In this study David Henderson, who teaches and practices psycho-analysis, attempts “to identify apophatic elements in the theory and practice of C.G. Jung.” (p. 153). The main representative of that tradition studied in this volume is the sixth century mystic Pseudo-Dionysius, who authored such works as *The Divine Names* and *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Henderson’s key argument, as spelled out in his opening chapter, is that “psychoanalysis, in this case the psychoanalysis of Jung, can be read as a continuation of the apophatic tradition.” (p. 5)

Chapters two (“The Corpus Dionysiacum”) and three (“Apophasis in Dionysius”) discusses the role of apophasis and similar notions in Pseudo-Dionysius. Henderson is confident that these aspects have not been extensively documented before (p. 16), a claim that is borne out in these two chapters, where he gives a comprehensive overview of how key terms such as kataphasis, apophasis, aphiariesis, hyper-, ekstasis and agnousia are used in this author. These are good analytical chapters, with many interesting references to discussions of the fundamentals of apophaticism.

In chapter four (“Jung, Neoplatonism and Dionysius”) Henderson discusses Jung’s use of, and reliance on, the Neoplatonic tradition. Henderson argues that “Jung’s reading of Dionysius, as well as other Platonic and Neoplatonic texts, placed him close to the source of important currents of apophatic discourse” (p. 53). He does admit though that Jung’s project was not to read these authors on their own terms, but to use their ideas as they fitted his own thought and theories. For example, Jung was critical of Dionysius’ traditional Neoplatonic and Christian idea of evil as privation (p. 52), preferring instead to regard the deity as the self, the synthesis of light and darkness, good and evil.

In chapter five (“The Opposites”) Henderson proceeds to a meticulous discussion of Jung’s use of some esoteric aspects of alchemical symbolism. He argues convincingly that the author of the *Divine Names* placed heavy reliance on Nicholas of Cusa’s theory on opposites. The self is a paradoxical synthesis of opposites, both conflict and unity. For Jung, so Henderson argues, this is more satisfactory than conscious Christian symbolism which leaves the conflict open instead of resolving it (p. 75). Furthermore, Jung believed that the “Platonic triad” differs from the Christian Trinity insofar as it is built on opposition (p. 77).

Jung’s skepticism about “Christian imagery” arguably complicates the comparison with Pseudo-Dionysius, for whom affirmation and negation were not
so much a matter of reconciling opposites in a synthetic unity as a way of pointing beyond opposing names to the Christian God, who essentially cannot be named at all. But, even so, argues Henderson, when Jung describes the self as “bright and dark and neither”, this “echoes Dionysius’ schema of kataphatic, apophatic and ecstatic” (Henderson, p. 65). This argument is developed in the sixth chapter of the volume (“The Transcendent Function”), which is devoted to Jung’s conception of transcendence, a conception which also echoes that of the Pseudo-Dionysius (p. 102).

The seventh chapter (“Jung and Contemporary Theories of Apophasis”) discusses Jung in relation to modern theories which engage with negative theology. This chapter contains a fascinating kaleidoscope of comparisons with Derrida, Deleuze and other thinkers, all of whom have influenced post-Jungian psychoanalytic theory. For all its interest, this chapter could have been placed in the end of the book, since its perspectives are not always centered on the main topic.

The book culminates in the last chapter (“The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and the Psychotherapeutic Process”), where Henderson argues for a “hidden sympathy” between the Pseudo-Dionysius’ Ecclesiastical Hierarchy and the psychoanalytical process (p. 154). Henderson points out interesting likenesses and makes useful, if, at times, somewhat far-fetched comparisons. Is psychoanalysis really comparable to liturgy (p. 149)? Is the establishment of a therapeutic alliance in the first session of psychoanalysis comparable to baptism as illumination (p. 139)? Can the role of the psychotherapist be compared to that of Christ (p. 144)? While Henderson tries to justify these comparisons and to show how aspects of psycho-analytic practices ‘echo,’ or ‘resonate’ with, the Pseudo-Dionysius’ thinking, it is not always clear how, or to what extent, psychoanalysis could learn from Pseudo-Dionysius. The comparisons are indeed interesting, but much more would need to be said to show what their practical applications could be.

This original and learned book goes a long way to showing that Jungian psychoanalysis echoes the philosophical tradition of which Pseudo-Dionysius was a part.

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