

Article

# Embracing the Unknowable: Paradigm of Ineffability

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**Abstract:** Ineffability is a long-time partner of the philosophy of religion and mysticism. Through apophatic conceptions of the divine, it can act to guarantee the transcendence of the divine, elevate it to something beyond our conceptions. It has also held the central role in defining if not the nature, then at least the characteristics of mystical experience. Sometimes it is that which affirms the unique nature of mystical experience, and sometimes it is what challenges the concept of mysticism as incoherent and paradoxical. In this article, I will explore if there could be a Being Ineffable that unites both the mystical experience and its (purportedly) transcendent object, while acknowledging the problem of coherence that ineffability entails. I will do so by forming an argument for ineffability that attempts to both validate and define absolute ineffability as the point of convergence between three meanings of Being Ineffable: as a definition of absolute (ineffability), as a mystical experience of it, and finally, as the Ineffable, that is, the God/Absolute/Ultimate; all the meanings are held together by an argument from ineffability—a permeating and silently expressed attempt to turn ineffability from its usual role of a negation into a necessary affirmation.

**Keywords:** mysticism; mystical experience; ineffability; philosophy of religion; philosophy of mysticism; apophaticism; apophatic theology

## 1. Introduction

Both a philosopher and a theologian can be quite comfortable applying concepts and theories beyond the boundaries of the ordinary, confident in their ability to pierce through the highest and the deepest of metaphysical and existential layers wrapped around that final Truth awaiting at the very end of their paths.

“There, right underneath the appearances. There lies the Absolute, the Ultimate Ground of All Being. I know it is there because of its necessity, it simply cannot fail to be there!”, declares the Philosopher with absolute confidence, provided by the well-established paradigm, carefully constructed to accommodate the selection of philosophical commitments she has adopted.

“Yes, I can see it, and I know it is that, than which no greater can be conceived, that awaits us there; perfect Being whose love not only created but continues to provide meaning and purpose to His creation,” echoes the Theologian reverently, his words infused with tradition-mediated certainty, build on a careful consideration of the doctrines of his faith.

What does the Absolute of the Philosopher and the God of the theologian have in common, if anything? Could it be in the silence that descends if we were to follow up on their confident declarations with further inquiries: What exactly is this Absolute and what does it mean for something to be the Ultimate Ground of All Being? What is a Perfect Being and how do we know it to be so? I will not try to answer such questions, but I will attempt to show that it is indeed the absolute silence—that is, ineffability—that the truth-seeking duo will inevitably encounter at the very end of their respective journeys.

In essence, this article, and the paradigm of ineffability it attempts to construct, consists of a path from an *argument for ineffability* towards an *argument from ineffability*, where the *paradigm of ineffability* (if there is One) is finally realized. If this article is about something—that is, if the Being Ineffable can be anything at all—it is an argument for nothing less than



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the necessity of the absolute ineffability: an apophatic abyss in which I lack the conceptual means to traverse; a failure and privation of language I will welcome with open arms, for the true meaning and success rests in that very failure.

But before we can begin, there is one more actor remaining to be introduced. She was silent and unseen, for he had nothing to say. Yesterday she might have been a philosopher, scientist, theologian, or anyone; it does not really matter, for today, after Being Ineffable—contours of which this article attempts to sketch—he is a mystic. Even if it is only through her silence, the Mystic will have a role to play.

## 2. Argument for Ineffability

The Argument for Ineffability attempts to both validate and define the concept of absolute ineffability; to establish that there “is” such a thing in the First Place.<sup>1</sup> With our philosophical goal so immensely far away, we are not yet in a position to qualify the “isness” of it—and perhaps we never will—but for the time being, it is a loud declaration of a philosophical intent. My use, understanding and the definition of “(A)bsolute” is something that this article is trying to accomplish as a whole, but as a preliminary definition, it refers to the “totality” of something; to something that has no relations or dependencies to anything outside of it.

The argument consists of two distinct but intertwined parts that contain such an essential overlap that the second part will take its shape simultaneously with the first. The first part is an attempt to establish absolute ineffability as a point of convergence between the three meanings of “Being Ineffable”.<sup>2</sup> In short, the first meaning of Being Ineffable is as a state of affair or state of being—the meaning and definition of “absolute ineffability”. The second meaning of Being Ineffable is as a mystical experience, where the mystical “Object” being experienced is the third meaning of Being Ineffable—The Ineffable.

The second part of the argument that should emerge from the first is an attempt to turn ineffability—something that is generally considered to be a negation, expressing a lack of something—into an affirmation. This somewhat unusual and uncommon turn is for the most part silently expressed through *the philosophical work* Being Ineffable performs through its different meanings; for example, as philosophical challenges to ineffability—absolute and otherwise—as well as their answers. It is especially prominent through the third meaning, where Being Ineffable works as a safeguard for the absolute transcendence of God through apophatic conceptions of the Divine and through its essential interconnectedness with various divine attributes. Even if it is getting way ahead (and beyond) of ourselves, it is metaphysical/epistemological/existential relation, something that underlies and overshadows everything as a necessary presence and condition: doing the God’s (philosophical) work.

## 3. Being Ineffable

The point of convergence between the three meanings of Being Ineffable, in sync with the above-mentioned turn of ineffability from negation into affirmation, is, at its core, an exploration of the Absolute. It is an inquiry about the philosophical consequences of equating God with the Ineffable. In other words, the argument for ineffability is not about the ineffability of any particular object or source, but Ineffability as a metaphysical Ultimate.

In turn, each of the three meanings of Being Ineffable will be presented and challenged. The point of convergence revealing the Absolute is not something that is meant to be summarized at the end; instead, it should slowly emerge and reveal itself through the continuous overlap between the three meanings, including the challenges and their answers. But before proceeding any further, there are some preliminary remarks that will hopefully clarify the task at hand.

First, this is solely a study done within the general context of philosophy of religion/mysticism. Any metaphysical, epistemological, and any such implications of what is presented should be viewed in that context. Most emphatically, this is neither a study of philosophy of mind, phenomenology, nor philosophy of language; any relation to theories

of reference and theories of mind/experience are purely coincidental, and no argument whatsoever in their domains will be attempted. Second, as I believe is the case with any and every philosophical study, there are some philosophical commitments that are needed to reach the conclusions.

My first commitment is to a version of an essentialist approach to the nature of mystical experience. Now, it is extremely important to note that the classifications and labels within the philosophy of mysticism are amorphous and many such labels, including essentialism, can take on different meanings among different authors. To me, essentialism means that I recognize mystical experiences as a *unique category* of experience, marked by their ineffability, completely incommensurable with ordinary experiences. That is, ineffability (Being Ineffable) is the essence of any 'genuine' mystical experience. I also commit to some aspects of classical theism when it comes to understanding the apophatic conception of the divine. This is related to a rather difficult-to-express commitment where I consider the ultimate question of "why is there something rather than nothing?" to be a valid question, and due and through that validity, it is a question that shapes, hides, reveals, and ultimately validates absolute ineffability (as Being Ineffable).

The three meanings of Being Ineffable come with both further explicit and implicit philosophical commitments that will both focus and narrow the philosophical applicability of the paradigm that should await us somewhere closer to the end. Finally, the paradigm part of the "paradigm of ineffability" itself takes its general shape from the Kuhnian paradigm adapted by me to suit this particular study, and relation to Kuhn's theory is as selective as it is generic. However, it should be obvious that ineffability is in a unique position in relation to "commensurability" in the paradigmatic spirit of "theory-ladenness" of everything and anything. Whether it is to expand, explain, or reject, this point will be encountered before the end.

### 3.1. *The First Meaning of Being Ineffable—The Definition*

In the academic approaches to ineffability, we can find both a variety of suggested objects and sources for ineffability as well as different types of ineffabilities, usually based on their strength and applicability.<sup>3</sup> At its weakest, simply learning a new language, adopting a new concept into one's repertoire, or having a new kind of (shared) experience could be enough to overcome at least some of the ineffability. Moving towards the stronger end of the scale, concepts available to the human mind are no longer capable of describing anything about the ineffable object. And finally, at its strongest, no mind—be it human, alien, angelic, or anything else—is capable of conceptualizing, or in any way holding onto, the ineffable object.

Since the ineffability we are after is of the Absolute kind, even these highest reaches will turn out to be insufficient, but that realization and arguments to support it are something that will appear only when ineffability is elevated from a mere epistemic hindrance to define the very nature of (second and third meanings of) Being Ineffable. In other words—and this is both stylistic and methodological observation to keep in mind—the (already presumed) point of convergence between the three meanings of Being Ineffable means that what we say about the last two meanings will further elucidate the first meaning—the definition—just like the definition itself will frame whatever we say about them.

### Challenging the Definition—The Problem of Coherence

It is usually around this juncture, right after an attempt to define ineffability is made, where any approach to ineffability faces the challenge posed by the paradox of ineffability arising from any statement of the "X is (being) ineffable" kind. When making the statement, it seems that one is simultaneously refuting the claim by stating something about X, the possibility of which the predicated ineffability is meant to deny. This places ineffability in quite a bit of philosophical trouble as the concept seems to defeat itself as soon as it appears. The paradox, at least in its present form, has been relatively close to the centre of the contemporary philosophical table at least since William Alston's (1956) article '*Ineffability*',

where he concludes that “There may be something in the world which can’t be talked about in any way, but if so, we can only signalize the fact by leaving it unrecorded.” (Alston 1956, p. 522)

Fortunately for all things ineffable, the paradox has recently received several interesting responses. Gáb (2020) offers a useful summary of some of the latest such approaches. Unfortunately for us, the proposed answers either come, or end up, with a weakened, non-absolute notion of ineffability and/or they divide the Divine (Ineffable) into parts—one which can be talked about and another which cannot, both options incommensurable with Being Ineffable.<sup>4</sup> However, the very reason such solutions do not work for my argument for ineffability is also the answer to the problem/paradox in itself: To the extent that my argument for ineffability is able to validate Being Ineffable as Absolute, that very validation will answer the problem of coherence. And to the extent that absolute ineffability can be(come) an affirmation, it negates the paradox.

Alston himself later changed his position to something very close to mine. His “Divine Mystery Thesis” (DMT) states “that nothing we can think, believe, or say about him is strictly true of God as he is in himself” (Alston 2005, p. 100). Even if he admits to a degree of ambivalence regarding DMT, he finds “impressive support” for it: (1) from the relation between the finite mind and the infinite source of all things; (2) from the doctrine of divine simplicity; (3) from (theological) paradoxes; (4) from the possibility of experiential acquittance with God (ibid., pp. 100–3). All of these points can be placed along the philosophical contours of Being Ineffable. However, Bennett-Hunter notes that Alston, in order to ensure that it is God who is ineffable, needs to secure reference to God by weakening God’s ineffability by appealing God as an object of direct experience (Bennett-Hunter 2016, pp. 17–18). It appears that Alston turns the experience of God either to something necessarily effable, or, at the very least, DMT denies that God is Absolutely Ineffable, something the second and the third meaning of Being Ineffable will deny.

In my reading, Bennett-Hunter’s (Bennett-Hunter 2015, p. 496; 2016, pp. 13, 18) approach seems to run in parallel to mine when he suggests “that the word ‘God’ be understood as a religious reference to the concept of ineffability alongside philosophical terms such as ‘ultimate reality’, ‘absolute’, and ‘Being’.” This ‘apophatic premise’ seems to be more or less my argument’s third meaning of Being Ineffable as the Ineffable, just more moderately capitalized. Whether that is so, we might see as we reach that far. Moreover, Bennett-Hunter’s approach and answers to the problem of ineffability eventually diverge towards existential and phenomenological depths that are unreachable by the unfinished paradigm of ineffability.

### 3.2. The Second Meaning of Being Ineffable—Mystical Experience

The first meaning of Being Ineffable pushed ineffability as far as possible from us and the reach of our conceptual capabilities. The second meaning seems to be doing just about the exact opposite of the first, as the Mystic contemplates and reaches towards the Ineffable instead of moving away from it. I will let Evelyn Underhill (2004, p. 4), with her ever-eloquent style, elaborate:

*[Mystics] succeed where all these others have failed, in establishing immediate communication between the spirit of man, entangled as they declare amongst material things, and that “only Reality,” that immaterial and final Being, which some philosophers call the Absolute and most theologians call God.*

And, even if a bit less eloquently, Jones and Gellman’s (2022) definition of a “narrow sense” of mystical experience gives us a very good preliminary working definition—even if it is one built around the non-absolute ineffability. It will be interesting to see how much of it survives as we establish Being Ineffable as a mystical experience:

*A purportedly nonsensory or extrovertive unitive experience by a subject of an object granting acquaintance of realities or states of affairs that are of a kind not accessible by way of sense-perception, somatosensory modalities, or standard introspection.*

Now, there are many more definitions for mystical experience (and mysticism) out there, and there seems to be a continuing trend for the authors to (re-)define the terms to suit some particular purpose. For now, I am myself quite content with combining both the above quotes because they help establish something that the second meaning of Being Ineffable requires:

1. The “Object” of the mystical experience is the Absolute/God

The “Object”, by designed happenstance, is also the third meaning of Being Ineffable—and here is also a good place to remind how the point of convergence is meant to emerge from these kinds of overlaps between the three meanings of Being Ineffable. The quotation-marks are needed because the subject–object relation of a mystical experience should not be equated with the subject–object relation of an ordinary experience, which leads to the second requirement.

2. A mystical experience is nothing like an ordinary experience. They do not belong to the same category, and there is no commensurability between them that would allow us to evaluate them using the same theories/terms/conditions.<sup>5</sup>

A mystical experience as Being Ineffable sets the experience completely apart from ordinary experiences, but even if we should not use the subject and object in the same sense as we would with ordinary experiences, there (quite obviously) is a subject—the mystic—that is the second meaning of Being Ineffable, and an “Object” that is the third meaning of Being Ineffable. Parentheses are needed because the part about it being obvious, in the context of this article, can only obtain within the paradigm of ineffability, and we are barely one fourth of way through that project.

### 3.2.1. The Mystical Variety

To further obfuscate the search for the second meaning of Being Ineffable, within philosophy of mysticism, there is a great variety of different typologies and categories of mystical experience that come with a wide variety of characteristics that allow for such distinctions to be made (e.g., Jones 2016, pp. 31–34). Because Being Ineffable is meant to establish and validate the absolute ineffability, variety is something that is essentially antithetical to it. There needs to be an ineffable “common core” to mystical experience, and any perceived variety can only occur outside this core—for example, as a result of post-experience interpretations (Stace 1960) or as some kind of a phenomenological after or side effect, such as a sense of bliss, of awe, or even of some kind of (noetic) certainty in regard to the meaning of what was experienced.

As an illustrative example of such variety, one of the more interesting divisions is between introvertive and extrovertive experiences. Stace (1960, p. 61) summarizes:

*The essential difference between them is that the extrovertive experience looks outward through the senses, while the introvertive looks inward into the mind. Both culminate in the perception of an ultimate Unity—what Plotinus called the One—with which the perceiver realizes his own union or even identity.*

Even if the division appears to take mystical experience to completely opposite directions, they culminate in the same “perception of an ultimate Unity” (Being Ineffable). And if we allow mysticism to be about the destination rather than journey, this and similar divisions are compatible with Being Ineffable. Moreover, Stace (1960), in tune with most philosophers who look into mysticism, most famously William James (2002, p. 295), considers ineffability to be an important characteristic of mystical experience:

*Ineffability.—The handiest of the marks by which I classify a state of mind as mystical is negative. The subject of it immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words.*

Of course, the ineffability they (most philosophers) have in mind might not be of the absolute kind and the support they offer for such is incidental at best. For example, Stace (1960, p. 291) denies absolute ineffability, apparently based on difficulty of securing the



reference for the absolutely ineffable object—but this is later contrasted with the mystical experience (as an apprehension of undifferentiated unity) that, “during the experience, is wholly unconceptualizable and therefore wholly unspeakable” (ibid., p. 297). Also, because my argument is about to move towards a completely opposite direction, we should take note how James (along with most authors on mysticism and ineffability) considers ineffability to be a ‘negative’.

Even if philosophers might be a bit suspicious and vary of invoking Absolute(s), including absolute ineffability, mystics themselves appear to be far more daring. As an illustrative example, I will present two quotes from (Pseudo-)Dionysius the Areopagite (Dionysius 1920, pp. 194–95, 197–98), from whom we get the term “mystical theology” and who played a pivotal role in the development of Apophatic tradition, both of which we will soon encounter together with the third meaning of Being Ineffable.

*UNTO this Darkness which is beyond Light we pray that we may come, and may attain unto vision through the loss of sight and knowledge, and that in ceasing thus to see or to know we may learn to know that which is beyond all perception and understanding (for this emptying of our faculties is true sight and knowledge), and that we offer Him that transcends all things the praises of a transcendent hymnody, which we shall do by denying or removing all things that are [ . . . ]*

*For the more we soar upwards, the more our language becomes restricted to the compass of purely intellectual conceptions, even as in the present instance plunging into the Darkness which is above the intellect we shall find ourselves reduced not merely to brevity of speech but even to absolute dumbness both of speech and thought.*

We have now seen examples of how both the Mystic and the Philosopher of mysticism seem to validate the ineffability of . . . what, exactly? Is it the mystical “Object” or the mystical experience itself that is deemed ineffable? Sometimes it is clear which one the author means and sometimes it is far less so. But to even begin to explore the nature of mystical experiences deeply enough to unearth a decisive answer where in the mystical experience the ineffability lies, would require us to assume that there is an answer to begin with. It would require us to assume that absolute ineffability could be located somewhere, that it could be something other than Being Ineffable. And such assumptions are not for us to make.

To summarize before presenting a challenge to it, the second meaning of Being Ineffable requires that there is a unique category of mystical experiences, incommensurable with an ordinary experience, that has God/Absolute as its “Object”. The second meaning receives its definition from the first, and its “Object” and validation from the third.

Here is a very good place to make note of the at-times-difficult-to-detect line of demarcation that philosophy of mysticism sometimes finds itself balancing on. On the one side there is philosophy of mysticism that we are engaged with here, and on the other side of the line there is mystical philosophy, intertwined with mystical theology. Both are most definitely interesting areas of research, whether by themselves or intertwined, and sometimes even joining up with philosophy of mysticism. But even if both of them might have a lot to say about ineffability and its location, we cannot afford to be as confident with answers as they can be in the face of the ineffable mystery emerging around us.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2.2. “NO”, the Constructivist Challenge

*. . . the single epistemological assumption that has exercised my thinking and which has forced me to undertake the present investigation [is that]: There are NO pure (i.e., unmediated) experiences. Neither mystical experience, nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing that they are unmediated. This is to say, all experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. The notion of unmediated experience, seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty. This epistemological fact seems to me to be true, because of the sorts of beings we are, even with regard to the experiences of*

*those ultimate objects of concern with which mystics have intercourse, e.g., God, Being, nirvana, etc. (Katz 1978, p. 26.)*

This somewhat excessively quoted paragraph from Katz (1978) initiated a long and oft-stagnated debate about the nature of mystical experiences. Even if this summary might cut some corners, Katz's emphatic "NO" is a response to W.T. Stace's (1960) influential work *Mysticism and Philosophy*, where Stace makes the case for the separation of mystical experience itself (which might be universal/unmediated) and its interpretation (performed within a particular context). At its core, the debate revolves around the question whether there is a universal ("unmediated") experience shared by mystics from different traditions. Katz does not deny that there are mystical experiences, but he denies that they belong to any kind of unique and insulated category, and that they should be evaluated by the same standards and methods as ordinary experiences—something I obviously cannot agree with.

So, my answer is similarly emphatic: "YES", there is a unique category of Being Ineffable as mystical experience, and the required uniqueness and universality comes from Being Ineffable (absolute ineffability), and as such, assuming my argument succeeds, to also call it unmediated becomes redundant. Even if related, the ongoing argument for ineffability participates in the debate only via reluctant necessity and is, in reality, trying to move away from it.<sup>7</sup> Regardless, the challenge itself is well-aimed at (the second meaning of) Being Ineffable. In short, it states that "because of the sort of beings we are", a mystical experience, similar to any other experience, is mediated through a complex conceptual apparatus, and that the mystic is not Being Ineffable. The possibly experienced ineffability is of some non-absolute kind.

What I assume to be the common answer to this challenge from constructivism/contextualism<sup>8</sup> focuses on the epistemological assumption that places ordinary experience and mystical experience in the same category. Even if it might require a leap of faith to distinguish mystical experience as a completely separate category that does not conform to the standards used for ordinary experiences, there seems to be several good reasons to consider that the required leap is short enough to be bridgeable, or even non-existent.

First, even a cursory glance at the mystical experiences as reported by the mystics themselves, including the few partially quoted ones in this article, points towards something that appears to be vastly (categorically) different from the ordinary modes of consciousness. And this is something that is well-reflected by the various typologies and characteristics found within the field of scholarly mysticism. Second, why would the "Object" (Absolute/God/Ultimate Reality) perform like an ordinary object of experience, instead of Being Ineffable? One can of course declare that the object is something else and invoke some psychological and cultural factors to account for the experiences and continue from there, but the success or failure of such approach is not of our concern here and now. In summary, if we value the mystics' own words and/or grant that the "Object" of mystical experience "is" the Absolute/God/Ultimate Reality, there is a good reason to be suspicious of Katz's epistemological assumption, and a similarly good reason to provide mystical experiences their unique status based on them Being Ineffable.

Moreover, the argument for ineffability does not require an object to be set against the subject; instead, the subject (mystic) is Being Ineffable ("Object"), for they are one and the same. In other words, this is something that happens when ineffability is extended to define the very nature of the relationship between the "Object" of the mystical experience and the mystic, such as Eckhartian detachment (McGinn 2009, pp. 109–11). Thus, ineffability culminates as the essential attribute of the "Object" that, instead of being any type of epistemic hindrance, is its very source (Compare with Hick 2004, pp. 292–95).

### 3.2.3. The Essentialist Elucidation

In both contrast and comparison, and as a purposefully contrived and slightly exaggerated response to Katz's assumption: The single mystical assumption that has illuminated my philosophical path and which has led me to dive into the Unknown is that there IS an ineffable core to all genuine mystical experiences. Both the mystic and the "Object" of

mystical experience provide every indication and lay the ground for the mystical essence (i.e., Being Ineffable) that is both unique and universal across the traditions.

I will not be making the case for it explicitly, albeit it can be easily deduced from the present argument for ineffability, but I have myself adopted the roughly essentialist approach to mystical experience and consider it to be ‘valid’ in its main tenet that there is a unique class of experiences called ‘mystical’ whose unique and universal essence follows from them Being Ineffable. However, we can again seek support for such notion, both from mystics and philosophers. Starting from Plotinus (quoted in [Stace 1960](#), p. 112):

*You ask how can we know the Infinite? I answer, not by reason. It is the office of reason to distinguish and define. The Infinite therefore cannot be ranked among its objects. You can only apprehend the Infinite . . . by entering into a state in which you are your finite self no longer. This is . . . the liberation of your mind from finite consciousness. When you thus cease to be finite you become one with the Infinite . . . . You realize this union, this identity.<sup>9</sup>*

And from the famous Christian mystic, Meister Eckhart (quoted in [McGinn 2001](#), p. 45): “Here God’s ground is my ground and my ground is God’s ground. Here I live out what is mine, just as God lives out of what is his.” McGinn explains that for Eckhart, God and soul are “both grounded in the same ground in a fused identity.” (ibid.) I am neither a Plotinus nor Eckhart scholar, and do not wish to place unwarranted meanings into their words, but I consider quotes like these to be fully compatible with and supportive of the second meaning of Being Ineffable. And it is not only these two authoritative philosopher-mystics that seem to speak for and about the Being Ineffable, but the history of mysticism shows us, in the words of [James \(2002, p. 325\)](#):

*[ . . . ] that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old.*

Being Ineffable as a mystical experience (and not just as a characteristic of one) also has a lot of support from various typologies of mystical experience. For example, various formulations of mystical experience that describe it as a union, identity, or merging between and the Object of mystical experience are all compatible with the understanding of the Being Ineffable as a mystical experience. However, Jones notes a common misconception that is a good reminder of a danger that one needs to be aware of: “[C]lassical mystics do not speak in terms of union of two substances—a fusion of the experiencer and another reality that had previously been two realities into one reality” ([Jones 2016](#), p. 193). The danger being that we also give different meanings of Being Ineffable a different ontic status.

At the same time, and more importantly, Jones’ answer to the question of mystical union seems to offer a lot of support for my approach to Being Ineffable. In summary, from mystical experiences, we learn that the union or identity is something that exists already before the mystical experience (see the above quote from Meister Eckhart and [Jones 2016](#), pp. 193–98). Even if there might be some ontic event taking place during the mystical experience, even if the “soul” or “self” undergoes some change that gives rise to the mystical experience, even if the soul/spirit ascends/descends to God/Absolute/Ground, the only thing that we need to assume is that any such activity is Being Ineffable, outside the reach and realm of our conceptual capabilities as required by the first meaning.

However, it should also be noted that there is no need to assume that all mystical experiences fit into the same theological, metaphysical, phenomenological, or any such category. But I do need to assume that some do, that there is a category of cross-cultural and interreligious mystical experiences with a singular “common core”. The essentialist approach to mysticism practically enforces this kind of unique category. Based on the relevance of ineffability to various typologies and categories of mystical experiences, the reported ineffability of many mystical experiences, as well as the “Object” of mystical



experience being the Ineffable (God/Absolute), I feel confident that mystical experience is Being Ineffable.

### 3.3. *The Third Meaning of Being Ineffable—The Ineffable*

The Mystic finds the final completion and fulfillment of her journey in the mystical experience as Being Ineffable, and it is both the (apophatic) Philosopher and the (apophatic) Theologian who find the end of their long path culminating in the Ineffable; in the God and the Absolute, Ultimate or Fundamental reality, or whatever name the Ineffable is given based on the point of departure, purpose, and the religious and cultural context within which it was reached. As a classic example of these kinds of apophatic conceptions of God (that is, the third meaning of Being Ineffable), Anselm of Canterbury tells us that “God is beyond conceivability” (quoted in [Gellman 2021](#), p. 128):

*He is greater than can be conceived. Therefore, O Lord, thou art not only that than which a greater cannot be conceived, but thou art a being greater than can be conceived. For, since it can be conceived that there is such a being, if thou art not this very being, a greater than thou can be conceived. But this is impossible.*

Apophaticism, the “view that God is both indescribable and inconceivable” ([Scott and Citron 2016](#), p. 1), is typically rejected within analytic philosophy of religion (e.g., [Scott and Citron 2016](#); [Yadav 2016](#)). Just like it was the case with the first meaning of Being Ineffable and the problem of coherence, recent research within analytic philosophy has been centered around analyzing various attempts of describing the indescribable, the problem of securing reference to something ineffable, and providing justification for such conceptions. [Gäb \(2020\)](#) offers a good overview of some of the recent conversations.

Besides the answers already provided to the challenges faced by the first and second meaning of Being Ineffable, the completed paradigm of ineffability should, if successful, provide and act as an answer/response to most of the problems encountered. And as it might be clear even without a word uttered nor word scribbled, the third meaning of Being Ineffable—and thus my ability to complete the foundation for the paradigm of ineffability—requires the apophatic conception of God/Absolute/Any-Such-Ultimate to be true, at least to the extent and in the way Being Ineffable can be said to be true.

I could, of course, rely on some of the multitude of arguments for the existence of God that are favorable to (even if not necessitating) apophatic conceptions. Such a list would include more or less every argument that is aiming to establish the God of classical theism as well as any neoplatonic conceptions of the First Cause, even if some theories of emanation might be a cause of some minor transcendent concern later, just as the list could exclude many arguments that strictly require “personal” God, as that can lead to obvious and quite serious problems. However, no matter how tempting and practical it might be, I will not be trying to validate or defend any arguments favorable to apophatic conceptions of God, at least not directly. Nor do I want to attack the conceptions and arguments antithetical to apophaticism. Instead, I will first take a brief glance at the Doctrines of Divine Simplicity (DDS), a philosophically heavy-weight doctrine that is not only commensurable with ineffability, but also seems to necessitate it. Then, I will explore negative theology as a response to apophatic conceptions that traces its path towards the ineffable by moving away from it.

#### 3.3.1. Doctrine of Divine Simplicity

Even if it is an overused remark, the DDS is anything but simple, and it is both a theologically and philosophically controversial and actively contested doctrine. I will not be taking part in those complex conversations, and our approach to the topic of DDS will be rather straightforward, and dare I say, simplistic. That is, I will not be concerned with all the possible metaphysical nuances and consequences the doctrine might or might not have, nor are we concerned with its application and relation to other doctrines, nor any divine attributes. I am only interested in its relation and (near-)identity with apophaticism and Being Ineffable.

The short and simple version of the DDS states: God is not composed of any parts. There are no relations, there are no distinctions; there is nothing in God that is not fully and completely itself. No matter the metaphysical framework applied, there are no dividing lines in God, not even between essence and existence. And when it comes to apophaticism and Being Ineffable, there is no distinct subject ‘God’ that can have predicates applied to it. In Weigel’s (2022) words:

*Divine simplicity is the hallmark of God’s utter transcendence of all else, ensuring the divine nature to be beyond the reach of ordinary categories and distinctions, or at least their ordinary application. Simplicity in this way confers a unique ontological status that many philosophers find highly peculiar.*

Considering everything said so far about ineffability, it seems that everything Weigel said about Divine Simplicity could also be said about Being Ineffable. In that regard, the one thing that does stand out in the quote above is the allusion that some non-ordinary application of categories might apply to the divine nature (Being Ineffable). It just so happens that apophaticism is not just a conception of God, but it can also be a somewhat non-ordinary approach to one.

### 3.3.2. Negative Theology

Apophaticism as *via negativa* (the negative way) is a traditional response to the Unknowability of God and the failure of our words to say anything true about God (Turner 1995, pp. 19–20). In the mystical context,<sup>10</sup> it takes the form of apophatic mysticism, a practice of “unknowing” in which the mystic—to finally acknowledge the title of this article—embraces the unknowable in order to reach the end of the mystical path.

This is often understood to mean that where affirmations (cataphatic language) fail, negations do apply to God; that even if God is ineffable, we can still say what God is not. So, we can once again follow in the footsteps of Dionysius (1920, p. 199) and say that God (the universal Cause transcending all things) is not a material body. He goes on to list a lot more things related to the material existence that God is not, which Turner categorizes as ‘perceptible’ things (Turner 1995, p. 26), such as: “outwards shape, or intelligible form, or quality, or quantity [ . . . ]”, nor is it subject to “any change, or decay, or division, or deprivation, or ebb and flow, or anything else which the senses can perceive.” So far, this *via negativa* seems to be heading towards something more or less sensible, and most conceptions of the divine would readily agree with it. However, the next stage (chapter) of the negative way will leave many such conceptions and unprepared travelers stranded.

First, those who thought that God not having a material body would mean that God is perhaps a soul, or a mind, are left behind as both are negated (and later, even the Spirit is negated). And this is just the first step in an even longer list of negated affirmations that Turner (1995, p. 26) labels as “‘conceptual’ names of God”. For example, Dionysius (1920, p. 200) denies that the universal Cause is “number, or order, or greatness, or littleness, equality, or inequality [ . . . ] or eternity, or time [ . . . ] nor does It belong to the category of non-existence or that of existence [ . . . ] nor is it darkness, nor is It light, or error, or truth [ . . . ]”, and finally, as an explanation that brings the whole Mystical Theology to its conclusion (ibid., p. 201):

*[ . . . ] nor can any affirmation or negation apply to It; for while applying affirmations or negations to those orders of being that come next to It, we apply not unto It either affirmation or negation inasmuch as It transcends all affirmation by being the perfect and unique Cause of all things, and transcends all negation by the pre-eminence of Its simple and absolute nature—free from every limitation and beyond them all.*

What are we to make of this? Does negative theology succeed in saying anything when even negations are negated? It seems to say one thing perfectly in tune with Being Ineffable, that God transcends all language, that both affirmations and negations fail to describe It. But this in itself is a positive thing—and a perfect moment to remind us that part two of the argument for ineffability was meant to turn ineffability into an affirmation—for it means

that Being Ineffable is not bound by even the negations, it is free from all creaturely speech and its limitations. When I, following the lead of the apophaticists, deny both the existence and non-existence of God, I am merely saying that It is not bound by such concepts, it is Beyond Existence and Beyond Being—that is, the third meaning of Being Ineffable.

To reflect further on the last sentence in the above quote, Dionysius seems to tell us something about God: that It is the perfect and unique Cause of all things, whose nature is simple and absolute. If this is where the *via negativa* has its ultimate terminus, we can be quite satisfied because we ended up exactly where we wanted, for we have been able to leave behind all creaturely distinctions and have arrived at something absolute and simple; something that seems very much like Being Ineffable.

But having left behind everything, where does this leave us and the Being Ineffable, or more precisely, with what? What is this unique Cause of all things that neither affirmations nor negations can reach, what is this something that is not any kind of thing at all, that is even beyond being and non-being? If it is not this, not that, neither yes nor no, and nothing in between, could it, perchance, be the Absolutely Nothing?

### 3.3.3. There Is Nothing like Ineffability

After exploring and affirming the ultimate metaphysical heights of the Absolute as Perfect and Simple, it might seem that suddenly finding oneself at the edge of the Absolute Nothingness has to mean that a slight mistake was made at some point along the way. But, if there is a horizon for existence, what else is there to form it but Nothingness? And if there is a horizon for the in-any-way-conceivable, what else is there to form it but the Ineffable? It seems to me that, after the arguably metaphysically arduous feat of substantiating the Absolute(s) of Nothingness and Ineffability, one can easily position oneself in such a way that the two horizons (seem to) be one and the same limit. This and the following section will attempt to introduce the philosophical contours of this most peculiar of positions, although I am certain that at least the echoes of the spirit of the question, which is both the source and embodiment of this position, has been heard by most philosophers.

“Why is the something rather than nothing?” is the classic question of ontology that might have been the exact question the duo in the introduction was trying to answer. It is the ultimate “why” question that has fascinated, intrigued, and frustrated philosophically inclined minds for at least two and a half millennia. For some and for very valid reasons, it can be found at the very core of any philosophical as well as theological and scientific inquiry. For others, and for similarly valid reasons, it is an anathema to reason—an ultimately empty question that one is well-advised to ignore.

The nothingness presupposed by the question has to be absolute because it is contrasted with something, and no mere physical vacuum is enough to fill such a void. The question requires a state so beingless that to call it a state is already a mistake. There is no being, no space, no time, no coordinates of any kind for something to even begin to exist in. And, perhaps both a bit more controversially as well as apophatically, contra one suggested answer to the question presented in [Sorensen \(2022\)](#), there is not even absence: There is no “anything” that would be considered absent because there is no potential for anything<sup>11</sup>, and if that is not metaphysically satisfying enough, then the apophatic response would have me denying even the absence as a gesture towards the Being Ineffable.

However, this is not the article where one makes an attempt to find, trace, and understand that horizon, but this is an article about Being Ineffable and, once again, there is a doctrine that will help me further affirm the role and place of ineffability as it puts the Nothingness to work.

### 3.3.4. Creatio Ex Nihilo

The role of the doctrine of creation out of nothing in this article is very similar if not identical to that of DDS: it is yet another safeguard for God’s (Creator’s) transcendence that the third meaning of Being Ineffable requires. Similarly, the focus will be narrow, and any theories of causality and the metaphysics that power them do not have a role to

play; regardless of their causal prowess, it is not enough to go against the flow of existence coming out of Nothing.<sup>12</sup> However, what I am about to try to accomplish with the doctrine of creation and Nothing will inadvertently take me either through or within touching distance of such divine attributes as aseity and eternality, but in the context and spirit of this article, they are more akin to signs marching along the margins, declaring and demanding more and more absolute ineffability for the approaching conclusion.

*Creatio ex Nihilo* represents God (or Cause, if you will) unlike no other, it is something that stands out as absolutely unique in the contingent flow of existence, running through all the possible worlds as if Nothing could stop it. Also, creation is not a one-time event where the lights of being were turned on, but a continuous “activity” that keeps nothingness at bay: existence existing, being being. To qualify/justify the activity further would require theological and metaphysical commitments outside the purview of this article. All we want to note is that there is no pre-existent substratum from whence the creation is built, and that confines all things creaturely, including creaturely speech, to be separate from the thus ineffable and transcendent Creator. In summary, Nothing is like the Ineffable, two sides of the same metaphysical coin that guarantees the transcendence of God and Absolute. There is, of course, more to say about the Ineffable Nothing, but for the paradigm of ineffability, this short foray will need to suffice; another sketched line in support for the validity around the contours of the Ineffable. Moreover, even if Absolute Nothingness is anything but a well-philosophized topic, validity of *Creatio ex Nihilo* is well-supported.

As a final and very personal note before moving onto the conclusion, the ultimate “why” question above seems to invoke the sense of the Ineffable. Simply thinking about Nothingness as set against the actualized something that our own existence consists of guides the thoughts on the edge of an abyss so vast that one (that would be me) needs to reach far beyond reason. First, realize there is Nothing that can be articulated or conceived about the abyss, then come to accept and understand that it is how it must be. The Ineffable is a necessary condition for everything that is. And that is my argument for ineffability.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

If I was successful, the three meanings of Being Ineffable spoke with One voice. The first meaning described what it is that we are trying to reach towards and about the difficulties involved. The problem of coherence (paradox of ineffability) turned out to be at least partially solvable as soon as one was ready to be bit less Absolute. But that was something we could not afford, and we had to accept the paradox as a limit of our conceptual capability. But, as something Absolute and metaphysically necessary, Being Ineffable was to take a role—that is, work as an affirmation rather than passive negation—and in so doing avoid the paradox.

After our words and concepts had been exhausted, all of them having faded into the obfuscating shadows of the Being Ineffable without reaching it, the second meaning turned our words and concept towards the experiences of the Being Ineffable. The unique nature of mystical experience had us hoping that the ineffable essence—the common core of mystical experiences shared by mystics throughout the ages, and the gap between the ordinary and mystical—could carry the Mystic all the way to the mystical “Object”, even if it is eternally condemned to be trapped by the quotation marks. This would allow us, through the metaphysical lens of the Mystic and her report, a brief glimpse of the contours of the Ineffable, of the “veiled Isis whom they call Truth” (Underhill 2004, p. 4)

Whether or not our hopes were realized in the mystical experience, we cannot truly know. But it was not just the “eternal unanimity” (James 2002, p. 324) and the “strange accent of certainty” (Underhill 2004, p. 4) that give reason to trust the spirit, if not the word, of their reports; it was the deafening sound of their silence—their certainty of the failure of their words to adequately convey what it was that they had experienced. For us, the question remained whether it was the mystical experience or that which was experienced that was being ineffable, and the conclusion was that we are not even in a position to assume there is an answer for us to find. If the “Object” of mystical experience is the third

meaning of Being Ineffable, as an absolute ineffability, it can be neither this nor that, neither experience nor object of one. The only available answer is, no matter how unsatisfactory it might be, that the mystical experience of the Being Ineffable cannot be anything but its ineffable Self—that is, Being Ineffable. In other and less mystical words, the lack of both words and certainty is what actually matters—an anticipation of the third Meaning.

The third meaning of Being Ineffable had us reaching for the Ineffable Itself. The God of the theologian and the Absolute of the philosopher. In the negative way towards apophatic conceptions of the divine, we might have seen glimpses of why the mystical experience was, by necessity, Being Ineffable. Why there was no object to be experienced nor a subject to experience it, and how the Being Ineffable, to be truly so, was even beyond being and non-being. But in all its apparent ineffability, no matter how absolute, Being Ineffable was what apophatic conceptions of the divine necessarily are. Ineffability was both the beginning and the end of the negative way; we also noted, albeit extremely briefly, how the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity both affirmed and required ineffability. We ended up on the precipice of Nothingness and glanced at the Abyss below.

Each meaning was challenged, each challenge was answered; the level of success was uncertain and wholly dependent on the arbitrator's willingness to accept the Absolute as both the source and solution of most of the challenges presented. It was not the purpose of this article to even attempt to change the 2600-year precedent and somehow capture Being Ineffable by any ordinary means. But philosophical analysis, the negative way, apophatic conceptions of the divine, and the doctrine of Divine Simplicity and *Creatio ex Nihilo*—as perfect partners for apophaticism—all seemed to point towards that one point of predicted convergence: absolute ineffability. If that was successful—if there is such an absolute point of convergence within the three meanings of Being Ineffable—it is only there because it had to be there.

In the end, this was all about the Absolute, about transcendent God, and the infinite abyss between the Ineffable and effable. Yes, there are also many reasons to consider Being Ineffable to be an anathema to reason that a genuine lover of wisdom would be wise to avoid. Does it make sense that there is something beyond the reach and realm of our concepts and words; something so removed that even simple “is” fails to capture anything about it. And what if our concepts did not have such a limit? What does that do to a God, shackled so by creaturely words and pulled down from the Heavens? Considering how Absolute and unforgiving the topic is in itself, it is somewhat relieving how many questions and paths of further inquiry do remain after almost three millennia worth of philosophical explorations; and even long before that, from the wonder in the face of the mystery of existence culminating in the love of wisdom and faith in the possibility of an answer, no matter how inarticulate.

Both the Theologian and the Philosopher, who have patiently followed us all the way from the introduction, seem to be dissatisfied with these concluding remarks.

“If I may interrupt you,” the Theologian says as soon as it becomes clear that I have finally given time for him and his concerns. “It seems that the God I worship, the God I love and who loves me, is nothing like the Being Ineffable you have tried to describe. Your Being Ineffable seems too different and too distant to hear my prayers, too removed for my Faith to reach It.”

The Theologian presents a very valid concern, and no doubt we could derive answers from within the Being Ineffable, for example by equating ineffability with freedom from conceptual limits, thus allowing the God of the Theologian to love him without any limits. This approach could also help explore the worship-worthiness of Being Ineffable as that which no greater can be conceived. Whether the Theologian would be satisfied with such explorations taken to their conclusions is not for this article to explore, but we should make note on the philosophical work ineffability that can and does perform both as a challenge and as an answer to one.

Be that as it may, the Philosopher is not yet satisfied: “Haven't we gone too far, ended up somewhere where what we left behind no longer matters? Is this article of yours



anything more than an obscure brochure inviting me to leave my own self behind and embark on a mystic path? Experience for myself this second meaning of Being Ineffable and perhaps with respect to the first meaning of it, attain some kind of ineffable insight of the Ineffable, the third meaning of Being Ineffable? I can accept that I will never know where and how the Ineffable is, you used more than enough words describing why that is so. But, and a lot more importantly, where exactly is this paradigm, the one promised already in the title of this article?"

The Philosopher's concerns are very timely indeed. The promised paradigm was not forgotten; in fact, it is only here, where everything has been said, that the attempt to build such a paradigm becomes conceivable.

#### *Paradigm of Ineffability*

The first question is, what is a paradigm? Looking at how the word has been used, it can be and do a lot of things. But here and now, it is better to keep it simple, if for no other reason than the elusive and ethereal building materials we have gathered along the way to build it with. Also, I do need to remind the reader that the relation between my use of "paradigm" to Kuhn's theory is as selective as it is generic. So, to put it simply, paradigm is a coherent narrative, a framework about reality through which we can ground our understanding of some aspects of it, determined by the paradigm itself. It is that which provides the theory to the theory-ladenness of observations; it is that which tells us what it is that we will see even before we look. When scientists point their telescope towards a speck of light in the sky, they will refer to a small library of theories in order to tell us what, where, and how that speck of light actually is. Change the place of a book in that library, or even tear off a single page, and it will be a different speck, even if no less actually.

I already referred to the Mystic as the metaphysical lens through which we can look towards the Ineffable. And the parallel to the telescope is there for us to draw, but to do so makes the category mistake of thinking that there is something for the Mystic to see, for it is not seeing or observing, because there is the somewhat peculiar (mystical) lack of an object and a subject. But it is exactly that, the vision that is not a vision, the subject that is not a subject, and the object that is not an object, the Being Ineffable in all its three meanings, which is meant to be the foundation for the paradigm of ineffability—a coherent narrative about the ineffable.

As a standard of paradigm-building success, a fully-fledged paradigm should provide its adopters with the kind of questions that can be asked within it, the kind/range of answers there are to be discovered, and the methods and criteria through which they can be established. And here is where things get somewhat ethereal for this paradigm: whereas ordinary paradigms can and often do dictate research with very little space for the researcher/explorer to move, to change the object of their research, or look for genuinely new approaches or objects (do that long enough and you risk a revolution!), for the paradigm of ineffability, there is very little it can directly dictate and it does not provide the philosopher, theologian, scientist, nor mystic with a set of methods to use, and even the object it offers is not really there.

However, it does offer something else instead. For philosophers of mysticism, it can expand the notion of ineffability beyond the narrow confines of the debates of the past generation. Most notably, the paradigm of ineffability sees ineffability as an affirmation instead of negation. It does not tell the philosopher what to do with the Being Ineffable, but it does provide her with an approval to take it as an Absolute together with a rough estimate regarding the philosophical cost that might follow from both affirming and denying absolute ineffability. For philosophers of religion, it can offer new ways to appreciate and approach apophatic conceptions of the divine and divine ineffability, and how Being Ineffable works amongst and along with divine attributes, such as divine simplicity, as was briefly covered. Further, there is no path to a conception of divine that would not somehow touch upon the Being Ineffable—for example, as a challenge (such as the problem

of coherence and what I call the problem of an empty altar the Theologian was concerned about) or as an answer to one (such as safeguarding transcendence and ultimacy).

I did make one mystical assumption—and I consider it well-supported both by mystics and by philosophers—regarding the second meaning of Being Ineffable, where I acknowledged the (roughly) essentialist understanding of mystical experience that I have adopted for myself. But no matter how valid, it is not a necessary assumption. The paradigm definitely allows it, but just as definitely, it does not require it; any validation or characterization of the absolute ineffability of mystical experiences would serve the paradigm just as well. However, adopting it does provide an example of how to bring the whole paradigm alive: it can become a philosophical linchpin for the paradigm, something that elevates the second meaning of Being Ineffable to a pedestal that we can talk about without endangering its absolute ineffability. This last stretch of this concluding section is not a proper place to expand a new argument, so I will just briefly note how the philosophical implication of an essentialist approach can introduce questions about the nature of mind and consciousness, as well as our connection with the Being Ineffable. It becomes something that takes us towards existential and soteriological implications, but those are too far for us to consider any further than noting that yes, they are suddenly part of the paradigm of ineffability.

To conclude, the paradigm of ineffability is an argument from ineffability. It is a framework in and through which absolute ineffability can be validated, or, at the very least, it helps the philosopher to understand the philosophical (epistemological, metaphysical, and existential) costs that come if and when the God/Absolute/The Ineffable is needed/included; when an attempt is made to reach the highest summits of metaphysical, epistemological, or even existential hierarchies, or unearth the very foundations such hierarchies require in the First Place. And, as a side note to those who wonder, silently and with a beatific smile, the Mystic gives us a noetic nod as she fades into the Cloud of Unknowing above and beyond any such hierarchies, his ascent exemplifying both the gap and the bridge between us and the Being Ineffable.

I acknowledge that the paradigm of ineffability might not be sturdy enough to be a proper paradigm, depending on the standards that such things are evaluated with. But after following the argument for ineffability and reaching this border of the Ineffable and the argument from ineffability; after realizing that there is absolutely no going further, whether it is a paradigm of ineffability or just an “ineffability view” that we have reached, we are, in our own non-absolute way, being ineffable. To conclude with a properly apophatic expression: By embracing the Unknowable, we can see what is before us in the light of the darkness behind us.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Subject matter of the Absolute(s) combined with philosophy of religion offers many (and often irresistible) opportunities to give sentences double meanings by capitalizing words. I try to be obvious when applying such performative tools.

<sup>2</sup> Looking at literature and research done on ineffability and apophaticism, one can find a lot more than three meanings and definitions combined with a variety of alleged sources and objects for ineffability. For example, [Jonas \(2016\)](#) discusses (and dismisses) ineffable objects, properties, propositions, and content, while finally endorsing knowledge as the valid source of ineffability she is after. And [Kellenburger \(1979\)](#) talks about “variety of mystical objects”, and it just so happens that all of them (Being, Truth, Self/Soul, and the mystical experience itself) are commensurable with our second meaning of Being Ineffable.

<sup>3</sup> See note 2.

<sup>4</sup> Whether it even is possible for something to be only partly absolute without losing that which made It absolute in the First Place is an interesting question in itself, but to answer that with an affirmative would require us to divide much more than the

Absolute/God. It would require us to separate and qualify our relation with, approach to, and knowledge of such an [A]bsolute more existentially—a topic for another day and another article (hopefully forthcoming).

5 As already stated, this is not a study in the philosophy of mind and any theory of mind/consciousness/experience; nor is it offering a phenomenological approach or anything along those philosophical lines. That is, such considerations are irrelevant as far as the contextual boundary of this article goes. And to elaborate or at least re-iterate using Kuhnian terminology: Whereas our understandings of ordinary experiences are bound to be theory-laden, mystical experiences (in this article) are bound to Be Ineffable. However, if this paradigm-building project is to be successful, it might be enough to make mystical experiences as Being Ineffable to be theory-laden as well, not too unsimilar to many typologies and philosophical approaches to mystical experiences that are out there. However, as was predicted in the Introduction to this article, absolute ineffability as the would-be foundation to the paradigm dooms it to failure. But that failure, as well as its consequences, are something that will need to await if and when it actually happens.

6 It was by complete accident that I declared this before realizing that I had just quoted “Mystical Theology”. I make no excuses and the quote is actually in a good and philosophically proper place. But I can also take the opportunity to add that mystics and theologians make very good philosophers and, perhaps, vice versa. In any case, it might be difficult to say which role comes first or if there is a valid difference to begin with.

7 The philosophical implications of any properly qualified “YES” obviously can lead to all kinds of strange and interesting philosophical heights. Even if it is just a “MAYBE”, I feel it is high time to let the yes–no debate fade away.

8 Katz himself rejects the label constructivism, preferring to call his approach contextualist (Jones 2020, p. 5, note 17).

9 Considering that the original source seems to be under unusually many layers, I will quote the related footnote from Stace: “This passage is from a letter from Plotinus to Flaccus, quoted in Bucke, op. cit., p. 123. Bucke gives as reference R. A. Vaughn, Hours with the Mystics, New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons 1903, vol. I, pp. 78–81.” I wish to challenge you, scholar of something Absolutely interesting who found these words of Plotinus compelling, to quote it through me, and we can add one more layer.

10 There is no simple “apophatic mysticism”; instead, the already mentioned various understandings and typologies of “mysticisms” and mystical experiences all reflect differently on what it means to “Unknow” or “Unsay”. Again, the topic is complex and will require a study of its own to adequately cover. The second meaning of Being Ineffable is meant to avert this complexity by assuming the essentialist approach to mysticism as well as the point of convergence with the third meaning of Being Ineffable as the “Object” of mystical experience. For more about apophatic/negative mysticism, see Jones (2020, pp. 225–29).

11 Potential-to-be(come)-something would probably be the last something to go, but we cannot even afford for that to exist in the Absolute Nothingness. Moreover, it still leaves the question open whether it is even possible to be closer to something that is Absolute (my answer is a very emphatic “no”), similar to the fact (?) that no finite distance travelled can shorten the infinite journey. That is, if one’s metaphysical goals require them to potentially exist within Nothingness, then they fail to become absolutely satisfactory answers to the question of existence.

12 The capitalized Nothing is meant to protect the sentence from emanationist claims, and the whole purpose of that uppercase ‘N’ is at least partially realized in the next section.

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