Society for the Contemporary Assessment of Platonism (SCAP) meeting under the auspices of the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division; and “Apophasis and the Neoplatonic Interpretation of Religious Revelation” at the 2004 American Academy of Religion (AAR) national convention in the Platonism and Neoplatonism Group. I thank John Rose, Gregory Shaw, and Willemien Otten for invitations to present and all participants for their questions, comments, and suggestions.