

# Basic Framework of Apophatic Metaphysics (Negative Theology) Toward Islamic Higher Education System: Analytical Study at Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (Ptkin) In Indonesia

A. Akrim<sup>1</sup>, Umarso<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education Islamic, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, Medan, Sumatera Utara 20238, Indonesia Email: akrim@umsu.ac.id

<sup>2</sup>Department of Education Islamic, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Malang, Jawa Timur 65145, Indonesia Email: umarso@umsu.ac.id

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## Abstract

The construction of the metaphysics of divinity that exists in the Islamic higher education system, especially in Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN) - in the form of universities) in Indonesia has been finalized and established. It turns out that there was a logic of metaphysics of divinity that was different from the mainstreaming of the established metaphysics, namely metaphysics (apophatic theology). Based on this reality, this study focused on the construction on the concept of apophatic theology that grew and developed in the Islamic higher education system in PTKIN (namely UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember). The research problem in this study was how does the construction of apophatic theology in the Islamic higher education system develop at UIN Sumatera utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember? In order to analytically answer this question, this study used a qualitative approach with data collection techniques; such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. The data analysis used interactive data analysis from Miles, Hubermann, and Saldana. This study found that apophatic theology was positioned as a discourse of profetization of divine values expressed through a negative style. The theological construction basically "rejects" divine knowledge with the logic of negation and paradox. This apophatic theology in the Islamic higher education system builds an axiological framework that more oriented towards the dimensions of humanity and divinity; or the profane dimension and transcendental.

**Keywords:** Negative Theology, Depistemology, Islamic Higher Education System, Islamic Education, PTKIN.

The discourse on divine metaphysics is still interesting to discuss and analyze through various perspectives. Gornandt analyzed the

hiddenness and incomprehensibility of divine reality until Gregory formed cataphatic theology Salman and Sahed (2017); Neuberger analyzed

the construction on the concept and image of God Visala (2020) Scott tried to explore the concept of God's personality within the framework of modern theology Novaković (2023); even Davis analyzed the axiological side of the existence of God and the world De Rochechouart (2020); Latief analyzed the concept of Christian divinity by using Islamic perspective Davis (2020); or Pickering's research that elaborated on the axiological dimensions of natural theology Mein (2013); Including political theology, such as Harper Rowlands (2009) or Davis (Hasyim, 2009). Sylvia Wynter-a Jamaican novelist and critic - considered colonization as a representation of theology, as analyzed by Barter (Cocksworth, 2023). All of these studies tried to unravel the construction of theological values to answer big questions about God and or also the axiological side. Moreover, human nature always seeks the meaning of life through religion, as during the Covid-19 pandemic, people experienced loneliness of liturgy, doctrinal loneliness, and loneliness to express their own religiousness (Kars, 2019).

It is reasonable that critical studies continue to emerge reveal the reality of metafisika - or the concept of divinity - such as Colpitts and Yarhouse's analyzed the differences on the concept and image of God in same-sex attracted communities Kars (2017); and also Trimeche revealed the emergence of differences on the concept of God from the aspect of defining humanity (Bonab et al., 2013). Novakovic analyzed Rober Nozick's metaphysical methodology that proved the existence of God through human self-experience (Mehraiki & Gholami, 2020). Spinks examined the relational impasse between existence in theology and God based on perspective (Neuberger, 2018). These studies can be interpreted if the theological conceptuality is formed from the metaphysical values of human divinity; it also influences human attitudes and actions. Empirically, the two domains have a strong relationship based on an axiological framework based on the locus of faith - or belief.

Therefore, several studies have emerged that inspect the relationship among these two spheres, such as research by Stulp stated grounded on the relationship between the dimensions of religiosity and comfort Blans (1996); Carrigan examined the insinuations of the cyberspace for ecumenicalism and religious survey Sharp et al. (2017); or Visala's study focused on freedom of action in theological construction (Spinks, 2023). Radner analyzed the relational reality of divinity, humanity, and artificial intelligence Marty (2018); or Diagne analyzed divinity and time (Welz, 2015). Therefore, if there is an effort to continue to study theological axiology. Shook focused on aspects of human spiritual experience Jugrin (2018); Howard analyzed from gender and faith aspects (Colpitts & Yarhouse, 2019). Bucks analyzed from doctrines Pickering (2021); or Goudarzi focused on the conceptuality of practical actions such as slaughtering or other forms of worship based on monotheistic theological values (Tracy, 1991). From religious aspect, Sharp's analyzed on the Christian concept of divinity Emery (1998), or Jonas studied on the deity of the Jewish people (Benor, 1995).

These dynamics indicate that the construction on the concept of divinity - read divinity - is basically a prescriptive recommendation comprising heavenly treatise - read scheme of acquaintance - and empathy of truth. The objects are to persuade religious communities of the truth of their faith through a comprehensive and formulated understanding. As concluded by Bonab the concept of divinity leads people to "satisfaction" with their spirituality (Radner, 2020). Abraham stated about the truth of his theological consciousness Davis (2022); but knowing and also understanding the nature of God is a paradox that continues to haunt theology. Welz in his study admitted that there are difficulties in defining God (Jardim, 2023). This crisis also gave rise to doubts about the validity of the theological construction through an attitude of questioning the validity of the standardization of the divine

knowledge system. This condition may be the same as the dynamics of divinity in Ezekiel considered to place great importance on ritual and sacrifice ethics (Heineck, 2017). This attitude is embryonic of negative theology; that offers a subjective ontological argumentative perspective. This theology positions "God" not only as an objective reality as the general definition that society understands, but also as a logos - or experience of divine transcendence (Jonas, 1987).

Negative theology can find a solution to frozen concept of divinity; as Williams concluded, he was also able to provide justice for acts of worship (Stulp et al., 2019). It is common for several studies to appear; such as Jugrin who examined the thinking of more modern theologians from Dionysius - the father of negative theology Izutsu et al. (1970); Kars focused on describing the intellectual atmosphere of two figures (Ibn 'Arabi and al-Qabrafiki) who were in contrast to human ability to imitate God's attributes (Carrigan, 2001). As well as Marques who discussed the construction of Jankelevitch's apophatic theology and contrasts it with tesyphatic metaphysics (Hamid, 2020). There is also classical study that discussed negative theology, Boeve who critically explained its philosophical dimensions Iqbal (2015); and Blans who tried to compare the pseudo-thought of Dionysius and Derrida's deconstruction (Iswahyudi, 2017).

Thus, the construction of negative theology has strong roots in Western civilization, then it began to enter the Islamic treasury through Isma'iliyyah ideology, particularly through Muhyi al-Din Ibn 'Arabi Barter (2022); or Kars' study that also described the thinking of negative theologians in the half of the 7th century Hijriyah (Buck, 2020). This theology in Islamic society has indeed become an alternative - read counter - to cataphatic theology that considered final King (2020); including Islamic education ranging from neo-traditional Salafism to liberal or progressive Islam. Based on this framework of thought, this study is focused on the construction

of negative theology in the Islamic higher education system at PTKIN (namely; UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember).

## Methodology

This study tried to understand and analyzed the negative theological construction that exists at UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember. Therefore, this study have the outlines of construction of negative theology in the form of ideas, views or thoughts that are behind it and develop in these three UINs. This idea is interpreted and carried out by researchers based on *verstehen* perspective; this study is expected to provide a comprehensive critical description based on an interpretive paradigm. On the other hand, this study understands the meaning behind the dynamics of knowledge of divine metaphysics, starting from cataphatic and especially apophatic theology. It is oriented towards understanding the paradigm background as the basis for idea of apophatic metaphysical divinity expressed at UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember. However, the researcher began this with an attitude of following "the way it is" to reveal the "essential" meaning of the theological reality in the Islamic higher education system that being investigated while emphasizing the subjective aspects of adherents of negative theology. Schematically, the flow can be described as follows:

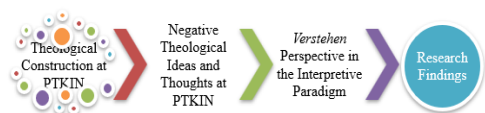


Figure 1: Negative Theology Construction Research Flow

This study used a qualitative approach, since the researchers can position themselves as flexible subjects, able to approach the study subject with an open mind, and not make assumptions before this study begun. Meanwhile, the type of research used was

phenomenology with a multicriteria design that research sites were PTKIN, namely: UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember. Therefore, the selection of informants was carried out by using a purposive sampling technique considering the breadth of the informant's understanding of the research focus. Through this technique, informants were classified as follow:

Table 1: Names of Informants

No.	Name	Age (Year)	Gender
1.	DM	56	Woman
2.	NM	34	Man
3.	ZY	39	Man
4.	IT	35	Woman
5.	AP	53	Man
6.	AMA	50	Man
7.	MY	39	Man
8.	FM	40	Man
9.	NF	39	Woman

Source: Prepared by the author (2024)

Data collection was carried out comprehensively by using three techniques, namely: participant observation; deep interview; and documentation studies. It is not separate from data analysis that carried out by using on-going analysis principle, means that it is not carried out separately after the data collection process is complete. It is carried out repeatedly between data collection and analysis simultaneously. Procedurally, the data has been collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document study analyzed by using an interactive model as stated by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana; consists of four stages, namely: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusions. For clarity, this analysis can be seen as follow:

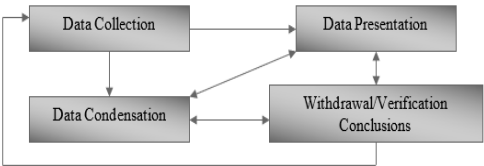


Figure 2: Miles, Huberman, and Saldana Interactive Model Data Analysis

Apophatic Divinity Metaphysical Discourse at PTKIN

Negative theological discourse in PTKIN; such as at UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, and UIN Jember is very unusual. In fact, it has never been heard or discussed by the academic community, since it does not have standard for discourse language that commonly used. It is natural that there are some academics who relatively do not fully understand this theology. As if the thesis developed by Rubenstein in accordance with the reality of PTKIN's theology; stated that negative theology can only be expressed through negative language (Milbank, 2023). Since the academic community at UIN tends to reveal the concept of divine metaphysics cataphatically. Therefore, the divine metaphysics they build tends to have a rationalistic dimension referring to revelationistic ethical norms (Al-Qur'an). It means that the narrative design of divine metaphysics at UIN was based on the informative reasoning of revelation elaborated with the authority of the ratio and developed using the cataphatic paradigm.

In this context, a lecturer at UIN Jember believed that metaphysical conception of divinity is delivered from observation and experience as an invalid conception. The metaphysics of divinity concept based on the human reality, even though it resulted from the processing of ratios and also contemplation still cannot be said to have validity. According to them, God is an unseen and irrational "reality", and to know and understand Him, it is necessary to be based on authoritative ethical information (namely Al-Qur'an). On the other hand, they

recognized the differences in the ability of rationality for each individual or community in exploring the meaning of Al-Qur'an. On its implication, the differences in abilities only create the concept of divinity among academic community. This conception, in the end, was built on the basis of interpretation - read presumption - of the community in accordance with scientific principles and beliefs.

For instance, within the framework of Islamic educational philosophy, God is positioned as the source of knowledge (Shook, 2014). In the interpretation of Qudsi hadith, God is identified as an "individual" who is gentle, generous, and far from being negative (Teehan, 2020). God is even said to be a transcendental entity who is a "supreme being", the creator of morals and values Latief (2017); and there are also those who claim it as a very necessary consequence (Armstrong, 1993). In animistic traditions, it is described as human "personality" Kilby (2019); and in Abrahamic traditions said that "God" as a descriptive noun referring to the ultimate reality, the powerful reality that is the object of religious belief and practice (Hakiki, 2018). This pattern is very different from the assumption put forward by deistics that God is considered by deists to be distant from the world and unconnected to its concerns (Jaworski et al., 2022).

In contrast with the minority of PTKIN academics who actually accept for experience and rationality to contribute to construction on the conception of divinity. They believe that experience and rationality can develop a contributive perception of divinity, then the metaphysics of divinity cannot be separated from human dimension, particularly the meaning of spiritual experience. One of them is suffering, entity of spiritual meaning, although sometimes there is a contradiction between the two. In this context, Kilby substantially suggests that in order to avoid this contradiction, theology needs to maintain the reality of future-oriented eschatology and provide concrete hope (Boeve, 1997).

However, the academics at PTKIN tend to position the flow of discussion about God as a normative construction. They established the parameters of religious truth lie in revelation assumed to be the only source of the divinity concept. Armstrong admitted the Abrahamic religion positions revelation as a parameter of truth and also a source of divine knowledge; the other religions - such as Buddhism - do not have theology in divine metaphysics. Based on this idea, mostly academics understand divine reality through a cataphatic approach. When ripples of different understanding emerge, assumed to be wild or "heretical" conception of divine metaphysics; as if the cataphatic theology is a theology that final and capable of providing ontological certainty.

The apophatic theology needs to be understood as an antithesis to cataphatic theology that "enriches" the perspective. God is doctrinally understood cataphatically to mean "reality can be known" or "reality can be thought", even though - like the construction of apophatic theology - God can be understood as "reality cannot be thought" or "reality cannot be known". In the extreme choose not to express the concept of divinity in the form of "language". Moreover, the characteristics of apophatic theology are only visible through the discourse revealed from themselves; or the limits of divine expression take the form of oddities that difficult to define and predict. Therefore, this apophatic theology is difficult to accept among academics who are considered unclear and do not have definitive boundaries regarding the image of God. The vagueness of the divinity concept in apophatic theology is considered inconsistent with religious guidance - reading revelation (Al-Qur'an). In fact, Mortley explained the entity's belief in the status of "aura" of ontos greatly determines its influence on the understanding (Hoffmann et al., 2019).

The nuances of apophatic theological oddities for PTKIN academic community are considered unable to be discussed, put into practice. The metaphysical conceptions of

divinity; namely theism, deism, coastalism, and panentheism, tend to be cataphatic that has clarity regarding the image of God. This peculiar pattern made Denys Turner not prefer to define apophatic theology (Edwards, 2023). However, this theology is slowly coming to the surface and coloring the discourse of educational theology - read Islamic education; in the context of The Cognitive Science of Religion (CSR) is said as the result of evolution on cognitive intuition and morality (Scott, 2006). Therefore, there is a dynamic of divine metaphysical ideas and thinking that colors the theological struggles at PTKIN.

There are two dynamics of metaphysics of apophatic divinity at PTKIN, namely: (1) the pattern of negation, namely the attempt to reveal "defining" negation of God. This pattern believes that humans will never know God comprehensively, since God is a mystery that unknown. And (2) nihilistic patterns; namely an attempt to define God through unspoken attitudes and expressed in words (translated). This pattern tends to be "silent" and "does not give rise to words", since God is an entity that cannot be described by any expression. It is natural that apophatic theology tends to choose to reveal the metaphysical concept of divinity that is latent and hidden within itself. These two patterns are difficult to accept among PTKIN academics who tend to be rational-empirical and scriptural-textual; or burhani and bayani.

Through these two patterns, apophatic theology is actually "forced" to open gap in the reconstruction of cataphatic divine metaphysics to a plurality of divine metaphysics. It means, at PTKIN there are two ideas "confront" each other and tend to "criticize"; namely the ideas of cataphatic (majority) and apophatic (minority) theology. However, this condition actually fosters an attitude of tolerance and openness towards differences in theological ideas within the PTKIN environment; in line with Iswahyudi's research findings, if heterodox theology functions to construct the principle of dissensus (non-consensus) truth in a pluralistic

order of life. This condition can be seen as follow:



Figure 3: Implications of Cataphatic Theology VS Apophatic Theology

The strength of tolerance based on divine values can actually be seen in the actions and attitudes of PTKIN academics who accept for differences, respectful of different religious beliefs, and care about humanity. Therefore, apophatic theological discourse is actually used as the arena for prophecy of divine values at PTKIN religious stage. A lecturer at UIN Sumatera Utara stated that the values of apophatic theology are not only a negative style of expression but actually nihilistic. A lecturer at UIN Jember stated that the concept of negative theology is often debated in the context of religious tolerance and brotherhood. The underlying spirit is moderately understand the meaning of divinity in the midst of human life; not extremists towards theological standards as Cocksworth did when questioning the validity of prayer; or Hart & Hill who also skeptical about the interpretation of sin verses (Rubenstein, 2008).

In this context, researchers who believe in apophatic theology tend to keep quiet without disclosure; and if there is disclosure, efforts are made to go beyond the usual metaphysical concepts of divinity. Since spiritual-transcendental experiences are intuitive and abstract; they cannot be described as the essence of perfection in words or sentences. Empirically, not all humans are able to find spiritual-transcendental experiences Rubenstein (2003); then the experience is more nuanced and subjective. The apophatic theology does not provide a realistic manifestation of spiritual experience through its own definition. The lecturers at UIN Malang consider apophatic

theology to tend to be "soaring" and contrary to the majority of divine reasoning - cataphatic theology. It is considered not to be a concrete, empirical and anthropomorphic representation of divine metaphysics - namely cataphatic theology – it is believed by academic community at PTKIN.

The implication is that apophatic theology is considered not to represent PTKIN's metaphysical conception of divinity, since it is considered absurd, abstract and not "grounded" theology. For instance, the description of God is believed to go beyond the conceptualization of existence and absence; this description cannot be understood and comprehended by the entire academic community. In fact, Ibn 'Arabi's theological hierarchy has emphasized that theological reality is integrated with the perpetrator's spiritual understanding and experience (Hart & Hill, 2022). It means that adherents of apophatic theology such as those at UIN Malang or UIN Sumatera Utara firmly stated the metaphysical definition of divinity has a hierarchy that harmony with their understanding and experience of spirituality. But they limit it, that God cannot be conceptualized through human reasoning, since God "transcends" the definitions contained in the definitive formulation of human language. The assumption was actually expressed by Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) when he attempted the negativity of theology (Bakunin, 2021).

Adherents of this theology have contradictory ideas, borrowing al-Fayyad's term, namely the principle of negation and negativity (Jordan, 2014). The resistance of apophatic theology to metaphysical concept of cataphatic divinity actually positions the theology in oppositional binary. The researchers saw that resistance arises due to differences in these beliefs regarding the metaphysical construction of cataphatic divinity considered too "imprisoning" the sacredness of God through human reason and language. The negation carried out is manifested in the form of denial of the concept of God, while the negativity takes the

form of background argument for denial of cataphatic theology. It is natural that they reject the cataphatic theological conception, since, as Tracy stated, it is impossible for God to be understood through human rationality. Therefore, like Milbank's conclusion, this apophatic theological concept would actually be more rational if it were framed in neoplatonic metaphysics. However, it was able to seep into the Islamic higher education system, particular for religious philosophy since there was chemistry between the axiological conception of apophatic theology and theological goals of Islamic education.

#### Depistemology of Apophatic Theology at PTKIN

The characteristic distinction of apophatic theology lies in the methodology of revealing spiritual experiences through the negation of statements and understandings about God. However, adherents of this theology tend to describe in negative terms, or remain silent and not express in any descriptive form. They worship the knowledge of divine metaphysics that appears from within themselves, since the conception of divine metaphysics has no definitive boundaries. However, generally, it has an impact on the growth of personal morality or society; and this implication has been empirically recognized as a form of excellence in reproducing social institutions such as law in society (Martin, 2006). This reality is referred by Ramsey & Mascall as honesty towards the reality of divinity (Miswari, 2018).

Interestingly, in this tradition, the "entity" believed that God is essentially a reflection based on the perspective of subjectivity. God can be known and understood through their spiritual experience by constructing knowledge without reason and human language. However, their faith is actually formed on the basis of knowledge-based doctrine, since knowledge is a tool to understand the existence of God as the first cause. The lecturers from UIN Sumatera Utara stated that they only understand the relationship between empirical-material reality and God; but

not the reality of God's essence. It is very clear that metaphysical knowledge of divinity is only a base concept from the imagination of humanity. Therefore, this concept cannot be transformed into a justification basis for knowing and understanding divine reality.

Theological construction for them - read adherents of apophatic theology - is considered as a building of knowledge not about "God" but knowledge about reflective imaginative knowledge of divine reality based on spiritual experience. Benor stated that a good attitude is an act of silence and limiting rational understanding (Goudarzi, 2023). In line with the construction of a thesis, God is light and darkness but neither of them (Al-Fayyadl, 2012). Dionysius in this context tried to criticize onto-theology to construct divine knowledge (Iman, 2015).

At PTKIN, apophatic theology is indoctrinated according to the understanding capabilities of academic community, then the negation and nihilistic principles do not cause paradigmatic "beats". Empirically, this theology can still be abstracted into a group of ideas, perspectives, views and approaches with negation and nihilistic principles. It has characteristic epistemological framework that very different from other theologies; and resulting in the construction of knowledge about divine "non-knowledge". It described well, the singular characteristics are very clear, since it contains contradictions and paradoxes. It can be seen in the statement of a lecturer at UIN Malang:

"This paradox can be described like this... the theological concept is a discourse on the metaphysics of divinity, but at the same time it is not a discourse. Even though it discusses knowledge, but when it discusses knowledge, it is as the absence of knowledge. Clearly, this theology is a discourse about divine knowledge, but it also positions itself as a discourse that confirms the absence of discourse itself. This is the contradiction and paradox in negative theology..."

The apophatic theology, according to its adherents at PTKIN, does discuss about divine knowledge but at the same time it negates that knowledge. It means, he builds his knowledge and simultaneously "rejects" this knowledge. Therefore, the epistemology of apophatic theology is termed "depistemology" (epistemology critiques its own epistemology). Since depistemology builds and dismantles divine knowledge, the adherents tend to choose to be "silent" and not reveal the definitive reality of divine metaphysics. They traced the source of knowledge of divine metaphysics and turned out that it was still paradoxical; and it is different from cataphatic theology that clearly has a source of knowledge. Borrowing a term from the Christian tradition, this dynamic may be referred to as "ontological gap between transcendence and immanence" (Saada, 2018).

Interestingly, they still bind and base their beliefs on authoritative ethical texts (revelation), reason, and humanitarian traditions (so-anthropological). However, he interpreted revealed texts (Al-Qur'an and Al-Hadith) in a different way compared with the method used by adherents of cataphatic theology. One of the interpretive methodologies is to go beyond the text philosophically, contextually and intuitively (based on spiritual experience); and it is a manifestation of their fundamental metaphysical belief in divine knowledge. For them, the source of essential knowledge lies in the absence of the source itself, then the doctrine of divinity is only an "introduction" to the nature of divinity. However, they believe that God is an unreachable reality by human mind; so that knowledge is treated only as an introductory example of an absolute reality that cannot be "understood".

Clearly, when apophatic people understand God, they do not do by binding and relying on knowledge - even though it comes from authoritative ethics, reason and humanitarian traditions. In understanding God, for them, it is necessary to start from a point of emptiness, that the source of knowledge is considered



meaningless or even "not-exist". They also have no basis or guide to truth; it rests the reality of truth on nothingness. In this context, Uebel reminded us the absence of knowledge base will actually give rise to criticism, since the foundation of truth in epistemology is very urgent in building science (Obasanjo, 2019). This condition of the fragility of knowledge base makes the apophatic theological discourse at PTKIN less visible.

Apophatics believe that truth does not require any foundation; Moreover, sacred divine truth cannot be described according to profane dimensional parameters. However, the absence of a source of knowledge does not mean that apophatic theology has a nihilistic paradigm, namely: the belief that human existence does not have any purpose. This apophatic sacralizes and deconstructs the attribution of the human dimension in theology. Therefore, the absence of sources of knowledge makes this theology more dynamic; and he even transforms in the process of searching for divine meaning. This searching is the self-reaction of adherents of apophatic theology to sacralistic reality; that William James said had a "divine" meaning" (Mortley, 2023).

By looking at the structure of their theological logic, it turns out that the apophatic theological thinking framework can be traced. They clearly do not reflect knowledge constructed by rationality, even though they have an authoritative ethical basis and religious tradition. This this theological logic is different from cataphatic logic that tends to rationalize divine knowledge through the logic of causality or analogical logic. Apophatic adherents use a frame of mind that elevates the sacredness of transcendental reality and releases the profanistic dimension (immanence). As King Jr. described, the logic of Christian theology regarding predestination and human freedom (Gill, 2023). There is a separation between the dimensions of transcendence and immanence in the theological structure

For them, divine knowledge is continually negated by other dimensions, then the construction of knowledge never reaches its final phase. Due to the apophatic adherents trying to escape from the ontological snare of immanence, then God's transcendence is not tainted by immanence. It is natural that they negate the knowledge of divine metaphysics composed by concepts and ontological presuppositions of immanence. Since they are worried that the effort to understand God will lead them to the knowledge of "reality" instead of God. When they explain about divinity; it is essentially "the reality being explained" not "the real God". In this context, the researchers assumed that God is an "Imaginative God", namely: the concept of God that emerged based on imaginative perception and human knowledge.

Conceptually, aphorisms used by adherents of apophatic theology are a framework for thinking about analogies and comparisons in order to represent the unreality. They describe transcendental reality so they can understand other academics. It means that every divine concept has elements of imagery that are structured metaphorically. Therefore, it does not have a permanent and standard label of truth; instead of presented ambiguously and open to other possible interpretations. It is natural that adherents of apophatic theology often think to use patterns of paradox and negation; and continually pitting understanding against understanding. Even two entities are positioned dichotomously and negated in one unified statement; or otherwise recognize these two entities.

For instance, it can be seen that the concept of transcendence represented as the entity of perfection and the perfect; but it still requires negativity. As if the entity of perfection needs to be affirmed by negativity, so this entity needs to be seen dichotomously. When acknowledging the existence of perfection, is also necessary to deny that perfection. In this context, theological statements with the particle "no" often impact the concept of knowledge. The "no-ness" is

precisely seen as a description that shows God's infinity in reason and immanent language. Therefore, reality - read a situation or event - is only "possible" precisely from its own "impossibility", that called the logic of paradox.

In this context, researchers think that this paradoxical logic is a critical antithesis to the analogical logic used by cataphatic theology. Since in the logical paradigm of cataphatic theology, we look for presuppositions - read points of similarity - between creatures and God; or in science it is said, between the "profane" and the "sacred". This analogical actually assumes that there is an ontological condition that God and humans can be aligned in the same relationship of understanding. It is not "accepted" by the logic of apophatic theology, that adherents of this theology reconstruct it through the logic of negation and paradox. According to them, divine reality cannot be reasoned and represented through the perspective of immanence.

However, this paradoxical logic actually shows that there is an ontological contradiction between understanding and comprehension; or knowledge with knowledge. In fact, they admit that each of these conflicting knowledges contains a construction of truth. This paradoxical logic is often criticized by adherents of cataphatic theology, since this logic is considered irrational; and considers it impossible to be truth between two contradictory knowledges. In this context, researchers tend to see the differences between cataphatic and apophatic theology as a treasure of divine metaphysical thought that needs to be oriented towards building tolerance amidst dissensus towards harmonious social life. Since acculturation and assimilation of perspectives and the segregation of knowledge will continue to impact the dialectics of Islamic theology. Hamid stated that differences in perspectives could actually encourage harmonization in social life (Williams, 2023).

### The Implications of Apophatic Theology for Islamic Higher Education

The supporters of the concept on negative theology are enthusiastic about restructuring the sacredness of cataphatic theology. Their theological views are thought to have no direction (non-teleological) by apophatic adherents. Among the arguments to be restructured is the purification on the concept of divinity, the essence that contains human projections and ideas. The apophatic theology actually wants to purify the idea of divinity from the demands of "dogmatism" that limit humans. In other aspects, it is considered as too old-fashioned and not to have sufficient benefits or functions. More than that, classical teachings and creeds have become idols, rooted in humans and displacing the reality of "God" that cannot be described. The apophatic theology affirms the sacredness of the holiness of "God" over all dimensions of the concept of divinity that are considered established.

In the context of apophatic theological discourse, theological problems often arise without any purpose of achieving a particular teleology. The presence of a range between "knowledge" and "not knowledge" creates a reality of belief for adherents of negative theology. In the Islamic higher education system - read PTKIN -, one thing that cannot be denied is the presence of dynamic faith formation efforts between "rational" and "mystical" knowledge, as well as "burhani" and "irfani" methods. This dialectical process repositions the stagnation of cataphatic theology that impact the opening of space for "certainty" in the existence of metaphysical knowledge. The process can be assumed as the manifestation of asymmetry between apophatic and cataphatic theology. The reality of belief at the level of its fundamentalist structure manifests in the form of theological knowledge that continuously intersects each other, creating contradictions between these two.

Basically, the efforts to restructure the sacredness of cataphatic theology have the purpose of uniting servants (abid) and God

(ma'bud). The adherents of apophatic theology believe that there is no veil to achieve "unity" with God. They consider that their theology as the form of manifestation of love for God that cannot be expressed verbally (Marques, 2021). Except in the form of negation sentences for cataphatic expressions; namely negativity the concept of cataphatic divinity. It turns out that the concept of apophatic theology also has an impact on their social behavior in society; as Heineck pointed out, there is a relationship between prosociality and the self-religiosity of negative theology adherents (Zhukovskyy, 2023). Obasanjo in his research also found that love in theology can foster dimensions of social welfare in social interactions (Gornandt, 2023). Hoffmann concluded moderate religiousness based on universal love can avoid conflict between religious communities (Saliyo, 2018).

For adherents of apophatic theology, love is not a feeling that requires rational-empirical ontological certainty; but rather a form of "unlimited pleasure" through the dichotomous paradigm between logic and intuition; also between knowledge and ignorance. They see God based on the negation and transcendence of a positive-ontological conceptualization of divinity. They viewed this as an attempt to sanctify the reality of divinity. The process at PTKIN turns out to be based on an educational orientation to develop divine awareness in academic community. According to Imam, the development of Islamic education methodology as an effort to perfect divine awareness can be inspired by philosophical Sufism that full of philosophical ideas (Trimeche et al., 2006). Therefore, the conceptual basis of education from the perspective of adherents of apophatic theology is a systematic effort to develop spiritual aspects and cultivate physical potential in a balanced manner, with the purpose of creating divine moral actions.

The dimension originates on the basis of criticism on cataphatic metaphysics of divinity, where their beliefs are framed in a de-ontological dimension as a criticism of divinity that tied into

definitive concepts of reason and language. For instance, negative theology adherents believe that God cannot be limited by verbal concepts or sentences (Howard et al., 2017). This view certainly creates a theological discourse full of contradictions and paradoxes at PTKIN. However, the paradoxical nature that is manifested through this transcendence, confirms their method of sacralizing divine reality. They believed that deontological infinity and inexpressibility of God's reality will place the position of "God with his divinity".

Therefore, the implications of apophatic theology at PTKIN are not only theological-philosophical aspects, but also include moralistic-empirical dimensions. It means they emphasize the need for balance between divine and human dimensions, as well as spiritual and social aspects. They believe that through the maturity of divine consciousness, a paradigm of integration between Faith, Knowledge and Charity will be created; as well as between Faith, Islam, and Ihsan. The academic community's immanent actions also have a nuance of transcendence, namely a continuous effort to "overcome" and "transcend" the relationship between "themselves" and God. The researchers refer as al-insan al-kamil that has a theological-philosophical style, with al-Jili emphasizing the theological nature and Ibn 'Arabi on the philosophical dimension (Diagne, 2021).

These dimensions, as observed by researchers at PTKIN, reach their peak in the construction of *muttaqin* humanity. The adherents of apophatic theology detail the "achievements" of *muttaqin* in linear-algorithmic lines, namely: believer, muslim, and muhsin. Therefore, Islamic higher education with its paradigm apophatic theology actually integrates the general sciences with philosophical Sufism. The academics who adhere this theology believe that the integrative Islamic higher education can pave the way to balance in developing social intelligence and spirituality. All of these are born from divine intelligence that is not spoken or written, but deeply embedded in the heart. In

order to achieve this goal, it was done through cleaning up the scientific construction of Islamic education from dichotomous and restructuring the sacredness of cataphatic theology at PTKIN. The appear of this orientation can be manifested on a massive scale through theological dialectics, as well as spread through doctrination (Uebel, 1996).

The divine consciousness possessed by adherents of apophatic theology can be considered the perfection of the figure of Abdullah, while constructive behavior or pious deeds are a real manifestation of this consciousness. Therefore, their actions bring goodness and grace, especially in the socio-anthropological and ecological dimensions (Umiarso, 2019). Umiarso stated that this concept encourages the actualization of substantive faith and pious deeds based on awareness of divinity (ihsan) (Clack, 2006; Ghafur, 2008). The spiritual values, moral actions and social ethics are the empirical impacts of negative theology that deserve to be designed academically (Harper, 2022). However, this awareness must be acted as the main reference in designing the goals of Islamic higher education in the present and future (William et al., 2004).

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the discourse of apophatic theology at PTKIN has significant

implications, particularly in the context of theological discourse at PTKIN; namely at UIN Sumatera Utara, UIN Malang, or UIN Jember. It will also contribute to the axiological framework of Islamic higher education. The purpose of education at PTKIN is not only focused on theological aspects, but also on socio-anthropological and ecological aspects. The integralistic goal comes from the source of knowledge and logic patterns in the depistemological system of apophatic theology itself. Therefore, the adherents of apophatic theology at PTKIN continuously and massively restructure the sacredness of cataphatic metaphysical knowledge about divinity.

This theological dialectic can be predicted to transform the construction of theology at PTKIN to develop into a form of apophatic metaphysics of divinity. Initially, cataphatic theology only functions as a theology that seeks to explain transcendental reality by using the principles of logic, metaphysics, and its conceptual procedures. In fact, the metaphysics of apophatic divinity has the potential to position itself as the more progressive theology at PTKIN; and has an impact on claims about truth and metaphysical knowledge in Islamic higher education theology. It can be seen clearly apophatic theology seeks to construct a "new order" or even "new concepts and theories" in Islamic higher education theology that can be abstracted conceptually based on its propositions.

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