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Apophatic and Mystical Realism. Nicholas' of Cusa Lesson

Abstract

In my paper I consider the question, whether one can reconcile radical apophatic perspective with the realistic interpretation of religious discourse. Both are supported by very important religious intuitions, but seem to be mutually inconsistent. In order to show what form of "apophatic realism" is possible to hold, I analyze the thought of Nicolas of Cusa: fifteenth century mystic and philosopher, whose thought does justice to the deepest religious intuitions and can be inspiring, and – in its basic principles – also tenable, even in XXI century.

I

In my paper[1] I argued for a versions of theism which I called "apophatic theism." The apophatic theism I advocated is not a purely speculative position. To the contrary, it has its roots in a religious attitude of worship and – also religious – intuition that it is of ultimate importance that a human person should not worship something which is not worthy of worship, i.e. something which is not of absolute character – that is to say, the intuition that a religious person should make all the effort to avoid idolatry.

I argued that no object which can be grasped in any conceptual system is worthy of worship, i.e. that the object of non-idolatrous worship (called "God") is beyond every assertion and denial. But – and this was the conclusion of my paper – the "apophatic" problem is deeper: a religious person has a problem not only with ascribing to God any particular characteristics, but also with the very reference of the term "God." If God is beyond every assertion and denial, then the word "God" neither has nor has not the object of reference.

The conclusion of my paper poses, however, another very important question: can we understand religious discourse in any realistic sense. This question is important not only for a philosopher, but also for a religious person. As many scholars of religion point out, there is a strict connection between the notions of the "sacred" and that of the "real." Religious persons worship what is sacred, and that what is sacred is (for them) far more real than any mundane, profane reality. So the question which I'm going to consider in the present paper is: can we retain this religious intuition within a strong apophatic perspective (I advocated for)?

Given the rich diversity of philosophical understanding of what it is to be real (i.e. the diversity of philosophical realism), it is almost impossible to give one general answer to this question. This is why in the following part of my paper I will focus on the thought of fifteenth century mystic Nicolas of Cusa. He managed to integrate a deep mystical insight with some very sophisticated philosophical insights and arguments, which makes him a very valuable source of inspiration also for contemporary philosophical and theological debate (and such a debate on the topic of religious realism, in particular).

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1   P. Sikora, *Atheism, Agnosticism, and Apophatic Theism*, Polish Journal of Philosophy 4 (2010) No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 65–80.

II

The assumption which lies at the roots of Nicholas' considerations is that whatever God may be, S/He must be of absolute character. What is important to note is that this is not a speculative but a religious remark – for Cusanus nothing non-absolute is worthy of religious striving of the human being. Nicholas thinks through all the consequences of this assumption. The result is the following:

> I give the name "Maximum" to that than which there cannot be anything greater. But fullness befits what is one. Thus, oneness—which is also being—coincides with Maximality. But if such oneness is altogether free from all relation and contraction, obviously nothing is opposed to it, since it is Absolute Maximality. Thus, the Maximum is the Absolute One which is all things. And all things are in the Maximum (for it is the Maximum); and since nothing is opposed to it, the Minimum likewise coincides with it, and hence the Maximum is also in all things. And because it is absolute, it is, actually, every possible being; it contracts nothing from things, all of which [derive] from it.[2] (*De Docta Ignorantia*[3] 1, 2, 5)

In the passage cited above Nicholas starts with the idea that the goal of religious life is that there cannot be anything greater than. This idea leads him to the most "realistic" conclusions, i.e. that "Maximum" is not only all things which exist, and that it is in all things, but that it is every possible being. One cannot conceive anything more real than "Maximum": "Hence, since the absolutely Maximum *is* all that which can be, it is *altogether* actual" (DI 1, 4, 11).

Here lies, however, a deep apophatic problem, very much similar to that pointed out in my paper[4] – namely the problem of reference of the words "Maximum," "God." As Nicholas puts it:

> Since the Maximum is the unqualifiedly Maximum, to which nothing is opposed, it is evident that no name can properly befit it. For all

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2   All quotes of Nicholas' works in J. Hopkins' translation, available on: http://jasper-hopkins.info.

3   Herafter: DI.

4   P. Sikora, *Atheism, Agnosticism, and Apophatic Theism*, pp. 65–80.

names are bestowed on the basis of a oneness of conception [*ratio*] through which one thing is distinguished from another. But where all things are one, there can be no proper name. Hence, Hermes Trismegistus rightly says: "Since God is the totality of things, no name is proper to Him; for either He would have to be called by every name or else all things would have to be called by His name." (DI 1, 24, 75)

The apophatic conclusion, i.e. the fundamental problem with the reference of the term "God," stems from the Nicholas' view of language and cognition. According to Cusanus, language is a system of differences (or even oppositions). This means that each linguistic term has a meaning in the contexts of other linguistic terms which have different meanings than the former, the meanings we capture in the process of differentiation and comparison.

Such a view of language is strictly connected with Nicholas' view of cognition. In this view "every inquiry proceeds by means of a comparative relation" (DI 1, 1, 3) – it is a process in which a subject compares what is not known (yet) to what is (already) known. But, what is very important, the process does not start with the insight into essences of the things compared and then – on the basis of this putative insight – proceeds to the act of the comparison of the two previously identified entities. Rather, it starts with the acknowledgment of the apparent differences, and results in constructing the identities of different beings in the process of naming acknowledged differences:

The fact that you know a man not to be a stone derives not from any knowledge by which you have knowledge of man and stone and their difference. Rather, it occurs *per accidens*, on the basis of a difference both of the functions and of the visible forms, to which, when you discern them, you give different names. For a movement in our discriminating reason imposes names. (*De Deo Abscondito*,[5] 4)

Further details of this process are described by Nicholas in more details in his work *Idiota de mente* (*On Wisdom and Knowledge*):[6]

[R]eason's operation concerns things that are captured by the senses (reason distinguishes, harmonizes, and differentiates these things), so that in our reason there is nothing that was not previously in our senses. In this way, then, reason imposes names and is moved to give *this* name to one thing and *another* name to another thing. But since in those things with which reason is occupied form is not present in its true nature, reason resorts to surmise and opinion. Hence, insofar as both kinds and species are captured by a name they are entities-of-reason that reason has made for itself from its harmonizing and differentiating of perceptible objects. (DM 64–65)[7]

In the passages quoted above Cusanus makes an important claim about language, namely that our linguistic ability is closely connected with our power of discrimination. This power, however, does not reach the very essences of beings, but is limited to the sphere of "operationum et figurarum" (functions/ actions and visible forms"), and because of that "reason resorts to surmise and opinion" – i.e. can only reach some level of contingent, provisional opinion. The process of discrimination is not of the purely sensual character, but includes some rational aspect ("a movement of discriminating reason") which "imposes names," i.e. has a discursive aspect. On the other hand, discursive activity depends on sensual perception. For that reason, there is a strict mutual connection between our perceptual recognition-abilities and the rational, conceptual activity. One can say that our perception is conceptually-laden, and our concepts are perception-dependent.

Moreover, according to Cusanus, what we recognize is not an absolute objective essence of things (the world as it is from God's-eye-point-of-view) but what we perceive with our perceptible apparatus and conceptually grasp with our rational resources. "Kinds and species" into which we categorize our experience of the world "are entities-of-reason," i.e. it is only within our conceptual schemes in place one can see the world as consisting of particular objects which have particular characteristics and belongs to particular categories.

The view sketched by Nicholas very smoothly fits with the ideas developed and well defended in xxth century by Hilary Putnam[8]. One can

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7   Translation slightly changed.
8   My argumentation why and to what extend the Putnam's ideas are plausible, see: P. Sikora, *Słowa i zbawienie. Dyskurs religijny w perspektywie Hilarego Putnama*,

easily see here close similarities to the basis assumptions of Putnam's internal or pragmatic realism, namely that the world we inhabit and get to know is not the Reality-as-it-is-in-itself, the Reality-as-it-is-in--God's-Eye-point-of-view, but a reality as it is perceived, conceived and interacted with by us: human agents with sensual-and-conceptual recognition abilities. Secondly, that our perceptual and conceptual abilities are mutually interwoven.

Also, Cusanus' view on language – even if he does not provide us with a lot of details – shares basic insights with some Putnam's sophisticated and plausible conceptions of language.[9]

Despite possible differences in details the fifteenth century mystic and twentieth century analytical philosopher agree on what is crucial in present context, namely: (1) On the fact that no linguistic term has a meaning on its own, independently from the broader linguistic context in which it occurs; for every word to have meaning it must be a part of the system of multiple words. (2) That the reference of a given term is established in the process which includes an act of identification of the object of reference of that term. Such an act of identification, however, consists in a differentiation of the object of reference from the broader context or background against which it is identified.

In my articles[10] I sketched out how the question of realism of religious language may be answered from the perspective which accepts basic insights of Putnam's thought. The main conclusion was that – because in the Putnamian perspective all reality and existence which can be conceived by a human person is conditioned and dependent on the humanly constructed conceptual scheme – the religious realism consists in a real character of human transformation achieved throughout religious engagement rather than in any metaphysically-realistic interpretation of the object of reference of the central religious category – i.e. category of God.

Given the fundamental congruence between Cusanus' and Putnam's view on language and discursive cognition it may be inspiring

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Kraków 2004. See also there for the references to the relevant Hilary Putnam's works.

9   Nicholaus' idea that language is a system of differences finds support not only in the Putnam's ideas but in all the views which accept and develop the work and thought of De Saussure's semiotics.

10   P. Sikora, *Realizm i teologia,* in: R. Woźniak (ed.), *Metafizyka i teologia*, Kraków 2008, pp. 323–342 2011; P. Sikora, *Wielość religii a debata: realizm/antyrealizm religijny*, Diametros 29 (2011), pp. 93–109.

to look at how the former – as both philosopher and mystic – sees the role of language in the religious life and how he understands religious realism.

III

It should not surprise us that having acknowledged all these facts about language and cognition Nicholaus sees clearly a fundamental problem with respect to the human efforts to speak about what religious people regard as the goal of their religious engagement, and call "God" (and which Nicholaus calls "Maximum" in order to stress its absolute character). The problem one here faces is, as I stressed above, not confined to the problem of ascribing to God any characteristic, i.e. to the problem of predication anything about God. The main problem lies deeper and consists in the impossibility of establishing proper reference of the terms such as "God" and "Maximum."

The problem stems from the two assumptions: (1) The necessary condition for a term to gain a reference is that the object of reference is identified by being distinguished from the broader background, and (2) nothing which can be an element of the broader reality could count as a goal of the religious engagement (cannot be named "God"). The conclusion is that no possible object of reference (of any linguistic term, including "God") could be named "God."

This conclusion is very problematical as regards the realistic character of religious language, at least in cases of theistic religions, such as Christianity – which was the religion of Nicholas of Cusa. In those cases the term "God" (and its synonyms like "Allah," "Jahweh" etc.) is the central term of a given conceptual system, a term which all the rest of a discourse is built around. All other words have their religious meanings only "sub specie Dei"[11] – in relation to God. This is why it seems to be crucial for realistic interpretation of religious language whether the term "God" is to be interpreted realistically. And from the philosophcal-theoretical point of view this question in turn can be stated in the following form: Is it the case that the term "God" has some real object of reference? The answer which emerges from Cusanus'

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11 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, q. 1, a. 7, http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth1001.html (20.11.2016).

considerations – which are in its basic insights supported by contemporary philosophical view of language – seems to be negative: that there is no object of reference of the term "God."

On the other hand one should not forget that the source of the problem was Nicholas' acknowledgment of a fundamental religious intuition that the ultimate goal (and horizon) of religious life (which includes thought) is maximally great, perfect and real. This intuition block a possible rejoinder to Nicholas' conclusion.

The rejoinder I have in mind goes as follows: It starts from the remark that there may be many levels or kinds of reality: the reality of physical objects, the reality of mathematical objects, etc. There is also, it is claimed, the reality of the story-world of a narrative. Objects and characters which are part of such a story are real in different sense than objects of our external environment but, nevertheless, they are real. One should then acknowledged that the word "God" is indisputably a part of many religious stories (e.g. biblical ones). In most of these cases, one can argue, there is a possibility to identify the referent of that word within the story-world. The word "God" may have some fictional character as its object of reference.

The rejoinder fails, because for a religious person such a fictional reality of a story-world is – in the case of the word "God" – much to weak. There are of course, a religious person would admit, some stories which refer to fictional characters (e.g. Job and his friends in the Book of Job). They play an important role in the religious life of a person, even if s/he has a clear awareness of the fictional status of the characters of the story. But in the case of the word "God" the situation is totally different: if a person thinks "God" refers only to the fictional character within a story, s/he can not remain a religious person.

Nicholas is well aware of the problem stated above, and, he remains a religious person, for whom the goal of his engagement is sacred and because of that cannot be less real than the most real beings he encounters in his life; even more: in comparison to the goal of his religious engagement the most real beings in the world seem to be completely unreal (the ultimate goal is a necessary basis for a contingent world of mundane beings). Cusanus decides then to embrace paradoxical answer to the question in what sense the religious language can be realistic:

> Moreover, the greatest truth is the absolutely Maximum. Therefore, (1) it is most greatly true either that the unqualifiedly Maximum exists

or that it does not exist, or (2) [it is most greatly true that it] both exists and does not exist, or (3) [it is most greatly true that it] neither exists nor does not exist. Now, no more [alternatives] can be either asserted or thought. No matter which one of them you say to be most greatly true, my point is made. For I have the greatest truth, which is the unqualifiedly Maximum. (DI 1, 6, 16)

This paradoxical character of the existence of Maximum is for Nicholas not something which cannot be experienced, i.e. it should not be conceived as existing outside the world in which a human being lives. This is expressed by (also paradoxical) statements which for many persons may smack pantheistically:

Therefore, because the absolutely Maximum is absolutely and actually all things which *can* be (and is so free of all opposition that the Minimum coincides with it), it is beyond both all affirmation and all negation. And it is not, as well as is, all that which is conceived to be; and it is, as well as is not, all that which is conceived not to be. But it is a given thing in such way that it is all things; and it is all things in such way that it is no thing; and it is maximally a given thing in such way that it is it minimally. (DI 1, 4, 12)

Paradoxical nature of religious language means that it is impossible to formulate any consistent metaphysical theory which would explain the ontological status of God, neither realistic nor non-realistic one. If so, it is reasonable to ask what is the point of producing such paradoxical religious discourse, which seems to state something about God, (particularly which states that God exists and that God existence has absolute character), but which et the end of the day turns out to be a stream of contradictories, and which should be withdrawn in the act of apophasis.

IV

According to Cusanus the point of religious discourse is a pragmatic one. It is necessary for inspiring and directing the religious attitude of worship ("cultura Dei"), but must be negated in the very process of religious engagement in order to avoid idolatry:

> The worshipping of God, who is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth, must be based upon affirmations about Him. Accordingly, every religion, in its worshipping, must mount upward by means of affirmative theology (…) And so, the theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshiped as the Infinite God but, rather, as a creature. And such worship is idolatry; it ascribes to the image that which befits only the reality itself. (DI 1, 26, 86)

How such an necessary act of an apophatic use of language may look like Cusanus tries to show in a short piece entitled *Dialogus de Deo abscondito – On the Hidden God*. It is the fictional dialogue between two characters: a Christian and a Pagan. Dialogue begins with the Pagan's acknowledgment of the Christian's deep piety, the attitude of worship. The Pagan asks the Christian about the object the latter worships, wanting him to give some idea of what he is worshipping. The Christian states that he doesn't know who God (the name of the "object" of worship) is, and explains that this lack of knowledge is precisely the reason of his religious attitude. Such an answer seems for the Pagan to be nonsensical, so he continues to ask, attempting to drive out the Christian's actual even if unspoken conception of God. The Christian consequently refuses to admit to any of formulations, arising during conversation, as to his conception of God.

Let us now focus on some particularly interesting and enlightening parts of the dialogue:

> *Pagan*: I ask you, Brother, to lead me to the point of being able to understand you regarding your God. Tell me: what do you know about the God you worship?
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> *Christian*: I know that whatever-I-know is not God and that whatever-I-conceive is not like God but that God excels [all this].
>
> *Pagan*: Therefore, God is nothing.
>
> *Christian*: It is not the case that He is nothing, for this nothing has the name "nothing."
>
> *Pagan*: If He is not nothing, then He is something.
>
> *Christian*: He is not something, either. For something is not every-thing. And it is not the case that God is something rather than every-thing.
>
> *Pagan*: You make strange claims: that the God whom you worship is neither nothing nor something. No reasoning grasps this point. (DA 8–9)

The passage begins with (repeated by the Pagan again and again) the request for the Christian to express what the latter knows about God he worships. Christian again explains that no possible object of knowledge can count as the God worthy to worship. The Pagan's reaction consists in an attempt to interpret Christian discourse non-realistically: if nothing counts for the Christian as God, than God is nothing, i.e. the term "God" is without referent. The Christian, however, refuses to accept such an interpretation, in so far as it is understood as some description of a particular metaphysical state of affaires, a description which uses well defined categories, esp. category of nothing ("for this nothing has the name 'nothing'"). The Pagan's reaction reveals that his way of thinking is trapped in the binary opposition: if God is not nothing, He must be something, which refutes the initial claim of the Christian. Because the Christian doesn't withdraw from that, the Pagan concludes that Christian position is unreasonable.

Because of this conclusion, drawn by the Pagan at this point of the dialogue, conversation broadens its topic, i.e. includes the motif of divine ineffability and more explicitly links semantic and ontological questions:

Pagan: Can He be named?
Christian: What can be named is small. That whose greatness cannot be conceived remains ineffable.
Pagan: But is He ineffable?
Christian: He is not ineffable, though He is beyond all things effable; for He is the Cause of all nameable things. How is it, then, that He Himself, who gives to others a name, is without a name?
Pagan: So He is both effable and ineffable.
Christian: Not *that* either. For God is not the foundation of contradiction but is Simplicity, which is prior to every foundation. Hence, we are also not to say that He is both effable and ineffable.
Pagan: What, then, will you say of Him?
Christian: That it is neither the case that He is named or is not named nor the case that He both is named and is not named. Rather, whatever can be said disjunctively or conjunctively, whether consistently or contradictorily, does not befit Him (because of the excellence of His infinity), so that He is the one Beginning, which is prior to every thought formable of it.
Pagan: So, then, *being* would not befit God.

Christian: Your statement is correct.
Pagan: Therefore, He is nothing.
Christian: It is not the case that He is nothing or that He is not nothing; nor is He both nothing and not nothing. Rather, He is the Source and Origin of all the beginnings of being and of not-being.
Pagan: God is the Source of the beginnings of being and of not-being?
Christian: No.
Pagan: But you just said this.
Christian: When I said it, I spoke the truth; and I am speaking the truth now, when I deny it. (DA 10–11)

The above passage shows that in the course of the conversation the Pagan has managed to broaden his way of thinking, giving up the attachment to the law of excluded middle: he is now ready to admit that God in Christian conception is both effable and ineffable. When seen from the contemporary point of view – in which we are much more accustomed to non-classical logical systems – this may seem to be a huge cognitive development. But for the Christian partner in the dialogue (i.e. for Nicholas) the current Pagan's position is still a wrong one. This is because it is still a theoretical position which tries to capture the nature of God – this time just using a richer set of logical tools. The Christian's critique of this broadened Pagan's position leads the latter once again to the non-realistic interpretation of Christian God-talk, the interpretation once again refuted by the Christian. Here comes a very interesting fragment: The Christian refutes non-realistic interpretation of his God-talk by formulating statement that God "is the source Source and Origin of all the beginnings of being and of not-being." The Pagan is very happy, having finally caught – i his opinion – the Christian on the definite formula about God's nature. But Christian immediately negates what he have just said, and claims that in both cases he has been speaking the truth, leaving the Pagan in a confusion. Confusion deepens in the final parts of the dialogue which tackles explicitly the question of reference of the name "God." The Christian states that "we do not call true the statement that 'God' is His name; nor do we call that statement false, for it is not false that 'God' is His name. Nor do we say that the statement is both true and false" (DA 13).

The whole point of such a strange talk shows up in the final sentence of the dialogue, spoken by the Pagan: "Therefore, may God, who is hidden from the eyes of all the wise of the world, be blessed forever."

In this sentence the Pagan acknowledges that God is "hidden," i.e. that it is senseless to try to get any knowledge about Him and His nature. Secondly, and more importantly, this sentence is not a descriptive one. In this utterance the Pagan does not describe anything but confesses his un-knowledge and expresses praise. The Christian has accomplished his goal: he has persuaded Pagan to change attitude from a theoretical to the "practical" one – the Pagan stops asking theoretical questions and joins the Christian in the act of worship (without having any knowledge about the object of worship).

V

The dialogue *On the Hidden God* shows us that negative or apophatic theology should not be understood as some theory about God expressed in negative statements. It is rather "a language of unsaying"[12] – a process which involves human subjects living in time. Within this process, language utterances – also those that have the form of statements (or negations) – are used to foster the process of "mounting up," elevation, or ascent. Their role is not to say something about God but rather to block any way of theoretical thinking about the ultimate goal and horizon of religious engagement, to break down any theoretical picture of God (and His/Her relation to the world), to deconstruct any metaphysical theory of the ultimate reality.

As the dialogue *On the Hidden God* shows, the process of such a deconstruction is carried by the use of language, and that deconstructing utterances may be misunderstood – i.e. interpreted as statements stating something about God either in positive form (making Him something) or in negative one (making Him nothing). For that reason they need further linguistic acts which correct such a misunderstanding. The question remains as to whether this is infinite process, as some scholars insists[13] of whether it ends at some point.

Nicholas answer to that question is quite clear:

However, someone who desires to grasp the meaning must elevate his intellect above the import of the words rather than insisting upon

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12 M. Sells, *The Mystical Language of Unsaying*, Chicago–London 1994.
13 This is the Sells' thesis, cf.: M. Sells, *The Mystical Language of Unsaying*, p. 2ff.

the proper significations of words which cannot be properly adapted to such great intellectual mysteries. Moreover, it is necessary to use guiding illustrations in a transcendent way and to leave behind perceptible things, so that the reader may readily ascend unto simple intellectuality. (DI 1, 2, 8)

Human religious ascent leads above "the import of words" unto "simple intellectuality." Given the fact that language belongs to the sphere of "multiplicity," Nicholas claims that the goal of the discursive activity is to lead a human subject to the point where all the multiplicity, including the multiplicity of linguistic signs, drops out. This is the lesson of *On the Hidden God*: the dialogue – i.e. the discursive engagement ends at the point when the Pagan joins the Christian in the act of worship. And because of the fact that the Pagan's description of initial attitude of the Christian ("I see that you have most devoutly prostrated your-self and are shedding tears of love-not hypocritical tears but heart-felt ones" DA 1) expresses does not mention any word of the latter, so we can assume that in his last statement of the dialogue the Pagan expresses his worshipping attitude (more for the reader than for himself) and stops talking.

Here lies the importance of the fact that the process of apophatic blocking of thinking and deconstruction of thoughts takes place within the context of religious engagement, as it is expressed by the whole construction of *On the Hidden God*: at the beginning of which lies the attitude of worship exhibited by the Christian; it ends when the Pagan joins the Christian in this attitude[14]. Cusanus' dialogue shows at what point the discursive apophatic activity of "unsaying" stops. It must pro-

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14   This fact poses a serious problem for Michael Sells' account of apophatic discourse, expressed in his *The Mystical Language of Unsaying*. Sells wants to brackets the question of religious experience to focus on semantic aspects only. He claims to describe the "meaning event" that "effects a semantic union that re-creates or imitates the mystical union" (p. 9). In the perspective of Nicholas such a bracketing of existential, extra-linguistic dimension misses the whole point. This difference (focus solely on language vs. necessary openness toward non-linguistic) accounts also for the difference as regards the possibility of the end point of apophatic linguistic "unsaying." It is precisely because Sells wants to confine his explanation to the sphere of "meaning event" that he does see the necessity of infinite process of linguistic "unsaying." For the end of this process which sees Nicholas lies beyond language and beyond "meaning event."

ceed as far as some of the participants of the discourse misunderstand its point and character of language utterances. In these cases Sells is right – further utterances correcting and undermining previous ones are needed. But when the addressee of apophatic discursive strategy catches its point and "elevates" itself above words in the act of worship – discourse becomes obsolete, and religious person may rest in silent "simple intellectuality."

This fact is of utmost importance, also because it enables us to understand in what sense the religious discourse – paradoxical, non-descriptive, of pragmatic value as it is – my be an aspect of what may be called religious realism. As the example of Nicholas' considerations has shown, religious realism cannot consist in any metaphysical interpretation of religious discourse. Any such interpretation would be less realistic than it should be from the religious point of view: it would make God only a contingent, conditioned being not worthy of worship or of any other religious engagement. Proper use of religious language, however, leads to the engagement and attitude which includes all of the life of the religious person. All aspects of life are, as it were, immersed in the religious engagement, all aspects of reality are experienced by the lens of this engagement; an engaged believer is overwhelmed by the sense of – indescribable – owe in the face of all embracing mystery. All of this brings about that for a person there is nothing more real than her/his religious striving. *This* is the apophatic, mystical religious realism.

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