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Cal Ledsham

Department of Philosophy, Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia

Published online: 17 Feb 2014.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21692327.2014.880568

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Disrupted cognition as an alternative solution to Heidegger’s ontotheological challenge: F. H. Bradley and John Duns Scotus

Cal Ledsham*

Department of Philosophy, Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia

(Received 25 November 2013; final version received 22 December 2013)

Heidegger accuses ontotheologies of reducing God to a mere object of intelligibility, and thereby falsifying them, and in doing so distracting attention from or forgetting the ground of Being as unconcealment in the Lichtung. Conventional theistic responses to Heidegger’s ontotheological challenges proceed by offering (typically) analogy, speech-act theorising (e.g. praise) or negative theology as solutions. Yet these conventional solutions, however suitable as responses to Heidegger’s Die ontotheologische Verfassung der Metaphysik (written 1957; Heidegger 2006) version of the ontotheological problem, still fall foul of Heidegger’s more profound characterisation of ontotheology in his treatise Seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus (written 1944–1946; Heidegger 1997). Therein Heidegger characterises ontotheology as a metaphysics that posits a first-causal ground of Being combining together an essentia (and ontology) and an existentia (a that-ness). This article presents an alternative family of metaphysical schemes that instead develop their metaphysical ‘theology’ in a non-naive epistemological context, and indeed maintain that God (or the metaphysical Absolute) cannot be cognised by us because we cannot reconcile the whatness and the that-ness of God in one coherent thought. God is thus unintelligible, and though able to be signified, cannot be reduced thereby to an object of cognition, and is not posited at the expense of considering the ground of Being as the encounter in Lichtung with Being. The two examples of such disrupted cognition accounts of a non-ontotheological metaphysics are from the medieval Franciscan John Duns Scotus and the British Idealist Francis Herbert Bradley. The paper ends with a discussion of the characteristic ‘disrupted cognition’ as a movement between two concepts that are unreconcilable within thought, without being contradictory or contraries, and explores the differences between theological and philosophical employments of ‘disrupted cognition’.

Keywords: Heidegger; John Duns Scotus; Francis Herbert Bradley; ontotheology; paradox; theological epistemology

I. Introduction

This article delineates and suggests counterexamples to one strand of Heidegger’s ontotheological critique of Western metaphysics, concerning the falsifying nature of conceptual representation of God. Heidegger’s accusation in nuce is that ontotheologies reduce God (or some other version of the ultimate metaphysical entity, e.g. the idealist Absolute) to a mere object of intelligibility, and so, to an inaccurate conception. The process of such reduction inevitably induces forgetting of, or occludes, our encounter itself with Being. This article outlines a family of alternative accounts in the Western metaphysical tradition that avoid forgetting our encounter with Being (by reducing God to...
a status like that of any other object within the range of our cognition), but not by the rather conventional means of negative theology or analogical theology. Instead they proceed by explicitly attending to the issue of God outside intelligibility and they attend to our encounter with Being by showing that God is intrinsically disruptive of cognition. These accounts self-consciously concern themselves with the ‘optics of knowledge’ to explicate the claim that we have an incorrigible epistemic blind spot, and they locate God (or the Absolute) in that blind spot. This blind spot can provide for God to be beyond the range of what is intelligible (i.e. incomprehensible) not because the concept of God is analogical or only negative or merely addressed in praise-speech, but because this family develop theories of the epistemic blind spot as paradoxical and disrupted and irreconcilable in relation to our field of knowledge. These accounts resist reduction of God to a mere object of intelligibility by explaining attempted cognition of that ultimate God-entity as ineluctably producing paradoxical results, and indeed leading to disrupted and so always incomplete and elusive cognition.

Two benefits accrue to considering this new family of positions. First, fresh resources are available for developing a post-ontotheological theism that is robustly Heidegger-proof. The introduction of a new family of ‘disrupted cognition’ solutions advances discussion of theistic responses to the ontotheological critique beyond the rather stale attention to analogy, negative theology, Aquinas and Neoplatonism. Second, the fact that Scotism has a variant solution to ontotheological problems might give pause to those narrators on Western philosophy that cast him as the villain and his metaphysics as the start of the slide into error or decadence.

I start by elaborating one strand of Heidegger’s ontotheological critique which this family of disrupted cognition accounts can be retrieved to address. This requires a brief characterisation of ontotheology (drawing on the 1957 Die ontotheologische Verfassung der Metaphysik) and passing treatment of what is both a methodological and exegetical issue of whether any sort of theism can escape condemnation as ontotheology because it induces forgetting of the ground of Being. I then complement this brief outline with the more detailed, but little-studied account of ontotheology in the 1946 treatise Seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus. I have identified two members of this ‘disrupted cognition’ family of approaches: John Duns Scotus’s conception of God and Francis Herbert Bradley’s conception of the Absolute. I introduce first Bradley’s idealist account, because his version of the limits on our representation of the idealist Absolute is more easily accessible than Duns Scotus’s account. I finally elaborate my main point of interest in these accounts, which is Scotus’s discussion of naming God.

II. Heidegger and ontotheology

Richard Cross has observed that ontotheology is written about as a bad thing, although, as he notes, it is not generally clear from the secondary literature exactly what it is and why it is terrible. Heidegger’s most sustained and canonical treatment of ontotheology, the 1957 Die ontotheologische Verfassung der Metaphysik, can be read as presenting four ontotheological problems of metaphysics; these related strands are bundled together to constitute the critique of Western metaphysics as ontotheology.

A first problem identified by Heidegger is his (pseudo)-historicalist claim that different epochs or thinkers have conceptualised the ground of Being differently and, in addition, there is no possible transhistorical theory or absolutely accurate representation of the ground of Being as such available to us. I do not address this criticism. Second, he maintains that ontotheologies are problematic as they do not recognise a difference
between Being and beings, because they are enmeshed in Western metaphysics.\textsuperscript{4} Despite being the ‘slogan’ version of the ontotheological critique, it is a fair reading of Heidegger to think that this strand of the ontotheological critique is not the most profound or important one\textsuperscript{5} even though it has received the most attention in the secondary literature focusing on theism and ontotheology.\textsuperscript{6}

Heidegger’s more important criticism is that Dasein’s openness to Being is ignored by focusing on an ontotheological ground of beings. One can put this in a positive, content-rich way (the third problem of ontotheology), to the effect that the particular concepts that Heidegger develops to explain Dasein’s openness to Being are ignored or displaced by Western metaphysics. For example, the sort of Heideggerian language that describes Dasein’s openness as an ex-static clearing for Being whose appearance is continually in abeyance (ausbleibt) and accordingly does not fully disclose itself, could be said to be pushed aside by standard Western theism as a solution to the question ‘what is Being?’

There are several reasons why expressing the problem of ontotheology as forgetting the encounter with Being in this positive way is too restrictive. First, one might come to reject Heidegger’s view and his jargon of Dasein, truth as unconcealment, Ereignis, etc., that he purports to have retrieved from Greek philosophy, but still want a realist theism that does not conform to Heidegger’s picture of metaphysics as naively or blindly overlooking the way we encounter Being as a ‘ground’ in favour of a first-being ground of Being. Second, noting that Heidegger’s account of Dasein, truth as unconcealment, existasis, Ereignis, etc. varies in its emphasis and focus across his career (for example, see McGrath, 2003 on Heidegger’s concepts’ Scotistic provenance), one might also want a statement of the ontotheological critique that does not presuppose a settled adjudication of the value of Heidegger’s distinctive terminology from different periods of his career.

Third, it would be good to have a characterisation of the ontotheological critique that can stand independent of determining the relationship of priority between any realist conception of God and the Heideggerian Lichtung. Indeed, it helps to frame the ontological critique to recognise that the subject-matter of the ontotheological critique is as much about the human, questioning Dasein, which interacts with encountering, receiving, knowing, thinking and representing Being, as it is about Being and God conceived in a standard realist metaphysics as independent of human interaction. For my purposes, it is enough to recognise here that it is an open question – partly exegetical and partly systematic-theoretical – as to whether the totalising but immanent quality of the Lichtung-conception rules out an independent, realistically conceived God tout court. I will return to this issue of the intrinsic ‘atheism’ of the Lichtung framework again, but here want to assume that an epistemically non-naïve theism is permissible, and as such can be acquitted of the charge of ontotheology.

III. The profound strand of the ontotheological critique

The fourth strand of Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology, and that on which I want to focus, is his general criticism that metaphysics, being a kind of ontotheology, enables (or perhaps presupposes; Heidegger is not clear on the difference) the ignoring and not attending at all to ‘Being itself’, or equivalently ‘the way Being is’. The claim is that Western metaphysics comprises various philosophical accounts and systems. Some of these accounts and systems rest on God as a kind of ground of beings, whereas Heidegger wants us to focus our attention on the ‘ground’ of Being in a different sense, that is, in terms of the ‘way’ beings are, rather than in terms of their causal structures leading to a first Being or Being in general:
Metaphysics thinks of beings as such, that is, in general. Metaphysics thinks of beings as such, as a whole. Metaphysics thinks of the Being of beings both in the ground-giving unity of what is most general, what is indifferently valid everywhere, and also in the unity of the [All] that accounts for the ground, that is, [Metaphysics thinks] of the All-highest. The Being of beings is thus preconceived of as the grounding-ground. Therefore all metaphysics is at bottom, and from the ground up, what grounds, what gives account of the ground, what is called to account by the ground, and finally what calls the ground to account…

Ontology…and theology are ‘Logies’ inasmuch as they ground beings as such and explain them within the whole. They give an explanatory account of Being as the ground of beings. They account for the Λόγος and are in an essential sense in accord with the Λόγος – that is, they are the logic of the Λόγος. Thus they are more precisely called onto-logic and theo-logic. More rigorously and clearly considered, metaphysics is: onto-theo-logic.7

On the face of it, the problem that Heidegger poses is that metaphysics considers Being in general and as a whole, and – in interaction with theology – posits or proves God as the ground of Being, the All-highest. Heidegger’s contention here is that God is posited at the expense of examining the ground or the Λόγος as the ‘way of Being’ in the sense of theorising about our ‘way of Being’. Once this grounding Λόγος as ‘way of Being’ is overlooked, and beings are examined with an eye to explaining them by reference to their causal relationships, some metaphysical ‘ultimate’ cause of them is posited. A diverse collection of possibilities is then offered in Western metaphysics to characterise this ultimate cause (for example, God, the Absolute, the Kantian subject, Nietzschean will-to-power), all of which are various forms of ontotheology.8 The development of the ontotheological concept of God proceeds as follows:

Being [= the object of thought] shows itself in the nature of a ground. Accordingly, an object of thought (that is, Being as the ground) is understood fully only when its ground is considered as the first Ground, πρώτη ἀρχή. The originary object of thought presents itself as the primordial item [Ur-Sache], the causa prima, that corresponds to the explanatory path back to the ultimate ratio, the fundamental explanatory account. The Being of beings is explanatorily considered, in the sense of a ground, only as causa sui. This is the metaphysical concept of God. Metaphysics must think in the direction of the deity because the object of thought is Being; but Being is in being as ground in diverse ways: as Λόγος, as ύποκείμενον, as substance, as subject.9

In this passage, Heidegger narrates the history of the process of representation as follows. We have considered the Being of particular beings, and represented it to ourselves as an intrinsically causal structure; that is, to be is to be a caused being. This causal structure is only fully represented in our mind when we step from considering Being within a causal structure and are led back to some sort of first cause or first Being, which is the ultimate explanation of all beings. This metaphysical God-as-first-cause is Heidegger’s conception of ‘theology’ which forms a complement with ‘ontology’. This first-cause ‘God’ can be depicted as a grounding concept in various ways (which correspond to the fundamentals of different historical philosophical systems). Examples are the Greek logos, or substance, or the Kantian or Idealist subject, or the undergirding substrate of all real things. Heidegger argues that Western metaphysics also produces non-theistic schemes (e.g. German Idealism) and openly atheistic schemes that are ontotheological (even, as we will see, Nietzsche’s will-to-power and eternal recurrence). Yet the grounding first cause is paradigmatically equated with the positing of the God of metaphysics, God-as-first-cause.
IV. The Die Seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus treatise

There are two aspects needing clarification in Heidegger’s accusation that God (or some other characterisation of the ground of beings) is posited at the expense of considering the way of Being. First, what exactly is the problem or misstep in positing God (or ‘God’) at the expense of looking at the way of Being? Second, what conditions would a realist theism have to satisfy to avoid being this sort of metaphysics? To give a foretaste of the refined version of the problem presented by the strand of the ontotheological critique explained in this section: Heidegger’s complaint is that Western metaphysics thinks about interrogating Being in terms of looking for an essence, a whatness of Being, rather than attending to the encounter itself that Dasein has with Being. This alleged overlooking makes developing any sort of substantive, content-rich, realist theology difficult if it is not entirely excluded in principle.

The best way to get to the heart of both this strand of the ontotheological critique and the sufficient conditions for falling foul of it, is to examine Heidegger’s treatise, Die Seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus (Heidegger 1997). In that treatise, Heidegger sets out the difficulties of exploring how to conceptualise the encounter of Dasein and Being as such, instead of through the ossified forms of Western metaphysics, which offer various historicised characterisations of the first-cause entity as the ground of beings. Heidegger claims that Western metaphysics has ignored ‘the way in which Being essentially occur(s)’ – a phrase I will discuss below. Instead, Western metaphysics has rather thought about Being in a Platonico-Schoolman way as a certain whatness, or essence:

In the question: ‘What is the being as such?’ we are thinking of Being, and specifically of the Being of beings, that is to say, of what beings are. What they are – namely the beings – is answered by their [quiddity or] what-being, τό τί ἐστιν. Plato defines the whatness of a being as an idea...the whatness of being, the essentia of ens, we also call ‘the essence’ [das Wesen]. But that [naming of the Being of things by specifying their essence] is no incidental and harmless identification [or designation – Benennung]. Rather, in that identification of a whatness, the very fact that the Being of beings – that is, the way in which beings essentially occur [die Weise, wie es west] – is obscured or hidden in thinking of it as a whatness.

Metaphysics searches for a stable characterisation or an essence of Being, and in framing the enquiry in terms that would be answered by a ‘what’, it overlooks examining the way in which beings essentially occur. The German phrase here for beings essentially occurring is ‘wie es west’, which uses the noun Wesen as a verb, west, which is a Heideggerism. It literally means something like ‘how it essences/is essencing’. In order to make clear in English that it is an odd term and better capture its intended character, it could be translated with a reflexive construction: ‘the way it essences itself’. This ‘way that beings essence themselves’ is described by Heidegger’s theoretical language of Dasein appropriating, enowning or encountering a phenomenon as presence. I will hereafter use the term ‘way of Being’ to describe this primordial engagement with reality that Heidegger identifies with Dasein and presence of Being; I use it so that I do not have to adopt any of Heidegger’s more content-laden concepts such as Ereignis. But there is a price of such neutrality, which is that such language flattens out and renders bland Heidegger’s quite precise neologism.

The next step is to look at how Heidegger elaborates the exact mechanics of forming an ontotheology and forgetting Being. Heidegger holds that we develop ontotheological conceptualisation by combining a whatness and an existentia. But first Heidegger introduces and interrelates the specialist terminology:
The names Ontology and Theology as they are used here do not possess the identical senses they have in the scholastic concept [Schulbegriff] of metaphysics. Rather, ‘ontology’ defines the being as such with respect to its essentia, and is found in psychology, cosmology and theology. Yet ‘theology’ too, rightly thought, reigns in both cosmology and psychology (or anthropology) as well as in metaphysica generalis.12

The particular combination of discipline names mentioned here (cosmology, psychology, anthropology, general metaphysics) suggests that Heidegger’s paradigm of such ontotheological metaphysics is still – in 1946–a Wilhelminian-era seminarian’s manual of philosophy. Heidegger’s point about ontotheology is that it answers ‘what is Being’ by giving a ‘whatness’ of Being (which Heidegger associates with ontology, essentia), and then refers to the fact that Being is (which he associates with theology as existentia). Theology is associated with existentia because it is the account of the causal ground of Being. It is not necessarily theistic or a personal God, although it is clear that the paradigm of a theo-logy – that is, an account of the causal structure upholding beings provided by reference to some other primary and first originating Being. Ontology gives content to the notion of an essence of Being, and theology tells a story about a thing in order to account for the fact that things exist at all. Heidegger’s term-of-art correlations of ontology as essentia and theology as existentia allow him to critique Nietzsche’s thought as an ontotheology. Heidegger reads Nietzsche’s will-to-power hypothesis as an ontotheology (that is, as a ‘whatness’ or characterisation assigned to Being), and Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence as a theology (i.e. a substrate, or first-cause behind and supporting the appearances of particular beings).13 These two correlations also account for his assimilation of the metaphysical schemes of the Idealist Absolute and God as supreme Being.

The accusation that Heidegger makes is that Western metaphysics overlooks what I have called the ‘way of Being’, and instead transforms Being into another being, with an essence or whatness and an individual existence, whether this being is another thing, or made the supreme thing, God. The actual content of the ‘what’ is not actually important:

[Metaphysics]…transforms Being into a being, whether it be supreme being in the sense of the first cause, whether it be distinctive being in the sense of the subject of subjectivity, as the condition of possibility of all objectivity, or whether, as a consequence of the coherence of both these fundamental conditions of Being in beings, it be the determination of the supreme being as the Absolute in the sense of unconditioned subjectivity.14

Heidegger’s criticism is that metaphysical thinking combines the existentia and essentia of Being together in one thought, and in doing so creates a distraction from, or falsification of, Being. It does not matter if the posited Being is God, or the Absolute, or the Will to Power; these are merely different characterisations, different whatnesses, of the same grounding ‘thing’ that grounds beings, and it is the very characterising of the nature of Being as a thing that is problematic. Heidegger insists that this process in which the ‘way of Being’ is left unthought or falsified as another being with a certain character, is of a singular, outstanding, and sui generis character.15 Heidegger puts this process of distortion in terms of combining a whatness and an existentia in Latin scholastic terms:

In the question ‘What is Being [das Seiende]?’ the truly existing [i.e. das wahrhaft Existierende] is understood regarding the essentia and regarding the existentia at the same time/together [zugleich]. Being as such is defined in such a way, namely, in that which it is, and in that that-it-is. The essentia and existentia of ens qua ens answer the question: ‘What is Being as such?’ They determine Being [Seiende] in its being [sein].16
Heidegger here is observing a manualist version of Scholasticism’s discussion of the distinction of existence and essence, famously used to establish God by Aquinas, and taking its choreography to be the basic ‘signature’ movement performed by all of post-Platonic Western metaphysics. What is significant for my purposes in the passage above is Heidegger’s challenge to the Western tradition to the effect that essentia and existentia can never be reconciled simultaneously to give a view of the ‘way of Being’ together at one moment (zugleich); we can look at Being as a whatness, some particular character, or we can consider the ‘way of Being’ (the wie es west), but we cannot hold both together at the same time as one stable cognition. To avoid this more profound version of the ontotheological critique and avoid issuing just another distracting, ontotheological concept of Being, a realist theism would need to fulfil at least two conditions. First, it would have to acknowledge that the ‘way of Being’ dimension to the question can be addressed. That is, it would have to consider our immanent cognition of Being rather than merely discussing an ontology of beings while being epistemologically naïve about beings. Second, it would have to recognise that there is a limit and a difficulty in thinking about the ‘way of Being’, because of the possibility of turning it into another posited ‘whatness’ in the course of enquiry. These conditions require, in a theistic context, that God be conceived of as paradoxical; he cannot be properly thought of in any standard conceptualisation that amounts to a tidy unity of essentia and existentia.

Note that Heidegger provides no argument that obliges one to adopt his solution to a non-ontotheological answer to the problem of Being (that is, to expound it in terms of unconcealment, presence, etc.). When Heidegger turns to consider how to think of the ‘way of Being’, which Western metaphysics has left unthought, he merely suggests considering Being as unconcealment and presence, etc. as candidates for moving thought on the issue forward. He does not argue for equating Being itself and unconcealment, but instead merely suggests the possibility that they are the same, and then explores what unconcealment amounts to. There are no Heideggerian arguments that preclude a paradoxical, hidden God as an answer to the wie es west? question.

It is worth recognising that any requirement that we adopt Heidegger’s suggestion of unconcealment as a solution to the problem of Being implies that the move to any sort of realist theism or first-being theology in the Western tradition would be intrinsically an overlooking of the ‘way of Being’ as a ground of thought; one could not posit God to exist while avoiding ontotheology. While it is true that in other texts the ontotheological critique appears to be as simple as making the accusation that one posits a first-cause ground of beings instead of contemplating the way of Being itself, the actual status quaestionis, which after Heidegger has distinguished theology/existentia and ontology/essentia, allows for multiple proposals and lines of enquiry. The open lines of enquiry include proposing a paradoxical God who disrupts attempted cognition of him.

I take the position that a good philosophical, realist theism – but not a ‘metaphysical’ one in Heidegger’s sense – could consider our ‘way of Being’ and develop a suitably epistemically modest concept of God that takes into account from the outset the intrinsic inadequacies of our cognition and the tendency of our cognition to merge essentia and existentia in ontotheologies. In particular, one could resolve the challenge by proposing an account that was explicit rather than oblivious about the impossibility of positing a ‘whatness’ ontology and then fusing it with an originary ‘theology’. Because of its sophisticated treatment of the inadequacies of our cognition, such a theism could still legitimately claim to have avoided the problem raised by this profound strand of the ontotheological critique. Accordingly, positing God is not merely a forced error engendered by ignoring the ‘way of Being’, nor is it an indicator that such an error has always
occurred; God-talk does not always have to occur at the expense of considering the *wie es west*, and holding God to be one sort of ground does not necessarily nullify one’s prior sensitivity to considering the ‘way of Being’ as a ground of Being. To suggest such an implied nullification is to twist this profound strand of the ontotheological critique into a criticism that is intrinsically atheistic, rather than just immanently-focused (or perhaps *Lichtung*-focused) on the way we form conceptual representations of metaphysical entities. To make Heidegger’s ontotheological critique into an intrinsically atheistic doctrine is to betray its foundation both in phenomenology of the *Lichtung* and, more importantly, the point of origin of *Dasein* as Heidegger’s extended meditation of the Aristotelian intellect as pure receptivity.

V. Disrupted cognition: Bradley and the unknowable Absolute

There is a family of Western thinkers that do avoid the sort of naïve fusions of *essentia* and *existentia* that amount to ontotheologies. I have identified two metaphysicians within this family: Francis Herbert Bradley and John Duns Scotus. No doubt a more conscientious historian of ideas will indeed find further members of this family. I want to introduce Bradley’s non-ontotheological account of the Absolute as an introduction to this family of thinkers of paradoxical, disrupted and incompletable metaphysical cognition. Bradley’s account of the paradoxicality and limits of our cognition of the Absolute parallels Scotus’s account, although Bradley’s is atheistic, and more importantly, obviously immanentist, whereas Scotus’s is theological and ‘realist’. Both posit an irreconcilable ‘what’ and a ‘that’ as limits on metaphysical thought, much as a non-ontotheological metaphysics would require.

Bradley’s position can be described as the thesis that accessing the idealist Absolute would be a ‘suicide of thought’. The point of interest in relation to the profound strand of the ontotheological critique is not his conclusion that the Absolute is unthinkable, but his rationale for why that which is beyond thought must be outside thought. Bradley presents his rationale as follows when arguing against the thesis that the unthinkability of what is beyond the thinkable does not imply that all existent things are objects of thought (i.e. does not imply standard Idealism):

To assert the existence of anything in any sense beyond thought suggests, to some minds, the doctrine of the Thing-in-itself. And of the Thing-in-itself we know (Chapter xii.) that if it existed we could not know of it; and, again, so far as we know of it, we know that it does not exist. The attempt to apprehend this Other in succeeding would be suicide, and in suicide could not reach anything beyond total failure. Now, though I have urged this result, I wish to keep it within rational limits, and I dissent wholly from the corollary that nothing more than thought exists. But to think of anything which can exist quite outside of thought I agree is impossible.

This position may be surprising given the textbook understanding of Bradley as a British Idealist, but as recent secondary literature has shown, and as Bradley himself made explicit, he was actually within the British empiricist tradition on the question of strict realism versus Idealism, despite adopting the style, language, tools and patterns of thought of the prior idealist tradition.

Bradley’s argument for rejecting the idealist implication of the unthinkability of what is beyond thought is based on an idealist thesis about conceivability, which claims that the whole cannot be thought and then the rest of the world considered sequestered from it. This need not detain us; my concern is with why the mind’s operations cannot handle...
neatly cognising the Absolute. Before presenting his conclusion in the quotation above about the suicide of thought in relation to the Absolute, Bradley sets out an account of how the mind works in general in terms of existence and content. This account of our way of thinking will explain why we cannot cognise the Absolute:

If we take up anything considered real, no matter what it is, we find in it two aspects. There are always two things we can say about it; and, if we cannot say both, we have not got reality. There is a *that* and a *what*, an existence and a content, and the two are inseparable. If we try to get the *that* by itself, we do not get it, for either we have it qualified, or else we fail. If we try to get the *what* by itself, we find at once that it is not all. It points to some thing beyond, and cannot exist by itself and as a bare adjective. Neither of these aspects, if you isolate it, can be taken as real, or indeed in that case is itself any longer. They are distinguishable only and are not divisible. And yet thought seems essentially to consist in their division.23

His point is that there is a dualism in thought that does not match the unity in reality between the ‘*that*’ of existence and the ‘*what*’ of character, and accordingly sets the ultimate limit of thought; a duality cannot comprehend unity.24 In any thought there is a mixture of analysis, of separation of predicate from subject, and of synthesis, of uniting the predicate with the subject. As for thinking about a subject beyond the limits of thought, Bradley considers and rejects this possibility, entertaining and dismissing a monistic version of such a proposal:

And the subject, again, is neither the mere *what* of the predicate, nor is it any other mere *what*. Nor, even if it is proposed to take up a whole with both its aspects, and to predicate the ideal character of its own proper subject, will that proposal assist us. For if the subject is the same as the predicate, why trouble oneself to judge? But if it is not the same, then what is it, and how is it different? Either then there is no judgment at all, and but pretence of thinking without thought, or there is a judgment, but its subject is more than the predicate, and is a *that* beyond a *what*.25

Bradley’s view of the problem is that going beyond thought to a thing that is a *that-what* combination is either pointless or will be done by positing a bare *that* without any real character. This is the point at which the immanentism of Bradley’s position reaches its limits which he identifies as the ‘suicide of thought’.26

Bradley’s limit of thought is somewhat similar to Heidegger’s accusation that this *essentia*-and-*existentia*/ontology-and-theology combination is a fiction, an impossible distracting distortion. The point is that Bradley has not posited a neat comprehensible Absolute, but instead, explained why cognising the Absolute will always evade us. Accordingly, Bradley avoids the profound strand of the ontotheological critique because he thinks our thought cannot fix the onto- and the theo- together – it cannot produce a *what* and a *that* at the same time; to think of one would disrupt thinking of the other. As we will see, Bradley’s account of our thought’s capacity as limited to cognising *that* and *what* is the immanentist counterpart of the Scotist proposal of naming God as the unique ‘this essence’; God’s unique essence is to be an impenetrable ‘this’.

VI. John Duns Scotus and God as *this essence*

With regard to medieval thought, Heidegger seems to have held as a generalisation that ‘the way of Being’ was only critically considered after the medieval period by early modern philosophy and then the idealist tradition. Yet he also occasionally credits the
early works of Meister Eckhart as attempts to grapple with the profound strand of the ontotheological critique. Heidegger had finished his engagement with Duns Scotus years before beginning to develop the ontotheological critique and does not seem to have revisited medieval thought in detail with the ontotheological critique in mind. This is a pity, because at least some early texts of Scotus point to a position on our disrupted and paradoxical cognition of God that arguably does not fall foul of the profound strand of the ontotheological critique identified above, because it does not purport to have a concept of God that is a *whatness* and an *existentia* as an object neatly comprehended by the intellect.

Scotus’s position is that the best name we can formulate for God is ‘*haec essentia*’, ‘this essence’. The ‘this essence’ conceptualises a thing that is unique in that it is the only instance of an essence whose individuation is ‘part of’ that essence itself. It is comparable to the Bradleyian inconceivable ‘that what’, and is primarily developed in Scotus’s various *Sentences* commentaries, Bk. 1, D. 3 and D. 22. It is not vulnerable, I will argue, to the profound strand of the ontotheological critique because it does not reduce God to being just another stable conceptual representation of an object within an unquestioned field of intelligibility. Instead, Scotus’s account uses comparable concepts of whatness and this-being to characterise God staying precisely beyond the limits of cognition, the transgression of which Heidegger holds to be the very error of ontotheology. Accordingly, this early Scotistic position can stand as a fresh alternative to reprising Thomism, negative theology, or analogy as theistic responses to ontotheology, because it can address God’s limited intelligibility in a non-naïve way by reference to our disrupted and unstable cognition of God, rather than just another ontotheological and perniciously ‘metaphysical’ concept of God.

In the early *Lectura Sentences* commentary, Scotus’s naming of God as ‘this essence’ is sketched along with an admission in D. 22 that he does not have arguments for it. Then it is refined and expanded in the *Ordinatio* version of the *Sentences* commentary. The *Ordinatio* version of the question focuses on whether God is able to be named by a name that signifies the divine essence in itself, as a ‘this’. At some point, a large annotation was added to the *Ordinatio* version. The later *Reportata* (1A) version – a text reworked by William of Alnwick and thus not pristinely authentic – contains only a more general discussion of whether God can be named by the wayfarer in this life; the material on God as ‘this essence’ disappears. In its place, material the same as the large *Ordinatio* annotation appears. (We do not know whether the *Ordinatio* annotation was the source of the *Reportata* text or vice versa.)

In the Parisian *Reportata* text, Scotus advances the commonplace Aristotelistic-scholastic position that we produce concepts via phantasms and the agent intellect; the concepts so produced are common and general to sensible and non-sensible things. Thus they are not capable of being unique designators of God. Any compounded concepts we develop to describe God, such as ‘infinite being’ or ‘most pure infinite act’ are resolvable into general and common concepts not belonging to God alone. Nor do we experience ourselves to have any concept that allows us to distinguish God as unique from non-divine beings; were we to have such a concept, we would have the ability in this life to know God as he is, implying that we would be in a beatific state in this life. Unfortunately for the history of the ‘this essence’ doctrine, it seems that this (or some similar Parisian *Reportata*) text with its focus on whether we can signify something that is beyond our understanding, dominates the discussion in *Sentences* commentaries thereafter, or at least from the extremely sophisticated and seemingly influential discussion of Peter Auriol (fl. 1314–1318) onward.
I now want to look at the detail of the *Ordinatio* ‘this essence’ doctrine. The context for the *Ordinatio* account of the ‘this essence’ doctrine is Scotus’s affirmation that something can be more distinctly signified than understood. He offers an argument based on our development of the concept of substance (carefully described as a persuasive argument, not a demonstration) for the general claim that we can signify beyond what we understand. We name a thing as a substance not because we know the substance of the thing; we only know the thing via its actions which we experience. The resulting significance of this for my purposes is that we have less of a knowledge of substance and *essentia* than the textbook clichés of scholasticism might suggest. Scotus presents an account of how we develop a concept of substance as substrate across time; diverse quiddities (e.g. quality and quantity) are unified by one third thing which is not conceived except as the concept ‘of this being’ (*huius entis*), which is the continuing substrate underlying change of experienced attributes across time. We impose a name on the ‘this’ which we figure out to underlie different experiences, which Scotus describes in an unfortunate passive-voice style as follows:

But on this other [substrate-thing], so distinguished [from the qualities and quantities it joins] (whatever that would be which is joined with those things which are understood), is imposed some name: that seems to be the proper sign ‘of this’, under the ratio which ‘this’ is, so that a person imposing the name means to signify that essence [*illam essentiam*] belonging to the genus of substance: and just as that person means to signify, in a way that the name which he imposes is a sign, yet he does not understand that thing distinctly which he distinctly means to signify by this name or this sign.34

Scotus holds that we impose, in a quasi-Lockean style, the name ‘this being’ on an unknown substrate which joins together different experienced quantities and qualities as a thing. We set the name ‘this being’ as a substance, but the name signifies more than we understand by that name, because we are actually ignorant of the substance itself, except that it joins and unifies experienced accidents. We know it only ostensively as the ‘this’ and posit it as having a joining, unifying role. The significant point here is that for Scotus this is an instance of the general claim that we can signify what is beyond experience, and beyond representation and intelligibility without being committed to the claim that we have reduced that thing to which we refer to a mere item within the field of intelligible representations. In the case of the being of substance, neither has the thing outside representation been rendered analogous to something within representation, nor has that thing been characterised in merely negative terms as not-being-a-represented-object. This is a view of signifying the thing beyond intelligibility that is not based on a theory of analogy of being or mere apophasic language.

After setting out this account of substance in order to show one case where we can signify more than we can understand, Scotus then considers signifying and understanding God. According to him, God can be similarly named by concepts common to God and creatures. (These standard designations, while constituting most of the scholastic treatment of the issue of naming God, are not of much interest for us here.) If we admit the possibility that signs can signify beyond what is intelligible, we can also signify God as ‘this essence’, and, he notes that he has developed an account of the concept of God as ‘this essence’ in Bk. 1, D. 3, the site of his theological epistemology. Scotus develops the ‘this essence’ account as a suitable name for God as his contribution to the scholastic enterprise of seeking a ‘philosophical’ name of God that is an intrinsically unique designator that distinguishes God from creation. (A more familiar result of this scholastic enterprise is Aquinas’s’s real distinction and God as *esse ipsum substantiam*.)
The name ‘this essence’ is one that, while unrepresentable and unintelligible, is not meaningful by analogy, not negative, but indeed paradoxical. It is paradoxical for Scotus and beyond intelligibility because it combines the thinness in the essence, in a way that is inconceivable except in a makeshift, conceptually-destabilising way. Indeed, we can only understand it partially in any one thought; we cannot comprehend the concept of essence and thinness in one moment. When we are thinking of a ‘this’, to consider it as an essence requires a disruption of cognition, because an essence, a quidditas is common, whereas the ‘this’ is individual. On Scotus’s account of universals, individuals and universals are not two contradictory or incompatible concepts; a thing could be a ‘this’ and a common nature, a quidditas. While not contradictory, the two are irreconcilable by our minds; a thing cannot be thought of as common, and as a ‘this’ individual at the same time.

A handy example of an irreconcilable, disrupted cognition is the phenomenon of conceiving of light as a particle and as a wave, but not both at the same time. This is the kind of thing that we cannot reconcile, because cognising one aspect of it cannot be done without disrupting cognition of the other aspect. Disrupted cognition occurs when the mind cannot simultaneously combine two irreconcilable concepts marking two characteristics. We should be careful about the logical terms we use to describe this irreconcilability. To be irreconcilable is not to say that the two terms are contradictory, because one is not merely the negation of the other. Nor are the terms ‘this’ and ‘essence’ contrarieties, like being-red and being-blue. Contrarieties and contradictories do posit irreconcilable properties or characteristics in an object, but not all irreconcilables are contradictions or contrarieties. The term irreconcilable is preferable to the terms incompatible, inconsistent or incoherent for describing something that exceeds intelligibility in engendering disrupted cognition, because irreconcilable puts an emphasis on the state of the cogniser, whereas incompatible and inconsistent emphasise an object with two properties. Incoherent (in-cohere) means unable to unite or stick together two things; it would be a good and serviceable term for irreconcilable characteristics in as much as it is action-focused and not object-focused, but unfortunately it is too pejorative. In contrast with action-based terms such as irreconcilable and incoherent with their focus on the cogniser, the terms incompatible and inconsistent put the emphasis on some standard concept of an object or objects that have ‘incompatible’ (i.e. not-co-sufferable) properties. Inconsistent puts the emphasis on two things not able to be set together – in-con-sistere. Because of the inadequacy of these terms, irreconcilable is the preferable term for non-contradictory disruptive cognitions.

I contend that God as a paradoxical and irreconcilable ‘this essence’ avoids the charge of the profound strand of ontotheology discussed earlier; God is not reduced to the status of another being in an unquestioned field of cognition as a result of naively composing an ontological character together with a theological existentia. To connect this ‘disrupted cognition’ account of God to another Heideggerian theme, we can also say that God’s continual irreconcilability is a kind of continual abeyance or Ausbleibung from our objectifying cognition. Instead, the Scotistic account explains why our cognition cannot deal with God, and a unique name is developed for God in relation to the paradoxical result that ensues when we try to bring God into our scheme of cognition.

In his treatment rejecting analogical names of God, Scotus argues that we cannot cognise God as he is in himself, naturally and as a particular thing; this would be to understand God under the concept of ‘this essence as this and in itself’. Scotus maintains rather that God does not allow us to see him as a particular ‘this essence’
object naturally, because understanding God under such a description is an object of the will, not a natural object. That is, to know God as this essence is to see God face to face and such a grasp of God is not a natural occurrence but one freely bestowed by God himself. God is best signified beyond what we can understand in this life as ‘this essence’, but were we to truly understand this, God would be actually present to us (i.e. in traditional theological terms, we would be enjoying the beatific vision).

Note that Scotus did not believe that the limitation on our cognition in this life and our inability to comprehensively cognise the concept of God as ‘this essence’ is the permanent fate of human knowers. Indeed, our epistemic limitations are set in this life because of God’s freely restricting our access to him in this life; the consolation being that revelation indicates a possibility of knowing God face to face after death. Scotus did not provide a definitive aetiology of why God has chosen not to disclose himself as he truly is to us in this life; his explicit position is limited to rejecting the thesis that our inability to know God as present is due to the nature of the intellect in itself, or that it is due to its embodied state, and suggesting as an alternative to these theses that (following Augustine) our limitations might be a punishment due to sin.

Scotus did not think that this lack of knowledge generates a sceptical problem, although he is both sanguine about the limited cognitive capacities we possess in this life. If one wanted to use the resources of Scotism for developing a philosophical aetiology (rather than an account based on revealed sources of a state which could be remedied in heaven) of why we are intrinsically unable to cognise God face to face, perhaps one could proceed on the basis of his doctrine of haecceitas and universals, or alternatively, on the basis of his account of the first adequate object of the intellect as a double primacy of being. The ‘double primacy’ of being refers to Scotus’s position that our intellect is not able to have one straightforward adequate object, and that its object (‘Being’) can only be designated as adequate because of the combination of two functions by which adequacy is maintained (viz. being common to all cognised things, or being able to move the intellect to cognition). This double-primacy doctrine could be reworked as a disrupted theory of cognition along the following lines: the fact that our intellect can only cognise some metaphysical constituents of things, and never others (e.g. ultimate differences) means that there is an apparently intrinsic limitation on its natural capacity.

A modern philosophical neo-Scotist could argue along these lines to the conclusion that our intellect has a built-in limitation not to be able to cognise all of reality at once, but only in divided parts. That is, the ontological unification into a being and its differentia cannot be correspondingly unified in thought. This would be to produce a form of Scotism that is a more strict counterpart of Bradley than the historical Scotus actually was, and it would require abandoning Scotus’s Christian commitment to the capacity of human nature (without any upgrading or ‘glorification’ of that human nature) to see God face to face eventually, in heaven, by divine dispensation. It would then be correspondingly vulnerable to charges of theological scepticism or agnosticism. While the charge of theological scepticism becomes a heightened liability if one takes disrupted cognition to set intrinsic and ineradicable limits to cognition, this neither spreads to general and mundane scepticism (as the case of Scotus on natural infallible knowledge indicates), and nor is it worse than the sceptical or agnostic problems posed by the Thomistic God as Being Itself.

Yet for any philosophical account that is to be compatible with this article of faith, the disrupted state of human cognition must be maintained only to be a provisional state overcome in the next life, or some account must be given of how human nature itself is transformed (‘glorified’) to allow knowing God in the next life.
VII. Conclusion

A theist can frame a response to the most profound strand of ontotheology making use of the Scotistic ‘this essence’ name of God (as a Bradleyian could for the Absolute). One can avoid reducing God to a status like that of any other object within the range of our cognition and avoid a ‘metaphysical’ God that is an epistemically-naïve straightforward composite of a whatness and existentia by offering an epistemology of our disrupted cognition; that is, by noting that there is some limit on our cognitive capacities themselves – that there are some concepts that cannot be rendered within that scheme – and then noting that God can be aligned with, and uniquely signified by, such concepts. Such is the case with ‘this essence’. This Scotistic account avoids the profound strand of the ontotheological critique by paying enough attention to the ‘optics of knowledge’ to understand that we have an incorrigible epistemic blind spot and then locating God in that blind spot. It can provide for God to be beyond the range of what is intelligible (i.e. incomprehensible), by identifying God with a paradoxical, disrupted and irreconcilable concept that cannot be brought within our field of knowledge. Such an account is accordingly suitably reserved or sceptical about our cognitive powers, and not an ontotheology. No doubt careful examination of other neglected medieval thinkers’ fourteenth century texts will reveal other members of the disrupted cognition family which can stand as alternative ways of avoiding the profound strand of Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics as ontotheological.

Acknowledgements

An early version of this paper was originally presented at the 2012 June APRA conference in Melbourne, and drafts at various stages very helpfully commented on by Shane MacKinlay, Gregory McCormick, Jenny Pelletier and Can Laurens Löwe. I want to acknowledge the CTC and the Univ. Div. research funding panels for assistance to attend the conference and develop it into a publication thereafter.

Notes

1. Heidegger, Identitat und Differenz.
2. Heidegger, Nietzsche II.
5. It is worth considering Heidegger’s own positioning of the problem of Being in relation to negative theology and the analogy of being. Heidegger notes that the analogy of being marks an impasse of thought and is merely a catchword to formulate religious belief in philosophical terms. As he puts it, “they rescued themselves from this dilemma [of bridging infinite and finite being while keeping them separate] with the help of analogy, which is not a solution but a formula.” Heidegger, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 38. Heidegger, AristeoLes Metaphysik, 46: “Die Analogie des Seins - diese Bestimmung ist keine Lösung der Seinsfrage, ja nicht einmal eine wirkliche Ausarbeitung der Fragestellung, sondern der Titel für die harteste Aporie, Ausweglosigkeit, in der das antike Philosophieren und damit alles nachfolgende bis heute eingemauert ist…. Man hat sich aus der Schwierigkeit gerettet mit Hilfe der Analogie, die keine Lösung ist, sondern eine Formel.” Once one realises that the more serious dimension of Heidegger’s ontotheological challenge lies in the problem of the forgetting of being or overlooking the Lichtung, and not the ontological difference as such, various attempts to rescue Aquinas or conventional analogical theism become beside the point. On analogical theism as an inappropriate response to ontotheology, see Hemming, Heidegger’s Atheism, 192–194.

Translation modified slightly for intelligibility: for example “wird das Sein des Seienden als der gründende Grund vorausgedacht”, rendered by Stambaugh as “thought of in advance as the grounding Ground”.

8. In terms of this fourth strand of ontotheology, there is only one ontotheology with multiple manifestations, because ontotheology is a singular forgetting/ignoring that frames various particular theologies and ontologies. On ontotheology as a singular phenomenon see Hemming, Heidegger’s Atheism, 263–264. On ontotheology as a frame, a structure, or a constitution of thought rather than a particular theological or philosophical position, see Jaran, “L’onto-Théologie Dans L’œuvre De Heidegger”, 37–38.


15. Heidegger, Nietzsche II, 312.

16. Heidegger, Nietzsche II, 311 (My translation): “In der Frage: »Was ist das Seiende?« wird dieses zugleich hinsichtlich der essentia und hinsichtlich der existentia gedacht. Das Seiende ist dargestellt als solches, d. h. in dem, was es ist, und darin, daß es ist, bestimmt. Essentia und existentia des ens qua ens antworten auf die Frage: »Was ist das Seiende als solches?« Sie
bestimmen das Seiende in seinem Sein.” The Krell translation for comparison is as follows: “In the question ‘What is the being?’ the truly existing is thought at the same time with respect to essentia and existentia. In that way, the being is determined as such; that is, determined as to what it is and as to the fact that it is…” (Heidegger, Nietzsche: Vol IV, 207.)


18. Introducing Bradley’s account of the limits of thought also allows me to pose a challenge (to which I do not know the answer) to theistic solutions to ontological distance, namely: does every account of God that is a paradoxical or non-ontotheological ‘realist’ theist position have an immanentised counterpart (which can be thus invoked as its ignored rival), as a condition of its being a proposal that is not vulnerable to the fourth strand of the ontotheological critique, because it takes the problems and limits of representation seriously? Alternatively, might it be the case that some paradoxical realist positions about God will be better than others, in not having a counterpart that can also be rendered immanent? I do not know the answers to these questions about the varieties of non-ontotheological theisms, but think they are worth announcing as important.


24. As he puts it: “We have seen that anything real has two aspects, existence and character, and that thought always must work within this distinction. Thought, in its actual processes and results, cannot transcend the dualism of the that and the what.” (Bradley, 168)


26. Quoted above; on this ‘suicide’ see Mander, An Introduction to Bradley’s Metaphysic, 34–37.

27. On Eckhart and Heidegger, see Heidegger, Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 38; Heidegger, Aristoteles Metaphysik Θ, 46–47.


30. Scotus’s Reportationes is still being critically edited as a whole work; the parts in question are referenced to Alan Wolter’s semi-critical edition and translation of the 1A tradition of the various extant Reportationes as follows: Scotus, Rep. 1A, Bk. _, D. _, [pt. _,] q. _, ¶ _, p. _. A unique qaestio is numbered as q. 1. All translations from Scotus are my own. On the resolution of general and common concepts compounded to describe God, see Scotus, Rep. 1A, Bk. 1, D. 22, ¶33, p. 13.


36. On the equivalence of conceiving of God as this essence and sub ratione deitatis, see Dumont, “Theology as a Science,” 589–590.

37. I maintain that paradox is a different form of ineffability than analogy, however, it should be recognised that this point is debateable. One could perhaps read Aquinas’s Esse Ipsum.
Subsistens and his theology of divine simplicity as paradoxical concepts that are irreconcilable without being contradictory, rather than a more conventional reading of them in terms of mere human cognitive limitation. While there is poor grounding for a ‘paradox’ reading in conventional Thomistic texts relating to analogy, and any texts that could be recruited as examples of disrupted cognition are subverted by Aquinas’ metaphysics of similitude and hierarchy and analogy and negative theology, there is some (weak) grounds for establishing it in Thomistic texts dealing with the unintelligibility of God as a subsistent transcendental: i.e. Being Itself or Goodness itself, because our cognition proceeds by a mental word that is an ontologised copula of a subject and a predicate. For an example of a more feasible candidate Thomistic text, see Aquinas (1888), ST 1ae, q. 3, art. 3, resp. & ad 1, pg. 40. (On this text, see Te Velde 2006, 72–74, 80–81 and Kockelmanns 2001, 297–299). On Ipsum esse subsistens, and limited cognition of non-composed things, see Te Velde 1995: 119–125. However, Aquinas typically takes this sort of point in the direction of negative theology, analogy, or super- eminent speech. (For example of all of these and metaphorical speech, see Aquinas [1918], SCG, Bk. 1, Ch. 30, pg. 92). One should note that there are no disrupted concepts which cannot be conceived together, but each adequately separately, but a case where there is a limitation on our ability to conceive one thing; the Thomistic case should be taken, I think, as a lesson that disruptive paradox is an instance of limited cognition, but not vice versa. It can secure epistemic transcendence of the divine, but not via paradoxical concepts.


42. Lect. Bk. 1, D. 3, pt. 1, q. 1–2, n. 46, p. 242–243: “Dicunt etiam aliqui quod causa quare non videmus nunc Deum in particulari, est status quem nunc habemus. – Et certe hoc verum est, quia hoc non est alius quam dicere voluntatem Dei huius esse causam, nam status est immobils permanetia legibus divinae sapientiae et voluntatis firmata; et ideo de communi lege est quod intellectus noster non habet operationem suam, nisi quando virtus phantastastica habet operationem suam: et hoc totum est ex voluntate divino.”

43. Ord. Bk. 1, D. 3, pt. 1, q. 1–2, n. 187, p. 113: “Sed quae est ratio huius status? – Respondeo. ‘Status non videtur esse nisi ‘stabilis permanentia’, firmata legibus sapientiae’, ibid., n. 187, p. 114: “…non est de natura intellectus unde intellectus est, – nec etiam unde in corpore, quia tune in corpore gloriose necessario haberet similem concordantiam, quod est falsum. Undecumque ergo sit iste statu, sive ex mera voluntate Dei, sive ex justitia puniente.” The explanation for our infirmity in this life is supported by reference to Augustine’s theory that our reduced cognitive capacities in this life are a result of the fall. Scotus is usually careful to admit this theory as a possible explanation but puts it forward as part of an explanation set in terms of the potestia ordinata and the will of God. On these explanations, see Honnefelder, “Ens in Quantum Ens,” 80–81 and Barth, “Being, Unicity and Analogy,” 230–231.


45. A key resource for this would be Scotus’s Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis. Opera Philosophica, vol. 4. Scotus visibly deals with the argument that a nature cannot per se be a ‘this’ (Q. Met. Bk. 7, q. 13, n. 61, p. 239ff), a view he then rejects in favour of making unity and ‘thiness’ a characteristic that is capable of more-or-less, instead of being all-or-nothing (Q. Met., ibid., n. 78–80, p. 245; n. 100, pp. 252–253, n. 119, pp. 258–259). Likewise, note his revision of individual difference from something constituting a thing as an individual predicable, to being something that is merely able to be a subject, or having maximal subjectability (Q. Met., ibid., n. 123–124, p. 261). The result is that what we take to be an ‘individual’ composed of universals is revised to be a mere ‘unitive ordering of contents’ (Q. Met., ibid., n. 158, p. 271).

46. Q. Met., ibid., n. 158, p. 271. Scotus notes that we cannot cognise individual differences in this life. On this, see also Ord. Bk. 2, D. 3, pt. 2, q. 1, n. 289–294, p. 289–294. This inability to
know individual differences in this life drives Scotus to argue for being as the first adequate object of the intellect via a double-primacy. On the double primacy, see *Ord*. Bk. 2, D. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 137, pp. 85–86.

47. On the sceptical implications of Aquinas’ God as Subsistent Being considered from a purely philosophical point of view, see Te Velde 2006: epilogue, esp. pp. 172–173.

Notes on contributor

Cal Ledsham is a lecturer and acting HOD of the Department of Philosophy of the Catholic Theological College of the University of Divinity (Melbourne, Australia). He earned his PhD in philosophy at the Institute of Philosophy of the Catholic University of Leuven, in medieval philosophy, and has a research interest in Catholic philosophical theology and fourteenth century philosophy (especially Scotus).

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