

# Sequence on Modern Ontology

## 1 From Theology to Philosophy

If theology is concerned with being in its entirety in relation to God, then we must say that it is also concerned with philosophy in its entirety as the science of being as such, of the way in which being appears, can be known about, acts and can be acted upon, besides those fundamental modes of being which 'divide nature' (to echo Eriugena) into the metaphysical, the biological and the physical. This concern with philosophy in its entirety does not mean, however, that philosophy straightforwardly provides a foundation upon which theology builds, or that philosophy gives an adequate, non-revisable account of being to which theology merely adds the further insights of revelation concerning the nature of the creative cause and the manner in which the creation has fallen and later come to be redeemed. One could even say that the latter model at once accords too much autonomy to philosophy and too much superiority to theology.

For this notion of philosophy as foundational and autonomous is notably ahistorical. In practice it usually means that Christian theology becomes subservient to the dominant philosophy of the day, as still too often prevails. The problem here is that these contemporary philosophies frequently turn out to be not at all theologically neutral, for example in their conception of the relation of God to being, or of the nature of language and of human understanding.

The fundamental reason for this is that an entity called 'philosophy' has never, as a matter of fact, really existed in pure independence from religion or theology. One can even go further, to claim that the idea, or rather the

illusion, of a sheerly autonomous philosophy is twice over the historical invention of certain modes of theology itself.

In the first place, as Pierre Hadot and others have shown, Greek philosophy was always a mode of spiritual practice and never an ‘interest-free’ enquiry involving a ‘view from nowhere’.<sup>1</sup> To quote Eric Voegelin:

Platonic-Aristotelian analysis did not in the least begin with speculations about its own possibility, but with the actual insight into being which motivated the analytical process. The decisive event in the establishment of *politike episteme* was the specifically philosophical realisation that the levels of being discernible within the world are surmounted by a transcendent source of being and its order. And this insight was itself rooted in the real movements of the human spiritual soul toward divine being experienced as transcendent. In the experiences of love for the world-transcendent origin of being, in *philia* toward the *sophon* (the wise), in *eros* toward the *agathon* (the good) and the *kalon* (the beautiful), man became philosopher.<sup>2</sup>

Of course Voegelin is only speaking here about one philosophical trajectory, albeit the most historically important one, namely the realist-spiritualist tradition of the Academy. However, the materialist Stoics distinguished between philosophy proper, ‘as the lived practice of the virtues of logic, physics and ethics’ and “discourse according to philosophy” which was theoretical instruction in philosophy,<sup>3</sup> and they sought to attune both their practical and their theoretical attitudes to the divine character of the cosmos. Even the more nakedly materialist Epicureans did not, according to Hadot, ‘conceive physics as a scientific theory, intended to reply to objective, disinterested questions’, but rather pursued the study of terrestrial and celestial phenomena in order to secure peace of mind in the face of death, by arguing that the gods never intervene in a self-sustaining physical universe. A free moral adjustment of attitude to this fact is possible because a genuine freedom of the will is grounded in the original, spontaneous, ungrounded and un-determined ‘swerve’ (*clinamen*) away from an original equilibrium and isonomy of the atoms themselves, which engenders all the differentiations of the universe.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1997), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 172.

<sup>4</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 117–120. See also Michel Serres on Lucretius’s moral purposes in *The Birth of Physics*, trans. Jack Hawkes (Manchester: Clinamen Press, 2000), 165–192, especially 176 on the *clinamen*.

Thus even the antique materialists were not trying to adjust their spiritual outlooks to awkward natural facts, but rather were searching for an account of nature that would allow for an experience of beatitude for the individual in this life – omitting the more political, relational and hyper-cosmic perspectives of the Academic tradition which Christianity later greatly augmented. As Robert Spaemann puts it: ‘Striving after pleasure and striving after self-preservation were not for Epicurus or the stoic simply naturalistic data, as they were for the French materialists of the eighteenth and for the evolutionary biologists of the nineteenth century; rather, they were aspects of reflection through which life is grasped as a whole which can turn out well or badly.’<sup>5</sup> So, as Spaemann argues, because Epicurus did not assume that real pleasure was merely sensory, but rather sought for an untrammelled and undisturbed personal sensation of happiness (*eudaimonia*), he sought it in a pure present moment uncontaminated by painful memory or fearful anticipation. However, such an ideal moment must paradoxically turn out to be unconscious, mystically transcending the mere experience of pleasure, just as our hedonistic enjoyment of friends will only sustain itself if we show some sort of disinterested regard for them which will guarantee that they can remain friends. Hence Epicurus deduces from a pleasure-seeking basis the duty to die for friends and the greater blessedness of giving as compared with receiving. Likewise, the Stoic pursuit of self-preservation, *conatus*, is not based in the first place upon an ontological anthropology, but upon an attempt to secure stability by maximising our power and range of connections. Yet, since such an effort will never guarantee security, it turns paradoxically into an attitude of resignation towards fate and indifference as to what happens to oneself.<sup>6</sup>

So in a way that seems very counter-intuitive to us moderns, it was antique *materialism* which encouraged pure sacrificial altruism and noble ascetic indifference towards all suffering, whereas the more spiritual, Academic tradition tended to allow more for the ultimate value of relationality and friendship, of ‘being-with’ the cosmos and the other, rather than self-obliteration in the face of these realities. One can only grasp why this was the case if one sees that these different philosophical stances were just as much different practices and different modes of religious belief as they were divergent argumentative conclusions. In the Academic case one has a philosophy which makes life in the *polis* and (sometimes) friendship with the cosmically transcendent divine ultimate;

<sup>5</sup> Robert Spaemann, *Happiness and Benevolence*, trans. Jeremiah Alberg SJ (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), 50.

<sup>6</sup> Spaemann, *Happiness and Benevolence*, 28–50.

in the materialist case one has philosophies grounded on a life of ascetic retreat or else solitude, and which preclude any ultimate association with the gods (whose existence is still not denied). Perhaps, as was indicated in the Preface, Deleuze and Guattari were right to identify the first and purest philosophy with an anti-mythical and monistic thinking of immanence, incorporating both matter and mind, both energy and image; however, insofar as their models for this are necessarily *antique* materialism (and Spinoza in certain ways in the wake of antiquity), then one could say that such pure philosophy is also a kind of theology, a mode of religiosity and even of *hyper* religiosity, insofar as it is materialism which tends to demand a discontinuity between the ethics of practical involvement and the theoretical stance of unification with reality.<sup>7</sup>

Paradoxically, it might seem, it was only when Jews, Muslims and then Christians rediscovered aspects of Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle and certain fragments of Neoplatonism, that they projected back onto antiquity a purely 'rational' enquiry that was somewhat of their own invention. This was because antique philosophy could be viewed as at least problematically legitimate if it was taken as the work of human reason, but not if it was taken as linked to specifically pagan religious reflection. In this way a category of 'pure reason' started to come into being only as the shadow of the notion of 'faith'. To cite Hadot once more: 'modern philosophy has come to consider itself a theoretical science because the existential dimension of philosophy no longer had any meaning from the perspective of Christianity, which was simultaneously both doctrine and life'.<sup>8</sup>

In many ways this rediscovery of antique thought disturbed an older Christian model for the integration of philosophy within Christian doctrine. In the case of the Greek Fathers from the apologists onwards, and of Augustine, little distinction was made between *philosophia Christiana*, 'doctrine' and 'theology'. Truth was seen as one, and revelation as the restoration of a fullness of truth, insofar as this is accessible for finitude, to fallen human beings. This sometimes entailed nevertheless a distinction between pagan (i.e. mainly Greek) and 'revealed' philosophy. However, the former – in the case of those Platonic authors held, by the Christian apologists like Justin Martyr to have already intuited monotheism – was less regarded as a replete natural philosophy than as a kind of mental typological anticipation of a full, revealed theoretical illumination. For with the incarnation of the *Logos* itself, and the more general descent of *Sophia*

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 35–61.

<sup>8</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 259.

in the joint arrival in time of the *Logos-Ecclesia* (a theme more rarely but nonetheless sometimes entertained), it was considered that a more complete human reasoning, or ‘philosophy’ became possible. But this more complete reasoning was itself situated within an entire ‘life according to the *Logos*’, such that the monastic life was often equated with *philosophia*.<sup>9</sup>

There is indeed much evidence to suggest that, before the year 1300 or so, there was no clear duality between theological and philosophical reason. This is witnessed, as Jean-Luc Marion has pointed out, by the quite cautious and limited use of the term ‘theology’ itself, given that this term would have been seen, in its pagan philosophical use, as tending dangerously to subordinate theology to philosophy.<sup>10</sup> This is particularly true for the Aristotelian legacy which divided theoretical science up into the mathematical, the physical and the theological and which also, on at least one reading, regarded the study of God as a regional division of the study of being in general.<sup>11</sup> Thus the Latin tradition prior to 1300 tended to favour terms like *sacra pagina* and *sacra eruditio* and later *doctrina sacra* to the term *theologia*.

In Aquinas nonetheless, in the wake of Maimonides, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, there is apparently a much greater distinction made between philosophy, including its rational mode of doing theology, and *sacra doctrina*, which reflects upon revelation. But to regard this seemingly sharp distinction as simply a gain, with time, of a greater clear-sightedness, is surely naïve.<sup>12</sup> For the new divide rather reflects the challenge posed by Aristotelianism as a philosophy seemingly true according to reason, and yet less easily assimilable in certain ways with the conclusions of faith than an earlier Platonic mode of thinking. Often this circumstance later gave rise to various modes of a ‘double truth’ doctrine, as in so-called ‘Latin Averroism’. It also eventually helped to encourage a new mode of theologico-philosophical reflection which not only dared to criticise Aristotle himself, but also the entire actualist and realist bias of the Greek philosophical legacy, in the name of an increasingly positivistic and voluntarist account of God, creation and revelation by vastly extending the scope and ontological primacy of logical possibility: I am thinking of Scotus and then of the nominalists. However, in the case of

<sup>9</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 237–270.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, ‘What are the Roots of the Distinction between Theology and Philosophy?’, lecture given at Georgetown University, 20 Apr. 2011, available on YouTube. Last viewed 12 June 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* V.1026a19, X.1064b3; Boethius, *De Trinitate* II.1–20.

<sup>12</sup> See John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19–59.

Aquinas, the new circumstance rather encouraged him to show how basically Aristotelian reasons, when properly considered, themselves supported the conclusions of faith.

Yet Aquinas was only here successful because he was able to show that the implications of Christian doctrine were more ‘materialist’ than had hitherto been supposed – or at least consistently supposed. The material creation was not only good, its material character was also for us vital in assisting the processes of mental deliberation, reasoning to God and the bringing about of our salvation. Even if most certainly Aristotle uniquely enabled him to state these conclusions in a bold new fashion, they were nonetheless supported both by a more accurate reading of Augustine than that provided by more spiritualist and dualistic interpretations, and by deployment of the Proclean strand of Neoplatonism (mediated in part by Dionysius the Areopagite) which already permitted an integration of a more ‘materialist’ view within a framework that remained fundamentally emanationist and participatory in a Platonic mode, but now assumed more emphatically theurgic and cosmological dimensions. The picture Aquinas is always arguing for concerns fundamentally the logic of creation *ex nihilo*, along with the gracious raising of spiritual creatures to a supernatural end that is, nonetheless, paradoxically an integral implication of their spiritual existence as such.<sup>13</sup>

Thus while Aquinas appears to deploy ‘purely rational’ arguments, the conclusions which he is supporting are always those consistent with faith – like, for example, the diversity and autonomy in different created spirits of the operation of the active intellect, which, against the Arab scholastics, he took to be required in order to sustain both the freedom of spiritual beings and the ultimate significance of the material distinctness and individuality of human spiritual creatures.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Aquinas was not a modern rationalist: he understood good reason to be an attentive reception, via the mediation of the senses and discursive operations, of the divine light of the *Logos*, in fundamental keeping (despite many scholarly denials) with the view of St Augustine.<sup>15</sup> Finally, for Aquinas, good reason can only be such if implicitly it desires, and therefore mysteriously intimates in advance, that which can only be received as a gift: namely the supernatural light of faith.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See for this point and the entire account of Aquinas here given, Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*.

<sup>14</sup> Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Auerroistas*.

<sup>15</sup> See Jacob Schmutz, ‘La Doctrine médiévale des causes et la théologie de la nature pure (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles)’, *Revue Thomiste*, special issue on the *Supernatural* (Jan.–Feb. 2001), 217–264.

<sup>16</sup> See John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, Mich., and London: Eerdmans/SCM, 2005, 2006), 88–108.

In these ways Aquinas effectively restored the Patristic integration of philosophy with theology, albeit he now more distinguished to unite. Unlike some of his contemporaries and many later medieval theologians, he did not locate the rational study of God within the field of metaphysics. Instead, he saw metaphysics as concerned with ‘being’ as its object and as concerned with God only insofar as it must posit a causal principle for being itself, in the sense of being as *ens commune*, or that abstract ‘generic’ existence which is displayed in various different essential modes amongst finite creatures, and in real distinction from them. Metaphysics understands that this ultimate cause of being, which is ‘God’ – as the coincidence of *ens* and *essentia* in *esse* or the ‘to be’ itself – must be the subject of a higher science which is in fact God’s own self-knowledge, since a science of the absolute uncaused ground of all things can only be self-reflexive and for us esoteric. So for any substantive knowledge of ‘theology proper’ at all, we depend upon divine revelation. Yet this, it turns out, for Aquinas concerns simply a heightened degree of the participation of both disclosive historical events and human mental illumination in the divine reality.<sup>17</sup> Grace-given revelation, which is nothing other than the creation’s awareness of itself in humanity as destined to return to God (‘deification’) is inseparable for Aquinas from the outgoing of creation, which can only proceed forth in the exact measure that it is bound to return, since at its depth its only reality is the gift of divine existence, which is ‘all in all’.<sup>18</sup> However, angelic, cosmic and human fallenness conceals this reality from view, and it must be shown again through the re-making of humanity and the cosmos (only achievable through Man the Microcosm) in the Incarnation of the *Logos*. It is uniquely the sight of Christ on earth and the tasting of Christ in the Eucharist which now restores to the intellect through the senses that ‘certainty’ of anticipating the beatific vision which is obscurely implied even by the rational appeal to God as first cause.<sup>19</sup>

Rational theology and revealed theology are not, then, for Aquinas, even from a human perspective, simplistically discrete ‘stages’, but rather always imply each other in different degrees and with different intensities along a continuum of coming-to-know within historical time. But from a divine point of view it is Aquinas’s central doctrine of divine simplicity (which means that all and every distinction we make as to the inner divine life applies only to our limited cognitive or ‘grammatical’ perspective) which ensures that the two theologies are only aspects of a single divine knowing.

<sup>17</sup> ST II-II, q. 171 a. 1 ad. 4 a. 2 resp.; a. 3 resp.; a. 6 resp.

<sup>18</sup> See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 88–103.

<sup>19</sup> See Frédéric Nef, *Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 281–378; Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 19–65.

For God the creator and revealer is one: his emanation of created being and his call to creation and humanity to return to him are a single same eternal unchanging action. Within God they are indeed further identical with the inner (relationally distinguished) Paternal generation of the Word, and the ‘returning’ procession of the Spirit through the Son from the Father. For in his *Sentence Commentary* Aquinas remarkably stated, anticipating Eckhart, that the Trinitarian and created outgoings are ‘essentially’ the same, and only distinguished by ‘the addition of a sort of relation to the temporal effect’.<sup>20</sup>

And even from the human, created point of view, as has just been stated, creation and deification (of humanity and of the cosmos in various proper degrees through humanity) are perceived as but finitely distinguished facets of the single divine act, although the teleological relation involved in the natural/supernatural distinction also embodies (one might add, to Aquinas) a trace of the distinction by substantive relation between the metaphorically ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ generation of the Son and the metaphorically ‘willed’ procession of the Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

This unifying perspective is reflected in Aquinas’s pedagogic practice, which rarely shows a strong division between the two modes of discourse, but rather tends constantly to shuttle between both. Reason, for him, always has an obscure onlook towards faith, while faith, which is relatively more intuitive, can never, in this life, fully leave behind the discursiveness proper to philosophy.

It follows that, for Aquinas, philosophy is not straightforwardly foundational and neither is theology straightforwardly superior.

Instead theology, whenever it intimates the heights, must humbly return to the depths and forever in time start all over again with the relatively prosaic problems posed by philosophy. Its transcendence of the philosophical

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent.* I, dist. 16 q. 1 a. 1 resp.

<sup>21</sup> On divine simplicity and our *modus significandi* in Aquinas, see David B. Burrell CSC, *God and Action* (London: RKP, 1979) For the argument that Aquinas ultimately, like Eckhart, ‘identifies’ from the divine perspective Trinitarian inner and creative outer emanation, at least in his earlier writings and possibly also in his later ones, see Philipp Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid: Introduction à la lecture du ‘système philosophique’ de Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1996), 202–203. I have taken the Trinitarian distinction of nature and will from the Franciscan tradition in Bonaventure and Scotus, but tried to reconcile it with the tradition of substantive relation, whereas the Franciscans intended to use this distinction to distinguish the persons *instead of* distinction by substantive relation. This involved a divide between non-voluntary natural generation and sheerly voluntary procession which I am not endorsing. I merely want to suggest a remote analogy between natural and supernatural orientation – or indeed natural and cultural orientation – on the one hand, and the relation between Son and Spirit on the other.



perspective is always, for now, merely provisional. Inversely, philosophy offers no secure self-contained foundation, because it always necessarily gestures beyond itself, in accordance with the Augustinian version of the 'Meno problematic' which Aquinas several times invokes: we can only seek God who is beyond all reach if in some strange sense we have already arrived at this destination, because he has always already reached down to us.<sup>22</sup> The scope of this problematic for him embraces both reason and revelation and transcends their division, as likewise does the entire framework of the participation of beings in Being and of spiritual beings in the divine light, which is in itself one and simple.

It can be argued, then, that Aquinas warded off the threat of duality posed by those Islamic philosophers with which he was familiar – even if one should point out that various mystically Sh'ite and Sufi figures later offered more integrating perspectives. Aquinas indeed, at times, when assessing the rational opinions of Plato and Aristotle, suggests that one must take account of the pagan character of their thought, though no doubt, with historicist hindsight, he did not do this to anything like a sufficient degree.

For these reasons it is not entirely clear that Aquinas fully accepted the retrospective invention of the rational autonomy of philosophy.

However, this autonomy was much more decisively confirmed in a second historical moment. In a gradual process stretching from Scotus through Suárez to Báñez, theology started to conclude that human beings not only have two distinct final ends (as Aquinas formally allows), a natural and a supernatural one, but that the former remains substantially independent of the latter. If previously the notion of a purely rational philosophy had been shadowed by a sense of something pagan and unredeemed, now, especially after Francisco Suárez, this was seen as an entirely legitimate exercise, within the bounds of 'pure nature', so long as it was undertaken in ultimate expectation of 'serving' the higher truth of faith.<sup>23</sup> A fully autonomous theoretical philosophy, in principle independent of any existential orientation or quest for beatitude, had at last arrived.<sup>24</sup> In a certain way, then, we must qualify Deleuze and Guattari: philosophy as concerned with purely immanent, univocal being (whether this is taken as including a transcendent 'god' or not) and so with a theoretical primacy of indifferent facts that we must come to terms with – an immanentism that is eventually much more nakedly

<sup>22</sup> See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 36–37.

<sup>23</sup> Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, 255.

<sup>24</sup> See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*.

spelled out in all its implications by David Hume than by Baruch Spinoza – is the bastard offspring of a theology which has embraced a dualism of natural and supernatural ends. It is not, after all, a pure but abandoned child of Greek antiquity.

So the paradox is that the theoretically secularising gesture, which permitted the arrival of a pure, autonomous philosophy, was entirely a theological gesture, and even one which sought to conserve the transcendence of God and the priority of the supernatural, by mistakenly insisting on the sheer ‘naturalness’ and self-sufficiency of human beings without grace, as a backdrop for augmenting grace’s sheer gratuity.

## 2 The Four Pillars of Modern Philosophy

This circumstance then poses a crucial question for theology today. Far from it being the case that theology is necessarily at the mercy of philosophical fashions, it is now, thanks to new historical research, in a position to ask whether the fundamental assumed shape of modern philosophy as such is not the result of buried and forgotten past theological decisions. Decisions which, in theological terms, were highly questionable, if, indeed, not outrightly erroneous.

Here one needs to see that the invention of a double human end (natural and supernatural) was itself embedded in earlier and equally doubtful theological options, which all tended to suggest the comprehensibility of finite being, essences, knowledge and causality entirely in their own terms, without reference to their created and supernatural origin. These were, primarily, the substitution of: (1) univocity for analogy in ontology; (2) mirroring representation for knowledge by identity in gnoseology; (3) the primacy of possibility for the primacy of actuality in modal theory; and finally (4) in the case of the theory of causality, the ‘concurrency’ of created with divine causality on the same ontological plane for an earlier notion of finite and infinite causation operating synergically on different ontological levels, with the latter conceived as transcendently all-determining of finite causes in their very independence, through a process of ‘in-flowing’ or *influentia*. This model extended also to intra-ontic strata: thus matter and form were now seen as ‘concurrently’ working causes operating in the same dimension, whereas by Aristotle and Aquinas they were seen as ‘reciprocally’ operating causes, meaning causes acting in incommensurably different fashions and yet each indispensable to the other. We shall

later see the acutely practical and social implications of this seemingly esoteric point.<sup>25</sup>

In all four cases one has a new set of philosophical theses which dictate the entire consequent course of modern philosophy – as several of the major historians of philosophy now agree. But, in all four cases also, it is arguable that the fundamental reasons for the adoption of these theses were theological.

(a) *Univocity*

First of all, as regards univocity, Ibn Sina (Avicenna in Latin usage) and later Scotus were concerned not just with questions of logic but with the security of proofs for God's existence which, in order to be fully apodeictic, can be held to require a stable middle term. Scotus was in addition concerned to defend the coherence of predicating terms like 'goodness' of God by insisting upon their core stability of meaning and projecting this supposed semantic identity upon the ontological level. This meant that our understanding of evaluative or 'perfection' terms had already become divorced from human experience and the spiritual life. In Aquinas it was still the case that an exploration of the meaning of the word 'good' involved entering on an existential journey towards an inaccessible plenitude of perfect goodness in God. So to delve into the richness of the meaning of good was also to ascend towards a higher contemplation and practice of goodness, and that ascent in its turn simply *was* the ascent towards God. Semantic and logical exploration was, in consequence, also here an ontological one and, in addition, an entering into a pedagogic *paideia*, beyond any merely detached, passionless enquiry. With the shift towards univocity, however, the meaning of the word 'good' can be known about sufficiently once and for all, in independence from any spiritual stance. This means that 'to become better', in practical terms, is no longer also to achieve a greater theoretical insight into the meaning of goodness,

<sup>25</sup> See, for all these four points and much of the following explication of them, Olivier Boulnois, *Être et représentation: Une généalogie de la métaphysique moderne à l'époque de Duns Scot* (Paris: PUF, 1999); Nef, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?*, 314–415; Schmutz, 'La Doctrine médiévale des causes'; Catherine Pickstock, 'Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance', *Modern Theology*, 21/4 (Oct. 2005), 543–575; John Milbank, 'The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 80/2 (2006), 193–227; David Burrell, 'Aquinas and Scotus: Contrary Patterns for Philosophical Theology', in *Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 91–113; André de Muralt, *L'Unité de la philosophie politique: De Scot, Occam et Suarez au libéralisme contemporain* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2002).

in line with that union of the theoretical with the practical which, we have already seen, defined ‘philosophy’ as such – as both ‘love of knowledge’ and ‘knowledge of love’ – ever since classical antiquity.<sup>26</sup> Instead, it implies a merely quantitative increase in the exemplification of a goodness already fully known about.

It is easy to see here how the ground for the Kantian finitisation and formalisation of practical reason has already been prepared. Similarly, Scotus anticipated in some measure the Cartesian thesis of an ‘equal measure of freedom’ pertaining between God and humanity, infinite and finite, since already for him the will is formally defined as ‘indifferent’ to the choice it makes – whether for or against what still for him (and still even for Descartes) should be its proper final end. Since later for Kant the ‘morally right’ consists, both for God and humanity, in an ungrounded decision of the will for a primary goodness (now reduced tautologously to mere respect for freedom itself as ‘moral right’), conceivable and definable independently of this decision, of any habitual formation, or teleological orientation of the affections, one can say that Scotist univocity opened the way here also for a further rationalist abolition of the qualitative distance between God and creatures.

Finally, Duns Scotus considered that his idea of being in the abstract, rather than materialised being as the natural first object of human understanding both guaranteed our spiritual nature and indicated the difference between a pre-fallen and a fallen, sensually debased, exercise of intelligence.<sup>27</sup>

It was especially in terms of this new, less ontological concept of the transcendental of being (which already edges towards the Kantian sense of ‘transcendental’) that metaphysics as ontology came to be considered independent of theology and transcendentally prior to it, in the course of a long process that culminated with Suárez in the early seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> And this was no mere procedural matter, for it meant that concepts of ‘height’ were no longer identical with concepts of ‘the most universal’ and that the former was now logically situated within the transcendental space of the latter. Excellence has been reduced to one more fact within a field fundamentally defined by facts – whereas previously all facts pointed ultimately towards the highest excellence and were only ‘there’ at all in

<sup>26</sup> This transposition is suggested by Luce Irigaray, in *The Way of Love*, trans. H. Bostic and S. Pluháček (London: Continuum, 2002). Even if the term was never quite used in that way, something of such a reversal was implied in it. See also Jean-Luc Marion, *Le Phénomène érotique* (Paris: Grasset, 2003), 9–23. I am indebted here for discussions with Tony Baker of the Episcopal Divinity School, Austin, Texas.

<sup>27</sup> See Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 223–291.

<sup>28</sup> See J.-F. Courtine, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique* (Paris: PUF, 1990).

their various ways of being because they were literally *facta*, made things or gifts suspended from this height, and symbolically signed with a trace of their sublime origin.

(b) *Representation*

Secondly, as regards knowledge by representation, the new model was much encouraged by Scotus's view that one can formally distinguish the divine intellect, as representing truth, from the divine being, which enjoys a certain metaphysical primacy. It was especially in relation to the paradigmatic model of divine knowledge that Scotus distinguished the *esse obiectivum* of known being as something 'caused to be known' by God and as intending a represented object, from the *esse formalis* of the actual representation itself. Through his 'objective' knowledge of things, God now *precisely* and univocally represents them, whereas, for Aquinas, God's eminent 'representation' of things as *identical* with his very being (not formally distinct from it, as for Scotus), knows things through a heightened *dissimilarity* to them – knows them truly by achieving them in himself as more than themselves and only knowable in their alien finitude as the participability of their infinitely perfect exemplary instance. It was just this traditional Platonic 'exemplarism' which Scotus abandoned: no longer is the stone as known by God 'nobler' than the stone as it finitely exists.<sup>29</sup>

In the older exemplarist view it can most of all be seen that Platonic-Aristotelian 'knowledge by identity' implies also a 'knowledge through transformation'. But with Scotus this becomes a knowledge through literal 'copying', even in the case of God, who 'mirrors' those things which he has willed to bring into being, yet in such a way that the mirror has ontological precedence over that which it mirrors.<sup>30</sup> This means that God can 'efficiently' produce the ideal objects of his knowledge independently of their formal reference or their formally eminent real pre-containment of created things. In addition, since his knowledge of actual things is merely consequent upon his willed production of them, rather than being – as for Aquinas – identical with his essence and with his *Verbum* (the second person of the Trinity), it has acquired a discursive as well as an intuitive aspect (and so in this respect also comes more univocally to resemble human knowledge).

<sup>29</sup> Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* IV, dist. 1 q. 1 para. [20]. See also, for a fine account of this point, Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid*, 48–72.

<sup>30</sup> Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 32 §23.

Such an account of divine understanding encourages the possibility that human knowledge also is essentially the subjective efficient and discursive production of an image, and only secondarily an intuited image ‘of’ something.<sup>31</sup> Gradually, this came to displace the Aristotelian and Thomist view that human understanding does not primarily depend on an accuracy of copying, but rather is guaranteed to be true (unless something ‘unnaturally’ interferes with this reality) by the unmediated identity of the abstracted form in the mind with the form as it exists when combined with matter in the material substances of which we have knowledge.

This switch from knowledge by identity to knowledge by representation was equally encouraged, from Scotus through to Ockham, by the increasing consideration that God, through exercise of his *potentia absoluta*, can sever the normal link between our mind’s understanding of things and the way they are in themselves. This helps to ensure that, in Scotus, the primary thing that is known through cognitive intention is not the real, external form-matter compound as for Aquinas, but rather, for the first time in history, an ‘object’, the *esse objectivum* which is a fundamentally inward reality, a ‘copy’ in principle detachable from external reference, because it no longer involves a real transmission of form from the external reality.<sup>32</sup> Following Ibn Sina, and what Étienne Gilson rightly called *augustinisme avicennisant*, most Franciscan theologians had already (unlike Aquinas) rejected Aristotle’s view that a form could pass as *species* all the way from matter to the immaterial intellectual capacity of the soul (or ‘mind’). This was because they considered it inappropriate to assign to the intellect such a degree of passivity in the face of a non-reflexive and so non-intellectual source: for their various alternative explanations, sensation is seen as somehow occasioning or triggering an auto-activation on the part of the mind. All these theories tended to involve, in consequence, some sort of notion of a direct co-ordination by God of material with spiritual causality at the immanent level itself. (In this way a theory of ‘causality by concurrence’ was invoked: see (d) below).<sup>33</sup>

This fear of ascribing any sort of passivity to the human mind in the face of non-cognitive and material sources can be seen as essentially linked to Plotinian tradition, which rejected the full descent of the human soul into a material body, in contrast to the ‘theurgic’ construal of Plato (Iamblichus, Proclus and Damascius), which allowed this, and therefore much more embraced a receptivity of the human mind in the face of the material

<sup>31</sup> For all this paragraph see Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 405–457.

<sup>32</sup> Duns Scotus, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 13 par. [12] 39 (461).

<sup>33</sup> See Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 72.

cosmos, often indeed seen as in some sense ‘greater’ and more intellectual (as animated by the world soul, following Plato’s *Timaeus*) than the human mind itself.<sup>34</sup> The latter perspective (known to him via Dionysius, John Damascene and the Proclean *Liber de Causis*), almost as much as his Aristotelianism, encouraged Aquinas’s ‘materialist’ emphasis, and allowed him much more to stress a humility of the human mind before the material creation, despite the truth that it is the noblest thing within that creation. Since the latter is the work of God, proceeding from an infinite mind with which the human mind is not commensurate, it could not therefore be formed by us (even if we had the materials to hand, in contrast to the later Renaissance claims of Ficino and Galileo).<sup>35</sup> Aquinas’s position here seems to do more justice to credal theology. Hence the Franciscan rejection of knowledge by identity for knowledge by representation is linked to a theology that is Platonising *in a bad sense*, one which underrates the nobility of the material creation.

The new Franciscan idea that we know primarily an object which intentionally ‘represents’ reality through copying it, producing a kind of phenomenal *simulacrum*, ultimately ensures the modern turn from ontology to epistemology, although this turn usually followed Ockham rather than Scotus in abandoning the ‘intentional’ moment in favour of a passively present atomic sensation, or else a phantasmic ‘idea’ in the case of René Descartes and John Locke – here following remotely Peter Auriole (just before Ockham) and Nicholas of Autrecourt (Ockham’s follower) rather than Ockham himself.<sup>36</sup> For Ockham, the human mind engages in an act of understanding by fictively substituting a ‘name’ for the thing known through sensation, in a way that further opens up a sceptical prospect (again by invoking God’s *potentia absoluta*) of doubting any intrinsic connection between names and things whatsoever. However, Scotus’s intentionalist variant returns much later with the thought of Husserl, and forms the basis both for his phenomenological *epoché* and curious combination of a quasi-realist receptivity with a transcendently idealist closure against transcendent reference to the real. This Scotist scheme is only mutated, not abandoned, by Heidegger, since he

<sup>34</sup> See Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> On Ficino and Galileo in this respect, see J.-L. Chrétien, ‘From God the Artist to Man the Creator’, in *Hand to Hand: Listening to the Work of Art*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 94–130.

<sup>36</sup> See André de Muralt, ‘Kant, le dernier occamien: Une nouvelle définition de la philosophie moderne’ (1975), in *La Métaphysique de la phénomène* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1985), 138–159, specifically 146.

identifies the human phenomenological openness towards – and anxiety in the face of – being, with the ‘there’ of being as such: *Da-Sein*.<sup>37</sup>

In the Scotist instance, an older sense that knowledge is an event which, through formal participation, ‘really relates’ us to the ontological form in its mode of ‘being known’, and so to its intentional ‘rebound’ back to the form/matter compound, is lost: now what is ‘intended’ by the act of understanding and its correlative object is merely a ‘represented’ being in the world, since the formality of the known object may ‘copy’ the real external thing, but has no real formal identity or continuity with it. And the newly invented ‘object’ sustains an ontological novelty through all its later transmutations: as primarily (following the divine paradigm) a ‘possibility’ it is prior to either actual essence or to existence, and yet as *aliquid* (‘something’) rather than *res*, it still shares with real things a parity of univocal being. Thus Scotus alternates in different places as to whether the first object of the intellect is real being or, rather, both real and objective being, and he opens the way for Suárez’s placing of *res* itself under the aegis of the *aliquid*, defined since Scotus as the ‘not nothing’, while leaving it unclear as to whether there is now a ‘transcendental object’ embracing both ‘things’ and ‘concepts’. In this way being starts to be reduced to the representable and ontology to give way to epistemology: a transition that will be consummated by Descartes and Kant.<sup>38</sup>

### (c) *Possibilism*

In the third case of the modal priority of the possible over the actual it is, once again, a matter of stressing the *potentia absoluta* as God’s primary attribute, along with an elevation of the divine will over the divine intellect, as well as, still more significantly, the formal distinction of the two. The latter notion ensures that reasoning, sundered from the erotic (in the sense of the desiring) will be more and more thought of in terms of the consideration of

<sup>37</sup> See de Muralt, *L’Unité de la philosophie politique*, 7–26 (esp 24), 154–157; ‘La Critique de la notion scotiste d’*esse objectivum*, le “psychologisme” et le “nominalisme” occamiens’, in *Métaphysiques médiévales: Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* (Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel, 1999), 20. De Muralt’s work is only marred by his refusal to accept that there is a significantly Neoplatonic dimension in Aquinas and that this is needed to enhance his Aristotelianism, with which it is not, however, essentially at variance. Curiously, such a recognition would render more powerful the general drift of de Muralt’s genealogy – especially in relation to the issue of causality, where the rise of concurrence was directly linked to the decline of Neoplatonic *influentia*. See Schmutz, ‘La Doctrine médiévale des causes’. See also for the above paragraph, Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 88–105, 405–457.

<sup>38</sup> Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 405–457.



an *a priori* repertoire of logical possibilities, while, equally, willing, sundered from an intrinsic determination by the rationally best, starts to become reduced to an arbitrary choice that precedes any necessities endemic to an order of actuality.<sup>39</sup>

For Aristotle, the actual was primary in terms of definition, time and substance.<sup>40</sup> We can define things because we encounter them. Possibilities arise only because certain things are already actual and these are the most basic realities, the primary instantiations of being. Accordingly, potentiality cannot actualise itself but must be actualised by what is already in being. This means that the possible is defined in terms of its tendency to the realisation of an actual *telos*.

Such an outlook was taken over and even augmented by Aquinas. For he understood the contingency of the created world in terms of the dependency of its *partial* actualisations (and so its partial *perfections*), upon the divine simple and infinite actuality. In this manner he considered the actualised ‘necessities’ of the created order which conformed to the regularities of eternal reason to be just as contingent – since they are dependent on the divine creative act – as its apparently more accidental or aleatory features.

For many of the Franciscan theologians, and pre-eminently Duns Scotus, this outlook paid too much tribute to pagan fatality. Yet one can argue that they only thought this because, in the wake of a conceptual paradigm shift from a more allegorical to a more literalist apprehension of biblical content, they were *reinterpreting* the biblical legacy rather than attending to it more precisely.

‘More literalist’ here means in part that the *sensus literalis* itself (which does not quite coincide with our contemporary meaning of ‘literal’) was less and less taken to include also the symbolic participation of natural realities ‘literally’ referred to (in our modern sense) in the divine. It means in addition that the allegorical, tropological and anagogical – that is, Christological, ethical and eschatological – senses (that are covertly implied by the *sensus literalis*) were increasingly reduced to a positive meaning of ‘literal prophecy’.<sup>41</sup>

This degeneration, as Henri de Lubac argued, destroyed in quasi-Nestorian fashion the Christological possibility of theology as such, which is grounded in a pointing of all created reality to the *communicatio idiomatum*

<sup>39</sup> For all of this section, see Nef, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?*, 314–411.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1049b4–5.

<sup>41</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: Les Quatre Sens de l'écriture* (Paris: Aubier, 1964), II-II, 263–302. See also Peter Candler, *Theology, Rhetoric, Manuduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006).

between Christ's divine and human natures, within which divine realities are translated into the terms of created symbolic echo and counter-echo – and are not left as 'separately' divine, conveyable only to human beings in positive, arbitrary, authoritarian terms.<sup>42</sup> If one takes account of the fact (which the best modern scholarship confirms) that the Bible is *internally* constituted through a typological apprehension of the cosmos, history and language, then this gradual slide towards 'Nestorian' literalism by no means implies an increase in 'biblical' influence at the expense of Neoplatonising metaphysics.

Indeed one should argue just the contrary: the very theologians (from Scotus through to Ockham and then to Suárez) who abandoned a metaphysically participatory framework were the same theologians who tended to abandon also a grounding of *quaestio* in *lectio*, or of scholastic dispute in scriptural commentary (whereas Aquinas commented with great exegetical and theological acumen on at least nine books of the Bible, while also compiling a *Catena Aurea* of Patristic commentaries on the Scriptures). This was because they increasingly tended to reduce revelation to the divine disclosure of isolated facts and logically linked propositions which could be distilled from the narrative and typological flow of Scripture, whose significance was in consequence downplayed and left to the musings of more 'mystical' writers. So it is precisely the more classical Christian sensibility, which tends to think of the disclosive role of the symbol as irreducible, and of revelation as given in signs whose horizontal *semiosis* (linked always to inter-bodily communication) cannot be elided from their vertical import, which will tend also to be sympathetic to the metaphysical mysteries of participation. For in the latter case it is taken that we 'see in part', and cannot ever travel to the back of the 'dark glass' in order to compare image with original, or the precise way in which our minds are able obscurely 'to envisage' the divine.

So the later Franciscan theologians tended to be suspicious of *both* participation *and* allegory as impairing our acknowledgement of the absolute freedom of God by supposing that various created realities, by their very nature, disclose something of the eternal divine essence. Instead of the notion of a partial reflection of created glory, they preferred to stress the sheer arbitrary electedness of every aspect of the created order. Hence the very notion of 'contingency' started to be redefined, with archiepiscopal backing at Paris and Canterbury, as a pure possibility that might not have been instantiated

<sup>42</sup> De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*, II-II, 198–207, 317–328, 349–352.

at all, or else instantiated otherwise.<sup>43</sup> For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, an actuality realises a possibility, but does not *continue* to be synchronically shadowed by a real possibility that is a hypostasised logical possibility, since for Aquinas an actuality fulfils in some measure a divinely intended good and therefore ‘cancels out’, through its very fulfilment, the genuinely possible. By contrast, for Duns Scotus, the contingency of a finite actual moment is only guaranteed by the *persistence* in some sense of the real possibility of an alternative actuality which is therefore *synchronous* with that actuality.<sup>44</sup>

One could say that the latter view ignores the non-punctuality of events: the way in which, for a single actuality to have been different, everything would have had to be different, all the way back to the outset of time. But this is just why, with Leibniz, Scotist modalism eventually shifts into the idiom of possible-worlds theory – the set of compossibles of this world is perennially shadowed by the sets of compossibles of infinite other worlds. An entirely aleatory construal of this situation is, however, prevented in Leibniz by his mathematicised Avicennian view that possibility in itself constitutes essences which urge towards existence; equally by his view that being is still, as for Aquinas, a perfection, and finally by the affirmation that God chooses the best of all possible worlds.<sup>45</sup>

But already before Leibniz, with Descartes, a voluntarism more radical even than that of Ockham had pointed the way to an overcoming of any essentialist possibilism, which supposes that God is presented with an *a priori* range of essential possibilities that he has not merely ‘made up’. Once Descartes had suggested that even the principle that 2 and 3 make 5 is the result of a divine decree for our world only, the prospect emerged of a more anarchic possibilism which thinks in terms of an absolutely open possibility of myriad conceivable axiomatisations for myriad varying systems corresponding to myriad various worlds.<sup>46</sup> It is within this lineage that, in our own day, a ‘plural worlds’ theorist like David Lewis can now

<sup>43</sup> See *La Condamnation parisienne de 1277*, trans. and ed. David Piché (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999), condemned articles 58–60, p. 98; 96, p. 108; 99, 103, p. 110; 107, 111, p. 112; 130, p. 118; 135–136, p. 120; 140–141, p. 122; 159, p. 126; 186, p. 136. These condemnations frequently targeted positions held by nearly everyone to be heterodox, generally Averroistic perspectives affirming the eternity of the world and the absolute eternal necessity of celestial motions, but in such a manner as to bring within their range incorporations of Hellenic philosophical perspectives concerning finite reflections of the eternal rational order such as those entertained by Aquinas.

<sup>44</sup> Duns Scotus, *Lectura I*, 39. And see Nef, *Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?*, 347–371, and David B. Burrell CSC, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1993), 25–37, 43–46.

<sup>45</sup> Nef, *Qu’est-ce que la métaphysique?*, 379–411.

<sup>46</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 21, p. 14.

*ontologically* subordinate all experienced actuality to the status of mere examples of the possibility that we know about in the instantiated possible world that we inhabit, implying that there very likely really ‘are’ infinitely many other instantiated worlds.<sup>47</sup> Atheism has no reason to invoke any transcendent prior actuality, and therefore it must revert in a more anarchic mode to Ibn Sina: there can be no reason why any possible system is actualised and therefore we must, on the whole (a certain agnosticism intrudes at this point), assume that what is possible is also (somewhere, somehow) actual, or from ‘its own point of view’ grants another mode of actuality. Therefore, this ‘modal realism’ implies that *no* world truly exists at all, and its multi-nihilistic atheism perfectly combines an ultimately theologically derived voluntarism – converted into a random instantiation of all possible sets of compossibles – with an equally theologically derived possibilism (from the same theological stock), which reduces the actual to a mathematically or logically comprehensible mode of organisation.

In this way, as in so many others, it is the legacy of *a certain type of medieval theology* which has ensured the modern triumph of atheism: (1) in reaction against its arbitrary, authoritarian God,<sup>48</sup> (2) in recognition of his redundancy within a voluntarist-possibilist outlook, and finally (3) in essential continuity with such a theology after all, given the fact that any assertion of an ultimate void of virtual potential can readily be given a ‘western Buddhist’ sort of gloss.

But what it is further crucial to note is the link between attitudes to the modal on the one hand, and attitudes to the existential on the other, already discussed in section (a) above. If metaphysics on the post-Scotist view is about being, and being concerns just the bare given instance of ‘not nothing’ (as in Suárez), then actuality can no longer be construed as a rising order of perfections, and the complete ‘nature’ of a thing is fully determined, not by the arriving ‘gift’ of actuality, but by a preceding inert, ‘given’ possibility. It follows that metaphysics defined as the science of univocal being quickly becomes in effect (again, as already in Suárez), or even in name, the science not so much of every *ens*, but rather of every *res*, whether actual or possible, with priority given to the possible – and so also to formal logic, to a sheerly indeterminate notion of will as choice (instead of the idea of will only being possible through a fundamental lure towards a *telos*) and eventually, as with Kant, to the priority of knowledge over being, since knowledge has prior access to possibilities and to the ‘formally

<sup>47</sup> David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> See Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

distinguished' transcendental categories within which alone it is supposedly 'possible' for us to know, but to know, theoretically, only phenomena.

By these modes the rise of possibilism aligns exactly with the shift in meaning of the term 'transcendental'. If actual existence is merely the instantiation of existential possibility, then *ens* denotes a predetermined range of meaning for being as a cognitive category (either infinite or finite with all its sub-divisions) rather than an infinite mysterious depth of actuality which finite things all participate in, to some limited degree. The same applies to all the other transcendental terms: *unum*, *verum*, *bonum*, *pulchrum*, *res*, *quid* and *aliquid*. (The latter term denotes the fact that every *res*, in order to be a 'thing', must have some sort of identity – in the infinite case inclusive of 'all' identity, in finite cases identified in relation to other, different finite identities.)<sup>49</sup> After Scotus, all these transcendental terms were generally no longer held to be fully 'convertible' with each other, such that (as for Aquinas), we only distinguish their infinite uncreated, or even their finite, created, instances from each other from our limited cognitive point of view. Instead, it was now held that these terms must be 'formally distinguished' from each other, on pain of losing their separate meanings, since it was now supposed that we have a *full and complete insight* into those meanings, precisely because 'transcendental' had already come to denote, long before Kant, an *a priori* grasp of the possible range of meaning of these terms. This implies, questionably, that we can comprehend categorically the mode of that 'truth' or 'goodness' or 'beauty' which it is possible for us to comprehend, and that we can know in advance what formal shape it will take: this is exactly what Kant seeks to define for the three 'transcendental' realms, now formally distinct from each other (and no longer intra-convertible), in each of his three critiques.<sup>50</sup>

This entire 'critical' enterprise is questionable, because one can point out, 'metacritically', that it has simply assumed a particular axiomatic system according to which the empirical contents that fulfil the criteria for possible truth, goodness and beauty are always hierarchically conditioned by these criteria, and cannot reciprocally qualify these very criteria themselves. And such an axiomatic system is counter-intuitive, because we know (or at least post-classical cultures know) that, for example, a single particular actual work of art may redefine for us our sense of the possible 'range' of the beautiful, while equally a single passage in a human life may do the same thing for our sense of the ethical, and even the possible modes of theoretical

<sup>49</sup> See Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid*.

<sup>50</sup> See Ludger Honnefelder, *La Métaphysique comme science transcendentale*, trans. from the original German by Isabelle Mandrella (Paris: PUF, 2002).

truth have been redefined by the invention of non-Euclidean geometries, transfinite and space-time relativity – which all render problematic Kant’s Euclidean- and Newtonian-based *a priori* categories of possible understanding.

Yet despite the way in which developments in modern mathematics, physics, aesthetics and politics (in the latter case revealing, since Hegel, the links between Kant’s supposedly universal ethical principles and the dubious assumptions of a liberal political system) all tend to call the Kantian approach into doubt, most modern philosophy has continued to be characterised by an alliance between the redefined transcendental and the priority of the possible. This is as true for phenomenology as it is for the analytic tradition. So cognitively speaking, as was already suggested above, we remain caught within a ‘certain Middle Ages’. It follows that to oppose to this a genuinely Thomistic or other mode of traditional theological-philosophical realism (all indebted to the Neoplatonic fusing of Plato with Aristotle) is not to be anachronistically nostalgic, but rather to appeal to a different strand of medieval tradition which, to a degree, resurfaced during ‘the Renaissance’. (For example, it is arguable that Pico della Mirandola was more Thomistic than many early modern ‘Thomists’.)<sup>51</sup>

In this way, the idea that natural necessities, essences, inherent formal meanings (*eide*) and so forth arrive only with actualisation as ‘gift’ from God is lost sight of. Instead, one has a doubly arid mere *givenness* without tint of generosity or gratitude. Possibilities are sheerly ‘there’ without real receiving, while actualities are non-predicamental existential instantiations of essences, equally just ‘there’ as if a description of ‘how’ they are was sufficient in itself, and did not require any raising of the issue as to ‘why’ they are in being at all, on the valid assumption that ascription of derivation colours our sense of the way things are ‘in themselves’.

An adequate (if not provable) answer to the question ‘Why?’ must be in terms of personal donation. For to say, with Heidegger, who lies still fully within the univocalist-possibilist paradigm, that an impersonal being, identical with the virtual void and with temporal passage, ‘gives’ limited existences is futilely to try to describe how Being itself is merely ‘given’ in its destiny to both reveal and conceal itself in the ontic.<sup>52</sup> It is not explained why this should be the case, nor why this reality should only become apparent and so truly ‘be’ at all (for Heidegger’s still phenomenological outlook) for human *Dasein*. Still less is it explained why this *Dasein* should

<sup>51</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Pic de la Mirandole* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1964).

<sup>52</sup> See Antonio López, FSCB, *Gift and the Unity of Being* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2013); Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper, 1972).

happen to coincide with a living being, in contrast to Aristotle's account of the coincidence of reason, self-moving soul and heightened sensitivity of animal 'touch' in his 'rational animal'.<sup>53</sup> And nothing is explained at all (in contrast to Neoplatonism) as to why exactly the ontic should take physical and non-rational as well as rational biological forms, while the possibility of non-temporal rational existences ('angels') is illogically left out of consideration.

Finally, Heidegger supplies us with no reason as to why Being as exhausted by temporal instantiation should not be considered as but one more dimension of the ontic, since it concerns only the interplay between the actual and the possible. 'Being as such' suggests rather the self-standing, the replete and plenitudinous, which already contains in eminent mode all of the reality of mere beings. If, by contrast, as for Heidegger, it is only 'there' in the ontic, then it is still merely a Scotist univocal abstraction which occurs always in the 'same' fashion, *qua* being, in a myriad series of ontic differences whose differences are metaphysically indifferent, and therefore require, for a perfected atheism, the 'flatter', more explicitly nihilistic treatment of a Deleuze or a Badiou, without any privileging of humanity, nor of oracular sites of spatial disclosure (as in Heidegger's later writings).<sup>54</sup>

In this way we can come to see how *both* phenomenology (when it has not already covertly trespassed upon theology) *and* analytic philosophy, as we saw with David Lewis, logically conclude that a pure transcendental ontology without God must point in an entirely aleatory and nihilistic direction. Where the post-Scotist transcendental is logically allowed, beyond Kant and Husserl (and ultimately in the lineage of Descartes and Spinoza), once more (as with Scotus himself) to determine the range of possible being and not simply the range of possible knowing, then, in atheistic terms, this must imply an anarchic virtuality, bounded only by the inner-axiomatic constraints of logical necessity. Hume was absolutely correct to argue that, outside any theologically supported framework, including the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic doctrine of the hylomorphic shape of material reality, there can be no room for any notion of 'natural necessity'.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>53</sup> See Didier Franck, *Heidegger et le problème de l'espace* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1986); *Heidegger et le Christianisme* (Paris: PUF, 2004) I am indebted to discussions with David Bentley Hart concerning Heidegger. More will be said about Heidegger and animality in *On Divine Government*.

<sup>54</sup> See Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 104–108.

<sup>55</sup> See Quentin Meillassoux, *Après la finitude: Essai sur la nécessité de la contingence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006).

*(d) Concurrence*

In the fourth case, that of concurrence, the more divine freedom is construed in univocal and so ontotheological terms as guaranteed by its power to out-compete and trump created freedom the more – as an indirect, paradoxical consequence – created freedom, is then also granted an autonomous space outside divine causation.

The older medieval model of causation, as Jacob Schmutz has explained, was essentially Neoplatonic.<sup>56</sup> Its central notion was that of *influentia*, which remained true to the metaphoric basis of the word. According to this notion, a higher cause in a chain of causes (for example the heat and light of the sun as opposed to the nutritive power of the earth) is not merely a (de-metaphorised) external ‘influence’ upon a cause lower down in a causal series, which would therefore act as but one ‘factor’, albeit a predominant one, in bringing about a certain effect – like a man pushing along a supermarket trolley, but being slightly assisted by his toddler son. Instead, the higher cause is a ‘flowing into’ the entire lower causal scenario, such that it conditions, at a qualitatively higher level, *both* the lower effect *and* the lower cause, just as the sun’s heat has already determined in large part the shapes taken by the surface of the earth which allows plants to grow within it. For the Neoplatonic outlook, a hierarchy of forms meant that lower forms were determined by higher ones, such that the causality of the higher ones only operated *through* the lower ones, even though, as Aquinas following Proclus taught, higher causes are always, in a covert fashion, more powerfully at work, even at lower levels.<sup>57</sup>

Thus higher causes operate unilaterally, even though they of themselves give rise, at a lower level, to a certain ‘response’ to their influence. In the case of material reality however, matter itself is not given by form, but is either a surd residue or else (and always, of course, for the three biblically based monotheistic traditions) something whose existence is directly derived from the highest cause of all, the Creator himself. This means that between ‘formal’ and ‘material’ cause a certain irreducible *reciprocity* pertains: for Aquinas, for example, matter is only actualised through form, while in the terrestrial sphere form can only be realised and ‘individuated’ through material limitation. However, this

<sup>56</sup> Schmutz, ‘La Doctrine médiévale des causes’. On the emergence of causality as concurrence see also Burrell, *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions*, 94.

<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *STI* q. 65 a. 3 resp.: ‘the thing that underlies primarily all things [Being] belongs properly to the causality of the supreme cause’.



reciprocal causality is still not causality by concurrence, precisely because form and matter do not both contribute actual parts or aspects of the causal sufficiency required in order to produce a certain effect. To the contrary, the formal cause is only working when it is already conjoined with matter and vice versa. This is because, as with the hierarchy of forms, formal and material causality operate at qualitatively different levels. All the *actual* ‘influence’ is supplied by form; matter provides only a mysterious field of passive potentiality that limits and so particularises the active potential of form in its abstract essential reach. In the case of Aquinas, it is more strongly insisted (in accord with his creationism) that material potential itself only exists ‘through’ the transmission of form, since *forma dat esse*,<sup>58</sup> while the ‘designated’ or spatial dimension of matter crucial for individuation only arrives *with* the composite.<sup>59</sup> In the most ultimate perspective, for Aquinas, the individuation of a particular material thing is fully achieved through the entire participation of form and matter in being, which allows it to

<sup>58</sup> *ST I* q. 65 a. 4 resp.: ‘composites have being through forms’. (‘Composites’ comprise material potential and formal actuality.) See also *De Potentia Dei* q. 5 a. 4 ad. 1: *quantum unicuique inest de forma, tantum inest ei de virtute essendi*; *ST I* q. 17 a. 3: ‘a thing has being by its proper form’. Finally see *ST I* q. 66 a. 1 resp., where it is denied that formless matter has ever existed, even at the ‘beginning’ of creation, since if matter exists it is in act and ‘act itself is a form’. Hence, beyond Aristotle, matter is only actualised, is only in existence at all, through form.

<sup>59</sup> Aquinas *De Ente et Essentia* II (4); in *Boeth. de Trin.* q. 4 a. 1 Aquinas considers that the definition of ‘man in general’ as a species involves ‘matter in general’ or ‘undesignated matter’. So if the latter alone individuated, that would mean contradictorily that man as species was already an individual. On the other hand, if pure matter individuated man from ‘outside’ his specificity, that would suggest that the individual – in nominalist fashion – did not share in universal specificity and therefore that universal essences ‘could not be defined’, because they would then be just empirical generalisations that might be falsified. Designated space, therefore, it seems is a kind of ‘bridge’ which for Aquinas constitutes a necessary relation of matter as activated and individualising to form. The spatial or the quantitative supplies a mysterious transitional terrain between material potential and formal actuality – which is *not* as later for Descartes, building on Scotus (see below in the main text) itself ‘mere’ matter as pure extension, a matter *falsely* etherealised into geometric form. In other words a Cartesian reduction of all non-thinking reality, including all life, to ‘matter’, in reality *loses* matter in a quasi-idealistic way. This is just the kind of thing which the Cambridge Platonists Henry More and Ralph Cudworth pointed out against Descartes. See Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 125–150; John Milbank, ‘The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity’, in Peter Candler and Conor Cunningham, eds., *Transcendence and Phenomenology* (London: SCM, 2007), 288–333.

‘exist’ as this or that. Here the individuality provided by material limit is converted into a positive value exceeding the generic and the specific at the existential level.<sup>60</sup>

However, the model of causality by *influentia*, as exemplified in both the unilateral series of emanating forms and the reciprocal interplay of form with matter, is only undergirded by a specific sort of classical theology. This ensures, as I have already mentioned, that the most general derives from the highest. Not only does a higher rank pre-form the causal sphere of a lower rank; its influence also pre-forms in a more eminent, more powerful sense, the entire series of lower ranks as compared with the influence of the immediate higher rank at any level whatsoever. It is for this reason, to invert the principle just mentioned, that the highest cause is also the most universal: its influence is more at work than anything else even at the very base of the hierarchy. Indeed for Proclus, and still more for Aquinas, who affirms creation, the highest cause, which is also the highest form coincident with the *actus essendi*, continues to operate at the lowest level when the virtuality of all other, lesser causes is exhausted: ‘Being is innermost [*magis intimum*] in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things [*quod profundus omnibus inest*] since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing.’<sup>61</sup> This is exactly why there is matter: one can legitimately gloss Aquinas to say that it is a kind of vast shadow of all created being which reminds creatures, negatively, of the inexhausted and simple, unified divine active potential beyond the scope of created act and form.

This is, perhaps, the ultimate ground for the need of corporeal sacraments: beneath all our corruption an untouchable ‘innocence’ of matter always returns us to God, because undesignated matter as potential, like a kind of photographic negative of finite being, is alone the pure work of the first

<sup>60</sup> *ST I* q. 47 a. 1. Here Aquinas *denies* that the ‘distinction’ of things comes from matter and attributes it directly to the creative act of God, who can alone directly know singulars through an act of intuition which is identical to his act of causing them participatively to be: see *ST I* q. 14 a. 11; *SCG I* 54. 4. This is why Aquinas has no need for the Scotist *haecceitas*, which is an unexplained positive principle sheerly extrinsic to the Scotist ‘common nature’ of an essence. The latter somehow exists extra-mentally and can be instantiated either in mental universals or in material particulars no longer individuated by matter alone, since matter in itself for Scotus now causally contributes merely a quasi-actual aspect of an item. (See immediately below in the main text.) (The ‘common nature’, as involving free-floating hypostasised forms outside the mind – in contrast to Aquinas, who only has universal forms in the mind and materialised forms in things – seems ‘too Platonic’ in the usual crude sense of ‘Platonic’ as involving isolated hypostasised abstractions existing outside a knowing subject.) See Alain de Libera, *La Querelle des universaux de Platon à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 330–351. I am indebted here to discussions with Adrian Pabst and Phillip Blond.

<sup>61</sup> *ST I* q. 8 a. 1 resp.

cause operating without any secondary assistance, even in the sense of assistance at a qualitatively lower level (rather than in the sense of ‘concurrency’). It is just for this reason that, at the base of the ontological pyramid, the unilateral descent of qualitatively different formal causes gives way to the reciprocal interaction between descending form and a matter which lies, as it were, even beneath the reach of this descent, since its depths are plummeted by God alone. Even though form gives to matter its existence as potency, it cannot actually give this potency in its categorial essence through the exercise of any ‘influence’ whatsoever. And this is why our *sheerly* ‘negative’ knowledge of matter as that which is privated of form echoes in the depths the apophatic approach to the heights – which, however, in the case of the upward reference, is also in constant dialectical oscillation with a positive attribution.

It is therefore the eminence of God as *esse* which undergirds causal influence both as unilateral descent and as reciprocal interaction.

But within the scope of the Scotist univocal ontology, as already partially instigated by his Franciscan forebear Bonaventure,<sup>62</sup> this undergirding is lost, and in consequence the new causal model of ‘concurrency’ emerges,<sup>63</sup> which continues to dominate all of western philosophy up till and beyond Immanuel Kant. Since, for univocity, finite being fully ‘is’ in its finitude, outside of participation, it becomes possible to think of infinite and finite causes as each contributing distinct if unequal shares to any particular causal upshot, within a paradigm of flattened quantitative uniformity

<sup>62</sup> Bonaventure’s incipient univocalism is shown in the way in which he thinks that all finite beings possess the same basic ontological structure as regards substance and accident, genus, species and individuation etc. Thus he equates the surplus of existence over essence in creatures with the potentiality of matter (to which he attributes a quasi-form), ascribing to angels and human souls a ‘spiritual matter’. Again, he does not think, as Aquinas does, that for angels species coincides with individuality, nor that humans’ souls are only aspects of the entire human substance, because he does not think that matter, as the potentiality of being, can be an intrinsic limitation of being, but instead regards it as an extrinsic addition. Aquinas by contrast thinks of being as pure act which is limited by the potentiality of form (as genus and species) and of matter (as individual). In this way Bonaventure essentialises and univocalises finite existence by identifying it with fixed ‘quantitative’ degrees of material potential rather than the limited but dynamic participation of form in act, as according to Aquinas. The latter’s sense of hierarchic metaphysical difference is far more truly Neoplatonic, as is his view that the addition of intellect to animal being and the modifications of intellect are ‘accidental’ only in some sort of radically ‘proper’ sense. The Franciscan General accordingly starts to view the activities of angels in a more voluntarist, contingent sort of fashion which is only tendentially ‘more biblical’. See Bonaventure, *In II Sent.* dist. 3, p. 1, a. 1 q. 1, concl.; dist. 3, p. 1, a. 2, q. 3.

<sup>63</sup> In Bonaventure it does so with respect to the doctrines of intellectual illumination and divine grace: Bonaventure, *De Scientia Christ.* q. 4 resp.; *In II Sent.* dist. 24, p. 1 a. 1 q. 2. And see Schmutz, ‘La Doctrine médiévale des causes’; Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 89–97.

rather than of levels of qualitative differentiation.<sup>64</sup> Thus the metaphor of two horses pulling one barge, explicitly refused by Aquinas, was now embraced to describe the co-operation of God and creatures in bringing about finite created results, including that of human redemption.<sup>65</sup> Within the older view, to the contrary, it had been accepted that at every level of being, and supremely in the case of the Creator-created relationship, a cause at one lower level could be doing ‘all the work’, while at another, higher level, ‘all the work’ was equally being done by a higher cause – like the ultimate principles of motion (vital and physical) which allow the horses to pull the barge and the barge to be pulled at all. Here it should be noticed that the eminent cause not only fully determines the lower formal cause, but also the receptive capacity of the lower thing that is causally effected – in the case of material things this will mean the potential of designated matter, or the ‘material cause’ (the receptive capacity of matter as such being determined by the highest cause – God – alone). In this way reciprocal exchange is unilaterally given from a higher level.<sup>66</sup> But now, within the univocal outlook, the mystery of non-competing yet co-functioning replete causalities at different levels was abandoned for a theory which worked in terms of a ‘zero-sum game’ – the more of divine, the less of created causality at work, and vice versa.

The theory of causality by concurrence does not apply only to the Creator-created level. As with the case of causality by influence, the divine model provides the paradigm and guarantee for all lesser causality, while inversely the way one conceives the latter provides indispensable metaphors for thinking about the former. Here, again, theology provides the ultimate vision and yet its appeal to philosophical examples, both discursive and empirical, is indispensable. In the present instance, with respect to causes immanent to the created order, the notion of qualitatively different causes operating simultaneously and synergically at different hierarchical levels is abandoned. No longer do the planetary bodies entirely bring about terrestrial movements

<sup>64</sup> See Nef, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?*, 314–411.

<sup>65</sup> Aquinas, *Contra errores Graecorum*, 23; Scotus, *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 5; Peter John Olivi, *Sentence Commentary*, q. 72. The metaphor became yet more standard in the seventeenth century.

<sup>66</sup> From this it can be seen that there is a subtle linkage between two different and apparently unrelated monisms. That is to say, between *univocalist* metaphysics and a merely *unilateralist* and impossibly purist account of the gift, whereas an analogical metaphysics both entertains reciprocity as not contaminating the reality of gift and points to perspectives of asymmetrical and hierarchically instigated reciprocity which deny the absolute contrast of the reciprocal with the unilateral. See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 53, 90–98, and ‘The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love’, in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), 253–317.

in a higher idiom; instead, they simply provide a ‘general’ causal context, which no longer has such clearly hierarchic connotations. They can then ‘concur’ with more specific mechanical or vital or psychic causes on one and the same univocal plane of being.

In this way, the subtlety of the older account of a descending series was lost. For that account, causality was ‘one-way’, a unilateral path of downward descent, since the higher causes were complete in themselves and for this reason did *not* really ‘casually effect’ things in our modern sense (the sense which Hume criticised) at all; rather they ‘gave’, through qualified emanation of their own reality, the subordinate ‘effect’ itself.<sup>67</sup> Nothing at a lower level assisted the higher cause, and in this sense there was no reciprocation. On the other hand, the lower-level causality which is proper to the effect itself (like the nutritive power of plants as granted by the sun), is a kind of ‘response’ to the higher cause, which is nonetheless itself ‘granted’ by that higher cause, just as, at the very highest level of all, and with the most completeness, it is God who gives the response of creatures to himself which establishes and defines their very being, besides that further response through grace which ensures our justification and deification. So it becomes proper to speak here of a paradox of ‘unilateral exchange’.<sup>68</sup>

The new *concursum* model, however, renders the interaction of higher and lower formal causes ‘reciprocal’ in a far cruder sense. For now the two causes are both contributing different aspects of one reality in a way that is simply complementary in a banal, everyday sense: the co-operation between a more ‘general’ and a more ‘special’ (specific) mode of determining. However, if the concurrence model compromises unilaterality with respect to the embedded series of formal causes – both within this series itself<sup>69</sup> and between this entire series and the first cause – it also compromises reciprocity in the case where, for the older (Platonico-Aristotelian) view it more genuinely applies: namely in the case of form-matter interaction.

In the first case, there is concurrence because, after Duns Scotus, higher and lower co-operating forms are no longer melded by participation into one single, architectonically shaping form in the instance of a distinct substantive entity – as for example the form of a man integrates an entire series of physical forms which participate in this form, while the form of the man itself includes a share in the psychic, in intellection and in the

<sup>67</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, ‘Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’Onto-théo-logic’, *Revue Thomiste* (Jan.–Mar. 1995), 31–66.

<sup>68</sup> See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 89–97.

<sup>69</sup> Scotus applies this model to the co-operation of humans and the sun in the case of human generation: *Ordinatio* I, dist. 3, pa. 3, q. 2, no. 503.

divine *esse*. Instead, for Scotus, if a series of constituting forms are mentally separable, then there is some ground for this in the real. They cannot any longer be absolutely unified in reality, because the ineffable bond of *influentia* which renders two formal causes absolutely necessary at two different levels, according to different analogical degrees, has been sundered, in favour of the idea that the higher cause exerts a merely more ‘general’ rather than specific influence, thereby fatally identifying the superior with the vaguer rather than (as for Proclus and Aquinas) the more intimate.<sup>70</sup> There can be no such bond because there is no analogy in being: rather, a higher existential reality can univocally meet a lesser one within the same ‘plane of immanence’, to use Deleuze’s appropriate phrase.<sup>71</sup> It follows that a series of formal causes which are all just ‘doing a bit’ can in theory operate without each other, and that God could, according to his *potentia absoluta*, bring about just this state of affairs. Moreover, *esse* is not uniquely and exclusively a divine effect, as for Aquinas, for whom co-operating finite causes only contribute in an analogical and participatory way that is entirely subsumed within the self-sufficient action of God. Instead for Scotus, since finite creatures equally exist, though with less ‘intensity’ alongside the infinite, their causal contribution to the existence of things must genuinely ‘add’ something to the divine initiative.<sup>72</sup>

When it comes to the second case, of formal-material interaction, then here also Duns Scotus abandoned the *influentia* model which was inseparable from the analogical conception of being. Form could no longer ‘entirely’ give being to matter. If matter is not only mentally distinguishable from form, but distinguishable as generically different, then in the concrete it must be not just really distinct, but also potentially separable from form, since if form and matter interact, this has to occur on the same univocal plane of being and both must contribute ‘something’ to the existence of a material substance.<sup>73</sup> For the ‘something’ that is matter to be real it cannot be a kind of mysterious negative shadow of form which makes sense only as the rebound to the One at the base of a descending formal series. (Here Aquinas, by contrast, clearly follows the Neoplatonists in trying to make more metaphysical sense, through deployment of such a scheme, of Aristotelian matter as ‘pure potency’.)

<sup>70</sup> Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, dist. 3, pa. 2. q. 1, and I, dist. 36, q. unica no. 65. On these grounds Scotus denies, against Aquinas, that *esse* is entirely and exclusively a divine effect.

<sup>71</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1987), 266.

<sup>72</sup> Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* IV, dist. I, q. 1 §7.

<sup>73</sup> Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* II, q. 1, n. 11 (121); *Quaestiones in Metaphysicis* 7, q. 5; *Lectura* II, dist. 12, q. unica. And see Eric Alliez, *Capital Times: Tales from the Conquest of Time*, trans. Georges Van den Abbeele (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1996), 206–207.

Instead, it must ‘fully exist’ in its own right, and the potential of matter must after all have a kind of actuality and a kind of general formality. It is for this reason, in part, that Scotus affirms that God *could* have created pure matter without form and likewise specific form that can be individualised (by ‘haecceity’) without matter.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, one can also reverse the priority here. Because Scotus wishes to say that everything is possible for God, and the current order of the world is merely the result of his decision for a certain set of compossibles, he is encouraged to embrace the *concursum* model of causality and the real separability of form from matter.

So for Scotus and his successors, matter and form reciprocally interact in a somewhat similar way to the series of embedded formal causes. However if, in the latter case, unilaterality was lost in favour of ‘partial co-operation’, in the former case, the same notion actually displaces a *more radical* reciprocity, for which totally asymmetrical and non-continuous realities interact without hierarchical interval to produce a single material substance. Again, following the *influentia* model, both realities are indispensable, and therefore the existence of separated matter is impossible even for God. Later we shall see the political implications of this shift.

For now it can be clearly seen that a theologically encouraged account of causality has long survived a loss of interest in divine causality and the memory of this genealogical origin.

### 3 Modern Philosophy: A Theological Critique

It has been shown how the modern philosophical preference for univocity, for representation, for possibility (including the division of the transcendentals and the sundering of will from intellect) and causal concurrence, possesses not always fully acknowledged theological roots – even if these roots were reciprocally encouraged to grow within the soil of a certain philosophical outlook.

From a Christian point of view, the buried theological stratum of modern thought does not obviously represent a progressive advance in Christian reasoning, but is rather thoroughly questionable. Equally, its more philosophical aspect does not seem rationally obvious as compared with older realist metaphysical outlooks.

<sup>74</sup> Scotus *Opus Oxoniense* II, dist. 17. The possible existence of form as we know it in this temporal and sublunar world without matter is affirmed (against Aquinas, amongst others) in Archbishop Étienne Tempier’s Parisian condemnations of 1277 which helped to shift the European mind in favour of the *via moderna*. See *La Condamnation parisienne de 1277*, condemnations nos. 96 and 103, pp. 108–111.

So one is left with a picture of two competing existential visions, which were originally elected for reasons of conjoined theological-philosophical preference, in which the theological factor in the end carried most weight, since this had to do with the most ultimate individual and social orientations. The choice between these visions has never been a matter of pure rational argument.

The theological and philosophical objections to the fourfold vision of the *via moderna* extended into ‘modern philosophy’ will now be summarised in the subsequent sections of the first sequence, beginning with the defence of analogy versus univocity. The treatment of ‘identity versus representation’ will be the most extensive, extending into several further sections, since ‘representation’ shapes the space of epistemology, which is the most determinative space of modern philosophy.

#### 4 Analogy versus Univocity

Theologically speaking, univocity breaks with the entire legacy of negative theology and eminent attribution, which also undergirded doctrines of deification. God can only be mysterious for this new outlook as infinitely ‘more’, while if the quality of this ‘more’ is to us unknown, then it proposes a voluntarist rupture to our understanding, not an eminent continuity. Thus for Scotus the phrase ‘God is good’ can only be meaningful if God is good with an infinite degree of precisely that perfection we know as ‘good’ with exactly the same meaning. No ‘ascent’ to God will here deepen that meaning, encouraged by the lure of an ever greater negative mystery.

Univocity also obliterates the sense that creation is through and through a divine gift with its claim that being as such, as opposed to finite being, is not created, since the term ‘being’ has now become a logically transcendental place-holder that precedes any existentially actual reality. Hence both infinite and finite being are now held to presume the formal possibility ‘to be’.<sup>75</sup> For Aquinas, by contrast, the divine infinite being is an absolutely unprecedented (logically as well as existentially) and mysterious simple actuality that is identical with infinite intelligence, while abstract being in general, *ens commune*, is first of all a created actuality and only thereby a subject of possible becoming or even of fictional speculation.

Philosophically speaking, univocity is only one possible *reading* of the ontological difference between Being and beings. It represents an existential orientation more than it does any conclusive mode of argument. For it is in

<sup>75</sup> See Honnefelder, *La Métaphysique comme science transcendente*.



part the result of an ungrounded decision that there can be no ‘middle’ in *meaning* between identity and difference – and therefore also the result of a decision against any specific, irreducible meaning for poetic metaphor and any grounding of meaning in a depth which for us must remain not fully fathomable. Since the beautiful in its excess to rational analysis and empirical verification is precisely a strange ‘shining through’ of infinite, inaccessible meaning to finite, locatable meaning, this decision is also a decision against the objective reality of beauty and a decision for the subordination of the appearance of beauty (now confined to epistemological epiphenomenon) to the reality of the sublime as our experience of the margin of an infinite which is simply inscrutable. For the reality of beauty in which the terrible is strangely the consoling, one substitutes simply the aesthetic of the terrible and the continuously interruptive and yet absolutely withheld.<sup>76</sup>

Univocity is equally a decision against a middle in *being* between identity and difference. Since the meaning of beauty is reduced to the subjective (something, after Kant, to do with the experience of the co-ordination of our diverse faculties), an aesthetically neutral objective reality is seen as always parcelled out (in line with the ‘concurrency’ model) between a general conditioning sameness on the one hand, which is ultimately the sameness of being as such, and a particular conditioned and yet reciprocally conditioning difference on the other. The connecting link or ‘correlation’ between conditioning and conditioned now becomes sheerly esoteric – hence the mystery of ‘schematism’ in Kant – within the very mode of philosophising that refuses to allow or to theorise any sort of occult connection.<sup>77</sup>

Alternatively, by a simple act of sceptical reversal (the ‘postmodern’), difference can become the primary conditioning factor and sameness the factor which is transcendently determined by difference and yet, through its reciprocal causal power, always succeeds in betraying its ‘virtual’ pressure towards pure otherness. This terminally negative dialectic (which it remains, despite denials and aspirations) offers to its devotees an unexplained mediation of ontological violence posing as evident *gnosis* to the initiated.

Yet the decision to refuse ‘the between’ (*metaxu*) of mediation, remains the same in either case, while the modern Hegelian ‘dialectical’ option is but a counterfeit mediation which involves a constant agonistic shuttle between sameness and difference that ultimately issues both in a swallow-

<sup>76</sup> See John Milbank, ‘Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent’, in Regina Schwartz, ed., *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature and Theology Approach the Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2004), 211–234.

<sup>77</sup> On ‘correlation’ see Meillassoux, *Après la finitude*.

ing of the different by the same and in an abjection of pure difference as totally contingent and irrelevant for the comprehension of truth.<sup>78</sup> In the case of *both* Hegel *and* the postmodern exacerbations of his reasoning, this irrelevant untruth is eventually proclaimed to be the nihilistic truth itself.<sup>79</sup>

If one follows these reflections, then one can see how one might deconstruct the typical ‘analytic’ claim that being is not a predicate and therefore is always said in the same fashion. Since, in terms of this claim, being is in no sense a quality, then the predication of being is simply the upshot of a double negation – dialectic being always latent to analysis as the only thing which prevents it from being sheerly tautological. What is, is only what is not ‘not’, not nothing at all. But this conceals an arbitrary decision to make but one aspect of existential grammar fundamental: the direct contrast between all the parts of the verb ‘to be’ and pure nullity. For as Plato taught, ‘there is a swallow’ (for example), stands in an indeterminate (semantic and phenomenological) contrast not only with ‘no swallow at all’, but also with ‘not a wagtail’, ‘not a magpie’, ‘not a blackbird’, ‘not a seagull’.<sup>80</sup> In this way the vertical of the predication of being over against nullity always gets horizontally diverted into the labyrinth of essential and particular differences. And ultimately, the decision to make ‘is not not’ normative is a decision for the *priority* of the not, since such a decision is linked to the new priority of the possible over the actual. This means that the mark of a thing’s being is that it instantiates a ‘can be this’ in such a way that the fate of ‘there will not be a this’ always hovers over it as the shadow of death, and fundamentally defines it. Such a definition in turn implies an equality between nullity and being (as also affirmed by the modern mathematical embrace of zero as a fully fledged number in the ‘natural’ number series) and therefore a kind of incipient nihilism.<sup>81</sup> Actuality is here not permitted to do any work in revealing essence or unique characteristics: as with the case of

<sup>78</sup> See William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (New York: SUNY, 1995) for an elaboration of a ‘metaxological’ point of view against univocal (i.e. ‘analytic’) and equivocal (i.e. postmodern) and dialectical (i.e. Hegelian) philosophies. Since his metaxological’ is at once the mediating, the analogical and the participatory, rearticulated in such a way as to take more account of temporal dynamics as compared with medieval metaphysics, his subtle but luminous project is profoundly similar to that of ‘Radical Orthodoxy’. On the abjection side to Hegel, see Slavoj Žižek’s now classic statement, ‘Not only as *Substance*, but also as *Subject*’, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 201–231.

<sup>79</sup> See John Milbank, ‘The Double Glory, or Paradox Versus Dialectics’, in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, eds., *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2009), 110–233.

<sup>80</sup> Plato, *Sophist* 1003e–1007b.

<sup>81</sup> See Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism* (London: Routledge, 2002); Jacob Klein, *Greek Mathematical Thought and the Origins of Algebra* (New York: Dover, 1993).

Kant's bourgeois conclusion, an actual reality is no more than its abstract numismatic equivalent. It is surely incredible that the famous 'thousand thalers' example is so readily accepted, because were one, say, to substitute 'daughters' (not perhaps in such great quantities), one would see the monstrosity of what he is saying. Is a number of actual daughters qualitatively and essentially the same as a number of possible daughters? This would only follow were it really conceivable that one could reduce their actual phenomenality to either the abstract mathematical ratios which they embody or else the causes (willed or otherwise) which went into their formation, or a combination of both. But if one wishes to 'save their appearances', then the specificity of the way they show themselves in the world is inseparable from their actuality, from their specific embodiment, movements and history of motions, physical and psychic.

It follows that the univocalist (ultimately Scotist and derivatively Kantian) version of the view that 'being is not a predicate' reduces to the idea that an actuality can be exhaustively defined in its essence and qualities as an instantiation of a preceding possibility, which must be either a *mathesis* or a virtuality or else both.<sup>82</sup> But in that case what an entity really is for us in its

<sup>82</sup> By contrast, the Thomist version of this view simply states that inevitable existential instantiation never follows, in either logic or reality, from the definition of a finite entity. But it does not unwarrantedly deduce from this, in Avicennian fashion, that the essential character of a thing is *ontologically* prior to its actuality – a deduction which smuggles back a covert 'existence' and even 'inevitable existence' of the essence, even though the real distinction of *esse* from *essentia* should preclude according any existence to essence as such, far less any existence that is bound to be – which belongs to God alone, wherein *esse* and *essentia* alone coincide. But God's existence follows from his essence only because an infinitely defined essence equally follows from his existence – whereas the essence of any contingently existing thing must always be somewhat fluid. See Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, 4. Although he says here that one can understand 'man' or 'phoenix' without knowing whether they exist in reality, he does not say (and his whole outlook would deny) that one first knows these things as logical possibilities, rather than as either real or imagined actualities – given Thomas's Neoplatonic-Aristotelian and Augustinian view (so strange to most today) of both the imagination and of thought as realms containing ontologically real entities. The reality of intellectual beings lies indeed at the heart of the argument of this early treatise. So whether essences are instantiated as merely imaginary or as humanly (as opposed to angelically) intellectual, or as fully real (as materially embodied or else existing as angelic separate spiritual substances) is a matter of degree of existential actualisation. This is not, for Aquinas, as it is for Scotus and Kant, an affair of simple either/or. Thus at the maximum degree of divine full existence, which is self-instantiating, being is not emptily existential, but coincides with an infinite qualitative determination of essence, an unimaginably saturated determination. In this pure *esse*, creatures participate in various extents. And only this hierarchically differentiated sharing in an infinitely actualised qualitativens constitutes for Aquinas 'existence'. His 'real distinction' of *esse* from *essentia* does not mean that in reality the one can occur without the other, only that the two do not entirely coincide, except in God.

phenomenality is after all *not* what it really is.<sup>83</sup> How it ‘looks’ is not what truly defines it, moves it and renders it real – and it is clear that modern physical science mostly works within this univocalist model (which renders its conclusions valid only up to a point). Hence if being is not (in this sense) a predicate and qualities do not proceed from actuality, the full actuality of a thing is abolished in favour of that spectral ghost of the actual which is the possible. And like a ghost, this also means that the essence and qualities of a thing hover exactly between life and death, redemption and damnation, or more precisely something and nothing. So what a thing uniquely is, equally may not be, and therefore, from an ontological point of view, equally is not. Actuality is therefore now twice abolished – first thinned out by possibility, it has now been hollowed out by a nullity that gnaws always at its heart. As Scotus put it, in terms which were later still more emphasised by William of Ockham, ‘everything which is unqualifiedly nothing includes in itself the essence of many’.<sup>84</sup>

So if affirmation of univocity is only a decision, then it is also a decision against common sense, because we persistently believe that what we see is a reality, and that the most real, the most vivid, lies on the surface or constantly rises to it. Here one can envisage a certain seemingly strange alternative conjunction of phenomenology, postmodernism and Thomism. For one may validly assume that what appears is real, and what is ‘superficial’ is fundamental and cannot be reduced to a more basic – but inevitably more thinned-out, more misty – depth. But to hold on to these positions one must perforce insist (against Deleuze, as thinkers as diverse as Michel Henry, Alain Badiou and François Laruelle now see) upon the priority of the actual against that of either the possible or the virtual (the latter being a kind of potential that has been supplied with both a subtle body and an outboard motor).<sup>85</sup> If we hang

<sup>83</sup> Phenomenology, as with Heidegger, tends to espouse the priority of possibility over act, precisely because the claim to reduce being to describable appearance must reduce it to the structures of its possibility, even if these be understood in wholly negative and ‘saturated’ terms. For this reason pure phenomenology is latently of itself ‘structuralist’ and this is why it can only think the excess of what does not appear as a sublime void in contrast to the figuration of the beautiful. Ironically, it is Merleau-Ponty, who openly engaged with structuralism, who also escaped this collapse. This was just because he did not make possibility prior to act, nor reduce being to phenomenality. Instead for him the excess of what does not appear can be spoken about in ontological, structural or semiotic terms, but this very formal acknowledgement of distance allows that there is something in the experience of that distance which cannot be reduced to subjective capture or structural formulation. The point where an ineffable experience of the absent coincides with attempts to figure the absent is the point where the sublime is integrated with the beautiful as glory.

<sup>84</sup> Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, dist. 43 q. unica n. 18. See also Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, 3–43.

<sup>85</sup> See John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum, 2006).

on to the reality of that which superficially appears in all its richness, then it cannot be reduced to anything which precedes it either in time or place. It is radically ‘uncaused’ and is in consequence either ‘self-caused’ in its single seamless occurrence, which exceeds any causal contrast of conditioning and conditioned (as Laruelle’s ‘non-philosophy’ demands),<sup>86</sup> or arrives to us as an emanated gift. The first, immanentist, option will always reinstate a dualism between the causing and caused self which will generally resort to some sort of idea of a single cosmic general self, reducing the world of the conscious individual who knows things and interacts with things other than itself – and sometimes affects things while being sometimes affected by them – to epiphenomenal appearance (as seems to occur with both Laruelle and Henry). And in that case, the fundamental self-caused actuality which is ‘just there’ seems, in its basic spontaneity, which determines that there will be such a world of illusions (and cannot escape from determining this), after all to reduce to an underlying virtuality which exposes the delusory and half-true character of what appears as visible, moving, inter-acting and so forth.

One only escapes this dualism and this virtualism by allowing that each actual thing with all its superficial vividness is the direct gift of an ultimate infinite actuality which is God. This is exactly why Chesterton was right to think that only creationist theism coincides with everyday common sense, in saving the appearance of appearances as such.<sup>87</sup>

It is this rendering which alone lines up with a decision to sustain the complex grammar of the existential by giving the ‘is’ in ‘there is a swallow’ equal weight as a marker of difference to the semantic freight it carries as a marker of sheer presence. For if being only occurs as *aliquid*, as Aquinas taught, as something that is distinguishable in relation to something else, then we have no objective reason to decide that we can abstract ‘sheer being’ from all the differently inflected beings, as though that gave us ‘the essence’ of being, even in semantic terms.<sup>88</sup> Indeed the pure ‘is’ over against ‘not’ of univocity is a fundamental grammar only likely to be adopted by a certain kind of non-mystical theologian, or else an agnostic or an atheist. It remains *possible*, at the very least, to decide that, if being always arrives to us in differentiated qualitative terms, it is in itself a kind of mysterious hyper-quality (an eminence of all differences), which as an infinite actuality conveys an absolute plenitude of qualities, just as we know that only

<sup>86</sup> François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy*, trans. Nicola Rubczak and Anthony Paul Smith (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> See G.K. Chesterton, ‘The Ethics of Elfland’, in *Orthodoxy* (London: The Bodley Head, 1957), 66–103.

<sup>88</sup> See Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid*, 13–48.

actual beings first realise those qualities which poetry can capture, and any possibilism must deny or refuse.

There is one final but crucial point. Beings in the world do not all appear with equal intensity. Some are more vividly in act than others and therefore some things exist more than others – that is, if we decide not to reduce the reality of appearances. At the phenomenological level (if we elect to remain there) this is not just subjective waffle, since things only appear to us at all in a coherent pattern through which we can move and converse intelligibly (as Badiou has shown), because certain things in certain situations (and certain things consistently so) are dominant over other things, while some things dominate in one way and yet are dominated by others in other respects.<sup>89</sup> Hence one can say that some things exist more intensely in some fashions, less so in others. So a hierarchy of being may be complex and entangled, but the actuality of phenomena, when we remain with it, presents itself always as such a degree-differentiated series. Light dominates the day, but the garden frames my labour; the colours of women's dresses illumine the street along which they are propelled, yet they could not do so were not the street wide enough to allow their passage, and yet constrained enough not to engulf their flaring in the wastes of an already vivid desert.

So while the differences of being may often be egalitarian, they can only strike us at all within certain complex hierarchical patterns of overarching and overarched, predominantly influencing and subtly inflecting. Therefore, if common sense intimates to us that the actual is ultimate, and common experience suggests to us that being which is always qualified may be in itself hyper-qualitative, then the hierarchical structures which 'transcendentally' permit this common experience suggest that finite being as such is hierarchical, because it 'participates' in various analogical degrees (and in different aspects in different degrees) in that infinite actuality which, for Dionysius the Areopagite, was 'thearchy' beyond hierarchy, and which alone gives and saves the finitely self-grounded actualities which appear before our eyes.

For these reasons it follows that it is – at the minimum – equally rational to decide that being is always the same in its fundamental virtuality, or to decide, instead, that it is copiously yet harmoniously differentiated in its fundamental actuality, and that to this difference is always added in its finite actual instantiations a more and a less, but always also varyingly as to a here and a there, and in ever more teasing oscillations.

<sup>89</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logiques des mondes: L'Être et l'événement*, 2 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006), 119–153.

## 5 Identity versus Representation

The theory of knowledge by representation is just as theologically questionable as the theory of the univocity of being.

First of all because, in God, since he is simple, intellect cannot ‘follow’, even metaphysically, upon being.

Secondly, as regards human knowledge, because the harmonious continuity between the way things exist in matter and the way they exist in our mind embodies a certain pan-sacramental order that is part of the divine government of the world, reflecting the divine reason as such, and therefore not liable to be interrupted by even a divine whim.

Thirdly, because the theory of knowledge by identity respects the partially spiritual, because integrally formed, character of all created things as proceeding from God. Knowledge, from a theological point of view, as Aquinas taught, has the spiritual purpose of raising and enhancing reality; it is not primarily, in its *raison d’être*, a neutral Sherlock Holmes-like capacity for observation and accurate inference.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, it turns out that knowledge by representation is by no means a ‘neutral’ philosophical theory which theology may or may not find to be a congenial inheritance. To the contrary, as we have already seen, the theory became dominant for overwhelmingly theological reasons. In the case of God this has to do both with the formal distinction and with univocity – metaphysical positions which, as has already been explained, are intimately linked with stances in both rational and revealed theology. In the case of human understanding, the rise of the theory of the object is inseparable from the invocation of the absolute power of God and an accompanying diminution of any sense of ‘natural necessity’, or of structures within the creation which inherently reflect and participate in the divine example. This means that the will is no longer, of its very natural ‘weight’ or *pondus*, drawn to a natural and ultimately supernatural *telos* which practical reason dimly intimates in advance. Likewise, the intellect is no longer seen as ‘intending’ its object of understanding, in such a way that, via the ministrations of the intellectual ‘word’ or concept, and the imaginary ‘phantasm’, the mind achieves an immediate ‘identity’ with the object known which is a kind of ecstatic relation to that object, expressing an aesthetic affinity or ‘convenience’ between things as existing and things as formally comprehended.

In these terms Aquinas modified the Aristotelian view that the concept in the mind is, in a purely formal mode, the same as the thing which is

<sup>90</sup> See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 1–18.

known by the concept, with the Augustinian teaching (linked to his view that our understanding echoes the Trinitarian relations) that the mind through intention really ‘returns’ to the thing known and establishes a kind of bond with it.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, a subtle balance was achieved between the idea that a form as known exists in a higher mode, and the equally important idea that this form-as-known is lacking in that full existentiality which only the matter-form compound possesses within the sub-angelic realm. In God alone do these two aspects fully coincide.<sup>92</sup>

If one ignores this Augustinian dimension then one will tend, like André de Muralt (whose work is nonetheless crucial and on the whole exemplary), to regard the Scotist and Ockhamite revolutions as simply abandoning Aquinas’s Aristotelian metaphysics, as if ‘intentionality’ were an Aristotelian doctrine, which it is not.<sup>93</sup> But on a purely Aristotelian view, the teleology

<sup>91</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* XI.1.2. Here Augustine gives the case of looking at an object as a remote image of the Trinity and suggests (following the Stoics) that in the case of looking at an object there are three aspects: the object seen, the act of seeing – including the image in the eye – and finally ‘what holds the sense of the eyes on the thing being seen as long as it is being seen, namely the conscious intention’. So here intentionality is linked with imaging the Holy Spirit as directive will. (The object seen being the ‘Father’; the act and image of seeing being the ‘Son’.) The intentional aspect of understanding is for him closely linked with the ‘carrying’ of knowledge by desire, just as the *Verbum* is uttered by God through the breath of the *Pneuma*.

<sup>92</sup> See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 1–18; Milbank, ‘The Thomistic Telescope’, in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*.

<sup>93</sup> See the excellent article ‘Intentionality in Ancient Philosophy’, in the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, at <<http://Plato.Stanford.edu/entries/intentionality-ancient/>>, which corrects several earlier misapprehensions. Aristotelian knowledge by identity of form is not the same as intentionality, which, rather, has Stoic roots. It is closely linked with the Stoic doctrine of signs and the idea that the sign indicates a *lekton* or ‘signified’ in modern parlance, which is not itself immediately the real referent but an ‘incorporeal’ position within a system of signification. Augustine sustained this connection, speaking of the sign-word as *dictio*, which indicates or intends a *dicibile*: *De Dialectica*, V. At the same time, intentionality could also for Augustine explicate the meaning of a sign-word directly in terms of reference: thus he speaks of *intentio digitis*, a pointing by the finger, as establishing the meaning of a word in his early *De Magistro* at X.34. So ‘intentionality’ for Augustine, as later often for the scholastics, hovers between indication of the signified and indication of the referent. The Stoics also spoke of *enteinein*, a cognate of the Latin *intentio* within the context of their theory of vision. This was also followed by Augustine in his *De Genesi ad Litteram* (I.31 and VII.20), where he speaks of a medium of *pneuma* which carries a beam from the eye to the thing known. Such a notion is probably echoed in Book XI of the *De Trinitate*. The fact that, in its origins, intentionality has to do both with semiotics and with the theory of vision is fascinating with respect to some debates in twentieth-century phenomenology. It would seem that there were also Arabic sources for the notion – perhaps these also were ultimately of Stoic derivation. See Sarah Catherine Byers, *Perception, Sensibility and Moral Motivation in Augustine: A Stoic-Platonic Synthesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



of knowledge tends to run in one direction only, which is the inverse of the teleology of the will: the thing known is the fulfilment of the thing as merely existing. Aquinas, to be sure, echoes this view,<sup>94</sup> but it is as if, for him, such fulfilment is always provisional, and is for now qualified by a kind of counter-teleology which is intentionality – and indeed this notion in its first Latin variant in Augustine lies close to the idea of knowledge as always accompanied by a directing desire.<sup>95</sup>

This counter-teleology involves, however, three distinct moments. First of all the concept, as Augustinian *verbum*, has become more of an inner emanation than it was for Aristotle. Despite the continued identity of the act of knowledge with the thing known, this identity (echoing the Father-Son relation in the Trinity) now also involves a real relational interval between the knower and the concept which he expresses. Secondly, the expressed concept is not only ‘word’ as uttered, but also ‘word’ (again following Augustine) as inner sign which points beyond itself to the real thing known by way of an invocation of that thing’s (partial) knowability: this is the conjunction of the thing as known with the thing as intended (or ‘signified’ in semiotic terms). The ‘intentionalisation’ of the Aristotelian concept therefore involves also its ‘linguistification’.<sup>96</sup>

But in a third moment one might say that the inner sign expands into an inner ‘icon’, because the intentional reference of the concept back to the thing known involves also the *conversio ad phantasmata* which links the universality of the concept with the sensory intuition of a particular reality by recalling this in an act of imagination (roughly that which Samuel Taylor Coleridge much later described as ‘the primary imagination’, by which we concretely envisage the coherent unity of a sensed thing or state of affairs).<sup>97</sup>

If intentionality in Aquinas involves an element of ‘reverse teleology’ as regards knowledge, which places it more in parallel to the path of the will which is teleologically directed from the willing person to a real external end,

<sup>94</sup> ST I q. 8 a. 3 resp.

<sup>95</sup> ST I q. 8 a. 3 resp.

<sup>96</sup> ST I q. 34 a. 2, resp.; q. 85, a. 2 ad. 2. And see Mark Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom: The Hierarchy of Philosophical Wisdom in Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 31–39. Jordan here exposes Bernard Lonergan’s a prioristic and therefore anachronistic obfuscations of the Thomistic *verbum*.

<sup>97</sup> Aquinas, ST I q. 86 a. 1 resp.: ‘even after abstracting the intelligible species [from the phantasms] the intellect, in order to understand [the singular], needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species’. Aquinas here cites in support Aristotle, *De Anima* 7, but while the Philosopher does indeed there insist that the soul never thinks without imagined images, it is not perhaps clear that he affirms a ‘return’ to these images in the way that Aquinas does. Also ST q. 84 a. 7 resp. See in addition Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 1–18; John Milbank, ‘On Thomistic “Kabbalah”’, *Modern Theology*, 27/1 (Jan. 2011), 147–185.

then this is precisely because knowledge is borne by desire for relation with the thing known, both intrinsically (since even God desires to know) and provisionally (since in knowing we are always returned to the thing known as not yet adequately known). It is because knowledge must seek to know further, and more specifically, that which it first obscurely knows through desire (following Augustine's reworking of the Meno problematic)<sup>98</sup> that our intentional understanding echoes also the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity as that loving 'breath' of the Father upon whose air-current the second person of the Trinity is both 'borne' as 'Word' and 'born' as Son.

Inversely, while the will 'immediately' and blindly through its *pondus* intends its practical goal, here an opposite and equivalent 'reverse teleology' is at work for Aquinas, since the very notion of a practical teleology requires an intellectual moment: the will must be in some fashion informed in advance through its conjunction with the intellect of the nature of the goal to be pursued, if it is to recognise it as desirable. Thus for Aquinas, again following Augustine, the will, on a Trinitarian analogy, emerges in procession 'through' knowledge as well as from the 'Paternal' source of knowledge in the memory, which Augustine had said occurs insofar as it puts these things to good 'use' through right desire.<sup>99</sup>

Hence the will is but *relatively* more ecstatic than the intellect, while the intellect is but *relatively* a more self-sufficient terminus than is the will.

Once one has taken this Augustinian dimension in Aquinas's theory of intentionality into account, then one can see how, in one respect, the modification of, and eventual movement away from, intentionality in Scotus and Ockham involves augmenting one potentiality of Aristotle's teaching itself, with a relative *neglect* of the Augustinian supplement. For if form fulfils itself in our understanding, in an approximation to the 'thought thinking itself' of the first mover, then it is possible to take this in a more empiricist-cum-idealist direction. Without the Thomist (and ontologically Trinitarian) intentional 'return' of the reimagined concept to the real, the way lies open for the real to be bracketed altogether in favour of what we 'seem' to know, or know internally within certain *a priori* constraints. But since the Aristotelian relative neglect of 'return' (although this may be somewhat less true of the *De Anima*) is bound up with his view that

<sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *STI* q. 2 a. 1 ad. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* X.4.17; Aquinas, *STI* q. 93 a. 6 resp. Also *STI* q. 8 a. 5 ad. 1: 'these powers include one another in their acts, because the intellect understands that the will wills, and the will wills the intellect to understand. In the same way good is contained in truth, inasmuch as it is an understood truth, and truth in good, inasmuch as it is a desired good'. See in addition Pierre Rousselot SJ, *The Intellectualism of St. Thomas*, trans. James E. O'Mahoney (London: Sheed & Ward, 1935).

material reality does not emanate from a divine source – is not ‘created’, does not bear a negative trace of transcendence and therefore should be increasingly ‘left behind’ – this late medieval shift seems dubious from a theological point of view.

Moreover, just why should it have been made by thinkers, from Scotus onwards, who are often seen as having a strongly ‘Augustinian’ aspect to their thought? An adequate answer here would have to be complex, but it is at least partially to do with Duns Scotus’s mode of understanding of the *vestigium trinitatis*. Scotus, in the wake of Richard of St Victor, other Franciscan theologians including Bonaventure, and also and supremely the lay cleric Henry of Ghent (who consummated this trend), differentiated the persons not by means of substantive relations, but instead in terms of qualitatively different emanations prior to either relationality or personhood. This qualitative distinction was made in terms of a supposedly exegetically based contrast between the generation of the Son *per naturam* on the one hand, and the procession of the Spirit *per voluntatem* on the other hand.<sup>100</sup> The character of the Son as *Logos* is in effect seen as more secondary by Scotus than by Augustine and Aquinas, because he believes that the Father as Father is ‘habitually’ in possession of the divine understanding, which the emanation of the *Verbum* merely actualises. The formally precedent divine intellect is, in turn, ‘formally distinct’ from the divine infinite essence which for Scotus actually *grounds* a Paternal *Monarchia* (which he insists on, following John Damascene) as superior to any relational engagement. The Son as ‘naturally’ generated is thoroughly secondary: he is held to be not formally infinite, since he is consequent upon the essence and even the formally distinguished divinely essential understanding and will which ‘quasi-emanate’ from this essence (‘before’ the Trinitarian emanations), and finally to be consequent upon the Father’s absolute personal priority. Hence the Son as Word simply ‘expresses’ and conveys like an instrument the essential divine intellect, just as the Spirit does the essential divine will.<sup>101</sup>

This means that while, in a sense, for Scotus, the most obvious analogue for the Trinity would be natural human birth combined with human ‘cultural’ willing, the psychological ‘illustration’ of the Trinity is in fact much more heavily psychologised by him than it was by Augustine and

<sup>100</sup> See Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 107–114.

<sup>101</sup> Duns Scotus, *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 1 aa. 2–3; q. 3 a. 2; q. 4 a. 3; q. 5 aa. 1–3. In effect, Scotus like many other of his contemporaries, downplays the Trinitarian qualification of monotheism. It is difficult not to see the impact of Islamic philosophy as a factor here – though it is by no means the only one and not necessarily the main one.

becomes much more literal in import – especially because the intellect is seen as emanating more spontaneously and so more ‘naturally’ than the will. (For Augustine the analogue remained a metaphor, even if a *necessary* metaphor, which a good exegesis of the Scriptures demands, rather than a mere ‘illustration’ of a positive dogma.)<sup>102</sup> In the case of Augustine, the memory, understanding and love of oneself which remotely mirror the divine aseity are nonetheless concerned with faculties that are through and through ecstatic: truly to recall, understand and love oneself is to recall the true self who recollects, intends and aims towards God and the neighbour.<sup>103</sup> But if these three faculties are not relationally understood within the divine *exemplum* as referring to each other and constituting each other, then the resulting non-relationality and self-sufficiency will tend also to elide the ecstatic aspect. Memory that does not intrinsically understand or recall is just a passive trace that might bear no clue as to ‘the past’; understanding that does not always remember something and desire something is complete in its own solipsism, like the Cartesian *cogito*. Love that does not understand anything, but affectively (and unilaterally) exceeds reason (in the tradition of Bernard of Clairvaux, under the long-term and somewhat baneful influence of John Cassian)<sup>104</sup> will be a love grounded upon a pure choice, not swayed by any mode of rational persuasion.

<sup>102</sup> See Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>103</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* VIII–X. See also Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 27–72, for a fine summation and development of the work of Rowan Williams, Lewis Ayres, myself and others on the question of how to understand the Augustinian self in the image of the Trinity.

<sup>104</sup> See Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity*, 106–133, and Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London: DLT, 1990), 9–118. And more specifically see Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Twelve Steps of Humility* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), 7–8, pp. 37–41. Here, the reason as instructed by the divine Son arrives at true self-knowledge in self-indictment of guilt which prepares the soul for the work of the Holy Spirit, who instructs the will in humility and loving submission to God the Father. This *schema* already departs from Augustinian complexity: it over-distinguishes the work and existence of both the Trinitarian persons and the human faculties which mirror them and encourages too much the ontological notion that we meet God when we leave the self behind, as if God and self were in ontic rivalry. Where the intellect is seen as somewhat less important for access to God than the loving will (whereas they are both equally essential for Augustine), then the crucial realities of participation and mediation are subtly diluted. By contrast, the true Augustinian and Dionysian traditions as perpetuated by the Cistercian tradition at its best (William of St Thierry’s ‘enlightened love’: see *The Mirror of Faith*, trans. Thomas X. Davis (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 13 and 17) and the later Rhenish, Spanish and French ‘humanist’ currents (following Bérulle) do not make this mistake. Even John of the Cross’s ‘dark night’ afflicts the soul in its entirety and does not betoken a simple passage from derelict self to the advance into an unknown God, because the night is already obscurely the night

Therefore such an understanding will not necessarily be intentional and such a willing will not necessarily be teleological.

It follows that, shorn of the relational dimension of reciprocal echo between the three faculties, the psychological analogue to the Trinity loses also its ecstatic, extra-psychological aspect. It becomes more the case that the three faculties in isolation echo the three persons of the Trinity, and that they do so within a solipsistic completeness, so ensuring that now, indeed (as not at all with Augustine), God is modelled by 'the solitary mind' in accordance with the priority Scotus gives (again unlike Augustine)

of erotic wounding which begins to transfigure human knowledge and will into their true ecstatic identity. (See, for example, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, trans. Benedict Zimmermann (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1973), Book II, XIII, 10). So while, indeed, John of the Cross like Luther reflects that 'crisis of the self' caused by the breakdown of organic society as identified by Michel de Certeau, he does so in a manner that, in the wake of Eckhart, insists more radically on the inherent 'nothingness' of created things as already taught by Augustine: this does not in the end downgrade the role of our own proper activities and emotions, whereas in the case of Luther the nothingness of our activity as such is perverted into the passivity of our created being over against a grace received within the same univocal plane. Hence it was the more voluntarist mystical current that helped in the end to encourage the Lutheran onto-theological delusion that we receive an unmediated, uncreated grace (hovering impossibly and idolatrously 'between' God in his essence and the creation, like the Palamite uncreated energies, formally distinguished from the divine essence) that precedes our meritorious response. By contrast, the latter, for Catholic doctrine, is the entirely grace-given and created work of the supernatural habit of charity, which involves the establishment of reciprocal bonds of friendship with others, and not simply the notion of the ethical deed as an echo of the supposedly purely unilateral divine bestowal of grace. Where the intellect retains an equilibrium with the will, there love retains its link with circumstance, preference, recognition and discernment – of all creatures in myriad ways by God, of God remotely by us, of humans by each other. But without circumstance and preference (the Augustinian *ordo amoris* which demands that finite creatures must love some more than others) love reduces to a blind act of the will which can in the end be no more than mere choice or election. This is exactly why, as Michel Hénaff shows, the Magisterial Reformers twice abolished gift, and therefore compromised love as the heart of Christianity – replacing it with a loveless trust in an inscrutable deity (*Le Prix de la Vérité* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002), 351–380). First of all they compromised grace by substituting whimsical 'election' for unilateral charity (albeit for a true view this 'gives' the reality of our thankful and meritorious return), and secondly they compromised reciprocal charity as the organising principle of society, opening the path to the general sway of capitalist contract. This seems to me to be a problem even with William Tyndale's positions, albeit that he qualifies Luther with the more Augustinian and metaphysically realist Wycliffite legacy according to which all authority, clerical and 'secular' (relating to our time on earth), is by divine gift, and must be exercised responsibly according to the laws of charitable distribution. For he has still lost the sense of charity as 'state of being' or as reciprocal bond, rather than one-way gesture, and it is just this which causes him to condemn, with all the Reformation, practices like the meritorious endowment of chapels and almshouses as 'selfish' and 'idolatrous' because mainly concerned with prayers for one's

to the essence over the persons, and the way in which he idolatrously categorises God as an individual, comparing him to ‘Socrates’.<sup>105</sup>

In this complex way, a very deficient understanding of the Trinity crucially helped to incite the model of representation, because it entirely altered Aquinas’s understanding of intentionality. In the case of Duns Scotus, the expressive word which always in Augustine and Aquinas involves a disclosive relation between known and knower (even in the case of God), is no longer seen as essential for every act of understanding. Instead there is, for humans, an immediate – though not entirely reliable – intuitive knowledge of particulars, without active intellectual translation and universalisation (as there is for Aquinas) by analogy with sensory awareness (here Scotus anticipates Hobbes and Locke), and in a fashion which mimics the immediate external orientation of human willing.<sup>106</sup> When it comes to reflective abstraction which achieves knowledge of real universals and intends ‘common natures’ (indifferent to universality of particularity, and somewhat like immanentised impersonal Platonic ideas), then the concept as object of knowledge is more complete in itself than it is for Aquinas, and only ‘intends’ through the act of representation which somehow cognitively ‘mirrors’ the material object.<sup>107</sup> (In Aquinas, there is indeed some aspect of ‘picturing’, but this only serves to convey the real ineffable proportion that exists between the knowing-imagining ‘icon’ and the real thing in the world.)

own soul. His real failure here (which is all of a piece with the strained and anti-scriptural denial of practices like anointing which could only be condemned through the equally un-biblical claim that miracles ceased in the apostolic age) is to grasp the ‘festive’ dimension of charity and the way an exchange need not be a mere calculus (even though it had so often degenerated into that in the late Middle Ages) because it is concerned with establishing bonds between the living and the dead, between the living and the living, and between material and spiritual benefit. See William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man* (London: Penguin, 2000), and Rowan Williams’s fine and sympathetic exposition of Tyndale in his *Anglican Identities* (London: DLT, 2004). Later chapters in this book are implicitly clear that Richard Hooker later took Anglicanism in a much more Catholic direction. See also, on the Protestant distortion of charity, John Bossy’s seminal remarks in *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 140–152.

<sup>105</sup> Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* I, dist. 3 q. 1 a. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, dist. 45 q. 3. n. 17; *Quodlibetal Questions*, 6 a. 1 [8] 19. And see de Muralt, *La Métaphysique du phénomène*, 60. In the second of Duns Scotus’s passages referred to, Scotus sees this sort of intuition as a model for the beatific vision which again suggests that he too much thinks of God as ‘another thing’ and plays down the Pauline ‘we will see as we are seen’, which implies (as Aquinas read it) the most extreme possible intensification of knowledge by identity, whereby the reality known entirely displaces the normal function of the intellectual *species*.

<sup>107</sup> See de Muralt, *La Métaphysique du phénomène*, 57–76, and de Libera, *La Querelle des universaux*, 321–351.

This means that Scotus has already ceased to think, in genuinely Aristotelian terms, of understanding as belonging to an existential ‘world’ of its own – in keeping with which vision, Augustine (and Aquinas after him) had declared that ‘knowledge is a kind of life in the reason of the knower’.<sup>108</sup> Instead, it has become a sort of *substitute reality*, the ‘best that we can do’ in the face of the fullness of the real – now thought of as if it was pre-intellectual and could exist altogether without the governance of created mind (which it cannot, for Aquinas),<sup>109</sup> just as, for Scotus, the divine infinite being ‘formally precedes’ the divine intelligence.

One might say that, on Aquinas’s view, the material world is like a kind of ‘day’ which is nonetheless of itself ‘dark’ with the density of black soil, since no light will phenomenally shine there unless there are minds to regard it. By contrast, the human understanding is like a kind of night, within which nonetheless, as for the opening of St John’s Gospel, a light always shines, the light of the *Logos* which ‘lighteth every man’. Or equally one could say that the material world is the state of being awake which is yet asleep without the wakened who walk through it, while the intellectual world (*esse intellectuale*) is like a state of sleep which nonetheless continuously enjoys a dream: the dream of consciousness itself. In Aquinas the very order of governance of this world involves the constant oscillation, as it were, of day and night: wakefulness amongst the sleeping stones and the semi-somnolence within the dream which inhabits a panpsychic reality. The day lacks its own light and awareness, which the night of the intellect supplies. And yet the night-powers can only see ‘in’ the daylight, can only dream ‘of’ the daytime.

But for Scotus, already, ‘night’ and ‘sleep’ have been defined at once by deficiency and instrumentality – perhaps echoing the fact that this is also for him literally the case, since he also flattened time (long before Newton) into an abstract passing, such that it could exist in independence of the movement of bodies and of rhythmic, liturgical oscillations that constitute as well as measure temporal *diastasis*.<sup>110</sup> Just as literal night has come in the modern west to mean merely an annoying lack of light, and literal sleep has come to mean merely a regular tiresome need to replenish the powers of mind and body, so that we have lost the ritual pattern of ‘segmented sleep’ punctuated by prayerful, studious or erotic ‘watches’,<sup>111</sup> so also for

<sup>108</sup> Augustine, *De Trinitate* IX.1.4.

<sup>109</sup> See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 88–103.

<sup>110</sup> See Pickstock, ‘Duns Scotus’.

<sup>111</sup> See A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day’s Close: A History of Nighttime* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), and Craig Koslofsky, *Evening’s Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Scotus the intellectual realm as ‘the dream of night’ primarily lacks that reality which it tries to grasp, and seeks to make up for the deficiencies of sensory intuitive apprehension. It is reduced in consequence to the status of ‘a virtual day’.

Thus the concept which only intends by representation is no longer the intellectual *verbum* which has ‘elevated’ (after Aristotle) form itself and in addition expresses an ineffable intentional relation (after Augustine) to the greater existential fullness of materialised form. Instead, it is a kind of ersatz substitute for the real thing, a mere model, a coding or ‘representation’. In the long term this gives rise to that sort of playschool pseudo-realism (so beloved of modern theologians) which speaks of the linguistic and the symbolic in terms of ‘inadequate but necessary models of the real’ and so forth.

## 6 Intentionality and Embodiment

But it also, as André de Muralt argues, gives rise to the Husserlian account of intentionality, which is ultimately traceable to Scotus, insofar as it effectively abandons the mediating role of the concept as inner (or indeed outer) sign. Husserl’s notion of understood *eidos* comes very near, as de Muralt points out, to the Aristotelian-Thomist notion that an understood form is identical with an existing form. In this respect Husserl began to break with the theory of knowledge as representation. Thus against idealism he insisted on the ‘separateness’ of the known object from the knower, and concomitantly that in knowing an idea we are ‘intending’ some aspect of reality. This is especially the case because we can only make sense, in his famous example, of the sides of a cube which are visible to us, *as* sides of a cube if we mentally and so ‘intentionally’ supply the missing sides and also intend the glimpsed sides as sides of the entire invisible figure. Since we can never fully experience, nor fully supply, the absent aspects of any phenomenon (even a cube, whose entire range of properties we cannot exhaust), phenomenological research and analysis becomes ‘an infinite task’.<sup>112</sup>

However, what is intended here is still fundamentally what can be ‘represented’, and not the real in its ontologically resistant reality. When Husserl wrote that ‘the presentation I have of Greenland’s icy wastes certainly differs from the presentation Nansen had of it’, he did not mean to draw attention to Nansen’s direct confrontation with the cold, isolation

<sup>112</sup> De Muralt, *La Métaphysique du phénomène*, 10–76.



and sublime vastness of the Arctic Circle.<sup>113</sup> Instead, by declaring that the ‘object is the same’ in either case, he makes it chillingly clear that reference to an intentional essence is indifferent to such direct encounter. Hence the contrast between ‘intentional essence’ and ‘semantic essence’ is not one between how a thing is in itself and the various different ways in which it can appear to observers, but is rather a sheerly phenomenological distinction that consciousness makes between the stable identity of a thing, on the one hand, and the differing and changing modes in which it may present itself to us on the other. The former is never exhaustively presented to us and yet it can be precisely grasped in its essence – like the cube which we never see all at once. Hence the intended geographical location ‘Greenland’ remains the same, even though we may be pointing to it on a map by a warm fireside, or else we may be referring to it as that which palpably surrounds us in all its desolation. Although we understand a geographical location to be a real place, external to our thought processes, it preserves, according to Husserl, its intentional consistency merely in the way that the ideal object presented by the description ‘straight line’ is identical with the ideal object presented by the description ‘shortest line’.<sup>114</sup> Only later would Maurice Merleau-Ponty save the reality of Greenland (for example) by arguing that it exists as the real but shifting intersection of multiply real and really related perspectives which are at once physical and ideational.<sup>115</sup>

From this comparison we can see that Husserl did not think, like Augustine and Aquinas, of all mental concepts as inner signs or ‘mental words’ which ‘intentionally’ point away from the mental itself, but instead (in an ultimately Scotist lineage) as blends of cognitive and imaginary intuition which do not signify a presumed extra-mental reality towards which sign and thought are inextricably open, but rather display to a degree the intended essence itself which is a Scotistic *esse objectivum*, defined by being the object of the mind’s regard.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, trans. J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001), Investigation V, ch. 2, §21, p. 123. Alasdair MacIntyre misreads this passage in a realist sense as indicating that ‘the object as presented always may be and often is an object quite apart from its being presented to some consciousness’ – see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Edith Stein: A Philosophical Prologue* (London: Continuum, 2006), 46.

<sup>114</sup> Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, Investigation V, ch. 2, §21, p. 123.

<sup>115</sup> I hope to say more about these matters in *On Divine Government*.

<sup>116</sup> Jacques Maritain once remarked that ‘The dependence certain characteristics of phenomenology seem to have on Duns Scotus might also be noted, particularly his [Husserl’s] theory of ideas and *esse objectivum*’. See *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1998), 109 n. 77. In the same place (109–110)

Yet this less than realist version of intentionality is insufficient, because it is the very excess of intended being over the realm of the mental which alone makes sense of the very idea of knowability. As Adorno argued against Husserl, it is because real things remain densely other and cannot be *fully* known that the mind registers them as the proper objects of cognitive awareness; it is finally the very unknowability of things as things which gives them to us as things-to-be-known.<sup>117</sup> (Only in the divine Trinity do knowing and alterity entirely coincide.) Even though Husserl in part recognised this, because he allowed that the offering of aspects is never completed, he nevertheless did not allow that this indicates an ultimate *apophasis* about the actual essences of things, which cannot be made the object of an eidetic reduction, since their given ‘reserve’ is simply the excess of existence itself over what we can think about existence. Greenland is after all the same place for Nansen out there in the Arctic wastes and for me ensconced in snug domesticity, because we are both lured not just by a denomination but by a name secured in semantic constancy only because it is affixed to a real, if never univocally seizable, global orientation.

And since Greenland is a real mystery and not a cognitively defined reality (just as ‘globe’ and ‘place’ are abstract mysteries more than they are graspable ‘essences’), *all* that we can know of it are its various geological, geographical, meteorological, historical and mythical aspects which are indeed like ‘signs’ through which we ‘intend’ a drastically absent reality which we nonetheless fully trust to ‘be really there’. So if one justifiably refuses any Husserlian notion of an ‘intentional essence’, one requires instead a sense, lacking in Husserl, of the manifest and yet undemonstrable way in which the visible aspects of things mediate to us their invisible reserve of self-sustaining unity and consistency which helps to integrate the endless revisability of perspectival shifts through which they are apprehended. This sense was later articulated by Merleau-Ponty, precisely because he balanced the primacy of phenomenology with an equal primacy for ontology.<sup>118</sup>

he well defined the difference between Husserlian and Augustinian/Thomist intentionality: ‘Intentionality is not only that property of my consciousness of being-directed transparency, of aiming at objects in the depth of itself. Above all, intentionality is a property of thought, a prerogative of its immateriality, whereby being in itself, posted “outside it”, i.e. being which is fully independent of the act of thought, becomes a thing existing within it, set up for it and integrated into its own act through which, from that moment, they both exist in thought with a single, self-same suprasubjective existence.’

<sup>117</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology*, trans. Willis Domingo (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).

<sup>118</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Intertwining – The Chiasm’, in *The Visible and the Invisible* trans. Claude Lefort (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130–155. I am indebted to discussions with Jennifer Spencer, formerly of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, on all this.

But within the Husserlian scheme, by contrast, it is at once the case that the intending concept is really but a representational substitute for the real and so is ‘existentialised’ – such that it lacks the formal dignity that it possesses in Aquinas – and that the intending displaces the real altogether. Thus Husserl defines even a ‘real object’ as ‘the possible object of a straightforward percept’.<sup>119</sup> Here a nominalist empiricism and a transcendentalist idealism are in exemplary collusion: ideas at the horizon would efface themselves before perfectly present facts, and merely instrumental universal notions before particulars, but correlatively such facts would be noetically entirely constitutable by our minds, since all that our minds can understand is the unfolding of what was always *a priori* latent in terms of the inherent manifestness of the essences of all knowable objects that can appear to us. Intentionality would therefore ‘eschatologically’ vanish and representation finally triumph as ideal construction. This means that not only does the concept (in a Scotist lineage) here ‘substitute’ for reality, like a dream for waking consciousness, but also all we are left with is the substitution, all we can do all day is day-dream. For within Husserl’s later ‘transcendental turn’ it is recognised that representation carries no guarantee of verisimilitude, and that this is rather delivered by the quasi-Fichtean assumption that the *a priori* structure of our intellection, which has an inexhaustible power precisely to intuit phenomena, is the road to the constitution of the real (which ultimately requires a divine guarantee, supplied by Husserl in his unpublished writings).

At this point Husserl threatens to betray one of the very imperatives of phenomenology, which rescues the integrity of immediate, surface phenomena against scientific reduction (which occurs only under a certain intentional bias). However, his later recognition of the way in which the body already cognises things through being itself an object in the world (and yet a peculiarly reflexive object), and consequently the way in which the opening up of a new aspectual and intentional field is contingently situated in space, time and human bodily interaction (his simultaneously corporeal and historicist turn), starts to work against this ‘substitutionalism’ – although this new turn was only fully followed up by Merleau-Ponty. For in the threshold reality of embodied life, which is at once ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’, material and conceptual *eidōs* are mingled, and therefore every comprehension tends to be immediately a relational return to ecstatic engagement with other realities, while comprehension itself ceases

<sup>119</sup> *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, Investigation VI, ch. 6, §47, p. 285; *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. R. Rojcewicz, A. Schuwer and F. Fersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1983–1989), Book I, §85, pp. 246–250.

to be instrumentalised and regarded as a ‘substitute’, since it is an integral part of the flow of intra-corporeal reality and the interaction between bodies and unconscious objects which together constitute an ultimate transcendental horizon. The intercorporeal also ensures that human understanding is fundamentally inter-subjective, since the knowledge inscribed in bodies is always a relation to other conscious bodies via shared attention.<sup>120</sup> All these dimensions – the orientation of bodies to things, bodies to bodies and subjects to subjects – make up ‘the life-world’ from which precise, logical scientific knowledge is only abstracted, upon which it obscurely depends, and to which it must always return as the source of new stimuli for research and exploration.

Both the dependency upon, and the return to, the ‘life-world’ now suggest a very different and ‘non-reductivist’ sense for the ‘phenomenological reduction’, since this is now more a matter of becoming aware of the full reality implied in the ‘natural attitude’ than of leaving the latter behind once and for all in favour of a superior vantage-point.<sup>121</sup> In this way the path to a richer, non-empiricist intentionalist realism is once again opened up by Husserl in a newly more ‘materialist’ and socio-historical fashion – although one which is somewhat anticipated by Aristotle’s *De Anima* and Aquinas’s deployment of this work.<sup>122</sup>

This late shift in Husserl’s outlook involves, therefore, an intensification of his initial recovery of the intentional. It is almost as if he travelled in reverse steps the road taken by modern philosophy after Scotus. He starts by rejecting the non-intentionalism of both empiricism and idealism, which was historically the result of the logic of the ‘substitutionist’ outlook: if representations are what we must ‘make do with’, then they are also all that we know – such was already the conclusion of William of Ockham against Scotus, in declaring that signs directly stand for things without the mediation of intentional concepts,<sup>123</sup> and it was later echoed by Descartes and the rationalists, besides Locke and the empiricists, and finally Kant and his idealist heirs. All these currents were haunted by scepticism: it seems to be apparent to our senses that there is a world beyond our awareness, but how can we know that our thoughts and our sensations have anything to do with this world as it really is, as opposed to our pragmatic negotiations with it? And if all is merely

<sup>120</sup> Husserl, *Ideas*, Book II, §18 a–b and c–h, pp. 60–70, 82–95.

<sup>121</sup> Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1970), Part IIIA, 28–55, pp. 103–189.

<sup>122</sup> See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 60–87.

<sup>123</sup> See de Libera, *La Querelle des universaux*, 286–287.

pragmatic, why, then, is there a conscious mental realm at all, given that everything functional might be performed unconsciously? That appears to be an unsolvable problem for the materialist psychologism against which Husserl reacted, and thus he reasserted the view that thought is inherently ‘thought of something’: an irreducibly constitutive relation to something of an intimate extremity unknown in corporeal nature.

But as we have seen, he first of all recovered intentionality in a Scotist mode, which naturally suggested the reversal from an empirical to an idealist outlook. Only much later did questions of embodiment, society and historicity (significantly enough) edge him back towards something like a more Thomistic and genuinely realist perspective upon intentionality. Husserl nonetheless failed formally to abjure a transcendentalist horizon of historically unfolding ‘necessary’ traditions of ideation, like that of Euclidean geometry or Galilean physics, thereby suppressing the problem of the contingency of axiomatic decisions which, however much they may prove their worth within a certain problematic field, are nonetheless tied from the outset to a certain material or ‘written’ construction of *problemata* – parallel lines which only never meet, for example, on a two-dimensional finite plane – as Derrida rightly pointed out against him.<sup>124</sup>

All the same, if we recall that we live in the body which both wakes and sleeps, then it is likely that we will realise how conscious mental ‘night’ does not simply reflect, or substitute for, the fully real but unconscious ‘day’, but is rather intertwined with it. The world is intercorporeal and intersubjective as well as being divided between the mental and the physical. Moreover, all our ‘private’ mental interactions with unconscious bodies tend to be interfused with, and also remotely modelled upon, the for us transcendently primary sphere of the inter-corporeal. In the body (to which the phantasmatic always returns) to think is always obscurely to receive and in turn to give again, to act through that sacrificial self-restriction towards the other that is yet the only path to self-fulfilment.<sup>125</sup>

Such a perspective indicates a contemporary road back to a theological vision of a meaningful universe that is inherently related according to an aesthetic order and comprises teleological goals, including the goal of intentional knowledge. The latter, genuinely understood, holds in a tensional balance both the dignity of thought and the dignity of material existence. Moreover, the greater understanding of the body as a ‘threshold’ reality,

<sup>124</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, Part II, 8–10, pp. 21–61. Jacques Derrida, *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. P. Leavey (Brighton: Harvester, 1978), includes Husserl’s text.

<sup>125</sup> See Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 45. Obviously one can see many of Wittgenstein’s reflections as promoting these sorts of perspectives.

opened up by a mode of phenomenology which is entirely compatible with a realist metaphysic, permits one better to understand how the divine *Logos* could have descended not just into intelligent mind at the angelic level, but into the corporeal soul and body of a living human being and have perpetuated this embodiment in the intercorporeity of the Church.

For embodiment best reveals divine reason in the created order, since it is in the body that one comes *nearest* to that divine synthesis of reason with existential reality that does not simply ‘swallow’ such reality in thought, thereby paradoxically leaving thought with nothing to think about. The body performs thought through its gestures, like an actor upon a stage, in such a way that embodiment iconically enlarges the thought and yet does not abolish thought as sign. Instead, the body in its very density ecstatically points away from itself to other bodies which are also living, enacted processes of signification for which being is itself a thinking and so an intentional referring. Even the angelic is in one respect here surpassed, because body is always darkly traced by that shadow of intellectual light which is matter – and it is just for this reason that the human being, not the angel, is the microcosm, and therefore can be appropriately hypostasised in Christ by the exemplary person of the Son. Yet it remains the case that the coincidence of being and thought is not perfect, as it is for the angels and for God: bodies oscillate between their daytime siesta of impenetrable material density and their nighttime operatic gestures of lucid meaning, under the spotlight of reason.

## 7 Intentionality and Selfhood

Advocacy of Merleau-Ponty’s perspective can seem to run foul of later developments in phenomenology associated with the names of Michel Henry, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion. These all have in common the view that intentionality cannot be regarded as phenomenologically fundamental. The reasoning here is entirely rigorous, since it is pointed out that, while the object of an intention, if it is regarded (in ‘Scotist’ terms) as merely the mental object, can become fully manifest, the process of intending itself can never be brought to full awareness. This is because any attempt to round upon our intending opens up the prospect of an infinite regress, since the intentionality of intending can only be preserved if something in the experience of intending escapes experiential awareness. Therefore the intentional core of our thought processes would always elude any phenomenological grasp.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie matérielle* (Paris: PUF, 1990), 13–59.

Undoubtedly, Husserl failed to resolve this conundrum and therefore Henry et al. are so far correct: intending itself would not appear to be reducible to a passive donation as the very heart of phenomenological ambition demands. However, at this juncture two alternatives clearly open to view: either, in order to have a pure phenomenology which will be coterminous with the whole of philosophy, intentionality must be grounded in something prior to intention, or else, in order to save the primacy of intentionality (which alongside 'givenness' is Husserl's other primary philosophical stress), pure phenomenology must be abandoned, and it must be seen to be 'crossed' by both ontology and semiotics. This is the route taken by Merleau-Ponty, for whom intending (in an Augustinian and Thomistic lineage) is once more of real objects, and now by a fully embodied self. These objects can never be fully manifest, but must to some degree be 'conjectured' through the reading of intentions as signs which also involves a 'perceptual faith', since the sign function is not prised apart from the phenomenological register of 'the shown'. Something mysteriously 'comes through' when we know, which is simultaneously 'seen' and yet 'judged'.

However, this option with regard to known realities is also an option with respect to self-awareness. If nothing is known save through an intention, and the *ecstasis* of intention exceeds manifestation, then we cannot be fully manifest to ourselves, any more than we can have a transparent insight into the essence of other things and people. Thus for Merleau-Ponty we cannot know ourselves 'inwardly' apart from the awareness of our body.<sup>127</sup> The latter is a threshold between subjectivity and objectivity, which cannot be known internally (not even in the instances of dream, pathology or mystical ecstasy, which do not evade the imagination) without a simultaneous knowing of it externally. I understand for example my hand at once as something I can move and as something I can see. Without being able to move my hand I would not realise what it is that I am seeing before my eyes, but without being able to see my hand I would not understand what it is to move it. It follows that, if I only know myself as an embodied self and there is no uncontaminated 'inner self', then I can only ever know my 'I' as always already a 'me' and only grasp myself as a reflection of an already commenced distance. This distance includes all the relations in which my embodied self stands to other finite realities and all their influences upon my embodied situation. I constantly have to 'claim myself back' from this distance, and yet also reaffirm the distance, unless I am to

<sup>127</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1992), vii–xxi, 148–153, 369–409.

admit that my only possible self is always alienated from a ‘real’ self which, however, is not really there.

The latter was Jean-Paul Sartre’s position, for which it is the ‘bad faith’ of ‘the spirit of seriousness’ to identify with one’s distanced self as authentic rather than temporarily if necessarily entertained.<sup>128</sup> The only possibility here of escape from alienation and a trumping of irony is to embrace the alien as the decided, or to opt for an altogether new decision and diversion. Here one can say that the option of intentionality and its ontologisation is embraced, but in nihilistically existentialist guise. Following Heidegger’s implicit abandonment of Husserl’s anti-psychologism by now situating the cognitive subject fully in ‘the world’ as an environment to which she is ineluctably related, every intentional investment of self in this world nonetheless eventually confronts the ‘nauseous’ reality of the intended world’s absolute indifference to our subjective human interests.

Michel Henry’s avoidance of this bleak existentialism comes at the cost of a total retreat from the intentional, in order to perfect the purity of the phenomenological project. Husserl had spoken of the indeterminate *hyle* of sensory and cognitive impressions that precede an intentional understanding.<sup>129</sup> Henry suggested that the awareness of this *hyle* continues to accompany every intention and to allow its instance.<sup>130</sup> In fact, the intending of objects is always a diminution of genuine cognition, since there we know only their exteriors and we know these in a mode of domineering distantiation which tends to obliterate real experience. Genuine cognition in awareness of the *hyle* is ‘auto-affection’. Despite the nomenclature, this is in no way anything reflective, but is rather an immediate and primordial awareness of self, through which we can also directly apprehend everything else insofar as it (through alien external channels) affects the self and entirely penetrates it.<sup>131</sup> Thus auto-affection is not a reflexive ‘inner-sensing’ or ‘self-sensing’ as expounded by Aristotelian tradition up until the time of Descartes and later revived

<sup>128</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Transcendence of the Ego: A Sketch for a Phenomenological Description*, trans. Sarah Richmond (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>129</sup> Husserl, *Ideas*, Book II, §85, pp. 246–250.

<sup>130</sup> Henry, *Phénoménologie matérielle*.

<sup>131</sup> Henry effectively revives (through the overwhelming influence of Schopenhauer on his thought) Goethe’s view that a true natural philosophy knows natural realities by sympathy from within ourselves. Merleau-Ponty’s perspective is rather compatible with the more balanced attempts by German Romantics like Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel to combine Goethe’s importantly corrective view with the more externalising considerations of empirical natural science. See Pierre Hadot, *Le Voile d’Isis: Essai sur l’histoire de l’idée de nature* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), 321–364.



against Descartes by Xavier Bichat and Maine de Biran (in whose lineage Merleau-Ponty profoundly lay). It is instead a ‘materialised’ and ‘affectivised’ version of the Cartesian ‘self-consciousness’ – the *cogito* itself, supposedly reborn.

However, whether auto-affection is pre-conscious or conscious, pre-cognitive or cognitive, is not entirely clear in Henry. As Peter Ashworth has pointed out, with the retreat from intentionality goes also a retreat from disclosive ‘mood’ – such as anxiety, melancholia, or boredom – as we find in Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre.<sup>132</sup> For a mood is a general intentional comporting of the self towards the world. But auto-affection is entirely indeterminate, indeed like Aristotelian matter, and its pure *pathos* is indifferent to either suffering or joy, evil or goodness. As Ashworth says, this means that the price Henry must pay for securing an absolutely unbreachable and inalienable citadel of subjectivity is the total loss of character and individuation of this subject. Once the ‘I’ is liberated from the ‘me’, the internal from the external body, and my abiding interiority from shifting worldly relationships, I am ironically left with only a personhood ‘in general’, and therefore all that we normally understand by subjectivity has been entirely surrendered. The heart of the self may be for the later Henry a mystical identity with God, but it is no longer truly an individuated self who is identical with God, as it most certainly was for Eckhart (whom Henry likes to invoke).<sup>133</sup>

The upshot is a negative agreement with Sartre after all: where the latter rejects the reverse ‘bad faith’ of refusing to invest the empty self in arbitrary worldly decisions, Henry’s espoused religious faith sanctifies this emptiness. Such a gesture would undergird that dubious and prevalent contemporary spirituality which obsessively and one-sidedly stresses our need to rid ourselves of self-illusion. This runs the risk of characterising as such deception every single one of our worldly investments and ‘trying on of parts’, either in external reality or in the imagination. Played out to the end – as it was with great brilliance by the English novelist John Cowper Powys – such a spiritual stance suggests a plurality of illusory if necessary and enticing mythological options on the one hand, and a Gnostic retreat to an absolute otherness that is both inward and infinitely remote, on the other.<sup>134</sup> By contrast, the real and genuinely strenuous spiritual task (as intimated by T.S. Eliot in *The Confidential Clerk*) is constantly to sort out

<sup>132</sup> Peter Ashworth is a psychologist who has studied philosophy with me. This entire section is deeply indebted to his acute insights.

<sup>133</sup> See Milbank, ‘The Double Glory’.

<sup>134</sup> See especially John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent* (London: Penguin, 2000).

which of the entertained 'fictions' one is naturally fit to inhabit by virtue of natural personal endowment, cultural situation and their genuine teleological desirability. Some illusions have to turn out to be real and operable, else nothing would be achieved at all and we would never acquire any characterisable or consistent identities.

It follows that externalisation of self is essential for the recouping of a characterisable self and any inward sense of who we are. The latter is somehow (and problematically) realised in the obscure interval and conjuncture between the inter-corporeal and the linguistic. And there is no relation to self more fundamental than such reflexivity, because, as Merleau-Ponty asserted, there is no originally perceived *hyle* that is not already suffused with meaning or with intentional reference, which already (as Augustine thought) informs all human sensation. Moreover, our most fundamental perceptions and sensations already involve an active attempt by the body to orientate itself and to operate within its environment. The latter impinges not in terms of passively received 'givens', but in terms of 'affordances' or opportunities for self-preservation and self-development.<sup>135</sup> Not just our hands but also our other sensory organs 'seize hold' of things in a way that cannot be reduced to an equivalent sensory input received in a sheerly receptive 'internal space'. Thus what the eye attains to is not just information received through a sensory organ, but a specific orientation or 'look' upon a thing that is also that thing's situation of our gaze in actual physical space. The event of this reciprocal informing constitutes 'sight', and any interior processing has to return to this surface if it is to 'see' at all. Hence no reconstruction of sight as internal event – whether in physical or phenomenological terms – is able to identify this experience as sight without reference to the irreducibility of the interactive and corporeal experience of vision.

It is true, as Henry contends, that the peculiar immediacy of subjective awareness cannot be reduced to reflection. But neither can it be prised apart from it, since every awareness is of something, and one cannot detach the awareness from this intending (including of self), even though the awareness is not reducible to intention. The consequence is that pure phenomenology is impossible, not just with respect to irreducible intentionality, but *also* with respect to the immediacy of the *cogito*. Because the mediation of intentionality is itself immediately experienced it can never be rounded upon as manifest. But because the immediacy

<sup>135</sup> On 'affordances' see James Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965).

of self-apprehension can only ever be reflexively intended it, likewise, can never become manifest. If it is said to be manifest as ‘saturated’, then the excess of both intuition *and* intention involved here (since we have seen that the manifest can never be prised apart from the intended)<sup>136</sup> defeats both intuitional fulfilment of meaning and the intentional horizon of this significance.<sup>137</sup> That which appears only to blind has necessarily to be reflexively imaged through conjecture, else it turns into the didactic manifestation of a nihilistic abyss. Thus where phenomenology holds on to both its fundamental insights by insisting that everything is at once donated and intended, it must deny the adequacy of phenomenology to achieve its own ends both with respect to the knowledge of things and with respect to self-awareness. Its extension of the attempted fulfilment of a non-theological ontology as epistemology therefore negates itself, and points the way back to the unavoidability of metaphysical speculation.

## 8 Reason and the Incarnation of the *Logos*

From the reflections of the two preceding sections we can begin to understand how classical ‘knowledge by identity’, expanded to include the corporeal dimension, is required by an orthodox Christology (whose political significance we will eventually see), for which the Incarnation is appropriate, since humanity is inherently disclosive of God, and we can only be saved through the divine restoration of the *imago dei* in

<sup>136</sup> Jean-Luc Marion’s supposition of an excess of intuited ‘givenness’ over intention would seem to assume a Scotist and Husserlian concept of intention as the fully if but formally ‘mastered’ mental object. But where it is allowed (with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) that the object of intention is corporeally and externally reached as real, then it follows that an agnostic experience of being overwhelmed is just as proper to the ecstatic reach of intention and the projection of a formal horizon of significance as it is to the blinding receptivity of fundamental intuition. Such realist intentionality is not replete in its intention of meaning, simply waiting to be exemplified by the adequate intuited object, which will never arrive. Instead, the more it receives new intuitions from without, the more its sense of a meaningful horizon is enriched and extended. Moreover, as I have already shown, to the degree that what is immediately manifest remains unknown as ‘saturated’, it must remain ‘intended’ if it is to be affirmed being, within intuition, yet in excess of any exhaustive intuitive seizure. Implicitly Marion concedes this, by substituting a sheerly arbitrary and fideistic willed ‘decision’ to acknowledge the otherness of donation (including oneself as donated) instead of a measured intentionality. See Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné: Essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1997), esp. 251–342, 419–423.

<sup>137</sup> Marion, *Étant donné*, 321–323.

us – it being assumed that this image is substantively imitative of the divine *Logos* in terms of the shape of its thoughts and feelings, and not just formally possessed of a logical reason that differs from God's only in finite degree (as for Scotus and Ockham), or of a will that is identical when 'considered in its essential and strict sense' to God's (as for Descartes), since will is here defined only by indifferent openness.<sup>138</sup> 'Knowledge by representation', on the other hand, is compatible only with a thinned-out Christology that retains the formal shape but not the spirit of orthodoxy. For it must perforce understand the divine Incarnation as a matter of arbitrary decree, and not in terms of aesthetic suitability according to the intrinsic structures of the Creation. Within this perspective, the Creation, and humanity in particular within it, does not inherently reflect to a remote degree the very mind of God in its infinite expression in the *Logos*. It is instead but the result of a divine decision for this or that set of compossibles and is accordingly known by God in terms of a mere representation of what he has done or will do. The 'fittingness' of the Incarnation then reduces to some sort of economy of means or ease of rhetorical instruction of humanity. In consequence, even the reception of grace by Christ's humanity ceases to be, for Scotus, something inevitably following upon divine enhypostatisation and requires a special act of divine will.<sup>139</sup> For nothing, thanks to the formal distinction, 'intrinsically' goes together with anything else any more.

But in the Thomist account of Christology, God can only save us, according to *convenientia*, by transfiguring our understanding and corporeity – both individually and collectively. If Christ is indeed 'substituted' for us, in the face of our lack, then this is only in order to re-create us and indeed to re-create us by bringing about and disclosing a new yet eternal marvel: the God-Man who is both created and uncreated. For after the Fall humanity is only again possible through the 'more than humanity' of a man 'personalised' by the second hypostasis of the Trinity. Hence for Aquinas, while Christ (as Maximus the Confessor showed and the Byzantine intellectual era confirmed) had an entirely human will and so an entirely human, though sinless, history of interaction with others and encounter with contingent events and circumstances, this biography was realised as a human biography by becoming entirely fused with the eternal divine metahistory. Just as human

<sup>138</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*: 'Fourth Meditation', 57, p.40.

<sup>139</sup> Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, dist. 13 q. 4 n. 8. And see John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), 74–78.

created nature is only fulfilled through its self-surpassing by grace into a supernatural life, so, likewise, human fallen nature is only fulfilled through collective corporeal participation (the sacramental and social life of the Church) in the God-Man.<sup>140</sup> And thereby, astonishingly, to the wonderment of angels, even created deification is exceeded through its new identity with divine hominisation. This represents a still greater glory – contingent (in this specific mode) upon the entire drama of sin and redemption and yet also, since God has eternally foreknown all and responded to all, eternally conjoined to the immanent life of the Trinity. For this reason, while, on the one hand, we may partially indicate the reality of Christ through a ‘stretching’ of our usual ontological categories, on the other hand the human narrative of the events of Christ’s life, and its continuation through his giving of the Spirit to the Church, through their combined conjoining to the Trinitarian metanarrative, now supplements our sense of the fundamental modes of being of all of reality. (How could the incarnation of the *Logos* mean any less?) Thus for the tradition consummated by Aquinas we can only ‘represent’ (in ontological terms) the reality of Christ, because in Christ God has fully ‘identified’ with us such that our knowledge of Christ is ceaselessly surpassed by the re-knowing of ourselves and all other realities in the context of the narrative of Christ and the continuous emergence of the Church.

But in the Scotist and later nominalist accounts, by contrast, a formal or real division between human and divine being in Christ (which effectively smuggles in a heterodox human personhood) will not allow that any reworking of the human essence in one man can (through cultural transmission) be contagious for the rest of us, but will only permit the legal transfer through grace of Christ’s divine benefits to his human nature. In this way, the peculiar errors of Protestantism are already rendered possible: Christ in his incarnation and atonement becomes a ‘mere’ substitute for our deficiencies, in the sense that he extrinsically makes them good, without real, inward reworking of our nature. Because he is only a substitute, we can fully ‘represent’ what he means for us and forget about the narrative dimension of his life in favour of a neat set of propositions

I am immensely indebted in this paragraph to the work of Aaron Riches, who has developed the links between Henri de Lubac’s ‘natural desire for the supernatural’ on the one hand and a Cyrilline and Maximian Christology on the other – a tradition elaborated by Aquinas, who already develops a greater mix of ontological and narrative elements in his Christology that reaches its consummation in Pierre de Bérulle’s theory of Christ’s *états* in which our true spiritual life is situated. See Riches, *Ecce Homo: On the Divine Unity of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013).

about his saving significance which in fact obliterates the saving *mystery*, or else in favour of a pietistic and *excessively* participatory Christological mysticism which tends to swallow up the believer in an eternal *stasis* of Christ's passionate anguish. For the divine *identification* with humanity is now reduced: either through a Calvinist weakening of the *communicatio idiomatum*,<sup>141</sup> or else through a Lutheran one-sided reading of this to mean God's kenotic 'enclosure' within a finite human space – which is one way to accommodate a nominalist suspicion of universal essences and constitutive relations.<sup>142</sup>

This 'substitution alone' is then of one synchronic piece with the substitution of image for reality in the theory of representation, since now the Incarnation and the Cross merely make up for our lack, such that their nocturnal travails yield to the literal day of our decreed restoration and there is no longer any devotion (abandoning the stress on this element in Scotus)<sup>143</sup> to the mystery of the God-Man as exceeding the occasion of his arrival (which Aquinas affirmed in his own way).<sup>144</sup> But just as the concept, *because* it is instrumentalised, becomes paradoxically a terminus in itself, so an instrumentalised Christology will also ensure a fetishistic, over-pious and too literally mimetic devotion to Christ's life and death, reduced to literal terms and shorn of its allegorical links with the intrinsic shape of every human destiny. An elusively sentimental 'personal relationship to Jesus' is eventually substituted for the partial disclosure of the mystery of the Trinity liturgically conveyed by the continued re-presentation of the God-Man in word, symbol and enactment.

<sup>140</sup> Calvin reduces this to a rhetorical figure, not fully expounding the way in which the divine person, though not the divine nature, is fully the subject of all that Christ in his humanity undergoes, in such a way that divine and human properties have indeed here been more than metaphorically blended. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II. xiv.1–2.

<sup>141</sup> See Thomas Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), and Graham White, *Luther as Nominalist* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1994).

<sup>142</sup> In Scotus the idea that the Incarnation would have happened in any case, and not just as a remedy for the Fall, is linked with a denial of human deification. In consequence, the highest good of the joining of humanity to God can only come about through the Incarnation. For Aquinas, however, this highest good is already there, such that deification is a precondition for incarnation – even if he may also hold to the reverse (this remains somewhat unclear, though it is clearly the case in Maximus and other Byzantines whose Christology Aquinas essentially elaborates). So one is forced to say (going perhaps beyond Aquinas but in agreement with Eckhart) that insofar as incarnation is beyond deification, this is the eternally decreed conjoining of the event of human deification to the divine nature itself, which exceeds the mere accident of its being occasioned by sin.

<sup>143</sup> See Milbank, *Being Reconciled*, 61–78.

## 9 The Passivity of Modern Reason

A merely 'substitutionary' Christology subordinates the theology of the God-Man to formal considerations regarding the divine *potentia absoluta*. But in a similar way, the 'substitutionary' character of knowledge by representation derives from the same formal insistencies concerning divinity, ensuring that theological considerations that are at once 'rational' (in the sense that the rational element in theology has now been reduced to the rationalistic which can only, without 'enlightened love', recognise the first cause as ultimate power) and also 'doctrinal' (in the sense that a particular mode of faith is privileging the divine will above all else), govern *both* the theological *and* the philosophical fields, with a secret depth of prior co-determination, at the outset of recognisably 'modern' thought.

For as has already been mentioned, it is the supposition that God *might* cause us to know an 'object' of understanding without it actually representing anything which ensures already in Ockham the dialectical turn from thinking of the concept as instrumental substitution to thinking of it as the sole *terminus* of the act of understanding, useful for pragmatically navigating our way through the world, but in principle subject to sceptical doubt, and useless as a foundation stone for the construction of any sort of metaphysical edifice. Thought at best, if it is reliable, gives us evidence as to the passing character of the world which we encounter and the items within it: it affords no clue as to the naturally necessary architectonic of this world, since there is no longer any reason to posit such a reality.

As de Muralt argues, this view effectively suggests, long before Kant, that we know only phenomena, handing over all noumenal certainty to the realm of faith.<sup>145</sup> He goes on to point out two crucial things about the philosophical trail which leads from the Venerable Inceptor to the sage of Königsberg. The first is that, if the conceptual object of understanding is merely the image of a thing that in principle might not be there, then the Aristotelian role of the active intellect becomes superfluous. This may appear highly ironic, in the light of the fact, already pointed out, that the initial Avicennian and then (to a considerable degree) Franciscan rejection of the intellectual *species* had partly to do with distaste for the idea of a passivity of spirit in relation to non-intellectual form. However, it can be argued that this refusal of an initial passivity condemns the mind to an all-pervading and double passivity: first of imaging and then of

<sup>144</sup> De Muralt, 'Kant, le dernier occamien'.

‘auto-affection’, wherein its self-elaboration is but a submission to a predetermined logical process in which judgement plays no real role.

By contrast, the Aristotelian and Thomist agency of the intellect was prompted precisely by a receptive engagement with the real world: an ‘arriving’ form had to be actively and judiciously abstracted. For the ‘representation’ model, however, a mirroring image just appears with certainty before the mind’s awareness like a wilting rose before the eye’s sight. This appearance must be accepted if it does not violate the principle of non-contradiction (now itself de-ontologised and apriorised) and if it is inseparable from our undeniable immediacy of self-awareness – the *cogito* already, as articulated by several of Ockham’s contemporaries. So the ‘turn to the subject’, because it is a consequence of affirming the absolute power of God and his principled liability to override all secondary causes, is in fact correlated with the *utter passivity* of the human mind and not at all, as perhaps the majority of historical commentators suggest, with its active, creative capacity. If the Cartesian and Kantian mind ‘constructs’, this process is really the reception of an inexorably fated unfolding of intellection. It is, to the contrary, rather the Thomistic view which suggests that thought is an ‘event’, something which ‘happens’ to formal reality and something which involves our active and imaginative intervention.

This passivity is later clearly celebrated by Descartes, whose entire philosophy was in part motivated by a ‘Counter-Renaissance’ impulse to extirpate the role of immanent vital forces and of human innovative creativity, both being seen as dangerously paganising in character.<sup>146</sup> The mind for Descartes is doubly passive: once in relation to the geometry of the extended world with which it does not need to resonate (through identity or analogy) in order to understand, and twice through its reception of innate ideas from God. But just this double passivity opens up – with the most extreme irony – the prospect of a reduction of Renaissance *poesis* (both artistic and natural-magical) to modern classical *techné*: the measurable, mechanical world being revealed only to our clear, solitary grasp can become the object of endless manipulation according to prescribed and absolutely fixed mental standards. Modern Prometheism therefore, is paradoxically linked to the *loss* of spontaneous mental activity and does *not* lie straightforwardly in continuity with the celebration of divinely human creativity by Nicholas of Cusa, Pico della Mirandola and others in the Renaissance period.<sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup> See Henri Gouhier, *Les Premières Pensées de Descartes: Contribution à l’histoire de l’anti-Renaissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1979).

<sup>146</sup> See Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).



Later, in the case of Kant, there is a return to the sceptical horizon opened out by Ockham, and a fulfilment of it in terms of the theoretical bracketing of God which ensures a reigning agnosticism as to our knowledge of 'objects', now firmly confined to the screen of phenomena. Accordingly, Kant accentuates the role of the *a priori*, subjectivising even the frameworks of absolute, empty space and time. All that is received from the material world is atomistic items of sensory information, which are obscurely integrated by posited 'transcendental objects'. This extreme sceptical nominalism seems to open out a greater role for the constructive subject, who must impose and 'schematise' upon the sensory information with the help of the imagination and the *a priori* categories. However, passivity still rules, because this construction is not a *poesis* performed by the subject within and upon the real external world, but rather is something that happens in that virtual and internal space where the subject shapes for himself an object that can be satisfactorily known. He does so entirely under pre-given transcendental constraints, combined with his pure receptivity of empirical information. There is no real role here for an *intellectus agens*, nor for a reshaping *phantasia*. The latter is only allowed 'free play' within a deregulated interplay of reason and sensation in the aesthetic realm: but here the real beauty of the diverse objects thereby shaped is but the transcendental and formal truth of the most general and so 'free' co-ordination of the faculties. So originality is in fact discounted: every beautiful thing is differently beautiful only because, in reality, all beautiful things are but formally beautiful in forever the same, monotonous way.<sup>148</sup>

The role of the transcendental object in Kant remained unclear, and still more so that of the unknowable and yet underlying *noumena* which ultimately guaranteed a degree of real material 'externality' of the *phenomena* to the shaping mind. German idealism was an attempt to extirpate these obscurities, and in the case of Fichte this meant that the ego now 'posits' all of reality, while projecting matter as its own shadowy limit – both in a somewhat Plotinian fashion.<sup>149</sup> It would seem, then, that now, without either a transcendent God or an external reality, the Cartesian double passivity has finally been abolished. However, the auto-creating ego is at once wholly free and wholly determined, in its unravelling of the logic of a freedom understood still in entirely formal and neutral ('Ockhamist') terms. Here, as already with Kant's practical reason, to be free reduces to being utterly subject to freedom – every serious and so 'moral', not indifferent, act is only serious to the degree that it is

<sup>147</sup> See Milbank, 'Sublimity: The Modern Transcendent'.

<sup>148</sup> J.G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre* (New York: Hackett, 1994).

auto-referring in re-receiving its own freedom – and by logical and utilitarian extension the freedom of others. (I cannot realistically be free myself, if others remain bound.) Therefore human passivity still rules, after all.

In comparison, Schelling and Hegel sought to recognise the independence of the natural world, in relation to the human mind. By acknowledging that thought is always the result of an interaction and an interchange between mind and nature they in part restored the Aristotelian perspective, along with many underground Renaissance influences, and abandoned knowledge by representation. *Just for this reason* they also now acknowledged to a degree (and in varying degrees in different writings) truth as an event, the mind as having a free and active shaping role according to its powers of judgement, and also, in the wake of Johann Gottfried Herder, started to realise that this implies the historicity of truth.<sup>150</sup> However, their agonistically dialectical understanding of the interaction between mind and nature severely impaired their reworking of a theory of knowledge by identity: this ensured that their perspective remained at bottom but a modification of Fichte. For Hegel mind in the end recovers nature within the power of its own self-constitution, which coincides with an abandoned material residue, while for the mid-period Schelling nature is reconciled with mind in terms of an immanent destiny at once disclosed and realised by aesthetic productions.<sup>151</sup>

So, in the end, the coincidence of freedom with necessity (in many different mutations) remains dominant. And therefore the same paradox of apparent pure activity still holds good as well: freedom which is auto-asserting and its own absolute horizon can only *suffer* itself. Hence for entirely rigorous reasons, in the case of all three great idealists our freedom is finally but a univocal fragment of the freedom of God who *also* must suffer this freedom – either as the doom of arbitrary positivity (the late Schelling) or else as the fate of a necessary becoming through the other in order fully to realise freedom's formality (Hegel). Because they construe the divine Trinity in these terms, and then understand history as the 'becoming' of the Trinitarian life, Hegel and Schelling both finally surrender their historicism to a logic of freedom as auto-determined. This precisely goes along with the fact that, for genuine providence standing as the ultimate eminent 'influence' above all secondary causes, they have substituted an immanent shaping logic or instinct, operating on the same univocal plane as other historical forces.

<sup>149</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 3–50.

<sup>150</sup> See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); 'The Double Glory'.

It can therefore be seen that throughout the course of modern philosophy, including much of phenomenology, except where it has drastically undergone the ‘corporeal’ turn, the passivity of the subject reigns as a direct implication of the theologically motivated turn to the subject itself – and it is this very passivity which is paradoxically to blame for the dominance of the technological paradigm. For this reason an entirely Protestant historicism, Protestant poetics or Protestant aesthetics has always been somewhat problematic. Where Protestant writers like Hamann, Herder, Novalis and the earlier Friedrich Schlegel offer us a genuine historicism, poetics and aesthetics, this is just to the measure that they have abandoned nominalism, voluntarism, univocity and a Protestant substitutionary Christology (the latter being still highly evident in Hegel).

Of course it should go almost without saying that the empiricism of Locke and Mill also elides the active subject. In theory a true empiricism would denote an openness to mystery that would require our free, active, interpretative response – to some degree this was the thesis of John Henry Newman.<sup>152</sup> But already with Francis Bacon the charitable orientation of knowledge was reduced to pragmatism, in alliance with the beginnings of a mechanisation of nature which now largely disallowed the vitalist and alchemical perspectives of Paracelsus, the earlier inaugurator of a more ‘useful’ and so more charitable philosophy of nature.<sup>153</sup> (Such an enterprise is in fact anticipated in several early Christian authors, for example Gregory of Nyssa and the Venerable Bede.) Once an atomist perspective had been adopted through the influence of Gassendi and Boyle, the empiricist tradition was in reality bound by the entirely *a priori* nominalist assumption that reality comes in discrete little bits and must at first be experienced piecemeal – synthesis being either logical tautology or else sheer whimsical artifice. So for this tradition the true learned gentleman, secure in his now commercially based pastiche of landed honour, proves his status by an ironically modest obeisance before the smallest facts, whenever he may chance upon them. Indeed, for a science-dominated society, the right to take an important part in pure social artifice is grounded upon one’s submission to a pure (‘non-revisionist’) metaphysical passivity.<sup>154</sup> The type is of course still all too much with us in contemporary Britain.

<sup>151</sup> See John Milbank, ‘What Is Living and What Is Dead in Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*’, in *The Future of Love: Theological Interventions* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

<sup>152</sup> See Charles Webster, *From Paracelsus to Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>153</sup> See Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

## 10 The Baroque Simulation of Cosmic Order

The second important point made by de Muralt about the course which runs from Ockham to Kant is that the Kantian recovery and radicalisation of the Scotist-nominalist project was delayed by the phenomenon of a reworked Augustinianism. The latter intrudes already with Luther, but in the latter case Ockham's radicalism is really fully preserved, because the appeal to 'Augustinian' grace is a wholly fideistic one, against a background of metaphysical scepticism. Luther's theology mimics terminist philosophy, because just as, in the latter case, the knowing subject passively receives the object of understanding in independence from any intentionality, and just as the willing subject receives the divine legal command in independence from any teleology, so also, for (at least the later) Luther, the Christian self is 'justified' without any real infusion into the will of a supernatural habit of charity, and so in indifference to the works that she may or may not have performed.<sup>155</sup> This 'pure grace' is less gift than it is rather arbitrary election, which ensures the entire passivity of the saved every bit as much as the damned human subject.<sup>156</sup> This is surely (as de Muralt intimates) the bizarre conversion of faith itself into a kind of premature and entirely impenetrable *gnosis*.

In the case of Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz, however, one encounters a more philosophical Augustinianism which is invoked to qualify the impact of the nominalist aftermath – including its Suarezian adumbration. One can even speak of a Baroque attempt to restore a high medieval synthesis of faith and grace under an overarching sense of the divine presence.<sup>157</sup> However, the continued dominance of univocity, nominalism and the *concursum* model of causality meant that this presence was not construed in a genuinely participatory way, but rather as a transcendentalist framework within created immanence, as a kind of overwhelming intrusion into our plane of reality, hovering over it like a perpetual dark but sunlit

<sup>154</sup> See White, *Luther as Nominalist*.

<sup>155</sup> For the more theological background to all this, see n. 104 above.

<sup>156</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes* (Paris: PUF, 1986). One can argue that there were also more successful and authentic (if philosophically incomplete) Baroque attempts at a new synthesis, for example that of Pierre de Bérulle in France and of many Anglican and even supposedly 'Puritan' thinkers – one can mention Richard Hooker, Thomas Browne, Robert Burton, Thomas and Henry Vaughan, Thomas Traherne and Peter Sterry.

cloud on a Baroque ceiling.<sup>158</sup> So this perspective remains essentially in accord with that ‘modern passivity’ already noted, and forms the other component of a ‘classical outlook’ which had its heart in France, but resonated elsewhere also.

With all three thinkers, one has a misreading of Augustinian illumination which imagines that this is once more a ‘substitute’ for the finite processes of cognition, including sensory reference, rather than its enabling light which operates at a higher, more removed level of causality (as Aquinas correctly realised). Thus for Descartes the divine infinity is present to us directly as a positive idea, while the continuity of corporeal and mental time is alienated to the divine *creatio continua*.<sup>159</sup> In the case of Malebranche the mind loses its control of its own body, and physical movements are ‘occasionally’ co-ordinated by God with mental ones. Meanwhile, for Malebranche’s ‘ontologism’, the mind itself sees its ideas ‘in’ God, as literal parts of the divine spiritual extension. Finally, in the case of Leibniz, nominalist atoms have become vitalist monads which are, however, ‘windowless’, such that the apparent relations between things, including the relation between the knowing human subject and the known, are in reality the registrations of a divinely ‘pre-established harmony’. In all three cases ‘illumination’ serves to alienate proper human powers and true human freedom.<sup>160</sup>

Nevertheless, the alien transcendental framework provides a regular order (even if for Descartes this is ultimately the result of an arbitrary divine choosing) which allows a Baroque equivalent for the medieval sense of a meaningful cosmos. One can read Berkeley’s account of vision and knowing as a direct encounter with divine ideas as a similar alien-

<sup>157</sup> For the presence of this outlook in seventeenth-century physical science, see Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). Although in the end he takes the normativity of seventeenth-century science far too much for granted (ignoring the counter-historical possibilities of more Neoplatonic and Hermetic medieval and Renaissance natural philosophies which sometimes seem to anticipate post-nineteenth-century physics and were left undeveloped), Funkenstein shows very well how univocity, precise representation, the voluntarist priority of the possible and causal concursus shaped modern natural philosophy (which became our ‘science’) every bit as much as philosophy in general. He is arguably wrong, however – for reasons which I have indicated in the main text – to see a real break with the seventeenth-century paradigm as occurring with Kant.

<sup>158</sup> Descartes, *Meditations*, ‘Third Meditation’, 45–47, pp. 31–33; ‘Objections and Replies’, ‘On Meditation Three’, 109–111, pp. 88–89.

<sup>159</sup> See Louis Dupré’s excellent chapter ‘The Faith of the Philosophers’, in his *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 269–311.

ation, although in his case it can be argued that there is an advance towards a more Patristic perspective in which what we see and know is truly a divine ‘created language’ whose beauty participates in the life of the Trinity.<sup>161</sup> But with David Hume it might appear (if one ignores, with most readers, his suggestions of a way to overcome post-Ockham scepticism by according a new revelatory role to feeling)<sup>162</sup> that one has truly a return to Ockham minus the invocation of God by faith. Every transcendental framework of ‘natural necessity’ now vanishes, and one is left only with the consistencies of logic and the constant passage of realities/impressions outside any anthropomorphic projection of causality. Kant inherits this perspective but tries unsuccessfully to fix and then to absolutise the ‘human’ framework for this passage of experience.

## 11 Deconstructed Representation and Beyond

In a sense, as Johann Heinrich Jacobi and, much later, Gilles Deleuze saw, Hume holds the balance between Spinoza and Kant. For if ‘represented objects’ are all that there is, then this would seem to suggest either absolute ‘objectivity’ (in the contemporary, not the Scotist, sense) — all that there is, is the flux of phenomena — or else absolute ‘subjectivity’ — all that we can be *sure of* is that there is the series of appearances that occur to our awareness. The latter position faces the problem of the mysterious absence of things in themselves, which might denote an ultimate nullity, while it must equally deal with the possible ‘nihilistic’ lack of any reliable connection between phenomena and noumena. But if the ‘bracketed’ real must shadow Kantianism as the spectre of nihilism, as Jacobi with genius saw, then equally, as he also saw, a philosophy of pure monistic immanence after Spinoza must be haunted by the question of the exact relation between the ‘one’ substance and the various finite modes in which it is ‘expressed’, including the mode of finite thought. If it is not transcendent to these modes, then its plenitude is in itself ‘nothing’; but if the modes are not supported by any transcendence, and ultimately, from the mystical perspective of ‘the third kind of knowledge’, simply *are* the one substance, then their modal specificity is

<sup>160</sup> See John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 97–105.

<sup>161</sup> See John Milbank, “‘What lacks is feeling’: Hume versus Kant and Habermas”, in *Habermas and Religion*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 322–346.

something almost illusory, again threatened by nullity – including the idiom of finite conscious mind.<sup>163</sup> In order to rescue the ultimacy of reason, Spinoza also had his own peculiar ‘Augustinian’ recourse: the one substance possesses the infinite attributes of extension and ideation which run in strict parallel and never interact.<sup>164</sup>

However, this cannot answer Jacobi’s more fundamental point – which also runs against Leibniz – namely, that if one construes reason ‘rationalistically’ as a search for *exhaustive* explanation, for ‘sufficient reason’, then this will paradoxically destroy reason and issue in scepticism and nihilism. For an entirely rational reality must be ‘one’ reality (for this reason Jacobi thought Spinoza a more consistent rationalist than Leibniz), but (as Paul Franks helpfully explicates) this single auto-determination of reason faces the logical Hydra of the antique ‘Agrippan trilemma’: an adequate explanation must either presuppose something which it cannot explain, or else be viciously circular, or else again face an infinite regress, an infinite postponement of complete and therefore (for this paradigm) sufficient understanding.<sup>165</sup> So in the first case reason, which seeks to be all, must recognise that the foundation of the all is irrational; in the second it must recognise that the rationality of the all is only a tautology within the bounds of a unity that is irrationally and contingently ‘just there’, and so, once more, irrational; in the third case it must recognise that an irreducible infinity of the whole turns out to be a cognitively unsoundable void. At this point, as Jacobi reasoned, the options are either nihilism or else a new realist (and Augustinian) recognition ‘by faith’ that thought is inherently and inscrutably orientated towards an eminently rational being whose ‘thereness’ and mystery it cannot displace through exhaustive rational insight.

Yet Hume’s deconstructed rationalism opens out a different prospect. It appears to point towards the *Sturm und Drang* ultimacy of rootless, character-exceeding passions which rule us like a thunderstorm, such that we can assume *no* rationally necessitated sequence of extension, while physical events are also ‘impressions’ of which the human brain is but the most complex site. In that case we have no ‘objectivist’ warrant to suppose a beautiful

<sup>162</sup> F.H. Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994): ‘Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn’ (1785), 173–251; 1789 version (excerpts), 339–378; ‘David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue’, 53–338; 1815 version, 537–590; ‘Jacobi to Fichte’, 497–536.

<sup>163</sup> See John Milbank, ‘Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi’, in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 21–37.

<sup>164</sup> Paul W. Franks, *All or Nothing: Systematicity, Transcendental Arguments, and Scepticism in German Idealism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 2005), 146–200.

and mystical transcendentalist framework for immanence, after Spinoza. But equally we do not have any ‘subjectivist’ warrant to suppose anthropocentric privilege, after Kant, nor any contrast between appearances and things in themselves. There is only the totality of objective facts, or rather events, into which we have a limited and basically passionate insight: there are only occurrences, passionately apprehended according to human needs, while our ontological categories (like ‘power’ and ‘cause’) and ethical values (like ‘honesty’ and ‘courage’) are but the ‘facts’ of the way our passionate responses to reality work according to the force and vividness of habitual non-identically repeated impressions which yet give rise to an ‘analogical’ sense of resemblance – in a seemingly passive, given fashion which is natural and yet ‘delirious’, in no way according to any sort of *a priori* order, nor in accord with any given evidence.<sup>166</sup>

But in reality Hume’s thinking already hovered between scepticism and a new, feeling-based fusion of cognitive faith with understanding.<sup>167</sup> For with respect to the empirical investigation of human understanding (which is Hume’s ‘philosophy’), all that is given is fictional association, and the only law which governs this givenness is ‘the law of association’. But this means, as Deleuze noted, that our awareness of what governs our nature leaves us powerless to rectify this nature according to law, since the law denotes only the rule of a seemingly mad anarchy – which is the inevitable conclusion of pure enlightenment.<sup>168</sup> This is because apparently arbitrary and contingently mental associations, by a traceable associative path of analogy, give rise to fictions, including ‘the fiction of a continu’d existence’ (of supposed external objects and reflexively of a continuous self),<sup>169</sup> but our being aware of this can never cause us to give up fictioning, since this is the very substance of our human lives:

The imagination tells us, that our resembling perceptions have a continu’d and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by their absence. Reflection tells us, that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted in their existence and different from each other. The contradiction betwixt these opinions we elude by a new fiction, which is conformable to the hypothesis both of reflection and fancy, by ascribing these qualities to different existences; the *interruption* to perception and the *continuance* to objects.<sup>170</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. E.C. Mossner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), I.ii.xiv, pp. 205–223.

<sup>166</sup> See Milbank, “‘What lacks is feeling’”.

<sup>167</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume’s Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 77–84.

<sup>168</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I.iv.ii, p. 259.

<sup>169</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I.iv.ii, p. 265.



Even if one were properly to object to Hume that any nominalism of original ‘punctilear’ impressions is phenomenologically untenable, since we ‘originally’ hear a car arriving, not an assembly of sounds which we later synthesise, this would only *reinforce* the point that we must live within fictions. (Nor is it clear that Hume *does* espouse such nominalism – rather than recording our propensities to espouse it, as in the previous quotation – since for him the most ‘basic’ feelings can be empirically synthetic.)<sup>171</sup> These can then only be more than fictions if one subscribes to a theologically undergirded metaphysical realism, which Hume may not rule out and may even apophatically affirm. But if one does not do so, then once we have recognised the double fiction described above of imaginary combined with rational reflective products, their natural inevitability, together with the real but crazy sequences which underlie them, suggest no causal order in nature, but only insane regularities: designs which in no way point back clearly to a designing God. If, all the same, we can assume an ultimate divine ground which is the whole or the origin of the whole of nature, then it is the anarchy of meaningless patterns and their intensification as the human capacity to fiction which most discloses it – and we have, therefore, no warrant to assume that God is ‘good’. This is the Baylean position, which Hume discusses in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, but arguably himself in the end shies away from.<sup>172</sup>

<sup>170</sup> See Donald W. Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium: Hume’s Pathology of Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

<sup>171</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. H.D. Aiken (New York: Hafner, 1948), Part XI, pp. 71–81. Pierre Bayle’s scepticism included the view that orthodox Christians cannot rationally answer with any plausible theodicy the Manichaean thesis as to an origin of evil independent of God. Whether he was sincere in his avowed Calvinist fideist stance in the face of this conclusion, or whether he remained secretly loyal to the Catharist ancestors of the Huguenots in his native Midi-Pyrénées, remains disputed. See the article ‘Paulicians’ from his notorious dictionary in Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, trans. R.H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 166–193. Hume’s reference to Manichaeism in the passage just cited most probably had this article of Bayle’s in mind. One should certainly link this passage to that ‘Caledonian antisysygy’ or ‘Scottish duality’ which is a crucial aspect of Scottish literature from James Hogg and Walter Scot through R.L. Stevenson, John Buchan and Eric Linklater to James Robertson of Fife and Angus in our own time. It has complexly to do with factors all in play during Hume’s day: a divided nationalist legacy between Gaelic-Pictish Highlander and Anglo-Brithonic lowlander, besides that between Presbyterian covenanter and Catholic-Episcopalian Jacobite, and in addition with Calvinist double predestination and finally the extraordinary modern coincidence of ‘primitive’ and ‘progressive’ culture (clans on the one hand, commerce on the other) within the bounds of one small country. John Robertson of Cambridge University has recently written illuminatingly concerning the analogies in this respect between the Scottish Enlightenment and the Neapolitan one – which also took place in the middle of a relatively remote, backward region of Europe. He in addition considers the relation of both Hume and

Hence, as Jacobi saw, Hume unveils the double spectre of the nullity of any ordered immanence and the nullity of any unified subject outside the general flux if we espouse a reason sundered from faith in reality (a faith which, on the most plausible reading, Hume himself upheld).<sup>173</sup> This ‘nihilism’ can then only be questioned within the inherited remit of empiricism (which I would contend Hume himself transcended)<sup>174</sup> if, like his more northerly Scottish successor Thomas Reid, one suggests that the passionate sensory responses are naturally and providentially ordered to the revelation of the real, albeit in a fashion that is to us entirely obscure and impenetrable.<sup>175</sup> Jacobi himself went further and exceeded this remit: the affirmation of a reliable real and of a coherent human subjectivity requires one to transmute Humean imaginary belief into a genuine ‘faith’ in true analogically sustained identities which is once more a Platonic erotic sense that what is seen participates in the divine order of the unseen.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, with Jacobi, the extreme Humean deconstruction of the paradigm of representation, which now elides things and impressions in the one flux, permits a certain new *recovery* of the paradigm of identity, albeit now much more explicitly under the auspices of a religious sense of reliance upon a reality grounded in God.

Here it must be noted that Hume’s deconstructed representation is in reality closer to a retrieval of a Platonico-Aristotelian account of knowledge by identity than Thomas Reid’s ‘direct realism’. Reid himself negatively acknowledges this when he suggests that Humean ideas, now just as free from a location in substantive mind as they are from an anchorage in material substance, *could* be thought to be ‘like the films of things in the Epicurean system’ and yet could *also* be thought to ‘resemble Aristotle’s

the Neapolitan Giambattista Vico to Pierre Bayle – also the enlightened child of a ‘wild’ region – primarily with respect to the Baylean question of whether a society of idolaters would be more ethical than a society of atheists. See his *The Case for Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680–1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). However, my daughter Arabella Milbank has suggested to me that the ‘antisysygy’ is already traceable before the Reformation in the contrast between the embodied spiritual eroticism of James I of Scotland’s humanist poetry on the one hand, and the bitter irony, exhibiting late scholastic influences, of the ‘makar’ Robert Henryson’s poetry on the other.

<sup>172</sup> See Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism and David Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>173</sup> Again, see Milbank, ““What lacks is feeling””.

<sup>174</sup> Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. D.R. Brookes (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 1997), ch. II, section V, p. 31; ch. VI, section XX, p. 170.

<sup>175</sup> See Milbank, ‘Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi’.

intelligible species after they have shot forth from the object, and before they have yet struck upon the passive intellect'.<sup>177</sup>

This observation unwittingly exposes a specific superficiality in Reid's crucial and generally perceptive genealogy, according to which 'the ideal system' has eventuated inevitably in scepticism. The 'ideas' which Reid rejects are the Cartesian or Lockean ideas as 'representing' things, that always follow upon merely physically and efficiently caused sensory impressions, or else logical reflections concerning these impressions. In the course of this obscure process, they somehow modulate from being meaningless traces on the brain to being picturing traces within the mind itself – as if the mind were a kind of ethereal and reflexive physical organ.<sup>178</sup> But if what we primarily know are conscious sensations glimpsed on an inner screen which is taken to 'mirror' reality, then quickly we will come to suspect that this is sometimes a distorting mirror, if there is nothing that experimental science will confirm as corresponding to our experienced sensations in physical nature. Thus Locke came to conclude that whereas ideas of primary qualities like '*Solidity, Extension, Figure and Mobility*' are '*Resemblances*' of bodies, ideas of secondary qualities like 'Sweet, Blue and Warm' are only impressions in our mind, somehow produced in it by the 'Bulk, Figure and Motion of the insensible parts [the primary qualities] in the bodies themselves' but possessing no real objective correlate.<sup>179</sup> Berkeley, according to Reid, then extended this subjectivism to primary qualities also – all that we can know is our impressions of things and 'ideas' based upon these impressions, since we have no way of ever 'seeing round the back' of our mental mirror or exiting from the mental box of our *camera obscura*, as Reid himself put it. But if Berkeley left us with only spirits and ideas, Hume left us with only ideas, having denied the continuity and secure identity of the human mind.<sup>180</sup>

The upshot then, for Reid, is that philosophy has denied what 'common sense' knows as the impenetrable and unquestionable 'givens' of conscious sensation and its immediate recognition of other realities, including other intelligent minds through the senses, memory and the imagination. What Reid here recognises is something like the priority of the pre-reflective 'life-world' as eventually affirmed by Husserl. However, he generally speaks as if the upshot of 'the ideal system' was to lock us further and further into sceptical subjectivity, from which only a return to common

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ch. II, section V, p. 34.

<sup>177</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), Book II, chs. I–IV, pp. 104–132.

<sup>178</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, paras. 10–15.

<sup>179</sup> Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ch. I, pp. 11–24.

sense, supported by a belief in providence, will rescue us. Yet the sarcastic comparison of Hume to Aristotle just given, together with Reid's preceding comical and stylish passage about a Humean world in which impressions and ideas are the only realities and the only actors, shows that a deconstructed ideal system equally, or perhaps even more, tends to *remove* subjectivity, leaving us with only the objectivity of events as event-images (a perspective which indeed seems to anticipate Bergson, as Deleuze realised). And in actual fact this already began to be the case with Berkeley, Reid's erstwhile Anglican master whom he nonetheless misread (perhaps because his clerical Presbyterianism could not deal with the mystically Platonic and Trinitarian dimension in Berkeley's thought). For Berkeley *already* entertained a scepticism about mental identity (his solutions being to do with our participation in God) and concomitantly *already* saw ideas as 'external' to the mind, as real signs which were the created divine alphabet 'out there', and not the result of human mirroring.<sup>181</sup>

It follows that the more impressions and 'ideas' in Berkeley and Hume have become prior to the instance of an elusive mind or spirit, the more they cease to be the mere 'copies' of things and become the things themselves, or the infinitely various and fluctuating 'aspects' of these things. (It is clear that Husserl's aspectual phenomenology was in the first place a development from Berkeley and Hume – neither of whom was really an 'empiricist' in the Lockean sense.) So to this degree one could indeed say, following Reid, that Hume's 'ideas' have *reverted* to taking on some of the characteristics of Aristotle's *species* of understanding. Of course this reversion is clearly ambivalent and incomplete: on one reading (though it can be questioned), Hume leaves us with 'only simulacra', whereas for Aristotle the specific known *eide* retain a bond of identity with their material mode of instantiation and ineffably convey to the intending mind a reference to this formal-material existence. Reid, on the other hand, through his appeal to a kind of assumed 'life-world', retains this sense of purely given, non-analysable intention – yet he unnecessarily rejects a return to Aristotelian or Thomistic *species* which the Humean deconstruction potentially opens up.<sup>182</sup>

By rejecting this option, Reid remains *more* within the paradigm of representation than does Hume, and returns less to the paradigm of identity. This is because he actually augments scepticism about the resemblance between sensory impressions and external objects, opining for example that the sensation of hardness is nothing like the hardness of things as

<sup>180</sup> Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 97–105.

<sup>181</sup> Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, Manuscripts: 'The Aberdeen Philosophical Society: Version I', pp. 297–315.

known by empirical science, and the experience of redness nothing like the redness of things which we must assume to have some unknown physical ground and so forth. (Yet can one really know?) So while this indeed denies all ‘mirroring’, it also suggests that we are stuck at the sensory (if not the cognitive) level, with mirror-like images that do not in reality do any mirroring at all. So no more than Locke does Reid think that the redness which we see is ‘like’ a red quality in reality, and he actually *agrees* with Locke that such a sensation (as opposed to a concept) can be referred to as an ‘idea’. The difference is merely that, whereas Locke was inclined to see the experience of redness as a kind of illusion caused by a mechanical process, Reid thought that the ‘real red’, which for him we *rightly* ascribe to objects, is some sort of physically occult source (a hiddenness of origin which inconsistently refuses the hiddenness of resemblance) of our sensory experiences of redness – a ‘certain power or virtue in bodies’ as opposed to Locke’s merely quantitative ‘Powers’.<sup>183</sup>

In consequence, Reid affirms in the strongest manner possible the Ockhamist view that our sensations might be just what they are without being in any way connected to those realities which they do in fact convey to us – as the sensation of solidity to the touch conveys to us the reality of hardness. God, he says, could just as easily so have arranged it that we would smell or taste or hear hardness and indeed, as far as reason (as opposed to common sense) is concerned, all our sensations could be exactly as they are even if no real referential objects existed at all.<sup>184</sup> Again, as for Ockham, he sees this relation as immediate and as not involving any transition through an interior conceptual ‘idea’ or Augustinian *verbum mentis*, but rather as a direct relation between ‘natural sign’ and the reality signified.<sup>185</sup> This transition is so fundamental that it is cognitively inscrutable. We should, however, not trust it in the first place, like Descartes, because we believe in the infinite goodness of God, but simply because we

<sup>182</sup> Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ch. VI, section IV, pp. 85–87.

<sup>183</sup> Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ch. V, section II, p. 57: ‘The firm cohesion of the parts of a body, is no more like that sensation by which I perceive it to be hard, than the vibration of a sonorous body is like the sound I hear: nor can I possibly perceive, by my reason, any connection between the one and the other. No man can give a reason why the vibration of a body might not have given the sensation of smelling, and the effluvia of bodies affected our hearing, if it had so pleased our maker. In like manner, no man can give a reason, why the sensations of smell, or taste, or sound, might not have indicated hardness, as well as that sensation, which, by our constitution, does indicate it. Indeed no man can conceive any sensation to resemble any known quality of bodies. Nor can any man show, by any good argument, that all our sensations might not have been as they are, though no body, nor quality of body, had ever existed.’

<sup>184</sup> Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, ch. VI, section XXIV, p. 190.

are bound to do so, through our as it were transcendental confinement to 'common sense' (and there is a real resemblance to Kant here, even though Reid avoids the duality of conceptual scheme and empirical content). Yet a reflection which wishes to remain with common sense, and not abandon it for the Humean delirium of pure philosophy, will indeed attribute this relation to the arrangements of providence.

Without the Aristotelian *species*, this is surely once again tantamount to an 'Augustinian' fideistic evasion of a naturalistic scepticism: the inscrutable link between our perceiving and the real is very akin to a sort of pre-established harmony, involving a direct intervention of God in the world on the same univocal plane as us, according to the concurrence model of causality. Reid's view that our inference to a designing God is as immediate and non-reflective as our inference to other minds through the observation of articulate actions (whereas in truth the habitual human reception of both things and persons as divine gifts involves a more implicit, apophatic and questionable sort of immediacy) is part of this same intellectual perspective. He does indeed allow that an unknown immanent process may be at work here, but the fact that we can never have any scientific insight into this at all suggests again a causality that is equivocally 'other', although it acts within the scope of our world. Also, this same fact means that our knowledge cannot include in any measure the reflexive knowledge of the proportion that pertains between knowing and being – whereas for Aquinas knowledge *was* a 'return to self' of subjective perception that was also an attainment of self-reflection on the part of abstracted form.<sup>186</sup> By discounting, along with the *species*, this aspect of knowledge, Reid reveals that he does not see truth as what Heidegger would much later, long after the Greeks, once more describe as *aletheia*, 'unconcealedness'.<sup>187</sup> Instead, because he still regards truth as a 'substitute' for the real (and just for this reason fails to see the integrity of the moment of *species*), he regards sensation and knowledge as a divine providential and concurrent arrangement for ensuring our safe and pleasurable interaction with the physical world. This accords with the Newtonian programme of 'providential naturalism' of the Aberdonian school: the divinely appointed 'ends' of things can be empirically demonstrated, because ends are not implicit in the very means by which cognitive processes work, as they were for Aristotle.<sup>188</sup> Knowing, for the latter, was for the greater flourishing of knowing; for Reid, however, sensations, memories and imaginations (he scarcely treats of abstract

<sup>185</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 1 a. 9. And see F.X. Putallaz, *Le Sens de la réflexion chez Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1991).

<sup>186</sup> For example Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 70.

<sup>187</sup> See Derek R. Brookes, Introduction to Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, xii–xxv.

reflection except as confirming the inscrutable operation of these faculties) are abolished in their dazzling blindness at the point where we recognise how they are crafted to guide us safely and pleasurably (on the whole) through mundane reality.

There is something ‘homespun’ about Reid’s thinking here which has never failed to appeal to some Americans – whether one thinks of Alvin Plantinga’s ‘Reformed Epistemology’ (which borrows the at once unbelievable and idolatrous claim about God as one more ‘other mind’) or Richard Rorty’s neo-pragmatism, which takes ‘direct realism’ as the key to the rebuttal of the representation paradigm, following Reid – significantly in the long-term wake of the Franciscan Peter John Olivi<sup>189</sup> – in dismissing ‘species’ along with ‘idea’ as equally unnecessary specular third terms.<sup>190</sup> But I have just shown how, without *species*, sensations that do not mirror remain nonetheless like a continuous screen of felt apparitions into which we have no real judgemental insight – whereas if there are sensory as well as intellectual *species* (as for Aristotle) then even the eyes must already judge in order to see at all. Reid’s sensations are too much still like images (or Lockean ideas), as he admits, but images now with only arbitrary relations to their originals, such that Reid above all rejects the role of ‘analogy’ (of thing to sensation, sensation to concept) in thinking about cognition. By comparison, the Aristotelian-Thomist sensations and concepts are transmuted forms and images, which analogically (by *convenientia*) resemble their originals and more inscrutably allow us to intend the originals through their own actuality. Why should it not be the case that when we see red we see something in the red thing that really is somewhat like our red – rather as with human beings it so often does seem to be the case that the red-haired tend to be fiery and passionate, whether they burn with an open or a concealed flame? At least in the case of Hume he does not think of imagistic impressions and ideas as a screen within our minds (whereas Reid, who does, is still confined in his *camera*

<sup>188</sup> Peter John Olivi, *Sentence Commentary*, qq. 58, 74. On Olivi in general, see Anne Ashley Davenport, *Measure of a Different Greatness: The Intensive Infinite, 1250–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 165–239, 251–301.

<sup>189</sup> Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), esp. 144–146. Rorty well describes here how Locke, by removing ‘identity’ from ideas, opens the way to scepticism. On the other hand, his acceptance of the Reidian view that Aristotle already too much modelled thought on sense impression seems too simple, and ignores the role of the *intellectus agens*, while being in a crucial sense *insufficiently* materialist. The point here surely is that ‘sense impression’ itself was very different for Aristotle; it already began the abstraction of form and the beginning of the release of the reflexive capacity of form itself – with which, for Aristotle, the intellect in act is identical.

*obscura* after all!) but as the one and only reality ('out there' or 'in here' through the folding back of the former) with which we have to deal.

All Reid-descended pragmatism is bound in the end to think that valid human cognitions promote and therefore surely 'represent', albeit blindly, physical and social achievements that are objectively measurable as such – as 'working' in some fashion or other. But all Hume-descended phenomenism supposes that the images of things originally *belong* to the things and so are 'out there' rather than 'in here'. It also surmises that we inevitably inhabit 'fictions' whose plot is prior to any utilitarian purpose (even that of social consensus) and confines goals themselves to fictional projections. So because he retains *only* the middle of ideas-fictions – and accordingly suggests that we can *only* think analogically<sup>191</sup> – Hume's deconstructed representation is nearer to the identity paradigm than Reid's attempt to avoid representation altogether. For knowledge by identity involves the realisation of identity with the known thing through a certain (non-externally surveyable) analogical resemblance (for example of sensation of red – or better, 'red sensation' – to red thing, which we could never observe from an independent triangulated standpoint). This indeed, we must have belief in – and it is here that Reid's 'rational fideism' is right, and in this respect he was followed by both Jacobi and Hamann.<sup>192</sup> However, their new theologisation of philosophy was in reality (as they were aware) more after Hume than after Reid, since what they most proclaimed was the transmutation into religious faith of the Humean belief, which we are all bound to sustain, in fictions concerning the continuity and stable (though fluctuating) identity of events-images (which Hamann after Berkeley saw as the words of a divine created language) fully 'out there' in the world. For Jacobi this was once more a Platonic trust in the participation of these worldly partial identities in eternal ones.<sup>193</sup>

In the case of Reid, as we have just seen, a variant on 'modern Augustinian passivity' still remains. Rorty may claim that Reid released the intellectual capacity from being construed on the model of mirroring sensation, but in fact he confined it to our 'direct' attention to real things which the screen of sensations mysteriously permits. This attention is at once functional and wholly receptive in character. Equally, when Hume is

<sup>190</sup> Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I.xii.192.

<sup>191</sup> See George di Giovanni, Introduction to Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 28–30.

<sup>192</sup> Jacobi, 'David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue' (1787), and 'David Hume on Faith . . . Preface' (1815), in *The Main Philosophical Writings*, 253–338 and 537–590 (esp. 549). See also, once more, Paul W. Franks's excellent post-analytic reading of Jacobi's intervention in his *All or Nothing*, 146–200.



read as he most usually has been, as a proponent of immanence, it is evident that once the divinely passive side of the representation paradigm is removed, empirical passivity still remains, or is even reinforced, because our shadowy spirit is entirely at the mercy of the 'actions' of events which are also images.

Only where Hume is read otherwise (as by Jacobi) as a proto-Romantic realist for whom feeling and faith give access to the real, is any activism returned to modern reason.

## 12 Passivity and *Concursus*

It must be stressed that this prevailing cognitive passivity, which denies the psychic realisation of being as truth, is also genealogically linked to the modern *conkursus* model of causality, which involves the notion that God and creatures can contribute different shares to a causal upshot, like two horses pulling the same barge. It might seem, on the face of it, as if this model should ensure divine-human collaboration, but the point is that, when applied to human intelligence, the zero-sum game involved will tend to pan out wholly in favour of divine activity and human passivity, if one wishes to respect divine transcendence – once having compromised it by adoption of this model in the first place. Hence the acknowledgement of divine power can now *only* be made by an espousal of human passivity and not equally, or rather even more, by affirmation of human autonomous activity (at its own level), as it can in the case of the *influentia* model. Hence if one supposes that one most respects divine power by imagining it as overriding finite causes on the same univocal plane of being, then one *will* require some finite 'contribution' at the ultimate level (as one will not on the *influentia* model), but this will tend to be a merely passive and accepting contribution. In the case of human understanding, our obedient attention to divine ideas will indeed be 'all our own work' outside divine prompting, just as on the Molinist model of grace our choice passively to receive grace is entirely within our own control, 'outside' the will of God.<sup>194</sup>

One consequence of this conclusion is that late medieval and Renaissance advocates of the high dignity of the human soul and human active capacity, like Eckhart, Cusanus and Mirandola, may lie in far greater continuity with the high Middle Ages and stand far less unambiguously at the threshold of modernity than is usually supposed.

<sup>193</sup> See Henri de Lubac, *Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 2000).

So here it is important to mention a certain misunderstanding which some commentators, including André de Muralt, fall into.<sup>195</sup> One should not regard Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa's radicalisation of the Augustinian (and Thomist) view that creatures are of themselves substantively 'nothing' as yet another example of modern passivity and alienation of all positive activity to the divine side. It is in part strange that de Muralt makes this mistake, because he clearly sees that passivity is linked to causality by *concursum*, and not to reciprocal or hierarchically differentiated causality. Yet Eckhart and Cusa, in insisting that being and unity are so entirely from God that no creature 'is', or 'is unified' of itself (Cusa exposes the latter truth through the application of mathematical paradoxes), are clearly refusing the *concursum* model in the most drastic manner conceivable. Indeed, there are indications that Eckhart may well be criticising the Scotist univocal ontology which undergirds this causal vision, by insisting that initial, univocal being is divine *esse* alone.<sup>196</sup> If both he and Cusanus speak so paradoxically of the non-being of creation as such as if it were 'something', then this can be taken as their wish utterly to oppose any ontotheological notion that there can really be anything that exists literally alongside God.

Scotus had, in a sense, raised the stakes, by insisting that, in order to guarantee creation's real independence, it must have a being that is truly its own, which in logical and ontological terms can be seen as fully existing without reference to its createdness as the origin of its being from God. Aquinas's subtle point had been that it is *being* that is shared, and therefore that it is 'self-standing' existence that is paradoxically the thing that most participates.<sup>197</sup> But Scotus now suggested that the integrity of finite being can only be guaranteed if one allows that this being is fully its own reality outside participation; otherwise, he contended, what is most specific to finite being, namely existence itself, is also problematically the

<sup>194</sup> André de Muralt, *Néoplatonisme et Aristotélisme dans la métaphysique médiévale* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1995), 77–99.

<sup>195</sup> See Alain de Libera, *Le Problème de l'être chez Maître Eckhart: Logique et métaphysique de l'analogie* (Geneva: Cahiers de la Revue de Théologie et Philosophie 4, 1980); John Milbank, 'Preface to the Second Edition: Between Liberalism and Positivism', in *Theology and Social Theory*, ix–xxxii. See also Milbank, 'The Double Glory'.

<sup>196</sup> See Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 141 and 146 n. 49. Te Velde, however, perhaps tries to evade the aporetic quality of what Aquinas says about participation and to over-stress the 'independence' of creatures. He certainly gives an excellent account of participation in relation to an *influencia* model of causality which allows God to establish independent existence and fully 'autonomous' secondary causality while remaining the entire cause of the 'being' of all this. On the other hand, he does not quite allow

most alienated thing, and our integral action as creatures is compromised. So in defending a traditional perspective as most technically expressed by Aquinas, Eckhart and Cusa were forced more dramatically to concede that it indeed implies in a sense that ‘God is all’ in a way that seems to threaten either acosmism or pantheism. But at the same time they had not lost sight of the Thomist paradox that what God shares is being itself – in other words the ‘self-standing’ of existence as such. This then forces them to speak in more aporetic and arcane terms than are usually found

that this could logically permit one to speak of creation as at once ‘divine’ and yet ‘not divine’. What prevents such a paradox arising for te Velde would seem to be his insistence that, for Aquinas, we do not participate in God himself, or the divine being or the divine essence. Yet Aquinas many times says that we participate in *esse*, and many times identifies God with *esse*, which has a perfect coincidence with *essentia*. When he says in his commentary on Dionysius, in a passage cited by te Velde (*In Div. Nom.* c. 2 lect. 4, n. 178), that the essence of God itself is imparticipable, he certainly does not mean that we only participate, in Palamite fashion, the divine uncreated ‘energies’ or actions towards us, as this would compromise the divine simplicity: for Aquinas the divine omnipresence simply *is* God. So what Aquinas must mean here is that God does not hand over the entirety of his essential being: he does not make ‘other Gods’ entirely like himself. What he gives is rather ‘similitudes’ of his ‘essence’ through which creatures are ‘propagated’. But he does not say that we participate only in a ‘similitude’ of God that is secondary to the divine essence: rather, the similitudes are likenesses of the essence and these likenesses *are* the created beings. Te Velde’s Utrecht colleague, Harm Goris, likewise translates a certain passage in the *Tertia Pars* as a participation ‘in a certain similitude of the divine being’. (See Harm Goris, ‘Steering Clear of Charybdis: Some Directions for Avoiding “Grace Extrinsicism” in Aquinas’, *Nova et Vetera*, 5/1 (2007), 67–80.) Translated thus, it is very unclear exactly what the participation could be in at all, and in fact Goris is offering an eccentric reading of the entire phrase, *gratia, secundum se considerata, perficit essentiam animae, in quantum participat quantum similitudinem divini esse*. Despite the word order, it is surely more plausibly translated as ‘grace, considered in itself, perfects the essence of the soul, insofar as it participates of the divine essence [through] a certain similitude’. The old ‘literal’ English Dominican translation has ‘grace, considered in itself, perfects the essence of the soul, insofar as it is a certain participated likeness of the divine nature’. It is possible that this phrase has in reality been mistranscribed, giving rise to the ambiguity. But te Velde himself declares that the contrast between ‘essence’ and the supposed divine ‘similitude’ is no simple opposition, as if these things stood alongside each other, but rather that in the similitude there lies an ‘immediate relationship to God himself who is self-subsistent being’ (*Participation*, 146 n. 49). Yet this phrase must surely imply the paradox that what creatures participate *is* ‘the imparticipable’ divine essence itself. The entire point of the Neoplatonic idea of participation, which Aquinas fully perpetuates, is that the ultimate shares itself without reserve, while nonetheless entirely reserving itself in its unsoundable mystery. What it gives in a measure is the ungivable, and it is only the ungivable that can be given. Hence it is precisely the imparticipable that can be participated and actually *because* it is imparticipable, an inexhaustible fountain: as Nicholas of Cusa puts it with regard to a mathematical paradigm, ‘although the circle does not impart itself otherwise than as it is, nevertheless it can be partaken by another only otherwise’ (*De Coniecturis*, I.11). Te Velde suggests that Aquinas’s model of participation in *esse* qualifies the Neoplatonic notion that ‘the creature

in Aquinas (although they can be found in certain places):<sup>198</sup> thus Nicholas declared that ‘God’s being in the world is nothing other than the world’s being in God’.<sup>199</sup> For the most interior reality of created things simply *is* God, and humans as reflective have conscious access to this interiority; creation is the ‘laying out’ (*explicatio*) of God; God in his inner ‘complicated’ Trinitarian life is the going out towards creation and the return of creation to himself.<sup>200</sup>

But to see this newly aporetic rendering of the creator/created difference, in the case of Nicholas of Cusa, as a further mutation of Scotist *concursum*, as de Muralt does, is surely perverse: nothing in Nicholas’s intellectual lineage suggests this, and nor does his overwhelmingly participatory framework. His God is infinite but simple, not formally divided, while the distinctions of creatures somehow consequent upon the *nihil* are real and not formal. Nor does the *nihil* really contribute anything, like a concurrent cause (as de Muralt quite bizarrely suggests): it is God who wholly gives finite things and yet their privative limitation is alone ‘proper’ to them – Aquinas thought no differently. Finally, Cusa does not contrast (as de Muralt avers, stretching his analogical historical method to breaking point) a negative ‘comprehension’ of the coincidence of opposites with their application to the real, unsoundable

is nothing other than a dependent “manifestation” of the divine subsistent being without having a proper substantial mode of being’ (*Participation*, 141). However, Proclean Neoplatonism already allowed a certain subsistence to finite beings. And while one can fully agree with te Velde that a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as expounded by Aquinas in terms of a sharing of being increases this sense of independent substantial existence, it *also* increases the sense that creatures are, indeed, but ‘dependent manifestations’, precisely because of the idea that alongside God, apart from his creative act and omnipresence, there is only ‘nothing’. So while, certainly, I would wish to stress a qualitative difference between Christianity and Neoplatonism, the point is that an over-apologetic approach here can miss the truth that Christianity, as it were, renders Neoplatonism ‘still more Neoplatonic’ and not less (rather in the way that the New Testament accentuates as much as it qualifies the message of the Old). Te Velde also ignores or plays down those ‘proto-Eckhartian’ passages in Aquinas which suggest that at the deepest level creatures are more accidental than they are substantial: indicating that they are only relatively substantial in a participated sense (while God is actually ‘hyper-substantial’ since nothing underlies him and he is only entirely self-standing as infinite, not as circumscribed; there is a real sense in which substance is found to be ‘nowhere’ in Aquinas). See Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, 33–35; Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné: Essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation* (Paris: PUF, 1997), 17–21, and Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei*, q. 5 a. 4 ad. 3.

<sup>197</sup> See Rosemann, *Omne ens est aliquid*, 191–210.

<sup>198</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De Coniecturis*, II.7: 107; Johannes Hoff, *Kontingenz, Berührung, Überschreitung: Zur philosophischen Propädeutik christlicher Mystik nach Nikolaus von Kues* (Frankfurt am Main: Albert Karl, 2007).

<sup>199</sup> See Burkhard Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity and Unity* (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 2001).

divine mystery, on the model of the Scotist conceptual *esse objectivum*, which stands for a reality that is in itself entirely obscure. Rather, based upon mathematical examples, we have a partial positive insight into the way finite opposites can converge at an infinite vanishing point, and through mystical contemplation we can gradually advance along this path.<sup>201</sup>

The reason for de Muralt's mistake here is really his rejection of the Neoplatonic dimension within Aquinas – despite the fact that this alone fully upholds the latter's accounts of analogy, of *influentia*, the prior exemplary plenitude of the *actus purus* and of intentionality. Hence de Muralt denies that the dominant hold of analogy of attribution – where a lower thing is only 'like' a higher thing by borrowing from it – in Eckhart is in continuity with Aquinas, and argues that, for the angelic doctor, the analogy of proportion – for which God and creatures can exhibit the same ratio in different degrees – carries equal weight.<sup>202</sup> But this is surely to perpetuate an anachronistically Cajetanian reading of Aquinas that is itself too contaminated by the univocity of being: Aquinas does not really allow one to say that a creature 'exists', independently of God, even in its own proper degree. To the contrary, being is that alien, eminent height by which our natures are actualised through participation alone.

This issue is not a trivial one. For to adopt de Muralt's position on Eckhart and Cusanus is to suggest that all we need to do is to return to the perspectives of Aquinas, as if, for all their dubiety, the intellectual moves of Scotus and Ockham posed no new questions which the heirs of the *via antiqua* must now perforce answer in somewhat novel ways.

These questions concerned:

- 1 The nature of creatures' integral standing 'outside' God.
- 2 The apparent violation of the principle of non-contradiction equally by the notion of analogy whereby two things are simultaneously *in toto* same and different (and not just in different respects); by that of realist and not nominal essence, where the *eidos* of a thing is coincidingly particular and universal; and of real relation where something is seemingly defined as also something else, since it depends on a constitutive contrast.
- 3 The possibility that God has communicated in some measure his creative power to creatures, which, as we have seen, Duns Scotus already regarded as an implication of concursive causality. (Even though, as we have also seen, such co-creativity can only

<sup>200</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De Docta Ignorantia*, I.11: 30–21: 66.

<sup>201</sup> De Muralt, *Néoplatonisme et Aristotélisme*, 100–156.

really operate as a passive fatality, rather than as a matter of active participatory engagement, on the *concursum* model.)

- 4 The idea that the active element in understanding, since it is essentially arbitrary, is dependent upon linguistic construction.

The nominalists answered these questions respectively in terms of:

- 1 Full finite standing in being.
- 2 Univocalist/equivocalist denial of analogy, universals and real relations.
- 3 The arbitrary power of God to transfer all of his own powers, including creative power.
- 4 The consequent arbitrariness of our cognitive generalisations or even claimed intuitions on account of their linguistic constructedness.

But Eckhart, Cusa, Mirandola and some other Renaissance thinkers tended to answer them in ‘post-nominalist’ rather than simply ancient realist terms, to give respectively:

- 1 A paradoxical reading of the creation as equally inside and outside the Godhead.<sup>203</sup>
- 2 A new thinking of analogy, universal and real relation as exceeding the terms of non-contradiction, by virtue of the character of the infinite and its impinging on the finite.
- 3 The idea that human creative activity is itself a participation in the inner-Trinitarian generation of the *Logos* and therefore that our making is teleologically constrained, not arbitrary, since (as supremely in God himself) *facere* fully coincides with *intellegere*.<sup>204</sup>
- 4 A greater association of the reasoning process with word, image and emblem. This involves, as Johannes Hoff has shown with respect to Nicholas of Cusa, a drastic effort to restore and renew high medieval symbolic realism by now showing that the most seemingly ordinary and also artificial objects – a spoon, a triangle, a map, a ball game, an astrolabe etc. – can be made to yield the full height of mystical significance.<sup>205</sup> The consequence of this is a more ‘figured’ and exotic

<sup>202</sup> On Meister Eckhart in this respect, see Milbank, ‘The Double Glory’.

<sup>203</sup> See John Milbank, ‘The Grandeur of Reason and the Perversity of Rationalism: Radical Orthodoxy’s First Decade’, in John Milbank and Simon Oliver, eds., *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader* (London: Routledge, 2009), 367–404.

<sup>204</sup> Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013).

discourse that is sustained by the Baroque and especially the later Anglican Baroque, as is most familiar from so-called ‘metaphysical’ poetry and was already promoted against the stripped-down logic and grammar of the Puritan Ramists by the Cambridge and East Anglican renegade Thomas Nashe.<sup>206</sup> Against an already arriving ‘dissociation of sensibility’ (of reasoning from embodiment and sensation), the post-Cusan writers reasserted association in a hyperbolic and pan-sacramental fashion.<sup>207</sup>

In the long term this post-nominalism suggested a saving of participatory reason and of symbolic realism by a greater invocation of the transrational: of the emotively led, the aesthetic, the imaginative and the poetic. Thus this current eventually helped to give rise to the proto-Romantic and Romantic revisionarily realist critiques of the *via moderna*, as seen in Jacobi, Hamann, Friedrich Schlegel and others.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>205</sup> See Marshall McLuhan, *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of his Time* (Corte Madere, Calif.: Gingko Press, 2006).

<sup>206</sup> This hyperbole could also invite atrophy due to an excess of artifice that could lose sight of any realist import altogether, as occurred with continental ‘conceptism’ or ‘Gongorism’ in poetry, where the use of conceit lacked the English restraint and ludic seriousness. In consequence there occurred, with Nicolas Boileau, in late seventeenth-century France, a reaction in favour of simpler and more ‘sublime’ poetic imagery, which had a strong influence in Britain also. It can often be overlooked that this reaction (and this point may well affect assessment of Milton’s poetic style) is by no means a ‘secularisation’ or a ‘classicising’ and post-Cartesian disenchantment, but in many ways the opposite. In consequence, some English eighteenth-century poetry, that of Christopher Smart supremely, is at once ‘sublime’ and yet in continuity with the earlier ‘metaphysical’ impulse. The phrase ‘dissociation of sensibility’ is T.S. Eliot’s: see his essay ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921). And see also in this respect Michel Foucault, ‘The Prose of the World’, in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2001), Part I, ch. 2, pp. 17–45. Although Eliot spoke of the metaphysicals as if they still naturally ‘felt their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose’, his eventual preference for Dante’s greater ease and restraint of expression as compared both with the metaphysicals and with Shakespeare implicitly acknowledged that there was already something ‘forced’ in their poetics. This brought him also a greater appreciation of Milton in his later years, and, again by implication, of the turn to ‘sublimity’. However, one could say that this later preference failed to acknowledge both the *need* for ‘forcing’ in the face of an already commenced dissociation which Eliot perhaps did not fully recognise, and the way in which this Baroque hyperbole actually attained a more adequate emphasis upon the incarnation of reason which Christianity had always implied but never sufficiently thought through or enacted.

<sup>207</sup> See John Milbank, ‘The New Divide: Romantic versus Classical Orthodoxy’, *Modern Theology* (Jan.–Feb. 2010), 26–38; Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millain-Zaibert (New York: SUNY, 2008).

### 13 Representation in Philosophy

From a ‘philosophical’ point of view (even if that can be but problematically distinguished from the ‘theological’) a theory of knowledge by representation is also questionable – as we have already seen, to some degree. Its paradigm is that of vision, but even this paradigm has a genealogy. Arabic optics, as inherited by Roger Bacon in the twelfth century, tended to encourage the view that the eye ‘copies’ the thing seen by forming an image of it, as if the idea were already conceived as a ‘camera’.<sup>209</sup> Traditionally, since Plato, Euclid, Galen and the Stoics, the idea of the eye as chamber of received images had been qualified by the notion that the eye emits its own answering beam of light in response to the light received from the thing seen: this notion was repeated by Augustine but rejected by Ibn Sina, following the lead of Aristotle.<sup>210</sup> Now even if the physics of this older notion be considered obsolete (and even that may be debatable), it retains its phenomenological pertinence, and indeed it is one of the paradigms for ‘intentionality’ itself in Augustine, which, via the scholastic development of this concept, helped to shape the very enterprise of modern phenomenology.<sup>211</sup>

For how is it that, standing consciously ‘at the back’ of our camera, we are able to see through its impressions, as though through a viewfinder? We never, as a seeing subject, *do* see the image at the back of the retina, whatever may be the case (metaphorically) for the brain. Rather, this image somehow permits us really and intentionally to ‘look out’ upon things, to throw a beam of invisible sensory light upon them. While Aristotle rejected the ‘ocular beam’ theory, he still thought of the eye as very remotely touching the object, just as the object remotely touched the eye, by way of the medium of irradiated air.<sup>212</sup>

<sup>208</sup> See Boulnois, *Être et représentation*, 56–67.

<sup>209</sup> Augustine, Sermon CCLXVII, 10; *De Genesi ad Litteram* I.31 and VII.20, and see also XII.6.15–12.26; Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, ‘On Sense and Sensible Objects’, 438a26–438b15.

<sup>210</sup> See n. 93 above.

<sup>211</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* 435a15–25: ‘the other senses [besides touch] perceive by contact too, but through a medium’. (Conversely he thought that there is always an infinitesimal physical medium in the case of touch, even if this is not enough to explain why the necessary proximity involved in touch does not ‘blind’ our sensibility, as it does in the case of an object brought too close to the eye. Here he thought that one needs to understand that the body itself is the medium between the soul and material reality. To complete the circle, this fleshly medium is required to ensure the conscious contact achieved by all the senses, since the soul must be ‘distanced’ even from the material point where the sensation reaches its body, if it is not to be psychically ‘blinded’. See the entire argument of the *De Anima*.)



Thus, phenomenologically considered (and sight cannot be reduced to a sheerly physical process without destroying its reality, which *is*, through and through, phenomenal),<sup>213</sup> the relevantly paradigmatic instance of sight is itself not one of passive representation: rather, it involves both an active beaming and a reciprocal touching.

So if seeing itself is not simply the regarding of images upon a screen within an ocular chamber, then neither need the mind plausibly be seen as a psychic chamber. Certainly information passes within the brain, but, when we think, we are not really ‘inside’ our brains any more than we are inside anywhere else. Rather, we are in a placeless psychic realm that enables us to be ‘anywhere’, exactly where the things are that are known by us (as Hume understood even better than Reid) or indeed ‘to be all things’ (as Aristotle put it).<sup>214</sup> Thus when we move about in the world we deal with things simultaneously in the concrete though bodily encounter and sensation, and in the abstract through mental modification which our hands’ shaping of things has already commenced. We move always through the day as if in a dream and must dream in order to move at all.

If we *do* imagine that the mind is a psychic chamber upon which we watch the passing of images as ‘ideas’, then a number of problems ensue. Were images all we had to go upon, then how would we be able to check that the images correspond to the originals? So only knowledge by identity guarantees a strong realism, whereas knowledge by representation remains chronically subject to scepticism. Any supposed ability to check the veracity of ‘ideas’ must propose that there is some way of distinguishing between the contribution of our mind and the contribution of reality, and must further propose criteria for ensuring the purity of both. However, since our only access to things is through words and strings of coherent images, according to cultural codings, everything we consider has been already synthesised and schematised in spatial and temporal relativity alongside other things. There *are no* isolatable facts which we can be sure of having received in their purity: only relatively reliable facts which fall under a certain description for certain purposes, like fragments of evidence used in a courtroom. In short, there is no *pre-given* reality which we can first consider apart from our engagement with it. Inversely, there is no

<sup>212</sup> Equally, if thinking is not dualistically divorced from material process, we cannot dismiss the idea that, even in some physical sense, our eyes ‘throw light’ upon things. For it might be asked whether in general modern physics has too easily dismissed the idea that reflective surfaces contribute some emanative effect of light on their own account – as the medieval use of coloration so evidently assumed. After all it is dense material realities – the stars – that in the first place cause the effects of both fire and light.

<sup>213</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* 431b20–25.

decent standard for the purity of our cognitive *schemata*, as Kant supposed: the more boring nuances of our everyday language (ignoring all poetic turns) beloved once of Oxford philosophers, do not disclose any eternal subtleties of the cognitive universe, but only features, in one aspect factual, of the way humans in general (or sometimes Oxonians in particular) tend symbolically to inhabit their world.<sup>215</sup>

The model of representation, then, if seriously adopted, will lead inexorably to the post-Humean view (as articulated by Deleuze, for example), that there are only sequences of self-replicating movement-images, coiled in greatest intensity to shape those material *simulacra* of *simulacra* known to themselves as ‘human beings’. But then it follows that our ‘representing’ lies entirely on the folding and unfolding surface of things and does not occur within a hidden chamber. Such motions and images at once perpetuate and betray, continue and discontinue, univocally and equivocally, the flux of the real as a series of local and indeed somewhat illusory specular echo-chambers. As befits, then, its initial link with a reserved lawless power of God, postmodern deconstructed representation can only in the end represent – in terms of the entire meaningless ‘process’ of eventuation-imaging – either chaos or nullity.

One can elect instead to adopt the model of knowledge by identity – but its links with a participatory theology, as we have seen, are not at all incidental.

## 14 Actualism versus Possibilism

The third assumption of modern philosophy – the priority of possibility – denies the traditional theological sense that there can be a kind of necessity in actuality as such which is a beautiful, harmonious, grace-imbued good order, recognisable by wise, rightly ordered judgement. It also tends, when applied to the human sphere, unrealistically to think of choices in terms of pure logical availability, whereas in practice certain initial choices drastically preclude later ones, whether for pragmatic reasons or for reasons of the formation of a habit.<sup>216</sup> The same theory also leaves mysterious the question of what sways any choice: in reality there is no ‘pure will’, but only the persuading of desire by some reason or lure that appears to a subject as more convincing or persuasive.

<sup>214</sup> Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 167–212.

<sup>215</sup> See David Burrell, ‘Al Ghazali on Created Freedom’ and ‘Creation, Will and Knowledge in Aquinas and Duns Scotus’, in *Faith and Freedom*, 156–189.

Possibilism, since in this way it neglects the lure of desire, can also be described as a ‘cold’ rendering of reality. It fails truly to provide an answer to the question ‘Why being?’ and confines itself in effect to the ‘how’ of being’s constitution, whether as infinite or finite. Nothing in neutral reason really justifies this perspective: instead it rests upon a mere decision to read reality in ‘cold’ terms as doubly ‘given’ – once as possibility, secondly as existentiality – rather than in ‘warm’ terms as the receiving of a gift, such that only the arriving actuality of a thing entirely defines it as what it is, since here existence is taken as fully particularising and defining a general form or essence.

The cold reading of reality effectively construes *all* of being as merely like instances *within* being. So, for example, within the bounds of finite existence, a bicycle in a shop window might present to the spectator the possibility of a gift to be given, whereas its later handing over to a child (after purchase) is the actuality of donation. At first the potential gift is just a spectacular ‘given’ in the window, while its later becoming a gift is a second ‘given’ fact of actualisation, once one has decided to intervene in the proffered drama by entering the shop door to act first upon the stage of commerce and then later upon the interpersonal stage of gratuity. In a similar fashion, a univocalist transcendental ontology comprehends finite existences as simply the ‘matter of fact’ given instantiations of previously ‘given’ (and not in any sense donated) possibilities of finite being. The same dual givenness applies to the specific general arrangements of the world which we happen to inhabit.

But surely the religious sensibility tends to read existence as such as only *definable* in terms of gift – as if the bicycle had never first appeared in the window and never had to be bought, but was miraculously conjured up only in that instance when it first appeared to the child on the morning of its birthday. As if we could only receive and ride bicycles which were presents and the theatre of gratuity were never preceded by the theatre of commercial transfer.

Yet despite this truth, as we have seen, the shift from interpreting being as created gift to interpreting it as the elective instantiation of uncreated possibility did not first occur mainly in terms of an exercise of purely philosophical and secular reason. Instead, certain modes of reasoning were adopted in terms of a religious attitude which wished to protect absolute divine freedom beyond even the scope of its generosity, by insisting that God, in relation to the world, mainly considers a range of ‘given’ possibilities, and then, ‘as a matter of fact’, makes a certain decision as to which ones will be actualised. Here, Aquinas’s alternative religious vision, according to which God is himself ‘compelled’ in creating by the aesthetic glory of his own intellect in the Paternal uttering of the *Verbum*, and the

discriminating ‘aesthetic’ judgements which he makes as to the contents of the created world, is dogmatically, not critically, abandoned.

Philosophically speaking, it would seem that there are at least equally good reasons in favour of the priority of the actual as the priority of the possible. Does not this principle alone conserve a strong realism, and indeed a kind of radical empiricism, as G.K. Chesterton divulged? For if we do not first know the fundamental patterns of the world and the kinds of things that are in it by encountering them in existence, then we can never encounter anything radically new, which seems counter-intuitive. All that we could meet with would be instantiations of essences that we already knew about, or could in principle imagine, trivially varied. Of course there is the problem of how we can recognise radically new things or search for unknown ones, but Plato (the *Meno* problematic) and Augustine (the theory of illumination) recognised that our strange anticipation of the unknown is radically aporetic, and requires an appeal to transcendence (in terms of recollection or illumination), on pain of denying the arrival of something new as something still rationally coherent.

Here again it can be seen how Aquinas’s legacy, this time in terms of its actualism, supports historicisation in a way that is not usually acknowledged. And that just as the ‘turn to the subject’ (linked to representation and *concursum*) does not after all favour any taking into account of the real contingent freedoms of history, so likewise the priority of the possible (which still dominated the horizon of Schelling and Hegel) must reduce history either to necessity or to the exercise of freedom without any teleological meaning and so without any meaning relevant for truth whatsoever. This is precisely why Vico, who sustains both Thomist actualism and Renaissance ‘external’, non-technologically reduced *poesis*, was a far more genuinely historicist thinker than the German Protestant idealists. (The same goes for those later Catholics Pierre-Simon Ballanche, Charles Péguy and Christopher Dawson.)<sup>217</sup>

The saving of the appearance of arriving novelty is the first, positive philosophical argument for the priority of the actual. The second, negative argument is that, just as we can ask the idealist, ‘But what is the reality of your thinking?’ so also we can ask the possibilist, ‘But what is the actuality of your pre-given range of possibilities?’ Surely they are only the possibilities that we have abstracted by affirmation or else by counter-factual contrast from this actual world, such that fully to sustain possibilism one would have to argue, in a speculative fashion, that there are a myriad unknown possibilities, which the limited structure of our mind fails to grasp. As with the

<sup>216</sup> See further below in the second sequence, section 10.

Kantian contrast of phenomena and noumena, a somewhat nihilistic prospect would thereby be opened out of meta-possibilities in excess of a notion of ‘possibility’ that would seem to be *defined* in part by mental graspability. Meanwhile nihilism itself is forced to speak of the void (just as modern mathematics speaks of zero) or the repertoire of the sheerly aleatory as if this also were ‘actual’.

If possibility is predatory upon actuality rather than vice versa, then this would favour the view that all ‘possible worlds’ are in a weak degree ‘actual’. Here it is relevant that modern philosophy sometimes describes a possibility that is non-actualised as ‘fictional’, because fictions, especially novels, reveal that thickly imagined alternative possibilities possess some degree of actuality of their own, since one can only grasp, say, the ‘logic’ of *Bleak House* by treating its world *as* a complex actuality and not at all as mixture of atomistic items of ‘possibility’ blended together in varying combinations with certain diverting but inessential variations. Such a formalistic reduction of the book to predictable manipulations of narrative structure would simply lose the specificity of the novel and its precondition of narrative genius. This is partly why Chesterton thought that the ‘other realities’ of fictions, especially fairy-tales, revealed by indirection the ‘magical’ and unfathomable curious necessities (‘limitations’) of our own world which are inseparable from its actuality, yet which can now, through this indirection, be seen as more than arbitrary, but rather as strangely crucial for the achievement of a life that bears aesthetic weight and moral solemnity.<sup>218</sup>

In these ways the bias of common sense runs towards the priority of the actual. However, the counter-intuition of possibilism cannot readily be refused by pure reason – even though, in its atheist guise, it is bound to evolve into nihilism. By contrast, the bent of the natural mind within this world can only be confirmed by resort to the theological. For if a purely immanent actuality were self-sustaining, it would still divide between that virtual aspect which propels it along with all other actualities, and the surface of its actual appearing, since there is nothing in any specific actuality in itself which necessitates its being: ‘There are others, it seems to me, who have at best to live / In two worlds – each a kind of make-believe’, as T.S. Eliot expressed it in *The Confidential Clerk*.<sup>219</sup> The actual can only sustain

<sup>217</sup> Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, 66–102.

<sup>218</sup> These ‘others’ are those who are neither geniuses nor untalented nor yet again religious, whose lives are split between a private artistic imagination and a public life which is itself a collective fantasy. Eliot implies that it is only religion that can integrate both, and ground both in a secure reality beyond our fantasising, even if we only have access to this reality through the imagination. See T.S. Eliot, *The Confidential Clerk: A Play* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 36–37, 40–42.

itself as irreducibly self-caused on the surface of the world if it is suspended from an infinite plenitude of the actual. And only as simply infinite – where there is no before and after, no conditioning and conditioned – can the actual be entirely self-sustaining without any self-division, or any subordination to virtual propulsion.<sup>220</sup>

## 15 Influence versus Concurrence

Finally, the theory of causal concurrence idolatrously reduces divine power to being merely a supremely big instance of the kinds of power that we know about, and denies the eminent capacity of divine power fully to determine even created freedom, while leaving the latter as free in its own terms and on its own level.

Even in philosophical terms this theory makes little sense. One can no longer take seriously the notion of an ‘almighty’ factor within the ontic realm who is either an overwhelming yet partial influence (in the reduced sense) upon us, or a kind of supreme headmaster who is giving us a fair bash at playing some rather risky games and not often intervening even when the going gets rough in the playground, as this freedom and enterprise is ultimately good for us. Neither the slightly preposterous God of Leibniz nor a cosmic less-than-Dumbledore can today be taken seriously.

When it comes to *concursum* within the structures of the finite world, this does less than justice to the way in which some ‘higher’ and often elusive causal (or better, ‘emanative’) processes operate as a holistic, integrating element – like the covering forces across the whole field of microbiology, for example – that does not simply ‘interact’ as one more factor with other causes at a more basic, intimate level. Nor, as we have seen, can the notion of ‘matter as quasi-act’ hold, without problematically abolishing matter altogether.

<sup>219</sup> This would be my response to John Mullarkey’s view that it is a philosophy of pure *immanence* which requires an undiluted actualism, in his *Postcontinental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum, 2006). This is an entirely logical position, since any dominance of the possible or the virtual would seem to be the shadow of transcendence. However, as I try to indicate above, only transcendence allows a notion of *actus purus* and then the idea that all finite things limit this pure actuality by degrees of potential. This scheme one might regard indeed as somewhat ‘dualistic’, but it is *the nearest one can get* to non-dualism. Immanentist monism, by comparison (for reasons Mullarkey much of the time sees), is always deconstructible into a much more rabid dualism of a ‘basic’ virtual whole over against semi-illusory actualised parts.

So it remains highly coherent to assume that an embedded series of qualitatively differentiated causes points always upwards, to the ultimate, self-abiding 'influence'.

## 16 Transition

In this sequence it has been shown how modern philosophy as an 'autonomous' discipline was paradoxically generated by a certain style of theology. This same style has fundamentally shaped its most fundamental presuppositions of univocity, representation, possibilism and concurrence. So, insofar as these presuppositions are theologically questionable, they tend to remain philosophically questionable also. The conversion of a certain theology into secular immanence fails to purge this questionability but rather increases it – at least in existentially humanist terms – insofar as the assumptions are thereby exposed as tending to have a nihilistic drift.

But as was said in the Preface, ontology does not govern performance so much as coincide with it, insofar as essence is *ergon* and metaphysics is also divine governance. Thus the manifold works of modernity implicitly assume ontological categories, but they equally construct these assumptions which they manifest. The discourse of political theory tends to summarise in a condensed theoretical way – if both thin and veiled – this coincidence of the ontological with the pragmatic in terms of an assumed or articulated anthropology. Hence its translations of the ontological categories which I have outlined into anthropological and political terms equally show us in a more adequate way just how these categories were practically shaped in the course of western civilisation.

Hence having now explained the vision assumed by modern western works, we will now examine the coincidence of that vision with the theoretical traces of the works by which that vision was performed, and in this performance further constructed as an anthropology, and so the more confirmed as secular assumption.