

# Patristic Apophaticism and the House of Being

MARIUS PORTARU 

*The Patristic Institute Augustinianum*  
E-mail: [mportaru@startmail.com](mailto:mportaru@startmail.com)

## Abstract

This essay proposes a brief reflection on language, considering Patristic apophaticism, as seen in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers, Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor. It discusses Heidegger's critique of onto-theology and his *Letter on Humanism*, where language is called "the House of Being". It tries to show that, according to Patristic apophaticism, the human *nous* is instead the "House of Being". The difference between Heidegger and Patristic thought lies in how Being is understood. It also notes that the *Letter on Humanism* displays a potential openness to the "energetic theory of language", which characterises Patristic apophaticism.

**Keywords:** Patristic apophaticism, Dionysius, Maximus, energetic theory of language, Heidegger, *nous*, the House of Being, language

Socrates: "How to learn and make discoveries about the things that are is probably too large a topic for you or me. But we should be content to have agreed that it is far better to investigate them and learn about them through themselves than to do so through their names".<sup>1</sup>

Has Orthodox theology thematised language and developed a systematic theory of language? We should probably answer this question in the negative. The main reason for this could be the subordination or reduction of reflection on language to the more important topic of the knowledge of God.<sup>2</sup> If Orthodox systematic theology seems to lack a theory of language

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Cratylus* 439b; transl. C.D.C. Reeve in John M. Cooper (ed.), *Plato. Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 154. I wish to thank dr. Bogdan Tătaru-Cazaban for the invitation to contribute to this thematic issue of *Diakrisis*.

<sup>2</sup> This is what we find, for instance, in prominent theologians such as Vladimir Lossky, *Essai sur la théologie mystique de l'Église d'Orient* (Paris: Cerf, 2008 [<sup>1</sup>1944]), 21-41 and Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 1 (București: EIBMBOR, 1996<sup>2</sup>), 81-99; English

so far,<sup>3</sup> patristic theology came closest to a self-standing theory of language in two moments of its history: the Cappadocian refutation of Eunomius of Cyzicus and Dionysius the Ps.-Areopagite's apophatic theology.

In the first instance,<sup>4</sup> Eunomius was claiming (embracing probably the naturalist conception of language from Plato's *Cratylus*) that trinitarian terms such as "ungenerated" or "born" name the very essence of God.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the Cappadocians denied that God's essence could be known or expressed in any way. We can learn and name God's activities,<sup>6</sup> through which God acts in creation and manifests Himself as a communion of Persons towards created persons. While averting that words cannot name the essence of any existing individual – neither the essence of God nor of created persons or things – but only their activities or manifestations, the Cappadocians were not embracing a purely conventional theory of language: the personal activities, through which the Trihypostatic God or human persons manifest themselves, express their being. The energies/activities (ἐνέργεια) are not foreign to what persons are in themselves; therefore, through their energetic manifestations, all entities, especially persons, communicate something true about themselves.<sup>7</sup>

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version: *The Experience of God. Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1: *Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God*, transl. and ed. by Ioan Ioniță and Robert Barringer (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 95-125.

<sup>3</sup> Although a response to the modern linguistic turn is emerging, cf. Nikolaos Loudovikos, 'From the Daydreams of a Private Religious Language to Its Ecclesiology: Wittgenstein and Maximus the Confessor', in his book *Church in the Making. An Apophatic Ecclesiology of Consubstantiality*, transl. Norman Russell (Yonkers NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016), 233-249; Stylianos G. Papadopoulos, *Theologie und Sprache. Erfahrungstheologie – konventionelle Sprache* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2007 [1988]); John Milbank, 'The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn', in his book, *The Word Made Strange. Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 84-120.

<sup>4</sup> "The Cappadocians stopped short of developing their understanding of the human invention of language into a coherent, systematic, philosophical, metaphysical/post-metaphysical understanding", Scot Douglass, *Theology of the Gap. Cappadocian Language Theory and the Trinitarian Controversy* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), 11.

<sup>5</sup> "When we say 'Unbegotten', then, we do not imagine that we ought to honour God only in name, in conformity with human invention; rather, in conformity with reality, we ought to repay him the debt which above all others is most due God: the acknowledgement that he is what he is... So, then, if, as shown by the preceding argument, 'the Unbegotten' is based neither on invention nor on privation... then 'the Unbegotten' must be unbegotten essence", Eunomius, *Liber apologeticus* 8 (ed. Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius. The Extant Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 40-42). I borrow this text and its translation from Douglass, *Theology of the Gap*, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Basil the Great, *Ep.* 334, 3.

<sup>7</sup> The energetic constitution of everything that exists will be later fully articulated by Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua ad Thomam* 5 (CCSG 48, 19-20), where he defines the natural energy (ἐνέργεια φυσική) as the constitutive power (συστατική δύναμις) of nature, the first and proper characteristic of nature, the most general movement of nature, that which gives it a specific shape (εἰδοποιὸς κίνησις), that which comprises all the natural

In the second instance, even though Dionysius' apophatic theology may seem to develop a more appropriate language to talk about God, his focus is not on language but on the highest knowledge of God, which is attained through the union (ἔνωσις) with Him. From the point of view of this supreme and ineffable existential knowledge-union, we perceive the inadequacy of any rational concept concerning God. Any natural analogy or commensurability between God's nature and creatures' nature is excluded. God descends to us through His processions and bestows being on creatures through the divine paradigms (θεία παράδειγμα), which are further specified as definitions (λόγοι), predeterminations (προορισμοί) and divine acts of will (θεία θελήματα). These processions correspond to the Cappadocian divine activities. They are the only source of the attributes we predicate about God, yet God, Himself in His being, remains wholly transcendent to His processions and manifestations towards creatures. Consequently, there is no proper attribute for God in human language: "Hence, with regard to the supra-essential being of God – transcendent Goodness transcendentally there – no lover of the truth which is above all truth will seek to praise it as word or power or mind or life or being".<sup>8</sup> Dionysius' apophatic theology represents much more an invitation to attain the supreme union with God, than a positive theory of language.<sup>9</sup>

In both these instances, extensive considerations of the use of language in theology were deployed, yet the main concern was the knowledge of God and not language *per se*. Dionysius' apophatic theology gave supreme articulation to St Gregory the Theologian's reversal of Plato: to Plato's belief that it is difficult to know God and even more difficult to express such knowledge (*Tim.* 28c), the Theologian replied that "it is impossible to express God and even more impossible to know Him".<sup>10</sup> The lack of a theory of language

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properties of nature. He specifies that non-being alone has no natural energy, which means that all kinds of individuals have a natural energy/activity, including a stone, for example.

<sup>8</sup> Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 1, 5; transl. Colm Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works, The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 54.

<sup>9</sup> "Not only learning but also experiencing the divine things", *De div. nom.* 2, 9. Dionysius presents his very clear plea at *De div. nom.* 1, 1 (transl. Luibheid, 49): "Here too let us hold on to the scriptural rule that when we say anything about God, we should set down the truth 'not in the plausible words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the power granted by the Spirit' (1Cor. 2, 4) to the Scripture writers, a power by which, in a manner surpassing speech and knowledge, we reach a union superior to anything available to us by way of our own abilities or activities in the realm of discourse or of intellect. This is why we must not dare to resort to words or conceptions concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being, apart from what the sacred Scriptures have divinely revealed. Since the unknowing of what is beyond being is something above and beyond speech, mind, or being itself, one should ascribe to it an understanding beyond being. Let us, therefore, look as far upward as the light of sacred Scripture will allow, and, in our reverent awe of what is divine, let us be drawn together toward the divine splendor".

<sup>10</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 28, 4 (PG 36, 29C): ἀλλὰ φράσαι μὲν [Θεὸν] ἀδύνατον... νοῆσαι μὲν ἀδυνατώτερον.

considered in itself is easily explainable in those theological contexts: theology is fundamentally preoccupied with the proper knowledge of God and the salvation of humankind brought about by such knowledge. From this standpoint, any reflection on language appears secondary or even instrumental.

However, one common feature implicit in the Cappadocian and Dionysian attitudes to language is represented by their intermediary position between a naturalist conception of language (names capture the essence of things) and a conventionalist one (names are conferred by joint agreement): although words do not express the essence of things named, they are the result of knowing the energies/powers/activities/manifestations of those things. They are not wholly arbitrary. This is all the more true for persons, divine or human. The philosophical presupposition of this standpoint is that through their energetic manifestations, all entities, especially persons, communicate something true about themselves, which is part of their nature, representing what they are according to their essence.

We may call this intermediary position between naturalism and conventionalism the energetic theory of language.<sup>11</sup> It remains underdeveloped in patristic theology (and it appears like an alternative to Plato's *Cratylus*), but we may spell out some of its features. According to this theory, we can give names to anything only because we can grasp their manifestations or natural energies/activities. These bear and express the essential traits of any existent. In Dionysius, the divine processions are the source of the divine names. In the Cappadocians, the divine activities prompt us to call God in different ways. According to Gregory of Nyssa, even the name God – Θεός – refers to a specific divine activity, that of seeing (θεάομαι) or of governing (θέειν, running over). Thus, on the one hand, we do not name God's essence or nature, and on the other, the names we attribute to God or any other individual are not merely arbitrary or purely conventional, but are derived from the knowledge of an individual's natural energies/activities. In the Cappadocians, this energetic theory of the origin of names appears alongside reflections on the human invention of names,<sup>12</sup> a view which supports conventionalism and instrumentalism with respect to lan-

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<sup>11</sup> I am not aware of the presence of this expression in previous studies. It does not, however, constitute a new view, it only puts a label on the Cappadocian and Dionysian insight that when we say that God is life, for instance, we name one of His activities towards creation, the life-giving activity. I am grateful to dr. Daniela Dumbravă for pointing out that André Scrima wrote about the revelatory energy ("énergie révélatrice") and the energetic field ("champ énergétique") of the symbol: "Son énergie révélatrice ouvre la voie à l'avènement du sens qui constituera l'horizon spécifique de l'existant dans l'être", André Scrima, "Le Mythe et l'Épiphanie de l'Indicible", in Enrico Castelli (ed.), *Mythe et Foi*. Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre International d'Études Humanistes et par l'Institut d'Études Philosophiques de Rome, Rome, 6-12 Janvier 1966 (Aubier: Montaigne, 1966), 85-86.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Douglass, *Theology of the Gap*, 60-68.

guage. On the other hand, the energetic theory of the origin of language counterbalances the mere instrumentalism of the cataphatic in theology.<sup>13</sup>

The energetic theory of language allows for a specific interplay between the cataphatic (the use of language) and the apophatic *in theology*. The cataphatic represents what we may affirm about God (for instance, God is good and Goodness itself). The apophatic is not simply the negation of the cataphatic (*i.e.*, it is more adequate to say that God is not good because He is, in His being, dissimilar to anything in the created realm) but represents a superior knowledge of God through union with Him by means of His energies/activities – what Dionysius calls the divine splendour. The apophatic represents a “positive” knowledge of God through the gift of God’s power, supernatural knowledge of God, which surpasses our natural power of thinking or speech. It is a knowledge through which God reveals Himself more profoundly and in which He appears to overcome any created attribute infinitely. Within the apophatic knowledge, the transcendence of God reveals itself as infinitely more properly transcendent than within the cataphatic knowledge (either in its affirmative or negative form, which are both rational human activities). Within the apophatic knowledge, as the conscious experience of God’s energetic presence, the perfect revelation of God Himself and His providence takes place, as well as the deification of the knower (you become like the One whom you now properly know).

Patristic apophaticism has not grown into a theory of language in the modern sense, despite its immediate result, the energetic approach to language. It remained implicit. These two patristic notions fared well through the centuries until new developments in humankind’s intellectual history gradually pushed them to the surface of thinking. Duns Scotus’ doctrine of the univocity of being (God and creatures fall under the same concept of being, the difference between them is ultimately one of degree, not quality, which means that whatever ontological attributes creatures have, God has them infinitely) with its afferent semantics led to an onto-theological construction of metaphysics,<sup>14</sup> which is the opposite of patristic apophaticism and its energetic semantics. The critique of onto-theological metaphysics was conducted initially, not from a recovery of patristic apophaticism or the perspective of an energetic theory of language.

Heidegger’s deconstruction of Western metaphysics as onto-theology was among the most influential. Onto-theology is presented as a specific construction of both metaphysics and God. Thus the collapse of this metaphysics calls forth the death of that “god”. The onto-theological “god” falls

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<sup>13</sup> A position defended by Papadopoulos, *Theologie und Sprache*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. W. J. Hankey, “Why Heidegger’s ‘History’ of Metaphysics is Dead”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2004), 425-443; Thomas Williams, “John Duns Scotus”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

under the power of human knowledge (under the category of being) and is built up out of concepts as the supreme being in the continuous chain of being. The onto-theological “god” grounds ontologically particular beings and the being-in-beings. In return, it is grounded by beings as the necessary ultimate cause of everything, the *causa sui*. The most precise and complete exposition of Heidegger’s view of the onto-theological constitution of metaphysics is found in *Identity and Difference*, a book which sums up a seminar on the metaphysics of Hegel, published in 1957 and considered by him his most important writing after *Being and Time*. To quote a central text,

Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere and also of the unity of the all that accounts for the ground, that is, of the All-Highest. The Being of beings is thus thought of in advance as the grounding ground. Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account.<sup>15</sup>

Although Heidegger claimed that throughout its entire history, from Thales to Nietzsche, Western metaphysics is onto-theological (it ends positively with Hegel and negatively with Nietzsche), intense scholarship in the history of philosophy during the second half of the twentieth century – stimulated precisely by Heidegger – proved that his reading of critical philosophers was historically rushed.<sup>16</sup> We know today that the metaphysics of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and other (neo-)Platonists – Christian Neoplatonism included – display no onto-theological structure, mainly because they do not dissolve the ontological difference between the First Principle and beings:<sup>17</sup>

One of the strategies for gaining freedom from Heidegger’s history has been to specify the criteria of onto-theology precisely. Although this strategy accepts the criticism of metaphysics implicit in the category, it finds that most of the history of Western thought, certainly its ancient or mediaeval history,

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, transl. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 58. For Heidegger on onto-theology, see I. D. Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology. Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7-43.

<sup>16</sup> W. J. Hankey, “Why Heidegger’s ‘History’ of Metaphysics is Dead”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2004), 425-443. The author provides a comprehensive overview of the emerging scholarly consensus that philosophy has liberated itself from the horizon of onto-theology at the beginning of the new millennium.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, Ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2001).

does not fulfil the criteria. It is only fulfilled by post-Scotistic philosophy and theology, especially as developed by Suárez.<sup>18</sup>

The onto-theological deconstruction of metaphysics faces, besides the historical, a philosophical problem, which Heidegger himself, according to one of his best exegetes,<sup>19</sup> called “one of the deepest problems”: given that metaphysics endorsed an onto-theological form since its very beginning with the Presocratic thinkers, which was subsequently fully formalised by Plato and especially by Aristotle, Heidegger asks why this happened. Was this merely an arbitrary event, or was there a necessity hidden behind the process? Heidegger rejects the arbitrary effect hypothesis as phenomenologically unsatisfying: there was perhaps something in the original self-manifestation of Being which made it appear as ground (for Heidegger, Being means always the Being-in-beings). But on the other hand, Heidegger is compelled to reject the *necessary* character of the original self-manifestation of Being as ground (otherwise, metaphysics as onto-theology will not have distorted its self-manifestation) and claim that the original philosophical project (or better, *projects*) of metaphysical grounding is underdetermined, that is, the self-showing of Being is insufficiently described in the works of Thales, Anaximander and other Presocratics. It is with this procedure that the philosophical troubles begin. Once we perceive that there is a distinction between the disclosure of Being and the philosophical description of this disclosure (as Heidegger more or less implicitly does), it becomes necessary to analyse this disclosure itself and not its philosophical description to reach an explanation regarding the arbitrariness or necessity of metaphysics as onto-theology.<sup>20</sup> Heidegger tries instead to recover the “original” *self-*

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<sup>18</sup> Hankey, “Why Heidegger’s ‘History’ of Metaphysics is Dead”, 432. This strategy was championed by J.-L. Marion, who has spelt out the characteristics of onto-theology with reference to God: « on ne saurait parler d’onto-théo-logie à moins de voir jouer une triple fondation: la fondation conceptuelle de l’étant par l’être (*Gründung*), la fondation des étants par l’étant suprême selon la causalité efficiente (*Begründung*), enfin de la fondation conceptuelle par l’efficiente. *La question reste bien entendu ouverte* (my italics, MP) (bien que Heidegger n’en décide pas explicitement) de savoir si l’onto-théo-logie exige que ces trois fondations fonctionnent simultanément, ou une seule, ou deux, et lesquelles. (...) (i) « Le dieu » doit s’inscrire explicitement dans le champ métaphysique, c’est-à-dire se laisser déterminer à partir d’une des déterminations historiques de l’être en tant qu’étant, éventuellement à partir du concept d’étant; (ii) il doit y assurer une fondation causale (*Begründung*) de tous les étants communs dont il rend raison; (iii) il doit, pour ce faire, assumer toujours la fonction et éventuellement le nom de *causa sui*, c’est-à-dire de l’étant suprêmement fondateur parce que suprêmement fondé par lui-même », Jean-Luc Marion, *Dieu sans l’être* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013<sup>4</sup> [1978<sup>1</sup>]), 285, 287. Cf. also Jean-Luc Marion, “The Idea of God”, in D. Garber, M. Ayres (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 265-304.

<sup>19</sup> Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 23-38, whose interpretation I adopt here, while the identification of the difficulties implicit in Heidegger’s exposition is mine.

*disclosure* of Being from its different philosophical *descriptions*. This way, not only is Heidegger's intellectual project utterly dependent on a particular historical reading of the history of philosophy (which in many cases was not accurate, as we have seen), but also his onto-theological deconstruction of metaphysics is philosophically problematic because it works with an understanding of Being, namely Being as the Being-in-beings, shaped within the very same metaphysics that he accused of distorting the self-manifestation of Being. The deepest metaphysical problem remains as acute after Heidegger's deconstruction of Western metaphysics as onto-theology as it was before: how do we understand/describe Being?

Heidegger's deconstruction of Western metaphysics leads partly to the question concerning language. In *Letter on Humanism*,<sup>21</sup> a work published in 1947 (ten years before *Identity and Difference*), Heidegger tries to recover the meaning of the word "humanism". In doing so, he delineates himself from all available "humanisms" of the moment: Sartre's existentialism (from his *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, 1946), Marxism and Christianity. "For this is humanism: meditating and caring, that man be human and not inhumane, 'in-humane', that is, outside his essence. But in what does the humanity of man consist? It lies in his essence" (200). Care, as a fundamental characteristic of man's existence, tend to bring man back to his essence, in the nearness of Being. Humanism is recovered when man lives in accordance with his essence by thinking about the truth of Being in a way that is not "metaphysical" (that is, onto-theological) and does not lose sight of the difference between Being and beings. How is then Being understood in *Letter on Humanism*? Being is not a "god" or any cosmic ground. "It is It itself", it is "the lighting itself" which lets the truth of Being appear to man (210-211). Being is the enabling (*das Vermögen*), which enables thinking to be thinking. Thinking is the thinking of Being. "Such favouring (*Mögen*) means to bestow essence as a gift. Such favouring is the proper essence of enabling [...] From this favouring Being enables thinking [...] Being itself, which in its favouring presides over thinking and hence over the essence of humanity" (196). On this understanding of Being, "Thinking accomplishes the relation of Being to the essence of man. It does not make or cause the relation. Thinking brings this relation to Being solely as something handed

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<sup>20</sup> "Indeed, it is precisely at this juncture – his deconstruction of metaphysical foundationalism having taken him back to the beginnings of Western metaphysics – that the later Heidegger, rather than trying to take another, diachronic step back in time, as though back behind the 'inception' of Western metaphysics, instead makes a lateral or synchronic historical move, turning to other Presocratic thinkers in an attempt to illuminate further aspects of the original self-manifestation of being in the West", Thomson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Transl. in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper&Row, 1977), 189-242. Henceforth, I will indicate the page number in the text for any quotation or reference.



over to it from Being. Such offering consists in the fact that in thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells" (193). Through language, man stands in the lighting of Being, and this ecstatic dwelling Heidegger calls "the ek-sistence of man" (204). Ek-sistence is not identical to *existentia*, which in the traditional metaphysical language signifies actuality as opposed to potentiality (*essentia*). "Man occurs essentially in such a way that he is the 'there' (*das "Da"*), that is, the lighting of Being. The 'Being' of the *Da*, and only it, has the fundamental character of ek-sistence, that is, of an ecstatic inherence in the truth of Being" (205). This implies that "language is the lighting-concealing advent of Being-itself" (206) and that man's essence is defined from the ek-static character of Dasein: "As ek-sisting, man sustains *Da-sein* in that he takes the *Da*, the lighting of Being, into 'care'" (207). Heidegger adorns the quartet ek-sistence – Being – thinking – language with catchy metaphors: "the word's primordial belongingness to Being" (198), "language is the house of the truth of Being" (199), "man is the shepherd of Being" (210), language is nearness to Being (212), "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being" (221). In a word, the humanism Heidegger proposes is one that "thinks the humanity of man from nearness to Being" (222).

Heidegger's understanding of Being in *Letter on Humanism* resembles much with Parmenides' dictum ἐστὶ γὰρ εἶναι (which he discusses, 214-215) and Parmenides' identification of being and thinking (cf. "But the lighting itself is Being", 211). Perhaps similarly to Parmenides' absolute monism, which collapses into absolute dualism, Heidegger's ontological immanentism is threatened by conceptualism,<sup>22</sup> onto-theology,<sup>23</sup> and a pronounced dependency of his concept of Being on language: "The usage 'bring to language' employed here is now to be taken quite literally. Being comes, lighting itself, to language. It is perpetually under way to language. Such arriving in its

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<sup>22</sup> Conceptualism stems from the unclear degree of reality of such 'Being', which seems to supervene on thinking and language. Heidegger mentions that there is 'a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual' (235). Still, it is unclear how his philosophical argument – the thinking governed by 'Being' is 'recollection of Being and nothing else' (236) – raises 'Being' and thinking above the conceptual sphere. Elsewhere, some ambiguity creeps in, if through the 'house of Being' language is understood: "Thinking builds upon the house of Being" (236) 'And yet thinking never creates the house of Being' (237).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. 'Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought' (230). In this phrase, the concept of Being seems to be superimposed on the idea of divinity, an approach which resembles the Scottistic univocity. Let us add the argument of a thinking that grounds or gives foundation: 'For ontology always thinks solely the being (*on*) in its Being. But as long as the truth of Being is not thought all ontology remains without its foundation' (235). Somewhere, Heidegger clarifies that through such an understanding of humanism and Being nothing is decided concerning the existence of God, that his view represents no atheism and no teaching of indifferentism regarding God; instead, 'the thinking that thinks from the question concerning the truth of Being questions more primordially than metaphysics can' (229-230). Still, God appears to fall under Heidegger's (new) concept of Being.

turn brings ek-sisting thought to language in a saying. Thus language itself is raised into the lighting of Being. Language *is* only in this mysterious and yet for us always pervasive way. To the extent that language which has thus been brought fully into its essence is historical, Being is entrusted to recollection. Ek-sistence thoughtfully dwells in the house of Being” (239). This intermingling between Being and language creates the history of Being, which “comes to language in the words of the essential thinkers” (215; cf. also 241). It was natural that this new connection between Being and language, or between Being and the historical saying of Being, bring language, the essence of linguistic expression and hermeneutics as an approach to Being to the forefront of reflection; in other words, a linguistic turn of philosophy.

Heidegger’s refutation of (onto-theological) metaphysics was conducted in ignorance of patristic apophaticism. The response of Ch. Yannaras<sup>24</sup> is based on this observation. Yannaras argues that Dionysian apophaticism escapes Heidegger’s criticism and, at the same time, offers an understanding of God which does not exhaust the mystery of God through its philosophical or theological articulation. Dionysian apophaticism overcomes post-Nietzschean nihilism by proposing a special kind of apophatic knowledge as a personal relationship with God. This personal erotic relationship is fulfilled through union (ἔνωσις) with Him. In his response, however, Yannaras does not address the linguistic turn of Heidegger’s new science of Being, nor the energetic theory of language implicitly present within Dionysian apophaticism and patristic theology more broadly. We may generally say that a systematic answer of Orthodox theology to the modern philosophical linguistic turn is yet to be expected.<sup>25</sup>

So let us return to an implicit distinction in Heidegger’s deconstruction of Western metaphysics as onto-theology: the distinction between the self-disclosure of Being and the philosophical description of its self-disclosure. This distinction seems to have something substantial in common with the Cappadocian and Dionysian energetic theory of language: that the self-disclosure of Being or the revelation of the personal God, respectively, determines human knowledge and language. When Heidegger writes that “thinking overcomes metaphysics by climbing back down into the nearness of the nearest” (*Letter on Humanism*, 231), he appears to be potentially open to the central tenets of the energetic theory of language. What prevents him from being actually so is his concept of Being, which seems to supervene on thinking

<sup>24</sup> Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, transl. Haralambos Ventis (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Loudovikos, “From the Daydreams of a Private Religious Language”; Maximos Constas, ‘A Greater and More Hidden Word: Maximos the Confessor and the Nature of Language’, in S. Mitralixis et al. (eds.), *Maximos the Confessor as a European Philosopher* (Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 95-109; Papadopoulos, *Theologie und Sprache*; Milbank, ‘The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn’.

and language rather than have a sufficient degree of separateness and transcendence to illumine language without this illumination be the Being itself. The absolute transcendence of God and the complete transcending of speech within the apophatic knowledge of God according to Dionysius' apophaticism require that the house of Being be the human νοῦς, not the human language.

To understand the relationship between the νοῦς (mind/heart) and the λόγος (rational intellect/word and, by extension, language), let us recall one of the clearest expositions in patristic theology of the postulate that νοῦς is the house of Being: it pertains to St Maximus the Confessor, who raises Dionysian apophaticism to new heights of insight. In a relevant passage of *Mystagogy* 5, Maximus describes the pairs that the mind (νοῦς) and its activities form with the reason (λόγος) and its activities. These are 1. mind and reason; 2. wisdom and prudence; 3. contemplation and action; 4. knowledge and virtue; 5. knowledge without forgetfulness and faith. These five pairs move around the pair that points to God: truth and good. If mind and reason are paired, we understand the same pairing for truth and good in the soul and God as the Archetype of the soul. Through the five pairs, the soul progressively advances towards God by strengthening and stabilising its habituation in the good through the repeated choice of his free will (διὰ τῆς ἐν τῷ καλῷ παγίας καὶ ἀμεταθέτου κατὰ τὴν προαίρεσιν ἕξεως). At the end of this ascent, God is known as unchangeable according to being (τὸ ἄτρεπτον τῆς οὐσίας) and beneficent according to His energy/activity (τὸ εὐεργετικὸν τῆς ἐνεργείας).<sup>26</sup> Within this context, Maximus offers precious hints concerning the relationship between the human νοῦς and language:

Consequently, he had his mind (νοῦς) illuminated by the divine rays and therefore, it was capable of seeing what many cannot see. He had his reason like a most accurate interpreter of the things contemplated by his mind (τὸν λόγον ἐρμηνευτὴν ἀκριβέστατον τῶν νοηθέντων) and like a mirror which is not obscured by any stain of the passions; it [his reason] was able to both understand and speak with supreme clarity (ἀκραφνῶς [...] καὶ φέρειν καὶ λέγειν) about things which others could not perceive, so that those who listened to him could see, on the one hand, that his entire mind is united with his reason (ὅλον μὲν τῷ λόγῳ τὸν νοῦν ἐποχοῦμενον), and on the other hand, that all the things contemplated are reflected clearly in his whole mind are transferred to his listeners through the mediation of his words, in such a manner that they could receive them.<sup>27</sup>

For reason (λόγος) is the activity and manifestation of the mind (νοῦς) related to the mind as effect to cause, and prudence is the

<sup>26</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Myst.* 5 (PG 91, 676AC).

<sup>27</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Myst., prol.* (PG 91, 661CD; transl. mine).

activity and manifestation of wisdom, and action of contemplation, virtue of knowledge, and faith of knowledge without forgetfulness. Through these is produced the inward relationship to the truth and the good, that is, to God. This relationship he used to call divine science, and knowledge without mistake (γνώσιν ἄπταιστον), and love, and peace in which and by means of which there is deification. Science because it is the achievement of all knowledge concerning God and divine realities which is accessible to men and the embracing without mistake of the virtues. Knowledge because it genuinely lays hold of the truth and offers a lasting experience of God. Love because it shares by its whole disposition in the full happiness of God. Finally, peace inasmuch as it experiences the same inward state as God and prepares for this experience those who are judged worthy to come to it.<sup>28</sup>

Maximus reveals here what may be called an anthropological structure of truthfulness in contemplation and language: reason or intellect (λόγος) represents our power of rational understanding, thinking and speaking; mind (νοῦς) represents our power of spiritual contemplation, which may attain to illumination and deifying union with God through His hypostatic energetic presence. When the intellect and the mind are cleansed from passions and passionate thoughts, on the one hand, the νοῦς is illuminated by the divine light and receives the gift of spiritual contemplation and understanding, or, in Dionysius' terms, of apophatic theology; on the other, the λόγος is illuminated by the contemplative mind (νοῦς) and receives the gift of expressing through words and without mistake the realities contemplated by the mind. When νοῦς and λόγος become one through God's grace and are illuminated by His light and deified by His uncreated energies/activities, our words spring from both and become theandric. The human νοῦς has become the house of Being, and the human language shares in the truthfulness of the Logos-Christ.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Maximus the Confessor, *Myst.* 5 (PG 91, 680BC; transl. G. C. Berthold, in Maximus Confessor, *Selected Writings* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1985, 193-194, with my alterations).

<sup>29</sup> The same distinction between νοῦς and λόγος is attested by St John Damascene. Among the five types of natural energy/activity, he identifies the mental natural energy/activity and the rational natural energy/activity: the former is characteristic of angels and all incorporeal beings who exercise their noetic faculty through a simple impulse; the latter is typical to humans, who are composed of an immaterial soul and a body, who do not exercise their noetic faculty through a simple impulse, but through a many-coloured, manifold, changeful and discursive one, cf. St John Damascene, *Elementary introduction into dogmas*, 8 (ed. B. Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos*, vol. I (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1969), 25, ll. 7-11): ἡ νοερά [ἐνέργεια φυσική] ὡς ἐπὶ ἀγγέλων καὶ πασῶν ἀσωμάτων οὐσιῶν ἀπλή προσβολῇ νοούντων· ἡ λογικὴ ὡς ἐπὶ ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐκ ψυχῆς ἀσωμάτου καὶ σώματος συντεθειμένων, οὐχ ἀπλή, ἀλλὰ ποικίλη καὶ διαλογιστικῇ προσβολῇ νοούντων. It is significant that when St John refers to the activity of the human mind, he does not use a verb derived from λόγος or λογικός; instead, he resorts to the same verb he employed to

Within Maximus' apophaticism, the two elements of Heidegger's implicit distinction between the self-disclosure of Being and the philosophical description of its self-disclosure become aspects of the same spiritual event, of the same "lighting of Being". Being transcends its lighting, which represents one of His energies/activities. Language appears as the discursive lighting of the contemplative lighting. Since the lighting of Being takes place primordially within the human *voûς*, *voûς* and not language is the house of Being. This translates into the paradox that patristic apophaticism, which essentially denies the adequacy of language about God, can also lead to a better language or way of speaking about God. If Heidegger has shown that the very condition of speech about God is not onto-theology, he has equally missed seeing that it is patristic apophaticism and its energetic theory of language. It is not excluded nor surprising that Heidegger himself seems potentially open to it: "Everything depends upon this alone, that the truth of Being come to language and that thinking attain to this language. Perhaps, then, language requires much less precipitous expression than proper silence. But who of us today would want to imagine that his attempts to think are at home on the path of silence?" (*Letter on Humanism*, 223).

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describe the mental activity of the angels, *vo  *. This linguistic choice may imply first that human reasoning is a manifold and discursive apprehension, qualitatively not discontinuous with angelic apprehension, and second, that human manifold apprehension may become a simple apprehension by changing the mode of its manifestation, not its nature.

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