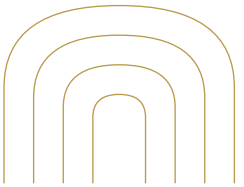
HEKHAL · READER'S EDITION



Περὶ Μυστικῆς Θεολογίας

Mystical Theology

Peri Mystikēs Theologias · On Mystical Theology

John Parker (1897)

PUBLIC-DOMAIN TRANSLATION

Edition of 2026-10-24 · hekhal.org

About this edition

From John Parker's *The Works of Dionysius the Areopagite, now first translated into English, from the original Greek* (James Parker and Co., London and Oxford, 1897), pp. 130-137, a public-domain edition, as transcribed by Roger Pearse (2004) at tertullian.org (public domain). The English on this page is Parker's wording, re-verified against that transcription on 2026-10-12; it is excerpted (Chapter I Section III and most of Chapter III are omitted), the transcription's four-hyphen dash is set as a double hyphen, and obvious transcription typos are silently corrected. Modern critical translations include Colm Luibhéid's 1987 Paulist Press edition and the Suchla critical Greek edition (Patristische Texte und Studien 33, 1990) which establishes the reference Greek text.

TRADITION	christian-mysticism
LANGUAGE	Greek
PERIOD	late 5th – early 6th century CE
ATTRIBUTION	Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (anonymous, writing in the persona of the Athenian convert of Acts 17:34)
TRANSLATION	John Parker (1897)
LICENCE	Public domain
ONLINE	https://hekhal.org/texts/mystical-theology-dionysius/

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The *Mystical Theology* is the shortest and most concentrated of the four surviving treatises of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. In five very short chapters it performs the apophatic ascent: the contemplative disposition that proceeds by negation, denying every concept of God in turn until the negations themselves are denied and the soul is delivered into the dark luminosity that exceeds knowing.

The author writes in the persona of the Athenian convert mentioned in Acts 17:34. Modern scholarship dates the corpus to the late fifth or early sixth century, with the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus making its first attested appearance at a 532 colloquy in Constantinople. The pseudonymity is not deception in the modern sense: the medieval reception treats the persona as a claim of theological lineage, and the text's stature was secured by that lineage long before its late-antique provenance was established.

CROSS-REFERENCES

- The Cloud of Unknowing, the direct vernacular descendant in late-fourteenth-century English.
- Risala al-Ahadiyya, the Akbarian Sufi structural parallel.
- Mishkat al-Anwar, the light-ontology triangle's third corner.
- Apophasis (ἀπόφασις), the negative-theological method this text systematizes.
- The light-ontology triangle: visual map of the documented transmission.

The Mystical Theology

PERI MYSTIKĒS THEOLOGIAS

CANONICAL

GREEK · C. 500 CE · CHRISTIAN LATE ANTIQUE

CHAPTER I · WHAT IS THE DIVINE GLOOM? SECTIONS I-II

ΚΕΦΆΛΑΙΟΝ Α'

Section I · The opening prayer

Triad supernal, both super-God and super-good, Guardian of the Theosophy of Christian men, direct us aright to the super-unknown and super-brilliant and highest summit of the mystic Oracles, where the simple and absolute and changeless mysteries of theology lie hidden within the super-luminous gloom of the silence, revealing hidden things, which in its deepest darkness shines above the most super-brilliant, and in the altogether impalpable and invisible, fills to overflowing the eyeless minds with glories of surpassing beauty.

τίς ὁ θεῖος γνόφος

What is the Divin

?Gloor

◆ ◆

Τριὰς ὑπερούσιε

Triad supernal: the opening invocatio

◆ ◆

ὑπερ-

Section I, continued · The address to Timothy

This then be my prayer; but thou, O dear Timothy, by thy persistent commerce with the mystic visions, leave behind both sensible perceptions and intellectual efforts, and all objects of sense and intelligence, and all things not being and being, and be raised aloft unknowingly to the union, as far as attainable, with Him Who is above every essence and knowledge. For by the resistless and absolute ecstasy in all purity, from thyself and all, thou wilt be carried on high, to the superessential ray of the Divine darkness, when thou hast cast away all, and become free from all.

Section II · The uninitiated

But see that none of the uninitiated listen to these things: those I mean who are entangled in things being, and fancy there is nothing

huper- · the super- prefix

Pseudo-Dionysius'
signature device fo
naming what exceeds th
.categorie

◆ ◆

ὑπερούσιος ἀκτὶς

huperousios aktis: the superessential ra

2

superessentially above things being, but imagine that they know, by their own knowledge, Him, Who has placed darkness as His hiding-place. But, if the Divine initiations are above such, what would any one say respecting those still more uninitiated, such as both portray the Cause exalted above all, from the lowest of things created, and say that It in no wise excels the no-gods fashioned by themselves and of manifold shapes, it being our duty both to attribute and affirm all the attributes of things existing to It, as Cause of all, and more properly to deny them all to It, as being above all, and not to consider the negations to be in opposition to the affirmations, but far rather that It, which is above every abstraction and definition, is above the privations.

1

CHAPTER II · HOW TO BE

ΚΕΦΆΛΑΙΟΝ Β'

UNITED AND ASCRIBE PRAISES

πῶς δεῖ ἑνοῦσθαι

How we ought both to b

unite

§ 1 · The super-bright gloom

We pray to enter within the super-bright gloom, and through not seeing and not knowing, to see and to know that the not to see nor to know is itself the above sight and knowledge. For this is veritably to see and to know and to celebrate super-essentially the Superessential, through the abstraction of all existing things, just as those who make a lifelike statue, by extracting all the encumbrances which have been placed upon the clear view of the concealed, and by bringing to light, by the mere cutting away, the genuine beauty concealed in it.

◆ ◆

ἀφαίρεσις

aphairesis: abstraction, taking away

§ 1, continued · Abstractions and definitions

And, it is necessary, as I think, to celebrate the abstractions in an opposite way to the definitions. For,

The technical Plotinia

term Pseudo-Dionysiu

inherits and Christianize

the soul ascends b

removing what does nc

.appl

◆ ◆

we used to place these latter by beginning from the foremost and descending through the middle to the lowest, but, in this case, by making the ascents from the lowest to the highest, we abstract everything, in order that, without veil, we may know that Agnosia, which is enshrouded under all the known, in all things that be, and may see that superessential gloom, which is hidden by all the light in existing things.

3

ἀγνωσία

agnosia: unknowing

4

CHAPTER III · AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPRESSIONS

ΚΕΦΆΛΑΙΟΝ Γ'

§ 1 · The Theological Outlines

καταφατική · ἀποφατική

In the *Theological Outlines*, then, we celebrated the principal affirmative expressions respecting God, how the Divine and good Nature is spoken of as One, how as Threefold, what is

that within it which is spoken of as Paternity and Sonship, what the Divine name of "the Spirit" is meant to signify, how from the immaterial and indivisible Good the Lights dwelling in the heart of Goodness sprang forth, and remained, in their branching forth, without departing from the coeternal abiding in Himself and in Themselves and in each other, how the super-essential Jesus takes substance in veritable human nature, and whatever other things, made known by the Oracles, are celebrated throughout the *Theological Outlines*; and in the treatise concerning *Divine Names*, how He is named Good, how Being, how Life and Wisdom and Power, and whatever else belongs to the nomenclature of God.

§ 1, continued · Speech contracts in the ascent

For, it was necessary that the *Theological Outlines*, and the

Kataphatic and apophati theolog

◆ ◆

κατάφασις

kataphasis: affirmation, the way of saying

↑

ἀπόφασις

apophasis: negation, the way of unsaying

▽

The two registers c theological speec

unfolding of the *Divine Names* should be expressed in fewer words than the *Symbolic Theology*; since, in proportion as we ascend to the higher, in such a degree the expressions are circumscribed by the contemplations of the things intelligible. As even now, when entering into the gloom which is above mind, we shall find, not a little speaking, but a complete absence of speech, and absence of conception. In the other case, the discourse, in descending from the above to the lowest, is widened according to the descent, to a proportionate extent; but now, in ascending from below to that which is above, in proportion to the ascent, it is contracted, and after a complete ascent, it will become wholly voiceless, and will be wholly united to the unutterable.

5

6

CHAPTER IV · THE CAUSE IS NONE OF THE SENSIBLY

ΚΕΦΆΛΑΙΟΝ Δ'

PERCEIVED

§ 1 · The first negation

We say then that the Cause of all, which is above all, is neither without being, nor without life, nor without reason, nor without mind, nor is a body, nor has shape, nor form, nor quality, or quantity, or bulk, nor is in a place, nor is seen, nor has sensible contact, nor perceives, nor is perceived, by the senses, nor has disorder and confusion, as being vexed by earthly passions, nor is powerless, as being subject to casualties of sense, nor is in need of light; neither is It, nor has It, change, or decay, or division, or deprivation, or flux, or any other of the objects of sense.

Editorial note. Chapter IV denies the sensible. The Cause cannot be characterized by any property a sensory faculty could register or a sensory category could contain. The

οὐδὲν τῶν αἰσθητῶ

None of the sensibl

perceived thing

Negated in this chapter

body · shape · form · quality

place · sense · contact

passion · power · light

change · decay · division

flux

↑

Ascending negatio

through the sensibl

denial proceeds upward through the hierarchy of sensible things in the order opposite to that of the kataphatic *Theological Outlines*.

7

8

CHAPTER V · THE CAUSE IS NONE OF THE INTELLIGIBLY PERCEIVED

ΚΕΦΆΛΑΙΟΝ Ε'

§ 1 · The second negation

οὐδὲν τῶν νοητῶν

On the other hand, ascending, we say, that It is neither soul, nor mind, nor has imagination, or opinion, or reason, or conception; neither is expressed, nor conceived; neither is number, nor order, nor greatness, nor littleness; nor equality, nor inequality; nor similarity, nor dissimilarity; neither is standing, nor moving; nor at rest; neither has power, nor is power, nor light; neither lives, nor is life; neither is essence nor eternity, nor time; neither is Its touch intelligible,

None of the intelligibl

perceive

Negated in this chapter

soul · mind · imagination

reason

number · order · greatnes

rest · motion · power · lif

neither is It science, nor truth; nor kingdom, nor wisdom; neither one, nor oneness; neither Deity, nor Goodness; nor is It Spirit according to our understanding; nor Sonship, nor Paternity; nor any other thing of those known to us, or to any other existing being; neither is It any of non-existing nor of existing things, nor do things existing know It, as It is; nor does It know existing things, qua existing; neither is there expression of It, nor name, nor knowledge; neither is It darkness, nor light; nor error, nor truth; neither is there any definition at all of It, nor any abstraction.

§ 2 · The third negation

But when making the predications and abstractions of things after It, we neither predicate, nor abstract from It; since the all-perfect and uniform Cause of all is both above every definition and the pre-eminence of Him, Who is absolutely freed from

essence · eternity · time

oneness · Deity ·

Goodness

Sonship · Paternity · Spir

⁂

The third negation · §

We neither predicate, nor

abstract from It.” (Parker

10

all, and beyond the whole, is also above every abstraction.

The full apophatic crescendo. Note the structure: every name kataphatic theology has just used (essence, life, Spirit, Goodness, Sonship, Paternity) is here denied: not as false but as inadequate to the Cause that exceeds them. The closing § 2 is the third negation: not that God is not these things, but that even the negation does not apply.

9

APPARATUS · THE THIRD NEGATION AS METHOD

Ἡ ΤΡΊΤΗ ἈΠΌΦΑΣΙΣ

The structural argument and its inheritance.

The treatise’s argument

The soul rises by denying. First it denies the sensible (Chapter IV). Then it denies the intelligible,

The three negation

First (Ch. IV)

οὐ τὰ αἰσθητά

not the sensible

including the very names of the Trinity that affirmative theology has just used (Chapter V). The closing move is the third negation: not that God is *not* these things, but that even the negation does not apply. This is the move the entire Western apophatic tradition repeats.

The descendants

Eckhart in the German sermons on the *Gottheit beyond God*; the *Cloud of Unknowing* in its sustained pastoral instruction in the cloud of unknowing as the only path to God; John of the Cross in the *nada nada nada* of the *Subida del Monte Carmelo*, each is the descendant of the closing paragraph of the *Mystical Theology*. The technical move is the same; the doctrinal-pastoral context shifts across the thirteen centuries the line spans.

The cross-tradition resonance

↓

Second (Ch. V § 1)

οὐ τὰ νοητά

not the intelligible

↓

Third (Ch. V § 2)

οὐδέ τὴν ἀπόφασιν

not even the negation applies

The conceptual core c

Western apophasi

The Akbarian Sufi tradition develops a structurally identical apophatic move in the doctrine of *Ahadiyya*, the divine unity prior to all names, including the name of God. The Kabbalistic *Ein Sof*, the limitless prior to all naming: performs the same operation in Hebrew theological idiom. The structural parallels are documented; the historical transmission across religious-cultural boundaries is partial. See the light-ontology triangle map for the full articulation.

11

12

An orientation

The *Mystical Theology* is, by any reasonable measure, the single most consequential text in the Christian apophatic tradition. Five short chapters, composed in late-fifth-or-early-sixth-century Greek by an anonymous author writing in the persona of the Athenian convert mentioned in Acts 17:34, contain the technical articulation of negative theology that the entire subsequent Western Christian mystical tradition will refine and pass forward without substantively departing from. Eriugena's ninth-century Latin translation makes the text foundational for medieval Western mysticism. The Rhineland mystics of the fourteenth century, Meister Eckhart above all, develop the apophatic register into vernacular German preaching. The anonymous author of the late-fourteenth-century English *Cloud of Unknowing* renders the method into sustained pastoral instruction. John of the Cross in late-sixteenth-century Spain produces the most systematic mystical-theological articulation of the tradition in the *Subida del Monte Carmelo*. Across thirteen centuries and four major languages, the Dionysian core remains.

What the text proposes, stated as compactly as possible: every affirmative statement about God imports creaturely categories that the divine reality transcends; every negation operates within the same conceptual frame as the affirmation it denies; the full apophatic move is therefore the negation of negation itself: the recognition that the divine cannot be reached by either affirmation or negation, since both proceed within categories the divine exceeds. The Cause is above both affirmation and negation. The contemplative ascent is the sustained practice of recognizing this excess, performed through the disciplined abstraction of every conceptual handhold the soul might cling to.

The pseudonymity question has shaped the text's reception more than perhaps any other single feature. Lorenzo Valla's 1457 philological demonstration established that the corpus could not have been composed by the Athenian convert of Acts; the text's vocabulary, philosophical idiom, and engagement with Proclus require a late-antique date. The medieval reception, which had treated the corpus as quasi-apostolic, had to absorb this correction. The contemporary scholarly consensus is that the substance of the corpus survives the philological correction: the late-antique author's

synthesis of Christian theology with Proclean Neoplatonism is itself a major intellectual achievement, and the subsequent reception is what shaped Western Christian mysticism regardless of who originally wrote the texts. The pseudonymous device is most plausibly read not as deception but as a sixth-century literary convention in which the persona serves as a claim of theological lineage: the author's argument is presented as descending from the apostolic mission, and the persona makes the claim explicit.

The relationship to Proclean Neoplatonism is the live methodological debate. Hans Urs von Balthasar and Andrew Louth treat the Dionysian corpus as a genuine synthesis in which Christian doctrinal commitments and Neoplatonist philosophical apparatus are constitutive of each other rather than merely juxtaposed; the Cambridge ancient-philosophy tradition tends to read Pseudo-Dionysius as either Christianity dressed in Neoplatonist idiom or Neoplatonism Christianized only at the surface. The reading affects how Pseudo-Dionysius is placed in the history of Christian doctrine: as continuous with patristic theology that had absorbed Hellenistic philosophical inheritance, or as a foreign element imported into Christian intellectual life. The

contemporary scholarly view tends toward the synthesis reading; the project of distinguishing where Christian commitments constrain Neoplatonist apparatus and where they extend it is the principal work of contemporary Dionysian scholarship.

The cross-tradition resonance is the most striking feature of the text from a comparative-religion perspective. The Akbarian Sufi tradition develops a structurally identical apophatic move in Ibn Arabi's doctrine of *Ahadiyya*: the divine unity prior to all names, including the name of God, accessible only through the contemplative recovery of the prior condition. The Kabbalistic tradition develops the same move in the doctrine of *Ein Sof*: the limitless prior to all naming, the apophatic ground from which the ten Sefirot emanate as differentiated divine self-disclosure. The structural parallels across these three traditions are real, documented, and worth attending to; the historical transmission across the religious-cultural boundaries is partial. The Plotinian-Neoplatonist substrate that all three traditions inherit through their respective mediating philosophical traditions accounts for much of the convergence; direct contact across religious lines is harder to

establish but not absent (the Andalusian milieu shared by Akbarian Sufism and early Kabbalah is documented in Scholem's *Origins of the Kabbalah*). The light-ontology triangle map articulates the documented and structural edges across the three corners.

For the reader approaching the text for the first time, the honest counsel is to read it more than once. Five chapters compressed into approximately two thousand words is a deceptive accessibility: the text rewards sustained re-reading in a way that few texts of any length do. Read once for the surface argument; read again for the technical structure of each negation; read a third time with attention to the moments where the prose itself enacts the apophatic operation it describes. The compounding super- prefixes (ὑπερ-) are not stylistic mannerism; they are the text's primary technical instrument for naming what exceeds categories without substituting a new category for the one being denied.

The contemporary scholarly reference is Colm Luibhéid's 1987 Paulist Press translation in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, with the Suchla critical Greek text (1990) for serious philological work. The Hekhal edition presents

the public-domain Parker 1897 translation as the open reading text, with the Greek selections drawn from the established critical tradition. For scholarly orientation, Andrew Louth's *Denys the Areopagite* (1989) is the standard short introduction; Bernard McGinn's *The Foundations of Mysticism* (1991, the first volume of his multi-volume *Presence of God* history of Western Christian mysticism) places the text within the broader Christian apophatic arc the *Mystical Theology* opens. For the cross-tradition perspective, Sells's *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (1994) develops a formal account of apophatic language through close readings of Plotinus, Eriugena, Ibn Arabi, Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart, with comparative reference to Abulafia and Moses de Leon.

The *Mystical Theology* generated a Greek scholiastic tradition almost immediately, with John of Scythopolis (mid-6th c.) and Maximus the Confessor (7th c.) producing the standard scholia that traveled with the corpus into the Latin West. Eriugena's ninth-century Latin translation made the text foundational for medieval Western

mysticism; the Carthusian translations of the fourteenth century carried it to the English vernacular tradition and to the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

The reference modern critical Greek text is the **Suchla edition** (*Patristische Texte und Studien* 33, 1990). The standard accessible English translation is **Colm Luibhéid** in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (Paulist Press, 1987; under copyright). Hekhal hosts the public-domain **John Parker** 1897 translation alongside the Greek. **Andrew Louth**'s *Denys the Areopagite* (1989) is the standard scholarly orientation; **Bernard McGinn**'s *The Foundations of Mysticism* (1991) places the text in its Western reception arc.

Colophon

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