

Denial and (In)consistency in Apophatic Traditions

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Monotheistic apophatic philosophers (e.g., Pseudo-Dionysus, Meister Eckhart, Maimonides, and Abū Ḥātim), the *Upaniṣads*, and the *Laozi* put forward the divine (God, Brahman, or Dao) or divine attributes as ineffable. However, they do so through utterable sentences that contain negations. For example, *God is not evil and not not evil*, *Brahman is not this and not that*, and *the dao that is called 'dao' is not dao*. Under a typical logical analysis, such sentences give rise to contradictions with the structure of $\sim P \wedge \sim \sim P$, in which P is a proposition. In addressing such contradictions, logicians are driven towards accepting paraconsistent positions (allowing for glutty (true and false) propositions) or paracomplete positions (allowing for gappy (neither true nor false) propositions). Such positions depend on interpreting the negation of apophatic traditions as propositional, in which the negation takes scope over an entire proposition and indicates its falsity.

I argue that the use of negation and double negation within these traditions establishes a denial that preserves the (presupposition of the) existence of the divine while indicating that an utterance or mention of the divine is incorrect. In so doing, I suggest that this denial is non-propositional and concords with analyses of metalinguistic negations by Horn, denegations by Searle and Krifka, denials by Priest, and weak rejections by Incurvati and Schlöder. In so doing, I reject a reading of the divine as inconsistent and suggest that apophatic traditions utilize denials to show the impropriety of non-propositional issues (e.g., a category mistake) regarding an utterance or mention of the divine or divine attributes.

Bibliography

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