God and being at an impasse: The case of John Duns Scotus and Jean-Luc Marion

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Abstract

This essay examines the relationship between Jean-Luc Marion's argument of 'conceptual idolatry' and John Duns Scotus' doctrine of the univocity of being. I argue that Scotus does fall under Marion's criticisms, which radically undermine the use of 'being' in theology, but that univocity, in its barest Scotist form, also seems impossible to avoid. After arguing that attempts to move past this ontological conundrum fail, I conclude the relationship stands at an impasse. While this conclusion is critical, I make it for the sake of a constructive argument: post-metaphysical theology should reckon with the inevitability of being, appreciating this impasse between the apparent hegemony of being and the priority of God's self-revelation. Making the impasse clear at least points the way towards a renewed theological consideration of being.

In Richard Cross' defence of John Duns Scotus against Radical Orthodoxy, he mentions in a footnote that some of its attacks had precedent in more 'august' thinkers, including Jean-Luc Marion in his seminal work, *God without Being*.[1] But in the first edition of that work, Marion names Duns Scotus only once, as his analysis of scholasticism engages rather with Thomas Aquinas. (In the second edition, he appends an essay on Aquinas and ontotheology that criticises Duns Scotus more directly.) And as of today few have written on the relationship between Marion's argument against the hegemony of being and Duns Scotus' theory of the univocity of being.[2]

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[1] Richard Cross, '"Where Angels Fear to Tread": Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy', *Antonianum* LXXVI (2001), pp. 7–41. Cross does not mention it, but Marion did publish the essay 'Une époque de la métaphysique', in Christine Goémé (ed.), *Jean Duns-Scot ou la révolution subtile* (Paris: Fac Éditions, 1982), pp. 87–95. Since Marion's thinking in that essay mostly aligns with his thought in *God without Being*, and since the present work is aimed for an English audience, I will restrict substantive discussion to *God without Being*, though I will address the main contention of 'Une époque de la métaphysique' throughout in footnotes.

[2] For English articles on John Duns Scotus' metaphysics in light of recent phenomenology related to Jean-Luc Marion, see Guus H. Labooy, 'Duns Scotus' univocity: applied to the debate on phenomenological

My first goal in this essay is to make Marion's implicit relationship to Duns Scotus in that work explicit. To do so, I will analyse Marion's notion of 'conceptual idolatry' that casts a long shadow over all metaphysical and ontological attempts to think God. Thereafter, I will assess Duns Scotus' doctrine of univocity in light of Marion's argument. I will argue that Duns Scotus' univocity conforms with and elaborates the Aristotelian and Thomasic recognitions of the primacy and universality of being. Thereby, Duns Scotus does indeed fall under Marion's condemnation of 'conceptual idolatry'. But univocity, in its barest Scotist form, also seems impossible to evade.

I will then address the common attempt to defend Duns Scotus by calling univocity a semantic rather than ontological theory, which I will argue fails to defend Duns Scotus, given the stakes of contemporary ontology. But Marion's attempt to think the givenness of God prior to being also will fail to evade the pervasive nature of univocal being. Marion and Duns Scotus' relationship will thus come to an impasse. This will be a largely negative and critical conclusion. However, I will make it for the sake of a constructive point: today's post-metaphysical theology needs to reckon with the inevitability of being, and it needs to appreciate this impasse between the apparent hegemony of being and the particular authority of God's self-revelation before trying to move so quickly to a solution. Making the impasse clear, I hope to argue, will at least point the way towards a renewed theological consideration of being.

Conceptual idolatry and the priority of being

Marion finds in all metaphysical considerations of the Christian God the failure to think God first through God's own revelation; instead, metaphysics always presupposes being in its conception of God and thereby thinks being prior to God. This is not a failing of univocity alone but of all thinking bound by metaphysics.[3]

He starts by elaborating idolatry in the context of human reason. He first distinguishes between the *idol* and the *icon*, which are not different beings but 'two manners of being for beings'.[4] When the divine is made manifest in the realm of visibility through the *signa* (i.e. what signifies the divine), then what is visible, in its mode of visibility, 'maintains with the divine a rigorous and undoubtedly *constitutive* relation: the manner of seeing *decides what can be seen*'.[5] Here Marion begins by emphasising that the *human gaze*, in whatever mode of visibility, determines the being of the being that it perceives. This gaze constitutes the idol.

An idol, then, is that which is an unwitting and deceptive slave to the human gaze. The idol 'captivates the gaze only inasmuch as the gazeable comprises it'.[6] Although the

theology', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 76 (2014), pp. 53–73; Michael Wiitala, 'The Metaphysics of Duns Scotus and Onto-Theology', *Philosophy Today* SPEP Supplement (2009), pp. 158–63 and Catherine Pickstock, 'Epochs of Modernity', *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 6/1 (2005), pp. 65–86.

[3]Even the post-metaphysical Martin Heidegger thinks being prior to divinity, as his later reflections on the divinities relied on the anteriority of being-itself. However, Heidegger claims Christian 'faith has no need for the thinking of Being. Whenever it does need it, it is already no longer faith. This Luther understood; even in his own church it seems this has been forgotten'. Martin Heidegger, *Seminare, G.A., 15* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1986), pp. 436–7. The translation is my own.

[4]Jean-Luc Marion, *God without Being: Hors-Texte*, 2nd edn, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 8.

[5]Ibid., p. 9.

[6]Ibid., p. 10.

icon turns the gaze away from its own tendency to set the terms for what can manifest, the idol establishes the human gaze's priority, allowing the 'gazeable' to comprise the idol's manifestation. The idol is a 'mirror that reflects the gaze's image, or more exactly, the image of its aim and of the scope of that aim'.[7] In this way, the idol 'consigns the divine to the measure of a human gaze'.[8] In the end, idolatry thus 'freezes in a figure that which vision aims at in a glance', and it gives only 'the gaze gazing at itself gazing, at the risk of seeing no more than its own face'.[9] Or, to use theological language, a gaze *incurvatus in se*.

He then applies this definition of idolatry to human intellection, which harbours the 'conceptual idol'. He sees the classical use of 'concept' as a case of the idolatrous gaze, especially when conceptualisation applies to the divine. He defines 'concept' thus:

> The concept consigns to a sign what at first the mind grasps with it (*concipere, capere*); but such a grasp is measured not so much by the amplitude of the divine as by the scope of a *capacitas*, which can fix the divine in a specific concept only at the moment when a conception of the divine fills it, hence appeases, stops, and freezes it.[10]

In the same way that the idol confines the divine to the *capacitas* and aims of the human gaze, the concept delimits the intellectual space in which the divine may appear. When a 'conception of the divine' fills this space, the concept of the divine is validated. But here, just as in the case of the idol, this validation proves only to be an 'invisible mirror' of the conception and the *capacitas* of the human intellect. So, when 'a philosophical thought expresses a concept of what it then names "God," this concept functions exactly as an idol'.[11] Conceptual idols have appeared and reigned throughout western thought, the two most prominent being the *causa sui* of metaphysics and the *moralischer Gott* of Kant and Nietzsche.

Every enterprise of human thought that takes the concept of God as its starting point thus enacts a 'regionalism'. By this, Marion means 'that for the term, by definition undefined, of *God* [i.e. the genuine term for God], the concept *substitutes* some precise definition [emphasis added], "God," over which, through the determining definition, understanding will exercise its logic'.[12] The thinking following from the concept works itself out according to the parameters of the concept set forth, all while leaving the actual God untouched. Now, the concept 'God' is not an illusion. It is genuine as an expression of what human thought thinks of the divine. But nevertheless, the divine God – as God, or at least as God self-disclosing Himself – is never addressed whenever we begin from the concept. God is substituted from the beginning by 'God'.

Marion aims to localise this idolatry of the concept in a specific place. Rehearsing Heidegger's own analysis of ontotheology, he states that 'the theo-logical pole of metaphysics determines, as early as the setting into operation of the Greek beginning, a site for what one later will name "God"'; and therethrough God arises in philosophy 'less from God himself than from metaphysics, as destinal figure of the thought of

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[7]Ibid., p. 12.
[8]Ibid., p. 14.
[9]Ibid., p. 26.
[10]Ibid., p. 16.
[11]Ibid.
[12]Ibid., p. 30.

Being'.[13] This 'thought of Being' is the representation of the Being of beings as the *causa sui*. The *causa sui* allows metaphysics a space to think of a transcendent divinity, but this space is also severely restricted to efficient causality.[14] Here conceptual idolatry is at play, for metaphysics allows the site for God to manifest by its setting of foundational parameters, but thereby it limits the space for the concept of God, thus returning the gaze of the concept back upon itself. In turn, the conceptual space reflected upon the *capacitas* of human intellect does not allow either being-itself (as anything but efficiency) or God-Himself (as anything but *causa sui*) to manifest.

At this point, Marion, like Heidegger before him, recognises a need to think God beyond metaphysics. He states,

> [Christianity] does not think God starting from the *causa sui*, because it does not think God starting from the cause, or within the theoretical space defined by metaphysics, or even starting from the concept, but indeed starting from God alone, grasped to the extent that he inaugurates by himself the knowledge in which he yields himself – reveals himself.[15]

An explicitly Christian theology must think 'starting from God alone', without the foundation-setting of metaphysics or even the barest concept.

There is one concept, however – the barest of concepts – most problematic for this theological goal, just because it is the barest and thus most universal: being. Being is anterior to every thought about God because, in the context of Heideggerian ontology and even perhaps thinking as such, the 'is' accompanies every thought.[16] And because the 'is' *must* accompany each thought, including a thought of God, this entails, for Marion, a failure to think God starting from God alone. Even Heidegger's attempt to think being *qua* being – without recourse to a metaphysical idolatry that obscures both the thought of being and God – succumbs to a *second* idolatry, for it thinks it must get an ontological understanding of being before it can move on to an ontic question about God. Here Marion repeats Heidegger's declaration: 'Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought' – and this anteriority of the 'truth of Being' makes even a post-metaphysical being inadequate for genuine thinking about God.[17]

We should pause here and dwell on why the 'truth of Being' is so anterior for Heidegger and was so throughout his career. For doing so will align Heidegger's thought with the scope of the rest of the philosophical tradition, as well as the later discussion of univocity in this essay. If there is one thing Heidegger takes for granted in his

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[13]Ibid., p. 34.

[14]Ibid., p. 35.

[15]Ibid., p. 36.

[16]Here I wonder if Marion succeeds in 'localising' conceptual idolatry as much as he thinks. Whether he does succeed depends on how universal one considers being for human thought. If it is as universal as I think Marion considers it to be (even in his post-Heideggerian context that seems so frustrated with this universality), then it is difficult to accept his attempt of 'localisation' in good faith. Marion's criticisms really extend not only to the metaphysical reduction of being to causation but to metaphysics as such, framed as the overarching question of being-itself.

[17]Marion, *God without Being*, pp. 39–40. As Marion admits, however, Heidegger is not referring to specifically Christian holiness but to the holiness immanent to human *Dasein*. Marion quotes Heidegger's statement in a 1953 session with Protestant theologians: 'With respect to the text referred to from the "Letter on Humanism", what is being discussed there is the God of the poet, not the revealed God. There is mentioned merely what philosophical thinking is capable on its own.' Ibid., p. 52.

early career, it is the universality, inevitability and constitutive relation of being, *Sein*, in human *Dasein*. According to *Sein und Zeit*, *Dasein* 'is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it'.[18] And, as Marion cites a later lecture of his, 'human *Dasein* is a being with the kind of being to which it belongs essentially to understand something like Being'.[19] Yet this is just an assumption of what Aristotle writes in *Metaphysica B* and of what Thomas writes in the *Summa*, both of which Heidegger cites in *Sein und Zeit*: 'being is the most universal of all', and 'an understanding of Being is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends in beings'.[20] To put it in a too simplistic sense, but one that is fitting for the following consideration of Duns Scotus: one always uses 'is' to state, it *is* raining, or, the truck *is* red, or even, God *is*, and every time there is an unstated, assumed comprehension of being therein. This is not an issue of the analogy or univocity of being but rather its universal primacy in thought, which applies to Aristotle, Thomas and Heidegger no less than to Scotus.

Therefore, Marion finds a final idolatry in Heidegger. For in his case, we must 'admit the absolute phenomenological anteriority of *Dasein*, as *comprehension of Being, over all beings and over every regional ontic investigation*'.[21] The phenomenological anteriority of being – regardless of whether one finds it obvious or mysterious – 'implies theologically an instance anterior to "God," hence that point from which idolatry could dawn'.[22] In the end, human *Dasein*'s being precedes its thinking of God.

How, then, to achieve the thought of God without being? This is Marion's project throughout the rest of the work, which I will only outline where it is relevant to Duns Scotus' doctrine of univocity. Marion is aware that his broad condemnation of the anteriority of being 'may in fact render thought on the whole immediately impossible'.[23] How can thought, let alone the thought of God, escape the anteriority of being? This escape can only come in the effort that aims to think 'God without any conditions, not even that of Being, hence to think God without pretending to inscribe him or to describe him as a being'.[24] God, in this case, must work as 'that which surpasses, detours, and distracts all thought, even nonrepresentational. By definition and decision, God, if he must be thought, can meet no theoretical space to his measure…'[25] The goal,

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[18]Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006), p. 32. This and subsequent translations from this text are my own.

[19]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 42.

[20]Aristotle, *Metaphyisca B* 3, 998 b 22; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2/1.94.2; cited in Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 3. In 'Une époque de la métaphysique', pp. 87–8, Marion distinguishes Thomas' and Aristotle's maxims from Scotus' by arguing the former did not consider being on object, while the latter is the first to treat being as an object of the intellect: l'être, l'être de l'étant, n'est pas un objet. Et ceci reste encore vrai chez saint Thomas… Il est remarquable en effet, que Scot introduise justement à propos de l'*ens* l'expression: *objet*… c'est une révolution fondamentale: considérer l'étant comme un objet.' I remain unconvinced by the distinction. Especially if I am trying to follow Marion's larger critique of philosophical and conceptual thought overall, it seems I *must* include Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas within the scope of that critique, despite some nuances. While Thomas might not use the term '*objectum*' here, his other maxim, 'whatever received is received in the mode of the recipient', fulfils the same function of the objectification of being in practice, especially when read in light of Marion's critique of conceptual thought overall. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.75.5.

[21]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 42; emphasis added.

[22]Ibid., p. 43.

[23]Ibid., p. 45.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

then, is to think God not only outside the confines of metaphysics but also outside the confines of being, that is, the classification that God is a being, *must* be a being, or manifests Himself only as a being.

Again, he acknowledges this seems impossible at first glance, given being's total hegemony in human discourse. But even within this hegemony, he claims God can act as that which 'surpasses, detours, and distracts all thought'.[26] From *within* the anteriority of being that is impossible for humans being *qua* human being to escape, God arises to challenge and relativise such anteriority. God, to be God, must arise *in* thought as the unthinkable – yet how can the unthinkable arise in thought? Marion contends 'we can only think [God] under the figure of the unthinkable, but of an unthinkable that *exceeds* as much what we cannot think as what we can'.[27] The thought of God as the unthinkable occurs first *within* the realm of thought and then is proven unthinkable in terms of its excess. By 'excess' Marion means, 'the unthinkable enters into the field of our thought only by rendering itself unthinkable there by excess, that is, by criticizing our thought'.[28] In this respect, God does not disappear as a concept but enters into conceptuality, yet only as a criticism thereof, indifferent to and overflowing of conceptuality's parameters, *capacitas*, and idolatrous gaze. This is not a negating criticism, but a criticism from what is far greater than the boundaries that human thought sets for it, from what manifests so wholly to human thought that thought can never succeed in putting a stop to it.[29]

This excess leads Marion to consider *Love* (ἀγάπη) as the best designation for God, for Love defines best this nature of total and abundant Self-giving: 'what is peculiar to love consists in the fact that it gives itself… loves without condition, simply because it loves; [God] thus loves without limit or restriction'.[30] In short, God *loves* before He *is*, because God is free of all limitation, condition and restriction; but, again, not in any mere negative sense, but such that God first *gives* Himself to thought, even while surpassing it. Love thus suffices for Marion's goal of thinking God according to His own revelation, as it prioritises God as Self-Giver, as the Gift Who gives Himself to thought. By first thinking God as Gift-Giver, we may succeed in thinking God *qua* God by God's own revelation.

With regards to being, thinking God first as Love reckons with the inevitability of God's entering into the concept, and therewith the seeming anteriority of being, while still setting God before this anteriority by proving His excess of it. This entails an 'indifference to be'. God may be – or He may not. In either case, God precedes the being which He deems to take upon himself or not. For a being to be able to do so, this would mean the being (here God) precedes being-itself, or, as stated earlier, the comprehending of being implicit in every human thought. Here comes a reversal of roles: God 'comprehends our Being of beings, in the sense that the exterior exceeds the interior, and also that *the understanding is not confused with the understood* – in short, that the comprehending diverges from the comprehended'.[31] Thus a space

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[26]Ibid., p. 38.

[27]Ibid., p. 46; emphasis added.

[28]Ibid.

[29]For an outstanding treatment of the excess of the Christian God to thought, see Jean-Luc Marion, 'Is the Ontological Argument Ontological? The Argument according to Anselm and Its Metaphysical Interpretation according to Kant', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 30/2 (April 1992), pp. 201–8.

[30]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 47.

[31]Ibid., p. 101; emphasis added.

opens between the understanding and the understood that keeps human thought from swallowing up its object into its own comprehension – a space Marion famously signifies, literally, by crossing God out with an X.

This is a difficult point to understand. The constraints of this essay do not allow me to go into detail about all the ways Marion claims that through the phenomena of proclamation of Scripture, the moment of the Eucharist, and the encounter with icons, God is not expelled from being but rather re-orients Himself anterior to being by critical excess. This excess arises out of the Self-giving of God Himself, the God Who wholly gives with a total freedom that includes even His entrance into the realm of 'idolatrous thinking', but *only as* free from its constraints. For Marion, it is crucial that Christian theology, against all philosophy and much of the classical theological tradition, must begin with the divine name of God as Love[32]: for God does not first *have* to be before He gives (Himself). In turn, all discourse can only follow from the priority of encounter with this Self-giving Love. Marion concludes, 'love is not spoken, in the end, it is made. Only then can discourse be reborn, but as an enjoyment, a jubilation, a praise'.[33]

Either this point is difficult, or it just totally fails to match his earlier criticisms of conceptual idolatry. For how could the theologian return to the naivete of jubilation and praise when the regulatory concept – and God, even when crossed-out, is a regulatory concept in Marion's case – functions foremost as criticism, albeit 'excessive'? As Laurence Hemming argues, Marion's attempt to cordon off Christian theology (in particular that of Thomas Aquinas) from the spectre of the history of ontotheology has 'thereby incapacitated [him] from showing how the God of revelation and the world to whom God is revealed go together… [For his] stress on the separation of *esse commune* and *esse divinum* is construed in an exclusively negative sense'.[34] Further, Gregory Schufreider criticises that, 'needless to say, Marion prefers icons to idols; although I would argue that, working from his own definition of the difference, it can be shown that all icons presuppose a certain idolizing of the incomprehensible'.[35]

While I would not go so far as Schufreider, I agree that Marion so succeeds in arguing against being-as-such that, using the very polemic against the 'idolatrous gaze', one may criticise the very 'icons' of God's Self-revelation as themselves no more than other instances of idolatry. Only *faith* – which is particular to an individual and granted by grace in the absolute mystery of God's Providence – *not* just the sheer fact of anteriority of God by God's excessive Self-revelation, may take the icon in good faith (as a Christian may) rather than in bad faith (as Schufreider does). This faith is *contingent*, no less so than God's own self-revelation as articulated by Marion. But if a theologian does not recognise this contingency of faith, the bad-faith critic may simply call out her icon as an instance of a projected, negative ontology, whereby the intellectual gaze justifies itself precisely through its projected (apparently blinding) vision of what exceeds

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[32]He also allows 'the Good' (*bonum*) as a divine name prior to being (*ens*), though he defines 'good' in the same terms as 'love'.

[33]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 107. Guus Labooy contends that Marion is trying to argue for the merit of genuine equivocity, in which case Duns Scotus' famous point that we could not tell any difference between 'God is wise' and 'God is a stone' might hold. Labooy, 'Duns Scotus' univocity', p. 70. To this, one might reply that the concrete-existential aspect of Marion's argument is crucial. Achieving the 'knowledge' of God's love cannot come through conceptual correspondence but in the actual, concrete event of sharing love between God and human beings.

[34]Laurence Paul Hemming, 'Heidegger's God', *The Thomist* 62/3 (July 1998), pp. 390–1.

[35]Gregory Schufreider, 'The Onto-Theo-Logical Nature of Anselm's Metaphysics', *Philosophy Today* (Winter 1996), p. 473.

its sight.[36] But how can we account for this contingency of faith? As Hemming notes, Marion has so split off God's revelation from the world that now the one who was *once of the world*, the Christian theologian bearing faith, can no longer account for that revelation in the world.

To summarise: Marion criticises all metaphysics and even post-metaphysics, not Duns Scotus alone, for thinking being anterior to God. The anteriority of being is a problem for all human thought, insofar as being is problematic for thinking God as God. Properly thinking God demands thinking God first as Self-giving Love, who can enter and exit out of our comprehending of being in freedom by the excess of His own revelation. It should be clear by now that Marion's critiques of metaphysics exceed the standard debate over analogy and univocity of being. Unlike Radical Orthodoxy, Marion is not defending a doctrine of *analogia entis*. He is radically questioning the primacy of being in theology overall, a primacy to which even Thomists and the proponents of Radical Orthodoxy would succumb. Yet his critique of the primacy of being extends so far that it throws into deep suspicion his attempt at a positive thinking of God's revelation.

Duns Scotus' doctrine of univocity in light of the primacy of being

Now I will interpret Duns Scotus' doctrine of univocity in light of Marion's own attempt to think God *qua* God. This context requires a somewhat different and more provisional interpretation than the prevailing defences of Duns Scotus' univocity. While I think both Thomas Williams' and Richard Cross' defences far exceed my own in logical terms, I do not find in either the basic insight I find in Duns Scotus' doctrine of the univocity of being. That insight is the Thomasic maxim cited earlier: 'an understanding of being [*ens*] is already included in conceiving anything which one apprehends in beings'.[37] To that primacy of being, I add two similar maxims: 'whatever received is received in the mode of the recipient', and 'knowledge is regulated according as the thing known is in the knower', for 'the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower'.[38] Both Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, as good scholastic theologians, agree on these principles. To analogise these principles to Marion's critique, the scholastic theologian accepts that all thinking is confined to the 'gaze' of the 'mode of the knower'. And being, since it is the most primary and universal concept, is a sufficient foundation, a 'gaze', for thinking through the transcendentals that regulate the mode of knowing.[39] Therefore, Scotus is not revolutionising so much as crystallising the premises of scholastic thought into one doctrine of univocity. Scotus argues that the concept 'being' accompanies every human conceiving, and further, this concept must be univocal between God and human beings. And even further

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[36]Schufreider argues this is just what Anselm does in the ontological argument, even when reformulated by Marion. See Schufreider, 'The Onto-Theo-Logical Nature of Anselm's Metaphysics', pp. 467–8.

[37]For the distinction Marion tries to make between Thomas' maxim of the primacy of being and that of Scotus, see note 20.

[38]Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.75.5, co.; 1.12.4, co.

[39]This interpretation has some precedent in Philip Tonner's *Heidegger, Metaphysics, and Univocity*: 'for Heidegger, just as for Scotus and other scholastics, being was the "first object of the intellect", and to this extent the scholastic claim is *repeated* by Heidegger in his claim that Dasein's understanding of being is its most fundamental characteristic and that being is its most natural concern'. Philip Tonner, *Heidegger, Metaphysics, and the Univocity of Being* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 34. But he does not offer an extended interpretation of Duns Scotus' own doctrine of univocity, which I will attempt here.

than Thomas, since human beings *must* have the concept of being in every conception as an utterly basic concept, there is no way for this concept to be treated as anything *but* univocal.

The most crucial material for much of this interpretation lies in Scotus' overall framing of metaphysics. I will begin there and then interpret his doctrine of univocity in light of this framing.

Like the other scholastics, Duns Scotus agrees 'that the first object of our intellect is being (*ens*)'.[40] Being holds this primacy through both 'commonness' [*communitas*] and 'virtuality' [*virtualitas*]: 'every per se intelligible either essentially includes the notion of being [i.e. commonly] or is contained virtually or essentially in something that essentially includes being'.[41]

In its own context, this point is quite complicated. However, I will glean a very simple consequence of it which will show that Duns Scotus is arguing every intellection of an object requires the concept of being, even when granting the actual being of the object is quite different from the intellecting act. When an intelligible includes the notion of being 'essentially' or 'commonly', it is an intelligible composite of, or in common relation with, universal and material substances – and there is no further ado. It is clearly intelligible that, say, the concept of Socrates as a rational animal would include the concept of being essentially in each of the categorisations of 'rational' and 'animal'. But it gets trickier when we try to intellect an intelligible wholly by and of itself; for example, when we are trying to understand Socrates *qua* Socrates, in his haecceity. Duns Scotus grants that it might not be clear how being could be understood within a haecceity which denotes an ultimate difference of that thing from all others. But he maintains that, even when we are trying to understand something in its haecceity, the notion of being is still 'contained virtually'. For all 'genera and species and individuals, and all the essential parts of genera, and uncreated being, include being quidditatively [essentially]; but all ultimate differences are included in some of these essentially', and 'all the properties of being are included virtually in being and what falls under being'.[42] In short, even haecceity and ultimate differences relate to being virtually.

This is a metaphysical point – and a quite difficult one for most of us who are not used to a scholastic idiom. But it also has an epistemic-ontological point of consequence. And it is a very simple point that risks repetition, but in order to understand Marion's contention against metaphysics (and Duns Scotus), I must dwell on it further. In every conception of a being, the concept of being must be included. This does not mean that being-itself is necessarily and essentially common between the two beings. There can be a great difference between the two beings regarding their respective actual being. And here we may even include attempted intellections of haecceity, of thinking things *per se* apart from all other being, including our own. But for intellection (i.e. for a being to be 'intelligible' at all), a being must be apprehended as either including a commonality of being *in quid* – and this is *communitas* of being between our thinking in metaphysical categories and the intellected being – or the being apprehending the

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[40]Ioannis Duns Scoti, *Ordinatio* I d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, n. 137. Ioannis Duns Scoti, *Opera Omnia*, III, Charles Balić et al. (eds.) (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1954). I have relied on the English translations of the text by Peter Simpson (now available on the *Past Master's Archive* as *The Ordinatio of John Duns Scotus*). See John Duns Scotus, *The Ordinatio of John Duns Scotus*, trans. Peter Simpson (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2022).

[41]*Ord.* I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, n. 137.

[42]*Ord.* I, d. 3, pars 1, q. 3, n. 137.

being whose being is uncommon to it must apprehend it *virtually*, in accompaniment with a concept which *does* have this commonness of being – and this is *virtualitas*. To return to my earlier point on scholastic maxims: either an intellected being must actually be as it is received in the mode of the knower, or it must be known virtually, i.e. received *in the mode of the knowing recipient*. And for us humans, this mode will always be the univocal term of being. Duns Scotus is not making an insidious claim compared to other medieval thinkers. He is asserting a most basic principle: being, 'is' – the human intellecting 'is' – irreducibly accompanies every thought of a being, by necessity of how intellection works. To quote Andrew LaZella, 'being is a concept of pure determinability',[43] and as such it precedes every specific determination, even the narrowest determinations of things in their ultimate difference from everything else.

This premise is crucial for the definition of univocity, and it is how I think the argument for univocity proves most successful. Duns Scotus begins with the question '*whether God is naturally knowable by the intellect of the wayfarer*'.[44] He refines this question with a quick dismissal of negative theology. It is pointless to distinguish that we cannot know what God is, because 'negation cannot be known except through affirmation', and anyway, 'nor are negations our greatest loves'.[45] So, we must seek 'after the underlying notion that this negation is understood to be true of', and at bottom this notion must be affirmative.[46] So, there must be some 'affirmative concept that is first'.[47] In the ontological context, we must seek after

a simple concept, the 'it is' of which is known by an act of the intellect combining and dividing. For I never know of anything whether it is if I do not have some concept of the term that I know the 'is' is about. And that concept is sought here.[48]

He is seeking after the barest concept that allows the intellect to grasp an affirmative concept of God, leaving out all questions of His essence or existence but pursuing an utterly basic, simple affirmation that lets all further intellection about Him to follow. He thus concludes his introduction by refining the first question: 'whether the intellect of the wayfarer could naturally have any simple concept in which simple concept God is conceived'.[49]

This question already puts him in an advantageous position for his debate over analogy and univocity. For he clarifies that he is not looking for a necessarily robust concept. He is reaching a bit deeper: there *must be* an *utterly* basic concept underlying whatever affirmation or negation we further make of a concept. This anticipates his most successful contention against analogy, because he is not discounting analogy but instead arguing it does not go deep enough to reach this utterly simple concept undergirding any analogical proposition we make.

[43] Andrew L. LaZella, *The Singular Voice of Being: John Duns Scotus and Ultimate Difference* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 57.

[44] *Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1.

[45] *Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 10. In *Negative Certainties*, Marion disagrees: 'Against Duns Scotus… we prefer negations provided that they *also* give certainties'. Jean-Luc Marion, *Negative Certainties*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 6.

[46] *Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 10.

[47] *Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 10.

[48] *Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 11.

[49] *Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 19.

Duns Scotus finds this simple concept to be the univocal, primary concept of being. He defines univocity thus:

> I mean by a univocal concept a concept that is so one that the unity of it suffices for contradiction, for affirming and denying it of the same thing; suffices too for a syllogistic middle term, so that the extreme terms, when united in a middle term thus one, may be deduced, without the fallacy of equivocation, to be united between themselves.[50]

Two criteria decide whether a concept is univocal. First, the concept must have sufficient unity so that to say, for instance, God *is* and God *is not* would be a contradiction. The second is that it acts as the middle term of a syllogism that unites two extremes. Socrates *is* a man, and all men *are* mortal, and therefore Socrates *is* mortal. This *is* makes the connections between these statements intelligible in the first place. To repeat LaZella's terms, the univocal concept here acts as a concept of 'pure determinability' that allows any determination to happen at all.

Duns Scotus then argues that the concept of being meets these criteria in the intellection of God. He states,

> the intellect of a wayfarer can be certain that God is a being and still doubt whether He is finite or infinite, created or uncreated; therefore, the concept of being said of God is different from ['finite' or 'infinite', 'created' or 'uncreated] and so of itself it is neither of them and is included in each of them, [and] therefore it is univocal.[51]

He uses as an example the debate among various ancient philosophers over what the first principle is and what attributes it has: fire, water, God, created or uncreated, infinite or finite, etc. But everyone agreed that, whatever this first principle is, it is a being. Through every change of conception of the first principle – from fire to water to a finite God to an infinite God, etc. – 'the first concept certain… the concept one had about being, would not be destroyed but preserved in the particular concept that was proved…'.[52] In every different concept of whatever the first principle would be, the notion of it as a being persists. This is because, as Labooy puts it, being is a 'wafer-thin' concept: it is '*that what does not imply a contradiction, being as that what is apt to be…* [it is] the frontier guard between the realm of meaning and that of meaninglessness'.[53]

Here is where Duns Scotus' argument against analogy comes in. Having argued that whatever is conceived must be conceived as a being, he contends that the concept 'being' in relation between the conceiver and the conceived must be univocal, not analogous. Suppose this relation was only similar, which means there were actually two different concepts, being (B1) and being (B2), that resemble each other quite closely. Either there is no more-basic concept underlying them, in which case it is impossible to put them in comparison at all, and we have equivocity (i.e. unintelligibility); or it is possible to compare these two, but to compare them and prove how similar they are, we must then posit something which they share on the basis of which they are similar. Whatever this is, therefore, it must be univocal. And since being is the first object of

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[50]*Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 26.
[51]*Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 27.
[52]*Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 29.
[53]Labooy, 'Duns Scotus' univocity', pp. 61–2.

the intellect and is irreducibly simple, this concept of being (B) can serve as that uni-vocal basis. Below every supposed difference in being that one can call an 'analogy of being', one can reach a most basic, simply-simple concept (B) upon which to compare the analogies.[54] For Duns Scotus, this 'wafer-thin', simply simple concept is being.

Now, again, Duns Scotus' univocity does not disregard analogy in all other cases thereafter, and he does not even posit that the *actual being* of the two in relation is uni-vocal. The 'wafer-thin' concept of being is seen by some as allowing all further compari-son and therewith dissimilarity between the being of the two in relation. As Labooy states, 'Scotus holds that we need the univocal concept of *ens* in order to be able to express the enormous *difference* between [B1] and [B2]'.[55] And for Labooy, this extremely limited commonness is beneficial for our thinking about the divine. Providing the 'semantic ground that makes it possible to speak about the divine', uni-vocity grants 'a very limited discursive knowledge of God, by which we can express His infinite alterity'.[56]

In sum, the univocity of being is a distillation of the scholastic maxims – that an understanding of being (*ens*) is necessary in every conception of a being and that being is the first object of the intellect – into the basis of the possibility of religious lan-guage about God. For Duns Scotus, the univocal concept of being in its barest, 'wafer-thin' scope is inevitable in any conception of a being as a being. But for him and his followers, univocity is not only inevitable but good, for it acts as the basis from which we may then distinguish the great differences between God and creatures. In short, Duns Scotus' univocal concept of being could be described just as: intelligibil-ity, and as that intelligibility which then allows all further difference.

Marion's treatment of Duns Scotus

Let's turn now to the few places of Marion's implicit and explicit treatment of Duns Scotus' positions in *God without Being*. In light of Marion's analysis of 'concep-tual idolatry', it is difficult not to concede that Duns Scotus falls precisely within this critique. It is more difficult, however, to argue that univocity – however 'idolatrous' it is – is not inevitable. For it seems impossible to conclude otherwise than that a concept of being in this barest form must accompany every comprehension of a being. Scotus is not so much deviating from a once-apophatic scholastic doctrine of analogy as he is bringing the underlying premise of metaphysics, indeed human thought, to the fore.

Marion himself recognises this problem in his treatment of Aquinas alongside Duns Scotus in the first edition of this work. He argues that, because for Aquinas being is the first and proper object of the intellect as primarily intelligible,

> the point of departure, for Saint Thomas (and not for Duns Scotus alone) remains Avicenna: 'being is what is first conceived by the intellect…'. The *ens* appears first, at least on condition that one takes the point of view of human understanding; the

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[54]As Williams notes, this argument 'does not show that the doctrine of univocity is true, but rather that either the doctrine of univocity is true or that everything we say about God is in the most straightforward sense unintelligible… Now I take it that an acknowledgment of the unintelligibility of all language about God is simply not a live option, so I am convinced the doctrine of univocity is true'. Thomas Williams, 'The Doctrine of Univocity is True and Salutary', *Modern Theology* 21/4 (October 2005), pp. 579–80. I am comfortable following Williams' assumption here as well.

[55]Labooy, 'Duns Scotus' univocity', p. 64.

[56]Ibid., p. 66.

primacy of the *ens* depends on the primacy of a conception of the understanding and of the mind of man.[57]

Both Aquinas and Dun Scotus agree that being [*ens*] is the primary conception of the intellect. And both, as Marion asserts, conceive of this primacy as 'depending on the primacy *of a conception of the understanding and of the mind of man*'.[58] It follows that Aquinas has already set the foundation for the Scotist conclusion 'that the *ens*, result of a concept because first of a human (*in via*) apprehension, remains univocal for "God" as well as for all other beings'.[59] But note: this primacy of the *ens* is not the primacy of the *ens* itself, or even *esse*, of being-itself. Rather, it is the primacy of the *ens* as intelligibility, as the 'human gaze' of conceptualising, to use Marion's language.

In the second edition of this text, which appends the essay 'Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theology', Marion shifts his critique from Aquinas to Duns Scotus.[60] He writes, 'the univocal concept of being implies, requires, and achieves, both in fact and in right, the inclusion of God in metaphysics'.[61] For 'metaphysics', with being (or entitativeness, as Marion puts it here) as the prime object of the intellect,

> deals (or claims to deal) with God as such because it does not have the least doubt that entitativeness has the right and power to rule God. …God can neither flee nor escape from the entitativeness – which deprives Him of his transcendence and which clasps Him in the common net where all beings, so to speak, swarm.[62]

Duns Scotus thus brings to the fore what all other metaphysics makes implicit: a domination of the comprehension and conceptualisation of being – the idolatrous 'gaze' of the intellect – in its thinking about every being, even the highest being, God, even and precisely in granting God this privileged status.

The failed semantic defence of univocity

Marion and Duns Scotus seem to stand at an impasse. On the one hand, Duns Scotus' argument for the necessity of a bare, 'wafer-thin' concept of being seems inevitable. On the other hand, Marion – aware of this apparent inevitability – is willing to depart from it to argue for a rigorously theological thinking. He is frank to set the terms:

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[57]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 80. And here is exactly why it's hard to accept the apparent distinction Marion sees between Thomas and Duns Scotus (see note 20), since the problem for both is the primacy of being *per se*, not simply being as an object for Scotus. Marion made this claim in 1982, the same year the first edition of *Dieu sans L'être* was published. Now, this coincidence could simply suggest some inconsistencies Marion later solves with his re-treatment of Thomas Aquinas. But I suggest it is not so easy to disentangle the two.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid.

[60]His re-interpretation of Thomas retreats from some of his earlier critiques of him, though he still maintains that Thomas is 'not only the first of the onto-theo-logians but one of the most radical, if not the most radical ever, to the very extent to which he holds neither to a supreme entity (Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant) nor to an indeterminate being (Avicenna, Duns Scotus, Malebranche) but to pure *esse* as such (which Aristotle had only approached)' (Ibid., p. 227). Marion's re-treatment of Thomas cannot be discussed in full here.

[61]Ibid., p. 209.

[62]Ibid., p. 208.

…if theology proceeds by the apprehension of concepts, as a 'science', then, for it also, the *ens* will be first, and man's point of view normative (at least according to the method; but method, in science, decides everything). If theology wills itself to be *theo*logical, it will submit all of its concepts, without excepting the *ens*, to a 'destruction' by the doctrine of the divine names [i.e. God as Love, the Good], at the risk of having to renounce any status as a conceptual 'science,' in order, decidedly nonobjectivizing, to praise by infinite petitions.[63]

In short, we may either pursue conceptual thinking, through which we will achieve 'God', a concept that is only the invisible mirror of the conceptual gaze, or we may pursue theology, through which we achieve God through worship but depart from all objectivising, conceptual thought.

It seems either Marion is right and Duns Scotus wrong to prioritise the concept of being, or Duns Scotus is right and Marion wrong to put such suspicion on conceptuality. Or perhaps the two positions are simply incommensurable, given their far different assumptions and aims, Marion to a kind of Barthian restriction of all religious language to the revelation of God and Duns Scotus to the scholastic confidence in natural knowledge of God. In this case, the wayfarer would side with whomever she aligns her assumptions and aims. The stakes and directions of this choice show just how radical and important the impasse is; the choice decides how the wayfarer will do all theology thereafter. Some today tend to dismiss previous generations' agonising over theological method, but this impasse should quiet any easy dismissals. Marion is right: method, in science, decides everything. And choice of method is indeed a radical choice.

I do not know if there is any room for discussion beyond this point. However, I will at least mention the prevailing *semantic defence* of univocity, which Labooy uses in his defence of Duns Scotus against Marion, and why I think it is not adequate to Marion's critiques. With this argument, I hope to show that the impasse remains.

It is now common to argue that for Duns Scotus, univocity is a *semantic* not *ontological* theory. Being-itself is not univocal between God, humanity and all other beings; rather, only the *concept* of being is univocal. The concept itself is only an intra-mental reality allowing the mental relation of one being to another. The crucial proof for this position is Duns Scotus' own commentary on Aristotle's point that 'equivocations lie hidden in a genus': 'This is not equivocation in the logician's sense, which involves positing diverse concepts [which yet allow one concept of being that can be abstracted from them], but in that of the ontologist, because there is no unity of nature in such a case.'[64]

As Cross argues, 'for Scotus, the concept as such is a *vicious abstraction*… that does not correspond to any real extramental property of a thing'.[65] There must be a radical split between the concept of being and being-itself to allow a genuine distance between God and the creature, indeed even the creature and creature, who share a univocal concept of being. Restriction of univocity to a semantic theory then shows, as Cross argues, that 'Scotus' theory is as apophatic as Aquinas".[66] For when 'we claim that things "are" in the same way, we are saying no more than that they fall under the same vicious abstraction. We are not saying anything at all about the way in which they "are" in

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[63]Ibid., p. 81.
[64]John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1, d. 3, q. 3, n. 163; quoted in Williams, 'True and Salutary', pp. 577–8.
[65]Cross, '"Where Angels Fear to Tread"', p. 13.
[66]Ibid., p. 15.

extramental reality'.[67] Labooy agrees, arguing Duns Scotus' theory of simple concepts (of which being is the simplest) 'is a semantic instrument, not coinciding with an ultimate ontological grid. Semantics and ontology are unlinked'.[68]

Holding to univocity as semantic only, however, would not answer Marion's concerns for idolatry mentioned above but simply accept them without reservation. Although my interpretation might suggest so at first glance, Marion's critique of the anteriority of being is not simply anti-ontological. He is concerned with how this anteriority transfers straightaway into the 'gaze' of the conceptualising intellect. The very problem of the concept is not only that it carries out some ill-fated hegemony of being, but that it brackets off a genuinely extramental existence from thinking and never approaches a genuine being, or, for that matter, being-itself. By bracketing off the semantic claim to reality, the concept puts in its place what I would call a pseudo-ontology: 'being' instead of being, or in the case of the divine, 'God' in place of God. But if the goal is to think God as God (or being as being, for that matter), then Marion, at least, would not be satisfied at all by resting content with that semantic restriction.

From the philosophical side as well, Heidegger would call this semantic restriction a most flagrant example of the omission of being-itself. To call being 'the most universal and emptiest concept' enforces a 'dogma' 'which not only declares the question of the meaning of Being superfluous, but sanctions the omission of questioning it'.[69] The semantic defence only helps sanction the omission of asking about the meaning of being. Just as Marion is not content with remaining at the level of the conceptual God, Heidegger could not remain at the level of conceptual, viciously abstract being. Such omission does not guard genuine extramental reality or ontology, as Cross and others may think, but only replaces it with an ossifying pseudo-ontology – to use Marion's language, a willing reflection of the human gaze back upon itself.[70]

In short, the semantic defence fails because it ignores and thereby accepts the first form of idolatry against which Marion contends. Whether Duns Scotus is 'as apophatic as Aquinas' is not at issue, for, according to Marion, Aquinas as much as Duns Scotus conceives the primacy of the *ens* as 'the primacy of a conception of the understanding and of the mind of man'.[71]

Labooy argues that the semantic nature of univocity does not prove so idolatrous, because the restriction of univocity to semantics sets a difference between '*understanding* and, on the other hand, *encompassing knowledge*; or, in Latin, *intelligere* and *comprehendere*'.[72] He contrasts the 'usurping form of rationality' in the modern concept of knowledge, which phenomenology rightly opposes, to Duns Scotus' more reserved

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[67]Ibid.

[68]Labooy, 'Duns Scotus' univocity', p. 60.

[69]Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 21.

[70]While Pickstock's treatment of Duns Scotus is uncharitable and unfounded in many respects, she is right to claim, 'the new autonomy [Scotus] grants to the semantic is itself a metaphysical move'. However, such a move does not exactly grant that 'purely logical existence, including purely punctiliar essential univocal being *in quid* now belongs entirely to the real', as she claims. It is a metaphysical move to *ignore* the ontological nature of being-itself and assume there is a non-ontological space one can cordon off from the fundamental ontological question without greater consequences. Thereby, the logical comes to *constitute entirely* the real in philosophical discourse, which, granted, is what Pickstock concludes is the logical endpoint of univocity. Pickstock, 'Epochs of Modernity', p. 69.

[71]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 80.

[72]Labooy, 'Duns Scotus' univocity', p. 56.

doctrine of knowledge that 'did not think that "the whole of reality was rationally transparent"'.[73] Instead, he contends that the doctrine of univocity gives a 'lasso' of our ability to name something that reaches much farther than the 'lasso' that reaches for what we can know. In short, the nameable extends beyond the knowable. Therefore, 'if we name an object, it is not automatically within our "gaze", *pace* Marion'.[74]

To this distinction, I must first note that Heidegger, Marion and others might still argue that univocity nevertheless sets the stage for the historical collapse of the difference between semantics and epistemology and ontology; even the more reserved scholastic form of rationality still serves as a predecessor for the modern 'usurping form of rationality'.[75] But it is not clear at all that this difference between the nameable and knowable ultimately holds for Duns Scotus anyway. He partakes in (what contemporary phenomenology would call) obvious ontotheology in some sections. He states that

> every metaphysical inquiry about God proceeds in this way: by considering the formal idea of something and taking away from that formal idea the imperfection that it has in creatures; and by keeping hold of the formal idea and attributing to it an altogether supreme perfection, and attributing it thus to God.[76]

Note that this is how a *metaphysical* enquiry about God works, not a semantic enquiry. And as a metaphysical enquiry, it does not defend him against Marion's critique of metaphysics as a whole. For in this case, the *formal idea* leads the way throughout and is never dispensed with, even with the removal of every supposed 'imperfection.' And thus the 'gaze' of the concept holds.

In summary, Marion's condemnation of conceptual idolatry does apply to Duns Scotus' doctrine of univocity, even if one tries to restrict univocity to the semantic. The semantic defence fails, because whether we like it or not, the semantic simply stands in for ontology – and stands as the poorest of ontologies, at that.

Conclusion: Between God and being

In conclusion, it seems to me that Duns Scotus and Marion remain at an impasse. For I cannot but be convinced that Marion's argument proves the inadequacy of metaphysics and philosophy to think God through God's own revelation. But I also cannot but be convinced that Duns Scotus' simply simple concept of being – which I interpret as a most basic intelligibility, or as Labooy calls it, the frontier guard of meaning and meaninglessness – is inevitable in every thinking, including that of God.

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[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.

[75]That is a common critique from the side of Radical Orthodoxy, and it is not an argument against the genuine merit of univocity, but it must be noted. Williams is right that 'proponents of Radical Orthodoxy rarely if ever argue that univocity is false' but instead argue 'it has disastrous consequences for theology and philosophy, and for society and culture generally' (Williams, 'True and Salutary', p. 580). Cross suggests they aim for 'the exclusion of all argument from systematic theology' in favour of treating intellectual history as doxography (Cross, '"Where angels fear to tread"', pp. 22, 9). It is a sad irony that those wanting to fight the techno-logism of our postmodernity use its same pragmatist approach to concepts and ideas – i.e. what the cash-value of a concept is. Cross does let Heidegger off the hook of this criticism, as he notes that 'Heidegger's observations… are not really apposite for a consideration of the work of RO theologians' (Cross, '"Where angels fear to tread"', p. 8).

[76]*Ord.* I, d. 3, q. 1–2, n. 39.

The attempt to defend Duns Scotus through the semantic defence does not decompress the impasse, Labooy's and other's arguments against Marion notwithstanding. But that the semantic defence of Duns Scotus fails against Marion's critique should not take any pressure off Marion, however. I hope to have argued how inevitable Duns Scotus' doctrine of univocity is for human thought. Marion himself suggests as much when he quotes the Apostle John: 'God [is] *agape*'.[77] However much he would like to bracket the 'is', being persists in the naming of God, even God as Love or the Good. Such a conundrum suggests that, even and precisely in the attempts to move beyond metaphysics and ontotheology, the theologian cannot depart from being – just as little as the defender of Duns Scotus can omit the question of being through semantics.

This impasse, I now conclude, reflects the situation of postmodernity described by Laurence Hemming. For Hemming, the essence of postmodernity is found as it

> proclaims, as the decisive interpretation of all that preceded it, that 'God is being.' …The word 'is' here above all has to be thought in relation to the subjectivity of the subject as 'causes,' even if, alone among causes, this cause (God) causes itself. …[Yet] as postmodernity proclaims that God is being, so at the same time it proclaims that God is dead and being is no more than a fiction. …[Therefore] for postmodernity… being is thought through the cleft between beings and divinity.[78]

We lie at the impasse between two poles: of thinking a necessity of the absolute anteriority of God in God's own Self-revelation – which itself suggests the demand for the absolute subjectivity of comprehensive self-positing, though it be given by a transcendent Wholly Other rather than the human subject – or thinking the necessity of the anteriority of being (as the *ens* of beings) in its accompaniment with every intellection – and thus the dominating comprehension of the conceptual gaze of human subjectivity. And so we lie anxious between the two poles. We swing from one side to the other, or, since we cannot bear the anxiety, we try to master our way to a doctrine that might hold the two poles together in a harmony.

With that attempt at mastery comes many theo-ontologies, in particular ones based on the doctrine of *analogia entis*, that pretend opposition to the West's pervasive ontotheology yet do little more than *will* for a resuscitated thought-pattern from past ages transmogrified into a worldview for the sake of a pragmatic demand. Thereby, analogical theo-ontologies fulfil the nihilism of the comprehensive subjectivity they thought they were fighting. Analogical thinking today, when it does not simplistically (and this means at its best) proceed from assuming the ontological difference between God and human beings, amounts to little more than pragmatistic will for apophaticism. At least pragmatic Hegelianism accepts its technological, communitarian univocity wholesale. Perhaps once, being and God could be harmonised by theological discourse, and that reflected the harmony of Christian being in the world. Yet today, after the 'death of God', such a harmony being of the past, the demand for a renewed harmony through a thought-pattern offers little more than a demand that is discontent with how both being and God manifest today, in an impasse.

Besides a demand for analogy, what still can theologians *do* about this impasse? Since that seems to be the obvious question demanded by the impasse – at least within

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[77]Marion, *God without Being*, p. 47.

[78]Hemming, *Postmodernity's Transcending*, pp. 237–8. I confess to pulling this quotation somewhat out of Hemming's own context. I hope he will forgive this misreading.

the present situation of academic theology, which demands theology to *do something*. Yet we might remain interested enough in the impasse itself to appreciate it, to instead *let it be* as it manifests itself in the being of the theologian.[79] For any attempt to move beyond or resolve the impasse without appreciating it could thereby miss the truth of the impasse.

And the truth may well be that the impasse itself is the ontological truth for Christian theology today: that the being of the theologian *is*, or at least in our world today *begins*, *comes into being*, as *inter-esse* (to borrow a provocative term from Søren Kierkegaard[80]) – *to-be-between* the being of beings and the self-revelation of God in contradistinction to that being, with all the anguish of condemnation yet hope for redemption that such entails. Then, just as theology accepts the anteriority of God as it grinds against the apparent inevitability of comprehensive being, the theologian may prove to outline a new theology of being.[81] This new theology of being may exposit that being (*esse*) is *just this dynamism between God and being* (*ens*), in the very being of *my being between* (*inter-esse*) the two, as I am unsettled and frustrated yet found in an ongoing redemption in God's salvation. This ontological salvation would come christologically, through the justification and transformation of being and my being through Jesus Christ. Of course, this 'new' theology of being would be little more than the old theology of faith.

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[79]Therefore, I clarify that *I am* convinced of the impasse, though I admit others may not be. This point is not just idiosyncratic, because the question of being is always a question of *my* being as well as of being-itself, such that it affects and effects *my being in the world*. Those are just the stakes of living an examined life, be it a philosophical or theological one.

[80]I do not, however, mean to borrow it in the same way that Radical Orthodox theologian John Milbank suggests in his 'The Sublime in Kierkegaard', in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 131–56.

[81]As well known, Pope John Paul II called for a renewed theology of being in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, to which Hemming offered a most thorough, critical and sympathetic response, with keen awareness of the intellectual–historical context in which such a call comes. See Laurence Paul Hemming, 'John Paul II's Call for a Renewed Theology of Being: Just What Did He Mean, and How Can We Respond?', *Studies in Christian Ethics* 21/2 (2008), pp. 194–218.