

THE FUTURE OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION IN LIGHT OF NEGATIVE THEOLOGY

O FUTURO DA FILOSOFIA DA RELIGIÃO À LUZ DA TEOLOGIA NEGATIVA

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Resumo: Neste artigo, defendemos a aplicação do método apofático tanto à Teologia quanto ao seu ramo, a Escatologia. Esta proposta baseia-se no pressuposto de que, à semelhança da inefabilidade de Deus, a inefabilidade da vida após a morte requer humildade intelectual e abertura à miríade de possibilidades que o futuro pode trazer. Defendemos que a adoção desta posição metodológica, enraizada no conceito de negação, pode assegurar o futuro da filosofia da religião em face de seus principais desafios, que surgem do seu objeto de estudo na intersecção da filosofia e da teologia. Ao reconhecer as limitações inerentes à linguagem religiosa, o apofatismo revela-se como um conceito filosófico capaz de favorecer o diálogo inter-religioso e intra-religioso, bem como o diálogo com humanistas seculares em geral. O conceito de Esperança também desempenha um papel crucial nesta abordagem, servindo como um denominador comum que reúne diferentes perspectivas teóricas.

Palavras-chave: Filosofia da Religião; Teologia Negativa; Escatologia Apofática; Misticismo; Esperança.

Abstract: In this paper, we defend the application of the apophatic method to both Theology and its branch, Eschatology. This defense is grounded in the assumption that, similar to the ineffability of God, the ineffability of the afterlife requires intellectual humility and openness to the myriad possibilities that the future may bring. We posit that adopting this methodological stance, rooted in the concept of negation, can ensure the future of the philosophy of religion among its main challenges, which arise from its object of study at the intersection of philosophy and theology. By recognizing the inherent limitations of religious language, Apophaticism emerges as a philosophical concept capable of enhancing inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue, as well as conversations with secular humanists in general. The concept of Hope also plays a crucial role in this approach, serving as a common denominator that brings together different theoretical perspectives.

Keywords: Philosophy of Religion; Negative Theology; Apophatic Eschatology; Mysticism; Hope.



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INTRODUCTION

It is advisable to explore the future of certain philosophical theories by first attempting to conceptualize them using the tools provided in the past century by analytic philosophy. Therefore, the initial step in analyzing the future of the philosophy of religion is to define the concept itself: what does the term “Philosophy of Religion” mean? What role does religion play in this discipline? What is the object of study for this branch of philosophy? Although the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* does not have an entry specifically labeled “Philosophy of Religion”, it does contain related entries such as “Natural Theology”, “Natural Religion”, and “Philosophy and Christian Theology”.

Within this conceptual ambiguity, it is possible to identify some common elements that aim to foster a productive relationship between philosophy and theology, primarily within the Christian tradition but not exclusively so. Some of these attempts reveal aspects of integration and contrast between them, with the latter sometimes manifesting as cooperation, disjunction, or even conflict.

According to the *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (MCFARLAND; FERGUSSON; KILBY; TORRANCE, 2011), Philosophical Theology is a branch of Philosophy of Religion in a more contemporary and broader sense. It can accept religious experience and revelation as premises, differing slightly from Natural Theology, which focuses more on sense experience and scientific knowledge. An example of a premise in Philosophical Theology is: "Assuming – for the sake of analysis – that God is impassible in the sense asserted by Christian orthodoxy, what does this imply for our understanding of the nature of God and of God’s attributes such as mercy and love?"

It is often assumed that while philosophical theologians may believe their conclusions to be true based on their premises, they typically do not prove their conclusions to be true because they do not prove their premises. The idea of an *a priori* ontological proof is controversial. However, within the domain of Philosophical

Theology, one can use philosophical tools to ensure, at least, the logical soundness of the metaphysical possibility of Theism – another concept deeply related to the subject of the Philosophy of Religion, especially in the analytic tradition.

In this sense, concerns may appear regarding the scope of what is known as Analytic Philosophy of Religion (APR), particularly in relation to its nomenclature. The first question is whether APR is too theological or excessively analytic. The second question is whether Christian Analytic Philosophers are operating within an echo-chamber or an epistemic bubble. The third question is whether APR adequately represents the diversity of religious and non-religious perspectives existing in the world. Responding to the second question may involve asserting that Christian APR does not presuppose the truth of Christianity but rather engages in rational arguments to support it. Regarding the third question, it seems that when APR disregards the Christian Tradition and adopts an abstract and construed concept of God (referred to as the *God of the Philosophers*), it opens the door to pluralism. However, we shall argue that this is not the only approach to achieve pluralism. The first question poses greater difficulty since it pertains to the somewhat nebulous boundaries surrounding the domain of Philosophy of Religion.

This conceptual vagueness is closely tied to the subject matter under consideration in this realm, which is God and Transcendence. Some theologians critique the assumption in Philosophy of Religion that God is a possible object of human knowledge, even apart from revelation, similar to any other object “out there” to be discovered. A related criticism concerns the alleged univocal account of theological language endorsed by the philosophy of religion, especially in the analytic approach. This approach dismisses other linguistic resources embraced by contemporary Christian theologians who prefer the use of analogical or metaphorical predication, and even non-predicative forms.

These criticisms are directed at both *Ontotheology* (which erroneously views God as an epistemic object) and the naively assumed univocity of religious language. These concerns must be taken into account when envisioning a potential future for the philosophy of religion, given its inherently complex nature at the intersection of philosophy and theology.

In the book *Contemporary Debates in Negative Theology and Philosophy* (2017, p. 1-14), J. Aaron Simmons raises the question: "How can scholars continue to do

Philosophy of Religion in light of Negative Theology?" Simmons analyzes the future of the discipline amidst its primary objections, including the dominance of *cognitivism* (emphasis on belief rather than practice), *narrowness* (focus on Christianity to the exclusion of other religions), and *insularity* (lack of collaborative engagement with other disciplines).

We argue that these challenges can be addressed through a meta-philosophical approach that acknowledges the limitations of language and the conceptual inadequacy in fully understanding the nature of God and Transcendence. The apophatic tradition emerges as a new tool to grapple with the complex phenomenon of religiosity in our age, fostering not only intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue but also dialogue with secular humanists in general.

In this paper we analyze the role of Negative or Apophatic Theology in addressing some of these issues and, consequently, in laying the groundwork for a promising future for the Philosophy of Religion, despite the challenges it currently faces. We advocate that this methodological stance can also be applied to Eschatology, a branch of Theology dealing with the so-called *Last Things*, whose current controversies among scholars are no less complex. The concepts of *God* and the *Afterlife* are connected to the fundamental questions addressed by the Philosophy of Religion.

In the first section, we introduce the concept of Negative Theology, which originated from the work *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* by Dionysius the Areopagite. This concept is centered on a critical approach to the limitations of religious language in the face of God's ineffability, also present in modern and contemporary philosophy. A comparison between negative theology and mystical theology reveals more similarities than differences, which are subsequently analyzed.

In the second section, we assert that the same mystery surrounding the nature of God is also present in the concept of the afterlife. Therefore, the negative method can also be applied to Eschatology, resulting in the concept of *Negative Eschatology*, in which the significance of *Hope* plays a crucial role. The *eschatological hope*, attained through intellectual humility and openness to the diverse possibilities that the future may bring, can enrich both intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue.

In the third section, we reject some potential objections to apophaticism by emphasizing the complementary role of the cataphatic and apophatic philosophy of religion, as well as the need for a methodological stance that really promotes openness and dialogue.

We conclude by highlighting the philosophical role of the negative method in both Theology and Eschatology, which ultimately proves helpful in ensuring the future of Philosophy of Religion in the face of its most significant challenges in contemporary times.

1. NEGATIVE OR APOPHATIC THEOLOGY

Negative theology is the ancient grounding for *Apophaticism*, which derives from the Greek word "apophasis" and can be applied in many domains beyond theology. Besides conveying the broader meaning of "revelation", "apophasis" literally means "saying no" or "saying negatively", equivalent to the Latin *Via Negativa*.

According to Sarah Coakley (2009, p. 280-312), the typology of the possible meanings of apophatic or negative theology can be described as follows:

i) The theological practice of *unsaying* claims about God, negating the positive to express God's uniqueness and transcendence (as in Dionysius the Areopagite). The relation between negating and affirming can be dialectical or mutually correcting, or the negative pole can be more fundamental, or it has to be negated as well.

ii) The ascetic practice of detaching human desires from false goals (as in Master Eckhart).

iii) The paradoxical theology of *divine absence-as-divine affliction* (as in Luther's *Theology of the Cross* and John of the Cross's *Second Night of Spirit*).

iv) The distinctively modern expression of God's *presence-as-absence* (as in Simone Weil, as well as in Kant's *Noumenal Darkness*).

Among the sources of Apophaticism there is the work *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* by Dionysius the Areopagite, a theologian of the 6th century who held that our talk of God must involve both affirmation and denial. Within this interplay of cataphatic (positive) and apophatic (negative) theology, there is a certain sense in which the latter has priority. For Dionysius cataphatic theology constitutes an important initial step in Christian discourse about God, though it must ultimately be transcended by the dedicated theologian. In contemplating the ineffable God, one must move from the presumption of knowing (cataphatic theology) to the mystery of unknowing (apophatic theology). Thus, the task of cataphatic theology is preparatory, allowing language to exhaust itself in attempting to name God, thereby paving the way toward an appreciation of God's surpassing every name.

The prefix *super* is used in Dionysius's philosophy to allow a term to remain at the border between the intelligible and the supra-intelligible, surpassing any determination. The meaning of the apophatic negation can be grasped at the confluence of three specific supra-intelligible terms: the alterity, the transcendence, and the excess (the infinity) (MOS, 2019).

In this sense, the negation applied by the apophatic method is not privative, but *super-affirmative*, indicating an infinite affirmation, beyond any determination. It is related to the attributes of excellence, surpassing, transcendence, and superabundance, all of which point to a categorical *beyond* that escapes all affirmations and negations. God is to be described not for what He is but for what He is not. God is beyond all conceptual schemes, is not conformed to any being, is superior to all beings and in this sense is a Non-Being or Non-Existent. Dionysius says: "(...) Even the Non-Existent shares in the Beautiful and Good, for Non-Existence is itself beautiful and good when, by the Negation of all Attributes, it is ascribed Super-Essentially to God." (ROLT, 2000, p. 52).

Dionysian negativity reminds the theologian that language does not apply to God in its ordinary sense but rather *supereminently*, by exceeding itself. Accordingly, Dionysius releases imagination, affirming every possible name for God and, consequently, allowing us to operate through excessive affirmation as well as negation.

The core of this conception is that Divine transcendence places God beyond all human categories. The fundamental categories of Being, Life and Wisdom cannot be applied to God, because He possesses them in a supereminent way. By simultaneously affirming and denying the nature of the One who is above all, one can represent Him analogically and independently of every affirmation and negation, as an *icon* and not as a concept subject to methodical-rational discourse. One cannot say *what God is* but only *what God is not*. In the limit, it would even be a mistake to say that *God exists*, let alone make any other positive statements about God – no matter how paradoxical that may seem –, for God is beyond Being and beyond everything else.

For Dionysius, God is neither knowable nor unknowable, in a logic that surprises us nowadays because it contains widespread failures of excluded middle and bivalence. It concerns the so-called “Law of the Included Middle”, described as follows:

It ensures that, between any two opposite terms, a space always exists for a middle term that is neither A nor $\sim A$ on its own; it may be either both at once (as the law of contradiction already permits) or neither (as implied by the law of non-identity). (PALMQUIST, 2017, p. 57).

Nevertheless, far from incurring in open contradiction, affirmative theology (cataphatic) and negative theology (apophatic) have a complementary role, for it is not a matter of simply denying what had previously been affirmed of God, but rather of a clear and rational perception that God infinitely transcends all these concepts, which thus need to be purified. An affirmation is only valid insofar as it is permeated by a preferable negation, which points toward the Ineffable. The Divine is inherently epistemically off-limits, rendering all human attempts to speak of Him equally invalid.

Negative theology is associated with mystical theology, in the sense that the former opens the way to the latter, preaching ignorance as the only means to end ignorance, or rather, to know the super-essentially unknown God in His *Divine Darkness*, as in Dionysian words.

The negative method reveals the movement of universal mysticism, calling into question every attempt to frame God in the tangles of religious language. Sometimes we find in the apophatic statements the kind of metaphorical and poetic language that touches upon mystical theology. Apophaticism teaches us that God is superior to thought and

knowledge, and therefore is the very absence of thought and absolutely unknowable; the knowledge we can have of Him is one and the same with ignorance. Once aware that God transcends all transcendence, the human mind can only approach Him by means of an apophatic procedure, that is, by saying what He is not, the end point of which is *knowledge through ignorance*.

In this sense, Apophaticism is not only a linguistic strategy but also has an experiential dimension, serving as a private and subjective state of experiencing through nothingness or darkness. In these mystical experiences, there is contemplation and ecstasies, a naked knowing of contemplative passivity. One enters new levels of perception and sensation, discovering new ways of *perceiving God*, including the paradoxical apprehension of God as precisely noetically unknowable.

The closeness between negative theology and mystical theology lies in their mutual essence as spiritual disciplines aimed at deconstructing human forms of knowing, perceiving, and loving. The mystics of the Middle Ages recognized this holistic meaning of mystical theology or the art of contemplation. All three major modes of medieval theology – the monastic, the scholastic, and the vernacular – involved mystical theology, though in differing ways.

However, it is important to stress that mystical theology is more of a lived experience (the perfect unification between us and God beyond time and space) than a dialectical approach, characteristic of theology with its negative method. Mystical theology appears not primarily as a way of thinking but rather as a program for living, whereas negative theology seems to combine both, transforming its way of thinking into a way of living or experiencing spirituality in a different sense, perhaps broader. In this sense, for apophaticism, religious experience surpasses the mere role of serving as a basic source of knowledge, attaining a spiritual state in which one feels united with the Unknown.

Additionally, far from being a concession to agnosticism or atheism, an apophatic theology is a position concerning knowledge of God's nature, rather than a position concerning belief in God's existence. It can even be a higher, more refined way of affirming that God exists. In this sense we can come to know that God exists, although we cannot know what God is (we know *that* God is but not *what* God is). We know there

is a mystery which we call God. This idea is also present in Aquinas' claim that "We cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not." (Aquinas, 2006, First Part, Question 3, Prologue). Not only do we not know the essence of God, but neither are we able to possess knowledge of this sort, at least during our lifetime. God is the wholly *other*, and to try to see otherwise is to commit a category mistake profoundly related to this radical failure of knowledge.

Apophaticism is also present in contemporary philosophy, for example, in the reading of the early Wittgenstein, whose aim was to dissolve philosophical perplexity through a therapeutic role, designed to keep in one's mind the riddle of existence. For him, "not how the world is, is the mystical, but that it is" (2022, 6.44). Applied to theology, this negative method is not concerned with trying to say what God is, but with trying to stop us talking *nonsense*, which happens when we attempt to say what cannot be said. Theology and Philosophy can then share the same *Via Negativa* model, according to which one cannot express anything fully, not just God, but anything at all. Despite its appearance of contradiction, this idea is profoundly related to the metaphor of Wittgenstein's ladder, as follows:

My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) (2022, 6.54).

In both apophatic theology and apophatic philosophy, there is a failure to express the meaning of *being* in language, causing the transition from *being* to *nothing*. Any linguistic approach is apophatic in the sense that *being*, much like the word "God" in Christian negative theology, fails to express the infinity of what is meant in positive terms. Negation is thus an operation to shatter our habit of categorical, logical, and consistent thinking, to finally attain a kind of silence that opens up to the different possibilities of the unknown.

William Franke is one of the foremost advocates of contemporary apophatic philosophy. In his book *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, he presents apophaticism as a *perennial philosophy* that challenges logocentrism, assuming "modern apophatic culture as rooted in millenary discourses of mysticism and negative theology that can be traced back to the origins of the Western intellectual tradition." (2014, p. 1).

For Franke, the subject matter of the unsayable lies in any attempt to talk coherently about the ineffable, which defies explanation in human language, but not only this. The limits we are dealing with are not themselves simply linguistic and conceptual, but they are rather existential, and for this reason an ethical approach is required by *apophasis*, which understands philosophy as a way of life. Franke's apophatic negation is a preventive measure, a self-critical tool to keep oneself from idolizing safe concepts. It is not a stop, but an opening to infinity.

In the following section, we apply the negative method to Eschatology, based on the assumption that the ineffability of God is analogous to the ineffability of the afterlife, which is one of its subjects.

2. NEGATIVE ESCHATOLOGY

We have observed that the history of philosophy provides examples of apophaticism, which recognizes the unknowability of certain transcendent realities. For instance, the way of negation also reveals itself in Kant's statement that "the thing in itself" is unknowable. In this sense a general apophaticism yields not only a God but also an afterlife much like Kant's noumenal darkness, as pointed out by Coakley (2009).

Both theology and eschatology share the common aspect of the mystery of their objects of study – the noumenal God and the noumenal afterlife, respectively. Thus, by making use of apophatic methods of disciplined speech, they seek to preserve the *learned ignorance* that follows from the recognition of these mysteries.

There are limits not just on coherent theological language, but on coherent eschatological language as well, for we cannot truthfully, or even intelligibly, describe in words *what* God is or *what* the afterlife promises to be. Just like God is radically dissimilar from us all, the afterlife is radically dissimilar from everything we experience in life. So, in their apophatic dimension, theology and eschatology recommend a critical approach to these limitations of religious language, the necessity to free oneself from firmly established habits of thought, in a negative method that *dislocates* the individual's social, historical, conceptual, cultural, and psychological assumptions.

For Simon Hewitt (2020), the same apophatic considerations are operative eschatologically, in order to be applied to our *post-mortem* existence. Just as negative theology concerns the recognition that God is completely ineffable, in a similar manner negative eschatology recognizes that the *post-mortem* reality is absolutely inscrutable, for which there can be no last word. We know absolutely nothing about our absolute or ultimate future, except that we have a future in the mystery that we call God. Not only do we not know what God is in our present mortal life, but it is possible that we will not know in the future immortal life. Hewitt stresses that ineffability is an eternal truth about God, which is why the contemplative knowledge of God in the afterlife seems to be *sui generis*. Even if, in Christianity, it is promised that we will resurrect after death and enjoy the so-called Beatific Vision and the truest happiness as a consequence, we should be modest in our expectations due to the speculative character of these scenarios, which once again recommend the humblest stance as the cornerstone of apophaticism.

In a similar manner, Kevin Hughes (2022) argues that the negations of apophatic theology and eschatology result from the ineffability of God more than from the epistemological limitations of finitude. He presents God's mystery as absolutely irrevocable, in the sense that life with Him in the *Eschaton* will never cease to be ineffable. This comes not as a consequence of the distance of God, or of finitude and sin, but due to the very abundance of the gift of God's presence. After death, life is the infinite progress of the soul going deeper and deeper into the unknown God.

As we have seen, mystical theology and negative theology are united in the indefinable presence at which they point. According to Hughes, mystical theology concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the *direct presence of God*. The indirect experience of God's presence in contemplation is the foretaste of the fullness of His presence in the *Eschaton*. The result of the approach to God in contemplation means the jump from the theoretical preparation for this encounter to the encounter itself envisaged through the lessons of Christian eschatology, in which the presence of God and eternal life appear as a promise. The core of this promise is the ground for developing the virtue of *hope*, which is fundamental in negative eschatology.

Therefore, the proximity between theology and eschatology in their apophatic dimension also lies in a sort of anticipation of mortal death by means of mystical death. In turn, the way to flow from the mystical to the eschatological is the same way that departs from *learned ignorance* to *disciplined hope*, acting *as if* the promised eschatological future were true. This disciplined hope is available to eschatology from this related field of study, mystical theology, and more specifically, from what is called the apophatic tradition.

Hope links theology and eschatology through the binding of their mutual apophatic perspective, which reminds us of what Kant identifies as the only objects of hope: immortality and God (Kant, 2015). For him, the propositions that we have immortal souls, and that God exists are called “postulates of practical reason”, for which there is no theoretical evidence of any sort. In this sense, experience can never prove or disprove the existence of an immortal soul or God. At the same time, we wish that there is a God and that our duration be endless, and because of this, hope appears as the wishful belief of this very possibility. For Kant, we are rationally justified in hoping for immortality and the existence of God, which the concept of the Highest Good presupposes. One of his primary questions is precisely “What may we hope?”, together with “What can we know?” and “What ought we do?” Hope appears then as profoundly connected to the ineffability of God and His promise concerning the other side of death – a pure hope that is patient and humble due to its apophatic character.

The concept of *disciplined hope* is essential to the negative eschatology proposed here, as it helps unite various world religions by minimizing the incommensurability among their doctrines.

In this sense, a look at the history of religions reveals that their conceptions are often incommensurable, since they deal with different concepts of God, Immortality, Afterlife, Body, Soul, Heaven, Hell, Good, Evil, etc. Possible divergences among the doctrines of different world religions are far from a satisfactory conciliatory solution, despite the permanent efforts towards inter-religious dialogue. This is because there is no ideal parameter for their comparison, which is needed to find a common denominator in their respective objects, or even an intersecting point in their main ideas. This incommensurability becomes especially evident in Eschatology, since each religion

handles the concept of afterlife in its own way, and there are even those that reject such a concept.

In this context, the philosopher and Catholic Priest Tomáš Halík introduced the concept of negative eschatology for the first time, in order to promote inter-religious dialogue in a world as fragmented as ours, against the spread of fundamentalism and fanaticism. Halík intends to foster dialogue not only inside Christian theology, but also among theologies of the other religions of the Abrahamic tradition (Judaism and Islam), and even with the involvement of secular humanists in general, including agnostics and atheists. The alleged conflict to be avoided derives in a sense from the crisis of religious language, which must recognize the uncertainty of all our knowledge, and our religious knowledge in particular (Halík, 2009).

Halík recommends applying to the secret of our eschatological future the same humble openness that we adopt with regard to the unknowability of God. He aims both to dispel imperfect sectarian positions and to encourage mutual tolerance among the various religions, each with its own particular conception of the possibility of existence beyond death. Halík proposes a radical openness to the mystery of our mortal existence, based on the *eschatological differentiation* between what is available to us now and what is the object of our eschatological hope, which is an invitation to patience and tolerance.

3. RESPONSE TO SOME POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

In this section, we aim to address some potential criticisms of our proposal to apply the apophatic method to the Philosophy of Religion as a more promising path to its future.

Firstly, it could be objected that apophaticism implies a way of negation that might be, of necessity, extremely thin, disallowing any propositional statement about God or the afterlife. This concern seems plausible once one acknowledges that if God truly transcends human categories, then the propositional content of any positive discourse about God would always seem false or meaningless, and the same goes for statements about the *post-mortem* state.

In principle, one could dismiss this worry by assuming that the analytic style is not suitable for doing theology, preferring instead a free and creative use of evocative language. The question to be posed is whether this is the only way to do theology in an open and humble manner that recognizes the ineffability of God and transcendence. We think it is not, for embracing apophatic theology does not necessarily mean renouncing the practice of analytic theology. An apophatic theologian could engage in analytic theology if she replaces the goal of arriving at a definitive and comprehensive understanding of divine mysteries with the goal of producing only approximations of the truth about God.

A similar criticism relates to the purported tension between classical logic and non-classical logic in the use of apophaticism: does it replace the solid principles of classical logic with the flexibility of non-classical logic to make its assertions? If so, does apophaticism thereby renounce the ability to make truth-value assertions about theological subjects, rendering it a form of expressive poetic language that is incommensurable with cataphaticism?

We argue that apophaticism and cataphaticism have complementary roles derived from the peculiarity of theological language. As we have seen, Dionysius the Areopagite proposed the negative method as a means to express God's ineffability in terms of uniqueness and transcendence. This negation is not privative, but *super-affirmative*, endowing all divine attributes with an uncategorical *superiority*, without depriving these metalogical properties of their intrinsic reality; on the contrary, it enhances them.

In this sense, there have been various interpretations regarding the relationship in apophaticism between negation and affirmation—whether dialectical or mutually corrective, with negation being either more fundamental or itself being negated. In all these cases, the importance of utilizing both approaches—apophatic and cataphatic—is recognized. Their commensurability stems from their complementarity, which can be understood as the cataphatic theology being a preparatory step to the apophatic theology. This reminds us of Wittgenstein's approach to negative philosophy, in which one allows language to exhaust itself in attempting to know what is beyond any knowledge.

As regards the logical aspects of apophaticism applied to the philosophy of religion, we claim that the very use of non-classic logic as a complement to classic logic can be justified in light of the nature of the objects of theology and eschatology. A similar approach is observed in some interpretations of quantum physics, which take non-classical logic as a more adequate conceptual ground to describe certain phenomena within the theories, whose objects may escape the traditional epistemic and ontological stance.

Finally, it could be argued that the assertion that apophaticism promotes openness to different possibilities and to inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue could be vulnerable to an objection similar to one raised against John Hick's pluralist proposal. According to Hick:

[Religious Pluralism] is the view that the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions. There is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation or liberation. (1985, p. 34).

One question to be posed is to what extent there is a difference between affirming the inadequacy of all simply cataphatic theologies and affirming the inadequacy of all cataphatic theologies other than someone's theology. The latter seems to be what every cataphatic proposal does in relation to all other proposals that are contradictory to it. In such a scenario, can there truly be inclusivism in the *open dialogue* promised by the apophatic method?

Without engaging in the debate on the cogency of Hick's pluralistic philosophy of world religions, we argue that the kind of *sectarism* envisaged by this criticism is exactly what the apophatic method here proposed is aimed to combat.

As we have seen, Halík's inclusivist proposal (2009) emerges as a valuable tool for challenging any narrow position that asserts the exclusive validity of one's own religion at the expense of all others. By highlighting the ineffability of theological and eschatological objects, Halík aims to facilitate genuine dialogue among various religious and non-religious perspectives, grounded in humble openness and shared hope. As human beings, we all experience a common uneasiness regarding our eschatological future, which could serve as a unifying factor in dispelling imperfect sectarian positions and

fostering mutual tolerance. We advocate that apophaticism can be one of several possible approaches to achieve this desirable state of affairs.

CONCLUSION

The main motivation behind this paper has been Simmons' question regarding how scholars could continue to do Philosophy of Religion in light of Negative Theology. He expressed concerns about the discipline's future in the face of objections like cognitivism, narrowness, and insularity.

We have argued that the negative approach to theology can effectively address these challenges confronting the philosophy of religion in our epoch. In the case of *cognitivism*, this philosophical method facilitates an emphasis on practice over belief, as seen in the intersection of apophaticism and mystic theology. With respect to *narrowness*, negative theology permits the inclusion of religions beyond Christianity by rejecting imperfect sectarian positions and encouraging mutual tolerance among the various religious doctrines. Concerning *insularity*, apophaticism promotes collaborative engagement with other disciplines to enhance religious language without losing sight of its conceptual limitations.

We have also seen that the apophatic method can be applied to both Theology and to its branch, Eschatology, in order to promote inter-religious dialogue. This approach is grounded in *hope*, construed as a common denominator that unites all religions and people around shared mysteries.

At this point, one arrives at the notion of *agnostic faith*, understood as a faith that refrains from being a closed, unchanging knowledge. It assumes its own provisionality and opens itself to the insights of other disciplines. Rather than purely propositional knowledge, which is unavailable to us in any definitive form, it focuses on *personal knowledge*, fostering both intra-religious and inter-religious dialogue.

We observe a persistent tension between the philosophy of religion and the negative theology, similar to the tension between cataphatic and apophatic theology. Departing from Dionysius, the philosophy of religion may be an important initial step in

God talk, although it eventually should be surpassed. Therefore, its task can be preparatory, allowing language to exhaust itself in attempting to speak about the transcendence in all its forms.

The future of the philosophy of religion may lie in dialogue with apophaticism, which can enhance conversations with other religious traditions and even with humanists in general, including agnostics and atheists. This movement stems from acknowledging God's ineffability and reveals the blurred boundaries among all disciplines dealing with the transcendence, as discussed earlier in this paper.

We propose approaching the philosophy of religion with a humble openness that does not imply renouncing the investigation into the subject. On the contrary, it is a methodological stance that acknowledges the imperfection of all our theories. This new perspective can also be existential through a dialogue with mystic theology, recalling the statement of the theologian Karl Rahner (1963, Chapter 7, section 1): "The Christian of the future will either be a mystic or not be a Christian at all".

Revisiting mysticism indicates the potential for the future of the philosophy of religion to benefit from its past, emphasizing how understanding the history of a philosophical concept can contribute to its enhancement.

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