

Eastern and Western Apophatic Paths between Pre-Modern Divinity and Post-Modern Secularity

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Abstract

In speaking to the topic “Between Humanity and Divinity: In Literature, Art, Religion and Culture,” this paper places its emphasis especially on the “Between.” Humanity and divinity can be experienced only in this “between.” The vast traditions, humanistic and religious alike, in both Eastern and Western cultures, define images of humanity and divinity always only in at least implicit relation to one another. Humanity no less than divinity is indefinable and unknowable as such. This unknowability is fundamental to Socratic—but equally to Daoist—wisdom. Only the space between humanity and divinity allows for representation of either and indeed for the extremely rich forms of figuration produced with astonishing abundance by literature and the arts, as well as by religious rites and practices, throughout world cultures. The paper expounds something of the apophatic or negative logic underlying these fields of representation, moving between divinity and humanity, as seen through “apophatic” (or negative theological) lenses. It attempts to do so in a comparative spirit reaching across cultures from Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance studies in the West to ancient and venerated forms of philosophical, religious, and aesthetic thinking in the East, particularly in Chinese tradition. The paper also includes, in closing, a methodological reflection on philology as a speculative discipline. Such a theoretical

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(Received 20 May 2019; Accepted 28 March 2020)

perspective is solicited by the overall theme, since thinking the “between” of humanity and divinity entails suspension of all univocal, positive positionings and fosters a kind of thinking without defined objects, a thinking in and from the space between all definable fields.

Keywords: wisdom, between, apophatic, unknown, negative theology, speculative philology, conjecture

In addressing the wonderful topic “Between Humanity and Divinity: In Literature, Art, Religion and Culture,” I wish to place the emphasis especially on the unassuming preposition “between” that spearheads this shot in the dark into some enormous territories scarcely susceptible of being circumscribed or confined.¹ When all is said and done, humanity and divinity can be known and experienced *only* in and through this “between” because they can be grasped only in their mutual relations, never simply in themselves or as such, but only from a position located somewhere in between the two. The vast traditions, humanistic and religious alike, in both Eastern and Western cultures, that inhabit and animate this “between” define images of humanity and divinity always only in relation to one another. This is at least implicitly, even when not expressly, the case, since both parts of the relation are not as such definable: both are most significantly operative, instead, only in the form of what cannot be grasped and articulated in any discourse.

Considered historically and anthropologically, in light of its myths and rituals, humanity has always understood and defined itself in relation to some conception of divinity—or at least of the Unknown. Yet, humanity, too, no less than divinity, proves to be indefinable and unknowable in itself. The way of thinking that I endeavor to share in this exposition—what I call my “apophatic” or negative way of thinking—always starts from and remains oriented to the *unknown* and *unknowable* as the underlying and most important subject of thinking. Whatever its more proximate designations and determinations, the subject of thinking, the ultimately real, most deeply considered, is unknowable because any way of knowing it has already inevitably reduced it to the finite means and measures of our knowing. The unfathomable mystery of the real in itself, or in its absoluteness, is more fundamental than any known quantities, of whatever type, pertaining to defined entities. We can begin to fathom it only by taking up a position *between* humanity and divinity, or more precisely between our ideas of such realities or mysteries, which themselves immeasurably exceed all our notions or conceptions of them.

¹ My thanks are due to Brian Reynolds, Xavier Lin, and the TACMRS committee and organizers for the honor of inaugurating our meeting on this inspired topic. Since this written version of my speech was synthesized after the fact by putting together notes originally written for extemporaneous oral presentation, the essay retains something of the oral mode and rhetoric that marked it originally as designed to address a specific audience in person and on a unique occasion.

Correlation of Negative Theology and Negative Anthropology

This “way,” then, begins from the admission that humanity can be known only in relation to divinity, which in turn is nothing if not a great Unknown. The Unknown is always already there in the midst—and as the origin—of the known. Realizing this changes everything and revolutionizes our understanding of ourselves and of culture, religion, art, literature, and life. Such a realization can be considered as incarnating a theological viewpoint or, more precisely, a *negatively* theological or “apophatic” viewpoint, that places—or rather recognizes—unknowable mystery at the center of all our knowing. All we know depends, at bottom, on what we do not know.

In order to flesh out this point of view in some detail, I propose to employ a comparative method and approach. The fundamental unknowability of which I speak is crucial to Socratic—but also and equally to Daoist—wisdom. I take the occasion of this meeting of a society for Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance studies, with its home base and center of gravity situated in Taiwan, as serendipitous. It is a venue calling for this mixed type of study and, consequently, for such bifocal vision. This international organization, with its specific amalgam of periods and disciplines, convening in this particular place, is naturally suited for featuring, and therewith also for fostering, cultural hybridity. Even while meeting geographically at National Chi Nan University in the middle of Taiwan, we are positioned culturally and intellectually between East and West. I will begin by developing my argument in the cultural and historical space between Greece and China, between Socratic philosophy and Daoist wisdom, and then pursue some of its ramifications in the span between antiquity and modernity, as well as between disciplines, especially theology, philosophy, literature, and the arts.

Western Tradition

It is proverbial that Socrates (469-399 BCE) knew nothing. His wisdom was precisely knowing that he did *not* know. Socrates had heard from the oracle at Delphi that he was the wisest of men. Reportedly, the Pythian priestess had borne testimony when she gave his friend Chaerephon the famous response: “Of all men living Socrates most wise” (Ἄνδρῶν πάντων Σωκράτης σοφώτατος). This is the form of the oracle transmitted by Diogenes Laertius (ca. 200-250 CE) in his *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers*, book II, chapter 5 (1: 168). Some 150 years earlier, Plato’s *Apology* 21a-d tells the story of how Socrates received this news when he was forty years old. At seventy years old

(17d), during his trial before the Athenians, Socrates recounts the episode, hinting at how he initially found the affirmation that he was wise to be enigmatic, if not laughable, until he learned how to understand it appropriately:

Everyone here, I think, knows Chaerephon, he said, he has been a friend of mine since we were boys together; and he is a friend of many of you too. So you know the eager impetuous fellow he [was]. Well, one day he went to Delphi, and there he had the impudence to put this question—do not jeer, gentlemen, at what I am going to say—he asked, “Is anyone wiser than Socrates?” And the Pythian priestess answered, “No one.”

Well, I was fully aware that I knew absolutely nothing. So what could the god mean? for gods cannot tell lies. For some time I was frankly puzzled to get at his meaning; but at last I embarked on my quest. I went to a man with a high reputation for wisdom—I would rather not mention his name; he was one of the politicians—and after some talk together it began to dawn on me that, wise as everyone thought him and wise as he thought himself, he was not really wise at all. I tried to point this out to him, but then he turned nasty, and so did others who were listening.

So I went away, but with this reflection that anyhow I was wiser than this man; for, though in all probability neither of us knows anything, he thought he did when he did not, whereas I neither knew anything nor imagined I did. (21a-d)

Socrates’s idiosyncratic form of knowing is based essentially on ignorance—but as harboring an indefinable normativity—a standard distinguishing the greatest and only possible human wisdom, which enables Socrates to critique all those who normally pass for wise in their own conceits.

Eastern Tradition

A similar recognition of the overarching priority of unknowing in our human condition is embraced around the same time on the other side of the globe by Zhuangzi (late fourth century BCE). It is expressed in terms recalling Socrates’s wisdom, as just formulated, in Zhuangzi’s famous aphorism: “Those who realize their folly are not true fools.” At the deepest level, Zhuangzi and Socrates alike know only that they know nothing. For both sages, actual knowing takes place always only in a kind of critique or negation of apparent or presumed knowledge. This is why, in a much-quoted formulation, Zhuangzi can say: “Not knowing is profound: knowing is superficial.” Another telling aphorism in *Zhuangzi*, attributed by A. C. Graham to the personage called “Translucence,” states: “Is it by not knowing that you know? Is it that if you do know you are ignorant? Who knows the knowing which is ignorance?” (Graham, ch. 5).

Any finite knowing borders necessarily on unknowing—but *who* knows unknowing? The subject of such Absolute Knowing could not be known, so it could not be absolute knowing. Given this situation, absolute knowing has to relate to, and even ultimately be based on, unknowing.

For both Zhuangzi and Socrates, the knowing of our unknowing proves to be the highest wisdom. Positive knowledge is reserved for the gods or heaven—which means practically that it is relegated to the *unknown*, whereas what seems to be knowable, the human, cannot be known except in relation to this unknown Other. This unknown or Other often figures as the mysterious and inaccessible, or at least unencompassable, incomprehensible realm of heaven, the divine, the domain of divinities.

One of Zhuangzi's, to my mind, most illuminating statements on the fundamental predicament of knowing as dependent on unknowing is the following one from inner chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi*. It casts this dilemma into our terms of the relation between the human and the divine:

To understand what is done by Heaven, and also what is to be done by Man, that is the utmost. . . . However there is a problem here. For our understanding can be in the right only by virtue of a relation of dependence on something, and what it depends on is always peculiarly unfixated. So how could I know whether what I call Heavenly is not really the Human? How could I know whether what I call the Human is not really the Heavenly? (40)

This view—namely, that everything is known only with reference to and in relation to the Unknown or unfixated—is opposed to what have become our typical assumptions in the modern, secular age. Instead of starting from what seems to be concretely evident before us, Zhuangzi acknowledges that all our knowledge is leveraged from the Unknown and is not founded on anything positively known. The very idea of the positively known, of the certainty of immediate, discrete, empirical givens, depends on “the heavenly,” and so on something ungraspably out of reach for finite, human knowing.

Between Transcendence and Immanence

This is the basic pattern of thought already in the *Dao-de-jing* from its very first verses. Everything depends on a universal All, which is nothing, nothing that can be thought or grasped. It is called the Way:

Dào kě dào, fēi cháng Dào 道可道，非常道 [The Way that can be said is not the everlasting way.]

Ming kě míng, fēi cháng míng 名可名，非常名 [Names that can be named are not changeless names.]²

Chapter 25 of the *Dao-de-jing* elaborates with fecund images on these aphoristic principles gesturing toward an antecedence to all that is nameable and sayable:

There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth. How still it was and formless, standing alone, and undergoing no change, reaching everywhere and in no danger of being exhausted! It may be regarded as the Mother of all things.

I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Tao. Making an effort to give it a name, I call it The Great.³

The terms employed here are characteristic of what could be called a vocabulary of transcendence. They are introduced through the experience of being exceeded in one's capacity of knowing, an experience that causes such terms to be formulated in a tension toward a source they do not comprehend.

A similar dependence of All on an unsayable One obtains in the metaphysical vision of Plato's *Parmenides*. These two indispensable source texts, the *Dao-de-jing* and the *Parmenides*, found and ground the vast traditions of Daoism and Platonism respectively. Considering them in parallel, as I am doing, might be challenged on the alleged grounds that the Chinese tradition is not metaphysical and has no conception of transcendence. There has been a great deal of debate as to whether this other, "Heaven," might be construed as another world, a metaphysical reality, or must rather be understood as purely immanent.⁴ Roger Ames and David Hall, along with A. C. Graham, and many others have taken an emphatic position denying any presence or relevance of metaphysics and any role for transcendence in the classical thinking of ancient China. These scholars are also generally eager to deny the relevance of divinity, except perhaps as myth, in this culture. They follow in the great tradition of the European Enlightenment with its humanism based on human reason. Since the eighteenth century, many philosophers of a secular bent have wished to see China as exemplary of a highly developed, sophisticated culture without God or divinities (see Ching and Oxtoby, *Discovering China*).

² Chinese texts quoted from the *Chinese Text Project*, <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>.

³ Translated by James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*. This translation is only one possible interpretation. I compare translations of Laozi's *Tao Tê Ching* by D. C. Lau; Arthur Waley; and Paul J. Lin.

⁴ See *Transcendence, Immanence, and Intercultural Philosophy*, edited by Nahum Brown and William Franke.

In *Apophatic Paths from Europe to China*, I treat this issue as an example lending itself to intercultural critique and as opening up far-reaching comparisons between East and West in their most characteristic conceptions of reality. Such an issue of immanence versus transcendence brings out the necessity of our positioning ourselves between cultures, between poetry and theology, between humanity and divinity, in order to understand each pole of opposition in terms of its other.

My argument, in the end, is that the standoff between those who deny transcendence to classical Chinese thought and those who fervently assert it can be resolved, or at least shifted onto a higher ground, by understanding transcendence negatively as apophatic. In both traditions, East and West, the transcendent (as well as the immanent, for that matter) is to be understood most profoundly as the unknown. In order to make this connection conspicuous and compelling, it will help to put both traditions into historical perspective and to view them in parallel.

The Metaphysical Apophatic: Wang Bi and Plotinus in Parallel

An apophatic metaphysical dimension of Daoism emerges especially at an advanced stage of philosophical reflection with Wang Bi (226-249 CE), just as the apophatic metaphysical implications of Platonism come fully into their own only with Plotinus (205-270 CE) and the beginnings of Neoplatonic philosophy. Both of these pivotal figures in their respective traditions perform a mystical-metaphysical troping of the founding discourse, which is apophatic and aphoristic, whether in a logical or a poetic register. Both Wang Bi's and Plotinus's mediations of their respective traditions make explicit the origin of All in Nothing and the founding role of Unknowing. In Wang Bi nothingness becomes the object of spiritual experience, while in Plotinus the One that cannot be grasped as anything definable serves analogously as the empty or at least unthinkable focus for a mystical ascent of the soul.

Key to working between divinity and humanity in both traditions is recognizing the Unknowability of divinity and humanity, their being nothing graspable in positive terms by finite intelligence, in both the East and the West. This is the case already implicitly in both (Neo)Daoism and in (Neo)Platonism. The No-Thing at the origin of all things in the *Dao-de-jing* (ch. 25) and the "beyond being" (*epekeina tes ousias*) of Plato's Good (*Republic* 509B) are apophatic embryos. They are developed with speculative élan by Wang Bi's discourse on Nothing in *Laozi zhilue* and by Plotinus's meditation on the One in the *Enneads*

respectively. In each case, only a “between” of divinity and humanity can be known—and only as in relation to the Unknown.

Both Plotinus and Wang Bi are recasting their respective traditions at a great historical remove from their original sources. Plotinus is at work during the decadence of the Roman Empire (well underway already in the third century CE and leading to the official Fall of Rome in 476) and Wang Bi flourishes soon after the demise of the Han Empire (206 BCE–220 CE). In each of these cultures, East and West, these are periods of loss of all verbal certainties and of authoritative, hegemonic discourse, periods issuing especially in acute self-critical reflection. Opening this distance from their sources creates a “between” of reflection in each case on the relation of the Nothing to the All. The implicitly *apophatic* metaphysics of both traditions emerges at these crucial junctures hundreds of years after their founding moments, at a stage at which the ethos of empire in each culture is crumbling.⁵

From the Apophatic to Representation and the Mythic

Only the space between humanity and divinity allows for representation of either. And this space allows for extremely rich forms of figuration producing the arts, literature, and religious rites with creative and imaginative abundance throughout world cultures. I wish to expound something of the apophatic or negative logic underlying these fields of representation as they move between divinity and humanity. I attempt to do so in a comparative spirit with materials ranging across cultures from Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance studies in the West to classical forms of philosophical, religious, and aesthetic thinking in the East, especially in Chinese poetry, art, and education.

Of course, we do always have some positive representations, and we inevitably work with and from them. My title for this oral address, as it first occurred to me, pivoted on positive representations of divinity and humanity in Western and Eastern traditions: “From Blake’s ‘Eternal Great Humanity Divine’ to Confucian Jūnzǐ (君子) as Consummate Humanity: Apophatic Paths between Post-Modern Secularity and Pre-Modern Divinity.” This admittedly cumbersome title identifies some emblematic images of fusion, or at least coincidence, between the human and the divine. I was thinking in particular of a richly imaged passage in Blake’s *Milton*, book 1, that teems in sensuous

⁵ See, further, Franke, *Apophatic Paths* 53.

forms for otherworldly realities. The images of the passage take shapes figuring especially the human body and its anatomy:

Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song,
 Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms
 Of terror & mild moony luster, in soft sexual delusions
 Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose
 His burning thirst & freezing hunger! Come into my hand
 By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
 From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
*The Eternal Great Humanity Divine*⁶ planted his Paradise,
 And in it caus'd the Spectres of the Dead to take sweet forms
 In likeness of himself. Tell also of the False Tongue! vegetated
 Beneath your land of shadows, of its sacrifices and
 Its offerings, even till Jesus, the image of the Invisible God,
 Became its prey—a curse, an offering and an atonement
 For Death Eternal in the heavens of Albion, & before the Gates
 Of Jerusalem his Emanation, in the heavens beneath Beulah. (2.1-15)

Blake collapses humanity and divinity together rather than opening up the space between them. He is a masterful mythmaker and seems here to produce a demigod. In this meditation, I wish to work towards a more apophatic conception—or rather non-conception—of divinity. From this perspective, God is formless. Accordingly, “the great form has no form” (大象無形), as the *Dao-de-jing* famously states (ch. 41, sec. 8). Likewise, the sage, the exemplar of true humanity, is a characterless *outis* or No One. Such is the quintessential Western protagonist of the quest for wisdom ever since Homer's Odysseus, who is self-(un)identified to the Cyclopes as no one (οὐτις). Such anonymous non-identity holds sway down to Robert Musil's *Man without Qualities* (*Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*).⁷

Consummate Humanity or the Sage

On the Chinese side of the comparison, and again starting from the richly filled-out representations of some ideal type of humanity that aspires to approach the divine, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) offers a definition of the *junzi* (君子) in terms of many positive characteristics. In particular, a *junzi* is loyal, obedient, knowledgeable, and disciplined. The *junzi* can live with poverty; the *junzi* does more and speaks less. Among the virtues attributed to him without fail, *ren*

⁶ My italics.

⁷ The theme is studied in many of its history-making avatars by Heller-Roazen, *No One's Ways*.

(仁, benevolence or goodness, also “humaneness”) generally designates the very core of being or becoming a *junzi*. This quality includes the notion of being a gentleman and counts as the basis for a kind of ideal personality in Confucianism. These positive characterizations manifest something of the positivist penchant typical of much philology. Indeed, philology happened to be Zhu Xi’s forte. He was a categorizer and classifier. He is the systematizer of Confucianism and the founder of the Confucian educational system. This gives him an immense importance in Chinese cultural history. He is often recognized as the equivalent of a Chinese Thomas Aquinas.

The Daoist notion of the consummate person (*zhì rén* 至人) contrasts with this Confucian ideal and model. Unlike the *junzi*, the Daoist sage (*shèng rén* 聖人) is not wise in any positive sense of the term. He is rather without wisdom, without words, without distinctions. He must even be without perspective or bias. As François Jullien writes, employing this phrase even as the title of one of his books, “A sage has no ideas” (*Un sage est sans idée*). More broadly, I have written, “The sage is himself without character or quality. He is indefinable and without exclusions—much like God in apophatic theology” (*Apophatic Paths* 41). There is a warning here against too one-sidedly positive approaches to characterizing humanity and divinity.

“Between” and “In”

Whether we are talking of humanity or divinity, what we *cannot* say is key. The negative is most crucial in our approach to what these terms must always leave unsaid and commend rather to regions of inexhaustible, unfathomable mystery. This predicament is encapsulated linguistically with another of the conference title’s most inconspicuous, but also most consequential, words, its other preposition, namely, “in.” The proximity and even inextricability of divinity and humanity is intimated already in this little word alone. Whenever it is used, “in” encapsulates the status of *knowing* as being an encompassing of some theme or object within a human purview. Yet at the same time saying “in” presupposes that one can stand outside of the domain named in an open and undetermined field of the unknown—that unknown which so often lends itself to being figured as divine. Designating something as “in” is always a matter of circumscribing it from a position that is presumed to stand outside it, but what (or whom) that outside position is itself *in* remains unstated. It operates rather as an unknown that powers the whole process from behind the scenes.

The “between” enables us not to say what divinity or humanity is but

rather to represent the one in terms of the other—or, at any rate, in terms of something other than itself, however unknown this other may remain. “Between” directs and guides us to reason analogically *from* given phenomena *to* what is not given—to the other as other, or as yet ungrasped, undefined. We can best speak about humanity and divinity in an idiom of neither/nor. We can only say what they *are not* because all of our utterances are inevitably inadequate to what they really are. Their absolute reality defies statement in language. But we indirectly glimpse them as neither this nor that, neither humanity nor divinity in any definitive terms. What we grasp of either of them is rather something in between the two. The “between” is the undefined space indirectly revealed by how other realms or registers or realities impinge on it. This space of the “between” is an imaginative construction.

“Between Humanity and Divinity” thus invites us to consideration of divinity *in* humanity and vice versa. The enigma of the way divinity and humanity elucidate each other lurks in the other covertly key word in the topic for the conference, the word standing at the head of the second part of its title: “in.” “In,” too, is a kind of “between.” What does it mean for divinity to be present “in” humanity? The “in” straddles divinity and humanity: from in between the two, “in” articulates both transcendence and immanence at the same time. “In” says both of these conceptually contradictory relations in one breath. In speaking of the relations between humanity and divinity, “in” connotes immanent transcendence, or transcendent immanence. The divine is, by its nature, or super-nature, transcendent. But, to the extent that divinity can be experienced at all, or is at least rendered in some expressible, transmissible form, it has to be found *in* literature, *in* art, *in* religion, and *in* culture.

In other words, the divine can only be apprehended in something human. While according to its concept, divinity is absolute and independent of human apprehension, any actual conceiving of the divine is, for us, always only in some sort of human terms. And yet, the divine can never be exhaustively identified with anything human: it can only be mysteriously manifest and *indirectly* refracted *in* literature, art, religion, culture, etc. The whole mystery of the relation between the divine and the human is concentrated into this notion of each being “in” the other. How is it possible for the transcendent and holy and spiritual to be present and manifest *in* material form and *in* a profane world? And how can the latter in any way be grounded *in* a transcendent, divine order of things? These perennial questions are, of course, answered very differently in different ages of culture: they are highly time-sensitive and remain, in the end, always open to other answers. Jesus in the Gospels promises an unveiling of this mystery only on a certain day when he will return through the Spirit: “At

that day you shall know that I *am* in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (John 14.20).⁸

The relations of inclusive exclusion (as with transcendence and immanence) dealt with by humanities studies are temporal as well as spatial, chronological as well as geographical. In working on pre-modern (classical, medieval, Renaissance) literature and culture today, we are working inevitably from a post-modern perspective, or better *between* pre-modern and post-modern times. We work within the modern doubly negated (in both directions, pre- and post-). This form of inclusive exclusion (between humanity and divinity, between classical and modern, between disciplines of literature, religion, art, philosophy, and even science) demands to be thought apophatically—that is, with allowance for, and even a certain concentration on, what escapes thinking, or in other words on what is *thought as unthinkable*. This makes the unthinkable and unsayable the keys to any comprehensive thinking and discourse on these subjects.

To think theologically is to think from and based on something that is undefined and indefinable. Following a certain set of practices and conventions that have been developed especially, although hardly exclusively, in Western cultures under the influence of monotheism, we can call it “God.” This inaccessibility to rational definition and adequate description of its very subject matter is the core idea of Negative Theology and the insight that makes it pertinent as a latent presence in almost all forms of radical—and therewith also of fundamental—thinking. Such thinking is thinking that aspires to think things from their origin and as a whole.

In this “in” between transcendence and immanence, the connecting “between” is already at work. In my work as a theological thinker and as a philosopher of the humanities, I work persistently between the secular and the religious, between the humanities tradition and revealed religion. This makes for a theological criticism of literature, or for reading literature as revelation, in a critical approach that I locate between philosophy and philology and propound as a “speculative philology.” This intellectual project comprises also an apophatic philosophy and a negative theology. As an example of this method, I take the most contentless terms of our topic, “between” and “in,” and make my exposition pivot precisely on them as touching on the full range and the plenitude of all our subjects and centers of interest.

⁸ For Bible quotations, I use the Authorized King James Version, checked against and, where necessary, corrected by the Greek New Testament and the Vulgate (*Bibliorum Sacrorum*).

In Between Periods, Disciplines, Cultures

My overall purpose here is to show some ways in which we as scholars of the humanities or researchers in Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance studies, work between divinity and humanity—between nothing and nothing—in the between that alone is determinable. We work between cultures, between disciplines, between periods, and all of these are transforms of working between humanity and divinity because, most deeply, all of these angles of approach probe the relations between the known and the unknown, the immanent and the transcendent, the finite and the infinite, the marked and the unmarked.⁹

As classicists and humanists, we inevitably work between periods. I will not talk at any length on the “between periods” specifically, so I want just to summarily sketch how it, too, can be made part of the overall design of this reflection on our working between humanity and divinity as scholars in the humanities concentrated on the inexhaustible meanings and truth realized in these traditions. We cannot help but interpret any historical past through our present. The event of the truth of the past is grafted onto our present experience: it is incarnate in our present consciousness and can happen only in light of present truth.¹⁰ It happens as an event of truth and therefore of divinity only because of this historical “between” and the uncanny anachronistic distancing and nearing that this entails. Divinity is revealed through historical process and its unfolding. Nevertheless, I wish to insist, it is actually revealed only as the unrevealable. This is the emphasis of negative theology, but it can also find support in fundamental theologies, even ones of very different types such as those of Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. Revelation always entails some form of *re-veiling*. By giving an expressible form to the inexpressible, revelation at the same time places a veil over or occults what it ultimately (and impossibly) aims to reveal.

We work even between *worlds*. The world is always other than our conception of it: we must learn to approach this world as other—as mediated by something or someone unknown and wholly other such as “heaven”—rather than as simply and immediately given. This is how classical poetry and tradition, unlike secular modernity, present the world. Such a perspective involves a deeper insight, refracting our own existential relation to the world and all the

⁹ Niklas Luhmann’s analyses of religion as about the “unmarked” in its relation to what can be marked and assigned a determinate significance offer a remarkably efficacious vocabulary for articulating what I treat as the apophatic (*Einführung* and *Gesellschaft*).

¹⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method* offers detailed philosophical exposition of this predicament.

complications implicated therein. Seeing the world from such an in-between perspective is thus in crucial ways richer and more wholesome than more supposedly positive ways of seeing. Such an approach involves imagining *this* world *as* other rather than simply evading this world for another. Such imagining is, after all, a way in which the *Divine Comedy*—with all its subtle and abundant representations of human and historical realities as leveraged from their final, eschatological truth revealed in eternity—pivots from the medieval world towards modernity.

Another crucial and inescapable aspect of the “between” that we continually explore is the dimension of interdisciplinarity: between literature and theology (or revelation), between theology and philosophy, between philosophy and philology. “Philology” represents an older, more traditional vocabulary for the humanities scholarship that I aim to revive (see especially the discussion of “speculative philology” in the final section of this essay). I conceive philology as working between poetic language and the divine word—in poetry, as well as in Holy Scripture. In this sense, interdisciplinary philology operates between humanity and divinity. In fact, for me as a theological thinker, all of these “betweens” are forms of moving between humanity and divinity, between the known and the unknown. The amphiboly of (theological) transcendence and (human) immanence is constitutive of thoughtful discourse per se. What we understand always hinges on what we do not understand—as Zhuangzi and Socrates so suggestively demonstrate in their so differently, but equally, ironic styles.

Literary Form as Revelation: Between the Known and the Unknown

Our being between the known and the Unknown opens up the space of imaginative representation of divinity in interaction with humanity. Theological revelation and the humanities tradition are mutually dependent and inseparable. In order to illustrate this, I will give some examples following the outline of two recent books of mine. Taken together, these examples demonstrate how literary form operates between humanity and divinity and thereby opens the known to the Unknown. They show how literary form becomes a revelation of divinity by embodying and alluding to the Unknown.

The Bible

A Theology of Literature: The Bible as Revelation in the Tradition of the Humanities moves through a series of literary genres, interpreting them as forms and aspects of revelation that build progressively on one another and develop into a comprehensive genre in which literature is essentially revelation. At the end of this series, the generically *sui generis* and eclectic Gospels recapitulate the Bible's forms of myth and history, prophecy and proverb, poetic writing and apocalyptic. Our human, philological categories are unveiled in their covert operation as theological categories, or as beholden ultimately to the indeterminate and unknown, whereby they are made to work between humanity and divinity.

The first of these genres as laid out in the Bible is myth and is found in the book of Genesis. It addresses the Unknown, raising such unanswerable questions as: Where do we come from? Or: What is our purpose? Its literary form is that of archetypal narration or story. I take "myth" to entail representation or revelation of the fundamental conditions of existence. The brutal fact of our "thrownness" into existence (as Heidegger puts it) is represented in Genesis as our being created. We are also sexually differentiated and dependent, and therefore vulnerable and disposed to sin, etc. Our constitutional createdness also builds into our existence a kind of reference to a Creator, to some source of our being that transcends our own finite impotence. Until recently at least, it seemed that any finite being was incapable of producing a living creature like itself, or in its own image.

The literary genre or narrative type that comes next in the narrative sequence of the Bible is that of epic history in Exodus, which probes this unknown origin more concretely. It asks: where do we come from historically as a nation? The book of Exodus presents a kind of epic history recounting the founding event of a nation or people (in this case Israel, the Hebrews) and revealing its (sacred) destiny. Such a work first forges an ability to articulate national self-consciousness. History is presented in a narrative frame designed to reveal its providential purpose and meaning.

The next overarching and pervasive genre in the Bible, one comprehending a number of its books, as well as characterizing the work as a whole, is that of prophecy. Formally, prophecy presents the voice of God directly in the form of oracles: "Thus saith the Lord." But this divine speech is persistently poetic. In fact, I contend that the revelation is in the poetry and therefore not opposed to the human voice and language that expresses it. The prophetic idiom, for example, in Isaiah's "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (14.14-16) is archetypal and often indeterminate in nature: and yet

it speaks into specific situations of human history (*Theology* 48). Despite its local situatedness and concern with immediate actualities, prophecy's universally poetic character enables it to address others elsewhere and to be experienced as poignantly pertinent in an almost unlimited range of other historical contexts.

The next major generic division in the sequence of books making up the Bible comprises the books known as the Writings. In them, the human voice is heard directly, but always only in relation to divinity. Human voices, and even the human as such, become revelations of divinity. In Ecclesiastes, human reasoning about the "vanity of vanities" seems to be perfectly ungodly. How can anything like that reveal divinity? Yet it does. It does so, ironically, by showing the futility of human reason with its circuits, which brings everything back always only to itself. We cannot overlook the speaker's (preacher's) circular and self-referential rhetoric. His statement: "I said to myself, what profit have I if another will come after me in my place and possess all that is mine?" (2.18) reads as a *reductio ad absurdum*. It demonstrates the limits and vanity of finite human reasoning and breaks it open to immediate perception of being and beauty that it cannot understand. "Light is sweet and truly it is a pleasant thing for the eyes to behold the sun" (11.7). These lyrical outbursts convey another perspective and voice, a highly poetic one that escapes the circularity of self-referential human reasoning. This reasoning thereby disqualifies itself as such and opens a perspective on the vision of God that it is not able actually to articulate or to comprehend.

Another case of apparently profanely human utterances that end up sublimely expressing the divine is found in the provocatively erotic poetry that is attributed to Solomon in the *Canticum Canticorum*. In the Song of Songs, an infinite degree of sensual intensity turns out to be the best image for the infinite and unfathomable love of God.

This series of genres in the Bible culminates with an unprecedented new invention, namely, the Gospel—a genre in which truth is manifest in and through the transformation of particular human beings' lives. This genre works expressly between humanity and divinity rather than just by purveying purportedly miraculous facts. It recapitulates the whole series of the genres, since it subsumes prophecy, poetry, historical narrative, and myth. The Gospel brings to a burning focus the aim of all these literary forms to reveal or witness to truth, and it calls for a life decision in response to its persuasive appeal. Its truth is to be verified in the individual's experience of self-transformation or "salvation." The Gospel in these terms represents the culmination of my intergeneric reading of the Bible as poetic, prophetic, epic, historical, and mythical—or rather as finally working between all of these genres.

Homer and Virgil

Much of my literary-critical work can be understood as an extension to secular writers, or at least to pagan traditions, of this reading of revelation as occurring *between* divinity and humanity. Some of the books in question concentrate on reading between the secular and the sacred in ancient and medieval literature up to the Renaissance, especially as it is found anticipated already in Dante. Other books of mine then move beyond this center-point into the poetry of modern writers working in the wake of Dante, but still in crucial ways within his paradigm of a poetics of revelation.

On the first leg of this, in the end, unified trajectory, *The Revelation of Imagination: From Homer and the Bible through Virgil and Augustine to Dante* studies the interface between divinity and humanity in the prophetic poetry of ancient traditions, both pagan and biblical, that lead up to and are synthesized into unity by Dante. Following a reading of the Bible in the book's first chapter ("Humanities Tradition and the Bible") as comprising a series of literary genres of revelation, along the lines just sketched, the ensuing chapters elaborate on the development of poetic prophecy as divine revelation through human creativity in a central strand—which is arguably the backbone—of Western literary tradition.

The book's second chapter, titled "Homer's Musings and the Divine Muse," traces in the *Odyssey* the ambiguity of the divine and the human with reference particularly to this creativity. Homer abounds in all-too-human gods and in insistently "godlike" men. Odysseus represents the struggle for human autonomy against invasive divinity, but also a kind of divinization of the human. Much of the charm of Homer rests in the ambiguous light showing the human and the divine as reflected in one another. Homer works between the two. There is even a movement of transfer of divine power to humans and toward their indifferenciation from divinity, as humans become divinely clever, having learned to sing like divine bards. Odysseus himself, even without the muses, enchants with his song and story. In his defiance of the gods (especially of Poseidon), Odysseus emerges as a kind of hero of secularization—as Horkheimer and Adorno compellingly demonstrate in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. And yet, secularization itself shines forth as an epiphany of the divine within the world. Homer presents an only incipient differentiation, and, finally, a kind of fusion, of the two. Divinity is realized in and through the secular realization of the human being.

The succeeding chapter, on "Virgil's Invention of History as Prophecy," traces Virgil's typological history of Rome as a revelation of its divine destiny.

In terms uncannily similar to those of biblical typology, Aeneas represents an archetype of a legendary heroism that is meant to be fulfilled by Augustus Caesar in Virgil's own time. In any case, for all its investment in interpretation of the mythic and historical past, the future remains the great Unknown that Virgilian prophecy interprets. Virgil reinvents prophecy as interpretation of history—in contrast with all manner of mantics and soothsayers or haruspicates, who degrade prophecy to more material forms pretending to magical efficacy. The future must remain unknown also because it is *freely to be made*. Divinity is constitutive of a call to Humanity that operates necessarily between “is” and “can be.”

Augustine and Dante

The fourth chapter of *The Revelation of Imagination*, titled “Augustine’s Discovery of Reading as Revelation,” probes the immense dimension of revelation that opens up in and with subjectivity that is destined to continue unfolding throughout modern times. God is discovered as “more interior to me than my own intimate self”: *Tu autem eras interior intimo meo*. In Augustine’s *Confessions*, the divine mystery constitutes the core of human subjectivity. Theological revelation takes place in the self-consciously reflective speech addressed to God in Augustine’s sustained dialogue: it all takes place within the frame of a prayer or conversation with God that grasps all human action and utterance as enabled by and expressive of divinity. The human subject emerges in the *Confessions* as the essential locus of divine revelation.

The final chapter, “Dante’s Poetics of Revelation,” recapitulates the forms of prophetic revelation whereby the divine becomes manifest in the human, literary forms that have been explored from different angles in each of the previous chapters. Dante remakes and integrates these forms into his own original synthesis. Following in the tracks of the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, Dante seeks revelation initially through a *descensus ad inferas* as his means of penetrating the unknown world and moving deeper into the meaning of life and the cosmos. He works from our human and historical behaviors, and his discerning, poetic-prophetic eye projects them into their eternal significance in the divine world. Above all, poetry, with its capacity for provoking ecstatic transport, is instrumental to constructing this “between” moving from the human to the divine.

Inspired by this model, throughout my career, I have practiced criticism as an art moving between the human and the divine as illustrated exemplarily by the *Divine Comedy*. My readings of Dante begin from the address to the reader

as the place of revelation that is an existential and theological event of truth catalyzed by Dante's text (see *Dante's Interpretive Journey*, ch. 1). Dante's work is itself a transmission of the Bible and of secular or pagan poetic tradition in at least two of its most world-historically significant forms—the epic tradition of Virgil and Homer and the lyric tradition of the Troubadours. But whatever historical sources it amalgamates, Dante's great poem comes into our historical present of interpretation and interrogates all of our coordinates for understanding ourselves.

Dante's poetic language works as divine revelation throughout the *Comedy*, but it does so in some special and peculiar ways in the *Paradiso*. In this final segment, the poem is scanned and governed by the ineffability topos. Divine revelation of theological transcendence is made to occur by self-reflection in the immanence of human consciousness. Reflection particularly on the limits of language serves the task of approaching the transcendent reality of the divine. Human self-reflection is realized as Trinitarian, as reflecting the inner life of the divine Trinity in the self-reflective dynamics of lyrical language.¹¹ This is why Dante can claim that his poem has been written by both heaven and earth—that is, by both human and divine agency:

Se mai continga che il poema sacro
A cui a posto mano e cielo e terra
Si che m'ha fatto per più anni macro . . . (25.1-3)

[If it contingently should come to pass
that the sacred poem to which heaven and earth have put their hand,
so that it has made me meager over the years . . .]

Dante's journeying to heaven in the *Paradiso* brings him back, paradoxically but constantly, to the earth and its topographies. Definitively, the poem's final image of God shows Dante our image or "effigy" (*nostra effigie*), but he cannot see how it is connected with the concentric circles of Trinitarian Divinity: he is defeated like a geometer trying to square the circle. This is a revealingly liberal arts type of image for unknowability applied to the mystery of the divine and the human as intersecting incomprehensibly. Only the space between them is intelligible at all.

¹¹ I broach this topic in an addendum, "Self-Referentiality and the Transcendent," to chapter 2 of *Dante and the Sense of Transgression*. I work it out in full detail in my manuscript *Self-Reflection: Dante's Paradiso and the Theological Origins of Modern Thought*.

Modern Secular Writers in the Wake of Dante: Self-Negation and Revelation

As we pass through and beyond the medieval period to the Renaissance, the role of subjectivity intensifies, or at least comes more into self-conscious focus. Infinite self-reflection becomes the site, as well as the form, of revelation of the Infinite. Dante intensifies this focus, taking cues from Augustine. And after Dante, modern writers in his wake continue to reflect on ways that the Unknown opens into a dimension of divine mystery. The Unknown is often experienced as an anguishing gulf by modern sensibilities. The processes of secularization that register clearly in Dante's poetic successors remain always beholden to some sense of divinity in the strongest of modern poets, even if only as irretrievably lost. I take up this succession then in *Secular Scriptures: Modern Theological Poetics in the Wake of Dante* by reading Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Blake, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Dickinson, and Yeats in light of this premise and in a Dantesque frame.

Method: Between Philosophy and Philology

I have now sketched my version of doing philology and philosophy between humanity and divinity. I have said that I am a theological thinker, and have hinted at how I twist or shape that calling into compatibility with being also a speculative philologist. I hasten to add, and indeed to emphasize, that the "theology" in question here is in no way exclusive of secular humanism. On the contrary, my theological thinking consists in dialogue with humanist philology. It turns constantly on the interpenetration of, and convertibility between, theological and philological approaches. That is why I welcomed the invitation to speak to this philological organization (TACMRS) on this topic suspended between humanity and divinity and to give you my approach to what I consider to be the most decisive task and challenge in our present, now irreversibly global, predicament. Thinking between the human and the divine is imperative for understanding our worldwide culture going forward together into our now ineluctably post-secular future.

I wish, in conclusion, to consider, from a methodological perspective, the kind of philology that this sort of vision between divinity and humanity makes possible and can fruitfully foster. Speculative philology is not per se methodological—for reasons that Gadamer expounds in *Truth and Method*, beginning

from the contrastive terms of his title. Speculative philology, as I conceive it, is even quite opposed to any rigid formulation and systematization of its procedures and techniques as a prescribable method. Still, it does call for probing reflection on its own ways and means. Self-reflection, after all, is constitutive of the speculative as such. “Speculative” comes from *speculum* in Latin, the word for “mirror.” Self-reflection is thus crucial to this peculiarly “speculative” type of philological/philosophical insight.

Philology, of course, is a fact-based, historical discipline that works from the concrete, physical evidence of documents and archeological artifacts. However, at its best, this material archive is used in creative and imaginative ways in order to reconstruct the experience of individuals. Such personal experience cannot be known by any strictly positive or scientific method. Philology, in the end, is intent on contemplating things such as the mind of an author, or the significance of a myth, or the purport of other cultural phenomena. In other words, philology deals with phenomena of meaning. Such “things” are inevitably multiple, relational, and perspectival. Philology is thus oriented ultimately to unknowables—not positively circumscribable entities, but relational phenomena consisting in unlimited possible perspectives. Meaning is contextual and relational and opens onto an infinity that remains always unknown, even as it orients knowing. As phenomena of meaning, all of the representations of culture are suspended between the known and the unknown.

Given the relational and intrinsically significant type of being with which it deals, philology, at its core and origin, is an inherently speculative discipline. The method of speculative philology that I practice and advocate entails reading across and between periods. It enables us to make unusual juxtapositions that can reveal uncanny coincidences and foster unexpected insights. In fact, by its serendipitous nature dealing with inherently contingent materials, speculative philology bears much in common with the arts of hunting and of seafaring—or with detective work, or again with art-historical investigations seeking to verify attributions of works to artists. Carlo Ginzburg makes such associations on the basis of what he calls a “conjectural paradigm.” I situate this type of thinking in the tradition of negative theology by linking it with the (howsoever different) conjectural method of Nicholas of Cusa in his *De coniectura*, following up immediately on his path-breaking chef-d’oeuvre *De docta ignorantia*.¹²

A conjectural or evidentiary paradigm makes use of cause and effect reasoning, but the demonstration is nonetheless based on a kind of guesswork

¹² English and German translations of Cusa’s Latin texts are available online at: <http://www.cusanus-portal.de/>.

rather than on a logical necessity. The description of a cause or an effect rests on choosing always only some aspect of the phenomena in question. Other completely different descriptions are always possible. For David Hume, causality is never perceptible as such, nor is it provable. What we can perceive is only a concatenation of different phenomena, not their intrinsic necessity. This leaves entirely open what the real or ultimate cause is. Causation, in any given instance or phenomenon, can be described as working on many different levels at once. As we ascend these successive levels, ultimately, the cause of “being itself” would be at stake, since any existing thing must in the first instance be caused simply to *be*—as well as, consequently or secondarily, to be big or small or heavy or light, or whatever other characteristics might be attributed to it. Not only each specific determination, but also the very being of any thing at all, needs to be accounted for in terms of its cause. This is so, at least to the extent that we enter into a causal mode of thinking in the first place and accept it as valid.

Causation is, in the end, a metaphysical concept—as Hume convincingly proved in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. It remains abstract, and any particular causal explanation requires an imaginative construction. Like any other such means, determining causation is an inventive mode of grasping reality. The indispensable imaginative component of causal explanation, or of any construction of discursive meaning whatsoever, is given striking relief in the work of Giambattista Vico. My principal inspiration and historical point of reference in proposing a speculative philology is Vico and his *New Science* (*Scienza nuova*). Vico’s work offers a model for a practice of philosophical philology as a speculative discipline. It consists in identifying talents and techniques for interpreting what cannot be strictly known apodictically but can only be imaginatively conjectured. The myths of the gentile gods are the original conjectural inventions necessary to the emergence and formation of human language in Vico’s speculative anthropology.

The conjectural, imaginative force involved in any construction of history is underscored further, with emphasis on the struggle for power that it embodies, in provocative ways by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin suggests how historical narratives can be blasted open and given entirely new meaning through their being re-imagined around a decisive event that takes on Messianic significance in the “now-time” (*die Jetzt-Zeit*) of interpretation itself. His “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (“Geschichtsphilosophischen Thesen”), taken along with his “Politische-Theologisches Fragment,” constitute further classics in the genre of employing philological methods speculatively for purposes of radically revising history and even of reshaping society. Such employments enable critics to use

literature, with its more concretely conjectural approach, to probe philosophical questions in subtle ways that escape the more abstract registers of systematic, philosophical, and deductive discourse.

This conjectural method is akin to what artists of countless different types require in order to make their art a means of discovering and revealing reality. Novelists, for example, require such conjecturing. This is at least what Honoré de Balzac argues in his account of their highest ambitions as crystallized in his encyclopedic *Human Comedy* (*La comédie humaine*). Those writers who are “really philosophers” (“réellement philosophes”) have an ability that science itself can hardly explain. “It is a sort of second sight that allows them to guess the truth in all possible situations; or, even better, I do not know what power transports them to where they must, where they want to be. They invent the truth, by analogy . . .” (“C’est une sorte de seconde vue qui leur permet de deviner la vérité dans toutes les situations possibles; ou, mieux encore, je ne sais quelle puissance qui les transporte là où ils doivent, où ils veulent être. Ils inventent le vrai, par analogie . . .”) (Balzac 53-54). What all-too-commonly goes by the name of “intuition” amounts to an analogical and conjectural mode of thinking in the interstices between different models and paradigms deployed so as to discern something shared in common, but inexpressible as such, operating in every one of them.

As mentioned at the outset, I found the choice of topic for this conference to be inspired, and so I was moved to construct my address around its exact verbal formulation in the conference title. The “between” is something like a magical or miraculous place because it does not require presupposing or positing the things it stands between: it can treat them hypothetically and obliquely—as in relation to one another rather than as self-standing, unequivocally posited, independently existing entities.

Both humanity and divinity are besieged and threatened species today. Many researchers and thinkers deny that they exist at all. The death of God has been proclaimed for centuries, and the death of the human could not but follow in its wake. The latter evacuation of the human subject has been embraced with determination by a large, amorphous school of criticism taking its cues especially from French “postmodern” thinking in the style of Michel Foucault or Giles Deleuze (Foucault 8-9). Nevertheless, the ways we relate to both divinity and humanity are in any case very real indeed, and they are impinged on mightily by our imaginations of what either of these two open mysteries could possibly be. In this “between,” we are free to explore all that humanity and divinity have meant, and can mean, across cultures and in our own global predicament today.

Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, from beginning to end, superlatively incarnates

and illustrates this predicament. Dante represents the human world and all its misery or glory as projected into the eternal worlds of heaven, hell, and purgatory. We see our finite, human reality in the perspective of the infinite, divine reality of which it is a premonition or prefiguration—a faint shadow or a fleeting spark. In following up on the vision of this text and others like it, including the Bible, alongside works by Homer, Virgil, and Augustine, humanities studies constantly show us the particular and finite in the perspective of the universal and infinite. They show how everything relates to everything else in an ambit of interlocking contexts that expand outwards without designated limits.

Any context that is defined can itself be contextualized, for there is no defined context of all contexts. This principle, or at least its analogues, has been demonstrated mathematically in highly formalized ways by Georg Cantor's set theory, with its transfinite numbers, and conclusively by Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorem. The necessary existence of an actual infinite, moreover, is for Cantor conclusive proof of the existence of divinity, as he tried rather quixotically to demonstrate to representatives in the Vatican.

We are left with the problem of how to build bridges between worlds that cannot be apprehended by us as existing in themselves, but only in being bridged. The Unknown stands at the origin and center: it is what brings us together. It forces us to confront the limits of our humanity, and on this basis we contemplate its other—namely, divinity, but this other qua other is ultimately nameless and not properly understood in its own nature through our concept of "divinity." Only between this nameless we-know-not-what and humanity can we undertake to discern, or imaginatively and inventively forge, our destiny as existing freely. In doing so, we produce only images of a mystery—in relation to yet another . . . we cannot say what.

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後現代世俗性與近代早期神性之間的 東西方否定神學路徑

摘要

在討論「人性與神性之間：文學、藝術、宗教與文化」此一題目時，本論文特別將重點放在「之間」一字。唯有透過「之間」，才能夠經驗人性與神性。無論在人文或宗教的浩瀚傳統中，東西方文化在定義人性及神性的形象時，都至少會以二者間含蓄不明關係的方式為之。人性之不可定義與未知，也不下於神性。這種未知在蘇格拉底或道家的智慧皆屬基本原則。唯有介於人性和神性間的空間能夠允許二者的再現，且透過全球文化中令人難以想像之豐富文學、藝術，以及宗教儀式與實踐來加以形象化。本文詳論隱藏於這些再現場域之下的否定神學或者否定邏輯，經由否定神學的透鏡來檢視游移於神性與人性之間的事物。論文將以跨文化的比較精神為之，內容涉及西方的古典、中世紀、文藝復興研究，乃至東方古老且地位崇高的哲學、宗教與美學思想，特別是中國傳統。文末，本文也包含了以語文學作為一個思辨學門的方法論省思。這種理論的觀點在處理本文的主題是有必要的，因為思考人性與神性的「之間」意味著擱置所有單一、正面的立場，而促進一種沒有明確客體的思考方式，一種在所有可定義場域之間游移的思考。

關鍵字：智慧、之間、未知、否定神學、推測語文學、推測