

A LATE WITTGENSTEINIAN APPROACH TO EARLY CHRISTIAN
APOPHATICISM

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ABSTRACT

A Late Wittgensteinian Approach To Early Christian

Apophaticism

This thesis investigates the possibility of a ground on which language can provide us with an opportunity to talk about God, despite the concerns about His ineffability as argued by religious apophaticism. Apophaticism is basically the idea that reality cannot be grasped by language. I begin by an exploration of what apophaticism is, and offer a specific form of apophatic thinking, namely, religious apophaticism. After I analyze how Plotinus argues for ineffability, I will move onto the early Christian reception of his apophatic thinking, *via negativa*, as it appears in the works of Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo Dionysius. The form of religious apophaticism I will outline here holds the idea that God is so transcendent that He cannot be represented in language or in any other medium. I will then present an analysis of religious apophaticism from the perspective of philosophy of language. A religious apophaticist believes that a concept cannot be applied to God and a natural being at the same time because s/he believes that there is an incommensurability between the beings to be represented. I will argue against this idea by bringing examples from Wittgenstein's arguments for language games and critique of ostensive definition. In the last chapter, I will show why it is problematic to hold a radical approach as regards the continuity in the application of concepts. I will look into the contrast between literalism and apophaticism, and argue that both positions are problematic. Finally, I will offer an analogical position to resolve the issue, and propose that to talk about God meaningfully, one needs to take into account the context in which the concept of God is constituted because language does not only describe facts.

ÖZET

Erken Hristiyan Apofatik Düşünceye Geç Wittgensteinci Yaklaşım

Bu tez, dindar apofatiklerin Tanrı'nın tarif edilemez olduğunu düşünmelerine karşılık, dilin bize Tanrı hakkında konuşma fırsatı veren bir zemin sağladığı fikrini incelemektedir. Apofatik düşünce gerçekliğin dil ile kavranamayacağı fikrini savunur. Bu tezde apofatik düşüncenin ne olduğunu araştırarak başlayacağım, ve apofatik düşüncenin özel bir biçiminden, dinsel apofatik düşünceden bahsedeceğim. Plotinos'un tarif edilemezliği nasıl savunduğunu anlattıktan sonra, erken dönem Hristiyan düşünürleri Nissalı Gregor ve Sahte Dionisos'un eserlerinde apofatik düşüncenin nasıl kendine yer bulduğunu aktaracağım. Ana hatlarından bahsedeceğim apofatik düşünce biçiminin, Tanrı'nın evrene aşkın olması sebebiyle dilde ve veya herhangi başka bir bağlamda tarif edilemez oluşunu nasıl savunduğunu anlatacağım. Daha sonra, dil felsefesi perspektifinden dinsel apofatik düşüncenin analizini sunacağım. Bir apofatik dilde temsil edilen gündelik varlıklar ile Tanrı arasında bir kıyaslanamazlık olduğuna inandığı için bir kavramın aynı anda hem Tanrı'ya hem de doğal bir varlığı atfedilemeyeceğine inanır. Wittgenstein'in dil oyunları ve gösterimsel tanım argümanlarını temel alarak bu yaklaşıma karşı çıkacağım. Son bölümde, kavramların atfedilmesindeki süreklilik probleminin radikal yaklaşımlardan kaynaklandığını savunacağım. Literalizm ve apofatik gelenek arasındaki zıtlığı baz alarak, her iki yaklaşımın da problemlili olduğunu öne süreceğim. Son olarak, bu problemi çözmek için analogik yaklaşımı tanıtip, Tanrı hakkında anlamlı bir biçimde konuşabilmek için dilin yalnızca gerçekleri tanımlamasına gerek olmadığını, Tanrı kavramının içinde anlam kazandığı bağlamın da dikkate alınması gerektiğini göstereceğim.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The idea that words are the names of objects and they are connected to each other in a specific way is a result of the widespread presupposition that language mirrors reality, without taking into account the context in which language is used. The presupposition has been dominating the history of philosophy and many trends in our society since the time of Plato.

That being said, there are several variations to how the issue is handled in different traditions. One of those traditions is religious apophaticism. I will look into what religious apophaticism is in the first place. In the opening chapter, I will try to explore a specific tradition, and focus on thinkers such as Plotinus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo Dionysius. In that respect, I will focus on a specific position as regards the religious apophaticism. The position I will explore, is that there are basically two realms of being: the realm of created beings, and the realm of God. An apophaticist argues that language we use to describe natural world, the created beings, cannot be used to describe God because He is utterly transcendent to His creation. Terms we apply to a natural being, cannot be used to refer to God because there is an incommensurability between God and what he created.

In the second chapter, I will turn into an exploration of Wittgenstein and the picture theory of proposition he articulates in the *Tractatus*. I will argue that as regards the realm of created beings an apophaticist adopts the widespread presupposition that there is one to one correspondence between word and object, and the meaning of our propositions consists on a pictorial projection of reality, as it is proposed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. However, I will also explore how an

apophaticist holds a different position regarding the language use about God, and how s/he denies the possibility of language referring to God. I will explore the way Wittgenstein argues against the picture theory of proposition in his *Philosophical Investigations*, and focus on his critique of ostensive definition and his conception of language games. In the second chapter, I will argue that religious apophaticism is problematic from the perspective of the late Wittgenstein.

In the final chapter, I will look into a dichotomy between apophaticism and literalism in religious language. I will argue that they differ from each other on the basis of how they apply words and concepts. A radical apophaticism prefers a total discontinuity in the applications of words, whereas a literalist adopts a full continuity in the application of language to both God and the created beings. I will argue that both are extremes, and that they result in problems in language use. From the perspective of the late Wittgenstein, there needs to be a middle ground where it is the context of how language is used that really matters. I will propose that in religious language, one has to take account of the context in which the concepts related to God already have a significance. In this way, I will argue that there is a middle position with respect to the application of concepts. That middle position is the analogical way, and it provides a supportive ground upon which meaningful talk about God is possible.

CHAPTER 2

RELIGIOUS APOPHATICISM

Apophaticism holds the idea that reality cannot be grasped by language. That is, reality cannot be expressed completely because of the limitations of human language and thought. Our sense experience, words, propositions, and faculty of reasoning are limited when it comes to comprehending reality. What is subsumed here under the umbrella term ‘reality’ consists in the assumption that there is an ultimate principle that is above and beyond everything, namely, The Transcendent. The idea that reality cannot be circumscribed by any linguistic means originates from the belief that it transcends nature and our capacity, such that it is impossible to grasp it in its fullness.

In religious language, the concept ‘God’ takes up the role of ‘The Transcendent’, and religious apophaticism strives for exploring the possibility of talking about God, whose attributes are ‘omnipotent’, ‘omnibenevolent’, ‘most perfect’, etc. Since God transcends the things in the world, the words we use for describing the latter cannot be used for describing God. That is, there is an incommensurability between God, who is utterly different than His creation, and the created world, such that we cannot use the same description to refer meaningfully to both God and His creation.

Along this line, in order to understand how religious apophaticism argues for language use about God, it is crucial to look at different concepts and traditions. One component here is the metaphysics of terms such as ‘ineffability’, ‘ultimate principle’, and ‘transcendence’. To provide a detailed exploration of these concepts, I will start with Plotinus, and try to explicate his metaphysics. Then, I will move onto

the second element, the idea of Creation Ex Nihilo. In connection with this, I will investigate how Plotinus' philosophy is received in the Christian tradition. Finally, I will explore language use in religious apophaticism and mystical union, by referring to thinkers such as Gregory of Nyssa and Pseudo Dionysius.

2.1 Plotinus and The One

Plotinus is considered by many as the founding father of apophatic thinking in the Neoplatonic tradition, thus preceding the Christian apophaticism of the Greek Fathers. Although his contribution is significant in many respects, in this chapter I will confine myself to his emanation theory and the concept of the One.

According to Plotinus, all existing beings in the world are ordered according to a certain hierarchy, where the natural world is the particularization of an utterly simple being. This hierarchy is not a static or frozen order in time and place, but rather is in a constant change and movement. This dynamic movement is represented by two different activities in Plotinus's metaphysics, that is, Emanation ('exitus') and Return ('reditus'). Emanation is a process through which the utterly perfect being overflows and gives rise to much more differentiated levels of being. Return, on the other hand, is a process opposite to Emanation, where the ultimate principle draws everything to itself, and everything has a longing to return to it (Louth, 2007, p. 41).

In the Plotinian universe, we basically have three realms of being: Soul, Intellect, and The One. The level of Soul is where we have the individual forms of natural objects. Even below the level of Soul, there is the realm of nature in that natural beings present the highest level of differentiation and multiplication in the hierarchy. Simply put, the realm of nature refers to a level of beings in our living world. In other words, this is the realm of sense perception, and it is the third

emanation from the One. Above the natural beings, there is the realm of Soul. In the level of Soul we have the individual forms of natural beings, discursive understanding, planning, and reasoning. Since the Soul is the realm of discursive understanding and sense perception, it is easier at this level to talk discursively about things. We can use words to describe things with respect to certain attributes such as their shape, colours, numbers, and etc... Words provide us with knowledge about the phenomena that are available to our sense perception and mind. In a sense, words are the names of things in the world, and they describe things in a way that makes their forms more intelligible to us. Forms of the things in the natural world exist in a higher level, and the Soul knows the archetypes of those forms by an activity of contemplation. The Soul knows the archetypes of forms because it is an emanation from the Intellect which is a higher level of being.

Plotinus is concerned with infallibility when it comes to knowledge. To him, being distant from the ultimate principle implies diversity and discursive thought, carrying with it the possibility of getting the nature of things wrong (p. 41). At this stage, Plotinus introduces a higher level hierarchy of existence, that is, *Nous*. *Nous* can be translated as Universal Intellect, and it corresponds to the level where the archetypes of the objects of our thought exist in a higher, more real world (p. xiv). We have the archetypes of natural beings, words, and even our individual thinking minds because the realm of Intellect is a kind of cosmic thinking activity; preceding our thoughts and thinking them as divine ideas (p. xiv). Every kind of concept, designation, form, property, name, word, and thought exist at this realm of Intellect. They exist in the Intellect as a unity and reflect a mental picture of universal mind:

Let us, then, make a mental picture of our universe: each member shall remain what it is, distinctly apart; yet all is to form, as far as possible, a complete unity so that whatever comes into view, say the outer orb of the heavens, shall bring immediately with it the vision, on the one plane, of the

sun and of all the stars with earth and sea and all living things as if exhibited upon a transparent globe. Bring this vision actually before your sight, so that there shall be in your mind the gleaming representation of a sphere, a picture holding all the things of the universe moving or in repose or (as in reality) some at rest, some in motion. (Plotinus, V.8.9; see in Louth, 2007, pp. 44-45)

At this level of mental activity, ‘the soul passes beyond discursive knowledge to a knowing more immediate, more intuitive. Here the mind ‘thinks reality’ (Plotinus, V.1). Put simply, one level above the natural world, we have the realm of the Soul. The realm of Soul contains the forms of natural objects, as if the natural world is a reflection of what is contemplated by the Soul, which is the principle of individual life and understanding. Since the Soul possesses the forms of natural beings, they are ontologically continuous. In that sense, natural beings are the actualization of forms contemplated by the Soul. In other words, forms in the realm of Soul are manifested in the realm of nature -in the natural world which is less simple and less unified- as if it were an actualization of what is being contemplated by the Intellect. As a result of Soul’s being continuous with the Intellect, knowing activity is much more immediate in the Intellect:

Its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired...The Intellectual – Principle is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity: this is pure being in eternal actuality... (Plotinus, V.1.4)

In that respect, Plotinus argues that our language can describe natural objects around us, but to a limited extent. We can talk about objects and their nature, but this talk is always limited and carries with it the possibility of error if we want to get a full grasp of what they really are. In order to have direct access to the nature of things, we need to pass beyond discursive knowledge (Plotinus, V.1.1, see also Louth, pp. 44-45). At the level of Intellect, there is no duality between the knower and the known. Thought and objects of thought co-exist in the same essence, being a part of constant contemplative activity in cosmic intellect. Hence, at this level of being knowledge is

not acquired through discursive thinking. Rather, it is a relationship of possession: “The Intellectual – Principle is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity: this is pure being in eternal actuality” (Plotinus, V.1.4).

To Plotinus, the need for a simple, self-subsistent first principle does not end here. He postulates a being that is even higher than Intellect, which is called The One. Plotinus holds that even though Intellect is the realm where the knower and the known possess each other, they still posit duality. In a sense, being at the level of Intellect is not simple enough to be the ultimate principle of existence. Thus, Plotinus proposes yet another being. The One, which is the generative principle of the universe. It is the ultimate source of natural beings, Soul, and the Intellect; so simple and beyond any other level of existence that it doesn’t exist in time and space:

Generative of all, the Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quality nor quantity nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time; it is the self-defined, unique in form, or better, formless... (Plotinus, VI.9.3)

The One is portrayed as something utterly formless, self-subsistent, beyond time and space. It is so much beyond the material world and thinking that it is formless and of which nothing can be said:

we must be patient with language; we are forced for reasons of exposition to apply to Supreme terms which strictly are ruled out; everywhere we must read “so to speak”. (Plotinus, VI. 8.13)

In Plotinus’ system, to be the generative principle means simplicity and ineffability. It is almost impossible to form any idea of the self-subsistent principle. That is, the One cannot be described by any words or proposition because there is not any differentiation in its essence. When it comes to the relationship between all these levels of existence, Plotinus provides a formulation in which the universe is all about the constant movements among these hierarchies. That is, being does not have any

moment of creation, of beginning; nor does it have any end. Rather, it is a constant flow of 'Being' from the generative principle to the natural world. This process is called emanation. The One is full of Being and Goodness so abundant that its Being overflows into the Intellect. Intellect then contemplates the divine forms and its origin and is manifested in the material world. Therefore, natural world is a manifestation of the divine ideas contemplated in the Intellect, the mental pictures of the universe, which is in turn what has been poured out of the One. This emanative process, to Plotinus, is dynamic in the sense that it does not have any beginning and end. The One's overflowing activity, and Intellect's manifestation in the natural world, are continuing even at this very moment. More importantly, the emanation process does not work in one way. The One draws everything to itself too, a process called Return. Countering emanative activity, Return is represented by the activity of Soul in the first place. Natural beings have a longing for their origin and desire to raise themselves higher and be unified again at the ultimate goodness of simplicity. The Plotinian universe as a whole is not a myth of creation in that respect. It is more like an eternal process, a chain of being where the superabundant single principle is manifested and reflected back on itself. This is why in the Plotinian universe there is an ontological continuity between the first principle and nature. The continuity can be likened to "a stream from a lake", consisting both of the water and the lake (DiRuzza, 2017, p. 6).

When it comes to language and apophaticism, Plotinus' formulation suggests an ineffability because ultimate reality is utterly simple and cannot be grasped by language, in the way in which we comprehend the world of objects by words and propositions. Discursive thinking enables us to talk about things in relation to their forms. These forms are instantiated in material beings and they are from the source

of being, the One. The attributes we use to define objects are derivative of the divine forms, and can only provide partial knowledge of what they really are. In other words, when we use our words to talk about things in the world, those words would give us a limited content of what they really are, simply because both the objects and the words are very distant from their 'original forms' in the realm of the Intellect. If I may take the lake analogy as an example, the objects of language are like the most distant capillaries of the stream to the lake that carry very little of the original lake. For example, when I say 'this tree is good', my knowledge of tree's goodness is not perfect because my grasp of the words 'tree' and 'good' depends on what I perceive at the level of the natural world. However, if I were able to have a contemplative ability to pass beyond the level of Soul and reach the Universal Intellect, I would then 'see' the nature of being related to these concepts more clearly. This movement, however, requires a different mode of knowing activity. In Intellect, knowledge is not discursive, but immediate. So, if one wants to have a better grasp of reality, s/he needs to contemplate and reach the level of Intellect. That leveling up is a kind of unification because our thinking ability is unified with the universal thinking activity. In unification, our minds know things as if the knower already possesses the known object: "its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired..." (Plotinus, V. 1.4).

Plotinus suggests here a specific form of ecstasy, a mystical experience, for an individual who desires to satisfy his/her need for unity and knowledge. Although reality in its simplicity is ineffable by linguistic means, the gap can be bridged by a certain ecstatic activity of mind -an activity of unification- which is already inherent in our nature since we are ontologically continuous with the Intellect and The One. In other words, we can have a sense of reality in mystical union because that ability

is inherent in us. Our knowing activity is also continuous with the natural process of emanation in that respect. That is, we have a grasp of reality at each level of the hierarchy, but in different modes and by different means. In the natural world, we have language to describe things by words, whereas at the level of Intellect our minds are engaged in undifferentiated thinking and they grasp reality in a different mode, without actually resorting to words and propositions. Even though our knowing differs in terms of depth and clarity, what is crucial in Plotinian system is that reality is made sense of by reliance on the existence of an ultimate principle: “The Intellect which has the object of thought would not exist if there was not a reality (ousia) which is pure object of thought: it will be an object of thought to the intellect, but in itself it will be neither thinker nor object of thought in the proper, authentic sense” (Plotinus, V. 6.2). Simply put, we need an entity preceding language and thought in the first place, and this entity in turn makes knowing possible.

2.2 Creatio Ex Nihilo and Christian Apophaticism

Now that I have explored the basics of Plotinian metaphysics, I move onto how early Christian thinkers positioned themselves in relation to the Neoplatonic tradition. They have a different outlook regarding the relationship between man and divinity, a position resulting in distinct theories of ontology and knowledge. Creatio ex nihilo is the new paradigm forming the basis of Christian dogma, and it is where I start this part.

Creatio ex nihilo simply means ‘creation out of nothing’. The term suggests at the outset that there is a creator, and creation. As opposed to the Plotinian universe, Christians have a different view concerning the relationship between human beings and the first principle. The difference in turn results in different views

concerning reality and language. Although I say there are differences between Pagan and Christian traditions, there is a continuity between the neoplatonic tradition and its Christian manifestation). The Ultimate Principle -the First Cause- is God in Christian Dogma, and He created the universe out of nothing. In that sense, the world and nature has a beginning. God created the world out of nothing by a deliberate act of His will. There is an overwhelming ontological distinction between God and his creation so that there is no ontological continuity or kinship as in the Plotinian process of emanation. There is a distinction now between the creator and created beings. Rather than being sustained in existence by a dynamic process of emanation and return, created beings are sustained in creation by God's will. In Plotinus' system, beings that originate from the first principle becomes more and more trivialized as there is the transition from the one emanation to the other. So there is the continuity of being. By contrast, in the Christian point of view, the beings in the created realm are not ontologically continuous with God. Intellect, material stuff and body are all ontologically distinct from the essence of God. As opposed to the emanation process where the soul can reach deification by contemplation, the soul cannot contemplate God because they are not continuous in creation. God created the soul, but the soul is not connatural with its creator. There is a total break in what is created and the creator, making the gap almost unbridgeable unless God makes it closer upon His will. That is, the soul can contemplate God only if God makes Himself known (Louth, 2007, p. 74). Deification is not a process inherent in the nature of the soul, but God given. In the tradition of the Greek Fathers, it is the Incarnation by means of which God manifests Himself and makes Himself known in the first place. Hence, it is impossible to know Him by contemplation or any faculty of reasoning, unless God himself wishes to reveal Himself.

Incarnation and Scripture are very crucial to Christian belief. Accordingly, knowledge of God's attributes and how He created the world comes from the Scripture. It is the word of God telling us how the world is created, and what the attributes of God are. Belief in Scripture is supported by belief in Incarnation, which is an act of God's manifesting Himself and His word in human form. That is also the reason why people form their beliefs about God in a more personal fashion. God has descended to humanity, manifests His nature out of grace and of His benevolence. This being so, however, Christian thinkers think that they have to account for the possibility of God-talk. That is, they tried to explain how God can be meaningfully talked about while being so utterly different from all of His creation. In other words, they question the extent to which all the attributions we can make about God such as Good, Great, Benevolent, All-knowing, All-present, All-powerful, Loving can circumscribe God's nature, if God transcends its creation and believed to be inconceivable. In a sense, all the terms we can possibly try to define God belong to the realm of created beings. Here is where Christian apophaticism comes to argue that we cannot attribute properties we used to define created beings to God because God is not ontologically continuous with them as in Neoplatonic tradition. In other words, any term we use to define God implies that we can grasp the transcendent God with properties that are not compatible to Him in any way. This is a problem from the perspective of apophaticism. In the apophatic perspective, the ontological distinction between God and created beings entails a distinction in the use of words. That is, words referring to finite beings cannot be used to refer to God as well. If we are to use the same words to define God, we need to use them cautiously. We can refer to God and created things with the same words only insofar as those words are used in a specific manner. Words we can use to refer to God are traditionally called

Divine Attributes or Divine Names. In Christian theology, and in Cappadocian Patristic tradition in particular, God's nature is unfathomable and can only be articulated by resorting to divine names and attributes. To talk about the utterly different and transcendent divinity, one can refer to God either by making analogy, or by negating all the positive attributes that are available to the human mind and language.

Along this line of thinking, kataphasis and apophasis might offer two opposing approaches to talking about God. 'Kataphasis' simply means affirmation, whereas 'apophasis' is the way of negation. Kataphatic theology is a positive approach to God-talk in the sense that one can form affirmative propositions about God. For example, when you say that God is Good or Great, you basically form an affirmative statement about God's nature- about how He is. In other words, when you say that God is Good, you affirm you know that God has the property of Goodness. Two implications that can easily be made with respect to kataphatic theology are that God is knowable in that He has a specific property; and that a certain property, which might otherwise be a property of any created being, can be applicable to God. The former implies that God can be known in the same way we know things around us, whereas the latter implies that words can be used to refer both to God and natural beings. Apophaticism, on the other hand, means 'unsaying', and is the negative approach to God-talk. That is, one cannot make positive statements about God. Any attempt at understanding God as if He were an object of human knowledge is rejected, and efforts for defining Him are rejected. Gregory of Nyssa, who is one of the prominent fathers of the Orthodox tradition, argues: "The infinite God is invisible, incomprehensible, and unknowable, because He is beyond all sense, knowledge, and concept; he has no boundary" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of*

Moses, I.46; II.162; II.236). Ineffability of God is not limited to human kind because He is totally different from all of His creation, He is ineffable to any of His creation in any way: “God cannot be grasped by any term, or any idea, or any other comprehension, remaining beyond the reach not only of the human but of the angelic and of all supramundane being, unthinkable, unutterable, above all expression in words” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium*, I.683). He cannot be conceived by human kind. Our concepts and words are insufficient to describe God in his fullness. We cannot grasp Him by our words and propositions, our faculty of mind cannot conceive Him as it does easily with created things, so as to leave us in a darkness regarding God’s nature: “true vision and the true knowledge of what we seek consists precisely in not seeing, in an awareness that our goal transcends all knowledge and is everywhere cut off from us by the darkness of incomprehensibility. Thus that profound evangelist, John, who penetrated into this luminous darkness, tells us that ‘no man hath seen God at any time’” (John 1:18), teaching us by this negation that no man — indeed, no created intellect — can attain a knowledge of God” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses*, II. 162–4; see also Louth, 2007, p.86).

This idea of darkness is one of the crucial themes for apophatic tradition. The darkness is represented as the total ignorance of the believer who wants to know more about God. This ignorance is important for the apophatic tradition because it is part of a more sophisticated journey to become more knowledgeable about the incomprehensible God. Apophatic thinkers like Gregory of Nyssa or Pseudo Dionysius offer us a path by means of which one comes closer to God. This path requires one to put constant effort in order to move up the hierarchy of closeness to God:

Moses’ vision of God begun with light; afterwards God spoke to him in a cloud. But when Moses rose higher and became more perfect he saw God in the

darkness. Now the doctrine we are taught here is as follows. Our initial withdrawal from wrong and erroneous ideas of God is a transition from darkness to light. Next comes a closer awareness of hidden things, and by this the soul is guided through sense phenomena to the world of the invisible. And this awareness is a kind of cloud, which over-shadows all appearances, and slowly guides and accustoms the soul to look towards what is hidden. Next the soul makes progress through all these stages and goes on higher, and as she leaves below all that human nature can attain, she enters within the secret chamber of divine knowledge, and here she is cut off on all sides by the divine darkness. Now she leaves outside all that can be grasped by sense or by reason, and the only thing left for her contemplation is the invisible and the incomprehensible. And here God is, as the Scriptures tell us in connection with Moses: 'But Moses went to the dark cloud wherein God was.'¹

In this journey, at each step one moves higher in the hierarchy and gets closer to God. This being so, however, the path is an apophatic one where darkness and incomprehensibility increase when the believer moves up the ladder. The metaphor of journey is used to remind us that efforts for knowing God- in the same way we get to know created beings- are in vain, but it is the desire and longing to search for Him that really matters:

The soul, having gone out at the word of her Beloved, looks for Him but does not find Him. She calls on Him, though He cannot be reached by any verbal symbol, and she is told by the watchman that she is in love with the unattainable, and that the object of her longing cannot be apprehended. In this way she is, in a certain sense, wounded and beaten because of the frustration of what she desires, now that she thinks that her yearning for the Other cannot be fulfilled or satisfied. But the veil of her grief is removed when she learns that the true satisfaction of her desire consists in constantly going on with her quest and never ceasing in her ascent, seeing that every fulfillment of her desire continually generates further desire for the Transcendent. (Gregory of Nyssa, Comm. on the Song XII: 1037; see also Louth, p.87)

The idea that God becomes more incomprehensible as we get closer to Him in a specific spiritual journey is parallel to an apophatic view that our words lose their power as the soul wants to grasp God in His fullness. According to Dionysius the Areopagite, who is one of the most influential figures in the apophatic tradition, words can be used for different purposes in the service of theology. They can name

¹ See Daniélou, J. 1962, for Exod. 20:21, in Commentaries. On the Song XI: 1000-1. See also Louth, 2007, p. 79.

God's creatures, spiritual functions and symbols, different hierarchies in the created order, and God Himself as in the case of Divine Names. "In the book on the Divine Names we have celebrated how he is called Good, Being, Life, Wisdom and Power, and other such things relating to the spiritual naming of God" (Dionysius, *MT III*: 1032 D–1033 C). Moreover, to Dionysius, words serve different purposes under different circumstances: "In the Symbolic Theology we have celebrated what conversions of names are necessary in changing their use from the realm of the senses to the service of the divine" (Dionysius, *MT III*: 1032 D–1033 C; see also Louth, 2007, p. 159). Dionysius holds that our level of understanding, and the power of our words change accordingly with the level of hierarchy in theology we are engaging in:

For it was necessary that the Theological Outlines and the Divine Names should be much briefer than the Symbolic Theology, seeing that the higher we ascend the more our words are straitened by the fact that what we understand is seen more and more altogether in a unifying and simplifying way; just as now on our entry into the darkness that is beyond understanding, we find not mere brevity of words, but complete wordlessness and failure of the understanding. And there as our reason descended from the most exalted to the lowest, the lower it descended, proportionately the more our understanding was broadened to encompass a multitude of notions, so now as our reason ascends from the lower to the transcendent, the more it ascends the more it is contracted, and when it has completely ascended it will become completely speechless, and be totally united with the Inexpressible. (Dionysius, *MT III*: 1032 D–1033 C; see also Louth, p. 160)

This part is interesting because here we have a combination of the *creatio ex nihilo* conception of the universe and a Plotinian one. Dionysius describes a faculty of reasoning that aims at grasping the nature of the utterly transcendent God and that goes back and forth among different levels of the ontological hierarchy. At each level of hierarchy, the degree to which our words can circumscribe the essence of things they are supposed to describe changes. That is, our language and understanding do

not succeed in grasping God, as they do for created things. Our faculty of reason and understanding becomes completely irrelevant before utterly transcendent God.

Considering the importance of divine names to Christian belief, the words one can possibly use to define God, such as Great, Good, Love, and etc., turn out to be in need of further philosophical exploration if one is to hold the idea that God is beyond all sense and conception. These words are very important to a Christian believer because they are believed to be the word of God. Dionysius also puts special emphasis on the divine names. At the end of the day, for Dionysius the divine names are kataphatic ways of talking about God. Whenever one affirms a certain name about God, this implies that God is known, in a certain way. To establish his apophatic way, Dionysius provides an ‘argument from energies’:

On no account therefore is it true to say that we know God, not indeed in His nature (for that is unknowable, and is beyond any reason and understanding), but by the order of all things that He has established, and which bears certain images and likenesses of His divine paradigms, we ascend step by step, so far as we can follow the way, to the Transcendent, by negating and transcending everything and by seeking the cause of all. Therefore God is known in all, and apart from all. (Dionysius, *DN VII. 3*: 869 C-872 B; see also Louth, 2007, p. 162)

Dionysius refers here to the argument from energies, or ‘argument from analogy.’ He argues that we can make affirmations about God in praise because He is manifested in the world. God’s being is beyond every created being in the sense that every created being is the result of God’s creative activity. Whatever we can ever know about any natural object is the result of God’s manifestation of His creative power. When one says that God is knowable thanks to revelation, this is actually knowledge from His creative activity, or His created effects on the natural world and us. We can know things as God created them by His will and His creative activity. In that respect, any divine name we can possibly apply to God is actually about God’s creative activities that God makes accessible to our capacity (Louth, 2007, p. 20). In

the tradition of Christian fathers, those attributes of God that He makes accessible to us are only the reflections of His created activities, rather than His essence, what He really is. What we can know about God, talk about Him in His created effects, as He relates Himself to us through creation and revelation. His essence, on the other hand, is ineffable to human capacity. He cannot be known in His essence.

Dionysius also stresses the importance of analogical approach to God-talk: “For these things we rightly say of God, and He is praised in due proportion by everything among all those things of which He is the source. And this is, moreover, the most divine knowledge of God, that He is known through unknowing” (Dionysius, *DN VII. 3*: 869 C-872 B; see also Louth, p. 162). The presumed distinction between God’s essence and activities is argued to make analogy possible. God’s effects in the creation can be a point of reference to understanding the nature of the creator. The way we can talk about God, the words and names we apply to Him can mediate the difference between the created realm and the creator, though to a limited extent. We have a similar approach in St. Gregory: “for He is invisible by nature, but becomes visible in His energies, for He may be contemplated in the things that are referred to Him.”² In this line of thought, divine names can provide us with a room for talking about God as Good, Great, Loving, and Knowing; but only insofar as they say something about God in a specific way. We can apply divine names to God only in a specific mode, in an incomplete fashion. Divine Names are helpful to make knowledge about God, but only insofar as they are used cautiously. Dionysius offers us a way of constantly negating whatever we can affirm about God: “God is known in all things, and apart from all things...” (Dionysius, *DN VII.3*: 872 A). “Therefore everything may be ascribed to Him at one and the same time, and yet

² Gregory of Nyssa, *Hom. VI*: 1269 A; see in Graefs. See also in Louth, 2007, p.88.

He is none of these things” (*DN* V.8: 824 B; see also Louth, p. 173). In this sense, Dionysius provides arguments for the incomprehensibility of God. To him, Divine Names can encapsulate divinity in the sense that they refer to Him in His fullness, rather than any part of Him; but never to His essence: “We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it . . . for it is beyond both every assertion... and also beyond every denial” (Dionysius, *MT*, 5. 1048B; *CD* I, 150. 6-7).

In the religious apophatic tradition that I am sketching, one needs to talk about God very cautiously even if s/he is praising Him with Divine Names. In Dionysian terminology, this is called the paradigm of ‘similar similarities’. Because every creature somehow comes from God, they are similar to God in certain ways. But some are more similar than others. Names and properties that correspond to those more similar created beings are more ‘like God’ compared to the dissimilar names and properties. Dionysius suggests that we need to be cautious about these more similar names’ about God. In the hierarchy of beings and symbols, those beings that are higher on the hierarchy are more likely to be similar to God. For that reason, higher names are likely to be thought of as substitutes for God, and can become idols to Dionysius. However, he has concerns regarding God’s absolute incomprehensibility and transcendence. He offers arguments in order to remove any possible danger to God’s ineffability. For that reason, he prefers unlike symbols and names for God, rather than similar ones, because he believes that there is less danger of thinking God with symbols less similar to Him:

If then negations concerning things divine are true, but the affirmations are inadequate to the hiddenness of the ineffable, revelations through representations unlike that which is revealed are more suitable to the invisible. (Dionysius, *CH* II. 3: 141 A; see Louth, p. 163)

Suppose, for example, two cases in which you call God differently. In the first scenario, you say that God is war whereas in the second you say God is Absolute

Beauty. In the first one God is predicated with a property dissimilar to Him; while in the second one He is predicated by a similar property. Dionysius holds that in the first case you cannot actually think that God is war. In the second one, however, it is easier to mean exactly what the words ‘Absolute Beauty’ call to mind. Hence, Dionysius suggests that one needs to prefer an apophatic way in talking about God because similar names can make one believe that s/he can know, understand, or make sense of God. However, he cannot be known in any human way because He is so utterly transcendent that even the names that are more ‘higher’ in the hierarchy of beings cannot apply to Him.

So constructed, religious apophaticism stresses the incommensurability between the transcendent God and His creation. The unbridgeable ontological difference between God and created beings results in an epistemological gap between God and understanding. From the perspective of language, religious apophaticism makes it almost impossible to talk about God as we talk about things. Names and concepts we can possibly use for natural objects cannot be used to refer to God in order to talk about Him. There has to be a difference in how we can use names similar to God and natural objects. There is no continuity in the use of the words and names because the beings to be represented in language are so different and incommensurable. This is actually the result of an essentialist perspective on language and reality, as Gregory Nazianzus argues: “for us the truth lies not in names but in things” (See in Ventis, 2009, pp. 132-133). In the next chapter, I will show how Wittgenstein takes up the issue, and why this perspective on language is problematic.

CHAPTER 3

WITTGENSTEIN AND APOPHATIC VIEW

Religious apophaticism as I outlined above stresses the incommensurability between the transcendent God and things in the world, and argues that the same words cannot be applied to both of them. Words we can use to describe human beings, such as ‘good’ or ‘great’, cannot be used to refer to God because the greatness of God and greatness of human beings are totally different and there is no continuity in the use of the words between the cases. Religious apophaticism holds that one cannot use the same word for the transcendent God and natural beings because they are utterly different and incommensurable. This being so, however, I will argue that meaning does not emerge through representation, or projective relation between word and ‘object’. In doing so, I will propose that the apophatic view of language is problematic from the perspective of the late Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language; and I will focus on his concept of language games and critique of ostensive definition.

3.1 Meaning as Pictorial Projection

In his *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein argues for the picture theory of the proposition. He takes language as a tool for representing reality by means of the *logical form*. Words and propositions are the building blocks of language and they represent the structure of the world; how things are. When we talk we resort to propositions in order to express a specific position regarding the nature of things. To the picture theory of proposition, our propositions reflect the world as it is, in a projective way. That is, a proposition is logically connected to reality as if the

proposition can be said to be true or false by looking at the pictorial similarity between the two. The truth value of a proposition is analysed according to whether the picture it provides is the same as the world is. If they are the same, it is true; if not, it is false. Furthermore, if the proposition we articulate cannot be represented pictorially, as in the cases like religion and ethics, then they are not meaningful, and cannot have any truth value. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein argues for a picture theory of proposition, and also shows how it is related to words and names that refer to the objects in the world. To him, the words are the names of the things they stand for; and together they constitute the propositions that show the way things are in the world: “One name stands for one thing, another for another thing, and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group – like a tableau vivant – presents a state of affairs” (Wittgenstein, 2013, *TLP* 4.0311). The picture theory of proposition argues that the structure of our sentences represents the arrangement of the things in the world. Propositions and state of affairs share the same logical form. Words are combined in a specific order in sentences and constitute a certain picture of the possible arrangement of facts in the world. If the way words are combined corresponds to the arrangement of facts, then our propositions are true according to Wittgenstein (Travis, 2011, p. 151). There are infinitely many possibilities that facts might be in the world, and this is the possible state of affairs. However, things can only be arranged in a specific order at a given time, and this is the state of affairs. Similarly, language is the totality of propositions, and only the ones that hold the same structure with reality are true. This is how language functions according to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*.

Language functions to describe facts, and propositions of language share the same structure with what they represent as the state of affairs: “The proposition is a

picture of reality” (Wittgenstein, 2013, *TLP* 4.01), and “The proposition is a model of reality as we think it is. The proposition communicates to us a state of affairs, therefore it must be essentially connected with the state of affairs” (*TLP* 4.03). What Wittgenstein means by ‘picturing’ can be understood as a kind of projecting relationship between language and reality. There is a one to one correspondence between the names and objects on the atomic level; and between propositions and facts in truth functions. Picturing is a projection of a certain structure upon the things in the world. This relationship is a two way one because the world also shares a certain structure with our words and propositions. Language and reality are isomorphic to each other and they share a common logical form. In the picture theory of the proposition as Wittgenstein puts it forward in *Tractatus*, meaning is determined by the pictorial correspondence between word and object. If you can show the one to one correspondence between word and object, then it is possible to constitute a meaningful proposition. If you cannot, on the other hand, depict the constituents of the proposition in a projective relation with the state of affairs, then it is not a meaningful language. That is why Wittgenstein’s *Tractarian* view is concerned with description of facts. The picture theory of the proposition assumes that particular structuring of all the facts constitutes the ‘state of affairs’ in the world, and language aims at describing those state of affairs. That is, there is this thing called ‘reality’ composed of all the possible facts that can be, and language gives us a logical picture of the structure of how the world is. The logical picture language provides us with is a proposition, and it is projected onto the facts it is to describe. In that respect, truth value of a proposition depends on the one to one correspondence between the facts and the proposition. If there is a one to one, pictorial correspondence between the proposition and how world is, then the proposition is

true. Meaningfulness of a proposition depends, in that respect, on whether the fact to be described can be pictorially represented or not. Truth value of the proposition, on the other hand, depends on whether the pictorial representation latches on to the reality being described.

Things in the World can be depicted in the mind of the language user as a picture. If the picture is the correct representation of the object, then there is a correspondence between word and object. Similarly, words constitute propositions, and propositions represent how the objects in the world are arranged. To the picture theory of proposition, propositions are in the service of describing facts only. They have a single purpose of representing the world as it is. The *Tractatus* does not show any concern for the place propositions and words have in human life. The world can be represented in language as a picture, irrespective of the function language has in human life. Hence, language mirrors reality, and words of language acquire their meaning without any need to account for the roles it plays in human life. According to the theory of meaning articulated in the *Tractatus*, a word is bound to describe what it is supposed to picture. Meaning emerges from the isomorphic relation between language and the world, and this role is fixed by how the world is. There is a projective relation between word and object, and that projection is mediated by the logical form provided by the proposition. Words do not need any use cases in order to acquire their meaning. Rather, it is in the nature of words that they are the *names* of the objects that they represent; independently of the human beings who use them. What guarantees that an object is named correctly by a word is the logical structure provided by the proposition.

Language, Wittgenstein claims in the *Tractatus*, functions in only one direction. Humans use language to communicate certain pictures corresponding to

the objects in the world. Words are the names of the objects they correspond to, and their meanings emerge out of that correspondence only. There is no way for a word to acquire a meaning without having any pictorial connection to reality. To the picture theory of proposition Wittgenstein argues for in the *Tractatus*, words are the tools people use to make a connection between the logical form of reality and reality as it is. Words always give people the one to one projection between objects and propositions because they are believed to acquire their meaning from that pictorial correspondence. The presupposition here is that the meaning of our words can only be derived from the pictorial correspondence they have to reality, and remains always the same unless reality changes. The meaning of words can only be justified by reference to reality. Reality is a kind of entity external to language, and language is in need of reference to that reality in order to be meaningful. One can justify the correct use of a word only by referring to the object that word is used for. Hence, reality is an entity prior to the emergence of meaning in language. You need an already established set of objects, or ordering of certain facts in order to make sure that the words and propositions you are using are meaningful. Describing already established facts is the sole purpose of language according to the picture theory of meaning. Given that words and propositions are the pictorial representations of the objects they are projected upon by logical operations, there is not much space for variety and color in the use of the descriptions. Because words are in one to one correspondence relations with the objects, a descriptive move in one area is applicable only in the same locus. The word 'apple' is a logical picture of the object 'apple'. If you want to describe the object 'apple' further, you can use words such as; red, juicy, hard, and etc... The words one can possibly use for 'apple' are the descriptive names for the object 'apple'. Applying the same descriptive names for

‘justice’ for instance, would result in meaningless talk because ‘justice’ is not an object one can possibly point and provide a picture for. Apples, on the other hand, are among the cluster of things onto which words can be pictorially latched. All the relevant names that can describe apples constitute meaningful language. Once you try to use the same descriptions for things that cannot be depicted, there emerges meaningless talk. There are things that cannot be expressed in a meaningful language because they are not facts that share the logical structure of our language.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein provides a theory of language. Although he is not primarily concerned with accounting for the intelligibility of natural sciences, Wittgenstein shares the basic assumptions of Logical Positivism. Along the similar line, in his earlier period he argues that propositions and objects of natural sciences are the object of any meaningful theory of language. Propositions of religion, art, and aesthetics, on the other hand, cannot be shown true or false, and they cannot be meaningful at all. The reason is that they do not have any common logical structure with reality. According to the *Tractatus*, there is no common isomorphic relationship between religious or aesthetic propositions and the way things are in the world. In that respect, the presumed isomorphic relation between proposition and state of affairs is the key to understanding the nature of meaning according to Wittgenstein in his earlier period. It is by means of isomorphism that I will investigate religious apophaticism in the first place.

Religious apophaticism has many different versions and schools of thought in its history. This being so, I will confine myself to a more radical version which can be seen particularly in the works of Pseudo Dionysius. Along the way, I will also refer to some Christian fathers since they are the important representatives of apophatic tradition in general. Radical apophaticism puts God and all his creation

into totally different ontological categories and argues that the former cannot be known or represented in language by means of any reference to created beings. God and natural objects are so incommensurable that you cannot use the same description for both God and natural objects. Put differently, words can be used for describing phenomena in the created realm, but cannot be used to talk about God. In that respect, in connection to the realm of created beings a radical apophaticist can be said to share the same concerns as somebody who holds the picture theory of proposition. What is crucial to a radical apophaticist, however, is that s/he rejects any possibility that one can talk about God. A radical apophaticist would argue similarly to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, and say that things in the world can be understood by looking at the pictorial similarity provided by the isomorphism between word and object. With respect to the realm of God, however, s/he would disagree with the picture theory because s/he believes that there is no object to be pictured in the case of God. Hence, argues a radical apophaticist, no word or proposition can be used to talk about God. In a sense, there is a limit to the way words can be applicable. Words can be applied to things in ordinary life, but they cannot be applied to God since He is utterly different from the things those words are applied to. The limit an apophaticist like Dionysius put to language use results from the religious worldview in the first place. Secondly, it is the result of a specific philosophy of language about how words are used for the things in the world created by God. Radical apophaticism posits a picture theory of meaning with respect to the realm of created beings, and rejects any possibility of meaningful talk with respect to God. Both two positions are problematic from the perspective of late Wittgenstein.

The idea that there is a one to one correspondence between word and object is not unique to apophaticism. To think that language mirrors reality does not make

somebody necessarily an apophaticist. However, it is important to show how apophaticism too has the same concerns as many other schools of thought that hold the idea that word and object are logically linked by a pictorial projection only. Apophaticists hold that things that are created by God precede language in the sense that existence of the objects is taken for granted such that they have already been created in specific forms, shapes, and state. Language, on the other hand, comes to describe objects and their features: “do not impact on nature [i.e., on what exists]; but nature rather changes the words as it draws them unto itself. Nor do words precede essences, but essences come first, and second to these come the words.”³ To Athanasius, nature exerts its imprint on words so that language gives us knowledge of the truth. The world is established in a specific order with all the essences in it, and language is like an attachment to the things in being. To this view, words are causally connected to the objects they are in charge of representing. The meanings of words emerge independently of how we, human beings, use them. Rather, it is connected only to how the objects are. Words give us the form of things, and their meaning is not isolated from the way God created those things. In a sense, an apophaticist would argue that if things were created in different forms by God, words would describe those things differently. The function of language to a religious apophaticist is, in a sense, to provide the *nature* of things to us. Truth lies in essences, and words exist in order to make the truth more intelligible to the human mind. As part of their negative approach to language’s ability to provide us with the ultimate knowledge about reality, apophatic thinkers such as Gregory Nazianzus argues: “for us the truth lies not in names but in things.”⁴ This is a stance in parallel with St. Athanasius’s point of view in that reality precedes language. Gregory of

³ See Athanasius, in Ventis, 2009, pp.132-133.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 132-133.

Nazianzus seems to put emphasis on two things: first, language is unable to provide a deeper knowledge of higher, divine reality; and second, things have priority in determining meaning. Things come first, and then words are attached to them and provide us with meaning. In a similar fashion, Gregory Palamas also put special emphasis on things, rather than words: “and should there be agreement among ourselves as regards things, I care not about words ... since for us the truth lies not in sayings but in things ... so that our task is not aimed at words, but the whole strife focuses [instead] on things.”⁵ (See Gregory Palamas, in Ventis, 2009, pp.132-133)

Things precede words such that meaning emerges by means of correspondence to the objects they are attached to. In addition, words are insufficient to provide insight and deeper understanding of things that are ontologically superior, such as God. In Plotinian metaphysics, the universe is something like a mental picture, holding in the cosmic mind the ‘gleaming representation of a sphere’ with all the things in the universe (Plotinus, V. 8.9; see also Louth, 2007, pp. 44-45). Things are in a specific order in the Plotinian universe, and they are thought in the universal mind as a picture. This is a kind of isomorphism between the form of the archetypes of the objects and how they are named. In early Neoplatonic metaphysics.

Understanding is acquired by the activity of this cosmic thinking. However, ineffability takes over understanding when the soul progresses into the higher levels of existence. To apophatic thinkers, meaning starts with the order of things in the world, but depth and clarity decrease when it comes to higher beings. If, however, one would want to grasp the meaning of names that belong to celestial beings, things get complicated. The higher the being in question is, the more ineffable it will be. What makes religious apophatic thinking unique in that respect is the idea that the

⁵ Ibid., pp. 132-133.

presumed isomorphism cannot be applied to the realm of God; not because they reject picture theory of proposition, but because that theory is not applicable to their religious belief. That is, God is not an object to be pictorially represented in language. The problem of radical apophaticism here is that it approaches language *from the perspective of the picture theory only*, and holds that language cannot provide us with any means to talk about God. However, the transcendence of God, and His not being an object do not limit language use about Him. As Wittgenstein in his later period argues, language is a tool that functions in many ways other than simply describing objects.

A radical apophaticist then, I suggest, is somebody who limits the intelligibility of language to the realm of created beings only, and who accepts the idea that God is totally ineffable, nothing can be said about Him. For example, words such as ‘good’ or ‘great’ can be used to describe human beings, but they cannot be used to describe God in the same way as they describe human beings because God and human beings are totally different in kind. The ontological incommensurability between God and human beings results in differences with respect to the application of the same words. The word ‘good’, for instance, cannot be used to refer to God. There is no continuity in the use of the word ‘good’ in these two cases because what is being referred to is of a totally different kind. There are various ways in which the word ‘good’ can be used to describe natural objects that can be depicted or perceived pictorially. Objects that can be represented in thought with a corresponding picture can also be described by the word ‘good.’ However, God is so transcendent that He cannot be represented in the same continuum. He is not even a ‘being’ to which words can correspond. This is the understanding behind religious apophatic thinking

with respect to language use, and I will try to show it is problematic from the perspective of late Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion.

3.2 Apophaticism from the perspective of language games

In his later period Wittgenstein abandons the idea that there is a one to one pictorial relation between language and reality. In his *Philosophical Investigations*, he initiates a new agenda regarding the nature of language. In this part, I will talk about how Wittgenstein approaches the issue of how language functions in his *Philosophical Investigations*. In so doing, I will attempt an exploration of two important themes: ostensive definition and language games. I will start by analysing what he means by ostensive definition, language games, and rule following. Then, I will show that apophatic understanding of meaning is problematic from the perspective of language games.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein demolishes his whole philosophy of language articulated in *Tractatus*. He abandons the idea that words correspond to objects and represent them in the mind as pictures of reality. He changes his mind and argues that language does not function simply to describe facts. Language can be used for various purposes, and pictorial description of various states of affairs is just one of them. People can use language to talk about many different phenomena, such as aesthetics, ethics, religion, and etc... To late Wittgenstein, one can talk about a value one finds in looking at a landscape, or about the feeling involved in loving somebody. These things do not necessarily involve logical connections to things that can be represented in language pictorially. They are part of human life and add value to it. With respect to these kinds of phenomena, correspondence between state of affairs and our sentences does not need to be the

essential starting point of meaning. Rather, we need already established ways of using language, which in turn define how words are used in specific contexts. The meaning of a word does not emerge through its projective relation to an entity external to the context in which it is used. The context has to be established in order to make sense of a word. Language is a communicative activity in the first place, and one has to take into account the community which uses it. Other than that, we cannot account for the meaning of our utterances. In an environment where meaning is associated with the correspondence between word and object, we end up speculating about the criterion of correctness concerning the projecting line between word and object. At different occasions we use the same word, and the consistency in each occasion cannot be the result of meaning the same projective gap between the word and object. Defining a word, for Wittgenstein, is a much more complex issue than a mere isomorphic relation between word and object.

In order to show how language functions, Wittgenstein puts forward some arguments against ostensive definition. To him, ostensive definition starts with the idea that words are given meaning through a correspondence with a simple object. Ostensive definition bridges the gap between language and reality. He claims that ostensive definitions can only work provided that what is to be defined ostensibly has already been classified under a certain category. One has to make sure that a certain logical status is established about the object being defined ostensibly: “ostensive definition -properly understood -presupposes the grammar of the concept. By this I mean: a successful ostensive definition can only be produced after what is to be defined has been classified under a certain logical category” (Wittgenstein, 2013, *PI* 257). Our concepts, he argues, are logical categories by means of which we make sense of the objects around us. If the logical category to which the object to be

defined belongs is not established, then the definition would not connect the object to the category. In other words, the gap between word and object would not be bridged if the logical category under which the object is to be defined has not been established as a given. People involved in the communication should already have known the context in which the concepts had acquired their meaning by previous uses. To mean the definition in a certain way, without giving any reference to the context in which the words and concepts are formed and used, is just a speculative assumption regarding the correctness of the linear isomorphism between word and object. It is a mistake to assume that definition is transferred by a specific mental activity of projection the correct meaning regarding an object.

In a similar fashion, the definition of a given object cannot be reduced to pointing only. We use certain words as names to point to objects, and might assume that our pointing over different occasions would guarantee the correspondence between the object to be pointed at and the sounds that accompany our words. In a sense, we believe that the particular sounds we make in pointing are merged with the objects, and they become the meaning of the words. Pointing by itself does not guarantee that the meaning of the object in question is established correctly. The presumed isomorphism between word and object does not work properly in different occasions, especially if the context surrounding the issues at hand is not established accordingly. That is, there are various ways an ostensive definition can be interpreted in different occasions unless the context in which the definition is given a meaning has already been known. To give an ostensive definition without taking into account the circumstances is problematic according to Wittgenstein. He gives the definition of “number two” as an example:

The definition of the number two, “That is called ‘two’ ”-pointing to two nuts—is perfectly exact.-But how can two be defined like that? The person one gives

the definition to doesn't know what one wants to call "two"; he will suppose that "two" is the name given to this group of nuts!-He may suppose this; but perhaps he does not. He might make the opposite mistake; when I want to assign a name to this group of nuts, he might understand it as a numeral. And he might equally well take the name of a person, of which I give an ostensive definition, as that of a colour, of a race, or even of a point of the compass. (Wittgenstein, 2013, PI 28)

He stresses here the impact of context on the emergence of meaning. If the importance of the context is ignored, the ostensive definition of 'two nuts' can be said to simply start with the association between the sounds accompanying the word 'two' and 'pointing to nuts'. The particular sound is associated with the word 'two', and the word 'two' points to a specific object in the world. Through this process of association the meaning of the word "two" emerges as a definition of what is being pointed at. That is also the process leading to understanding. We make sense of the definition of the words as a part of this associative activity. With respect to the ostensive definition perspective, association between pointing and the accompanying sounds is taken to be correct. Actually, the association is taken for granted because otherwise the ground on which the communication takes place becomes slippery. When a definition is given for a word, or a word is articulated, the person to whom it is given is supposed to know what the pointing amounts to. Language is grounded on the assumption that the association always holds and the language users interpret that association correctly all the time. Wittgenstein rejects this idea and claims that language cannot be grounded on the assumption that interpretation of the correspondence between word and object correctly is the key to understanding. To him, any interpretation that does not take into account the context surrounding the language users is an arbitrary speculation, if not a magical, superstitious imposition. With respect to the case of number two, the ostensive definition can be interpreted in

many ways. It is nuts or colour that can be the addressee of the pointing. That is why the context has to be taken into account in an ostensive definition.

By ‘context’, Wittgenstein argues for the necessity of mastery of concepts and words he calls ‘stage setting’. On a more sophisticated level, the person has to have the concept of ‘nuts’ or ‘colour’ being learned. Only then, the stage on which the conversation is going to take place is established. Other than that, all communication is grounded on an arbitrary assumption that the definition of two is meant correctly by a mere inner gesture of pointing to ‘nuts’:

Whether the word “number” is necessary in the ostensive definition depends on whether without it the other person takes the definition otherwise than I wish. And that will depend on the circumstances under which it is given, and on the person I give it to. And how he ‘takes’ the definition is seen in the use that he makes of the word defined. (Wittgenstein, 2013, PI 29)

Wittgenstein highlights a new dimension in language by adding elements of ‘action’ to the emergence of meaning. Definition of words cannot be reduced to the correspondence between the nuts and accompanying sounds. The object and sounds that accompany are just the starting point for the construction of the meaning of ‘two nuts’. Wittgenstein argues for a language that is more dynamic and flexible, such that the definition is interpreted along with what the person who uses the word makes of it. It is not only the background grasp of concepts surrounding a specific definition that makes the communication go. Rather, there is an active engagement needed in the formation of meaning. Correct interpretation of the definition of a word requires more than learning the surrounding concepts as in the case of nuts and colour.

Meaning emerges as you make use of the words within a certain context. With respect to ostensive definitions, Wittgenstein provides yet another example and he says that in a game of chess pointing to a pawn and calling it a pawn is not a suitable strategy to ask an object’s name:

So trying to ask what, for example, the second pawn is called after the instructor has pointed to the first one and said 'this is a pawn' is not a question relevant to something's name..

'this is called the pawn' will *prevent* further questions about the name of the second or third pawn. *'only someone who already knows how to do something with it can significantly ask a name.'* (PI 30)

Chess is a game that has rules of its own. There are chess pieces in the game with different features such as colour, shape, starting position, moves, and etc... To play the game properly, one needs to have a mastery of the rules of the game that are intrinsically connected to the pieces' features. The movements of each piece are defined as part of the game, and they are indispensable aspects of the pieces. In order to teach somebody who knows nothing about chess, one can start pointing to a pawn, a pawn that has the shape of a pawn as every other pawn, and says 'this is a pawn'. From the ostensive definition point of view, pointing to the first pawn and calling it 'pawn' would suffice to define it. Pointing to a pawn here has to guarantee learning because a pawn is an object with a certain shape and it can easily be associated with the word 'pawn'. Moreover, once the learning is complete, further questions regarding other pawns in a row can also be addressed easily by giving reference to the definition that is already being provided. Wittgenstein argues against this position, because he holds that it is not simply the pointing itself that teaches the meaning of pawn here. To him, only somebody who already knows the concepts that surround the game of chess would not ask the questions regarding the name of second or third pawns because s/he has a mastery of the concepts such as piece of wood, position in a row, rank, moving a chess piece, and even game in general. Unless one knows what to do with all these concepts, how to use them in defining and playing the game chess, s/he cannot have a grasp of what a second pawn is without asking any further questions. All these tap into the single idea that a certain context needs to be presupposed in order to point by using words to define things in

the world. Other than that, pointing is just an arbitrary way of assuming that objects are isomorphic with things. If no stage has been set regarding the issue at hand, there will always be speculation about whether the definition is interpreted correctly or not. In a sense, ostensive definition is taken to be a kind of mental act of transferring various interpretations.

When it comes to thinkers in religious apophaticism, they hold the idea that language does not suffice to provide us any means to about God as we talk about His creation. Things in the realm of His creation precede the language and are more important than words. The meaning of a word in the realm of created beings is derived from the correspondence between the word and object. That is what I argued for in the previous chapter. In addition to the presumed relation between word and object, I will also argue that apophaticism looks at the meaning of a term by means of a connection to an extra-linguistic entity. Furthermore, an apophaticist divides the realm of God from that of His creation, and argue that although we can use words to talk about the latter, we cannot use them to talk about the former.

Given that there is an isomorphic, one to one pictorial relationship between created beings and words, there needs to be a ground upon which the correspondence holds correct in possible cases such that meaning is sustained, definitions are interpreted correctly. Knowledge human beings have about beings that are created by God is more accessible and clearer compared to the one about higher things such as celestial things and God Himself. Human beings know things by their reason, and reason is equipped with grasping the relationship between word and objects. The isomorphism is so clear that the mind grasps it. The underlying assumption that names come to objects as definitions without any context itself requires a standpoint

outside language. The standpoint holding meaning and language intact is God and his will according to religious apophaticism:

For that Source is the beginning of everything and from it come Being itself and every kind of being, all source and all end, all life and immortality and wisdom, all order and harmony and power, all maintenance and establishment and arrangement, all intelligent and reason and perception, all quality and rest and motion, all unity and intermingling and attraction, all cohesiveness and differentiation, all definition, and indeed every attribute which by the mere fact of being gives a character thereby to every existing thing. (Dionysius, *DN*, IX. 2.1.7)

The utterly transcendent creator brings forth unity and harmony to his creation, including the relationship between attributes of things and how they are named. The unity is sustained by God, and it forms the basis of the ground on which the meaning of words can be understood. The unity is intact all the time because of God, and it also paves the way for the ultimate ground upon which words latch onto things and define them correctly over different occasions:

All this holds all the more truly with respect to the Cause which produced the sun and which produced everything else. The exemplars of preexist as a transcendent unity within It. It brings forth being as a tide of being. We give the name of “exemplar” to those principles which preexist as a unity in God and which produce the essences of things. Theology calls them predefining, divine and good acts of will which determine and create things and in accordance with which the Transcendent One predefined and brought into being everything that is. (Dionysius, *DN*, IX. 2.1.8)

In a sense, creation itself implies sustainability in language use according to Dionysius. The person pointing to a specific object knows the definition of the words s/he is using in pointing. Being part of the unity in the world, objects are known with certain attributes, and those attributes have certain names. There is no need to account for the association between a name and its corresponding object. What is being meant by pointing to objects is interpreted correctly by the conservants. Things are created by God in order, and they are held in unity by Him such that the correspondence between the word and object is sustained since there is no change on

the part of the object. From the perspective of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in the *Philosophical Investigations*, meaning does not arise out of reference to reality external to language, without the context being established by the language users. As I explore above, the idea that association between word and object is interpreted correctly by the language users is groundless if no context has been presupposed before. As in the case of chess, there are various ways a definition can be interpreted if the relevant concepts at the background have not already been established. With respect to the unbridgeable ontological gap between God and his creation, words that define ordinary objects or human beings cannot hold for the transcendent God. Human beings cannot furnish the words about the Creator with meaning, because He is so utterly different from the rest of His creation. From the Wittgensteinian point of view, this problem originates from philosophy of language underlying religious apophaticism. Religious apophaticism implies that isomorphism is between word and object; but God cannot be articulated by words that apply to the objects of his creation since He is transcendent. He is not part of the creation, not even a being.

The presumed associative power of interpretation does not hold exactly when it comes to Divine Names of God, descriptions that are directly revealed in Scripture. Assume that we are to define a person as 'good'. When somebody asks what a good person is, the definition is automatically triggered by the presumed relation between the person, which is a being, and the good, which is a word defining it. From the ostensive definition point of view, pointing to a person and calling him 'good' is enough to convey the meaning of goodness. There is no difficulty in interpreting 'goodness' differently from how it is supposed to define a person because 'goodness' and 'personhood' are part of creation. Using the word 'good' for a person implies that the person is good because of the presumption that there is unity in creation, and

words and objects are not exceptions to that unity. Objects are there, and words come to them. The relation between the two is derived from the unity in creation, which in turn comes from God. This being so, however, pointing to a person and calling him ‘good’ can be open to various interpretations, none of which are correct without the context being presupposed. Goodness can define a person as mankind in general, a species of animal kingdom, a lump of flesh and bones acting in specific ways, and a spiritual being. The word good, on the other hand, can be interpreted to define a set of physical movements, an inner quality of soul, objects that can be sold, and etc...

For example, interpreting the instruction ‘be a good person’ correctly, depends on the context in which the instruction is given. Only in a linguistic environment where the words like behaviour, action, solidarity are already known, the instruction ‘be a good person’ can be interpreted correctly; though error is always possible unless further refinements are required. A word such as ‘good’ we use for human beings, can be interpreted differently in different contexts. In order to understand how it is interpreted in a specific context, one needs to look at how it is used: “If it is asked: ‘How do sentences manage to represent?’, -the answer might be ‘Don’t you know? You certainly see it, when you use them.’ For nothing is concealed” (Wittgenstein, 2013, PI 435). Rather, it is a dynamic tool for its users to communicate by following certain rules. These rules are important in using words for specific purposes, and they are always open to refinement. Meaning is not a strict correspondence between the term ‘good’ and person. It has to do with how words are used in an actual shared culture. Goodness and personhood are concepts that are part of human life, and we learn them by observing people acting good, for example. Without actually knowing any good person being good, we could not talk about interpreting the relationship between the two correctly. More generally, we learn by practising the word ‘person’

under different circumstances and contexts. The concept we learn is always with exceptions and even open to errors in actual use cases. Language provides us with rules for connecting actions and content of what we say rather than the static pictures between words and objects.

To Wittgenstein, language is a kind of game where we follow certain rules. Meaning arises out of how we apply words in the actual environment. It is not independent of the lives of human beings. Definition of a good person cannot be made sense of by giving reference to the unity in creation, which is external to the language game. We can apply our words to differing purposes, and all the different applications find support in actual use, where the rules of how to apply them are clearly established by the players in the language game: “How does it come about this arrow \rightarrow points? ... The arrow points only in the application that a living being makes of it” (*PI* 454). Religious apophaticism argues that words we can apply to created beings cannot be applied to the Creator because there is an incommensurable gap between the two. Similar to the case in ‘good person’, we have the same approach to how language refers here. In the case of pointing to a person and defining him/her good might be interpreted in various ways if the application of the concepts involved depends only on the presumed correspondence between *the words* ‘good person’ and ‘the person’. However, the word ‘good’ does not have a fixed meaning before being used in actual life. It has acquired its meaning in use. If the rules of how it is to be applied change, meaning changes. In a similar fashion, there are various ways of talking about God. Words such as ‘good’ or ‘great’, can equally be used for God too, though in a different way. The application of the words does not have to be representational all the time. To define a person as good might be an application of the word as representation of specific behavioural activity, such as

helping elderly, or acting justly. When we apply the word 'good' to God, most of the time the rules followed by using the word correctly are very different. Rules for how to interpret God as Good differ from the rules for interpreting a human being as good. Religious apophaticism has a specific view on God and creation. They believe that things created by God can be grasped by language, whereas God Himself is totally ineffable to any linguistic means. A radical apophaticist would hold that language pictures reality with respect to ordinary things, a position which is problematic. S/he would also argue that it is impossible for us to talk about God meaningfully because He is not a thing like His creation, a position which is also problematic from the perspective of late Wittgenstein. This is a mistake about the nature of language because language is not a generality about reality. Rather, it is a living tool, a playful activity that might be likened to games (Phillips, 1993, p. 62). There may not be an objective reality of God such that I point to a thing and call it God, but this does not undermine the possibility of having a religious life or language games in which I can talk about Him. There are various times in our lives that we can point to moments in which people express their belief in God, and define Him in many ways such as 'Good', 'Merciful', 'Omnipotent', 'Great', 'Loving', and etc... These are all different descriptions of God, and none of them are comparable 'completely' to the ostensive description of a 'good apple' or 'good person'. This is not because God cannot be described in language. Rather, there is no 'complete description' of God that refers to Him. No description can give us the 'full grasp' of God because language does not function that way. The fact that there is no 'complete description' of God, however, does not undermine the possibility of talking about God altogether. That is, we can still talk about God and give Him a place in our lives. Once we can situate Him in our lives, and play meaningful language games where

we know how to act upon the word God, we start understanding the concept involved and find meaning in religious life. All these are possible only if one accepts the importance of the role context plays in the formation of meaning, though. To overcome the problem a radical apophaticist faces, s/he needs to give more attention to the relational nature of language where the context is as crucial as the things and concepts that are being described.

CHAPTER 4

PICTURE, REPRESENTATION, AND APOPHATICISM

I have argued that language does not function only to describe. There are various ends to which words are put. Objects can be pointed at and referred to in language, but this does not undermine the fact that there needs to be a shared culture and practices within which the common use of the word referring to the object arises. The meaning of the words emerges in specific contexts of activity and language. Such contexts Wittgenstein calls ‘language games.’ With respect to language use in religious matters, apophaticism can adopt a radical position and claim that God cannot be described or even referred to because He is not an ordinary object. God is not a part of what He created. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word emerges in ways different than ostensive pointing. In this final chapter, I will attempt to highlight what is destructive about some language related views present in religious apophatic thinkers. I have in mind the literalist position according to which nothing that cannot be pictorially represented in language is meaningful. I will argue that both literalism and religious apophaticism adopt the same approach as regards the way words are used to describe God, but they are at the opposite ends of the spectrum. That is, a literalist would prefer a full continuity regarding the application of words to objects and God, whereas an apophaticist would prefer a total discontinuity between God and words used for objects as an ostensive definition. I will argue for a middle position that does not require an apophatic to have a stance on the very extreme. In doing so, I will be providing an exploration of Wittgenstein’s arguments for linguistic expression, his distinction between picture and representation, and his understanding of ‘forms of life.’

4.1 Literalism and Apophaticism: Continuity in the Application of Concepts

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein famously stated: “What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about, we must consign to silence” (*TLP* 7). Here, Wittgenstein makes a clear distinction between what is factual and what is not. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein argues that meaningful propositions have one to one correspondence to how things are arranged in the world. There is a pictorial representation of a specific state of affairs in the mind of the speaker when s/he articulates his/her thoughts. The comparison with the state of affairs in the world would then show whether the proposition is true or false. Not every proposition is of this kind however, according to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. Propositions of science are meaningful because they correspond to/are pictures of a state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*) in the world. The way the words are arranged in the proposition corresponds to the arrangement of things in the state of affairs. From the perspective of picture theory, the associative power between a proposition of science and reality, differs from those propositions of religion, art, aesthetics in this respect. To the picture theory of meaning, the proposition ‘a car accident happened last night in the background’ is meaningful, because one can compare the structure of the proposition with the structure of the state of affairs in the world at a given time. If there is a correspondence, the proposition is true, if not; it is false. On the other hand, according to the picture theory proposition of religion, aesthetics, and ethics, cannot be examined in the same way as a proposition about car crash is examined. There is no ground on which an ‘objective’ examination of the proposition ‘God exists’ is possible because no projecting line between the picture the proposition provides and the world can be established. Hence, in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argues that

propositions of religion, aesthetics, and ethics cannot be true or false because they are not meaningful at all and we must be silent about them. With respect to language use in religious matters, he argues that facts in the world are totally different from issues related to God: “How things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference to what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world” (*TLP* 6.432). In his earlier period, then, he simply argues that propositions of religion cannot be articulated by any linguistic means. Religious matters and areas that add value to human life, such as ethics and aesthetics, are what might be called ‘mystical’ and we should be silent about them.

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein alters his position about what he previously declared as mystical, and out of this world. Although they cannot easily be decomposed into logical atoms and verified like propositions of natural science, religious, aesthetic, ethical, and even philosophical issues do matter to human beings, and they have to be integrated into the overall system of language. Even though ‘God does not reveal himself in the world’ as *an object*, He does show himself in our lives, and language. More importantly, God’s being included in our linguistic formulations, is inseparable from how we relate ourselves to Him, how we situate Him in our lives. The meaning of the phrase ‘God exists’ is logically inseparable from the fact that there are people expressing (‘avowing’) their faith in God, praying to Him and living a certain religious life. To Wittgenstein in his later period, this is how language functions; it does not only describe facts. The meaning of a specific term arises within a language game where the players of the game have a use for it. Without actual use, a word is dead because only in its surroundings a word acquires its meaning. A word cannot be made sense of if one tries to use it in isolation from the context. Words are like toolkits that people can use for varying

purposes. They can be used to describe facts that can be represented pictorially too, but this is not the only way. Words and propositions can also be used to describe phenomena that cannot easily be represented as pictures.

One can describe the ‘taste’ s/he got from a novel s/he read last week. The taste she gets from the novel might be quite different from the taste his/her mother gets, for instance. Two people, a daughter and her mother for example, might describe the taste they have taken from reading the novel differently because each finds different meaning in it. They are at different ages and maturity in life and the novel means different things to each of them. The way they articulate the taste they experience in reading the novel cannot be pictorially represented as in the case of a car accident. Of course, one can form a mental picture of the taste by listening to how they express their experience of reading the book. However, the picture would not be of the same kind as in the case of a car accident. The daughter and her mother find value in the novel, and that value differs from each other. There might be a mental picture accompanying the way they express how valuable the novel is, but the value they find cannot be reduced to that mental picture; neither is it of the same kind as the mental picture involved in the car accident. In the example of reading a novel, the meaning a reader finds in it is not isolated from the life the reader lives. In the case of a novel, there is a stage already set with respect to the whole culture of literacy, literature, history, politics, propaganda, and etc... The daughter and her mother are in a society where all the surrounding culture has already been established. When they read the novel, the meaning they find is not independent of the context surrounding their culture. The way they interpret the novel is not isolated from the way they talk about the other areas of that culture. The specific taste each gets from the novel can vary, but ‘reading a novel’ means pretty much the same in

their lives; they do not interpret it 'by looking at a piece of paper'. In a sense, reading a novel and finding value in that activity are intrinsically bound to each other. To understand what a novel means to a reader, one needs to investigate how reading it adds value to the life of the reader. Trying to describe the word 'the novel', it is not enough to point to the mental picture of such a thing. Rather, one has to take into account what it means for people to have literature as part of their lives in which reading a novel has a place.

Understanding what a novel means to human beings requires grasping the role it plays in human life. How the concept 'novel' shows itself in the life of human beings has to be investigated in order to understand the meaning of it. To look at the object itself only, isolated from the life within which it appears, is a resort to an extra-linguistic item, and does not give us any meaning according to late Wittgenstein. In a similar fashion, the way people talk about God is intrinsically bound to the way they position themselves towards the reality of God. They pray, worship, and show respect for God. Religious people find meaning in religious talk and expressions not because they necessarily point to a being that can be pictorially depicted but because they have developed ways to talk about Him consistently. They express their feelings in a ritual, for example, and everyone's feelings might be different. However, they can communicate their feelings and talk about them. Communicating a certain concept does not require one *to point to an already agreed upon extra-linguistic item*; rather, the way it is communicated in language depends on the language games we build among us.

To take linguistic meaning as something fixed by pictorial depiction leads to denying the possibility of referring to God through language. As I said earlier, religious apophaticists' position, specifically that of Dionysius, limits the

applications of various descriptive names to realities other than God. The underlying motivation is the idea that God is not a being, and not continuous with what He creates *as beings*. He even goes so far as to state that ‘God is not a being’ because the essence of God is indivisible, and existence implies ‘duality’ in His essence, as in the case of Plotinus’ ‘One.’ That is, terms like ‘existence’ or ‘being’ are continuous with every other word we can use to refer to objects *other than God*. Application of those terms to God implies that God is continuous with creation, and results in treating God as an ‘object’; which is against the core of Christian belief. In a similar fashion, Dionysian negative theology negates all the positive attributes regarding the essence of God. The standard characteristics that have been traditionally associated with God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, merciful, loving, and etc... are all negated because they cannot capture God’s simplicity. They all result in duality; there cannot be any division in the divine essence. Nothing that can also be used for the realities of the world can describe God’s essence because God is *not* a being continuous with all the other beings. For example, to argue that God is great, from the perspective of *via negativa*, carries the danger of misunderstanding the ‘greatness’ involved here. The greatness of God cannot be likened to any other kind of greatness. Human beings can be great too, but this is not comparable to the greatness of God since He is not a being like human beings. The danger of misunderstanding is eliminated by avoiding the description altogether.

At the other end of the spectrum lies literalism. To a literalist, there is a total continuity in the application of words. In the case of God and His attributes, a literalist would take any attribute as if they were applied to any phenomenon. Attributes like being, existence, greatness, goodness can all be applied to God in the same way as they are applicable to phenomena in ordinary life. That kind of attitude,

however, is problematic because from the religious point of view, God is not something similar to phenomena in ordinary life. Let us take the concept of 'existence', for instance. A literalist would argue that to say that God exists is similar to saying that the queen of England exists. That is, the concept of 'existence' can be applied in the same way to both God and the queen of England. Queen Elizabeth has many characteristics: she is a human being, lives in England, is an older woman, and a symbol representing a historical tradition still alive in a country. All these characteristics go together with the fact that 'she exists'. To a literalist, the proposition 'she exists' can be examined with respect to all the other properties she has. A literalist would prove the existence of Queen Elizabeth by pointing to the older woman who lives in England, resides in the palace, etc... That kind of projection is possible because s/he applies the concept of 'existence' to the queen by comparing the mental picture of 'Elizabeth' in his/her mind with what s/he already knows as the example of existent. That is, the way Queen Elizabeth exists is similar to the way all people exist because she has certain characteristics that can be 'similar' or 'dissimilar' to any human being that exists.

What makes a literalist radical, on the other hand, is the idea that any kind of language application can be judged by the same framework of reference to reality. This is the same for numbers, sensations, and feelings too. To a literalist, the meaning of these terms can be understood by looking at the similarity they have with respect to many other concepts that are already known. Any kind of objective criterion for comparison would suffice to apply the literalist understanding to different areas, according to the literalist. God's existence, greatness, creativity, are all concepts that are continuous with the things that exist in the world. In that respect, a literalist would take the proposition 'God exists' to be the same as the sentence 'the

queen Elizabeth exists'. However, to a religious believer, this is an unacceptable position. For example, to say that the queen Elizabeth exists differs from the existence of God because in the case of the queen, one knows how to associate the concept 'existence' with the queen, that is, queen is a person like any other who has certain physical characteristics and behavioral patterns that are observable as any other observable phenomena we associate with existence. God, on the other hand, is not a being one can see and has any ordinary interaction with. S/he cannot apply the term existence to God as s/he did for the queen because it is difficult to answer 'how similar' God is to humans or any other observable phenomena. A religious person relates himself/herself to God in a specific way rather different than in which s/he relates himself/herself to a human being. If a religious person accepts a literalist doctrine, s/he would be in trouble because in his/her belief system God is not similar to beings created by Him.

Yet another example is the attribution of 'Greatness'. To a literalist, one can easily understand what 'the queen Elizabeth is great' means. Greatness of the queen can be interpreted by looking into specific cases like the head of a state is great, or a victorious leader is great. There are different examples of how the concept is associated with. Greatness of the queen is similar to a greatness of a person who acts generously to the people around, organizes the state and makes tough decisions. In these examples, the concept of 'greatness' acquires its meaning through the pictorial similarity between things that are known to be 'great'. That is, the concept of greatness in the proposition 'queen Elizabeth is great' is made sense of by making a comparison between the queen and people who are similar to the queen in certain observable characteristics. This comparison is a kind of mental association. That association depends on the assumption that words picture objects, independent of the

contexts and of how people live their lives. In specific cases like that of Queen Elizabeth, no obvious problem arises out of this assumption because in daily life it is easier to associate the queen with a head of state. The presumed continuity in the application of words holds here. However, when it comes to religious matters, problems do arise. God is a being to which the concept of existence cannot be applied in a similar way, because nothing is pictorially similar to God in ordinary life. God is not a being that can be compared to phenomena in ordinary life on the basis of physical similarity. It is not the similarity or dissimilarity that regulates the meaning of 'God Exists' or 'God is Great'. Rather, it is the way of life and the way people use the word 'God' in their lives. People who believe in God, do express their beliefs that God is Great because He has a certain place in their lives. Their faith regulates their lives, and He is not separable from the ordinary life they conduct. They believe that God has standard attributes like caring, is fatherly, and an omnipotent creator. Greatness of God also involves these attributes, and their meaning can only be understood by looking into the lives of the people who express their beliefs in a God with such attributes. Rather than looking for a pictorial correspondence between God and the attributes, what position those attributes have in the lives of the people who apply them, and what role they play there, should also be investigated. The issue of how similar the concept to an object or a word is requires a criterion of correctness established independently of the association between the word and object. Description of various facts and objects does not suffice to provide an insight into religious beliefs, aesthetic taste, artistic movements, etc... Language functions in many ways, and people use words to express what is important to them even if there is no specific object to be described pictorially.

On a similar ground, a literalist and a religious apophaticist would approach the expressions of religious language differently. I will provide an example from Michelangelo's famous painting, 'God creating Adam'. A literalist would say: when I look at the painting 'God creating Adam', I see that the way the artist represents God is a precise picture of God as He is. On the other hand, an apophaticist like Dionysius would say: when Michelangelo tries to represent God, he is actually providing us with a painting of Renaissance Italy because God cannot be represented by any image or artistic way; the picture does not offer any insight into the divinity as Christians experience it. The way a literalist approaches the painting reflects the effort to reduce God to an image which is in total continuity with how we approach every other representation in ordinary life. An extreme apophaticism, on the other hand, denies that God is a reality that can be connected to realities in ordinary life; so s/he denies that divine presence can be represented by images taken from human life. A literal interpretation would have the idea that God and Adam in the painting may well be comparable to older and younger citizens of Renaissance Italy, but the way Christians understand the creation of Adam is more than that. It is not simply that there are two people who are used as models for God and Adam. This would be a pictorial approach that there is a magical link between people painted and the content to be understood. A literal interpretation would assume that the gap between the painting and how it is interpreted by a believer is bridged automatically because there is no need to examine the context further. That is, the older man is the picture of God and the younger man is Adam created by Him. There is a total continuity between what is being depicted in the painting and what the religious person sees on the canvas. A literalist would not examine further the context that surrounds the lives of the people who live a religious life, practice certain religious rituals with specific

goals and feelings, organize their behavioural and cultural practises according to their faith. Hence, a literalist position imposes a full continuity of language use where the value religious belief adds to human life is ignored. Furthermore, it approaches the concepts and propositions involved in religious talk as if they can be investigated in a similar way to the concepts of ordinary life.

This is an ostensive interpretation of the relationship between God and creation. In order to have a correct understanding of the painting, there needs to be a stage being set in the first place regarding the religious context. The picture does not show anything by itself - the way the community practices its religious belief, such as devotion, rituals, music etc has to be incorporated into the meaning of the 'painting'. Similarly, the radical apophaticist is also in trouble by saying that there is nothing religious in the painting. By denying the conceptual connection God has to His creation, apophaticism actually denies the meaning people find in acting religiously. By 'denying a conceptual connection', I mean this: the apophaticist considers God to be utterly transcendent, in a way that makes it totally impossible for a believer to make a connection between Him and His creation. There is no way to connect God, who is considered to be an utterly transcendent being with an indivisible essence, to things and phenomena in ordinary life. However, belief in such a divinity who is totally unconnected to human life would be devoid of meaning and colour. By trying to remove the religious content altogether from the painting, a religious apophaticist would be in a position to destroy the very core of his/her religiously decorated life and set of practices. People who believe in God and live a Christian way of life pray to God as if He is a fatherly figure who provides His grace, and devote themselves to Him in order to acquire salvation. In doing all these things, a believer does not actually need to have an image in his/her mind that God is

somebody like the old man in the painting. However, the painting adds value to their lives independently of God's being similar to His creation or not. The idea that God cannot be represented in any way in language or by artistic means is the result of a misunderstanding of the relationship between pictorial depiction and expressing a specific belief by resorting to pictorial means. This is in turn the result of approaching religious belief as if it is something reducible to an ostensive definition only, without any context of human life being taken into account. Hence, an apophaticist, like a literalist, would be in trouble by adopting an extreme position regarding the continuity of religious terms with respect to concepts in ordinary life.

4.2 Picture vs Representation

To interpret the painting 'God Creating Adam' as an artistic expression of a story which also has religious significance requires one to take into account the lives of people in which concepts like 'omnipotent', 'fatherly', 'loving creator', emerge and acquire their sense. Without introducing these concepts surrounding a religious life into a language game of the word 'God' or 'Creation', the painting cannot easily be interpreted as an expression of a religious story. If no religious context has been set, the painting would be just an image describing actions of any two men. Indeed, even that kind of interpretation would require that concepts such as 'human being', 'gender', 'interacting human beings', and even 'similarity' have already been established among the language users according to late Wittgenstein. A literalist, on the other hand, would argue that God enters the language game simply as a picture (*Bild*). S/he might interpret Michelangelo's painting as the picture of God; or hold that the greatness of God is similar to that of queen Elizabeth. In these cases, the literalist needs to provide a criterion for similarity to the mental image s/he is

supposed to have with respect to God and the object of comparison. However, no criterion of correctness for the comparison can be provided on the basis of pictorial similarity because the context surrounding God and the queen are different. To understand the greatness of God one needs to take into account the value he adds to the life of a believer with the word ‘great’. Greatness involved in ‘God is Great’ is very different from the way Queen Elizabeth is said to be great. Belief that ‘God is Great’ reflects how a believer organizes his/her life according to that belief, and is situated in a certain way of life. In a similar vein, an apophaticist takes the other extreme and argues that God is totally different from His creation, and cannot be represented in any way: representation of God in the painting has no religious relevance at all, and the term ‘greatness’ cannot be attributed to the queen and God in the same way because there is no way of comparison between the two. I have already argued that the position is in common with that of literalism. This is because literalism approaches religious terms with a theory of meaning exclusively based on ostensive definition, disregarding the importance of the religious life and context.

In addition to all these, what is also critical with respect to the two opposing positions is that they do not take into account the difference between ‘picture’ and ‘representation’ as Wittgenstein articulates it in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

Consider the language game with the words ‘He is in pain’. To it –one would like to say- belongs not merely the picture of behaviour, but the picture of pain too. Or; the paradigm not merely of behaviour, but of pain too. –To say ‘The picture of pain is introduced into the language game with the word “pain” ’ is a misunderstanding. Pain is not represented through a picture, nor can anything be substituted for this representation that we would call a picture. It is true that in a sense the representation of pain enters the language game; but not in the form of a picture. A representation is not a picture, but a picture can correspond to it. (Wittgenstein, 1972, *PI* 300 & 301; see also the translation in Winch, 1987, p. 77)

In this passage, Wittgenstein makes a distinction between the German words *Bild* and *Vorstellung*. ‘*Bild*’ here is a picture that projects one structure upon another,

like ‘a map depicts the surface of the earth’ (Winch, 1987, p. 68). In the case of pain, the word ‘pain’ often accompanies an expression of internal sensation of pain as in the exclamation ‘I have a pain’. Although pain is an inner sensation, the word ‘pain’ is not the *picture* of an internal state. Rather, it is introduced to the language game with a specific observable, communicable expression, ‘I have a pain’. The meaning of the word ‘pain’ is constituted by being introduced to the community of language users and their behaviour, as a publicly observable expression of the ‘internal’ state. The person who feels pain as an internal sensation might have a mental picture of that sensation which is accessible only to himself or herself. However, the meaning of the word ‘pain’ attached to that sensation cannot be private because it is not separate from the fact that there are people who react to someone in pain, notice pain behaviour and pity the one who is in pain. It is the behavioral expression of pain which turns it into a representation of a subjective experience which might have otherwise been private. By means of which this representation of the internal state is introduced to the public language game in which the word ‘pain’ acquires its meaning. It is also clear that, as Wittgenstein argues, the internal sensation is not reduced to a mere behaviour: “A representation is not a picture, but a picture can correspond to it” (Wittgenstein, 1972, *PI* 301). In a similar fashion, let us consider that we replace the expression ‘oh! I have a pain!’ with ‘oh! I believe in God!’ Just like ‘I have a pain’ is not a description of pain, ‘I believe in God’ is not a description of God either. Both ‘I have a pain’ and ‘I believe in God’ are ‘avowals’ that make a previously internal state public such that we can talk about the concepts involved (Winch, 1987, p. 77). Initially, we have the expression as a starting point of communication, and concept formation emerges thereafter. Hence, Wittgenstein

keeps the reality of the internal, private experience; and also adds the dimension of communication and public expression to the picture. Practising the use of the word 'pain' over different occasions of people expressing their pain-state through their bodily movements, the meaning of the word pain is constituted. In this way, what is presumably 'private' becomes public and acquires a place in the community. The meaning of the word 'pain' is constituted through human action. People express their pain behaviour with certain 'sounds' and other people give responses to people in pain behaviour in particular ways. Over multiple occasions, if those 'sounds' and physical expressions accompanying them are reacted to in a specific way, the connection is formed between the words (sounds initially) and their use. It is important to keep in mind here that to Wittgenstein, there is a 'logical connection' between the inner sensation and its outer expression. This connection he calls 'grammatical'. There is always the possibility of pretense that one is not in pain but simulates a deceptive pain behaviour. However, the logical connection remains intact in that kind of pretense, because the consecutive, multiple occasions of the public use fix the meaning of the word (Sidiropoulou, 2015, pp. 13-27). In other words, if everybody was constantly pretending, even the concept of 'pretending' would not arise. The concept of pretense arises in a world where there is a difference between somebody pretending and somebody not pretending.

This is how Wittgenstein argues for the difference between picture and representation. By showing the distinction between picture and representation, he also puts emphasis on the importance of the notion of communicable expression of mental states or thoughts. With respect to religious belief and practice, the right way of putting the relation between God and efforts to describe God has to take

into account the public expressions of faith and religious practices. As I argued above, a literalist would take the physical similarity too seriously with respect to the formation of meaning. Irrespective of the context in which words are applied, a literalist would stick to the criterion of similarity when s/he examines the meaning of a concept like 'great'. In that respect, s/he would propose that the greatness involved in 'the queen Elizabeth is great' is the same as the greatness involved in 'a head of state is great'. The kind of examination a literalist conducts here is the comparison of the mental image of queen Elizabeth with that of a head of state. The notion of similarity is the key here to understand a term's applicability. A term is applicable to objects, numbers, sensations, and divinity if there is a way to find a similarity among its alternative applications. With respect to God, a literalist would argue that words about Him are comparable to words about other realities. However, the mental act of looking for a similarity or dissimilarity is not by itself enough to establish any meaningful association. The notion of similarity has to be investigated with respect to a certain public background, as in the case of pain and responses to pain behaviour. That is, 'similar' also *has to be applied according to a criterion*. The meaning of 'similarity' is also bound to a certain context. Without being introduced to a public game, a concept cannot be made sense of. The language game of the word 'Great' consists of people using the term for the things they call 'Great'. Over multiple cases, the meaning of the term is constituted. What is similar to 'Great' and what is not are part of a language game in which many comparisons are made among people in different situations. If the community in which the term is given meaning is bypassed, the concept 'Great' would be left simply as a mental object which is only accessible to its holder. In that case, the mental object would not in

itself suffice to produce the meaning of the term ‘great’. In that kind of scenario, a private object cannot be similar or dissimilar to the things that are public. In a similar vein, a literalist would be in trouble when it comes to religious terms. A literalist reduces the meaning of concepts and terms used in a religious context to the meaning of concepts we encounter in environments that are not necessarily religious. That is, a literalist bypasses the impact a religious belief has on the life of a believer, and removes the colour the belief adds to the lives of people who express their belief in God.

Equally destructive is religious apophaticism. For instance, an extreme apophaticist would deny that the older man in Michelangelo’s painting represents any meaningful religious idea, or any religious content for a religious believer. The criterion s/he uses to decide is ‘similarity’. An apophaticist would say that the old man in Michaelangelo’s painting cannot be God not because He is not similar to God, but because God cannot be similar to any observable entity. The notion of similarity here has to be investigated, though. Wittgenstein argues against the idea that similarity and likeness are certain methods of projection which supposedly take place *in the mind*. He introduces the idea of thought being a picture, and gives the example of ‘the picture of my brother in America’ (Wittgenstein, 1966, p. 66). Suppose that you have a brother who travelled to America and has taken a picture in front of the Statue of Liberty. When you see his photograph, you say that it is the picture of your brother in America. When you say that ‘this is the picture of my brother’, you actually make a comparison between the mental picture of your brother and the photograph in front of you. What is being compared is the ‘likeness’ of the two pictures. However, according to Wittgenstein, the important question here is what guarantees the likeness. There needs to be a technique of

comparison as regards the mental picture in mind. This technique, Wittgenstein argues, emerges in the embodied human life. The method of projection in the case of ‘brother in America’ requires one to already know how to use the concept of ‘similarity’, as well as the concepts such as travelling, going abroad, country, etc... These are all part of what can be called ‘stage setting’, as in the example of asking the name of a pawn in the game of chess. ‘God creating Adam’ is a picture open to interpretation as any other linguistic or artistic expression. However, a religious person interprets it in a specific way and finds religious meaning in it. The painting, to a religious person, reflects the idea that God is a fatherly figure who supports His creation, and shows His wisdom. That kind of interpretation is rooted in the life of a believer who believes that God is *like* a father and can support His children when they are in need of help. That is why the interpretation is not automatically generated, but depends on the context. The context here is a whole embodied life of people who express themselves through prayers to God and worship Him. They live in a world where the idea of creation has an important place, and it is seen as an act of God. This constitutes the stage setting with respect to the painting ‘God creating Adam’, and an extreme apophaticist has to take it into account. If there is no grammatical connection between the divinity and His creation, there would be no way of articulating religious beliefs meaningfully. The painting is a means through which the believer expresses his religious beliefs. It also has the function of teaching what is involved in a religious life. As in the case of pain, pain behaviour is needed in order to make the word public and communicate the internal state thereof; but this does not undermine the reality of an inner experience. Similarly, the painting ‘God creating Adam’ is a work of art that represents God in a way that arouses a feeling of excitement in the

people who believe in God. The specific responses of human beings to God in the painting are already the part of their language game where the concept of 'God' acquires its meaning. However, the fact that the meaning of the term God is constituted by the reactions of human beings to the painting does not mean that God is reduced to human reactions or the painting, only. To make it clear, the fact that human beings cannot talk about God independently of human life does not mean that God depends on us. It is the concept of God that depends on us, rather than God Himself. Hence, an apophaticist would be in trouble finding a religious content in the painting:

If we ever saw this, we certainly wouldn't think this the Deity. The picture has to be used in an entirely different way if we are to call the man in that queer blanket 'God', and so on. You could imagine that religion was taught by means of these pictures. 'Of course we can only express ourselves by means of pictures.' This is rather queer ... I could show Moore the pictures of a tropical plant. There is a technique of comparison between picture and plant. If I showed him the picture of Michelangelo and said, 'Of course, I can't show you the real thing, only the picture' ... The absurdity is, I've never taught him the technique of using this picture. (Wittgenstein, 1966, p. 63)

In conclusion, to take a radical side on the spectrum of continuity with respect to religious and non religious language results in problems. A literalist would be in trouble to account for the full continuity s/he assumes because it is difficult to compare the concept of God to the concepts of worldly things.

'Greatness' involved in God-talk cannot be similar to the greatness of the queen because in the case of God no projection between the God and 'greatness' is possible. Similarly, an apophaticist would have problems if s/he argues that God cannot be called 'Great' because He is utterly transcendent. When a religious person expresses his or her belief that God is Great, this is not only a description of a mental picture compared to an object or a person, but rather it is an expressive function of language which takes into account the lives of the people. In a similar

fashion, the painting ‘God creating Adam’ needs to be interpreted from the perspective that picture and representation are different, just as Peter Winch has argued (Winch, 1987, pp. 78-70). The notion of similarity between the men in the painting and God cannot be accounted for simply by means of the ‘mental picture’ in the mind of the observer which is accessible only to himself or herself. One needs to bring the public into play in order to constitute the meaning in the first place. The form of life people live through is the dimension where religious language can be applicable meaningfully, without disregarding the context and depending only on the presumed correspondence between word and object.

4.3 Middle Position in Apophaticism: Essence vs Energies

Having an extreme position regarding how God is related to language is problematic. The belief that God is utterly different from His creation and that the same words cannot be applied to both Him and His creation relies on the assumption that there needs to be an all encompassing definition that accounts for all the aspects of the phenomenon in question. That is, a radical apophaticist is actually in search of a state of mind where s/he grasps ‘God’ as a whole, in His totality. Any attempt at describing that state of mind, is an effort that misses the point. Apophaticists implicitly try to specify a feeling or experience that corresponds to the ultimate description conveying the whole content involved in the concept of God, but they cannot specify such a thing. Then, they reject descriptions altogether because they have the fear of *misdescribing* Him. The underlying motivation in looking for an ultimate description is the presupposition that there are mental pictures that are logically linked with the names of objects, and also there are internal states that imply the association between word and

object is set once and for all by means of a pictorial projection, without any relation to the way words are used in certain contexts. In other words, people on the radical side would search for an ultimate point of contact between language and reality, as if a reality external to language would provide structure to all the language. That is, they see definitions as extra-linguistic items that magically connect to the words, and picture them in a specific, already established form. The problems a radical apophaticist faces result from the implicit search for an ultimate description of God which transcends any created phenomenon. Since there is no such thing as ultimate description, and linguistic meaning does not emerge by reference to an extra-linguistic item, they could not find any (Sidiropoulou, 2015, p. 27). In this part, I will argue for a position that does not necessarily need an ultimate description of God.

In any form of apophaticism, God is ineffable in His essence. Human beings cannot know God in His simplicity because He is utterly simple as He is and His essence allows no divisibility. Any attempt at describing Him with categories or concepts that can also be applicable to His creation is in vain. This being so, however, a believer relates himself or herself to God anyway. Even though it is believed that He is indescribable, believers hold that He exists. The belief that He exists is part of the way people relate their lives to this utterly transcendent entity. It has a certain place in their lives, in how they position themselves accordingly with respect to ethical issues, communal practices, etc... Belief in God shows itself in how people regulate their lives with certain rituals and practices, and religious belief and expressions get their meaning through these practices. Belief in God, in a sense, does not start with the belief that God exists as if He were a phenomenon that acquires its meaning outside the life of a believer.

The way the concept of God is used in the contexts of worship, rituals, prayer, gratitude, charity taken together establishes the meaning of the word 'God.'

Descriptions that a believer attributes to God arise out of the various ways in which he relates himself to the system of belief he is living through, and cannot be thought independently of that. It is particularly in this sense that I will argue that analogy has a particular meaning in the life of a Christian believer.

In Christianity, God is described with specific names. These names are attributes of God, and very important to the core of Christian belief. God is believed to be an omnipotent, all knowing, great, benevolent and loving father of human beings. He is also utterly transcendent and totally differentiated from any part of His creation. In the midst of all the ineffability, the only way to talk about the names of God is the belief in scripture and revelation. As part of Christian belief, God manifests Himself in the form of a human being and relates Himself to the believers. The way God manifests Himself in certain forms is part of the belief that he has created effects on the natural world. Although He is utterly different from any of His creation, by His own will He shows His act of creation. Though God cannot be known in His essence as 'fatherly, loving, and caring', His effects of creative power would imply an analogy as regards these concepts. God is not comparable to any one of His creations as He is in His essence. However, the way He is praised and described can be considered as the way God asserts his act of creation is his created effects, and this is called His 'energies.' A radical apophaticist like Pseudo Dionysius would think that God cannot be known in any way, no positive attribution can be applied to Him because there is an unbridgeable gap between God and things He created. When one assumes the analogical position, however, s/he embraces a middle position between a radical

apophaticism and literalism with respect to the continuity in the application of religious concepts. Analogical approach would take into account the distinction between essence and energies. The gap between an utterly transcendent being and the natural world is bridged by means of analogy. Analogical approach assumes that words can be used in different, relative senses. Only in this way the gap between is bridged, and meaningful talk about God becomes possible.

To say that 'God is Great' for instance, requires one to use 'Greatness' as a term reflecting the beauty and perfection in the creation of the objects in the world. There *is not* a single, all encompassing way to describe 'Greatness'.

Rather, there are various senses in which something can be great. Greatness of a flower might be its beautiful colours and sweet smell, whereas the greatness of the queen is her power in organizing and leading society. In each case, we have some kind of resemblance, but not necessarily a pictorial one. Wittgenstein would deny that there is a pictorial resemblance. In the case of a flower, greatness can be related to its continued blossom, and its reproduction which in turn can be interpreted as a botanical term or as a sense of which nature is likened to a mother giving life. There is no single point of contact between the words 'flower' and 'great' as if one pictorially represents the other. 'Greatness' of flowers is related to other forms of greatness to a certain extent. With respect to God, greatness traditionally involves His creative power, but this power is related in many ways to how the concept 'greatness' is involved in our ordinary life and language use. In each case, it reflects something about God, a hint about Him in a certain way, but not in a direct, unmediated and total way.

The need for generality inherent in the extreme position is the result of disregarding the importance of relational nature of meaning. A literalist disregards

the role religion plays in human life and reduces the concepts used in religious language to a talk about ordinary life, whereas a radical apophaticist denies the language use about God altogether. In the case of literalism, we do not have a holistic understanding of how the meaning of a concept is constituted. By definition, literalist theories of meaning are always based on one to one correspondence between word and object. A literalist does not give any importance to how human beings relate to each other and how they use their words in their interactions. The context surrounding human life is disregarded, and religious talk is assumed to be the same as talk about ordinary objects, or other areas such as numbers, sensations, and etc... However, it is the distinctive characters of religious terms and practices that bring value to the life of a believer. On the other hand, an apophaticist tries to find an ultimate description that can cover all the aspects of God once and for all. Since s/he cannot find any, s/he denies any kind of talk and expression about God altogether. In literalism, terms and expressions about God are totally reduced to pictorial projection as if the meaning of religious terms are in total continuity with that of terms about humans and other natural beings. In apophaticism, the pictorial approach remains intact with respect to how words and propositions are related to the ordinary world, which is the creation of God, but any kind of projection is denied when it comes to talk about God. In both literalism and apophaticism, there is a need to take into account the context and the living surrounding in which words are used. The meanings of the terms used are constituted by what the community in question is doing with those terms. If there is no context being set, pictorial projection by itself would not constitute the meaning. In the case of the painting 'God creating Adam', we have a work of art that any society would understand, but the religious

significance cannot be provided by the pictorial projection only. It does not have a religious significance for a Buddhist monk, for instance, because the concept of a fatherly creator does not have a significant place in his life. The painting has religious significance because there is an already established language game in which God is a creator who has attributes such as ‘fatherly’, ‘forgiver’, ‘wise’, and etc...

Literalism and radical apophaticism approach the painting ‘God creating Adam’ from very different perspectives, but none of them give importance to the specific context in which the painting has a religious significance to a believer. Analogical position, however, takes into account the context in which the meaning of concepts emerges. From the perspective of analogical position, the older man in the painting represents the standard attributes of God such as ‘fatherly’, ‘omnipotent’, and ‘loving father’. The man in the painting might be a ‘picture’ of an older citizen in Renaissance Italy, but it represents a sense in which a Christian believer would experience God who reveals Himself in the form of a human being. Being manifested in the form of a father is an energy of God which He asserts as a creative activity in the world, and this manifestation provides a sense by means of which people relate the concept of father to God in certain ways. Since the concept of ‘father’ is understood only relationally to how it plays a role in the lives of the people who relate themselves to it, a literalist would not have to account for the value a religious person finds in a religious life. Analogical position would accept the possibility of using words with different but continuous senses in different contexts, and this prevents the analogical perspective from becoming as extreme as the positions of a literalist, and an apophaticist. In that respect, Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language in his later period can contribute to

the analogical position. The Wittgensteinian approach pays specific attention to the analysis of language use with respect to a specific context. Language and meaning are related to the context in which words and descriptions are used, such that there is no single, all encompassing definition of a given concept. This is very important to the analogical position as well, as in the case of descriptions of God. We do not have any strict definition of what God is. No direct, total encounter with God is possible to the Christian religious tradition. Rather, God is considered to relate Himself to us via His creative power. The belief that He manifests Himself in the form of human being is not inseparable from the fact that human beings also find ways to relate themselves to God whom they believe is a 'father'. To define God as a 'father' is an analogical use of the term 'father', and reflects a context in which the concept of a creator who has mercy for His creation has a place. Similar to the way God is defined as 'father', there are many ways God can be analogically described and referred to. None of those definitions, however, ignore the specific form of life in which language is used. Any definition one can try to make of God is related to the context, and none of them can cover all the aspects of Him. This is not because God cannot be known in any means. Rather, there is no such definition that functions independently of the life of the people who use it.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I have argued that there are various ways one can talk about God and religious life. The possibility of talking meaningfully about different realities lies in realizing and acknowledging the role of the context in which the meaning of words is constituted. Apophaticism might argue that language does not suffice to talk about God, given that He is transcendent that He is not even a being at all. From the perspective of late Wittgenstein, this does not undermine the possibility of language use about God.

Religious apophaticism holds a radical approach with respect to language use about God. A radical apophaticist would deny the possibility of any kind of description about God on the basis of the belief that God is not a being like his creation, and transcends the world and our linguistic means to grasp His reality. I showed that this position is problematic from the perspective of the late Wittgenstein. The belief that God is transcendent does not necessarily imply that He is ineffable because language does not function only to describe facts. There are various ways language can be used, and ostensive definition is just one of them. The formation of the meaning of a word starts with public use of the word and is not inseparable from how people react to it. In that respect, the way a word is used, the function it has in a sentence is the key to the formation of its meaning. Language is something like a game in which there are rules specifying how to play. In order to have meaningful communication, one has to have a mastery of the practices and rules involved in the game. The context determines which rule is being used and how a word is used. It is this relational nature of language to the

context that there is no need for a magical link between a word and its correct application.

With respect to religious language, the context it is used in is the life of a believer who express his/her belief in God. The believer has already a background in which s/he grasps how the concept of 'God' is used. Transcendence of God does not prevent him/her from expressing the belief that God is 'Great', 'Omnipotent', 'Fatherly', and 'Loving' because meaning of those terms does consist in a projection upon a tangible object like reality. In the case of God, there is no such tangible object involved and a radical apophaticist argues that we cannot describe Him thereby. This approach is problematic because language does not start with a reality external to language. Rather, it starts with action and use of words by the language users. Our reactions to the phenomena we encounter, either our internal sensations or external reality, initiate a connection with others where we exchange our words. The meaning of those words emerges within such surrounding of language use. Similarly, the meaning of the concepts we use to describe God emerges in our lives, and it is inseparable from how we relate ourselves to the concepts involved in religious life, what is the place they have in *our* life.

The concept of 'father' is treated differently by a literalist, and an apophaticist. The apophaticist does not apply it. A literalist would apply it to God as if He was a father like a biological father, whereas a religious apophaticist will deny any application on the assumption that He cannot be represented in any way. However, there is an analogical position which is a middle stance between the literalist and the apophaticist. Analogical position makes it possible to give importance and base the use of language on the similarities between God and His

creation. So it has to pay attention to the context in which the meaning is constituted, similar to what Wittgenstein argues in *Philosophical Investigations*. The value one finds in believing that God is 'father' is not lost if an analogical position is accepted. Therefore, language can provide us with a way to talk about what we find valuable in life. This is possible because language does not function to describe facts only, but rather, it gives us a colorful canvas on which we can talk about various things and realities.

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