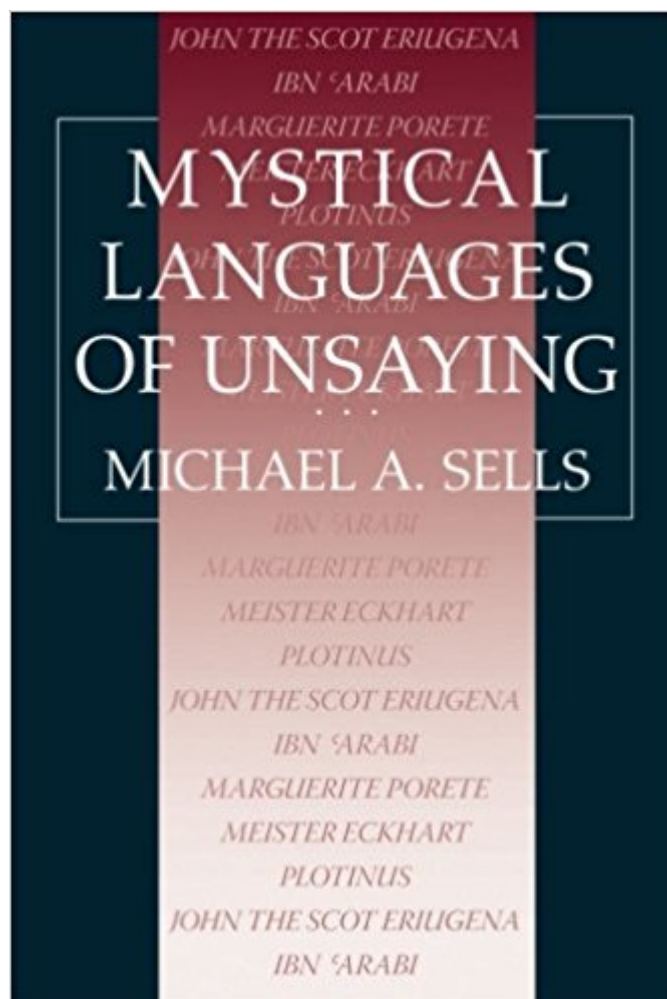


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Mystical Languages Of Unsaying



Synopsis

The subject of *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* is an important but neglected mode of mystical discourse, apophasis, which literally means "speaking away." Sometimes translated as "negative theology," apophatic discourse embraces the impossibility of naming something that is ineffable by continually turning back upon its own propositions and names. In this close study of apophasis in Greek, Christian, and Islamic texts, Michael Sells offers a sustained, critical account of how apophatic language works, the conventions, logic, and paradoxes it employs, and the dilemmas encountered in any attempt to analyze it. This book includes readings of the most rigorously apophatic texts of Plotinus, John the Scot Eriugena, Ibn Arabi, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart, with comparative reference to important apophatic writers in the Jewish tradition, such as Abraham Abulafia and Moses de Leon. Sells reveals essential common features in the writings of these authors, despite their wide-ranging differences in era, tradition, and theology. By showing how apophasis works as a mode of discourse rather than as a negative theology, this work opens a rich heritage to reevaluation. Sells demonstrates that the more radical claims of apophatic writers—claims that critics have often dismissed as hyperbolic or condemned as pantheistic or nihilistic—are vital to an adequate account of the mystical languages of unsaying. This work also has important implications for the relationship of classical apophasis to contemporary languages of the unsayable. Sells challenges many widely circulated characterizations of apophasis among deconstructionists as well as a number of common notions about medieval thought and gender relations in medieval mysticism.

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Customer Reviews

Using examples from Christian and Islamic mystical texts, Sells shows that these texts operate through "apophatic" language, that is the language of unsaying or saying what cannot be said. An important study in the History of Religions, in Literary Criticism, and in the comparative study of mysticism.

This is a powerful book by a great scholar. The way that Sells applies and critiques postmodern thought in relationship to mystic experience is quite powerful. The notion of "unsaying," that mystic language both tells us something and unspeaks itself simultaneously is brilliant. A must for students of mystic thought.

The contents of this text are profound and one of the best treatments of the subject I've ever come across. It has incarnated, nay, manifested itself as a University of Chicago paperback. That august publisher has provided us with a tangible reminder of the universality of mutability and change. Not long after I started reading it, the book split along the spine and now all the pages are falling out. So I must search for a hardcover version, if it exists.

Very scholarly for my background and training. Maybe to be expected based on the subject matter, but definitely moments of "moving" inspiration arising from the mystic's efforts at "Unsayings".

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