

# Being is double

Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank  
on God, being and analogy

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the contemporary dispute between philosopher Jean-Luc Marion and theologian John Milbank concerning the relation of God to being and the nature of theological analogy.

I argue that Marion and Milbank begin from a shared opposition to Scotist univocity but tend in opposite directions in elaborating their constructive theologies. Marion takes an essentially Dionysian approach, emphasising the divine transcendence “beyond being” to such a degree as to produce an essentially equivocal account of theological analogy. Milbank, on the other hand, inspired particularly by Eckhart, affirms a strong version of the Thomist thesis that God is “being itself” and emphasises divine immanence to such a degree that the analogical distinction between created and uncreated being is virtually collapsed. Both thinkers claim fidelity to the premodern Christian theological tradition, but I show that certain difficulties attend both of their claims. I suggest that the decisive issue between them is the authority which should be granted to Heidegger’s account of being and I argue that it is Milbank’s vision of post-Heideggerian theological method which is to be preferred.

I conclude that Marion and Milbank give two impressive contemporary answers to the ancient riddle of “double being” raised in the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato’s “Parmenides,”* a riddle which queries the relation between absolute First being and derived Second being. Their contrasting solutions cohere with the wider goals of their respective intellectual projects and correspond to the concerns of their respective interlocutors within Continental philosophy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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He himself is the only thing that really is, if you understand what I mean.

- *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's "Parmenides"*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Works by Jean-Luc Marion*

- DMP      *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*. Translated by Jeffrey L. Kosky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- GWB      *God Without Being: Hors-Texte*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- I&D      *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*. Translated by Thomas A. Carlson. Fordham University Press, 2001.
- "TA&OT" "Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy." In *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, edited by Christian Sheppard and Michael Kessler. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

### *Works by John Milbank*

- BR      *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- BSO      *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People*. Malden: Blackwell, 2014.
- SM      *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005.
- TST      *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. 2nd ed. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006.
- Vico 1      *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744, Part 1: The Early Metaphysics*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991.
- Vico 2      *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744, Part 2: Language, Law and History*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992.

### *Works by Thomas Aquinas*

- SCG      Anderson, James F., Vernon J. Bourke, Anton Pegis, and Charles J. O'Neil, trans. *Thomas Aquinas: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles*. 4 vols. New York: Hanover House, 1955.

*ST* Daniel J. Sullivan, ed. *Thomas Aquinas: The Summa Theologica*. Translated by The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Willimantont: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.

## INTRODUCTION

### *A debate about double being*

Quite accidentally, in a remote Italian monastery in the early 1870's, one of the most curious texts in the history of Western thought was discovered. Unknown for millennia, without an autograph and only partially preserved, it became known as the *Anonymous Commentary on Plato's "Parmenides"*.<sup>1</sup> Its fragmentary palimpsests were in hand for just a few decades—long enough to produce a critical edition of the Greek text—before slipping history's grasp once again when they were destroyed by fire at the University of Turin in 1904.<sup>2</sup> The anonymous third century text is particularly intriguing because it appears to be the first moment in the Western tradition where God is identified with being, overturning the Platonic orthodoxy of the One ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας,<sup>3</sup> and anticipating the scholastic theologies of *esse*.<sup>4</sup> The final sentences of

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<sup>1</sup> Though various possibilities have been floated, the author of the text remains unknown. Pierre Hadot's watershed argument for Porphyry in *Porphyre et Victorinus* (Études augustinienes, 1968) has been criticised but remains influential. Some now argue for a pre-Plotinian author, while others judge that the text is too ambiguous and best left anonymous. See Kevin Corrigan "Platonism and Gnosticism: The Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides, Middle or Neoplatonic?," in *Gnosticism and Later Platonism: Themes, Figures, and Texts*, ed. John Turner and Ruth Majercik (Society of Biblical Literature, 2000) and the essays collected in John Turner and Kevin Corrigan, eds., *Plato's Parmenides and Its Heritage Vol. 1, History and Interpretation from the Old Academy to Later Platonism and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) for a thorough discussion of the scholarship. Whatever the particulars of authorship, the fact that the earliest identification of God with being was almost certainly the conjecture of a pagan philosopher is an irony that will not be lost on readers of Étienne Gilson.

<sup>2</sup> See Gerald Bechtle, *The Anonymous Commentary on Plato's "Parmenides"* (Bern: Verlag P. Haupt, 1999), 17–21 for a brief account of the textual history.

<sup>3</sup> See John Rist, "Mysticism and Transcendence in Later Neoplatonism," *Hermes* 92, no. 2 (1964): 213–225; Rein Undusk, "Infinity on the Threshold of Christianity: The Emergence of a Positive

Fragment V make the novel proposal:

Behold whether Plato does not seem to speak in riddles, because the One, which is ‘beyond substance’ and beyond being [ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας καί ὄντος] on the one hand is neither being nor substance nor activity [ἐνέργεια], but on the other hand acts and is itself pure act, so that it is also the being before being [τὸ εἶναι τὸ πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος]. By participating in it the other One receives a derivative being [ἐκκλινόμενον τὸ εἶναι], which indeed is to participate in being. Thus, being is double [διττὸν τὸ εἶναι]: the one exists prior to being, the other is brought forth from the One which is beyond, the absolute being [τοῦ εἶναι τὸ ἀπόλυτον] and as it were ‘idea’ of being, participating in which some other One has become existent, with which the being which is produced by it is yoked...<sup>5</sup>

The Commentator is wrestling with the “riddle” implicit in Plato’s corpus concerning the kind of existence enjoyed by the first principle. On the one hand—and here the Commentator alludes to the Good beyond being in the *Republic* VI and the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (137c)—Plato says that the One must be located outside

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Concept Out of Negativity,” *Trames* 13, no. 4 (December 2009): 328–36; Mark J. Edwards, “Christians and the Parmenides,” in *Plato’s Parmenides and Its Heritage Vol. 2, Its Reception in Neoplatonic, Jewish, and Christian Texts.*, ed. John Turner and Kevin Corrigan (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 189–98. Some readers also find a certain identification of the One with being in Plotinus (who may or may not predate the A.C.)—see, for example, Kevin Corrigan, “Essence and Existence in the Enneads,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Bechtle, *The Anonymous Commentary*, 252–7; Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 6–9.

<sup>4</sup> The historical lines here are disputed and can be only lightly drawn, but it is clear that Victorinus and then Boethius are important mediators, reaching Aquinas at his *De Hebdomadibus* commentary. See Luc Brisson, “The Reception of the Parmenides before Proclus,” in *Plato’s Parmenides and Its Heritage Vol. 2, Its Reception in Neoplatonic, Jewish, and Christian Texts*, ed. John Turner and Kevin Corrigan (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 111–18; David Bradshaw, “Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being,” *The Review of Metaphysics* (1999): 383–401; Mary Clark, “A Neoplatonic Commentary on the Christian Trinity: Marius Victorinus,” in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic O’Meara (New York: State University of New York Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Fragment V, translated in David Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 103. The final phrase is omitted by Bradshaw and here is taken from Gerald Bechtle’s translation in *The Anonymous Commentary*, 62.

the realm of multiple, particular, determined being, for it is a perfect unity that is “neither being nor substance nor activity.” On the other hand, Plato makes the seemingly contradictory claim in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* that the One “participates in substance”.<sup>6</sup> How can this be so? The Commentator’s solution to Plato’s riddle is to split his conception of being in two—“being,” he declares, “is double”. The One, itself split into a First and Second One, corresponds to this double sense of being. The First One possesses “being before being,” that is, “absolute” infinitival being, and it is the source and “idea” of the “derived” being which constitutes the Second One.<sup>7</sup> As the fragment trails off, the Commentator notes that the two poles of this double being are “yoked” one to the other, with the Second “participating in” and “brought forth” from the First.

This ancient conjecture of a “double being” provides an excellent heuristic for examining the present-day debate concerning God, being and analogy that has been carried on between theologian John Milbank and philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. For these contemporary thinkers—and for Christian theology in general—Plato’s riddle is transposed into somewhat different terms. The two poles of the Commentator’s

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<sup>6</sup> Fragment V, translated in Bechtle, *The Anonymous Commentary*, 58–9. The Commentator is alluding to *Parmenides* (142b–143b).

<sup>7</sup> This split is predicated on a subtle integration of Aristotelian elements with the Commentator’s Platonic sources, as the talk about “act” suggests. Bradshaw notes that “the Commentator, in attempting to explain his innovative distinction between pure being (τὸ εἶναι) and derivative being (τὸ ὄν), appeals to Aristotle’s notion of *energeia*... in its verbal form... [and] equates the One’s *energein* with *to einai*, thereby making the Plotinian account of the One’s self-directed activity into an account of pure, unqualified being.” (Bradshaw, *Aristotle East and West*, 107.)

doublet correspond to divine Trinitarian being and created being, and the “yoke” between them correspond, in the Thomist context at least, to theories of participation and theological analogy.<sup>8</sup> In taking up double being my intention is not to critique Marion and Milbank’s theology from the Commentator’s point of view, nor to analyse the use and influence of the *Commentary* in their theologies.<sup>9</sup> Rather, I will use the Commentator’s double being as a tool or touchstone, a means of conceptually clarifying the contemporary debate. For it provides an exceptionally helpful way of articulating the perplexity at the root of the old Platonic riddle: given the set of all existing things, is the First to be found inside or outside of this set, or somehow both or neither? This ancient perplexity remains very much alive in the projects of Milbank and Marion.

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<sup>8</sup> Interesting complexities ensued when “double being” was historically absorbed into a Trinitarian context. Victorinus, for example, identified the Father with the First, and ascribes only Second being to the Son-Logos (see *Adversus Arium* IV.19). Later Christian ontologies, on the other hand, deliberately flattened the various hypostases, henads and triads of the Neoplatonists into a straightforward Creator/creature distinction, and in these contexts the Commentator’s double being becomes a reference not to intra-Trinitarian difference, but to the difference between divine and created being. Balthasar is perhaps correct to suggest that this equalising of being among the Trinitarian hypostases “is in truth the most conspicuous victory of Christian thought over Greek thought” (*Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 19n16). In line with these more mature Christian ontologies, “double being” will in this thesis mark the division between the First being of the Trinitarian Godhead and the Second being of creation.

<sup>9</sup> Milbank discusses the text in “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 41, and “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On The Modalities of Terror,” in *Belief and Metaphysics*, ed. Conor Cunningham and Peter Candler (SCM Press, 2008), 39–40. As far as I know, Marion has not addressed the *Anonymous Commentary* in print.

*The Marion-Milbank "debate"*

In 1995 John Milbank wrote a now somewhat infamous article titled "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," in which he sharply criticised Jean-Luc Marion's proposal of a "God without being".<sup>10</sup> Since then he has carried on a long critical engagement with Marion's work.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Kevin Hart judges that Milbank has been Marion's "most demanding conversational partner from within theology."<sup>12</sup> Their "conversation" has been a curious one, however, as Marion has declined to write a single word in reply to the sizeable number of publications in which Milbank appraises his work.<sup>13</sup> Despite this silence from Marion, their parallel oeuvres have flourished into two impressive and rival answers to the contemporary question of God and being and their long-running disagreement has taken on the character of a debate, if only indirectly from Marion's side. This thesis is a modest attempt to illumine and adjudicate that debate.

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<sup>10</sup> "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," *New Blackfriars* 76, no. 895 (July 1, 1995): 325–343, reprinted in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 36–52.

<sup>11</sup> This is a little misleading—Milbank's earliest reference to Marion's work actually comes in "Enclaves, or Where Is the Church?," *New Blackfriars* 73, no. 861 (1992): 341–352. Here Milbank states that "I am not sure that I can follow [Marion] in his account of a priority of charity as the 'pre-ontological'" (352n1). In 1992, Milbank may have been "not sure" about Marion's theological ontology but by 1995 this uncertainty had certainly evaporated and "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics" established the critical orientation toward Marion that remains essentially unchanged today.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin Hart, ed., *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 42.

<sup>13</sup> Milbank addresses Marion in somewhere between thirty and forty publications, depending on how one divides his essay collections. In chapter 3 I will consider a 2005 interview which represents the closest Marion has come to addressing Milbank's work in print, though even there Milbank is not explicitly named.

Part of the intrigue of the Marion-Milbank debate is the breadth of philosophical and theological convictions which they hold in common. As others have observed, these two thinkers “dispute the same territory,” and though Milbank may be cranky with Marion he remains Marion’s “cranky ally.”<sup>14</sup> Three shared intellectual contexts should be noted in particular. First, Marion and Milbank are both Catholic Christian thinkers. Marion’s commitments on this point are well known and though Milbank is ecclesologically Anglican, his theology has in recent years become increasingly Catholic in its orientation.<sup>15</sup> Both see themselves developing doctrinally orthodox projects in the tradition of the *nouvelle théologie*.<sup>16</sup> This ecclesiological location sets the Marion-Milbank debate at some remove from other confessional treatments of

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<sup>14</sup> Kevin Hart, *Postmodernism: A Beginner’s Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2004), 151; Chris Fleming and John O’Carroll, “God and Phenomenology: Re-Reading Jean-Luc Marion,” *Compass: A Review of Topical Theology* 40, no. 3 (2006): 39, my italics.

<sup>15</sup> Milbank’s increasing attention to Aquinas is an implicit indicator of this, but one can point to many explicit indications. Milbank notes that “we consider that future unity under the *aegis* of Rome... is what should be sought” (“The Grandeur of Reason and the Perversity of Rationalism: Radical Orthodoxy’s First Decade,” in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. Simon Oliver and John Milbank (London; New York: Routledge, 2009), 395–6). He frequently describes his theological approach as “Catholic”—see, for example, “Life, or Gift and Glissando,” *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1, no. 1 & 2 (2012): 147; “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek,” in *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?*, ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 218. Cf. “The Programme of Radical Orthodoxy,” in *Radical Orthodoxy?: A Catholic Enquiry*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000), 36: “Radical Orthodoxy... can equally be espoused by those who are formally ‘protestant’, yet whose theory and practice essentially accords with the catholic vision of the Patristic period through to the high Middle Ages.”

<sup>16</sup> Marion, to cite one explicit instance, names Balthasar and Danielou as two of his “masters” (*God Without Being: Hors-Texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xix). Milbank notes that what is “to be salvaged from twentieth-century theology [is] mainly the contribution of the *nouvelle théologie*” and names Henri de Lubac as “the exemplary exponent of the *nouvelle théologie*” (“Grandeur of Reason,” 368). See also his book-length study of de Lubac, *The Suspended Middle: Henri De Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

theological ontology that have been elaborated in the last century, most notably the various Protestant approaches that follow in the wake of Barth, both in the mid-twentieth century and more recently.<sup>17</sup>

Second, both are Continental thinkers. Apart from a few allusions to Wittgenstein, one is hard-pressed to find a single reference to analytic thinkers in Marion's work. Milbank's recent work displays an appreciative reception of thinkers such as Wilfred Sellars, David Lewis, John McDowell, David Armstrong and Jonathan Lowe, but for the most part he too resists analytic approaches.<sup>18</sup> He rejects "the general run of analytic approaches to transcendence... [as] partly a matter of good taste," but also because of their tendency to "idolatrously reduce God to the ontic, or regard him as if he were simply a very large 'single being.'"<sup>19</sup> The root issue for Milbank (and for

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<sup>17</sup> Eberhard Jüngel's "analogy of advent" is probably the most important Protestant contribution after the Barth-Przywara-Balthasar period—see his *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute Between Theism and Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 226–98. Significant contemporary Protestant treatments of theological ontology have come, to name just a few major instances, in Bruce McCormack's watershed *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford University Press, 1995) and subsequent writings, Robert Jenson's *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002) and *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. 207–23, and Stanley Grenz's *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics"; "Mystery of Reason". Also relevant are Milbank's 2011 Stanton Lectures, which are titled "Philosophy: A Theological Critique." These eight lectures are under revision for publication with Wiley-Blackwell, but manuscripts are available at <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/2011/03/12/john-milbanks-stanton-lectures-2011> (accessed 5 May 2013).

<sup>19</sup> "Stanton Lecture #4: Transcendence without Participation" (2011): 6. He uncharitably describes Plantinga and Wolterstorff's Reformed Epistemology here as "bizarre." Elsewhere, Milbank points to Richard Swinburne and Thomas Morris as illustrative of unfortunate theological approaches—see

Marion too, I would surmise,) is the commitment among many analytic philosophers of religion to the univocity of religious speech.<sup>20</sup> Following Marion and Milbank's proclivities, this study will be concerned almost exclusively with Continental approaches to God and being.

Third, both subscribe to what one can loosely call the "French genealogy" of modernity.<sup>21</sup> This is an enormously important point for all of the discussion to come and I will treat it in some detail here. The French genealogy is an interpretation of Western intellectual history which repeats and modifies Heidegger's "history of being".<sup>22</sup> Here the appearance of ontotheology and metaphysics (in the pernicious

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"Faith, Reason and Imagination: The Study of Theology and Philosophy in the 21st Century," 2007, 6–7, [http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank\\_StudyofTheologyandPhilosophyinthet21stCentury.pdf](http://www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_StudyofTheologyandPhilosophyinthet21stCentury.pdf) (accessed 5 May 2013).

<sup>20</sup> Milbank suggests that "the Scotist shift... establishes the ultimate presuppositions of analytic philosophy itself." (*Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), xxvn41. D. Stephen Long also observes an "alliance between Scotist theology and some versions of analytic philosophy" (*Speaking of God: Theology, Language and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 118). For a defense of univocity, see Richard Cross, "Idolatry and Religious Language," *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2008): 190–196. For a critique of univocity from an analytic perspective, see Nick Trakakis' "Does Univocity Entail Idolatry?," *Sophia* 49, no. 4 (December 1, 2010): 535–555.

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Chris Hackett for this expression. There is a sizable secondary literature on the French genealogy to be consulted. Excellent bibliographical starting points are the references listed in Wayne Hankey, "Why Heidegger's 'History' of Metaphysics Is Dead," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2004): 432n16, and Catherine Pickstock, "Duns Scotus: His Historical and Contemporary Significance," *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 569–70n2.

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger elaborates this "history" across his whole oeuvre, but see particularly "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) and the essays collected in *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

sense) is subjected to, as Milbank puts it, a “drastic retiming”.<sup>23</sup> The “fall” of philosophy is no longer located at the transition from a pure Presocratic apprehension of being to metaphysical Socratism as Heidegger argued, but 1500 years later in the late medieval period when Aquinas’ synthesis of the premodern theological tradition was fragmented by Scotus, Ockham, and other Christian theologians. Many things contribute to this fragmentation, but the most important is Scotist univocity.<sup>24</sup> For Aquinas, speech about God is neither univocal nor equivocal but rather “names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense.”<sup>25</sup> Duns Scotus rejects the Thomist position and argues that speech is predicated of God and creatures with the same essential meaning—that is, univocally—only according to an infinite or finite measure. He claims that a word with multiple referents must function by picking out something held in common by each referent, and thus analogical predication must reduce to a core of univocity.<sup>26</sup> This novel understanding of theological speech underwrites a univocity of being that sets divine and created being within a single concept and continuum of existence. This is for the French genealogists the original and definitive expression of ontotheology: God is made, in Marion’s words, “part and parcel of the general being of the world,” and Scotus’

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<sup>23</sup> John Milbank, “Stanton Lecture #1: The Return of Metaphysics in the 21st Century” (2011): 8.

<sup>24</sup> Here I follow Marion’s exposition in “The Idea of God,” in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263–304.

<sup>25</sup> *ST* 1a.13.5.c.

<sup>26</sup> See *Ordinatio* 8.3.27 and the discussions in David B. Burrell, “John Duns Scotus: The Univocity of Analogous Terms,” *The Monist* 49, no. 4 (1965): 650–1; Thomas Williams, “The Doctrine of Univocity Is True and Salutory,” *Modern Theology* 21, no. 4 (2005): 575–585.

intellectual manoeuvre marks, in Milbank's words, "the turning point in the destiny of the West."<sup>27</sup>

This shift in conception of theological speech underwrites a variety of philosophical developments in subsequent centuries: God is integrated into the new disciplines of *metaphysica* and *ontologia* as another (infinite) object; epistemology is reconceived as representation of a mathematicised nature by a sovereign subject; the notion of being is gradually thinned from the medieval plenitudinous *esse* to become, eventually, Kant's vacuous predicate or Hegel's poor and most abstract determination. Scotus, Ockham, Suárez and Cajetan thus prepare the way for Wolff, Descartes and Leibniz, and then Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. The ontotheology, atheism, and nihilism of modernity are therefore, according to the French genealogy, a result of prior decisions made *within* Western theology.<sup>28</sup> The death of God, as Fergus Kerr aptly sums up the story, was "an inside job."<sup>29</sup>

The key progenitors of this modified Heideggerian genealogy have been primarily French: Jean-François Courtine, Olivier Boulnois, Éric Alliez, Jacob Schmutz, Andre

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<sup>27</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, "God and the Gift: A Continental Perspective," in *God's Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, ed. Rupert Shortt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 146; Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 44.

<sup>28</sup> Milbank has also suggested that a parallel though less dramatic story may be told regarding Eastern theology—see "Christianity and Platonism in East and West," in *Divine Essence and Divine Energies: Ecumenical Reflections on the Presence of God in Eastern Orthodoxy*, ed. Constantinos Athanasopoulos and Christoph Schneider (James Clarke & Co, 2013), esp. 177–186.

<sup>29</sup> Fergus Kerr, "Aquinas after Marion," *New Blackfriars* 76, no. 895 (1995): 360.

de Muralt, Michel Corbin and Alain de Libera, among others, all of whom work “ultimately in the wake of Étienne Gilson, whose views they have nonetheless heavily qualified.”<sup>30</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar’s account of Western thought represents an important contribution from outside the French context.<sup>31</sup> There is, of course, diversity amongst these historians, but they share a common focus on the post-Aquinas scholastics as the key moment for the opening of modern ontotheology and indeed modernity itself.<sup>32</sup> Jean-Luc Marion is himself one of the genealogy’s most important contributors, having produced several significant historical researches.<sup>33</sup> Milbank makes frequent use of the French genealogy.<sup>34</sup> His work has

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<sup>30</sup> Milbank, *TST*, xxvn41.

<sup>31</sup> See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol. 4: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, trans. Brian McNeil and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> The French genealogy should therefore be understood as a precursor to Hans Blumenberg’s influential account in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), even if Blumenberg displays little awareness of the Gilsonian stream which precedes him. Stephen Webb’s complaint that Radical Orthodoxy “do not acknowledge their debt to Blumenberg’s historical analysis” is therefore a little chronologically confused (*Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 140.) But Webb’s error is redeemed by intimating such a fine précis of Milbank’s whole project—The *Illegitimacy* of the Modern Age! The French genealogy may also be understood, on the other hand, as a counterpoint to Jüngel’s telling of “the history of the thought of God as it moves toward resignation,” in *God as the Mystery of the World* (8-9 and *passim.*), according to which it is the “pious confession of ignorance” of the pre-Scotist apophatic tradition which must “necessarily end” with the modern death of God.

<sup>33</sup> The most important are his early studies of Descartes and the Cartesian period. With the notable exception of *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes: analogie, création des vérités éternelles et fondement* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1991), most of these been translated into English: *Descartes’s Grey Ontology, Cartesian Science and Aristotelian Thought in the Regulae*, trans. Sarah E. Donahue (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2004); *On Descartes’ Metaphysical Prism: The Constitution and the Limits of Onto-Theo-Logy in Cartesian Thought*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999); *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007). Marion’s essay “The Idea of God,” in *The Cambridge History of*

contributed little original historical scholarship, but it has been perhaps the most important vehicle for bringing the French genealogy to the attention of contemporary Anglophone theology.

One should not underestimate the importance of the French genealogy for Milbank and Marion. It is the most basic shared presupposition in their approaches to the question of God and being.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, it is so fundamental that Marion can name univocity as “the first criterion of onto-theo-logy” and Milbank can call theology in the Scotist style a “rival Christianity” to that of premodern orthodoxy.<sup>36</sup> The ontotheology of univocity is Marion and Milbank’s mutual *bête noire* and, beginning from a shared starting point in Continental and Catholic philosophical theology, they

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*Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 263–304 summarises much of his earlier work on Descartes and the path to modernity.

<sup>34</sup> Milbank confirms his reliance on the French genealogy in countless places, but a few particularly illuminating examples are *TST*, xxiv–xxxi; “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 479–500; “Stanton #1”; “Stanton #4”.

<sup>35</sup> I would therefore contest Merold Westphal’s analysis in “The Importance of Overcoming Metaphysics for the Life of Faith,” *Modern Theology* 23, no. 2 (2007): 270–1, where he suggests that “Marion does not tell the story as Milbank does, with Scotus and Ghent as chief villains.” This is essentially false (Milbank learns the story *from* Marion) and obscures the most interesting aspect of their dispute, namely how two thinkers with such a breadth of kindred convictions can arrive at such seemingly antithetical constructive theologies. Wayne Hankey is correct, if hyperbolic: “There is almost nothing in the Radical Orthodox constructions which is not picked up in one way or another from French thinkers.” (“One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History,” in *Levinas and the Greek Heritage, Followed by One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, ed. Jean-Marc Narbonne and Wayne Hankey (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 187.)

<sup>36</sup> Marion, “Thomas Aquinas and Onto-Theo-Logy,” in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Christian Sheppard and Michael Kessler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 50; Milbank, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 497–500, section titled “The Two Rival Metaphysics are Rival Christianities.”

have each elaborated a constructive solution to this problem as the foundation of their respective intellectual projects.<sup>37</sup> The double being debate which I examine in this thesis turns on the contrasts between these two theological solutions to univocity.

*Thesis question*

The crucial item in Marion and Milbank's theological solutions is a new account of theological analogy. Investigating these accounts will be the heart of the present study. The particular question this thesis proposes to answer is: *What is the nature of the analogy between First and Second being according to Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank? How do their accounts differ, why, and which is to be preferred?* This may be put in slightly different terms: *Is God "beyond being," "being itself" or somehow both of these? How do Marion and Milbank think these claims should be coordinated and understood?*

My focus on this particular question about God, being and analogy sets a range of other widely-discussed elements in the theological debate between Marion and Milbank outside the ambit of this thesis. I do not address Marion and Milbank's reflections on ethics, economics and politics,<sup>38</sup> their accounts of sex and erotic love,<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Christina Gschwandtner suggests that "Marion's work in theology especially, but possibly even his phenomenology, constitute attempts to recover a language for the divine that would escape univocity" (*Reading Jean-Luc Marion: Exceeding Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 128–9). Milbank states that French genealogy "can be crudely summed up as 'it all went wrong with Scotus'" and suggests that "Radical Orthodoxy is... offering a theological response to this newly accepted genealogy." ("Grandeur of Reason," 379–80).

*Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003)

<sup>38</sup> Three important texts for Milbank are *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge,

nor their respective theological epistemologies.<sup>40</sup> I address their dispute over “the gift” only as it pertains to the issue of being and theological analogy.<sup>41</sup> I do not examine Marion’s influential phenomenology of givenness in detail.<sup>42</sup> Though I will

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2003), *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009) and *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People*. (Malden: Blackwell, 2014). Though Marion has written less here, one may get a sense of his approach in “From the Other to the Individual,” in *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*, ed. Regina Schwartz (New York: Routledge, 2004); “The Originary Otherness of the Ego: A Rereading of Descartes’ Second Meditation,” in *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 3–29; “The Freedom to Be,” in *Prolegomena to Charity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 31–52.

<sup>39</sup> See Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) and Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). See also Derek J. Morrow, “The Love ‘without Being’ That Opens (to) Distance Part One: Exploring the Givenness of the Erotic Phenomenon with J-L. Marion,” *The Heythrop Journal* 46, no. 3 (2005): 281–298.

<sup>40</sup> See my unpublished paper, “A Thinking and Feeling Soul: John Milbank and Jean-Luc Marion on Theological Rationality,” 2013.

<sup>41</sup> For Milbank, see especially “Can a Gift Be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic,” *Modern Theology* 11, no. 1 (1995): 119–161; “The Gift and the Given,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2–3 (May 1, 2006): 444–447; “The Transcendality of the Gift: A Summary in Answer to 12 Questions,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 65 (January 1, 2009): 887–897. For Marion see especially “On the Gift: A Discussion Between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); “Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of the Gift,” in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 80–100; *The Reason of the Gift*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011). The two seminal texts in the background of their debate is Marcel Mauss’ 1954 classic *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: W. W. Norton, 2000) and Derrida’s *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). For discussions of Marion and Milbank’s contributions see Hart, *Postmodernism*, 136–154; Tamsin Jones Farmer, “Revealing the Invisible: Gregory of Nyssa on the Gift of Revelation,” *Modern Theology* 21, no. 1 (2005): 67–85; Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology*, 4th ed. (Fordham University Press, 2001), 172–183; Catherine Keller, “Is That All? Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank’s Being Reconciled,” in *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to “Radical Orthodoxy,”* ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (New York: Continuum, 2006), 18–35.

<sup>42</sup> It is elaborated at length in *Being Given*. Christina Gschwandtner’s *Reading Jean-Luc Marion* and Robyn Horner’s *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-Logical Introduction* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005) give a good

take up the issue tangentially, the question of God and being is also distinct from the specific doctrine of creation.<sup>43</sup> I do not address in detail Marion's controversial relationship to his confrères in French phenomenology after the "theological turn,"<sup>44</sup> nor Radical Orthodoxy's relation to contemporary philosophy of religion and Christian theology.<sup>45</sup> While I pass over all of these issues, I would contend that the material I do address in this study fundamentally shapes all of them and that these wider questions therefore cannot be properly understood without a clear account of their roots in Marion and Milbank's principal debate about double being. For, as this study will show, it is here in their constructive accounts of double being that their deepest (and often underappreciated) disagreements come to light. There is in the literature no sustained analysis of this most crucial element in their work. My

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orientation to this central aspect of Marion's work.

<sup>43</sup> For critical treatments of Milbank's conception of creation, see James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 185–230; Brendan Peter Triffett, "Plurally Possessed: Gift and Participation in the Theo-Ontology of John Milbank" (PhD, University of Tasmania, 2011), <http://eprints.utas.edu.au/12514/>.

<sup>44</sup> I will, however, briefly address Marion's theological *apologia* to his contemporaries in my conclusion. Recent and substantial treatments of Marion's work in the context of contemporary French thought may be found in Enda McCaffrey, *The Return of Religion in France: From Democratisation to Postmetaphysics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Malden: Polity Press, 2012); Christina Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics?: Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); J. Aaron Simmons and Bruce Ellis Benson, *The New Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba, *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, Anthony Paul Smith and Daniel Whistler, *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011); Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*; Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider, eds., *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Laurence Paul Hemming, ed., *Radical Orthodoxy?: A Catholic Enquiry* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); James K. A. Smith and James Olthuis, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

expositions in this thesis will fill this important lacuna and set the terms for more sophisticated treatments of the various other issues in the debate between them.

There is one other limit to the scope of this thesis which is important to note—this study is not an historical one.<sup>46</sup> Much of the debate between Marion and Milbank turns on the conception of “being” which is at work in the premodern theological tradition and large portions of chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to tracing their respective readings of historical figures such as Denys, Aquinas, and Eckhart. However, though I occasionally indicate how their readings stand in relation to current scholarship, my primary intention is not to assess historical accuracy but rather to elucidate the way

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<sup>46</sup> There are several extant English monographs that deal with Marion’s historical treatment of the theological tradition—see Tamsin Jones, *A Genealogy of Marion’s Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Christina Gschwandtner, “Sparks of Meaning at the Points of Friction: At the Boundary Between Philosophy and Theology in the Work of Jean-Luc Marion” (Ph.D., DePaul University, 2003), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/287981070>; Derek J. Morrow, “The Phenomenology of Cartesian Metaphysics According to Jean-Luc Marion” (Ph.D., University of Dallas, 2009), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/304619048>. Milbank’s history has attracted much attention and controversy—see, for example, Paul DeHart, *Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Inquiry* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley, eds., *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric, and Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Neil Ormerod, “‘It Is Easy to See’: The Footnotes of John Milbank,” *Philosophy and Theology* 11, no. 2 (1999): 257–264. The “RO reading” of Scotus has attracted much criticism, most of which may be located via the references in Pickstock, “Duns Scotus”. Wayne Hankey has given particular attention to Milbank and Marion’s appropriations of Neoplatonism, a key theme in the ‘double being’ dispute—see, amongst others, his “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” in *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric, and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones (New York: Routledge, 1998); “The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena,” *Hermathena* no. 165 (1998): 9–70; “Misrepresenting Neoplatonism in Contemporary Christian Dionysian Polemic,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (December 11, 2008): 683–703; “Radical Orthodoxy’s Poiēsis: Ideological Historiography and Anti-Modern Polemic,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2006).

their historical retrievals contribute to their constructive projects. (To go further than this by carrying on a comprehensive historical evaluation of their interpretations would be a task far beyond the constraints of the present study—this would be so for even one historical source, let alone the dizzying range of thinkers whom Milbank and Marion call upon.) The only significant exception to this will be in chapter 3, where I probe Marion and Milbank’s claim to Thomist credentials in their accounts of double being. While one cannot and indeed should not divorce the domains in any strict way, this thesis is primarily a consideration of contemporary philosophical theology, not historical theology.

#### *Thesis structure*

This thesis proceeds in four chapters. The first two chapters give thorough expositions of Marion and Milbank’s respective accounts of God, being and analogy. I draw on the full range of their writings, clarify a range of subtleties in both of their mature positions and offer an interpretation of the development between their early and later work. My exposition of Marion is a little longer, balancing my discussions of Milbank’s critique of Marion in chapter 3. In each chapter I include a section addressing the most outstanding “perplexities” of each account. For Marion these concern his troubled claim to a Thomist lineage; for Milbank they concern his

complicated treatment of henological and pre-ontological themes.<sup>47</sup> Throughout each exposition I use the Anonymous Commentator's double being paradigm as a means of ordering and clarifying the sprawling diversity of theological lexica that both thinkers use. These expositions are essential for gaining a clear understanding of Marion and Milbank's theological responses to the French genealogy and they will prepare us for the comparative and evaluative discussions carried on in the last two chapters.

My exposition of Marion will show that his account of double being is predicated on an equivocity of being between First and Second. Marion construes transcendence in strictly non-ontological terms, a construal which is prompted by his Heideggerian and modern conception of Second being and which underwrites his proposal for a pre-ontological divine Charity. This same approach is expressed in many ways across Marion's writings, whether in the language of the Dionysian "beyond being", Thomist *ipsum esse* and analogy, phenomenological givenness, or a range of further alternatives. My exposition of Milbank will show that, contrary to Marion, Milbank labours to collapse the gap between First and Second being by affirming a near-identity of the two. The radical immanence of God to creation implied here is the basis for a more positive, non-modern and non-Heideggerian account of Second being. While Milbank's account of analogical predication follows a basically Thomist

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<sup>47</sup> Gilson coined the term *énologie* in *L'être et l'essence* (Paris: Vrin, 1948), 45, to indicate the pre-ontological priority of the One in Plotinus and Proclus. It is rendered "monology" in *Being and Some Philosophers*, however, as others have done, I anglicise the French to keep the Greek  $\epsilon\upsilon\upsilon$  in play.

line, his theological ontology and his use of pre-ontological themes carry him beyond his Thomist starting point to an almost pantheist conclusion.

My third chapter is titled “Disputes” and brings these two accounts of double being into direct confrontation and so carries on the debate that, because of Marion’s silence, has never quite materialised. I treat the three issues that in my judgement constitute the most important loci of disagreement between Marion and Milbank: analogical attribution, theological ontology and post-Heideggerian theological method. In the course of each section I trace Milbank’s own critique of Marion and offer my own evaluation of both their positions, judging each dispute from the Thomist point of view as I understand it. I argue that Milbank’s approach to analogical predication is to be preferred because Marion’s approach reduces finally to an unacceptable equivocity of speech. I argue that from a Thomist point of view both protagonists have troubles in their theological ontology: Marion with his dichotomy of love and being; Milbank with his pantheistic leanings. In the third and most fundamental dispute concerning theological method after Heidegger, I argue strongly in favour of Milbank’s position. Marion refuses to countenance a conception of being other than his own modern and Heideggerian construal, and this refusal is the root of the various problems in his account of double being.

Having fulfilled its goals of exposition and evaluation, the thesis concludes with a chapter addressing the remaining aspect of my thesis question, namely *why* Marion

and Milbank's accounts of double being differ. I suggest an interpretation of their debate which highlights their contrasting interlocutors within contemporary Continental philosophy, their basic assessment of "being" in the Christian tradition and their most fundamental aims as philosophers and theologians. In light of this interpretation of the double being debate, I end my investigation by suggesting a few possibilities for mediating between Marion and Milbank's intellectual projects.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *God without being: an exposition of Jean-Luc Marion's account of double being*

“God without being” — this phrase, taken from the English title of what is probably Jean-Luc Marion’s most influential book, aptly sums up the account of double being which he has developed over his career. This chapter aims to demonstrate this claim with reference to the full breadth of Marion’s writings.<sup>1</sup> The chapter proceeds in three sections. The first considers the theological response to Heidegger’s philosophy which Marion develops in his early work under the inspiration of Denys the Areopagite.<sup>2</sup> The second addresses Marion’s conception of theological analogy, beginning with Marion’s evolving view of Aquinas and then considering the variety of other approaches to analogy presented in his work. The third briefly notes some of the most striking perplexities in Marion’s account which emerge in his attempt to claim a Thomist lineage for his position.

I argue that Marion’s position remains consistent throughout his career: God is

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<sup>1</sup> I address all of Marion’s texts which have appeared in English as well as a couple of his most important untranslated essays.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to Pseudo-Dionysius as “Denys” for the sake of brevity, but also as a mark of esteem. As Balthasar says, “one can only rejoice over the fact that he succeeded in vanishing behind the Areopagite for a millennium, and that now afterwards, in the age of the opening of graves, he has been brought out, he stubbornly hides his face, I suppose, for ever. Could he ever have said more than his work has said?” (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics, Vol. 2: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*, trans. Andrew Louth, Francis McDonagh, and Brian McNeil (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 149).

“beyond being” in a Neoplatonic fashion, the First is set apart absolutely from Second being. Marion’s account of analogy permits an equivocal predication of *esse* to the First, but this does not substantially modify his constructive position. I also argue that Marion’s construal of Second being remains strictly modern and Heideggerian. These latter issues—the nature of Second being and the nature of its analogical relation to the First—are profoundly important for this study. As I will show in chapter 2, Milbank contests Marion’s account of issues and the disagreements here will emerge in chapter 3 as the very heart of the debate about double being.

### A. Heidegger’s Second and Denys’ First

#### *Marion’s mixed reception of Heidegger*

To understand Marion’s account of God and being one must begin with his mixed reception of Heidegger. On the one hand, Marion embraces Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology as a useful tool for Christian theology.<sup>3</sup> He rehearses Heidegger’s critique in the biblical register of idolatry, arguing by way of rich phenomenological analyses that a material idol “acts like a mirror” to the viewer’s own gaze, tricking her into thinking she has encountered true transcendence when in fact she is ravished only by her own image.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, the icon functions like a window through

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<sup>3</sup> Or, more properly, Heidegger’s critique of onto-*theo*-logy. It is Aristotle’s *theion*, not *ho theos*, which is first and foremost in Heidegger’s sights. See Martin Heidegger, *Hegel’s Concept of Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), 134–6. See also the discussions in Marion, *GWB*, 63–4 and Kevin Hart’s “The God Effect,” an essay appended to *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 271–298.

<sup>4</sup> *GWB*, 12. Marion’s most substantial treatments of the idol and icon may be found in: *The Idol and*

which the gaze of the (divine) other may meet the viewer, allowing for a truly transcendent encounter—an “exchanging of our gaze for the gaze that iconistically envisages us.”<sup>5</sup> Marion carries these analyses over to conceptual idols and icons and argues that many of the metaphysical posits of modern philosophy and theology function as idols by corralling God into a closed, anterior epistemological or ontological system—“God” is a mere mirror of human speculation.<sup>6</sup> Descartes’ *causa sui* is a typical example of such conceptual idolatry.<sup>7</sup> Against such ontotheologies, Marion seeks a conceptually “iconic” theology, one which apprehends not the “God” of metaphysics but the revealed “Gxd” of Christian faith, and the first test such a theology must pass is the fire of Heidegger’s critique.

However, Marion’s embrace of the Heideggerian critique is tempered by his claim that Heidegger’s philosophy implies a peculiar idolatry of its own. This “second

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*Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Fordham University Press, 2001) *passim.*; *GWB*, 7–52; *The Crossing of the Visible*, trans. James K. A. Smith (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004) *passim.*; *Being Given*, 225–233; “The Idol or the Radiance of the Painting” and “The Icon or the Endless Hermeneutic,” in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 54–81, 104–127.

<sup>5</sup> *GWB*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> Marion’s most extensive elaborations of this theme may be found in *DMP*, 67–127; *GWB*, 29–37; “TA&OT,” 40–58; “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Relief for Theology,” trans. Thomas Carlson, *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 4 (1994): 572–591; “The End of the End of Metaphysics,” trans. Bettina Bergho, *Epoché* 2 (1994): 1–22. Marion generally begins with Heidegger’s diagnoses in “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” which may be found in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 42–74.

<sup>7</sup> See *DMP*, 67–127; “TA&OT,” 40–58.

idolatry” has two elements.<sup>8</sup> First, the methodological restrictions that Heidegger sets around phenomenology unduly limit the question of God. For Heidegger “philosophical research is and remains atheism” and this arbitrary judgement entails that any Christian affirmation of divinity will be reduced to a sub-philosophical claim that supervenes on the purer, prior exercise of “the existential analytic of *Dasein*, and later... the thought of *Sein*.”<sup>9</sup> Heidegger’s demarcation of disciplines in his 1927 lecture “Phenomenology and Theology” confirms this arrangement, granting theology the dignity only of an ontic science and dominion only over the particular ontic region of faith.<sup>10</sup> Second and most importantly, Marion objects to Heidegger’s locating of God within the horizon of Being. Here *Sein* becomes a “screen” which sets the conditions of possibility for God’s appearing:

Being offers in advance the screen on which any “God” that would be constituted would be projected and would appear—since, by definition, to be constituted signifies to be constituted as a being.<sup>11</sup>

This situation precludes conceiving God as anything other than “a being,” even if the

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<sup>8</sup> I follow Marion’s treatment in *GWB* chapters 2 (“Double Idolatry”) and 3 (“The Crossing of Being”) here.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 80, cited at *GWB*, 42, 68; *GWB*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Theology,” in *The Piety of Thinking: Essays by Martin Heidegger*, trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 5–21. Marion discusses Heidegger’s lecture in *I&D*, 212–15; *GWB*, 66–73; “The Possible and Revelation,” in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 10–11; “On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy,” trans. Eduardo Jose E. Calasanz and John Carlo P. Uy, *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 13, no. 1–3 (2009): 55–6.

<sup>11</sup> *GWB*, 70, cf. 69–73, 109–11, 217–8n67. See also Xiaoqiang Han’s discussion in “Is Being a ‘Screen’ of God?,” *Res Cogitans* 1, no. 5 (2008): 86–103.

greatest. Heidegger states that “the god also is—if he is—a being and stands as a being within Being and its coming to presence.”<sup>12</sup> But conceiving God within the Fourfold in this fashion can, Marion insists, only result in idolatry:

the proposition “God is a being” itself appears as an idol, because it only returns the aim that, in advance, decides that every possible “God,” present or absent, in one way or another, has to be.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, even as he so acutely diagnoses the ontotheological idolatries of the Western tradition Heidegger produces his own peculiar second idolatry, one which brings to expression the “the chief idolatry, which is the idolatry of Being itself.”<sup>14</sup>

#### *Marion’s Dionysian reply to Heidegger*

Marion’s theological solution to Heidegger’s second idolatry is to posit a God “without being”. God should be thought above not only beings and entities, but above even Being itself, as the transcendent, charitable, pre-ontological source of all, whether *seiendes* or *Sein*. Marion proposes to think God “beyond ontological difference” and to renounce “thinking him on the basis of Being,” for “whence comes the decision that Gxd should have to be, like a being that Being manifests, that is

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<sup>12</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Turning,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 47, cited at *GWB*, 47. I quote Marion’s text here (“if he is”) which modifies Lovitt’s “when he is.”

<sup>13</sup> *GWB*, 44. This argument is also raised in *I&D*, 215–6.

<sup>14</sup> “The Impossible for Man—God,” in *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 22–3.

manifested according to Being?"<sup>15</sup>

The primary inspiration for Marion's proposal is Denys, in whom he finds a God wholly beyond being:

[F]or Denys, neither being [*l'être*] nor being [*l'étant*] offers a proper, or even an improper, name of God. The major argument gives no cause for doubt: το ον is always preceded by τό ἀγαθόν because even non-beings not only "desire" the ἀγαθόν but participate in it... [This] should not be understood simply, in the classically metaphysical meaning, in the sense that God "...is not a being who is in a certain way, but who is absolutely," nor even in the more radical sense that God "is not, but is himself the being of beings; not that beings alone come from the being before all time, but also the very being of beings." Instead, this surpassing of beings must be understood otherwise, in the decisive sense according to which God, as goodness and αἴτια, designates "the principle of beings, on the basis of which all beings whatsoever as well as being itself and every principle are characterized"... the first (or the last) of the de-nominations of God will have to be drawn from the horizon of the good rather than from that of being.<sup>16</sup>

There may be ambiguity in medieval theologians who speak of God in terms of *esse*, but with Denys "prudence is not even necessary," for it is plain that he never

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<sup>15</sup> *GWB*, 45, 70, italics omitted.

<sup>16</sup> "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of It," in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 146–7. I have omitted some of Marion's Greek citations for brevity. See also Marion's parallel summaries of Denys on being in *I&D*, 139–161; "What Cannot Be Said: Apophasis and the Discourse of Love," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101–4; "Nothing and Nothing Else," in *The Ancients and the Moderns*, ed. Reginald Lilly (Indiana University Press, 1996), 188–92; "TA&OT," 54; "Idipsum: The Name of God According to Augustine," in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 189; *GWB*, 73–83, esp. 75: "Gxd gives Being to beings only because he precedes not only these beings, but also the gift that he delivers to them—to be."

“determines God by being.”<sup>17</sup>

Famously, Marion lifts this Dionysian theology and sets it down alongside Heidegger’s ontology:

This inalienable site [ie. Heidegger’s Being] governs every possible world. Theology would add, it governs every world as created; in short, the finitude according to which, essentially, being is deployed in and for Being, coincides

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<sup>17</sup> “In the Name,” 145. Given that Denys is the primary historical authority for Marion’s constructive theology, it is worth noting that his reading of God and being in Denys finds reasonably strong support in the literature. The literature divides into three broad interpretations on this matter. (1) The first interpretation agrees with Marion that Denys posits God “beyond being” essentially repeating the One of the mainstream Neoplatonists—see Eric D. Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 5–16, 119n23; I. P. Sheldon-Williams, “The Pseudo-Dionysius,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), esp. 469; Christian Schäfer, *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite: An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise on the Divine Names* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 55–88, esp. 68; Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 148–61, esp. 154; Wayne Hankey, “Aquinas, Plato, and Neo-Platonism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55–64. (2) The second interpretation finds in Denys an identification of God with unrestricted “being itself” akin to Aquinas’ theology of *esse*—see Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Continuum, 2001), 87; William Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 36–8; Adrian Pabst, *Metaphysics: The Creation of Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 141–7, where Pabst explicitly argues against Marion in favour of “The Coextension of Being and the Good according to Dionysius”; Kevin Corrigan and L. Michael Harrington, “Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/pseudo-dionysius-areopagite>. (3) The third interpretation takes a middle way, recognising that in contrast to Aquinas the Dionysian God lies “beyond being” but noting that the Areopagite elevates being to a greater priority than do his Neoplatonist forebears—see Fran O’Rourke, “Virtus Essendi: Intensive Being in Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas,” *Dionysius* 15 (1991): 31–80; Fran O’Rourke, “Being and Non-Being in Pseudo-Dionysius,” in *The Relationship between Neoplatonism and Christianity*, ed. Thomas Finan and Vincent Twomey (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1992); Sarah Klitenic Wear and John M. Dillon, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition: Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15–50; Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 186–9. As I will show in chapter 2, Milbank’s reading of Denys oscillates between the first and third of these interpretations of Denys.

with the field of the created; creation indicates not only being but even Being, since Being is only at play in the measure of finitude... let us understand Being/being playing in finitude in *Dasein*, itself overinterpreted as *ens creatum*... In this simple situation, a violence most certainly reverses the Heideggerian topography: the gap between creature and creator is no longer inscribed in the sole ontic region; on the contrary, all of ontological difference would find itself reinscribed in the field of creation: the *creatum*, while remaining neutral, would go beyond the strict domain of the *ens (creatum)* to comprehend as well, though in a different capacity, Being taken as "*neutrale tantum*."<sup>18</sup>

The ontological structure of Marion's Dionysian theology is clearly displayed here. He lifts the entire fold of Being and beings—both poles of the ontological difference—and places it *in toto* within the field of creation, under its *pre-ontological* Creator. Thus Marion modulates Denys' Neoplatonic theology into a Heideggerian key. *Sein* and *seiendes* are coextensive with creation while God himself is beyond being, without being, and therefore free from Heidegger's idolatry of being—a neat solution. (As I will show in chapter 2, one of Milbank's primary critiques of Marion is that this solution is *too neat*—theology cannot merely append a God to Heidegger's Second being; it must offer its own rival account of Second being.)

### *The highest name(s)*

Having demonstrated the inadequacy of "being" as a designation of God, Marion proposes some alternative names that do not compromise God's transcendence. He emphasises that there is no fully adequate "real name of God, because God is beyond

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<sup>18</sup> *GWB*, 109. This Dionysian recasting of Heidegger's ontology is also elaborated at *GWB*, 46 and *I&D*, 207–15.

any name," but still judges that there is a "better possible name," a highest name, and argues that the consistent witness of the scriptures and orthodox theology is that this highest name is Goodness.<sup>19</sup> Being "offers only the next-to-last step of speakable elevation," but Goodness exceeds it as the "first praise."<sup>20</sup> Goodness is the most apt designation because of all the divine names it most clearly indicates God's transcendence. Unlike Being, it "opens a properly unconditioned field" which incorporates even nonbeings, and in which "the very possibility of a categorical statement concerning Gxd ceases to be valid."<sup>21</sup> The "first praise... abolishes every conceptual idol of 'God' in favor of the luminous darkness."<sup>22</sup> More than Being, Goodness "manifests itself as ecstatic transcendence" and "deepens infinitely within a hyperbole that we will see later refer finally to the Trinity."<sup>23</sup>

The transcendence of the Good confirms the "unthinkability" or incomprehensibility of God, a principle to which Marion refers in countless places as a definitive

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<sup>19</sup> "God and the Gift," 145–6. Marion discusses God's proper name-lessness and the priority of Goodness in *I&D*, 141–51; *GWB*, 74–84 and 215–7; "In the Name," 142–5; "What Cannot Be Said," 103–4; "TA&OT," 64; *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), §44–45; *DMP*, §19–20.

<sup>20</sup> *GWB*, 73–6. Marion is specifically drawing on Bonaventure here. Marion argues that it is only with Aquinas' metaphysics of *esse* that there is a "novel break" toward a position "directly opposed to the anteriority, more traditionally accepted in Christian theology, of the good over the *ens*." (*GWB*, 215n49, 74; cf. *I&D*, 212, 244.) As I will discuss in the next section, Marion's mature view of Aquinas retracts the most strident elements of this early critique.

<sup>21</sup> *GWB*, 75–66.

<sup>22</sup> *GWB*, 76.

<sup>23</sup> *I&D*, 154–5.

characteristic, even *the* definitive characteristic, of divinity.<sup>24</sup> It “belongs to the formal definition of God” and constitutes in some respects the very difference between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.<sup>25</sup> This determined commitment to the principle of unthinkability—and one cannot overstate how precious a principle this is for Marion—has particularly significant implications when it is twinned with the coextension of being and intelligibility which Marion recognises in modern philosophy.<sup>26</sup> These two judgements (that being equals the thinkable; that God is by definition unthinkable) coordinate to produce a straightforward imperative: God must be posited without being. “The impossibility... of thinking outside of ontological difference” will “suit the impossibility—indisputable and definitive—of thinking God as such.”<sup>27</sup> By accepting only the highest designation of Goodness, a name which is “not to be comprehended but to be received,”<sup>28</sup> Marion fulfils this

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, *GWB*, 22–3, 45–7, 154–5; *I&D*, “§13. Unthinkable Eminence,” 139–50; *DMP* chapter 4 “God”; *In the Self’s Place* “§44. The question of the names of God”; “The Question of the Unconditioned,” *The Journal of Religion* 93, no. 1 (2013): 17; “TA&OT,” 50–1; “The Formal Reason for the Infinite,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); “The Impossible for Man” *passim.*; “The Essential Incoherence of Descartes’ Definition of Divinity,” in *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations*, ed. Amélie Rorty (University of California Press, 1986) *passim.*; “Is the Argument Ontological? The Anselmian Proof and the Two Demonstrations of the Existence of God in the Meditations,” in *Cartesian Questions: Method and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1999) *passim.*; “Mihi Magna Quaestio Factus Sum: The Privilege of Unknowing,” *The Journal of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2005): *passim.*; “What Cannot Be Said”, *passim.*; “Resting, Moving, Loving: The Access to the Self according to Saint Augustine,” *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 1 (2011): 31.

<sup>25</sup> “In the Name,” 148–158 and 154. “The Arian” Marion says, was “the sole metaphysician of presence, if there ever was such a thing” (154).

<sup>26</sup> I will discuss this in detail below in the section titled “Marion’s Second being: Heideggerian and modern”.

<sup>27</sup> *GWB*, 45–6.

<sup>28</sup> *I&D*, 154–5.

imperative and so inscribes the transcendence of God beyond being and thought in the strongest possible fashion.

Marion allows that some other higher designations are essentially equivalent with Goodness. One is the Dionysian term Αἴτια, which Marion translates as “Requisit” (in English, “Requisite”) as opposed to the usual “cause.”<sup>29</sup> Αἴτια performs a unique linguistic function, indicating not that God *has* beauty, being, wisdom and the other perfections at issue in the divine names, but rather that he *gives* these things. The creaturely names are not “predicated” of the Αἴτια but rather “he is praised *for* them.”<sup>30</sup> (This aspect of Marion’s theological speech should be firmly underlined—it will prove crucial in our consideration of his approach to analogy.) In addition to Αἴτια, it is arguable that Marion would judge Distance, Trinity and Thearchy to be names convertible with Goodness.<sup>31</sup>

However, the most important synonymous designation is certainly Love, which

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<sup>29</sup> See *I&D* §14, where Marion comments that Αἴτια should “be understood as that which all those beings request (αἰτέω, αἰτιάομαι) who for their part fundamentally receive themselves therefrom as request-ants (τὰ αἰτιατά).” (160) Milbank endorses Marion’s proposal here—see “Truth and Vision,” in *Truth in Aquinas*, by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock (London: Routledge, 2001), 27–8; “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon,” in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, ed. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 64n49.

<sup>30</sup> *I&D*, 152, my italics.

<sup>31</sup> As I will discuss below, when suitably understood Aquinas’ *ipsum esse*, Augustine’s *idipsum* and *Sum qui sum*, and Anselm’s *melius* and *majus* may also qualify for Marion as higher, non-ontological names.

Marion dubs “the transcendence par excellence.”<sup>32</sup> This designation introduces a surprising amendment to Marion’s account of theological speech, for Marion declares that there is a univocity of love between creature and God:

[I]f love is only said like it is given—in one way—and if, moreover, God names himself with the very name of love, must we conclude that God loves like we love, with the same love as us, according to the unique erotic reduction? Clearly, one may hesitate, but nevertheless we cannot avoid this conclusion... God loves in the same way as we do.<sup>33</sup>

Created and divine love is thus univocal, even as God loves “infinitely better than we do.”<sup>34</sup> Love represents God’s “highest transcendence, the only one that does not dishonor him” and the name of love may be univocally construed because “between God and humans everything remains ambiguous except, precisely, love.”<sup>35</sup>

As I have said, the function of these higher names is to uniquely evince God’s

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<sup>32</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, “La transcendance par excellence,” in *Le croire pour le voir: Réflexions diverses sur la rationalité de la révélation et l’irrationalité de quelques croyants* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2010), 167–75. See also Joeri Schrijvers’ “Jean-Luc Marion on the Transcendence Par Excellence: Love,” in *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics*, ed. Wessel Stoker and W. L. van der Merwe (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 157–172.

<sup>33</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 221–2. On Marion’s univocity of love, see also “The Univocality of Erotic Discourse and Mystical Theology” section in “The Unspoken: Apophasis and the Discourse of Love,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 76 (2002): 39–564, and brief comments in “God and the Gift”. Marion’s fascinating reflections in *In the Self’s Place* address only the univocal nature of all created loves (*agape* and *eros*, love for self, neighbour and God, even “a certain carnal charity, a spontaneous one between animals”) but not the love that God himself exercises—see “§42. The univocity of love” and 385n81. Similarly with the discussion of Descartes’ univocity of love in “Does the Ego Alter the Other” in *Cartesian Questions*, 131–8.

<sup>34</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 222. Marion’s account of love is thus textbook Scotism—a univocal notion affirmed finitely with regard to creature and infinitely with regard to Creator.

<sup>35</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 222; “What Cannot Be Said,” 118.

transcendence, but it must be stressed that for Marion this transcendence is not understood in some vague or general manner but as specifically *in contrast to* being. God, as Marion puts it in one place, “can only be instaurated as God on the basis of his *pre-ontological condition* and pre-transcendental freedom.”<sup>36</sup> Marion begins with this conviction to drive an absolute distinction between Being and transcendent Love or Goodness. It is a “property of love” that it is not “bound to the limitation of being” and this is “why love is beyond being.”<sup>37</sup> Hence, if God is love, “then God loves before being,” for “*agape* alone, by definition, is not known, *is not*”; “only love does not have to be. And Gxd loves without being.”<sup>38</sup> Marion seeks a charitable and transcendent First, and this means a God absolutely beyond and free from Second being—a “God beyond all ontology.”<sup>39</sup>

The particular conception of transcendence at work here is clearly Levinas’ “otherwise than being”. Indeed, what Marion describes as his career-long “obsession” with the “erotic phenomenon” should be construed as a Christian repetition of Levinas’ pursuit of a pre-ontological ethics, now in the register of a pre-ontological charity.<sup>40</sup> The Levinasian logic in Marion’s approach is important to

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<sup>36</sup> “The Impossible for Man,” 20.

<sup>37</sup> “God and the Gift,” 150.

<sup>38</sup> *GWB*, xxi, 106, 138, my italics.

<sup>39</sup> *I&D*, 218.

<sup>40</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 10. Marion says here that “all of my books,” beginning with *I&D* in 1977, have been “just so many steps toward the question of the erotic phenomenon.” He suggests that “what *Dieu sans l’être* aimed to show negatively,” *The Erotic Phenomenon* “attempted to realize positively.” (*GWB*, 2nd ed., xxix-xxx.) Apart from Levinas, another important influence on Marion

note because, as I will show in chapter 3, Milbank contends that Marion's Levinasian and strictly non-ontological definition of transcendence is an arbitrary and theologically problematic choice, and adjudicating their wider debate will turn significantly on our judgment of this matter.

*Marion's Second being: Heideggerian and modern*

Marion's account of analogy presents some complications to the Dionysian vision I have been tracing thus far, but before turning to that topic it is vital to confirm how he conceives the being which he insists God is without. As I have explained, in Marion's Dionysian vision there is no First being as such—the First is a pre-ontological charity *beyond* being. Thus, "being" in the vast majority of Marion's writings refers only to *Second* being. The character of this Second being is for Marion consistently Heideggerian and modern, as can be demonstrated by noting several key characteristics.

Firstly, Marion's being is *finite*. He explicitly follows Heidegger on this point. Heidegger claims that "being itself is essentially finite and reveals itself only in the transcendence of Dasein which is held out into the nothing" and, indeed, his whole philosophy may be read as an attempt to apprehend immanent being without a

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here is the renewed interest in Neoplatonism which flowed into wide stretches of twentieth century French thought after Bergson, typified in such thinkers as Jean Trouillard, Stanislas Breton and Henry Duméry. Wayne Hankey gives a comprehensive treatment of this in "One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France".

transcendent creator via “a delicate removal of the notion of infinite being (*ens infinitum*) from ontology.”<sup>41</sup> Marion confirms the authority of Heidegger’s analysis: it “has established not only the finitude of *Dasein*” but also leads us “to conclude that Being deploys itself as finite.”<sup>42</sup> For Marion being “has been taken definitively into the empire of beings” and hence “Being is only at play in the measure of finitude.”<sup>43</sup> Marion even remarkably suggests that Anselm obscurely anticipates this point: “only the good deserves the qualification of infinite, as if Anselm were convinced (in advance of Kant and Heidegger) that being as such is always finite.”<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, Marion’s being is *univocal*. Marion takes the majority report of modern philosophy after Scotus as determinative for his own account of Second being. There is now a substantial literature which convincingly shows that Heidegger’s conception of being follows the modern mainstream in assuming strict univocity, and Marion’s

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<sup>41</sup> Martin Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?,” in *Basic Writings*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 108; S. J. McGrath, *Heidegger: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 105. McGrath cites Heidegger’s comment that “with this infinity, life blinds itself, annuls itself. Incarcerating itself, life lets itself go. It falls short,” and observes that “Heidegger’s life project is to think the finitude of being without referencing the infinite” (*The Early Heidegger and Medieval Philosophy: Phenomenology for the Godforsaken* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 209, 217). McGrath’s studies and John Caputo’s *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982) should be read alongside each other as two complementary accounts of this theme. McGrath concludes in favour of Aquinas’ transcendent *esse subsistens* whereas Caputo, damning Aquinas with faint praise, concludes in favour of Heidegger’s immanentism.

<sup>42</sup> “The Impossible for Man,” 23 and 39n14.

<sup>43</sup> “The End of the End of Metaphysics,” 17; *GWB*, 109.

<sup>44</sup> “Is the Ontological Argument Ontological? The Argument According to Anselm and Its Metaphysical Interpretation According to Kant,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 2 (April 1992): 217.

treatments of Heidegger confirms this claim.<sup>45</sup> As I will discuss below, it was Marion's failure to probe Heidegger's univocity that attracted the ire of his early Thomist reader. Though Marion's mature treatments of Aquinas complicate this point, the univocity of Heidegger and the moderns is assumed in all of his other writings, early and mature.

Third, Marion's being is *nihilistic*. I do not intend this in a necessarily pejorative sense but rather as a technical (and, I take it, non-controversial) description of Heidegger's ontology as it is developed in texts such as "What is Metaphysics?," "The Question of Being" and *The Principle of Reason*.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to the plenitudinous *ipsum esse* of Aquinas, the possibility and origin of Heidegger's *Sein* is found in *das Nicht* or *abgrund*, and thus his ontology is a nihilating one: "the Nothing 'is' not something

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<sup>45</sup> See Rudolf Allers, "Heidegger on the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 20, no. 3 (1960): 370; Theodore Kisiel, *The Genesis of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 1–115; McGrath, *The Early Heidegger*, 88–119 and 208–242; Philipp Tonner, *Heidegger, Metaphysics and the Univocity of Being* (London; New York: Continuum, 2011); Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 104–7; Peter Dillard, *Heidegger and Philosophical Atheology: A Neo-Scholastic Critique* (New York: Continuum, 2008), esp. 131n13. Cf. Gilles Deleuze's passing comment that Heidegger "follows Duns Scotus and gives renewed splendour to the Univocity of Being" (*Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Athlone, 1994), 66).

<sup>46</sup> "What Is Metaphysics?"; "On the Question of Being," in *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 291–322; *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996). See the discussions in John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 47–96 and 140–260; Louis Blond, *Heidegger and Nietzsche: Overcoming Metaphysics* (London: Continuum, 2012), 31–53; Jean-Luc Marion, "The Nothing and the Claim," in *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 167–202.

other than Being, but this itself.”<sup>47</sup> Marion embraces this Heideggerian thesis, agreeing that “Being advances, under the species of Nothingness/Nothing” and arguing that his own phenomenological approach “manifests the equivalence between present being (the presence of being) and the nothing” and “designates Nothingness/Nothing as Being.”<sup>48</sup> “Nothingness itself in its essence” displays “an equivalence with being as such.”<sup>49</sup> Like Heidegger, who points appreciatively to Hegel’s claim that “Pure Being and pure Nothing are... the same” as an anticipation of his position, Marion endorses Hegel’s judgment that “nothing has a thinner content than being.” Though Hegel infers from this latter point that obviously “God would be sufficiently rich to contain in himself a determination as poor as that of *being*,” Marion moves in the other direction and suggests that the nullity and poverty of being “raises a difficulty about the divinity of this concept.”<sup>50</sup>

Fourth, Marion’s being is *thinkable*. Marion finds in modern philosophy an identity of being and rational thought that emerges with Johan Clauberg’s claim in 1691 that

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts*, trans. Gary E. Aylesworth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>48</sup> *GWB*, 117, 120, 124–5.

<sup>49</sup> Marion, “The End of the End of Metaphysics,” 15. See also *I&D*, 200–3; “Heidegger and Descartes,” in *Martin Heidegger: Critical Assessments*, ed. Christopher E. Macann (London: Routledge, 1992), 201–3. In “Nothing and Nothing Else,” Marion confirms the identity of being and *nihil* but argues for an alternative interpretation of “nothing” which leads us to the “beyond being”. Marion’s choice to reconceive “nothing” but not “being” is a significant and revealing one.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?,” 108, citing Hegel’s *Science of Logic* I.III; Marion, “The Question of the Unconditioned,” 4–5, citing Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences* §51.

there is a “strict equivalence between being and the thinkable.”<sup>51</sup> This proposal sets the human intellect as sovereign over both world and God, requiring all phenomena to accede to the conditions of possibility set by conceptual thought. The idolatrous implications for theology are obvious. According to Marion, this conviction is borne through the modern period to Heidegger, so that Heidegger’s ontology can act as “a *negative* propaedeutic of the unthinkable thought of God.”<sup>52</sup>

With this fourth characteristic about thinkability, then, we can conclude that Marion construes Second being as finite, univocal, nihilistic, empty, and coextensive with and exhausted by conceptual intelligibility. Given this profoundly glum vision of Second being, it is only logical that, in the interests of divine transcendence, Marion would pursue the Dionysian move to a God without being.

However, Marion’s account of Second being does not exhaust Marion’s account of

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<sup>51</sup> “Mihi Magna Quaestio Factus Sum,” 8. Clauberg declares: *Ens est quicquid quovis modo est, cogitari ac dici potest*, “Being is all that which, in whatever manner may be, can be thought and said” (*Metaphysica de Ente, quae rectius ontosophia*, secs. 6 and 4). Marion argues that with this thesis Clauberg inaugurates the discipline of *ontologia* that informs our thought to this day. Though Marion does not clearly say that the coextension was a complete novelty in Western thought, he does suggest it. Clauberg’s was a “radical thesis” which shifted inquiry from the *aliquid* to the *intelligibile* to form “a science of being not insofar as it is, but insofar as it is known” and it underwrote a new discipline that, despite Clauberg’s protestations, “remained unknown to Aristotle and the medievals and was established only by the moderns,” even if it was partly anticipated in Aquinas. (“Mihi Magna Quaestio Factus Sum,” 8; “Phenomenology of Givenness and First Philosophy,” in *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 9–13; *DMP*, 46–8; “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 575n5). For further discussion see *DMP*, 67–127; “The Question of the Unconditioned,” 3–4; “Is the Argument Ontological?,” 139–40.

<sup>52</sup> *GWB*, 45–6.

*Creation*, and we must be careful to read him precisely here. Creation may rightly be called “the Second,” but for Marion this is not quite the same thing as “Second being.” This is so because creaturely life is not coextensive with being, but rather with *givenness*. Thus, to speak properly of Marion’s Second, his Creation, we must briefly consider his widely discussed phenomenology of givenness.

Marion’s phenomenology is an attempt to thematise creaturely life in the wake of Heidegger, now in the non-ontological terms of phenomenal donation. Marion attempts to pull back the curtains of the dark ontology found in Heidegger and the moderns to reveal behind it a brighter, “new definition” of phenomena, “no longer as object or being, but as given.”<sup>53</sup> He aims to take a “step back, outside of being” by performing “the reduction carried out to its final consequences, outside of Being.”<sup>54</sup> This reduction to givenness aims “to manifest the ‘other than being’ in its multiple modes,” modes which include “non-beings,” “nonbeing phenomena,” and the “phenomenon without being.”<sup>55</sup> In one striking passage, Marion says his new phenomenology requires that

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<sup>53</sup> *Being Given*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> “The Phenomenological Origins of the Concept of Givenness,” in *The Reason of the Gift* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 32; *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 162.

<sup>55</sup> “‘Christian Philosophy’: Hermeneutic or Heuristic?,” in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 78; “On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy,” 74-5 and “Nothing and Nothing Else,” 192; “The Banality of Saturation,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 385; “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 582.

one would have to extend to every being-given the status of a beyond of beingness [ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας], which Plato reserved solely for the ἰδέα ‘τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ.’ General metaphysics, as *ontologia*, thus would have to yield to a general phenomenology of the donation of all being-given, of which the *Seinsfrage* could eventually constitute but a simple region or a particular case.<sup>56</sup>

In Thomist parlance we might call this a *super-esse commune*—just as Marion’s Dionysian God is beyond being, so here *all* beings are beyond being! As Marion acknowledges, this is a repetition of his doctrine of “God without being” now modulated to the creaturely domain: it is “a sketch of what *Dieu sans l’être* bluntly intended through direct recourse to theology,” but now “deploying givenness solely within the frame of reduced immanence.”<sup>57</sup>

As Marion indicates in his paradigmatic analysis of the painting, the key move is to recognise that “to the ontic visibility of the painting is added as a super-visibility, ontically indescribable—its upsurge.” Here “it is no longer a matter of seeing what is, but of seeing its coming up into visibility—a coming up that has nothing ontic about it.” The invisible, secret heart of the painting—and in turn the invisible, secret heart of all beings—is not to be found in Being, for actual concrete beings are only the “ontic support” for an invisible giving which “in the end... *is not*.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 583.

<sup>57</sup> *Being Given*, x, 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Being Given*, 3, 47–8, Marion’s italics.

Thus, in the same way that he appends the Christian God to Heidegger's ontology, Marion appends a primordial, pre-ontological givenness to Heidegger's (and Husserl's) phenomenology, behind and beyond created beings. This primordial giving is the positive aspect of Marion's vision of Creation and it is a vision which, following François Laruelle paradoxical formulation, we can accurately describe as an "ontology without being."<sup>59</sup> Marion's account of Second *being* however—that is, his account of visible, concrete being—remains consistently as I described it above: finite, univocal, nihilistic, empty, coextensive with and exhausted by conceptual intelligibility.

Marion's uncompromising commitment to this distinctively modern and Heideggerian conception of being and his refusal to countenance alternatives is one of the most important points to bear in mind as this study proceeds. It is the nub of his disagreement with Milbank and, as I will argue in chapter 3, is the single most significant problem in his theological approach.

## **B. Marion's doctrine of analogy**

Given the strict Neoplatonic "beyond being" which Marion emphasises in his Dionysian response to Heidegger, one might imagine that theological analogy has no place in his account of God and being. But this is not the case, and this second section

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<sup>59</sup> François Laruelle, "The Call and the Phenomenon," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2013): 108). Laruelle observes that Marion's project aims at "an 'ontology' without Being, yet not without reality".

of my exposition traces Marion's conception of analogical predication and of the analogy of being. This is one of the most subtle and elusive aspects of Marion's work, rarely broached by his commentators, but it is essential that we establish a clear account as it will be crucial for making an accurate evaluation of his position in chapter 3.

*Marion's early and mature interpretations of Aquinas*

Marion's account of analogy finds its clearest expression in his treatment of Aquinas. This has two distinct stages: the first is associated primarily with his controversial presentation of Thomas in *GWB*; the second emerges in a handful of later writings, the most important of which is his widely noted 1995 "retraction" essay, "Saint Thomas Aquinas and Onto-theo-logy."<sup>60</sup>

On Marion's early view, Aquinas is condemned for reversing a traditional priority of the name of the Good over the name of Being and for thus opening a way toward the

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<sup>60</sup> Published in 1995 as "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et L'onto-Théo-Logie," *Revue Thomiste* XCV (1995): 31–66, and translated into English in 2003. Other important mature treatments of Aquinas may be found in the prefaces to the 1995 and 2012 English editions of *GWB*; *DMP*, 221–4; "Metaphysics and Phenomenology"; "The Impossible for Man". The "Remarque additionelle" appended to Marion's 1986 essay "De la «mort de Dieu» aux noms divins: l'itinéraire théologique de la métaphysique," in *L'être et Dieu*, ed. Henri-Bernard Vergote and Dominique Bourg (Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1986) prefigures much of Marion's mature position, just four years after publishing *Dieu sans l'être*. Derek Morrow gives a subtler three-step reading of Marion's development, with a prior stage associated with Marion's early work on Descartes—see "Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance: Jean-Luc Marion's Phenomenological Reading of Thomistic Analogy," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2007): 62–66. For the purposes of this study, however, the two-stage division suffices.

modern ontotheological tradition.<sup>61</sup> His theology is apparently an idolatrous one, for “can one not hazard that, according to what St. Thomas himself freely insinuates, the *ens*, related to ‘God’ as his first name, indeed could determine him as the ultimate—idol?”<sup>62</sup> Despite his profound familiarity with the French genealogy and despite explicitly discussing univocity and “the legendary opposition of the Thomistic school(s) and the Scotist school” in the course of his early texts, Marion’s early position imputes to Aquinas a Scotist conception of being and, as I showed in earlier, he assumes such a conception throughout his constructive response to Heidegger.<sup>63</sup>

GWB was greeted with “savage reviews” from Thomists.<sup>64</sup> Marion responded to these criticisms with a new interpretation of Aquinas, such that he can retrospectively observe in 2012 that his “position has changed notably since 1982” toward “a more

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<sup>61</sup> *GWB*, 73–83.

<sup>62</sup> *GWB*, 81–2.

<sup>63</sup> *GWB*, 80–2 and *passim*. This important point has been noted by many commentators. See Milbank, “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 46–7; Kerr, “Aquinas after Marion”; Tony Kelly, “The ‘Horrible Wrappers’ of Aquinas’ God,” *Pacifica* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 1996): 185–203; David B. Burrell, “Reflections on ‘Negative Theology’ in the Light of a Recent Venture to Speak of ‘God Without Being,’” in *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Roman Ciapalo (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Declan Lawell, “Thomas Aquinas, Jean-Luc Marion, and an Alleged Category Mistake Involving God and Being,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83, no. 1 (2009): esp. 34–5; Kenneth Schmitz, “The God of Love,” *The Thomist* 57, no. 3 (July 1993); Kevin Hart, “The Sacred and the Holy: Emmanuel Levinas on Ethics, God, and Art, Lecture 4: Responses,” unpublished manuscript (Australian Catholic University, 2012), 13–14; John Macquarrie, “Review of ‘God Without Being,’” *The Journal of Religion* 73, no. 1 (1993): 99–101.

<sup>64</sup> Kerr, “Aquinas after Marion,” 363. Marion himself refers to these “reproaches” in *GWB*, xxii.

balanced position than that of my earlier study.”<sup>65</sup> On Marion’s mature view Aquinas is entirely absolved of the charge of idolatry and ontotheology (his theology “does not at all match the requirements of the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics,”)<sup>66</sup> and Aquinas’ position in Marion’s theological genealogy is modified: there is no longer a “disparity between Denys and Thomas” regarding being nor an “innovative break in relation to the Fathers,” but instead a broad continuity with the earlier Christian Neoplatonist tradition.<sup>67</sup> It is now only a particular rendition of Aquinas, typified in such readers as Lotz, Rahner and especially Gilson, which must be judged “not only the first of the onto-theo-logians but one of the most radical.”<sup>68</sup> Marion’s mature reading follows “a totally different way” to this majority view, transforming Aquinas from *GWB*’s unfortunate progenitor of modern metaphysics into an ally of Marion’s post-metaphysical project of a God without being.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *GWB*, 2nd ed., xxx; “TA&OT,” 67–8n2. It should be noted here that Marion’s early position was not purely disparaging of Aquinas. He could still say in his early work, for example, that Aquinas “would allow one to advance quite far in the direction of what *distance* indicates.” (*I&D*, xxxviii.)

<sup>66</sup> “TA&OT,” 58. In this essay, Marion clears Aquinas against Heidegger’s three cardinal marks of ontotheology (43–58) and argues that the discipline of “metaphysics,” understood in the pejorative sense that Heidegger has made familiar, only truly begins *after* Aquinas with Suárez (46–7). Cf. “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 49–55.

<sup>67</sup> *GWB*, 217n64, 215n49; “TA&OT,” 54.

<sup>68</sup> “TA&OT,” 58–61, 73n57, quote at 60. Marion’s own early position may also be understood as an expression of this majority view.

<sup>69</sup> “TA&OT,” 61. I do not think it is the case, however, that the mature Marion attempts to “save” Aquinas entirely. He still regrets the “rupture” which elevates *esse* over *bonum* and still looks to “the path that Saint Thomas did *not* take” (*GWB*, xxiii; “TA&OT,” 72n54). He has not retracted his bald accusation that “Thomas gives the utmost evidence that he did not understand at all” Anselm’s ontological argument (“Is the Ontological Argument Ontological?,” 210). In a strange passage that I will discuss in section C of this chapter, he declares that Aquinas remains trapped “definitively

*Marion's mature conception of Thomist analogy*

However, the most important shift in Marion's mature position is a new account of *esse* and the Thomist analogy of being, as against his earlier Scotist presentation of Aquinas. Marion clarifies that there are "two understandings of *esse*" at issue in Aquinas: divine *esse* and creaturely *esse commune*.<sup>70</sup> The identity of God's essence and *esse* sets him apart from all creatures and from the totality of created being and marks an absolute fault-line between God and creation.<sup>71</sup> (It also serves to exempt God from the discipline of *metaphysica* that would incorporate God as one of its objects only later in the tradition.)<sup>72</sup> There is a uniquely non-reciprocal, causal relation of "creational distance" between the divine *esse* and *esse commune*, but the former remains entirely distinct from the latter—"God does not depend on it, is not inscribed

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within the horizon of being" ("The Impossible for Man," 19). Most significantly, however, Marion has not retracted his critique of Aquinas' "reductionist interpretation" of Dionysian "nonbeings" in terms of unformed matter (*GWB*, 77, 216n60). The argument from nonbeings was and remains crucial to Marion's theological and phenomenological case against the "horizon of being"—see *GWB* 74-83 (regarding Denys) and 83-102 (regarding the New Testament); "In the Name," 146-7; "Nothing and Nothing Else," 190-2; "On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy," 74-5; "Metaphysics and Phenomenology," 582. Marion's early recognition that Aquinas opposes his Dionysian approach to non-being is undoubtedly correct (cf. Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 85-113), and his later silence on the matter is, I suggest, very revealing. It confirms the difficulty of establishing an Aquinas consonant in every respect with the Areopagite and, as I will discuss in chapter 3, indicates the impossibility of integrating Aquinas satisfactorily into a contemporary theology which insists that being must be construed as a limiting "horizon" and not, as for St. Thomas, the plenitudinous infinity of God.

<sup>70</sup> "TA&OT," 49.

<sup>71</sup> See "TA&OT," 47-51. Marion also uses the language of "ousio-ontical difference" to mark this distinction between God and creature. Whereas creatures are constituted by the horizontal ousio-ontical difference (ie. the real distinction), God is set apart by his vertical "ousio-ontic indifference" (49).

<sup>72</sup> "TA&OT," 45-6.

within it, and is not comprehended in it.”<sup>73</sup>

Marion explains that for Aquinas this peculiar relation is governed by the “analogy of being.”<sup>74</sup> Marion gives only a sketch of the doctrine, passing over many highly wrought disputes in this most contested territory of scholarship, but the few points he does emphasise reveal his Dionysian and Heideggerian commitments clearly at work, now in a Thomist context.<sup>75</sup> Firstly, he argues against his own early view that Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy “rejects in advance any kind of univocal conception of entity” and instead “opens a space where the univocity of being must be exploded.”<sup>76</sup> Secondly, he suggests that the analogical predication of *esse* to God must be understood according to a deeply apophatic conception of the divine names and a particular understanding of divine causation:

Thus God is only named by the name of the cause and because of the cause

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<sup>73</sup> “TA&OT,” 51–56, 54, 62.

<sup>74</sup> “TA&OT,” 48. I address the contentious issue of whether an *analogia entis* is present in Aquinas in dispute #2 in chapter 3.

<sup>75</sup> One point that he does labour at some length is the priority of *proportio* over *proportionalitas* or, in the more common nomenclature, analogy of attribution over analogy of proportionality (“TA&OT,” 49–51, 70n30). Milbank, for his part, agrees: “[Marion] is of course right to say that, in Aquinas, analogy concerning God is a matter of two-term *proportio*, not of four-term *proportionalitas* between two compared ratios” (“Truth and Vision,” 44). See also “Materialism and Transcendence,” in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 413–7; “A Critique of the Theology of Right,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) *passim*. Milbank and Marion thus stand in mutual opposition to contemporary interpreters such as Steven Long in *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011) or Laurence Paul Hemming in “Analogia Non Entis Sed Entitatis: The Ontological Consequences of the Doctrine of Analogy,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (2004): 118–128.

<sup>76</sup> “TA&OT,” 48 and 49.

("Deus nominari dicitur a suis causatis"); the names attributed to God only make sense as effects from whence they come; they can be applied to God with this minimum of nonimpropriety, which separates them from pure and simple equivocity only to the degree that the causal relation guarantees that they bear the mark of their cause, at least by virtue of its efficient causality.<sup>77</sup>

This linkage of predication and causation runs "along the lines of the meaning of Dionysius" and indicates that Aquinas "takes up once again a major argument from the Dionysian tradition" that posits a strictly pre-ontological causal principle and "an essential discontinuity" between the *esse* of First and Second.<sup>78</sup> Thirdly, Marion insists repeatedly on the absolute character of the division between divine *esse* and created *esse commune* that is embedded in the analogy of being. At every point, Marion stresses that the analogy is intended only to divide and not to join. Many passages in "TA&OT" and other mature writings on Aquinas confirm this, and I list some of the most significant here (unless indicated otherwise, all italics are mine):

The analogy of being... has no other function than to dig the chasm that separates the two understandings of *esse* (*and not to bridge it*)...<sup>79</sup>

It is necessary to suggest, against the first evidences... that the *esse* assigned to God excludes itself from the common and created being and consequently *from all what [sic] we understand and know under the title of being*.<sup>80</sup>

"Good," "beautiful," "true" and so on doubtless tell us nothing of divine goodness, truth, and beauty except that they proceed from it by an

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<sup>77</sup> "TA&OT," 51.

<sup>78</sup> "TA&OT," 52-4.

<sup>79</sup> "TA&OT," 48.

<sup>80</sup> "TA&OT," 62.

indisputable efficient causation *but abstractly and without real content*.<sup>81</sup>

[T]he *esse* that Thomas Aquinas recognizes for God does not open any metaphysical horizon, does not belong to any onto-theo-logy, and remains *such a distant analogy* with what we once conceived through the concept of being, that God proves not to take any part in it, or to belong to it, or even—as paradoxical as it may seem—to be. *Esse* refers to God *only insofar as God may appear as without being*.<sup>82</sup>

[For Aquinas] the *absolute and radical gap* that separates *ens* from *esse*... prohibits thinking *esse* from *ens* and much less from *ens commune*.<sup>83</sup>

[Aquinas] does not chain God to Being because the divine *esse* immeasurably surpasses (and *hardly maintains an analogia with*) the *ens commune* of creatures.<sup>84</sup>

[A]s I have tried to show in the privileged case of Thomas Aquinas... being remains an inconceivable *esse, without analogy, or even penitus incognitum*...<sup>85</sup>

Thomas Aquinas maintains the transcendence of God with respect to metaphysics and to creation by widening the gap between *ens commune*... and the *actus essendi* by which God remains, according to His very being, profoundly unknown. *The equivocity (or, at least, analogy) widens being enough so that God is able 'to be' without falling into the domain of metaphysics*.<sup>86</sup>

If *esse* truly offers the first name of God according to Thomas Aquinas, this thus signifies for him in the first place that God is called *esse* but *as to name only*

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<sup>81</sup> “TA&OT,” 51.

<sup>82</sup> “TA&OT,” 64–5.

<sup>83</sup> “De la «mort de Dieu»,” 128, (“l’écart absolu et radical qui sépare *ens* de *esse*... interdit de penser l’*esse* à partir de l’*ens* et encore moins de l’*ens commune*”).

<sup>84</sup> *GWB*, xxiii.

<sup>85</sup> “In the Name,” 145.

<sup>86</sup> “La science toujours recherchée et toujours manquante” in *La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, ed. J.-M. Narbonne and L. Langlois (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 24. Translated by Derek Morrow in “Aquinas, Marion, Analogy, and Esse: A Phenomenology of the Divine Names?,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2006): 30n15.

*and not as such.*<sup>87</sup>

I labour these quotations to confirm a point which is of paramount significance to this study: for Marion, *esse* is ascribed to God in an absolutely apophatic manner and this reflects an absolute ontological division between First *esse* and Second *esse commune*. Thomist *esse* is, Marion says, a strictly “meta-ontological” term, a wholly “negative name” indicating a “nonontological” kind of transcendence. It goes beyond any understanding of “being” and “aim[s] beyond being itself, whatever it might be.” The mature Marion can thus paradoxically conclude that Aquinas’ *esse* is an “*Esse* without Being” and that therefore it is “fundamentally Thomistic” to speak of a “God without being.”<sup>88</sup> The Dionysian First beyond Second being that Marion elaborated in his early work is thus repeated in a new theological lexicon in Marion’s treatment of Thomist analogy. He speaks now according to the Latinate array of *esse*, but his vision of double being remains identical: a First divorced absolutely from Second.

*Analogy: parallel cases*

Marion approaches the issue of analogy explicitly or obliquely in a variety of other contexts. In this section I will briefly trace the most important of these parallel cases to establish whether, at any point across the breadth of his theological and phenomenological work, Marion presents an exception or qualification to the account of analogy in terms of absolute rupture that he finds in Aquinas.

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<sup>87</sup> “TA&OT,” 61.

<sup>88</sup> “TA&OT,” 64–6. The final part of the essay is titled “Answer to the Question: *Esse* Without Being”.

*Augustine*. Marion's evolving reading of Augustine's *idipsum* and *Sum qui sum* parallels his evolving reading of Aquinas's *esse*.<sup>89</sup> Opposing his own earlier view, which had condemned Augustine's approach as "explicitly taken up according to the onto-theo-logical constitution of metaphysics," Marion's mature position contends that the majority "Thomistic interpretation" of Augustine, which finds in the bishop an identification of God with being, "must... be contested."<sup>90</sup> He suggests that Augustine's account of divine names is essentially identical to the Dionysian "discourse of praise"—the *idipsum* is a "pure deictic" which "shows, but signifies nothing" about God and "remains radically and definitively apophatic."<sup>91</sup> If in the unlikely event that the name does suggest any content "it would be rather *bonum* than *being*."<sup>92</sup> As for *Sum qui sum*, it refers only to immutability and not ontology:

*Sum qui sum* indicates the divine immutability opposite all the rest that fall into nullity... Thus, immutability, not Being, designates the difference of God, with an immutability that is marked by *the equivocity of Being*, without measure between it and all the rest.<sup>93</sup>

Like Marion's Aquinas, "even when he sometimes uses *ipsum esse* never does Saint Augustine trouble himself about Being."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Marion's mature view is presented in "Idipsum", which was edited to form the final chapter of *In the Self's Place*.

<sup>90</sup> *GWB*, 215n15; *In the Self's Place*, 284–5. Marion explicitly opposes more than a dozen "majority" readers of Augustine.

<sup>91</sup> *In the Self's Place*, 286–9.

<sup>92</sup> "Idipsum," 189. Marion goes on: "This suggests that St. Augustine may be closer to Dionysius... than to St. Thomas Aquinas' emphasis on *ipsum esse*."

<sup>93</sup> *In the Self's Place*, 291, my italics.

<sup>94</sup> *In the Self's Place*, 296. Marion's novel phenomenological reading of Augustine has been widely

*Anselm.* Marion's reading of Anselm's ontological argument runs similarly. Overturning a wealth of secondary literature,<sup>95</sup> Marion claims that Anselm's argument was not intended to be "ontological" at all and actually concerns itself only with "the sovereignty of the good."<sup>96</sup> He points to Anselm's disavowal of a concept of God and his preference for *melius* and *majus* as divine designations as proof that Anselm construes God's transcendence in a rigorously Platonic and Dionysian mode:

Thus what lies beyond the essence, the ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, is revealed as the criterion of "that than which a greater cannot be thought" (*id quo majus cogitari nequit*), and the good manifests itself as sovereign in any essential definition of God... He can only be thought as He offers Himself, as sovereign good, as sovereign insofar as He is the good, rather than as Being... God is not defined

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admired, but many have also registered doubts about its treatment of God and being. Janet Soskice rejects Marion's "tortured" and "insupportable" reading of *idipsum* ("Augustine on Knowing God and Knowing the Self," in *Faithful Reading: New Essays in Theology in Honour of Fergus Kerr*, ed. Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby, and Thomas O'Loughlin (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 74). Joseph O'Leary complains that Marion "produces an 'ahistorical' and 'utopian' reading" that falsely sets Augustine "in an extraterritorial realm of purely Christian thought." O'Leary insists that Augustine identifies God with being in *De Trinitate* and elsewhere ("could anything be clearer?") and notes that Marion's book "is peppered with 'perhaps' and 'it could be,' which may indicate a consciousness of the strained character of his suggestions." ("Jean-Luc Marion on St Augustine: Marginal Notes," *Joseph S. O'Leary Homepage: Essays on Literary and Theological Themes*, March 2009, [http://josephsoleary.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2009/03/jeanluc-marion-on-st-augustine-marginal-notes.html](http://josephsoleary.typepad.com/my_weblog/2009/03/jeanluc-marion-on-st-augustine-marginal-notes.html), accessed 28 January 2013.) See also the comments in Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 202n11; Lorenz B. Puntel, *Being and God: A Systematic Approach in Confrontation with Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012), 391–405; Kevin Hart, "In Priora Extendens Me: Confessiones, IX.x.23-25," in *Glossator: Practice and Theory of the Commentary Vol. 7: The Mystical Text*, ed. Nicola Masciandaro and Eugene Thacker (CreateSpace, 2013), 17–8.

<sup>95</sup> One note in "Is the Argument Ontological?," for example, disputes eleven recent interpreters of Anselm (202-3n35).

<sup>96</sup> "Is the Argument Ontological?," 160. Marion gives a fine account of the argument's fate in the hands of the moderns from Descartes through Kant, Malebranche, Leibniz and Hegel—see 139-145 and "The Question of the Unconditioned," 6–14.

by means of any concept of the essence, and his presumed essence is not regulated by the *ousia*, but on the contrary can only be thought as it offers itself—beyond Being, in the horizon of the good.<sup>97</sup>

This elevation of the Good displays what Kant occluded in his treatment of the ontological argument, namely Anselm's "absolutely unquestioned and completely problematic onto-ontological equivocality." Anselm's God "neither exists nor does not exist, has no obligation one way or another."<sup>98</sup>

*Pascal.* Marion's appropriation of Pascal's three orders has obvious affinities with his account of analogy and being.<sup>99</sup> While Cartesian metaphysics submits God, soul and world to a "single, univocal... parameter: the concept of 'being,'" the "perfect heterogeneity" of Pascal's orders "excludes even the least univocal parameter or concept" and precludes "all onto-theo-logy in general." The gap between God and created being is parsed with reference to the second and third orders which apprehend them: the distance "raises the first incommensurability [between bodies

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<sup>97</sup> "Is the Argument Ontological?," 152, 156.

<sup>98</sup> "The Question of the Unconditioned," 10–11. Marion elsewhere notes that Anselm's God "exists *in re* in a very special way... he is in reality *because* he is not in understanding. And this is the last and highest degree of being." ("Is the Ontological Argument Ontological?," 212.) I think that this comment speaks neither for nor against an analogy of being, though it is perhaps significant that the sentence is omitted in Marion's later version of the essay—see "Is the Argument Ontological?," 148–50.

<sup>99</sup> Marion takes up the three orders in many texts. Of particular note is *DMP*, 277–345; "Pascal and the 'General Rule' of Truth," in *On the Ego and on God: Further Cartesian Questions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007); "'Christian Philosophy': Hermeneutic or Heuristic?," in *The Question of Christian Philosophy Today*, ed. Francis J. Ambrosio (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999); "Evidence and Bedazzlement," in *Prolegomena to Charity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 53–70; *In the Self's Place*, 101–144; "Metaphysics and Phenomenology".

and minds] to the next level” to mark “an infinite transgression.”<sup>100</sup> For Pascal, when “faced with God, *to be/to exist* are seen as one idol among others, though no doubt the most radical,” and, concomitantly, “the order of charity surpasses infinitely that of being, and governs being—as it does all beings—as one gift among others.”<sup>101</sup> God may be “the single ‘universal Being,’” but he is to be construed as “charity, incommensurable with and *lacking any analogy to the greatness belonging to the inferior orders.*”<sup>102</sup> Thus Marion concludes that Aquinas’ doctrine of *esse* confirms Pascal’s position: Thomist *esse* aims only “to mark the distance—an ‘infinitely infinite distance’—from the creature to God (Pascal).”<sup>103</sup>

*Other medievals.* Marion claims for his own the common medieval formula “all things are, indeed, nothing in comparison with God, yet they are not absolutely nothing.”<sup>104</sup>

He comments that

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<sup>100</sup> *DMP*, 308–10. Marion notes that “only the third order sees the two others, in such a way that, paradoxically, it must remain invisible to them... The second order, which does not have to love in order to produce evidence, therefore does not reach the third order, and does not even see that it does not reach it... charity abandons the evidence of the mind to its own logic” (315–6, 335). The absolute divide between knowledge and love affirmed here and elsewhere dovetails exactly with Marion’s identification of being and conceptual intelligibility. Milbank, as will see, argues that Marion’s love/knowledge dichotomy, predicated as it is on a strictly Cartesian conception of knowledge, is as contestable as the modern conception of being with which Marion works. For an analysis of Marion and Milbank’s respective epistemologies, see my unpublished paper “A Thinking and Feeling Soul: John Milbank and Jean-Luc Marion on Theological Rationality,” 2013.

<sup>101</sup> *DMP*, 297; “The End of the End of Metaphysics,” 18.

<sup>102</sup> *DMP*, 345, my italics.

<sup>103</sup> “TA&OT,” 61.

<sup>104</sup> “*Omnia Deo comparata nihil sunt, et tamen simpliciter non nihil sunt.*” “Nothing and Nothing Else,” 192 and 195n33. Marion cites as sources of the formula Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Eckhart, Charles de Bouvelles, John of the Cross, Canfeld, Bérulle and Pascal.

those two opposite states (beings and nothingness) do not contradict each other because each one appears within a different horizon: "*simpliciter non nihil*" refers to the horizon of being, "*Deo comparata nihil*" refers to a *non-ontological horizon*. The pole to which the comparison refers defines more precisely the identity of this non-ontological horizon. We must notice that the mere mention of God is not sufficient to define it, because of *the equivocality of God's names*.<sup>105</sup>

*Denys' discourse of praise*. Marion's account of Thomist analogical predication is clearly a modulation of his prior Dionysian theory of the divine names.<sup>106</sup> On Marion's telling, the Dionysian *triplex via* culminates in the "discourse of praise" or "de-negation," which entails a very specific and peculiar kind of linguistic reference. Praise, he explains, has the form "*x* praises the Requisite as *y*" with the "as" indicating "inasmuch as" and not "as if", such that there is no straightforward identification of *y* with the Requisite.<sup>107</sup> Rather, "*y* indicates the relation under which *x* aims at the Requisite... [it] refers back to *x*."<sup>108</sup> When, for example, the worshipper (*x*) praises God as "beautiful" (*y*), she is not really predicating Beauty to God or even finally referring to God at all, she is naming her receipt of beauty from God. This means, as Marion succinctly puts it, that "*y* aims at the Requisite, but describes the requestant *x*."<sup>109</sup> For Marion, Dionysian speech names the gift and *not* the giver.

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<sup>105</sup> "Nothing and Nothing Else," 192, my italics.

<sup>106</sup> Marion's influential and original exposition of the Dionysian *triplex via* is elaborated in *I&D*, "\$16. The Discourse of Praise" and "In the Name", and put to work in *GWB*, 73–78, 183–97; "What Cannot Be Said"; "Idipsum"; *In the Self's Place*, chapters 1 and 7.

<sup>107</sup> *I&D*, 187. Cf. "In the Name," 143–5.

<sup>108</sup> *I&D*, 187.

<sup>109</sup> *I&D*, 187. Thus Marion can say that "with praise, it is no doubt no longer a matter of saying but of hearing." ("In the Name," 148.) This conception of theological speech has a long Neoplatonic

Marion explicitly replicates this Dionysian approach in the context of Thomist *esse*, observing that “if God causes Being” then it follows for Aquinas that “God can be expressed without Being.”<sup>110</sup> Theological speech, especially speech about being, does not make “attributions” but only “marks God's absence, anonymity, and withdrawal.”<sup>111</sup>

*The saturated phenomenon.* Marion's novel notion of saturation indicates an excess of intuition over (Kantian/Husserlian) concept and he argues that it may be encountered in many places: historical events, art, the idol, the flesh, the face, the sublime, the icon or indeed in any banal experience appropriately apprehended.<sup>112</sup> In saturation we receive “an absolute phenomenon” that is “disconnected from all analogy with any object of experience whatsoever,” that is, an “absolute without analog.”<sup>113</sup> It

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provenance. Plotinus, for example, in *Enneads* VI.9.3.49-55 examines descriptions of the One which “predicate an attribute not of it, but of us” trans. Dominic O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 56.

<sup>110</sup> *GWB*, xxiv. Cf. “In the Name,” 136; “TA&OT,” 54: “what being can mean for entities is now to be seen apart from God (and from what “to be” may mean for him) by the distance of a cause.”

<sup>111</sup> “In the Name,” 143–5.

<sup>112</sup> Key texts for this important theme in Marion's work include: “The Saturated Phenomenon,” in *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, ed. Dominique Janicaud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 176–216; *Being Given*, 179–247; *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); “Metaphysics and Phenomenology”; “The Banality of Saturation”.

<sup>113</sup> *Being Given*, 209, 364n56. Marion's comments about analogy here allude to Kant's analogies of experience in the first *Critique* (A176/B219–A218/B265)—obviously a different problematic than the theological analogy that interests us in this study. But as the quotations here indicate, Marion's use of the Kantian schema in reference to revelation and divinity only confirms in other terms the equivocity between First and Second being that I am tracing in his other writings.

produces dazzling exceptions to Being—“nonbeing phenomena.”<sup>114</sup> But it is God and his manifestation that constitutes “the absolutely saturated phenomenon,” the “being-given par excellence,” and the “ultimate variation on saturation.”<sup>115</sup> Christ appears as “bursting absolutely without compare, common measure, or analogy” and presents a paradox, “which his absoluteness renders *inaccessible as such* to all sight, contact, and speech.” With God, no mode of thought or horizon “could successfully tolerate the absoluteness of the phenomenon, precisely because it gives itself as absolute, that is to say, *free from all analogy* with common-law phenomena.”<sup>116</sup>

*Distance.* Marion’s elaboration of “Distance” in his early work must also be mentioned here as it contains his most substantial constructive approach to the theme of analogy outside of “TA&OT.”<sup>117</sup> Broadly speaking, Distance names the relation between God and creation and the intra-Trinitarian relation of Father and Son, two relations that are not entirely separable. Marion posits an affiliation between this divine Distance and Heidegger’s *Ereignis*, the primordial giving which is prior even to ontological difference.<sup>118</sup> There is properly “no similitude, nor any

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<sup>114</sup> “The Banality of Saturation,” 385.

<sup>115</sup> *Being Given*, 211, 235; “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 588.

<sup>116</sup> *Being Given*, 211, 240, my italics.

<sup>117</sup> For Marion’s treatment of Distance see *I&D*, 158–62, 198–253; *GWB*, 73–83, 99–107; *DMP*, 306–22, 340–42; “The End of the End of Metaphysics,” 16–20. Helpful analyses of this matter may be found in Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 51–60, and Gschwandtner, *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 135–149. Gschwandtner assesses Marion’s intentions perceptively when she titles her treatment of Distance “A Recovery of Analogy.”

<sup>118</sup> Richard Polt’s study “Ereignis,” in *A Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Mark

dissimilitude” between the two and no possibility of “an identification nor of an analogy in the current sense of the term” because “no directly measurable relation joins them.”<sup>119</sup> But there is nonetheless a peculiar sort of analogy here:

[I]n itself, Being plays according to the appropriated withdrawal of the *Ereignis* and thus, as one says, “presents some analogies” with distance. That “analogy” itself in turn finds itself taken up within distance, where Being sees its abandoned inanity forgiven. This placement in distance, in bringing about through its depth in Being an icon of distance, both maintains supremely the independence of the question of Being and holds back any threat of idolatry—which, far from weakening the rigor of such a relation, reinforces it. For what places Being in distance as an icon of distance remains first the humble and unthinkable authority of the Father.<sup>120</sup>

Perceiving this peculiar analogy of being requires “the conversion of the idol into icon”—that is, the Christian must approach Being with a phenomenological “indifference” which will permit him to see through its “idolatrous pretension” and so receive the regard of its divine donating source.<sup>121</sup>

One might suppose that this early mooted of an analogy between Heidegger’s Being and Marion’s Distance represents a counterpoint to Marion’s mature work. However, though the texts are fantastically obscure and may be amenable to other readings, I think such a conclusion would be in error. This is because, firstly, at no point does

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Wrathall (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 375–391, discerns three distinct understandings of *Ereignis* across Heidegger’s oeuvre. It is clear that Marion’s theological reflections are concerned only with the third, which is associated with the *es gibt* of the 1962 lecture “Time and Being”.

<sup>119</sup> *I&D*, 243.

<sup>120</sup> *I&D*, 253.

<sup>121</sup> *I&D*, 251. Cf. Marion’s parallel prescriptions in *GWB*, 105.

Marion allow a two-term relation between First and Second being; he permits only an analogy between two *relations*, the two “givings” of *Ereignis* and Distance. Though he certainly does not mark this, the analogy Marion floats is actually more akin to the four-term analogy of proportionality that he elsewhere rejects.<sup>122</sup> There is certainly no possibility of the analogy of attribution that he traces in Aquinas and hence no possibility of analogous “similitude” between First and Second being. Secondly, the “conversion” of idol into icon which may be enacted by a charitable will “submitting Being itself to the thought of love” does open up for Marion a “nonmetaphysical thought of Being,” but this modifies the perception of Second *esse creatum* only and leaves First *esse divinum* untouched on the far side of a “non-ontological difference” where it only “exerts its sway over Being.”<sup>123</sup> There is no sense of an infinite analogical *esse* that is respectively participated or possessed, but only an absolute division between created being and non-ontological Creator. Therefore, we should

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<sup>122</sup> Aquinas’ analogy of proportionality emerges in his early work as an elaboration of Aristotle. It proposes that “one thing is related to another as a third thing is related to a fourth” (*De veritate* 2.11.a2, Robert W. Mulligan, trans., *Thomas Aquinas: The Disputed Questions on Truth*, vol. 1 (H. Regnery Company, 1952), 114). Put formally and in terms of being, the analogy runs “God’s *esse* : essence :: creature’s *esse* : essence.” Marion’s analogy seems to run something like “*Ereignis* : being :: God : creation.” Marion emphatically rejects Cajetan’s rendition of proportionality on the grounds that it posits a “neutral and abstract” term outside the analogical series and “a defined, commensurable and intelligible” relation between the analogates. He prefers two-term *proportio* for its disavowal of any “commensurable proportion” between creature and God (“TA&OT,” 49–50). Marion explicitly follows Bernard Montagnes here (“TA&OT,” 70n30), who argues that in Cajetan’s account of analogy “Scotus has been granted dangerous concessions.” However, it is telling that Montagnes also insists that the mature Aquinas departs from his own early rendition of proportionality because of the “risk of equivocity” which he later saw was implied in it. (Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004), 64–79, 135–157). The peculiar analogy which Marion proposes in his early work runs, I think, the same risk.

<sup>123</sup> DMP, 342.

conclude that Marion's early treatment of Distance is essentially consonant with the treatment of analogy in his later work.

*The divine "existence."* A final theme that bears on the question of analogy is Marion's positive construal of God's existence. Reflecting in 1991 on *GWB*'s initial reception, Marion observes:

The whole book suffered from the inevitable and assumed equivocation of its title: was it insinuating that the God "without being" is not, or does not exist? Let me repeat now the answer I gave then: no, definitely not. God is, exists, and that is the least of things.<sup>124</sup>

Is there a God? Yes, "no doubt, God can and must in the end also be."<sup>125</sup> Marion rightly passes for a theist. However, there is another question lurking behind this (let us call it "naive") affirmation of the divine existence. Marion goes on to say that the real issue "is not the possibility of God's attaining Being, but, quite the opposite, the possibility of Being's attaining to God."<sup>126</sup> Marion tells us what this means in an exposition of Anselm:

It is clear that, like all his creatures, God must exist; but what is at stake in the argument ultimately goes beyond this meager result. If God exists—as He does—He does so as *summum bonum*; thus, He appears as sovereign only as the primary and ultimate good, from which all creatures originate and to which they all return. The demonstration that God exists simply confirms

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<sup>124</sup> *GWB*, xix. Cf. *I&D*, 145: "It is the least of matters to acknowledge that God is as much as any other being." Cf. "TA&OT," 59: God "manifests himself... *in being* (which, even when starting from other horizons, theology has always ended by conceding)".

<sup>125</sup> *GWB*, xix-xx.

<sup>126</sup> *GWB*, xix-xx.

intelligibly a dialogic interplay, a dialogic situation, in which, from the outset, even before God's existence is confirmed, invocation, prayer, the request, and the giving of thanks had already designated Him as the absolute, anterior, preexistent interlocutor...

Indeed, God must be: Yet this is not an objective or a glory, only a means, which enables one to pray to Him with the full realization that He is the transcendental good and, in this sense, the sovereign good. To be sure, one must know that God is, but only in order to use intelligibly the horizon that, in advance, He has always already opened to the listening mind.

The question, even when setting out to demonstrate that the sovereign good exists, does not primarily consist in thinking it in terms of the two alternatives of being or not being; for being does not define or exhaust God's essence, nor can it reach the eminence of the good. Being offers a path, a humbly indispensable path, to the overeminent good of a God who must be loved. Although the question of being also concerns God, God is never circumscribed within the "question of being," as a horizon that would precede or predetermine Him. God is, in order simply to give Himself and to receive praise.<sup>127</sup>

This lengthy passage is the single clearest articulation of Marion's positive understanding of God's existence and it takes us to the very heart of his vision of double being. His position could be described as a Neoplatonic ontology modified by a theistic personalism. God is clearly "beyond being": he is not a thing among things but stands apart from existing things as their pre-ontological source. God does not exist but *becomes*; he freely enters Second being in order to commune with and receive praise from created beings. Marion can thus speak in passing of God's "existence (which is to say his being inscribed among phenomena existing in the world.)"<sup>128</sup>

This is the personalist modification and it is required to affirm (as against the

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<sup>127</sup> "Is the Argument Ontological?," 159–60.

<sup>128</sup> "The Impossible for Man," 19–20.

relationless Neoplatonic One) the orientation of the Christian deity toward relationship and communion with his creatures.<sup>129</sup> God *is* for the sake of our religious practice and as a function of it, his being is “only a means” to the end of our piety.<sup>130</sup> God’s existence is thus a concession to us.<sup>131</sup> Considered outside of this context, however, Marion’s God occupies precisely the position held by the Neoplatonic One: a First strictly beyond Second being, set apart absolutely and without analogy to it.

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<sup>129</sup> This contrast with Neoplatonism is not, as William Franke suggests, absolute (*On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, Vol. 1: Classic Formulations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 15–6). For a careful treatment of these matters, see Wayne J. Hankey, “God’s Care for Human Individuals: What Neoplatonism Gives to a Christian Doctrine of Providence,” *Quaestiones Disputatae* 2, no. 1 & 2 (2011): 4–36.

<sup>130</sup> There are marked pragmatist overtones in Marion here. His construal of religious practice as a Wittgensteinian language game particularly suggests this—see *I&D*, 180–95; *GWB*, 53–60; “In the Name” esp. 134–8 and 155–8; “What Cannot Be Said”. See also Robyn Horner’s discussion of Marion’s “pragmatic theology of absence” in *In excess*, xix–xx.

<sup>131</sup> This should not be understood as merely “a grudging concession to the uninitiated” on Marion’s part, as Robyn Horner suggests (*Jean-Luc Marion*, 92). Rather, the divine existence is God’s concession to creatures—it is an actual divine concession, not merely a pedagogical one. Lorenz Puntel, no admirer of Marion, makes the same mistake when he judges the concession “a blatant contradiction” and a “playing with words” (*Being and God*, 315). Marion’s theology may have its incoherencies, but his concession here is not a contradiction; it is simply a Christian repetition of classical Neoplatonism’s henological ontology. Laurence Paul Hemming’s novel critique of Marion also missteps at this point. Hemming argues, contra Marion, that Heidegger “neither thinks God from out of being nor even God subordinate to being; [he] thinks the flashing *manifestation* of God’s *self-deploying* in the realm of being. God enters the realm of being as a *being*. Then and only then does God become a being.” He argues that it is only Marion who insists that if God is, he must be a being—Heidegger, “quite the opposite from Marion, never thinks that God is a being... Only the *manifestness* of God is a being in the domain of being.” (*Heidegger’s Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 254–261). Whether Marion has “fundamentally misread Heidegger” as Hemming claims (“Reading Heidegger: Is God Without Being? Jean-Luc Marion’s Reading of Martin Heidegger in *God Without Being*,” *New Blackfriars* 76, no. 895 (1995): 344), is a question beyond my scope here, but it is clear that Hemming has on this point misread Marion. For Marion’s treatment of God’s existence affirms precisely what Hemming affirms via Heidegger, namely that God is not “a being” but voluntarily enters and manifests in the realm of being. Against Hemming, it seems to me that the Thomist critique of Marion should be carried on by challenging Marion’s agreements with Heidegger, not his purported departures.

*Equivocity?*

Establishing Marion's position on analogy is, as Catherine Pickstock observes, "very difficult indeed."<sup>132</sup> However, this review of the full breadth of Marion's work drives us, I think, toward an unavoidable conclusion: no matter which source in the tradition he is retrieving, no matter what philosophical or theological theme he is essaying, Marion appears to operate always with an *equivocity of being*. This should be taken not in the weak sense of equivocity as merely non-univocal, but in the stronger sense of non-analogical. "Being," if it must be spoken of God, is spoken by Marion in a strictly equivocal fashion and the analogy between First and Second implied in such speech is in fact a wholly equivocal rupture, an abyss without any similitude whatsoever. It is hard to interpret Marion's occasional concessions ("hardly maintains an *analogia* with," "equivocity... or, at least, analogy,") as anything more than superficial nods to the language of his sources and the demands of his critics. It *may* be the case that Marion could clarify his position to avoid this result, but this would require, I think, a substantial recantation of many existing formulations. Even if the letter is in a few places ambiguous, the spirit of Marion's work clearly strains toward equivocity.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Catherine Pickstock, "Epochs of Modernity," *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 6, no. 1 (2005): 80.

<sup>133</sup> Kenneth Schmitz is a little more sympathetic: Marion says that "Thomas 'hardly' maintains an analogy with the *ens commune* of creatures; but this 'hardly' means either not at all or somewhat; and if the latter, then being as *esse* is heard again." ("The God of Love," 507.)

Many readers have come to similar conclusions regarding Marion's equivocity.<sup>134</sup> However, a couple have risen to Marion's defence. Derek Morrow acknowledges that it seems Marion's theology "collapses into pure equivocity," but contends that a more careful appreciation of the phenomenological background to his treatment of *esse* undoes this worry and might mean that Marion "can find a measure of acceptance among Thomists that previously could not have been envisaged."<sup>135</sup> In a similar spirit, Christina Gschwandtner argues that Marion's corpus taken as a whole constitutes "an attempt to recover a new version of analogy."<sup>136</sup> She cites Marion's early studies of analogy in the Cartesian period to refute Fergus Kerr's claim that Marion has "a deep-seated suspicion of the very idea of analogy" and points to Marion's phenomenology of the icon, his notion of Distance and the themes of participation and immanence in *I&D* as evidence that his "new version" of analogy successfully avoids an equivocal position.<sup>137</sup> However, Gschwandtner addresses

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<sup>134</sup> As far as I know no one has established the equivocity issue across the range of Marion's writing as I have here, but many have noted it with reference to Marion's treatment of Aquinas—see Michael Ewbank, "Of Idols, Icons, and Aquinas's *Esse*," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2009): 161–175; John Martis, "Thomistic *Esse* — Idol or Icon? Jean-Luc Marion's God Without Being," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 9, no. 1 (1996): 55–68; Kerr, "Aquinas after Marion"; Kelly, "The 'Horrible Wrappers' of Aquinas' God"; Schmitz, "The God of Love"; Lawell, "Thomas Aquinas, Jean-Luc Marion"; Eric D. Perl, "Esse Tantum and the One," *Quaestiones Disputatae* 2, no. 1 & 2 (2011): 185–200; Brian Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 2002), 66; Brian Shanley, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Onto-Theology, and Marion," *The Thomist* 60, no. 4 (1996): 621–4; Puntel, *Being and God*, 302–331; Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism*, 262–5. Cf. Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion*, 149–50.

<sup>135</sup> "Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance," 65–6, 72 and 75. See also Morrow, "Aquinas, Marion, Analogy, and *Esse*".

<sup>136</sup> *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 128–9. See also 128–149, 153–5, 174–7, 243.

<sup>137</sup> *Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 280n9 and 129–140, 153–4. The quote is from Kerr's "Aquinas after Marion," 363.

none of the difficult texts noted above, and the positive evidence she does cite is profoundly ambiguous and by no means exonerates his mature position.

Morrow sees Marion's equivocity problem more clearly, but he gives only the barest of constructive suggestions about how the proposed phenomenological sensitivity answers it, not nearly enough to acquit Marion from the charge.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, he fails to grasp how deep the Heideggerian and Neoplatonic roots of Marion's equivocity run. It is one thing to observe that Thomistic *esse* "becomes mute" and "cannot be heard from [the] vantage points" of modern metaphysics, but it is quite another to say that there are no non-modern or non-Heideggerian vantages on being and that therefore God can only be faithfully thought "without being."<sup>139</sup> As I will argue in chapter 3, it is finally these assumptions which compel Marion to tarry with equivocity in the hope of preserving God from the effects of being, and he cannot be exonerated from the charge of equivocity until they are apprehended and accounted for. On the question of analogy, then, the burden of proof remains with advocates such as Morrow and Gschwandtner for, from a Thomist point of view, it certainly appears that Marion's "new version" of analogy is finally not analogy at all, but

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<sup>138</sup> In "Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance" he suggests that *esse* must be understood in light of Distance which "discloses how we are related to God" (72-5) and that an iconic reading of *esse* will involve not just "seeing" but also "being seen" by God's counter-gaze (76-7). However it is not at all obvious how these suggestions help since, as I have already argued, the "disclosure" of Creator-creature relations in Distance allows no similitude between divine and created *esse*, and "being seen," while obviously a rich notion, simply dodges the equivocity question, which concerns the analogical reference of creaturely perfections that we see to their divine source.

<sup>139</sup> "Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance," 73.

rather equivocal speech about God that reflects a strict equivocity of First and Second being.

Thus I judge that there is no significant change in Marion's *constructive* theology between the early and mature readings of Aquinas, nor between Marion's early and later work more generally.<sup>140</sup> Regarding Aquinas, Marion's retraction modifies only the judgement that Thomas lies outside Marion's lineage of salutary "without being" theological sources. But on the key question of analogy and being, Marion's mature position simply replaces univocal *esse* with an equivocal *esse*—a *volte-face* that in effect returns us to the same position. The problems inherent in *GWB*'s refusal of analogy persist in Marion's mature work, now under the name of "*Esse* without being." The one constant in Marion's shifting readings of Aquinas—and indeed in all of his theological and philosophical work—is his modern and Heideggerian construal of Second being as finite, univocal, nihilistic, empty, and coextensive with and exhausted by conceptual intelligibility. Around this constant Marion oscillates between a rejection of univocity and an embrace of equivocity but he never, in my judgment, affirms an analogy of being. This aspect of Marion's work is rarely apprehended by his commentators, but any thorough evaluation of his theology must grapple with it. It is especially significant for this study—in the next chapter I will

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<sup>140</sup> Others think similarly. "Marion's differing and indeed opposite understandings of Aquinas appear to be united by a single intention" (Morrow, "Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance," 66). The mature position "does not in fact represent a serious alteration in argument and conclusion" (Schmitz, "The God of Love," 507). See also Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition*, 66; Lawell, "Thomas Aquinas, Jean-Luc Marion," 42n74.

show that Marion's equivocality of being contrasts sharply with Milbank's approach, and in chapter 3 I will argue that, from a Thomist point of view, Marion's position here ultimately underwrites an unsatisfactory account of double being.

### C. The perplexities of Marion's Thomism

I'm a good Thomist.

- Jean-Luc Marion<sup>141</sup>

I have argued that Marion's theology posits, in the wake of Heidegger and Denys, a rigorously pre-ontological First and that this starting point compels him to reinterpret analogy in terms of an equivocality of being. This conclusion obviously implies a rather dim view of Marion's claim to the Thomist heritage. But Marion insists that his theology is "fundamentally Thomistic" and, in an effort to take Marion's claim seriously, this section will briefly probe the Thomistic scholarship that Marion claims as confirmations of his approach.<sup>142</sup> Perhaps a consideration of Marion's most important Thomistic influences will shed some light on the perplexities of the Thomism he professes.

*Montagnes on analogy.* In one of his early studies of Descartes, Marion says that in his treatment of Thomist analogy "I subscribe to the conclusions of the remarkable work

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<sup>141</sup> "God and the Gift," 150.

<sup>142</sup> "TA&OT," 64.

of Bernard Montagnes,” referring to the 1963 book *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to Thomas Aquinas*.<sup>143</sup> He confirms his continuing reliance on Montagnes’ “remarkable” and “illuminating study” in his mature reading of Aquinas.<sup>144</sup> However, close study of Montagnes’ work does not corroborate Marion’s interpretation of Aquinas but rather presents a twin perplexity. On the one hand, Marion’s early view of Aquinas seems to discount Montagnes’ emphasis on Aquinas’ thorough rejection of univocity.<sup>145</sup> On the other hand, Marion’s mature view ignores Montagnes’ insistence that Aquinas turned away from proportionality after *De Veritate* precisely to avoid the problem of equivocity.<sup>146</sup> According to Montagnes, Aquinas in later works such as *De Potentia*, *SGT* and *ST* emphasises that

[T]he divine names are not equivocal... When two beings receive the same name by chance, it is impossible to know the one by starting from the other. Such would be the case if the divine names were equivocal: there would be nothing in common between beings and God—the latter would be the wholly other, beyond being and knowledge... [I]f being were equivocal, one could not attribute it simultaneously to God and to a created thing. It would belong to the one necessarily and to the other not at all: if the realities of this world qualify as being, then God is not being, but beyond being; and if God is being, being belongs to Him only, and nothing truly is a being aside from Him. Equivocity would introduce a definite rupture in the domain of being.<sup>147</sup>

Far from supporting his position, the source which Marion relies on as the most

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<sup>143</sup> *Sur la théologie blanche de Descartes*, 88n24, trans. Morrow, “Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance,” 68n19. Montagnes’ book was originally published as *La Doctrine de L’analogie de L’être D’après Saint Thomas d’Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1963).

<sup>144</sup> “TA&OT,” 70n30. See also “The Idea of God,” 293n10 and 294n14; *On the Ego and on God*, 252n78.

<sup>145</sup> Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, esp. 23–64.

<sup>146</sup> Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 64–79.

<sup>147</sup> Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 66.

important confirmation of his reading Thomistic analogy appears more like a rebuttal of both his renditions, early and mature.<sup>148</sup>

*Fabro on “intensive being”*. It is a remarkable fact that Marion’s treatment of Aquinas says almost nothing about First *esse* in a constructive manner. He labours at great length to show that First *esse* stands apart from *esse commune*—actually a moot point for most Thomists, who never doubted it—but he says precious little else.<sup>149</sup> The only substantial exception comes in the following passage in “TA&OT”:

[T]he *esse* assigned to God excludes itself from the common and created being and consequently from all what we understand and know under the title of being. Therefore, God without being (at least without *this* being) could become again a Thomistic thesis. And to go beyond, unto the *esse* of which God fulfills the act, it would be necessary to think without ontological categories but according to truly theological determinations—as, for example, that of “intensive being.” Being taken according to this excellence would thus find itself already outside of being.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Derek Morrow has also noted the “unaccountable curiosity” of Montaignes’ influence on Marion (“Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance,” 67–9). Morrow interprets Marion’s appeals to Montaignes as a sign that “Marion intends to safeguard precisely what his Thomist critics think he has jettisoned: namely, our ability to speak about God in a way that says something meaningful.” (71) Eric Perl, on the other hand, points to Montaignes’ conception of analogy as a middle way between univocity and equivocity as “precisely the wrong way to put it” and cites Marion’s equivocal position approvingly as proof of Montaignes error! (“Esse Tantum and the One,” 199.) In my judgment, Perl correctly grasps Marion’s mature position but misses the perplexities of its development in the context of twentieth century Thomism, while Morrow sees these perplexities but misjudges their significance—Marion’s apparent equivocity is a sign of his allegiance to Heidegger, not Aquinas. I will discuss this issue further in chapter 3.

<sup>149</sup> John Wippel speaks for virtually all when he says that only a “fatal misreading of Aquinas’s thought” will ignore the divide between *ipsum esse subsistens* and *esse commune* (*The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 591–2).

<sup>150</sup> “TA&OT,” 62.

Marion's allusion to "intensive being" refers to the coinage of Cornelio Fabro, who develops the notion as a way of conceptualising the referral of "being" to both God and creature.<sup>151</sup> As Fran O'Rourke explains, Fabro's notion of intensities is intended to indicate that God's being is "more" than creaturely being in a qualitative (and not quantitative) way—"an escalation of inner attainment, as distinct from that of outward extension or expansion... a heightening or gathering of concentration."<sup>152</sup> *Esse* is possessed by the creature *per participationem* and by the Creator *per essentiam*—it is "contained more *intensely* in the source."<sup>153</sup> This intensive understanding of *esse* is participatory and not "existentialist", and reflects a more Neoplatonic interpretation of Aquinas.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> As Marion's note at "TA&OT," 73n59 indicates, where he cites the French edition of Fabro's landmark *Partecipazione e causalità secondo S. Tommaso d'Aquino*. (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1960). Fabro's publications in English relevant to intensive being are limited—see the articles on "Existence" and "Participation" in Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito, eds., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols., 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003); "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," trans. B. M. Bonansea, *The Review of Metaphysics* (1974): 449–491; "Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies," *The New Scholasticism* 44, no. 1 (1970): 69–100. See also Fran O'Rourke's lengthy examination in "Virtus Essendi" and Jason Mitchell's comprehensive doctoral study "Being and Participation: The Method and Structure of Metaphysical Reflection according to Cornelio Fabro" (PhD, Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, 2012).

<sup>152</sup> O'Rourke, "Virtus Essendi," 79.

<sup>153</sup> O'Rourke, "Virtus Essendi," 31.

<sup>154</sup> In this respect, Fabro's studies (in conjunction with Louis-Bertrand Geiger's) were a watershed in twentieth century Thomist scholarship, leading to a majority turn against the anti-Platonic readings of Gilson and the Leonine Thomists. Wayne Hankey traces this turn in "Aquinas' First Principle: Being or Unity?," *Dionysius* no. 4 (1980): 133–9, and "From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: The Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-Speaking North America," *Dionysius* 16 (1998): 157–188. See also Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1996), 1–24.

Kevin Hart has wryly observed that Marion's inclusion of "TA&OT" as an appendix to the second French edition of *Dieu sans l'être* represents "what Derrida would call a 'dangerous supplement,' since it challenges the very Heideggerian basis of the critique of Heidegger elaborated in the original book."<sup>155</sup> One may also say that Marion's quiet reference to Fabro constitutes a dangerous allusion, for it challenges the very henological basis of Marion's mature claim for a Thomist God without being. This is so because, as Fabro emphasises, intensive being says that the creature is ontologically "dissimilar to God," reflecting "the infinite distance of the creature from the creator," but also "truly similar to God not only insofar as his essence is derived by exemplarism from the divine idea, but properly '*in rationis entis*.'" <sup>156</sup> This ontological relation provides a "semantics of participation" that underwrites analogical attribution.<sup>157</sup> Marion's comment that God's intensive *esse* would "find itself already outside of being" is therefore true in part, but the equivocality of being that Marion has in mind here is an obvious misconstrual of Fabro's intentions, which militate against the sort of equivocal divide between First and Second that Marion desires.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Hart, "The Sacred and the Holy: Emmanuel Levinas on Ethics, God, and Art, Lecture 4: Responses," 10.

<sup>156</sup> Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et Causalité Selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires De Louvain, 1961), 599–600, trans. Mitchell, "Being and Participation," 526, italics omitted.

<sup>157</sup> See discussion in Mitchell, "Being and Participation," 527–30.

<sup>158</sup> Indeed, Milbank claims Fabro for his project of a God "with being"—see "Truth and Vision," 110–11n120.

The perplexity of Marion's appeal to Fabro does not end there, however. In a recent essay, Marion argues that Scotus' conception of being fails to attain to true transcendence and then suggests:

One might, of course, wish to radicalize divine transcendence by increasing [being's] density to the point of "*ipsum esse*" (following St. Thomas) instead of deploying it within the confines of the concept of entity (following Duns Scotus, and later Suárez). One might—and, I suppose, one should. Such a move, however, does not change the fundamental situation with regard to transcendence, since *ipsum esse* cannot itself be conceived, at least from our standpoint (*quoad nos*), except as the real composition of essence and *esse*.<sup>159</sup>

Marion's reference to an increasing "density" of *esse* is certainly an allusion to Fabro's Thomism. However, startlingly, Marion goes on to declare that, though intensive *esse* sidesteps Scotist idolatry, it "does not suffice to set [God's transcendence] free, since it remains coiled within the chasm of essence and *esse* and therefore definitively within the horizon of being." Thomist transcendence, Marion insists, "must be transcended if God is whom we have in mind," and this move will necessarily take us "outside of being."<sup>160</sup> It is very difficult to interpret these comments as anything but a straightforward contradiction of Marion's prior blessing of Fabro's "truly theological determinations," which set *esse* "already outside of being."<sup>161</sup> That Marion would now condemn what is his only positive articulation of the nature of Aquinas' First being is a surprising and confusing move, and I must confess that I am not sure what

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<sup>159</sup> "The Impossible for Man," 18.

<sup>160</sup> "The Impossible for Man," 18–9.

<sup>161</sup> "TA&OT" had also declared that Aquinas' *ipsum esse* was happily located "well out of the horizon of being" (64).

to make of it. Could it be the case that Marion's strikingly circumspect comment about following Aquinas' theological approach ("one might — and, I suppose, one should") gives voice to his true opinion of the Angelic Doctor? Marion has gone to great lengths to claim a Thomist heritage for his project, but perhaps his heart was never really in it after all—a perplexity indeed.<sup>162</sup>

*Balthasar on the affirmation of being.* A third perplexity of Marion's Thomism is his peculiar response to Balthasar's account of God and being. Marion notes that his "approach owes much" to Balthasar and this is evident in many places, especially in the soaring conclusion to *I&D* that repeats and elaborates Balthasar's own finale in *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*.<sup>163</sup> Given this affiliation, Marion's contention that the theologian should avoid trading in being is an unexpected one, for the thrust of Balthasar's whole oeuvre and the burden of the very passage that Marion expounds in *I&D* is that the theologian must *affirm* being:

The Christians of today, living in a night which is deeper than that of the later Middle Ages, are given the task of performing the act of affirming Being, unperturbed by the darkness and the distortion, in a way that is vicarious and representative for all humanity.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> The ambiguity is compounded yet further by Marion's subsequent reaffirmation of his warm "TA&OT" reading of Aquinas in the 2012 preface to the second English edition of *GWB* (xxix-xxx).

<sup>163</sup> *I&D*, xxxviii and "§19. The Fourth Dimension," 233–253; Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, "Our Inheritance and the Christian Task," 613–656. Marion notes that his interpretation of Heidegger follows "the breakthrough signaled by H. Urs von Balthasar" (xxxvi).

<sup>164</sup> *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 648. Balthasar concludes that "the Christian is called to be the guardian of metaphysics in our time." (656)

The French genealogy argues that being lost its charm in modernity and Marion concludes that theology should therefore proceed without it, but Balthasar suggests that there is too much at stake for theology to abandon being. Rather, our situation is a call to the hard pedagogical work of articulating afresh what “being” might mean from a theological point of view so as to lead our contemporaries “into the all-embracing openness of man to Being.”<sup>165</sup> It is this conviction that underwrites Balthasar’s own explicit condemnations of Marion’s theological trajectory. Marion’s theology, according to Balthasar, attempts to “mislead us... into removing God from being.” But this move forgets that love “is not prior to being but is the supreme act of being” and that goodness is “the intrinsic ‘self-transcendence’ of *esse*.” These perfections do “not flow forth from somewhere above the Divine Being, which... is itself the abyss of all love.” Marion’s mistake, Balthasar suggests, is to “concede too much to the critique of Heidegger and others.”<sup>166</sup> Balthasar’s keen criticisms here regarding the relation of love to being and the theological authority of Heidegger should be kept in mind as this study proceeds, for, as I will show in chapter 3, they are echoed in Milbank’s critique of Marion.

As with the previous perplexities then, Marion combines a profound debt to Balthasar with a striking demurral from his Thomist forebear, a demurral which goes

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<sup>165</sup> *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 654. As I will show in chapters 2 and 3, this is precisely the way that Milbank construes his own theological project.

<sup>166</sup> *Theo-Logic Vol. II: Truth of God*, trans. Graham Harrison and Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 177n9, 134–5n10, italics omitted. As far as I know, these two footnotes constitute Balthasar’s only published comments on Marion’s work.

to the core of his project of a God without being. But like Montagnes' opposition to equivocity in theological speech and Fabro's opposition to ontological equivocity of *esse*, Balthasar's call for a theological affirmation of being would seem to demand, if anything, a God "with being."<sup>167</sup>

One might say that these perplexities are not very perplexing at all. Marion has simply followed his Thomist guides selectively, eating the meat and spitting the bones, as it were—a perfectly respectable intellectual procedure. This observation is true, but misses the most interesting aspect of the perplexities, namely *why* Marion is compelled to reject the core Thomist principles at issue here. Answering this question will be the task of chapter 3, where I will address the three issues implicit in Marion's divergences from Montagnes, Fabro and Balthasar: analogical attribution, theological ontology and the post-Heideggerian estimation of being. There I will argue what this chapter and particularly this section has intimated: Marion's vision of double being does not fare well under a Thomist appraisal.

Marion's mature view of Aquinas suggests that he has undergone a significant conversion to Thomist thought. But when a bold leopard claims to have changed its spots, the canny observer knows that some spots will inevitably remain. In the case of Marion, it is the account of being propounded by Heidegger and the moderns that

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<sup>167</sup> Indeed, Balthasar in this respect lends more support to Milbank's theology than in Marion's. See Milbank's discussion of this issue in "Can a Gift Be Given?," 153–4.

remains with Marion, even as he boldly claims the Thomist inheritance.

### **Conclusion: First without Second**

Being... offers no privileged access to the question of God and provides no grounds for a decision procedure. Rather it disconnects God and being absolutely.

The perfect univocity of love honours God in a more holy manner than the equivocity of being itself.

- Jean-Luc Marion<sup>168</sup>

The Anonymous Commentator proposed a double being: a First infinitival and unrestricted being yoked to a Second derived and determined being. We can see this clearly repeated in Marion's theology. In his treatment of theologians such as Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, who undoubtedly ascribe being to God, Marion recognises a double structure of divine First and created Second being. However, his Neoplatonic-Dionysian inheritance determines the nature of the yoke between First and Second: the two poles of *esse* stand in a purely equivocal relation, without any likeness of analogy, and the attribution of *esse* to God is made "as to name only." This structure is confirmed across all of Marion's writings. Marion conceives transcendence in terms of the First's absolute separation from Second being and he thus cuts the yoke of the Commentator's double being, producing an "*esse* without Being." In place of an ontological yoke of analogy, he posits a primordial voluntary

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<sup>168</sup> "The Impossible for Man," 19; "De la «mort de Dieu»,” 130, my trans.

relation, a univocity of love. (Interestingly, however, Marion's elevation of a transcendent Love is not entirely foreign to the Commentator, however, who also speaks of "the very great separation of the inconceivable hypostasis" from the realm of Second being and urges us to an "apprehension of the Lovable" who is "the unknowable itself.")<sup>169</sup> Marion's mature work displays the ongoing influence of his early Dionysian reply to Heidegger's second idolatry, and the Pascalian and pre-ontological God of charity, posited as a theological appendix to Heidegger's ontology, returns in Marion's account of analogy.

One of Marion's early essays concludes with a call to embrace "the perfect univocity of love" as the highest mode of theological reflection, higher even than "the equivocality of being itself."<sup>170</sup> Here, distilled in a sentence, is the whole account of double being which Marion will go on to articulate over his career. The First is without Second being, whether by denial or equivocal affirmation, and this reality is best expressed in terms of a pure and pre-ontological love. God is love, and therefore God is without being.

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<sup>169</sup> Fragment I, trans. Bechtel, *The Anonymous Commentary*, 40, 42. "Lovable" renders the Commentator's ἐράννοῦ.

<sup>170</sup> "L'univocité parfaite de l'amour honorerait plus saintement Dieu que l'équivocité de l'être elle-même." ("De la «mort de Dieu»,", 130, my trans.)

## CHAPTER TWO

*God with being:  
an exposition of John Milbank's account of double being*

If Marion's vision of double being gives us a God without being, we might say that Milbank's account gives a God "with being." This chapter will expound the full breadth of Milbank's work to date to demonstrate how this is so. I begin by indicating Milbank's starting point in the Thomist claim that God is "being itself," and examine the construal of Second being which this starting point elicits. As will rapidly become clear, Milbank's beginnings here contrast starkly with Marion. I then consider Milbank's doctrine of analogy and its implications for the Creator-creature distinction. In the third and fourth sections I address the most ambiguous element in Milbank's account of double being, namely his shifting attitudes to henology and pre-ontology. Reading Milbank rightly on these points is enormously important for grasping his critique of Marion, which is centred on a dissatisfaction with Marion's use of pre-ontology. My exposition as a whole will demonstrate that Milbank's account of double being emphasises the radical immanence of First being to Second being, in notable contrast to the radical transcendence of First from Second in Marion. This contrast will be prove important in the confrontation and evaluation of their approaches which I carry on in chapter 3.

## A. Milbank's God "with" being

### *A Gilsonian beginning*

In chapter 1 I showed that the animating conviction of Marion's theology is that God is "beyond being" in a Dionysian fashion. The animating conviction of Milbank's theology, on the other hand, is that God is "being itself." He endorses this thesis in countless places across his work. In his programmatic *Theology and Social Theory*, for example, Milbank argues that early Christianity distinguished itself from Greek thought by "reinterpreting" the Platonic Good "as identical with Being" and referring it to God.<sup>1</sup> The Christians "broke with Neo-platonism by ascribing all Being" to God and thus construed him "as infinite Being."<sup>2</sup> Milbank confirms this early declaration in subsequent writings, arguing that "the Good is no longer a Platonic idea beyond being" for Christian theology but "is to be equated with the infinity of being;"<sup>3</sup> unlike the supreme being of Aristotle's cosmology, Aquinas construes God as "pure being" or "Being as such in its all."<sup>4</sup> God must be understood "as ontological being itself"<sup>5</sup> and as "alone truly being in himself."<sup>6</sup> We should see "God as Being itself, on the one hand, and creatures as existing in this or that fashion, on the other."<sup>7</sup> Similar

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<sup>1</sup> *TST*, 297.

<sup>2</sup> *TST*, 437–8.

<sup>3</sup> "Problematizing the Secular: The Post-Postmodern Agenda," in *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, ed. Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick (Routledge, 1992), 40.

<sup>4</sup> "Truth and Vision," 29; "Materialism and Transcendence," 413.

<sup>5</sup> "Stanton #1," 8.

<sup>6</sup> "The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences," in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 308.

<sup>7</sup> "The Soul of Reciprocity Part One: Reciprocity Refused," *Modern Theology* 17, no. 3 (July 1, 2001): 370.

formulations abound across his work.<sup>8</sup>

Milbank's theology thus has a marked affinity with the "metaphysics of Exodus" propounded by Étienne Gilson.<sup>9</sup> Gilson famously argued that in the "Christian outlook where God is identified with being," the "proper name of God is Being."<sup>10</sup> This claim marks a "radical difference" from Greek thought in which "there is no sense of the word 'being' reserved exclusively for God."<sup>11</sup> Milbank's Gilsonian affinities are of particular significance to his double being debate with Marion because it is Gilson perhaps more than any other whom Marion takes as a foil for his own theology.

### *Milbank's Second being*

Any contemporary theologian who affirms that God is "being itself" must inevitably give some response to Heidegger, that quintessential philosopher of being. As I have demonstrated, Marion's response is to posit a pre-ontological God as the donating source of being and to reinscribe the entire fold of ontological difference within the

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<sup>8</sup> See also, for example, "History of the One God," *The Heythrop Journal* 38, no. 4 (October 1, 1997): 380; "Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul," *Modern Theology* 13, no. 4 (October 1, 1997): 463; "Double Glory," 191; "Grandeur of Reason," 375; "Can a Gift Be Given?," 153-4; "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics," 452n1.

<sup>9</sup> Classically articulated in his "The Necessity of Being" chapter in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), 42-63 and contrasted with Neoplatonism in his "On Being and the One" chapter in *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 1-40.

<sup>10</sup> *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 59 and 51. Gilson argues that the identification of God and being marks the most "decisive influence" of Christianity upon Western philosophy (47).

<sup>11</sup> *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, 48.

“field of creation.”<sup>12</sup> Milbank’s strategy differs from Marion’s. Rather than proposing a theological appendix to Heidegger’s ontology, Milbank attempts an immanent critique of the ontology itself, arguing for a rival interpretation of being which he argues may be legitimately – that is, non-ontotheologically – referred to God.

Milbank carries on his critique and response to Heidegger across a wide set of writings,<sup>13</sup> but it can be distilled to two main points. First, Milbank makes an argument for “conjecture,” which contends that any piece of phenomenological analysis necessarily contains a hermeneutical element which is informed by the phenomenologist’s prior assumptions and preferences. Taking a cue from Cusanus’ treatise *De Coniecturis*, Milbank describes this as the “conjectural” aspect of all phenomenology: “to speak of a univocal Being is a conjecture, and to speak of an analogical Being... is also a conjecture.”<sup>14</sup> We cannot “arrive at any fundamental or framing phenomena, with the question of their underlying ontological base either bracketed or rendered superfluous.”<sup>15</sup> A wholly objective phenomenological reduction is therefore impossible and there is no such thing as a “pure

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<sup>12</sup> Marion, *GWB*, 109.

<sup>13</sup> See particularly *TST*, 298–309; “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 345–55; “The Soul of Reciprocity Part Two: Reciprocity Granted,” *Modern Theology* 17, no. 4 (October 1, 2001): 488–505; “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics”; “Can a Gift Be Given?” 138–142; “Transcendality of the Gift,” 889–90; “On Theological Transgression,” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 145–61; *BSO*, 40–41; “Truth and Vision,” 41–4; “Grandeur of Reason,” 373–9; “Problematizing the Secular”.

<sup>14</sup> *TST*, 308. Cusanus’ text has been translated in Jasper Hopkins, trans., *Nicholas of Cusa: Metaphysical Speculations*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), 163–297.

<sup>15</sup> “Grandeur of Reason,” 389.

phenomenology” free of ontological assumptions.<sup>16</sup> Milbank puts this argument to work against Marion by advocating an “impure” phenomenology, one which is “already also in itself an ontology, also a metaphysics,” as opposed to Marion’s claim to have apprehended a pure pre-ontological givenness.<sup>17</sup> However, it is above all against Heidegger that Milbank addresses the argument. With Heidegger’s analyses of moods, temporal examinations of Being and beings or speculations about *Ereignis*, the critical question to be asked is “what authorises the reading?”<sup>18</sup> It must be recognised that Heidegger “merely elects” a certain interpretation of phenomena; there is always a “subjectivity... of reception” and an ineluctable element of speculation in his method.<sup>19</sup> Milbank labours this point because it is a necessary piece of ground-clearing to prepare for his own proposal of a rival, theological, non-Heideggerian account of being.

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<sup>16</sup> Milbank follows Eric Alliez, Alain Badiou and Ray Brassier on this point. He rehearses the argument in many places—see “Grandeur of Reason,” 388–90; “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 360–8; “The Thomistic Telescope: Truth and Identity,” in *Transcendence and Phenomenology*, ed. Peter Candler and Conor Cunningham (London: SCM Press, 2008), 311–4; “The Mystery of Reason,” in *The Grandeur of Reason: Religion, Tradition and Universalism*, ed. Peter Candler and Conor Cunningham (London: SCM Press, 2010), 80–2, 95–9; “Stanton Lecture #6: The Habit of Reason” (2011); “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 460–475; *BSO*, 56. Cf. “Truth and Vision,” 41–2: “for us, intuition is never prior to judgement supplemented by argument, which is preformed by language and tradition; there is no ‘raw experience’.” Milbank specifically opposes Marion on this score in “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 344–55; “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 47–8.

<sup>17</sup> “Grandeur of Reason,” 389. Milbank frequently links his constructive approach here to Merleau-Ponty, in whom Milbank finds a phenomenology that “opens out directly beyond itself into ontology” (“Beauty and the Soul,” in *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty*, by John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschogrod (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2003), 11). See also “Gift and the Mirror,” 269–70; “Soul of Reciprocity Part Two,” 490–505; *BSO*, 66–77.

<sup>18</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 138, italics omitted.

<sup>19</sup> “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 349; “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 42.

The second element of Milbank's response to Heidegger is to argue that the ontological conjectures of Christian theology are superior to those of Heidegger. There is a great deal to be said here, for this issue opens onto the theological vision of being that has been the focus of Milbank's entire oeuvre. I must restrict our treatment here to simply noting the main elements of Milbank's approach.<sup>20</sup> As against Heideggerian *Sein*, which is differentiated from beings "only as empty and therefore general," Milbank argues that from a Christian point of view being is "the self-standing, the replete and plenitudinous, which already contains in eminent mode all of the reality of mere beings"; it is "an infinite mysterious depth of actuality which finite things all participate in, to some limited degree."<sup>21</sup> To theoretically bolster this proposal, Milbank enthusiastically embraces William Desmond's notion of the "metaxological."<sup>22</sup> The metaxological "between" provides the ultimate "framing transcendental reality" within which the persons, things, relations and differences

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<sup>20</sup> Almost every one of Milbank's texts is relevant to his positive account of ontology. His single most sustained, mature treatment is probably "Double Glory", though I would also highlight the following: *TST*, 429–40; *SM*; "Life, or Gift and Glissando"; "Stanton Lecture #5: Participated Transcendence Reconceived" (2011); "Stanton Lecture #8: The Surprise of the Imagined" (2011); the "Sequence on Modern Ontology" in *BSO*, 19–113; the poems and preface ("The Eight Diagonals") in *The Legend of Death: Two Poetic Sequences* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> "Truth and Vision," 42–4; *BSO*, 41, 39. Milbank suggests that for this reason Heidegger, unlike Aquinas, only grasped a secularised version of *esse commune* and never in fact perceived the true ontological difference which implies a fully transgeneric plenitude.

<sup>22</sup> See especially "Double Glory," 131–76; "Life, or Gift and Glissando". Milbank notes that "I am putting my own gloss on Desmond's schema, to which I am nonetheless enormously indebted," ("Double Glory," 220n39) and says of Desmond: "Since his 'metaxological' is at once the mediating, the analogical and the participatory, rearticulated in such a way as to take more account of temporal dynamics as compared with medieval metaphysics, his subtle but luminous project is profoundly similar to that of 'Radical Orthodoxy.'" (*BSO*, 52n78.) Milbank draws primarily on Desmond's *Being and the Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) and *God and the Between* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008).

(whether univocal, equivocal or dialectical) of phenomenal experience are given. This approach expresses in contemporary terms “what has traditionally been described as an ‘analogical’ outlook.”<sup>23</sup> Conceiving being and creation as *metaxu* illumines the “Catholic logic of paradox—of an ‘overwhelming glory’ (*para-doxa*) which nonetheless saturates our everyday reality.”<sup>24</sup>

This participatory and metaxological Second being is shot through with the immanent presence of the First, a theme which Milbank develops with reference to Henri de Lubac’s vision of graced nature. In this “paradoxical ontology of the supernatural,” created being is interpenetrated by supernature and refers always ecstatically beyond itself, without any sense of self-contained or self-standing being; Second being is always *given* being—a “radical gift, gift without contrast.”<sup>25</sup> This approach disallows any prior concept of being and hence cannot properly be called an ontology in the modern sense; it is rather a theo-ontology, non-ontology, transontology or ontodology.<sup>26</sup> Here the temporal character of being may be interpreted in Augustinian terms (against Heidegger) as charitably and liturgically

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<sup>23</sup> “Double Glory,” 131.

<sup>24</sup> “Double Glory,” 163, some italics omitted.

<sup>25</sup> *SM*, 96, 100. Milbank is also echoing François Laruelle here. Cf. “Double Glory,” 200.

<sup>26</sup> See *The Suspended Middle*, *passim*; “The Mystery of Reason,” 109; “Truth and Vision,” 29–31; “Gift and the Mirror,” 255. As this comment suggests, Milbank essentially agrees with Marion regarding the novelty of *ontologia* as a modern discipline, as I discussed in chapter 1.A. Cf. “Stanton #1,” 3–5. Milbank’s non-ontology differs from the “nonontology” or “grey ontology” that Marion finds in Descartes in that Milbank is attempting to reorient being to its donating source, whereas Descartes brackets being for epistemological reasons—see Derek J. Morrow, “The Conceptual Idolatry of Descartes’s Gray Ontology: An Epistemology ‘Without Being,’” in *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Ian Graham Leask and Eoin Cassidy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

related to God's eternity.<sup>27</sup>

Much more might be said, but in broad strokes this is the "Platonic, neo-Platonic and Catholic 'analogical ontology'"<sup>28</sup> which Milbank advocates, by way of both logical argument and phenomenological analysis, as a rival to Heidegger's ontology.<sup>29</sup>

The two aspects of Milbank's case for an alternative account of Second being—the argument for conjecture, the superiority of a Christian ontological conjecture—are brought together in an explicit critique of Marion in the following passage from "Truth and Vision." Milbank here rejects Marion's argument for a "purely created site of the ontological difference" and a "straightforward identification of *ens commune* with the ontological."<sup>30</sup> He allows that the ontological difference is "in a sense internal to Creation" by dint of the real distinction, but because *esse commune* is not "fully transgeneric," ontological difference must finally refer to the properly transgeneric Creator:

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<sup>27</sup> See "Sacred Triads," 465–6, 473n59. Cf. "On Theological Transgression," 160–1 and "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 41.

<sup>28</sup> *TST*, xxi.

<sup>29</sup> Milbank pursues an argument from phenomenological analysis (or "Cusan conjecture") at significant length in his "Paradox: A Misty Conceit" section in "Double Glory," 160–176. See also "Stanton #4"; "Stanton #5"; "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 42–5; "Soul of Reciprocity Part One," 346–355.

<sup>30</sup> "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 44; "Truth and Vision," 43. The original version of this essay explicitly states that this partial identification of ontological difference with *ens creatum* is a concession to Marion, who is "right... as I would now concede" ("Intensities," *Modern Theology* 15, no. 4 (October 1, 1999): 476).

[W]hile, in a sense, Marion is right, and *esse* exceeds even the ontological difference, in another sense, being (*ens commune*) that is divided from essence or from the ontic is itself, as somewhat generic, still somewhat ontic, and fails to arrive at the difference of Being from a being or of *esse* from *ens* (in Thomist terms). By contrast, only the *esse* which exceeds the ontological difference in fact attains the ontological difference. This is surely confirmed by the fact that the real distinction in the creature is not defined as simply one between *essentia* and *ens commune*, but rather as between *essentia* and *esse*, suggesting that, for the creature, the latter is what is received of the divine self-subsisting perfection in the individual being which causes it to exist in a unique fashion. For if the ontological difference is finally the creator/created difference, then each creature is internally constituted out of nothing as that difference.

It follows that *sacra doctrina* offers a reading of the ontological difference other than that of Heidegger's, and does not take his for granted, thereby handing being and the world over to futility, boredom and nullity. Certainly Marion is right against Gilson: the ontological difference is not necessarily an ally of Christian transcendence. But he is wrong to see it as a barrier against it, since it is not a difference intuitively manifest in only one way, but manifest in different ways according to judgement. Nevertheless, of course, the judgement that we make of it (Christian, Heideggerian, or otherwise), is adopted as, for us, the most compelling, the most manifest, the most intense.<sup>31</sup>

In these dense sentences Milbank argues that Heidegger's account of ontological difference to be one conjecture among many possible conjectures, advocates for a superior Thomist alternative, faults Marion for failing to make a similar immanent critique of Heidegger, and so rejects the strictly pre-ontological construal of God which is demanded by Marion's approach. As we will see in chapter 3, Milbank's argument here takes us to the heart of the debate over double being, for it is finally the possibility of a non-Heideggerian account of ontology that divides our two

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<sup>31</sup> "Truth and Vision," 43. Milbank gives a slightly different account in "Intensities," 476–8. He develops his suggestion that God at once "attains" and "exceeds" ontological difference elsewhere—see "Soul of Reciprocity Part One," 372; "Grandeur of Reason," 375; "Materialism and Transcendence," 413–4.

protagonists.

Whether Milbank's alternative ontological conjecture might persuade a confessing Heideggerian is an open question, but the important point for our purposes is that Milbank *contests* Heidegger's account of being and offers a rival in its place. Since Heidegger's account of being is also Marion's account of being, Milbank's rival vision is therefore a key part of Milbank's theological reply to Marion. It is his alternative understanding of being as infinite, plenitudinous, analogical and so on, which Milbank identifies with God, and *not* being understood in Heidegger's terms (univocal, finite, nihilistic and so on). Marion's God is without Heideggerian being; Milbank's God is with being, understood in non-Heideggerian terms.

## **B. Milbank's doctrine of analogy**

### *A Thomist approach*

As my exposition has already intimated, Milbank sees analogy as a key part of his approach to theological ontology. Unsurprisingly, his account of analogy leans heavily on Aquinas. As against Marion, however, Milbank insists that in Aquinas' account of analogical predication there is "positive" content in the divine names, and particularly in the predication of *esse*; they are not predicated equivocally. In his clearest articulation of this point, Milbank observes that,

For Aquinas... eminence implies a 'supereminence' such that, for example, God's goodness is 'like' the mode of creaturely goodness and yet also 'unlike'

this goodness in an unknown manner that nonetheless establishes the very archetype of this excellence (all this being very authentically Platonic). So in ascending the analogical scale of Being, one passes from a known to an ever-more-unknown Good, yet this difference of the unknown Good is not equivocal, since it more and more clearly discloses the nature of the finite good it surpasses. Yet neither is this 'shared' goodness univocal, for with this disclosure the distance of the finite from the infinite good is rendered yet more clearly apparent.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere Milbank suggests that a created thing gives a "faint conveying of a plentitude of perfection beyond its scope," perfections which are "preeminently precontained in God in an exemplary and more 'excellent' fashion."<sup>33</sup> The divine names "are not wholly equivocal" because we "first grasp some inkling of their sense through their application to creatures" who provide "natural analogies for God" that "remotely anticipate" his nature.<sup>34</sup> Picking up an ancient metaphor, Milbank notes that we see the pure white light of divinity only as refracted in the colours of creation, "but we do somehow see this, else we should not see colours at all, since they are, exhaustively, light's refraction." A finite perfection "exists by disclosing that ideal actual perfection which is its exemplar" and this clearly must be so from a Thomist point of view, for "how could we grasp any analogy if the higher divine perfection

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<sup>32</sup> "Materialism and Transcendence," 416–7. In addition to the texts cited below, other important treatments of this theme may be found in: "A Critique of the Theology of Right," 15–6; "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics," 468–74; "Gift and the Mirror," 287; "Sophiology and Theurgy," 72.

<sup>33</sup> "Truth and Vision," 41.

<sup>34</sup> "History of the One God," 393; "Henri de Lubac," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology Since 1918*, ed. David Ford, 3rd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 84. Cf. "Truth and Vision": "Aquinas, after Gregory, insists that one cannot know that a thing is without having some dim inkling of what it is, since nothing is ever manifest or judged as manifest in entirely neutral anonymity" (27).

were not actually shown through the lesser perfection?"<sup>35</sup> It is wrong therefore to say that "for Aquinas analogy has *nothing* to do with 'resemblance', even though for Aquinas we are only 'like' God in terms of God himself as the common medium"—rather, we should say that a created being "is through and through 'like' Being, in so far as all that in it 'is', entirely derives from Being as a donating source."<sup>36</sup>

It is important to note that Milbank distinguishes this recognition of analogical likeness from Scotus' approach. He argues that the Scotist method maximises a concept first grasped at the creaturely level, such that God's perfections are qualitatively the same as ours only extended to an infinite degree. For Scotus, transcendental terms are understood "as specifying in advance the exact formal 'range' of our access to goodness, truth, beauty and so forth," whereas for Aquinas there is no prior specification of what these terms mean. They function by "opening out for us an unlimited but obscurely anticipated horizon of meaning which is real and objective and yet inexhaustible," and this process reflects the "inherently wild 'vagueness' of transcendental terms" in Aquinas.<sup>37</sup>

This method of analogical naming reflects Aquinas' analogical conception of *esse*. In the wake of Scotus and other late scholastics, the mainstream of modern and

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<sup>35</sup> "Truth and Vision," 41, 44.

<sup>36</sup> "Christianity and Platonism in East and West," 158–161n2; "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 42.

<sup>37</sup> "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics," 473–4

contemporary philosophy conceives of being as a brute “either/or” fact.<sup>38</sup> However, for Aquinas existence or being is constituted by a “Neoplatonic series of actualizations, taking ‘actualization’ to be convertible with ‘perfecting’.”<sup>39</sup> God is “pure being... alone absolutely self-subsistent” while creatures “only ‘are’ in a derived, approximate, analogical sense” and are only “substantive in a derived sense.”<sup>40</sup> “Only God has the plenitude of being” and “exists without qualification,” whereas creatures “are a kind of blend of being and nothingness.”<sup>41</sup> Milbank notes that Aquinas’ doctrine of analogical predication is therefore ontological and not only semantic because analogical *esse* is clearly a necessary part of “the theological metaphysics which the theology of the divine names assumes.”<sup>42</sup>

### *An Eckhartian supplement*

Milbank makes an Eckhartian addition to his initially Thomist approach to analogical attribution, and it is at this point that the contrast with Marion’s account of double being fully emerges. One of the main reasons for the turn to Eckhart is a concession Milbank makes in his recent work regarding the success of the Scotist and terminist critiques that were historically brought against Aquinas’ doctrine of analogy.

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<sup>38</sup> See “Intensities,” 494n103; “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 473–4 and 486; “Truth and Vision,” 29–30; “Thomistic Telescope,” 295–6; “Radical Orthodoxy,” in *God’s Advocates: Christian Thinkers in Conversation*, ed. Rupert Shortt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 108.

<sup>39</sup> “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 486.

<sup>40</sup> “Truth and Vision,” 29.

<sup>41</sup> “Truth and Vision,” 41.

<sup>42</sup> Milbank argues this point against interpreters such as Lonergan, Lash, McCabe and (the early) Burrell—see “Intensities,” 470–6; “A Critique of the Theology of Right,” 15–6; “On ‘Thomistic Kabbalah,’” *Modern Theology* 27, no. 1 (2011): 157.

Milbank now judges that these critiques have a legitimate logical force: Thomist analogy and participation does in fact violate the ancient rules of non-contradiction and the excluded middle as these critics claimed.<sup>43</sup> Aquinas “failed to recognize” this fact and “one must agree with Scotus’ demonstration that this is the case.” The Scotist achievement meant that “no conventional scholastics were thenceforth really able to preserve Thomas’s legacy” and that it was therefore only those bold enough to shirk the ancient laws who were able to “salvage analogy in the face of Scotism and Terminism.”<sup>44</sup> Milbank points to Cusanus and Eckhart as the two key figures here. They posited a consciously *post*-nominalist version of analogy which happily offended against the strictures of Aristotle’s logic and, Milbank contends, contemporary theology must follow suit if analogy is to be made viable again today.<sup>45</sup> Though Cusanus is important here,<sup>46</sup> Milbank has given much more attention to Eckhart’s elaboration of this *post*-nominalist analogy and so my exposition will focus

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<sup>43</sup> See “Materialism and Transcendence,” 417–8; *TST*, xxvi–xxix; “Thomistic Telescope,” 292–7, 315–16; “Stanton #5,” 14–23; “Grandeur of Reason,” 384–7; *BSO*, 100–105. Cf. “Conflict of the Faculties,” 303–6; “Double Glory,” 224–5n102. Milbank argues, however, that *every* position here is finally forced to offend against non-contradiction. Aquinas’ realist account of universals fails but “nominalism has failed just as dismally” and opting for scepticism is no solution. (“Thomistic Telescope,” 320–1).

<sup>44</sup> “Materialism and Transcendence,” 417.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. “Stanton #5”: “Can we sit back on the verandah and simply ignore the ‘Franciscan’ mistakes of Scotism and then the *via moderna* upon which much of modernity itself rests? Can we simply return to the ‘Dominican’ path? But such mere nostalgia is hopeless...” (14).

<sup>46</sup> Milbank particularly draws on Cusa for his phenomenological arguments against the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle. Following Cusa’s analyses of visible and mathematical items, he argues that phenomenal reality shows itself to consist only in “congeries of intersecting and fluid forces which run out into the infinite,” and careful attention to this phenomenal flux gives sufficient reason for rejecting the Aristotelian principles not only at the heights of theological speculation, but also in quotidian life (“Stanton #5,” 18–9). See also “Thomistic Telescope,” *passim*.

on the Meister.

In his commentary on Ecclesiasticus, Eckhart notes that “even until today there are some who are in error because they understand the nature of analogy poorly and reject it.” He aims to sort out the confusion with reference to Ecclesiasticus 24:29 (“They that eat me, shall yet hunger”):

Analogates have nothing of the form according to which they are analogically ordered rooted in positive fashion in themselves. But every created being is analogically ordered to God in existence, truth, and goodness. Therefore every created being radically and positively possesses existence, life, and wisdom from and in God, not in itself as a created being. And thus it always “eats” as something produced and created, but it always hungers because it is always from another and not from itself... They eat because they are; they hunger because they are from another.<sup>47</sup>

Eckhart construes analogy here as a reflection of the creature’s absolute dependence on God. Just as the wise man consumes wisdom and yet hungers, so the creature is “radically and positively” filled with perfections but never possesses them, like filling a vessel without a bottom. The dynamic of analogy is thus entirely one-sided. The lower analogate in no way possesses the excellence in which it participates, but rather

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<sup>47</sup> *Commentary on Ecclesiasticus*, 53, translated in *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 178. Burkhard Mojsisch calls this the “fundamental text” for Eckhart’s doctrine of analogy (*Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity, and Unity* (Amsterdam: B.R. Grüner, 2001), 60–1). It is identified as a “key text” by Bernard McGinn (*The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2001), 91–2; “Meister Eckhart on God as Absolute Unity,” in *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, ed. Dominic O’Meara (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 131) and Jan Aertsen (*Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought: From Philip the Chancellor (ca. 1225) to Francisco Suárez* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 362).

has it entirely on loan—“the perfections are as such only in one of the *analogia*.”<sup>48</sup> The creature receives its all, including its being, from an alien source and has no integral, autonomous standing whatsoever.<sup>49</sup>

Milbank follows Burkhard Mojsisch in construing this one-sided analogical relation as a peculiar sort of univocity: “the theory of analogy is only to be understood in connection with the underlying theory of univocity.”<sup>50</sup> Unlike “vertical” analogy, in which a proportion or share or likeness of the primary analogate is given to the secondary analogate in a hierarchical fashion, Eckhart posits a “horizontal” sharing such that God’s excellences are given to the creature *in toto* and univocally. Milbank is careful to distinguish this from Scotist univocity, which runs vertically: a prior and formal notion of being is applied to the lower creature finitely and to the higher God infinitely. But in Eckhart’s horizontal univocity the creature and God are made peers, as it were, in a univocal and actual being located “within the relational and

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<sup>48</sup> Jan Aertsen, “Eckhart,” in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge Gracia and Timothy Noone (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 439.

<sup>49</sup> Aertsen judges this to be a demurrer from Aquinas: “In contrast to Aquinas, who teaches that ‘being’ and the other transcendentals formally ‘inhere’ in creatures, the Meister denies any ontological autonomy to them.” (*Medieval Philosophy as Transcendental Thought*, 365). Milbank, for his part, downplays any contrasts between Aquinas and Eckhart, as I will discuss below.

<sup>50</sup> Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart*, 76. Milbank states that this book, *Meister Eckhart: Analogy, Univocity, and Unity*, “represents the consummation of a new, much more precise reading of Eckhart” (*TST*, xxvi–xxx) and relies heavily on it his own appropriation of Eckhart. Milbank elaborates his Eckhartian “univocity of being” in “Double Glory,” 203–4, 231n185, n187; *TST*, xxvii–xxviii; “Mystery of Reason,” 92; “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 65; “Life, or Gift and Glissando,” 146–7; *BSO*, 100–105. Milbank’s early reflections on Eckhart in “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 335, are clarified and extended in all these later texts.

productive (Trinitarian) co-ordinations of the infinite itself.”<sup>51</sup> Eckhart “insisted that primordial, univocal being belongs to divine infinite being alone, not, as with Duns Scotus, to both infinite and finite.”<sup>52</sup> Milbank notes that,

[Eckhart] concludes that every being and especially every spiritual being is grounded in, is in a mysterious way ultimately identical-with, this infinitude as its ‘image’, and so is finally drawn into a univocal ambience (albeit one beyond the contrast of identity and difference in a way that one should regard as supra-analogical) – yet this conclusion is required in part precisely by the logic of analogy of attribution.<sup>53</sup>

Milbank takes Eckhart’s peculiar treatment of univocal being here as a supplement to his Thomist doctrine of analogy – “this Eckhartian scheme indeed turns the univocity of infinite being into a kind of hyperbolic analogy.”<sup>54</sup> The Eckhartian “hyperbolic analogy” constitutes for Milbank the ultimate expression of theological analogy and also the solution which must be given in reply to the legitimate Scotist critiques of Thomist analogy.

The most striking aspect of Milbank’s appropriation of Eckhart here is the wide ambit he grants to this new hyperbolic analogy. Whereas Mojsisch proposes Eckhartian univocity only with respect to the human soul, Milbank explicitly universalises

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<sup>51</sup> *TST*, xxvii. In “Life, Gift and Glissando”, Milbank extends this spatial metaphor to incorporate Spirit and creation as expressions and elaborations of the divine “diagonal medium” of Father and Son. The filial relation “is in an extraordinary sense, ‘univocally analogical’... as Eckhart taught” (146-7). Milbank’s speculations here are, as elsewhere, highly compressed, highly stimulating and almost impenetrable.

<sup>52</sup> “Double Glory,” 203.

<sup>53</sup> *TST*, xxvii.

<sup>54</sup> “Double Glory,” 231n185.

Mojsisch's univocity thesis to say that the totality of creation finds itself in the "univocal ambiance" of divinity.<sup>55</sup> The text cited just above is one example, referring "every being" univocally to the divine. Milbank says similarly elsewhere: all "particular and conditioned things along with general and conditioning things" are found "within a kind of flattened, simple equality, univocal at the level of the infinite alone;"<sup>56</sup> "all created things, not just souls, have uncreated / created sparks;"<sup>57</sup> "the created soul (and, indeed, the Augustinian 'seminal reason' of every created thing) is identical with the uncreated deity;"<sup>58</sup> "all creatures are indeed identical with God in their univocal core which is infinite."<sup>59</sup> Milbank's account of analogy thus makes the extraordinarily bold claim that the entire array of Second being—mineral, vegetable, animal and spirit—falls within the scope of Eckhart's hyperbolic analogy and thus enjoys a peculiar kind of univocal relation with First being.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Significantly, the crux of Mojsisch's interpretation is Eckhart's statements about the univocity of divine and creaturely *iustus*, a uniquely human attribute. See *Meister Eckhart*, 76–80.

<sup>56</sup> "Mystery of Reason," 92–3.

<sup>57</sup> "Double Glory," 227n136, Milbank's italics.

<sup>58</sup> "Double Glory," 189. See also "Double Glory," 227n136 and "Sophiology and Theurgy," 65.

<sup>59</sup> "Stanton #5," 18.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. "Alternative Protestantism: Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition," in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, ed. James K. A. Smith and James Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005): "Why do we imagine that we honor God by seeing him reflected only in human spiritual subjects, who then—bereft of mediation by significant physical things and by their own bodies—are thereby inevitably reduced to formally contracting wills? We proceed to project this reduced subjectivity onto God himself, producing thereby the idol of the cosmic tyrant. Is not this supposed Hebraism and nonpaganism after all a very serious kind of idolatry?" (41).

*The Creator-creature distinction*

To grasp the significance of the Milbank's Eckhartian supplement to Thomist analogy we must briefly consider his account of the Creator-creature distinction. "The distinction between God and not-God is aporetic,"<sup>61</sup> he writes, for creation is "both outside God and yet not outside God."<sup>62</sup> He argues that this aporia is implied in the dogma of creation *ex nihilo*. Creation must occur on a site somehow "within" or "from" God himself, for, unless we cancel Christianity's absolute monotheism by positing some primordial entity or receptacle alongside God, where else could this site be?<sup>63</sup>

Milbank apprehends this aporia of creation *ex nihilo* from two angles. First, looking to creatures, the core, heart or ground of the creature cannot be straightforwardly distinguished from Creator. As a donut revolves around the hole at its centre, so the creature is constituted by God as its secret centre—the creature is "precisely like,

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<sup>61</sup> "Double Glory," 190.

<sup>62</sup> "Interview and Conversation with John Milbank and Simon Oliver: Radical Orthodoxy and Christian Psychology I - Theological Underpinnings," *Edification: The Transdisciplinary Journal of Christian Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2012): 61.

<sup>63</sup> Milbank argues in this fashion in many places—see, for example, "Ecumenical Orthodoxy - A Response to Nicholas Loudovikos," in *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word*, ed. Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 159; "Double Glory," 200-1; "Mystery of Reason," 92-3; "Stanton #6," 21. Cf. Milbank's comment that "the creation, since it is at once *ex nihilo* and emanatively *ex Deo* (in Aquinas, for example), is regarded as only existing at all within an entirely asymmetrical relation of dependence on God." ("The Return of Mediation," in *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 225).

indeed identical with, the Godhead in its hidden heart.”<sup>64</sup> Over his career, Milbank has taken up a highly diverse set of theological motifs to indicate this. His favourites include: Augustine’s *rationes seminales* and *intimior intimo meo*;<sup>65</sup> Eriugena’s seeds, monads and “created God;”<sup>66</sup> Maximus’ created *logoi*;<sup>67</sup> Aquinas’ real distinction and *maius intima*;<sup>68</sup> Eckhart’s uncreated sparks;<sup>69</sup> Cusanus’ infinite in the finite;<sup>70</sup> Bérulle’s divine self-reception;<sup>71</sup> Vico’s *puncti metaphysici*;<sup>72</sup> Bulgakov’s un/created Sophia, world-soul and eternal dimension of the creature;<sup>73</sup> a Christian variation of Heidegger’s ontological difference.<sup>74</sup> Milbank takes these motifs generally to indicate that “while the creature is not God, the heart of the creature... nonetheless *is* God.”<sup>75</sup>

When we apprehend creatures in light of creation *ex nihilo* we see that “in some sense

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<sup>64</sup> “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 65. I borrow the donut simile from John F. X. Knasas, *Being and Some Twentieth-Century Thomists* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 16 and 178–9.

<sup>65</sup> “Double Glory,” 189 and 227n136; “Hume versus Kant: Faith, Reason and Feeling,” *Modern Theology* 27, no. 2 (2011): 289; “Stanton #5,” 28–9; *SM*, 49; “Materialism and Transcendence,” 418.

<sup>66</sup> *TST*, 431–2 “Gift and the Mirror,” 299; “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 63; “Foreword,” in *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*, by James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 19.

<sup>67</sup> “Ecumenical Orthodoxy,” 160–1; “Double Glory,” 227n136; “Mystery of Reason,” 92; “Hume versus Kant,” 289; “Sophiology and Theurgy” *passim.*; *BR*, 11–2; “Stanton #5,” 28–9; *SM*, 49.

<sup>68</sup> “Intensities,” 476–7; “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 161n87; “A Critique of the Theology of Right,” 14–5; “Truth and Vision,” 43; “Materialism and Transcendence,” 413–8.

<sup>69</sup> “Double Glory,” 227n136; *TST*, xxvi–viii.

<sup>70</sup> “Thomistic Telescope,” 324; *BR*, 208; “Stanton #5,” 28–31.

<sup>71</sup> *TST*, xxx.

<sup>72</sup> *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744, Part 1: The Early Metaphysics* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1991), chapter 4 “Participation in the One,” 153–228.

<sup>73</sup> “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 63–4; “Double Glory,” 227n136.

<sup>74</sup> “Truth and Vision,” 42–4; “Grandeur of Reason,” 374–5; “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics” *passim.*; “Can a Gift Be Given?” *passim.*; *BR*, 117–8; *TST*, 298–304.

<sup>75</sup> “Stanton #4,” 10–11.

the ground of created being must be uncreated.”<sup>76</sup>

Secondly, the aporia of creation may be approached by way of the doctrine of God. Here the paradox settles at the point of distinguishing between Creation and the intra-Trinitarian processions. The generation of the *Logos* and the spirating of the Spirit are so intimately related to the *exitus* and *reditus* of creation that they are “in some sense identical.”<sup>77</sup> Creation is “in some sense within God (enfolded in the generation of the *Verbum* and the procession of the *Donum*).”<sup>78</sup> In a word, God “gives only ‘once’.”<sup>79</sup> Again, this consideration of creation *ex nihilo* suggests an aporetic distinction between God and world, or First and Second being.

However, if we embrace this aporia and refuse to distinguish clearly between First and Second, then how do we avoid a vicious dilemma: either all is God (pantheism) or God is all, and there is nothing else (acosmism)? Milbank explicitly raises and attempts to address this objection. His solution is to say “that *both* pantheism and acosmism are true...it is true both that ‘there is only the world’ (but including worlds

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<sup>76</sup> *TST*, xxvi–vii.

<sup>77</sup> *TST*, xxvii.

<sup>78</sup> *BR*, 208. Cf. “On ‘Thomistic Kabbalah,’” 168.

<sup>79</sup> “Double Glory,” 191. Milbank is treating Eckhart here, but insists that “[N]one of all this is alien to orthodox Catholic tradition... Aquinas in his *Sentence Commentary* had already said that the procession of the Trinitarian persons and the act of divine creation are essentially the same.” (190) Eckhart, for his part, still “maintained the orthodox distinction between divine generation/procession (of Son and Spirit) and divine creation” (*TST*, xxvii). Cf. “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 62.

of which we may not know) and that ‘there is only God.’”<sup>80</sup> Eckhart’s elevation of creation *up* into a “univocal ambience” with God must be answered in “an opposite but complementary direction” by the Russian Sophiologists, who assert that “God is in his own ‘feminine’ dynamic essence ‘more than God’” and also “that in himself which goes outside God.”<sup>81</sup> These sophiological motifs serve to draw God down to the creation, as it were. These two emphases complement each other: the first affirms God’s transcendence and the second “salves the Scotist anxiety about the integral actuality of the created order, without lapsing into Scotist ontotheology.”<sup>82</sup> Milbank thus seeks a doctrine of creation which is “equally balanced” to produce a “positive paradoxical tension wherein the ‘pantheistic’ is always the ‘acosmic’ and vice versa.”<sup>83</sup> As an orthodox theologian Milbank resists any straightforward affirmation of pantheism or acosmism, but he does insist that Christian orthodoxy must recognise a truth in both heresies—“the best we can do is to affirm both these further strange impossibilities at once.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “Double Glory,” 189. See also *BSO*, 100–2.

<sup>81</sup> *TST*, xxvii; “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 63. Sophiology is an increasingly important part of Milbank’s theological palette. See especially Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy”, but also “Grandeur of Reason,” 394; “The New Divide: Romantic Versus Classical Orthodoxy,” *Modern Theology* 26, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 29; *BR*, 105–137; “Foreword” in Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*; “Alternative Protestantism,” 39–40.

<sup>82</sup> *TST*, xxvii.

<sup>83</sup> “Double Glory,” 204.

<sup>84</sup> “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 65. Milbank insists that his position is a legitimate expression of Catholic theological tradition and points to Augustine, Denys, Eriugena, Aquinas, Cusanus and Bérulleas further sources—see particularly *BR*, 131–3. Milbank’s resistance to straightforward pantheism is evident, for example, throughout his Stanton Lectures.

This profoundly aporetic account of the Creator-creature distinction reveals the function that Milbank intends his doctrine of analogy to serve. It is an attempt to theorise both the ontological yoke that runs between First and Second being and the theological speech that tracks this relation, and to do so in light of the paradoxes implicit in Trinitarian creation *ex nihilo*.

Though Milbank has raised and addressed the problems of pantheism and acosmism here, it is not clear that he has sufficiently answered them—as I will show in chapter 3, these issues in Milbank’s aporetic Creator-creature distinction is problematic from a Thomist point of view.

*Putting Milbank’s doctrine of analogy together*

There is another outstanding question in Milbank’s doctrine of analogy, namely how we should coordinate his Thomist analogical attribution with his Eckhartian thesis of univocity “at the level of the infinite,” two notions which would seem to contradict one another. Though Milbank obviously believes that the two are compatible he has not explained in detail how to conceive them together.

I suggest proceeding in the following fashion. Starting from creatures, we follow Aquinas’ method of naming God’s perfections in accord with the *res / modus* distinction, recognizing the analogical likeness of creatures to God through the inklings and approximations of his perfections in created things. Then, as theological

reflection expands to integrate the doctrines of Trinity and Creation, we recognise that the participatory likenesses marked in analogical speech reflect a primordial giving that may be construed in terms of an ontological identity between First and Second. Theological analogy begins with the visible likenesses of God in creation, and ends with the recognition of an invisible univocity between God and creature, implicit in Christian dogma. One of Milbank's comments on Eckhart suggests precisely this:

[Eckhart] insisted that all creatures are indeed identical with God in their univocal core which is infinite, and yet that the Trinitarian God is in himself the God who Goes out to establish finitude in its analogical degrees.<sup>85</sup>

First and Second being are primordially identical, but here below in the realm of Second being we perceive this only by way of "analogical degrees." This suggestion for understanding Milbank's approach indicates what Milbank intends with his many gravity-defying descriptions of these matters—a "univocity of infinite being" and "hyperbolic analogy" that possesses "a kind of hyperbolic analogical exactitude," a "univocal ambience" that is "supra-analogical" and so on.<sup>86</sup> Milbank is here trying to bring the paradoxes of analogical attribution and Creation *ex nihilo* to a sort of speculative fulfilment by positing, in the Commentator's terms, a primordial identity between First and Second being, thus collapsing the ontological yoked gap between them, all while maintaining the necessity of analogical discourse as the only

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<sup>85</sup> "Stanton #5," 18.

<sup>86</sup> "Double Glory," 231n185, 203; *TST*, xxviii.

possible mode of finite creaturely reflection on the nature of the First.

As I am sure my exposition has suggested, Milbank's recent reflections on theological analogy constitute some of the most difficult material in an already difficult oeuvre.<sup>87</sup>

However, the thrust of his speculations is clear: Milbank is shooting for a radical immanence of First being to Second being, and his doctrine of analogy, particularly in its most recent iterations, is elaborated with this end in mind. As I will show in chapter 3 and my conclusion, this aspect of Milbank's theology is one of the key points of difference with Marion, whose concerns lie in the opposite direction, in preserving the First's transcendence and separation from Second being.

### C. First "beyond being"?

I began this chapter by observing that Milbank's account of double being is akin to Gilson's metaphysics of Exodus—Milbank's God is being itself. Milbank's aporetic Creator-creature distinction and his Eckhartian hyperbolic analogy confirm this identification of God and being in an even stronger fashion. However, this picture

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<sup>87</sup> The following sentences from "Life, or Gift and Glissando," 146–7, should suffice to confirm this point: "God is in himself both vertical interchange of gift and horizontal absolute continuity. God is at last *entirely* the diagonal medium because the Father is only 'above' the Son in generating the Son, and the process of engenderment is nothing but the Son in his vertical iconicity. (For this reason an 'entire' diagonal medium is, in an extraordinary sense, 'univocally analogical', because the Son is a 'perfect' likeness to the Father and univocally at one with him in infinite being, as Eckhart taught.) This diagonal line is infinitely and entirely expressed in the Father-Son absolute substantive relation, but as infinite expression it is also infinitely unexhausted and like a fractal line winds on, as it were, from two to three and then presumably infinite dimensions in the Holy Spirit, whose substantive relation to Father and Son forms a 'square' on the base of their mutual love."

must be complicated, for Milbank incorporates a set of henological and pre-ontological themes into this initially Gilsonian approach. I outline the most important of these themes in this section.

### *Eckhartian Unum*

While Eckhart famously declared that *Esse est Deus*, he also proposed a certain priority of unity over being in God, one which Milbank embraces. Eckhart's understanding of divine unity is a particular and stipulated one. God's unity contains and transcends all difference and multiplicity; he has no peers against which he might be contrasted, no genera in which he might be contained; he is *indistinctum*, and his "indistinction" is precisely that which distinguishes him from all distinct, finite things. It is for this reason that Eckhart glosses *unum* as *negatio negationis*: "one" does not mean "not multiple," but rather indicates the negation of all negations as such.<sup>88</sup> Milbank endorses this approach:

God must be understood in these terms [that is, 'negation of negation'] because he is 'One,' a term which, while it does not qualify 'Being' in the way that the transcendentals 'True' and 'Good' do, is not only, for this reason, closer to being, but also 'the purity and core and height' of being, insofar as any relative nonbeing entails negation and thereby diversity, and therefore being, in refusing any such negation, can be understood at its 'height' to be the negation of negation which is tran-scendental unity. Being, in knowing no exception to itself, knows no diversity; therefore it is Unity, and it is Unity which holds Being to be Being rather than vice versa, even though Unity 'adds

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<sup>88</sup> The most important text for these issues is Eckhart's commentary on Wisdom 7:27, which is translated in *Teacher and Preacher*, 166–171. See also McGinn's discussion in *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 90–100.

nothing' to Being and is not therefore "beyond being" in a neoplatonic sense.<sup>89</sup>

For Milbank, *unum* has a certain priority over the name of being because of the logical entailments which follow from its *negation negationis* character. In the same way that Cusanus' notion of the *non aliud* transcends the contrast of same and other,<sup>90</sup> Eckhart's *unum* displays a unique capacity to indicate the unrestricted plenitude of God's being.

### *Eckhartian Intelligere*

In addition to unity, Eckhart also famously says in his *Parisian Questions* that God is first *intelligere* before he is *esse*.<sup>91</sup> Milbank notes that,

As Eckhart argued, if being as such is also the intellectual, then in a sense, as the highest aspect of being, the intellectual stands "before" being itself. (If God is through and through thought, then his existence is not formally prior to his understanding, as Scotus argued.) But thought, as Eckhart also pointed out, is a kind of nullity precisely because (after Augustine) it is intentional. To think something is kenotic... it follows, therefore, that if God contains all beings within his simplicity, he must be hyperintellectual and therefore the most empty—such that "if God is to become known to the soul, it must be blind." In this way, for Eckhart, God is not so much being as "purity of being"; this is why he often claimed that a "nothingness" lies even before being. According to his hyper-Thomistic formulation, *esse est Deus*; but one cannot equally say *Deus est esse*, since all of the divine being must be identified with intellectual

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<sup>89</sup> "Double Glory," 203–4.

<sup>90</sup> For Milbank's appropriation of Cusanus' *non aliud*, see especially *Vico Part 1*, 29–30; "Double Glory," 192; "Thomistic Telescope," 324; *BR*, 135.

<sup>91</sup> *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. Armand Maurer (Belgium: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), "Question 1: Are Existence and Understanding the Same in God?", 43–51. Cf. *Sermo XXIX*, translated in *Teacher and Preacher*: "it is very clear then that God is properly alone and that he is intellect or understanding and that he is purely and simply understanding with no other existence" (225).

receptivity and creativity which, at the apex of being, is in a sense more than being.<sup>92</sup>

A few things should be noticed here. First, Milbank clearly affirms Eckhart's locating of intellect "before" *esse* for his own constructive theology.<sup>93</sup> Second, Milbank sees this affirmation as compatible with Eckhart's seemingly contradictory formulation in the Prologues to his unfinished *Opus Tripartum: esse est Deus*. Both descriptions have the one referent, namely the "purity," "apex" or "highest aspect" of being which is identified with God. The ontological formula thus has embedded in it the intellectual and henological elements of Eckhart's approach.<sup>94</sup> Third, the priority of *intelligere* implies a sort of divine nullity. This is so because of the kenotic character of thought. For Eckhart, the reasoning mind has no being apart from the intentional object of its thought; its thought is "always 'about' something" and is therefore "self-obliterating."<sup>95</sup> Milbank goes on to indicate the theological gain which is made in the elevation of *intelligere* over being:

[B]y raising intellect to co-primacy with being as a nullity "beyond being," Eckhart was able to allow that there is a kind of infinite "coming-to-be" expressed by the idea of the divine Trinity, without attributing to the

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<sup>92</sup> "Double Glory," 173.

<sup>93</sup> See "Double Glory" 153, 174-5, 191, 204. God is, Milbank writes, "more primarily intelligence than being" (174).

<sup>94</sup> On these matters, see also "On Theological Transgression," 159; "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 45. Milbank's interpretation, which sees Eckhart's corpus as a coherent whole, finds reasonable support in the literature—see, for example, Jan Aertsen, "Ontology and Henology in Medieval Philosophy," in *On Proclus and His Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Egbert Bos and P. A. Meijer (Leiden: Brill, 1992); McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart*, 90-100; Mojsisch, *Meister Eckhart*, 98-9.

<sup>95</sup> "Mystery of Reason," 79.

passionless God any real change. God, as it were, echoing Eriugena, eternally creates himself.<sup>96</sup>

Similarly to his use of Eckhart's hyperbolic analogy, the priority of *intelligere* is embraced by Milbank as a means of compressing the gap between Second created and First divine being. The "coming-to-be" of created Second being is found in the intelligent First, and in virtue of Eckhart's intentional identity of intellect and thought, this intellectual apprehension is a means of the First's self-exposition. Intellect thus has a "para-transcendental" relation with being: it is a "partial and yet 'higher' transcendental," which remains nonetheless "convertible with being as infinite source." It reveals divinity in "the most primordial circumstance imaginable" and aims at a radical intimacy of First to Second.<sup>97</sup>

### *Iamblichan One beyond the One*

In several recent writings Milbank has made a new retrieval from the Neoplatonist tradition: the doctrine of the "One beyond the One" in Iamblichus and Damascius.<sup>98</sup> Milbank does not interpret this Iamblichan addition of a second (and sometimes even a third) *êv* to the Plotinian henology as an attempt to outleap Plotinus with a yet higher, yet more transcendently distant first principle, but instead sees it as a way of overcoming the unity/multiplicity and immaterial/material contrasts which the

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<sup>96</sup> "Double Glory," 174–5.

<sup>97</sup> "Double Glory," 175.

<sup>98</sup> There are four important essays: "Sophiology and Theurgy"; "Materialism and Transcendence"; "Mystery of Reason"; "Christianity and Platonism in East and West".

Plotinian One assumes.

[T]his ultimate One is not ‘still more unified’ and entirely cut off from everything that follows from it, but rather is a secret ground *beyond* the later division between the one and the many, entirely in keeping with the general theurgic thrust towards elevating matter and multiplicity... [Iamblichus heads in] a direction which from the Christian point of view is more tending towards ‘orthodoxy’ than any encouragement of Trinitarian heresies, Arian or otherwise, for it turns out that he, and in his wake Damascius, was shifting to a perspective, perhaps in line with the original view of Plato, that would render ‘mediation’ still more ultimate than the One.<sup>99</sup>

Damascius names this highest Iamblichian principle “the Ineffable” and Milbank argues that this notion is intended as “an extreme negation of negation.”<sup>100</sup> It effaces all distinctions, even “the distinction between non-distinction and distinction”; it is “beyond the contrasts of remaining, procession and conversion” and also “exceeds not just the contrast of imparticipable and participable, but also the contrast of participated and participating.” Damascius’ henology therefore thinks transcendence and gift “in just about the most radical manner imaginable,” and proposes a First that implies absolute “mediation,” not absolute singularity.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 76–7.

<sup>100</sup> “Mystery of Reason,” 90. Milbank describes the Ineffable as a “One beyond the One beyond the One.” (88) For a thorough treatment of the ‘realm of the One’ in Damascius, see Sarah Ahbel-Rappe’s edition of Damascius’ *De Principiis*, particularly her excellent glossary—*Damascius’ Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>101</sup> “Mystery of Reason,” 88–90, italics omitted; “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 77. Elsewhere Milbank describes this notion of mediation in terms of ‘radical participation’ as an explanation of the Proclean talk about an unparticipated One: “one can conclude that ‘non-participability’ is in fact something like a *hyberbolic* degree of self-sharing, such that unity gives everything to be, yet without dividing itself... [this] paradoxical model of *methexis*, characteristic of theurgic Neoplatonism, can be described as ‘participation all the way up’ - or ‘radical participation’, since it does not allow that there is any literal ‘reserve’ in excess of communication, precisely because it is

Milbank argues that this Iamblichan-Damascian schema may be usefully appropriated for Christian theology.<sup>102</sup> Its notion of the super-eminent presence of all created things in the Ineffable gestures toward creation *ex nihilo* and its negation of negation may be fruitfully integrated into Trinitarian doctrine. The main Christian supplement required is a “full identification” of the Ineffable with the three henads and an equalising of the henadic hierarchy (though Milbank thinks is perhaps already embedded in Damascius’ own conviction that the Ineffable must contain the movements of procession and return in itself).<sup>103</sup> Milbank’s emphasis on the non-contrastive negation of negation here performs the same function as in his retrieval of Eckhart’s *unum*: the transcendence of the First is construed in non-contrastive terms such that its intimacy to multiple and determinate being is actually *increased* by its transcendent elevation, not decreased.

Having considered the three important cases of Eckhart’s *unum* and *intelligere* and the Iamblichan One beyond the One, we can see that there is a clear pattern in Milbank’s use of pre-ontological themes.<sup>104</sup> The move to some kind of transcendence “beyond

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this very reserve which is ‘impossibly’ communicated.” (“Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 164–5.)

<sup>102</sup> Milbank’s most substantial elaborations are in “The Mystery of Reason,” where he is responding to François Laruelle’s retrieval of henology for the purpose of “non-philosophy.”

<sup>103</sup> “Mystery of Reason,” 91.

<sup>104</sup> Another rarer case is Milbank’s descriptions of the First as “paraontological.” Created perfections, he writes in one place, are present “absolutely and perfectly in the supreme ontological (and paraontological) cause that is God” (“Materialism and Transcendence,” 416). He uses similar

being” when speaking of the First is made in order to affirm the First’s radical, universal immanence to Second being. As I have noted, the rhetoric of transcendence is put to work here by Milbank in a way quite different to Marion. Milbank moves beyond being only in order to affirm God’s intellectual, super-eminent and intimate comprehension of Creation within himself.

#### **D. The perplexities of Milbank’s henology**

Given the Dionysian, henological starting point of Marion’s theology, it is natural that the perplexities of his account of double being will be concentrated around his attempts to assimilate Aquinas and other theologians of *esse* to his vision. On the other hand, Milbank’s affinity with Gilson—who controversially argued that “no Christian philosophy can posit anything above Being”—means that the perplexities of his account of double being naturally concentrate around his integration of henological and pre-ontological themes.<sup>105</sup> This section will trace the development of Milbank’s often contradictory treatments of pre-ontological thought and offer an interpretation of this perplexing aspect of his work. Establishing Milbank’s position carefully here is vital for our purposes. Milbank’s critique of Marion is centred on Marion’s claim to a pre-ontological charity, and their respective attitudes to pre-ontology will be a primary point of contention in chapter 3.

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language in other places—see “Sophiology and Theurgy”, 76; “Double Glory,” 204. The prefix “para” is intended here I think in both its senses of “beyond” and “beside”. The pattern here is the same. There is no sense of division between the First and the created being of the Second, but only an emphasis on universal, intimate presence.

<sup>105</sup> Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 30.

*Milbank's mixed messages*

Milbank's oeuvre shows some notable shifts in orientation with regard to henology and pre-ontology. In line with his basically Gilsonian approach, Milbank's early work displays a marked distaste for any talk of a non-ontological or pre-ontological God. He condemns any claim for a strictly pre-ontological principle as "meaningless."<sup>106</sup> He censures theologies of gift which attempt to transcend being for forgetting that "events have to be actual" and failing to see that a "pre-ontological *unum* is yet more static than being."<sup>107</sup> He is careful to argue that salutary theologians such as Gregory and Cusanus should not be mistaken for henological thinkers: the former's divinity "is not 'before' Being" and the latter's notion of unity "marks not a henological priority."<sup>108</sup> This antagonism to certain kinds of pre-ontological thought remains consistent right through to Milbank's latest work. Plotinus' henology, the various meontologies of the German idealists, Levinas' otherwise than being project, and of course Marion's God without being attract the strongest critiques.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "The Invocation of Clio: A Response," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 1 (March 1, 2005): 41–2.

<sup>107</sup> *BR*, xii, italics omitted.

<sup>108</sup> "The Force of Identity," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 209n14; *Vico Part 1*, 38.

<sup>109</sup> For Plotinus, see my discussion below. For the German idealists see "Sophiology and Theurgy," 57–62; *BR*, 1–25; "Double Glory". For Levinas see "Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 11–2; "On Theological Transgression," 153; "Gift, Relation and Participation: Plato versus Lévinas," in *Emmanuel Lévinas: Philosophy, Theology, Politics*, ed. Adam Lipszyc (Warsaw: Instytut Adama Mickiewicza, 2006); "Soul of Reciprocity Part One," 341–2, 385–6n50; "The End of Enlightenment: Post-Modern or Post-Secular?," in *The Debate on Modernity*, ed. Claude Geffré and Jean-Pierre Jossua (London: SCM Press, 1992), 46–7; "Life, or Gift and Glissando," 144; *BSO*, 238–9. I will treat Milbank's critique of Marion on this point in chapter 3.

However, other pre-ontological thinkers receive a mixed report. Plato is one. In mainly older writings Milbank emphatically rejects Plato's ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας as a Christian theologoumenon, for "if God is the Good, then the Good is no longer a Platonic idea beyond being, but rather is to be equated with the infinity of being."<sup>110</sup> Plato's is a "metaphysical mode of affirming transcendence, which... remains, as Kierkegaard realized, locked within immanence."<sup>111</sup> In more recent work, however, Milbank positively contrasts "the Platonic 'Beyond Being' which was superexistentially present as the Ideal" with the "kind of 'real' absolute absence or void" in Derrida and Deleuze which is "all too like Plotinus's One."<sup>112</sup> He celebrates Aquinas' affirmation of "a certain pre-ontological insistence of the ideal (Plato's Sun of the Good beyond Being which itself discloses Being)," suggests that Plato's notions of "participation, real relation and mediation point the way beyond" Levinas' philosophy and suggests that the absolute mediation in Damascius is "perhaps in line with the original view of Plato."<sup>113</sup>

Denys also receives mixed treatment—a point important to note, given the centrality of the Areopagite for Marion's theology. Milbank generally speaks of the Dionysian theology with approbation. In *TST*, Denys is celebrated as a primary source of

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<sup>110</sup> "Problematizing the Secular," 40. Cf. *TST*, 377–81.

<sup>111</sup> "End of Enlightenment," 44.

<sup>112</sup> "Materialism and Transcendence," 404.

<sup>113</sup> "Truth and Vision," 25; "Gift, Relation and Participation: Plato versus Lévinas," 144; "Sophiology and Theurgy," 76–7. See also "Sacred Triads," 457–62; *BR*, 113–22; "Stanton #4," 9–10; *BSO*, 12–3; "Christianity and Platonism in East and West", *passim*.

Christian theology's unique ontology of peace and he remains a key figure in Milbank's lineage of radically orthodox thinkers.<sup>114</sup> The theurgical elements of the Dionysian vision receive particular appreciation in Milbank's account of liturgical and cultural practice.<sup>115</sup> However, on our question of God and being, Milbank displays a marked hesitation. He repeatedly notes the "beyond being" structure of the Dionysian theology and regrets it. Gregory should be preferred because with him, "unlike Dionysius, there is no suggestion of a 'Good beyond Being', and therefore his doxologic remains entirely an ontologic."<sup>116</sup> Milbank suggests that Aquinas' choice to elevate *esse* "in contrast to Dionysius" serves "finally to disperse the Neoplatonic suspicion that actuality, in its rich plenitude of diversity and always defined limited character, is necessarily adverse to perfected good or absolute unity."<sup>117</sup> Other brief comments confirm this critical orientation to the Dionysian pre-ontological Good.<sup>118</sup>

However, in other texts Milbank appears to contradict these judgments. He argues that

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<sup>114</sup> *TST*, 297 and 382–442. For Denys' place in Milbank's theological genealogy see, for example, "Conflict of the Faculties," 308; "Foreword" in Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*; *TST*, xix; "Sophiology and Theurgy"; *BSO*, 32–3.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, *Vico Part 1*, 13–4; "Theology Without Substance: Christianity, Signs, Origins - Part One," *Literature and Theology* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 1988): 11–2; *BR*, ix–x; "Gift and the Mirror," 310–11; "Sophiology and Theurgy"; "On 'Thomistic Kabbalah,'" 157–66.

<sup>116</sup> "The Force of Identity," 209n14. Milbank goes on: "while Gregory's God is as much *dynamis* (and so a 'giving') as *ousia*, his *dynamis* is not 'before' Being."

<sup>117</sup> "Can a Gift Be Given?," 143, italics omitted.

<sup>118</sup> See "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 46; *BR*, 17. A recent exception is Milbank's commentary in "Christianity and Platonism in East and West," 183–6. Here Milbank finds in Denys the same salutary, Proclean priority of "mediation" that I will discuss below.

while, as Dionysius the Areopagite realized, God is superabundant Being, and not a Plotinian unity beyond Being and difference, he is also nevertheless, as Dionysius also saw, a power within Being which is more than Being, an internally creative power... The pre-Thomist intimation in Dionysius of a kind of surplus to actuality in God is therefore correct, but one needs to state clearly that no priority can be given to either pure *actus* or pure *virtus*.<sup>119</sup>

Milbank later affirms the Dionysian “critique of *actus purus*” conveyed in this passage and repeats his desire for “something like an ‘equal priority’ of the pre-ontological with the ontological.”<sup>120</sup> Milbank also reverses the preference for Gregory over Denys which I noted above, suggesting in recent work that Gregory’s theology is compromised by its notion of inward ascent which proceeds “in a partially Plotinian fashion.”<sup>121</sup> Milbank’s treatment of Dionysian attribution shows similar shifts in interpretation.<sup>122</sup>

Milbank’s reception of the Platonic and Dionysian pre-ontological Good thus displays some significant contradictions.<sup>123</sup> On the whole, he seems to think that the Dionysian theology should be resisted for insufficiently “existentialising” its Neoplatonic influences insofar as it posits a God beyond being in a *Plotinian* fashion. (I will explain Milbank’s pejorative sense of “Plotinian” below.) However, Milbank

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<sup>119</sup> TST, 429. The text is unchanged from the first edition (423-4).

<sup>120</sup> “Enclaves,” 352n1.

<sup>121</sup> “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 73–6. Cf. “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 181–2.

<sup>122</sup> Dionysian predication is sometimes endorsed (“Intensities,” esp. 475–6) and sometimes critiqued (“Double Glory,” 224–5n102 and 229n159).

<sup>123</sup> ‘Contradiction’ and not just ‘development’ because, though I give a reading of Milbank’s development regarding pre-ontology below, it does not fully account for these diverse judgments of Plato and Denys that are dispersed over both early and later texts.

equivocates about whether the Areopagite is actually guilty on this score.<sup>124</sup>

In addition to a straightforward condemnation of some pre-ontological approaches and a mixed judgment of others, Milbank's recent work displays a thoroughgoing embrace of a certain set of pre-ontological proposals. I detailed the most important of these in the previous section: Eckhart's *unum* and *intelligere* and the Iamblichan-Damascian One beyond the One. These all affirm a principle before being, and the Iamblichan henology is particularly explicit that this first principle is "beyond being," and yet Milbank continues to speak pejoratively of other expressions of pre-ontology.<sup>125</sup> What are we to make of these mixed messages?

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<sup>124</sup> Milbank's reading of Denys therefore appears to oscillate between the first and third of the three interpretations the Dionysian scholarship which I briefly traced in chapter 1.A. Wayne Hankey is therefore largely correct when he says that with Milbank "Aquinas is... embraced in his difference from Denys, rather than, with Marion, so far as Thomas remains with Denys and makes God prior to being" (Hankey, "The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism," 28). However, as I will argue, this judgment must be nuanced in light of Milbank's more recent work.

<sup>125</sup> A few citations will have to suffice to indicate this consistent theme. Iamblichus argues in *De Mysteriis* that "there is the good that is beyond being and there is that which exists on the level of being" (I.5) and points to the "one god" and "prior cause... unmoved in his singularity and unity" who precedes even the One "from whom springs essentiality and essence" (VIII.2, trans. Emma C. Clarke, Jackson P. Hershbell, and John M. Dillon, eds., *Iamblichus: De mysteriis* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 21 and 307–9). Proclus states in *Theologia Platonica* that the One is "before Being" and "brings Being into existence as its primal cause." (III.8, 31, trans. Radek Chlup, *Proclus: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 55). In the *Elements of Theology* he writes: "that the First Principle transcends Being is evident. For unity and Being are not identical... it has unity only, which implies that it transcends Being." (Prop. 115, trans. E. R. Dodds, ed., *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 102–3). Damascius observes in *De Principiis* that "the One is beyond Being (and this is still more true of the Ineffable)" (I.8, trans. Ahbel-Rappe, *Problems and Solutions*, 83).

*The extended genealogy*

I suggest that Milbank's shifting attitudes to pre-ontology should be understood in relation to recent developments in his telling of the French genealogy. Somewhere around his 2002 essay "The Last of the Last," Milbank began extending his genealogy of modernity further into Western intellectual history.<sup>126</sup> He identifies a second, prior "culprit" who prefigures many of the errors of Scotus, namely Plotinus. According to this extended genealogy, the Neoplatonist school divides into Plotinian and Proclean streams that give contrasting treatments of soul/body, epistemology, culture, theurgy and a variety of other issues. These multiple disputes turn on a central disagreement about the value and function of matter in a participatory ontology. The Plotinian genealogy is marked by a stringent distaste for materiality that precipitates the conceptual (not actual) construal of being in Scotus. Modernity is thus a distant child of Plotinus, its "ultimate grandfather."<sup>127</sup> Milbank's "alternative modernity,"

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<sup>126</sup> "The Last of the Last: Theology, Authority, and Democracy," *Telos* 2002, no. 123 (March 20, 2002): 5–34, reprinted in *BR*, 105–137. Milbank elaborates this extended genealogy in many subsequent texts: "Invocation of Clio," 20–21; *TST*, xix–xx, xxix; "Grandeur of Reason," 379–87; "Materialism and Transcendence," 404; "Stanton #5"; "Stanton Lecture #7: The Objectivity of Feeling" (2011); "Ecumenical Orthodoxy," 158–61; "Mystery of Reason," 87–8; "Sophiology and Theurgy," 73–7; "Thomistic Telescope," 317–8n40; "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics," 499; "Christianity and Platonism in East and West" *passim.*; *BSO*, 19–48, 208–211.

<sup>127</sup> *TST*, xix. In "Invocation of Clio", Milbank clearly summarises the Plotinian position and its implications: "Kant is the long-term heir of the Plotinian strand of Neo-Platonism that stressed the raising of the human soul above the sensory and the material and the inner constitution of the latter within the soul itself. Kant eventually combines such a stress (anticipated already in German Dominicans like Dietrich of Freiburg) with a different mutation of Plotinianism emerging through Avicenna, Roger Bacon, Henry of Ghent, Peter Olivi, and Duns Scotus. This current tended to establish a priority of the consideration of being over the divine cause of being; the idea that being is univocal; a theory of knowledge in God, angels, and humans as "mirroring" the real rather than being in some sort of ontological identity with it; and the view that fundamental causality is

however, takes “another ancient way... the Proclean-Dionysian version of Neo-Platonism.” This tradition runs, according to one of Milbank’s trademark extravaganzas of historical compression, through “Cusa – Pico – Bérulle – Pascal – Cudworth – Shaftesbury – Thomas Taylor – Coleridge – Vico – Jacobi – Hamann – Kierkegaard.”<sup>128</sup> Milbank concludes that “the Plotinus/Proclus contrast, internal to Neoplatonism, helped to generate, and roughly maps onto, the Franciscan/Dominican contrast” and this “both shapes and is secretly more fundamental than the modern/pre-modern alternative.”<sup>129</sup>

Milbank makes some extraordinarily ambitious historical claims here—modernity hidden in the *Enneads*!—and a great deal more scholarship would be required to justify them.<sup>130</sup> But this is not our concern here. Rather, the extended genealogy is pertinent because it permits Milbank to distinguish two kinds of henology for contemporary use, one which Christian theology should avoid and one which it should embrace. When Milbank comments in his mature work that Eckhart’s “Unity ‘adds nothing’ to Being and is not therefore ‘beyond being’ in a neoplatonic sense,” or when he resists the “pagan neoplatonic view that a necessarily impersonal and

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efficient not formal or final in character. These conjoined tendencies allowed a “metaphysics” or an “ontology” to emerge for the first time as a fully autonomous and fundamental field of understanding. Basic to this new “ontology” was the idea that being is what is clearly knowable by the mind and that God is the supreme ontic instance of being thus understood.” (20.)

<sup>128</sup> “Invocation of Clio,” 20, italics omitted.

<sup>129</sup> BSO, 209. Cf. “Christianity and Platonism in East and West”: “the choice historically has *not* been one between a pure reading of Aristotle and a Platonically contaminated one, but rather between *two alternative Neoplatonic options in the hermeneutics of Aristotle*” (159–60n2).

<sup>130</sup> Milbank does concede that he is “of course vastly over-simplifying” (TST, xx).

non-intellectual ‘One’ stands above ‘Being,’” we should interpret him to be resisting a Plotinian approach.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, in thinkers of the Proclean ilk, especially Iamblichus and Damascius, Milbank finds a salutary pre-ontological transcendence which is non-dualist and non-contrastive, verging on a monistic identity between God and creature and anticipating the logic of the Cusan *non aliud* and *coincidentia oppositorum* and the Eckhartian *indistinctum*. Transcendence here serves only to emphasise the First’s immanence to Second being, not its distinction from it. It serves to elevate the material and cultural activities of Second being and does not denigrate them, as the standard picture of Neoplatonism implies. Pre-ontological transcendence thus inverts its own stereotype—and to some degree Milbank’s own early treatments—to become a means of affirming Second being in an even stronger fashion than mainstream existentialist Thomism.

As a corollary of the extended genealogy, Milbank has completely reversed his assessment of the Iamblichan henology in its relation to Christian orthodoxy. In his early work, Milbank repeatedly endorses Rowan Williams’ account of the evolving Neoplatonist philosophies.<sup>132</sup> Williams argues that the tradition moved “consistently

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<sup>131</sup> “Double Glory,” 203–4, italics omitted; *SM*, 51. In the former text Milbank makes the Plotinian/Proclean contrast explicit here: Eckhart did not think participation “in a neoplatonic sense—if by that one means that neoplatonism generally did not see an analogical continuum as reaching into the One itself (though this is qualified by Proclus)” (224-5n102).

<sup>132</sup> Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 181–232. Milbank endorses Williams’ approach in *TST*, 434–5; *BR*, 225n30; “History of the One God,” 400n61. Milbank himself explicitly opposes Damascius’ ontology up to at least 2007—see “Gift and the Mirror,” 277 and 280.

but cautiously towards the greater ‘inflation’ of the absolute first principle,” culminating in the One beyond the One of Iamblichus and Damascius. Falling for the “bureaucratic fallacy,” the later tradition imagined that the serial addition of another higher One would achieve a first principle even farther beyond being, multiplicity and materiality, and it was Arius’ commitment to this kind of hyper-transcendence that prompted his denial of the incarnated Christ’s full divinity.<sup>133</sup> In line with his extended genealogy, however, Milbank now argues that “Iamblichus is not, as Rowan Williams once suggested... taking further the Plotinian tendency to posit an ultimate One that is radically alone,” but instead, as I noted earlier, articulating an absolute priority of “mediation.”<sup>134</sup> In a remarkable turnabout, Milbank now suggests that, far from Arian heresy, Damascius’ treatment of henology intimates and perhaps even emulates Christian orthodoxy.<sup>135</sup>

With his extended genealogy, then, Milbank appears to have shifted from a sporadic Gilsonian antagonism in his earlier work to a warm embrace of pre-ontological

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<sup>133</sup> Williams, *Arius*, 195.

<sup>134</sup> “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 77. Milbank now prefers Gregory Shaw’s treatment *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995) in opposition to Williams—see “Sophiology and Theurgy,” 76–8; “The Politics of the Soul,” 2012, 6, [theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank\\_PoliticsOfTheSoul.pdf](http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers/Milbank_PoliticsOfTheSoul.pdf) (accessed 12 December 2013); *TST*, xix–xx; *BSO*, 32–3, 208; “Christianity and Platonism in East and West”, *passim*.

<sup>135</sup> “Mystery of Reason,” 91–2. Cf. *BSO*, 102n196: “while, certainly, I would wish to stress a qualitative difference between Christianity and Neoplatonism, the point is that an over-apologetic approach here can miss the truth that Christianity, as it were, renders Neoplatonism ‘still more Neoplatonic’ and not less (rather in the way that the New Testament accentuates as much as it qualifies the message of the Old).”

themes in recent writings.<sup>136</sup> He voices his mature view when he observes that the premodern “theo-ontology” is distinguished from modern ontotheology because “ontological considerations were here subordinate to knowledge of the first principle, and for this reason did not necessarily assume preeminence over henological, gnoseological, or axiological reflections.”<sup>137</sup>

It is important to note that the pre-ontology that Milbank embraces is specifically of the Proclean type: non-contrastive and mediatory, absolutely immanent to the multiplicity and materiality of Second being. It is this kind of pre-ontology which has attracted Milbank more and more to what he calls “hyperbolically orthodox” thinkers: pre-eminently Eriugena, Eckhart and Cusanus.<sup>138</sup> This trio—“the three perhaps most rigorous of all Christian theologians”<sup>139</sup>—is especially important for Milbank, for in them are found many of the key notions that we have touched on in

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<sup>136</sup> Milbank confirmed this contrast with Gilson in private conversation in July 2013. Milbank’s development here parallels the turn in medieval studies away from Gilson’s proposal of a monolithic “Christian philosophy” of *esse* toward the appreciation of diversity in medieval Christian treatments of the transcendentals—see the discussion in Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 6–10 and 434–8.

<sup>137</sup> “Gift and the Mirror,” 255.

<sup>138</sup> “Grandeur of Reason,” 394. Milbank states: “I am thinking primarily of Eriugena, Eckhart and Cusanus, but to a degree I would also include Anselm, Kierkegaard and Chesterton... I would myself make a distinction between the ‘broad’ Christian theologians who are *more* paradigmatic because of their reach, complexity and supple variety — Augustine, Maximus, Aquinas — and the ‘concentrated’ thinkers whom I have already mentioned who may be more secondary and yet consistently ‘push things further’ in a way that we cannot now ignore.” See also *TST*, xxxvi–xxx.

<sup>139</sup> “Grandeur of Reason,” 375. He elsewhere comments that the three constitute a “slightly more ‘underground’ (though not heterodox) current of medieval Catholic thought... the radicalism of these thinkers is in fact the radicalism engendered by a defense of orthodoxy. They were ‘radically orthodox’ in a very specific sense.” (“Double Glory,” 113–4).

this chapter: the univocity at the level of the infinite in Milbank's hyperbolic analogy, God as *indistinctum* and *non aliud*, creation as "created God."<sup>140</sup> Milbank's emphasis on these hyperbolically orthodox thinkers is the primary impetus in his claim for the radical immanence of the First to Second being. Conversely, as I will show in chapter 3, Milbank finds in Marion only the deleterious style of henology which he sees in Plotinus, and for this reason he remains trenchantly opposed to Marion's use of pre-ontology.

All of the themes I've noted in this section—the distinction of two styles of Neoplatonic henology, the shared priority of *esse* with pre-ontological designations, the elevation of material life—is concisely indicated in a paragraph which very nearly sums up the whole of Milbank's mature approach to pre-ontological themes:

If God is transcendentally, eminently one, then this surely does not mean that he is an individual, a very big unity alongside other unities. Rather it means that he is both simple and plenitudinous—beyond the contrast of universal and individual, beyond the contrast of the one and the many... This is one way in which we need to be on guard that the Christian notion of the unity of God (beyond Neoplatonism) as personal, existential, and intellectual actually slips beneath the Neoplatonic sense of the absolute transcendence of the ultimate nonnumerical unity. (Especially in the case of Iamblichus and Damascius, for whom the most ultimate and ineffable one was also the dyad—the ground of variety and materiality—and just for this reason, though unreachable by contemplation, was present in everything and made itself manifest in material ritual practice.) The Christian absolute *esse* and *intellectus* remains also the mystically ineffable *unum* that is not in competition with finite unities. Does not then the vision of the generous glory of God, require a reenchantment of

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<sup>140</sup> This marks a shift in some respects from Milbank's early work, where he outright condemned Eriugena for his pantheist tendencies—see *Vico Part 1*, 15 and 117–132.

the cosmos, which can alone acknowledge its divine derivation? <sup>141</sup>

In the case of Marion's Thomism, a closer look at the perplexities only confirmed our confusion and weakened his claim to that tradition. In the case of Milbank's pre-ontology, however, our examination of the perplexities has produced some clarity. We can conclude that pre-ontology is repudiated by Milbank insofar as it distances First from Second, but embraced insofar as it increases the First's paradoxical immanence to Second being.

### **Conclusion: Second with First**

We read the whole of Christian doctrine with a strong stress on paradoxicality.

- John Milbank<sup>142</sup>

In the conclusion to chapter 1, I suggested that Marion's Dionysian ontology and equivocal account of analogy served to cut the yoke between the two poles of the Anonymous Commentator's double being. God should be imagined as a Love "without being" because Second being has no likeness whatsoever to God's First being.

How does Milbank's account of God, being and analogy compare? His initially Gilsonian approach maps straightforwardly onto the double being structure. God as

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<sup>141</sup> "Alternative Protestantism," 40-1.

<sup>142</sup> "Interview and Conversation with John Milbank and Simon Oliver," 61.

*ipsum esse* is identified with the infinitival being of the First and created *esse commune* is identified with the derived being of the Second. As for theological predication, Milbank's approach finds in creation inklings and approximations of God's infinite perfections which correspond to the creature's participatory likeness to its divine cause. These predications reflect a semantic and ontological doctrine of analogy which accounts for the yoke between First and Second beings.

However, overwhelmingly, Milbank's theological ontology seeks to tighten the yoke between First and Second, even to the point of collapsing the distinction entirely. This has become increasingly so in his recent work focussing on his hyperbolically orthodox sources in the tradition. Virtually every theme that I have noted in this chapter aims at an affirmation of the immanence of First to Second and the necessarily paradoxical nature of any distinction between the two: the aporetic division of Trinity from creation, the notions of *indistinctum*, *negatio negationis* and *non aliud*, the pre-ontological *unum*, *intelligere*, nullity and non-contrastive One beyond the One, the extended genealogy of modernity and, perhaps above all, the assertion of univocity at the level of the infinite in Milbank's hyperbolic analogy. All of these serve to collapse the gap between First and Second being. The transcendence of the First is for Milbank always a means of prosecuting the agenda of immanence, with the conviction that the increase of one is not the cancellation of the other, but rather the increase of both.

The Anonymous Commentator observes at one point that the Second “both is and is not [the First] at the same time.”<sup>143</sup> The vision of double being which Milbank has elaborated over his career constitutes a sustained and ambitious meditation on this paradox, a paradox which reflects the strange, immanent intimacy between First and Second being.

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<sup>143</sup> Fragment V, trans. Bechtel, *The Anonymous Commentary*, 60.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Disputes*

Marion is always exactly half right.

John Milbank<sup>1</sup>

My expositions in the previous two chapters have established for us the contrasting character of Marion and Milbank's respective accounts of double being. Marion affirms an equivocality of being between First and Second and an equivocal account of analogical attribution. These positions are predicated on his modern and Heideggerian conception of Second being and his concomitant understanding of transcendence as strictly pre-ontological. Milbank affirms a radical immanence of First to Second being by way of his hyperbolic analogy and non-contrastive notion of pre-ontology, and this emphasis on divine immanence is reflected in his richer, rival conception of Second being as participatory, plenitudinous and so on. Having carefully scrutinised and synthesised Marion and Milbank's work, we are now in a position to compare and evaluate their visions of double being.

The goal of this third chapter is to perform this comparison and evaluation and thus to carry on their aborted debate about double being. The chapter is divided into three disputes that address the three most important points of contention between Marion

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<sup>1</sup> "Soul of Reciprocity Part One," 352.

and Milbank: analogical attribution, theological ontology, and post-Heideggerian theological method. I treat these in order of ascending significance, working as it were from fruit to root. That is, I suggest that in Marion and Milbank an account of theological discourse is underwritten by an account of theological ontology, and this is in turn underwritten by a vision of how theology should proceed after Heidegger. This last issue will emerge as the locus of their most fundamental disagreement. In the course of each dispute I trace Milbank's own critique of Marion and offer my own evaluation of both their positions.

I will make my own evaluations from a Thomist point of view, as I understand it. Though the scope of Marion and Milbank's double being debate runs over the entire Western philosophical tradition, it is essential to focus on Aquinas because, if there is a fulcrum on which this double being debate turns, it is him. On the questions of analogy and being, even with the widened *ressourcement* of the *nouvelle théologie*, Aquinas remains the touchstone and critical centre of debate for contemporary Catholic theology. Furthermore, he is claimed as an ally by both parties in a way that no other theologian quite is. A Thomist orientation, therefore, is arguably the most illuminating perspective we could assume.

### Dispute #1: Analogical attribution

Nevertheless, it cannot be said that whatever is predicated of God and creatures is an equivocal predication; for, unless there were at least some real agreement between creatures and God, His essence would not be the likeness of creatures, and so He could not know them by knowing His essence. Similarly, we would not be able to attain any knowledge of God from creatures, nor from among the names devised for creatures could we apply one to Him more than another; for in equivocal predication it makes no difference what name is used, since the word does not signify any real agreement.

- Thomas Aquinas<sup>2</sup>

The first dispute between Marion and Milbank concerns analogy as a rule of theological speech and, more specifically, the analogical attribution of “being” to God. Borrowing a phrase from Christological studies, we might say that this dispute approaches double being “from below,” for it asks about the way in which the First possesses perfections that we first perceive in creaturely life below and attribute upward to him. (The next dispute about theological ontology will approach double being “from above.”) Regarding the theological significance of analogy, Marion and Milbank agree that though it is initially a linguistic rule, it nonetheless reflects a theological ontology, and both speak of an “analogy of being” with reference to Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> As to a definition of analogy, we may pass over its tremendous and

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<sup>2</sup> *De veritate* I.2.11.a.2, trans Mulligan, *Thomas Aquinas: The Disputed Questions on Truth*, 1:111.

<sup>3</sup> Marion notes that “Thomas Aquinas scarcely uses the term *analogia entis*” (“TA&OT,” 48) but recognises the importance of the concept for Aquinas and elaborates it at length in that essay. Milbank notes that “*analogia entis*” only gained currency with Przywara’s work but that “clearly it is not entirely inappropriate” in the Thomist context because Aquinas speaks plainly about an analogical causation between divine and creaturely *esse*, and his “use of evaluative perfection-terms, *already* assumes a metaphysics of participation, such that grammar here grounds

intricate literature,<sup>4</sup> for it suffices for our purposes here to define analogy in rather general terms as a mode of discourse between pure univocity and pure equivocality (after Aquinas) and as a marker of “similarity within dissimilarity” (after the Fourth Lateran Council’s celebrated edict).<sup>5</sup>

To begin, we may clarify Marion and Milbank’s contrasting positions by way of an illuminating comment from David Bentley Hart. Hart observes that Aquinas and the

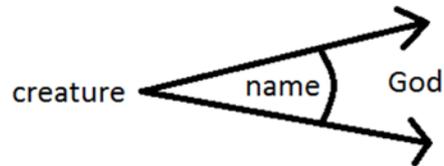
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itself in theology, not theology in grammar.” (“Truth and Vision,” 40; “A Critique of the Theology of Right,” 16; cf. “New Divide,” 31–2; “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 198–200.) Ralph McInerny insists that “Thomas never speaks of the causal dependence in a hierarchical descent of all things from God as analogy” and says that, while this does not imply that Aquinas would reject an “analogy of being,” he “would not have confused the two meanings, pressing the real proportion or analogy of creature to God into analogous naming, as if it were a type of it.” Rather he “would point out that the coincidence of the *ordo nominum* and *ordo nominis* is adventitious” only (*Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington: CUA Press, 1996), 162). Milbank and Marion would be happy to accept McInerny’s first comment, I think, but would reject the “adventitious” nature of the coincidence: it is nothing less than creation *ex nihilo* that confirms the coincidence. Indeed, David Burrell, a close ally of McInerny, cites Milbank’s insistence on this point as the reason for abandoning his own earlier strict division of semantics and ontology—see “Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): 51n17). Marion and Milbank agree with Bernard Montagnes depiction of analogy’s unfortunate path from Aquinas to Cajetan: analogy “has shifted from metaphysics toward logic; there is no doubt about the significance of this slippage: a philosophy of concepts is substituted for a philosophy of reality” (*The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 162).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Palakeel’s *The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse: An Investigation in Ecumenical Perspective* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1995) gives a sense of the field.

<sup>5</sup> See ST 1a.13.5.c. Marion cites the Lateran text twice in his writings—*I&D*, 152; “In the Name,” 158. In both instances, it is presented as a decisive explication of the meaning of Christian transcendence. The crucial phrase in the edict against Joachim of Fiore runs: “between the Creator and the creature so great a likeness cannot be noted without the necessity of noting a greater dissimilarity between them” “Inter creatorem et creaturam non potest [tanta] similitudo notari, quin inter eos non maior sit dissimilitudo notanda.” Heinrich Denzinger, *Kompendium Der Glaubensbekenntnisse Und Kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, ed. Peter Hünermann, 42nd ed. (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2009), 1215. (Only some texts include “tanta”.) Translated in Heinrich Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Roy Deferrari (New Hampshire: Loreto, 1955), 171.

tradition of classical theism speaks about God according to a “sort of analogy” that is “open at one end (so to speak) to a meaning that we can only faintly grasp.”<sup>6</sup> Hart’s comment suggests the following schema:



The single point represents the creaturely pole of theological speech, that is, meanings embedded in the divine names which we understand from life in the world. The other pole, open to an infinitely extending semantic sector, is the divine end of the analogy.<sup>7</sup>

Marion and Milbank certainly agree that theological discourse is “open” in this way. Their disagreement concerns the relation between the closed and open senses of analogical predication, or, in the terms of the Lateran edict, the relation between a recognised “likeness” and the “ever greater dissimilarity between” God and creature that must be simultaneously recognised.<sup>8</sup> Everything hangs here on the

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<sup>6</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 126.

<sup>7</sup> A comparable (if polemical) schema of the Scotist approach would look something like this:



Here, a single constant name is predicated either finitely or infinitely to creature and God, with the name indicating a sort of *tertium quid* common to creature and Creator.

<sup>8</sup> Milbank has not discussed the text explicitly, as far as I know, but one certainly senses a comfortable fit between Milbank’s theology and the *analogia entis* that Przywara and Balthasar

interpretation of the edict's *maior dissimilitudo*. For Milbank this greater dissimilarity provides the unending apophatic context in which continuing, positive similitudes may still be affirmed; the creaturely end of analogy gives us faint but true inklings of the infinitely open end. For Marion, the greater dissimilarity functions as a complete apophatic erasure. Any claimed similitude is overtaken and cancelled by dissimilarity such that, in the end, there is no similitude at all. The closed and open ends of analogy are distinguished by an absolute difference, that is, a difference of equivocation. This contrast between Marion and Milbank's conception of analogy's open end is of vital importance for the double being debate—their positions here reflect their theological ontologies and determine the nature of our knowledge of First being.

#### *Milbank's critique*

With these contrasting positions in mind, let us briefly consider Milbank's critique of Marion on analogical predication. Milbank's reading of Marion on this point coheres with my exposition in this study. He argues that Marion's early work "preserves, to a large degree, the Heideggerian refusal of analogy," while in the mature work, "since *esse* is an empty name, all analogical predication must be a purely apophatic gesturing to a divine distance." Marion's fundamental equivocity repeats the mainstream postmodern affirmation of primordial difference and his position "seems to leave the finite symbolic and historical vehicles of revelation stranded in a pure

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famously extrapolate from the Lateran declaration.

positivity.”<sup>9</sup> In a phenomenology and theology of this style, it is difficult or impossible to differentiate the Christian God from sheer, horrifying sublimity. Marion’s saturated revelation “is a pure flux, which washes over every boundary, and as such, it is difficult to know how it is ‘the Good’, nor how it truly differs from the impersonal Heideggerian flux of the *es gibt*.”<sup>10</sup> Marion settles on equivocity as an entailment of his conviction that “the crux of a ‘non-metaphysical’ theology regards... gift versus Being.” But Milbank insists Marion is mistaken on this point—the true crux of a postmodern theology is “the referring or not of the transcendentals to God via analogical participation” and Marion’s project remains “still somehow the legatee” of modern theology’s estrangement from analogy.<sup>11</sup>

### *Evaluation*

In *ST* 1a.13.5.c, Aquinas gives his classic treatment of analogical predication. He argues that “univocal predication is impossible between God and creatures” because the perfections of the divine simplicity are only imperfectly present in the creature, who “receives the similitude of the agent not in its full degree.” Aquinas then denies that the divine names are “applied to God and creatures in a purely equivocal sense, as some have said.” Rather, “names are said of God and creatures in an analogous sense, i.e. according to proportion” and this is so because all speech about God must reflect the peculiar causal relation of Creator to creation. Names are “said according

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<sup>9</sup> *BSO*, 52n78; “Truth and Vision,” 26.

<sup>10</sup> “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 43; “Truth and Vision,” 44.

<sup>11</sup> “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 47.

to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently.”

This very brief glance at the *Summa* indicates that Milbank’s conception of analogy as a matter of recognising inklings, approximations and similitudes of the divine perfections in creatures must be judged preferable to Marion’s equivocal approach which finally denies any such likeness.<sup>12</sup> I agree with Milbank regarding the problems in Marion’s approach to analogical predication. In the remainder of this section I will confirm Marion’s divergence from Aquinas in greater detail and show how this decision weakens his theological account of double being.

A careful reading of Marion reveals that his approach to analogy actually has more affinity with the account of attribution and *esse* given by Maimonides in the *Guide* than with Aquinas.<sup>13</sup> The Rabbi writes:

[E]xistence is, in our opinion, affirmed of Him, may He be exalted, and of what is other than He merely by way of absolute equivocation... the term “existent” is predicated of Him, may He be exalted, and of everything that is other than He, in a purely equivocal sense.<sup>14</sup>

He concludes that “the meaning of the qualificative attributions ascribed to Him and

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<sup>12</sup> Obviously a thorough appraisal would require much more work than I can do here. Starting points for further examination would include *De veritate* 2.11; *De potentia* 7.7; *SCG* I.33 and I.34.

<sup>13</sup> See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Vol. 1, trans. Schlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), particularly chapters 50-63.

<sup>14</sup> *Guide*, Vol. 1, 118 and 131.

the meaning of the attributions known to us have nothing in common in any respect or in any mode; these attributions have in common *only the name and nothing else.*"<sup>15</sup> Marion's judgment that "God is called *esse* but *as to name only* and not as such" echoes the Maimonidean formula almost to the letter. *Esse* is not analogously stretched here; it is *snapped*, emptied out before ascription to divinity.<sup>16</sup> Aquinas' resistance to what "was taught by Rabbi Moses" obviously casts doubt on the plausibility of such an interpretation of Thomist analogy.<sup>17</sup>

The reason for Marion's misconstrual of analogy is his failure to integrate the metaphysics of causal participation that is for Aquinas the ontological basis of analogical predication. That is, he fails to construe theological speech "according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause." Marion asks "if God causes Being, wouldn't we have to admit that, for Saint Thomas himself, God can be expressed without Being?"<sup>18</sup> But the question calls for precisely the opposite answer to that which Marion seeks. Marion's rhetoric does pick up a Neoplatonic theme inherited by Aquinas—that an effect is of a different nature to its cause—and hence it

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<sup>15</sup> *Guide, Vol. 1*, 131, my italics.

<sup>16</sup> "TA&OT," 61. I use the term "stretched" advisedly, as it is often taken as a description of the Scotist approach. Two comments from David Burrell indicate the ambiguity: Christians must forbid "any ordinary brand of "onto-theology" wherein a notion of *being* can be stretched to include the creator as well as creation," but Aquinas still recognised that "perfection-terms were capable of the peculiar stretching needed to speak properly about God." (*Faith and Freedom: An Interfaith Perspective* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 123; "Philosophy and Religion: Attention to Language and the Role of Reason," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38, no. 1-3 (December 1, 1995): 120). It is this latter sense of stretching as opening that I intend.

<sup>17</sup> *ST Ia.13.2.c.*

<sup>18</sup> *GWB*, xxiv.

is true in an important sense that God is “without” the being of Second *esse commune*.<sup>19</sup> However, it is misleading to alight here without affirming the equally essential Thomist principle of *omne agens agit sibi simile*, which recognises a certain likeness to God in created things and a certain likeness to created perfections in God, who possesses them pre-eminently as their uncreated source.<sup>20</sup> *Esse* is no exception here. Indeed Aquinas highlights *esse* as the fundamental instance of the causal relation: there is a likeness of the unique divine agent in created effects “according to some sort of analogy; as existence [*esse*] is common to all. In this way all created things, so far as they are beings, are like God as the first and universal principle of all being.”<sup>21</sup> Marion seems to occlude entirely this essential element of Aquinas’ thought.<sup>22</sup> He cleaves to his prior Dionysian discourse of praise, which claims that the divine names indicate only created gifts and not their divine giver. A divine name

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<sup>19</sup> See A. C. Lloyd, “The Principle That the Cause Is Greater than Its Effect,” *Phronesis* 21, no. 2 (1976): 146–156 and O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 208. Marion rightly notes that Aquinas is “the direct heir of a line of thought that the *Liber de causis* illustrates” when it says that “first among created things is being” (“TA&OT,” 54). Marion’s correct recognition of Aquinas’ Neoplatonic heritage here is not matched, however, by a recognition of his modification of that heritage.

<sup>20</sup> For a fine discussion of this theme see John Wippel, “Thomas Aquinas on Our Knowledge of God and the Axiom That Every Agent Produces Something Like Itself,” in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 152–171.

<sup>21</sup> *ST* Ia.4.3.c. Przywara, whom Marion himself cites as an authoritative theorist of Christian transcendence (“In the Name,” 158n68), cites this text to show that even with its ever greater dissimilarity, “the ‘analogy of being’ is certainly a bridge” between First and Second *esse*. (*Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. David Bentley Hart and John R. Betz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 236.) Marion’s judgment that the analogy of being “has no other function than to dig the chasm that separates the two understandings of *esse* (and not to bridge it)” presents a telling contrast with Przywara (“TA&OT,” 48).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ST* Ia.4.2.c: “since therefore God is the first effective cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way.”

“aims at the Requisite, but describes the requestant,” and God remains without these perfections as their pre-ontological source.<sup>23</sup> But the entire apparatus of Aquinas’ metaphysics of *esse* and *res / modus* distinction may be taken as a careful repudiation of precisely the kind of absolute Maimonidean rupture in theological speech and absolute Plotinian rupture between *esse divinum* and *esse creatum* which Marion endorses here. As Milbank aptly puts it, God “unlike the Plotinian One, gives only a sharing in what he eminently has,” and this theological distinction must be reflected in Christian theological speech.<sup>24</sup>

This critique of Marion does not depend on an idiosyncratic reading of Aquinas—indeed, it would be confirmed by an overwhelming majority of Thomist commentators.<sup>25</sup> I would contend, moreover, that Marion’s position is unsatisfactory

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<sup>23</sup> *I&D*, 187. I treated this in chapter 1.A. Marion’s univocity of love is the exception that proves the rule.

<sup>24</sup> “Gift and the Mirror,” 274. Milbank’s contrast of Proclean and Plotinian Neoplatonisms may be here legitimately mapped onto the treatment of being in Marion and Milbank himself. In Plotinus, donation is “a secondary ontological phenomenon, which only commences at a level below that of the absolutely unified. Everything else somehow derives from the One, yet the One gives nothing of itself.” In the Proclean tradition, “donation is primordial” and there is no “One beyond the gift”, but rather an absolute self-giving (“Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 162, 173–4).

<sup>25</sup> I am indebted here to my colleague Patrick Kavanagh’s fine unpublished paper “The Meaning and Significance of the Distinction Between *Res Significata* and *Modus Significandi* in the Work of St Thomas Aquinas,” 2013. See, for example, Rudi A. te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The “Divine Science” of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 72–122, esp. 114–5 and the critique of Marion at 86–7; Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1995), 92–116, esp. the section titled “The Divine Similitude in Created Being”; O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 41–58; Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 179–190, 210–11; Cornelio Fabro, “Participation,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito, vol. 10, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Gale, 2003), 905–910; Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 70–75;

even on the terms of scrupulously apophatic readings of Aquinas such as that of David Burrell, with whose approach I have great sympathy.<sup>26</sup> Burrell constantly emphasises the importance of the *res / modus* distinction: we rightly attribute names to God, but we do not finally know what it is that we say, for we cannot know what God is. The divine names perform an “imperfect signification;”<sup>27</sup> they are always already “fractured” and “suitably negated, from within.”<sup>28</sup> Perfection speech must “outstrip any realization that we come across of it” to indicate “the incredible surplus meaning available to perfection terms.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, while the creature may resemble God in a fashion, “‘resemblance’ can hardly mean what we normally take it to mean...

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McInerney, *Aquinas and Analogy*, 158–163; Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*, 383–387; Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington: CUA Press, 2004), 291–352; Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 34–43, 66–7, 79–91, and esp. the “Concordance of the arguments against the equivocity of the divine names” (178–9); George Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960), 104–110, 151–5; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 501–575; Philipp Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A “Repetition” of Scholastic Metaphysics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 281–300; Mark Jordan, “The Names of God and the Being of Names,” in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 166.

<sup>26</sup> I highlight Burrell deliberately here, as both Marion and Milbank endorse him as a reader of Aquinas. Marion cites him approvingly at “TA&OT,” 73–4n63. Milbank employs Burrell’s “truly inspiring work” (“Truth and Vision,” 109n103) regularly across his writings. Burrell developed a theory of Thomistic analogy in *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) which was the basis for his subsequent *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) and *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001). Philip Rolnick’s *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (American Academy of Religion, 1993) gives a careful account of Burrell’s development toward his mature, somewhat less Wittgensteinian view, which is reflected in the more recent essays cited below.

<sup>27</sup> Burrell, “Philosophy and Religion,” 120–3.

<sup>28</sup> “Desire and the Semantics of God-Talk: Beyond a ‘negative/positive’ Polarity,” unpublished manuscript (Blackfriars, Oxford, 2012), 1; “Aquinas and Maimonides: A Conversation About Proper Speech,” *Immanuel* 16, no. 16 (1983): 79.

<sup>29</sup> *Faith and Freedom*, 119; “Aquinas and Maimonides: A Conversation About Proper Speech,” 79.

since the resemblance which Aquinas asserts is not a recognizable one.”<sup>30</sup> Analogy is for this reason “a special form of equivocation.”<sup>31</sup> However, even for this most apophatic interpreter, Thomist apophaticism never implies a pure equivocity:

[S]ince any warrant we have for using human language at all of God—even perfection terms—turns on the grounding fact of creation, such terms cannot be univocal, since *they must be able to span “the distinction”* of creatures from creator without collapsing it. For creation, with the all-important “distinction” it introduces, at once assures that our human language will possess such terms as well as demands that we rely on them if we would speak coherently of God, still recognizing ourselves to be creatures with a creaturely mode of knowing. *Any attempt—on semantic or any other grounds—to deny human language that capacity must also deny that we can say anything whatsoever about God. And that is indeed what Moses Maimonides had to insist...*<sup>32</sup>

In light of this, Burrell’s ringing praise of Marion must have in mind other elements of his position, such as its systematic critique of univocity.<sup>33</sup> If not, then Burrell has

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<sup>30</sup> *Faith and Freedom*, xix. Burrell later notes that it is *esse* that “accounts for whatever similarity can be had between creator and creature.” (120) Burrell takes issue with fellow Thomist Thomas White, who posits “a real ontological resemblance between creatures and God.” Burrell argues that, while such a claim may be defensible, it “will have to be laced with dramatic disclaimers as well; in short, strategic and perhaps multiple negations.” (“Desire and the Semantics of God-Talk,” 5.)

<sup>31</sup> *Faith and Freedom*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> “Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language,” 35, my italics. Burrell’s phrase “the distinction” alludes to Robert Sokolowski’s notion of “the Christian distinction” between God and world elaborated in *The God of Faith and Reason Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

<sup>33</sup> Burrell appends a note at the end of his detailed critique of Marion’s early position, stating that Marion’s retraction essay “addresses the substance of this critique so thoroughly as to render it redundant as critique: Aquinas is recovered for who he is!” (“Reflections on ‘Negative Theology’ in the Light of a Recent Venture to Speak of ‘God Without Being,’” 67n10). He speaks of Marion with great approbation in multiple subsequent writings, noting that Marion’s “conversion” to the mature position allows for “the richest possible account of existence” (“Creator / Creatures Relation: ‘the Distinction’ vs. ‘Onto-Theology,’” *Faith and Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (2008): 178). However, as I argued in chapter 1, at no point is “being” substantially rethought by Marion; it remains strictly as

not fully grasped the equivocality of being which structures Marion's theology and the Heideggerian assumptions which direct it. For the Thomist God is not "without" being in the absolute sense that Marion intends: as the First, he is "with" the fullness of the being that, in bits and pieces, we perceive here in the creaturely life of the Second. Marion's claim that the final witness of the Christian tradition is "essential anonymity" and "a pragmatic theology of absence," is simply not tenable from a Thomist point of view, even as Aquinas' theology remains profoundly informed by the apophatic intuitions which Marion holds so dear.<sup>34</sup> Aquinas' rebuttal of equivocality indicates Marion's problem precisely: "if that were so, it follows that from creatures nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all," an offence against both "the philosophers" and "the Apostle."<sup>35</sup>

Marion's failure to attain to true "similarity in dissimilarity" in theological attribution entails the further problem, already intimated in Milbank's critique, of accounting for the positive, revealed knowledge that he clearly claims for Christian theology. Marion says, for example, that "in good theology, the primacy of *esse* implies especially that it is to be understood, more than any other name, starting from God,

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Heidegger and the moderns construe it, simply with an equivocal "Esse without being" appended henologically above. Thus Marion's can hardly be called from a Christian point of view "the richest possible account of existence." Could Marion agree with Josef Pieper, Burrell's doyen of Thomists, that "things are good precisely because they exist, and... this goodness is identical with the Being of things"? (*The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*, trans. Daniel O'Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 54). My exposition of Marion's Second being has shown that he certainly could not.

<sup>34</sup> "In the Name," 157 and 155.

<sup>35</sup> ST Ia.13.5.c. Aquinas cites Rom 1:20 here.

and not that God can be conceived starting from *esse*.”<sup>36</sup> Taken in a weak sense this claim is obviously true, the only alternative being Scotist and Feuerbachian idolatry. But as I have shown, Marion intends the claim in the strong sense of an equivocity of *esse*. If we take Marion seriously on this point we must ask: with what angelic speech does he claim to speak *esse*, or indeed any theological attribution, “starting from God”? Whence comes this God’s eye view?<sup>37</sup>

On the contrary, theological thought and discourse starts here below, for we are dust;

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<sup>36</sup> “TA&OT,” 61.

<sup>37</sup> This is not mere polemic on my part. Cf. “The Impossible for Man,” 34: “the task is to transcend our own finite point of view in order to pass over to God’s point of view.” Or *GWB*, 110: we “must attempt... to accede, from the very point of view of our situation defined by finitude.” There is of course a grain of truth here, but as Lorenz Puntel rightly observes, “for the theologian who is at work on the task in question, “speaking of and/or from God’s point of view” means that he *as-a-human-being* is considering, interpreting, and arguing in favor of what he takes to be God’s point of view.” (*Being and God*, 372.) Puntel’s italics indicate my point precisely. Christina Gschwandtner, on the other hand, defends Marion’s “God’s point of view”: “it means that he wants to preserve the kind of analogy between God and humans that Aquinas and Dionysius express... one that moves terminology from uncreated to created, from infinite to finite, not the other way around” (*Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, 128). But as I have been arguing here, divine naming in Aquinas works in exactly the opposite way than Gschwandtner suggests. The *ordo rerum* does of course move from uncreated to created because God is cause of creatures, but this causal movement is the very reason why our “terminology” (the *ordo nominis*) moves “the other way around,” from creature to God, known to unknown. As Denys passionately emphasises, we name God *from* creatures. Or, as Rudi te Velde sums up Aquinas: “In the process of naming we proceed from effect to cause, from creatures to God. In the process of creation itself, however, the perfections flow from God into creatures.” (*Aquinas on God*, 106–7.) Gschwandtner’s defense actually serves to underscore the problems of Marion’s equivocity. On the one hand we are agnostically adrift with zero knowledge of the uncreated from created inklings; on the other hand, we have a fideistic assertion of sheer revelation “from uncreated to created,” leaving us with *too much* clarity about the uncreated, which is to say, with idolatry.

we have no other place to start.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the revelation of *sacra doctrina* does not somehow cancel the creatureliness of our thought and speech but rather embraces it. Christian speech is spoken always already from below, even as its object (or with a nod to Barth, its Subject) is revealed from above.<sup>39</sup> Marion's construal of revelation as a pure, saturated, and sublime event at once overestimates our capacity for angelic spiritual perception and underestimates our ability as embodied, traditioned, linguistic and rational creatures to interpret and respond to ambiguous and revelatory phenomena. Marion's approach claims an absolute revelation but cannot discern between the God of charity and, as Milbank puts it, a "pure arrival from the abyss"<sup>40</sup> We are given extraordinary confidence in a bedazzling phenomenon but, to borrow a phrase from Richard Kearney, we are unable to apprehend the difference between the phenomena of strangers, gods and monsters.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Marion's judgment that Christianity "precisely does not constitute a religion" because it bypasses human reasoning by means of revelation reflects a similar misunderstanding—see "The Question of the Unconditioned," 19.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Jamie Smith's comment on the Incarnation: "God's incarnational appearance is precisely a condescension to the conditions of finite, created perceivers. How could God appear otherwise? The Incarnation signals a connection with transcendence that does not violate or reduce such transcendence, but neither does it leave it in a realm of utter alterity without appearance." ("Between Predication And Silence: Augustine On How (Not) To Speak Of God," *The Heythrop Journal* 41, no. 1 (2000): 77.)

<sup>40</sup> "Truth and Vision," 44.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness* (London: Routledge, 2002). See also the critiques of Marion along these lines in *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 32–3; Marion, Derrida, and Kearney, "On the Gift: A Discussion Between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion," 78; Shane Mackinlay, *Interpreting Excess: Jean-Luc Marion, Saturated Phenomena, and Hermeneutics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010) *passim*.

Marion's equivocity is more than an unfortunate but forgivable exaggeration in an otherwise salutary attempt to repudiate ontotheology—it is theological failure which signals yet deeper problems. For there is in Marion a precise and deliberate fit between *ordo nominis* and *ordo essendi* and, as I will show in the next two disputes, his Heideggerian conception of the latter determines the equivocal account of the former. On the question of analogical attribution then, Marion's account has serious shortcomings and Milbank's is clearly preferable from a Thomist point of view.

**Dispute #2: Double being**

Being is said in many ways.

- Aristotle<sup>42</sup>

I am sure that two very different meanings if not more lurk in the word, One.

- S. T. Coleridge<sup>43</sup>

Who can read with eyes other than his own?

- Karl Barth<sup>44</sup>

This second dispute addresses theological ontology. Whereas the first dispute concerned the naming of the First “from below,” this dispute approaches the question of double being “from above,” akin to the way Christology may be approached beginning with the Trinitarian *Logos*. Here I treat double being in light of the doctrines of the Trinity and creation *ex nihilo*. From this point of view, the key question is whether God should be construed as “beyond being” or as “being itself.”

Here more than anywhere Marion and Milbank rely on particular interpretations of the whole theological tradition to make their case. To get a sense of their contrasting interpretations I have gathered the most important historical sources for Marion’s

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<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.1, 1003a33.

<sup>43</sup> S. T. Coleridge, *Collected Notes* (London: Routledge, 1961), II, 2332, quoted in Douglas Hedley, “Pantheism, Trinitarian Theism and the Idea of Unity: Reflections on the Christian Concept of God,” *Religious Studies* 32, no. 01 (October 24, 2008): 61.

<sup>44</sup> Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, Anselm’s Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1985), 9.

and Milbank's respective accounts of double being into a table below. For each historical figure I cite an exemplary text or two to indicate those elements in their thought that I think best correspond to the Commentator's Second being and First being.<sup>45</sup> Obviously, forcing such diverse thinkers into the Commentator's foreign schema requires more or less Procrustean abuse in each case (Aristotle, Denys and Heidegger perhaps suffer the most). The format may well obscure more than it shows, but it does clearly indicate the remarkably wide historical, linguistic and conceptual ground which is contested in Marion's and Milbank's theological ontologies, and it is only by apprehending the breadth of their dispute that we may accurately appraise it.

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<sup>45</sup> Bibliographical sources for these citations are listed in an appendix.

| Name                  | Date                | the Second  | the First  | Text  |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---|--|---|
| Plato                 | c. 423 – c. 347 BCE | being / reality (ουσία)   | the Good beyond being (τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας)  | <i>Republic</i> VI  |
| Aristotle             | 384 – 322 BCE       | substance (ουσία), incorporating the eternal, actual Prime Mover (ἀρχὴν τοιαύτην ἧς ἡ οὐσία ἐνέργεια... ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, αἴδιον καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια οὐσα)  | n/a  | <i>Metaphysics</i> XII  |
| Plotinus              | c. 204/5 – 270      | beings and being (τὰ ὄντα καὶ τὸ ὄν)  | the One beyond being (ἐπέκεινα ὄντος)  | <i>Enneads</i> V.5.6  |
| Anonymous Commentator | c. 200 – c. 300     | derivative Second being (τὸ ὄν, ἐκκλινόμενον τὸ εἶναι)  | absolute First being (τοῦ εἶναι τὸ ἀπόλυτον)   | <i>Anonymous Commentary on Plato's Parmenides</i> , Fragment V  |
| Gregory of Nyssa      | c. 335 – c. 395     | the “spaced” being of creation (διάστημα, διάστασις)  | the true being of divinity (ἴδιον θεότητος γνῶρισμα τὸ ἀληθῶς εἶναι); the really existing (ὄντως ὄν) God   | <i>In Eccles.</i> 8<br><i>Contra Eunomium</i> 3.8<br><i>De Vita Mosis</i> 25  |
| Augustine             | 354 – 430           | things different here and there ( <i>quod non modo aliud, et modo aliud est</i> ); things which neither absolutely are nor yet totally are not ( <i>nec omnino esse nec omnino non esse</i> )             | the self-same ( <i>idipsum</i> ); being itself ( <i>ipsum esse</i> ); true, unchangeable existing ( <i>quia uerum esse incommutabile esse est</i> )    | <i>Confessiones</i> VII.xi and IX.x<br><i>De trinitate</i> 2<br><i>De ciuitate dei</i> VIII.vii<br><i>En. psa.</i> 121.5<br><i>En. psa.</i> 134.4 |
| Damascius             | c. 458 – c. 538     | One-all (ἐν πάντα) and all-One (πάντα ἐν)   | the Ineffable (ἀπόρητον)   | <i>De principiis</i> I-VIII   |
| Denys                 | c. 480 – c. 550     | God's “supra-existential” being (ὧν ἐστὶν ὁ θεός ὑπερουσίως) which is the Being of beings (ἀλλ' αὐτός ἐστι τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσι... καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ εἶναι τῶν ὄντων); being, the first created perfection (ὁ ὧν) | the Good really beyond being (τῶ ὄντως ὑπερουσίω) transcending both beings and non-beings (ἀγαθότης παντελής καὶ ὑπερβάλλουσα τὰ ὄντα καὶ τὰ οὐκ ὄντα) | <i>De diuinis nominibus</i> IV and V  |

|                      |                      |   |   |   |
|----------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Boethius             | c. 480 –<br>c. 524   | the being of things ( <i>ipsum esse rerum</i> )   | the first Being and first Good ( <i>primo esse, primo bono</i> )  | <i>De hebdomadibus</i>  |
| John Damascene       | c. 676 –<br>749      | being itself (αὐτό τὸ εἶναι)  | God beyond all beings and being itself (ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ ὑπὲρ αὐτόδε τὸ εἶναι ὧν)   | <i>De fide orthodoxa</i> I.4  |
| Eriugena             | c. 815 –<br>c. 877   | the Second and Third divisions of <i>Natura</i> , ie. “that which is created and also creates” and “that which is created and does not create” ( <i>eam quae et creatur et creat... eam quae creatur et non creat</i> ) | <i>Natura</i> (φύσις), the indivisible one ( <i>unum indiuiduum</i> ) incorporating all things which are and which are not ( <i>omnium quae sunt et quae non sunt</i> )                                     | <i>Periphyseon</i> I and II   |
| Anselm               | c. 1033 –<br>1109    | less true, less great existence ( <i>est non sic vere, et idcirco minus habet esse</i> )  | truest and greatest existence ( <i>solus igitur verissime omnium, et ideo maxime omnium habes esse</i> )  | <i>Proslogion</i> 3   |
| Aquinas              | 1225 –<br>1274       | common, created being ( <i>esse commune / ens commune</i> ); being by participation ( <i>omnia sint solum quasi esse participantia</i> )  | God, subsisting being itself ( <i>Deo... qui est ipsum esse subsistens</i> ) wholly undetermined ( <i>ipsum esse subsistens, omnibus modis indeterminatum</i> )   | SCG II.37 and III.19<br>ST Ia.11.4                                    |
| Eckhart<br>(early)   | c. 1260 –<br>c. 1327 | being, the first creature ( <i>prima rerum creaturarum est esse</i> ); concrete beings ( <i>esse formaliter inhaerens</i> )   | God, who is intellect ( <i>est intellectus et intelligere et non ens vel esse</i> ) or “purity of being” ( <i>puritas essendi</i> )   | <i>Questiones Parisienses</i>   |
| (late)               |                      | determinate “this or that” being ( <i>de ente hoc et hoc... de esse huius et huius</i> )  | absolute being ( <i>esse absolute, pleno esse</i> ) or God ( <i>Esse est Deus</i> )   | Prologues to <i>Opus tripartitum</i><br>and <i>Opus propositionum</i> |
| Cusanus              | 1401 –<br>1464       | the contracted maximum ( <i>maximum contractum</i> ); unfolding creation ( <i>explicatio</i> )  | the Maximum, all that can be ( <i>maximum... omne id quod esse potest</i> ); enfolded divinity ( <i>complicatio</i> ); the not-other ( <i>non aliud</i> )   | <i>De docta ignorantia</i><br><i>De li non aliud</i>                  |
| Pascal               | 1623 –<br>1662       | our being, unnecessary, temporal and finite ( <i>notre être... pas un être nécessaire... pas aussi éternel ni infini</i> )  | universal being ( <i>être universel</i> ); a necessary, eternal, and infinite being ( <i>un être nécessaire, éternel et infini</i> ); a being truly worthy of love ( <i>un être véritablement aimable</i> ) | <i>Pensées</i> §123, §135, §220, §378<br>(Lafuma numbering)           |
| Heidegger<br>(early) | 1889 –<br>1976       | beings ( <i>seindes</i> ) and Being ( <i>Sein</i> )   | n/a   | <i>Sein und Zeit</i> (1927)   |
| (late)               |                      | time and Being ( <i>Zeit und Sein</i> )   | event of appropriation ( <i>Ereignis, es gibt</i> )   | “ <i>Zeit und Sein</i> ” (1962)                                       |

As I have already suggested, the key question lurking in the double being tradition sketched here is one that has been circling this study from the outset: is the First beyond being or being itself? A common reply to this question is to propose the compatibility of the two options, and in general terms Marion and Milbank accept this thesis. David Bentley Hart gives lucid expression to this compatibilist view, suggesting that a straightforward contrast of the two claims would constitute “a false opposition”:

Both ways of speaking of God are correct, as the word “being” is not univocal between the two usages... When the Greek Fathers spoke of God as Being—as, that is, *to ontos on* or *ho ōn*—or when Thomas spoke of God as *the actus essendi subsistens* or *esse*, they were quite correctly speaking of God as the transcendent source and end of all things, in whom there is no unrealized potential, deficiency, or change, and whose being is not merely the opposite of non-being. But it is precisely this way that God is also (to use the venerable Platonic phrase) *epekeina tes ousias*. That is, he wholly transcends “beings,” or discrete “substances,” or the “totality of substances,” or even the created being in which all beings share. Thus he is sometimes referred to as “superessential” or “supersubstantial” Being. The proper distinction, then, is not between two incompatible ways of naming God, but between two forms of the same name, corresponding to two distinct moments within the *analogia entis*.<sup>1</sup>

Hart’s assertion of the compatibility of “beyond being” and “being itself” as “two distinct moments within the *analogia entis*” corresponds precisely to the First and

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<sup>1</sup> “Response to James K. A. Smith, Lois Malcolm and Gerard Loughlin,” *New Blackfriars* 88, no. 1017 (2007): 617–18. Cf. Hart’s parallel comments in *The Experience of God*, 28–32 and 107–13. This is, incidentally, not far from Aquinas’ own view: “The first cause is indeed according to the Platonists beyond being, inasmuch as the essence of goodness and unity—which is the first cause—surpasses separated being itself [*ipsum ens separatum*]. But in reality and truth, the first cause is beyond being [*ens*], inasmuch as it is infinite being itself [*ipsum esse infinitum*].” (Commentary on the *Liber de Causis* VI, 175, trans. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 206.) William Franke suggests that, historically considered, the apparent contradiction is only “a matter of sensibility and outlook and ultimately of modes of relationship.” (*On What Cannot Be Said*, Vol. 1, 15.)

Second being of the Anonymous Commentator. According to the compatibility thesis, then, when the theological tradition says that God is “beyond being” it means that God is beyond Second being, and when the tradition says that God is “being itself” it means that God is identified with First being.

While some would reject it,<sup>2</sup> Marion and Milbank both interpret the double being tradition in a fashion that confirms this compatibility thesis—that is, they see no contradiction in claiming both Plato and Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> Their dispute does not lie here. Rather, their disagreement turns on the way that they conceive the being which is in play in the realm of the Second and how they conceive the analogical yoke that runs between Second and First. On these matters Marion and Milbank take their cue from different figures in the history of double being and their choices here influence their reception of the rest of the tradition. The determinative question for their dispute

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<sup>2</sup> Two exemplary dissenters would be Gilson and Christos Yannaras. Yannaras finds “an insurmountable contrast on the level of ontology as well as epistemology” between the Western “apophaticism of divine *being*” and the “Christian thought of the Greek East.” (*On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, trans. Haralambos Ventis (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 23–30.) Gilson argues that the Greek Neoplatonic approach “was manifestly unusable for a Christian” and that with Aquinas “the entire doctrine of Denis is... inverted.” (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Laurence Shook (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 137–143.) Having posited the disjunction, Yannaras opts for the Greek fathers and Gilson opts for the Latin schoolmen.

<sup>3</sup> A recent comment from Milbank makes his agreement with Bentley Hart on this point quite plain: “As for the notion of ‘unity beyond being’, one should perhaps take this in the sense of ‘hyper-ontological’ rather than simply ‘non-ontological’. Ascription of ‘being’ to the ultimate was avoided only because it has too many connotations of particularity; but later, at first within Neoplatonism itself, and then much more consistently within Christian thought, it was realised that a transcendently unifying ‘power-to-be’ could be understood as itself the being of power - as *esse* in the infinitive.” (“Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 188n1.)

about theological ontology, then, is actually not “beyond being or being itself?” but rather, “whose Second? which First?”

*Whose Second?*

As I noted in my exposition, Marion’s account of Second being is taken from Heidegger and the moderns. Being is finite, univocal, nihilistic, empty, coextensive with and exhausted by conceptual intelligibility. Milbank’s conception of Second being, on the other hand, takes its cue from a conglomeration of pre-modern theological sources and resists Marion’s account point for point: being is infinite, analogical and plenitudinous. It is “an infinite mysterious depth of actuality which finite things all participate in, to some limited degree” and indicates ultimately “the infinite plenitude of Being which is God.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Milbank entirely rejects the coordination of being and thinkability that Marion endorses. As I will discuss further below, he insists that the modern “correspondence between Being and knowledge” must be challenged.<sup>5</sup> Thus we can say that Marion’s Second being is Heideggerian and modern, while Milbank’s Second being is, broadly speaking, Thomist and Eckhartian. As I will show in the next dispute, these opposed accounts of Second being take us to the deepest root of the Marion-Milbank debate.

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<sup>4</sup> BSO, 39; “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 139. See my exposition in chapter 2.A.

<sup>5</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 140.

*Which First?*

Marion's account of the First takes its cue from Denys. God should therefore be properly spoken of not as "First being" but as "First Good," for there is no proper ascription of being to God. God is, as Marion ceaselessly emphasises, the pre-ontological "principle" of "all beings whatsoever as well as being itself."<sup>6</sup> This Dionysian arrangement shapes his reception of the First in the wider double being tradition. He is constrained by the language of certain texts to ascribe being in some sense to the First: "obviously we cannot doubt that Thomas Aquinas did designate God as *esse*," and Marion is "not... disputing the authenticity of the Augustinian uses of *ipsum esse* or *idipsum esse*."<sup>7</sup> Marion reads such texts, however, in rigorous accord with the Dionysian vision, positing an equivocity of being that cuts the yoke of analogy between First and Second, preserving his strictly non-ontological notion of transcendence. As one commentator observes, Marion has "shifted Augustine and Aquinas toward Denys, and all three of them toward their Neoplatonic sources," and this may be justly said of his treatments of Anselm and Pascal also.<sup>8</sup> In this way, Marion's God without being is elaborated across the whole diversity of the double being tradition. The First is a Love either beyond Second being or, where analogy is in play, linked by a strictly equivocal analogical yoke. Either way, the First is always without Second.

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<sup>6</sup> "In the Name," 146.

<sup>7</sup> "TA&OT," 66 and *In the Self's Place*, 295.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Hankey, "Jean-Luc Marion's Dionysian Neoplatonism," in *Perspectives Sur Le Néoplatonisme*, ed. Wayne Hankey, Jean-Marc Narbonne, and Martin Achard (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009), 267–280.

Milbank's account of the First, on the other hand, takes its cue from his "hyperbolically orthodox" thinkers, especially Eckhart. Whereas Marion cuts the Commentator's yoke between First and Second being, Milbank identifies First and Second so closely as to collapse the gap between them. As I indicated in my exposition, pantheism and acosmism loom very near. Milbank's Eckhartian hyperbolic analogy and his non-contrastive One beyond the One underscore the aporetic Creator-creature distinction that is implied here. Milbank's reception of the wider double being tradition assumes this "radical Thomist" starting point. In his mature work, Plato, Iamblichus, Augustine, Proclus, Damascius, Denys, Eriugena, Aquinas and others are all interpreted in light of Milbank's hyperbolically orthodox vision of absolute mediation and paradoxically intimate divine immanence.

There is a certain will-to-homogeneity in both our protagonists' receptions of the double being tradition. In my judgment, Marion's reading is the more violent.<sup>9</sup> Milbank's treatment of Denys and the Neoplatonist schools, for example, indicate a quicker willingness to note diversity in his sources. (Milbank's treatment of certain issues outside the scope of this thesis, such as the relation of nature to grace and

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<sup>9</sup> Marion comments in *I&D* that "the sole criterion for an interpretation is its fecundity" and makes the piquant observation that "my reading has perhaps seemed at times 'to force the text.' And the text has, to be sure, been forced, not as one violates, but as one forces a door" (xxxvii and 137).

philosophy to theology in Aquinas, are a different matter.)<sup>10</sup>

### *Pre-ontological principles*

Another contrast in receptions of the tradition concerns Marion and Milbank's appropriation of henological and pre-ontological themes. Marion takes up the Dionysian Good and Pascalian order of charity as a means of underscoring the distinction and freedom of God from Second being. Milbank's retrieval of various principles "before being" (mainly from Eckhart, Cusanus and Damascius) are made in order to emphasise God's intimacy to Second being, his *in*-distinction from it. Their respective use of meontological themes go similarly. Both wish to distinguish their approach from those of the later German meontological tradition—Marion labours particularly against the Heideggerian *Nicht*, Milbank against Žižek's repetition of Hegel and Fichte.<sup>11</sup> But again their constructive elaborations aim at different, and in certain respects opposed, ends. Marion claims a litany of thinkers who posit God or the One as "not-being" and "nothing," insisting that they speak of "a non-ontological, that is, theological, nothingness" as a means of showing that God is "far beyond Being and beings."<sup>12</sup> Milbank claims the nullity of the Eckhartian intentional

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<sup>10</sup> See Paul DeHart's dogged critiques of Milbank on these matters in *Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy*. Milbank gives an indication of his somewhat subversive approach to Aquinas when he notes that "The *arcanum* of his teaching... resides rather in the positions he does affirm, often briefly and like a kind of residue, akin to Sherlock Holmes's last remaining solution, which must be accepted in all its implausibility" ("Truth and Vision," 18).

<sup>11</sup> Marion, "Nothing and Nothing Else," 183–188; Milbank, "Double Glory" *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> "Nothing and Nothing Else," 188–193, italics omitted. Cf. *I&D*, 138, where God is described as "a supreme nonbeing."

*intelligere* as means of marking an identity between the divine intellect and its object—God is nothing, but subsists as the plenitude of being that he “thinks” in his *Verbum*.<sup>13</sup> Speaking roughly, one may say that Marion puts the rhetoric of pre-ontology to work in order to reinforce God’s *transcendence beyond* Second being, while Milbank’s uses it as a means of evoking God’s *immanence to* Second being.

### *Two univocities*

Another contrast may be seen in Marion’s and Milbank’s assertion of a kind of univocity at the summit of their theological ontologies. That both thinkers affirm such a thing is remarkable, given their mutual antagonism to Scotist univocity, and it makes for a very curious parallel in their respective visions of double being. With Marion we have a univocity of love between God and creature; with Milbank we have a univocity of being “at the level of the infinite.” In each case, I think, univocity is taken up as an attempt to articulate the most primordial, basic relation of First and Second from the highest or most ultimate possible aspect. For Milbank, the First-Second relation is ultimately one of ontological identity: creation is present in the Trinity in a primordial “flattened, simple equality” of divine and created being, and his assertion of an ultimate univocity brings his aporetic Creator-creature distinction to a certain speculative completion.<sup>14</sup> For Marion, the primordial First-Second relation is not ontological but voluntary. Love makes an end run, as it

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<sup>13</sup> “Double Glory,” 173–5.

<sup>14</sup> “Mystery of Reason,” 92.

were, around the equivocality of being and so constitutes the fundamental relation of God and creature. When considered in light of Milbank's Eckhartian coordination of being and *intelligere*, these two univocities confirm a certain Franciscan / Dominican contrast vis-à-vis the relative priority of the will.<sup>15</sup>

### *Milbank's critique*

Milbank's critique of Marion regarding theological ontology has three elements. Firstly, he contends that Marion's attempt to achieve an absolute transcendence by stepping outside of being actually produces the opposite effect, reducing God to merely "a being" among beings—an "idolatrous and unsatisfactory result for theology."<sup>16</sup> Marion's phenomenology is centred on a modern, Husserlian subject standing before its array of objects (even if the constitutive subject-object relation is inverted so that *l'adonne* is constituted by the gift and not vice-versa,) and this orientation means that Marion's God beyond being can only be construed as "a kind of radically purified subjectivity... something ontic and contained within the ontological difference."<sup>17</sup> Any proposal of a non-ontological divinity in Marion's style "collapses back into the *worst* metaphysics" and makes "an onto-theological construal of God and Revelation as individual 'objects' and 'individual' things, which

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<sup>15</sup> Milbank has himself suggested such a contrast—see "Gift and the Mirror," 269; "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 48–9; "Soul of Reciprocity Part One," 345–6.

<sup>16</sup> *TST*, 296. The argument is also in "On Theological Transgression," 157; "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 39–40; "Can a Gift Be Given?," 137–142.

<sup>17</sup> "On Theological Transgression," 157.

we first ‘experience’ in an immediate fashion.”<sup>18</sup> Marion’s error here is based partly on his misunderstanding of classical theology’s integration of the Aristotelian *actus purus* with the Platonic first principle, which, Milbank argues, replaced “the Neoplatonic ‘One’ with *esse*, the infinitive of being, thereby stopping-up the *hiatus* between the anexistential and the existential that could harbour the idea of ‘the One beyond the gift’.”<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, Milbank repeatedly objects to Marion’s elevation of divine Love over Being. “What if God did not first have to be,” asks Marion, “since he loved us first, when we were not?”<sup>20</sup> But Milbank argues that the question falters because, while we creatures “only are as we love and remain in love,” God “who is love cannot not be. God loves-to-be.” He does not share in “the contingency of our being.”<sup>21</sup> Love is “an ontological category coincident with being itself” and hence it cannot “truly ‘be’ before being,” nor can we hear its “call from ‘before’ Being.”<sup>22</sup> Marion’s position denies the “total ontological security” of love in God.<sup>23</sup> Marion’s God merely wills to be and is in this way “curiously akin to Descartes’ *causa sui*,” whereas the traditional view says that God “loves as he is ‘to be’ according to an absolute, self-grounded

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<sup>18</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 137 and 141.

<sup>19</sup> “Christianity and Platonism in East and West,” 175.

<sup>20</sup> *GWB*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 48–9. Milbank develops this argument elsewhere: “Enclaves,” 352n1; “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 142–3; “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 142 and 157n40; “On Theological Transgression,” 157.

<sup>22</sup> *BSO*, 120; “Gift and the Mirror,” 290; “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 38.

<sup>23</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 157n40.

necessity.”<sup>24</sup> Marion’s voluntaristic approach underwrites an “austere” theology of a distant divine Other and his mature attempt to “slant Aquinas in a henological rather than ontological direction” repeats the errors of his earlier work, confirming “a *deus absconditus* at a ‘distance’ absolutely removed” from being.<sup>25</sup> The univocity of love, furthermore, produces a “God who is like us in structure, only infinite—in other words [an] *onto-theological* God.”<sup>26</sup> “If God simply is the infinite instance of one aspect of our life in this world—namely love—then God is surely idolized.”<sup>27</sup>

Third, Milbank rejects the modern and Heideggerian conception of Second being that underwrites Marion’s call for a pre-ontological theology. To Marion’s coordination of being and conceptual knowledge Milbank replies that only a Scotist “idolatry toward creatures” would assert that being is “unproblematically comprehensible,” for in fact “every ‘present’ reality is riddled with *aporias* (of time, of space, of particularity and universality).” Milbank argues that the premodern tradition never suggested what Marion and the moderns assume: “the Christian thought which flowed from Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine was able fully to concede the utter unknowability of creatures which continually alter and have no ground within themselves” and Eckhart, to name one of many examples Milbank highlights, rejected “any ‘grasp’ of *esse* as a univocal term which can genuinely be predicated

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<sup>24</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 143, italics omitted. The argument is repeated at “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 365.

<sup>25</sup> “Soul of Reciprocity Part One,” 351; “Truth and Vision,” 26.

<sup>26</sup> “Gift and the Mirror,” 276.

<sup>27</sup> “Gift and the Mirror,” 287.

of a creature,” and it is only Scotism might suppose that we have “full and complete insight” into the meaning of transcendental terms, particularly being.<sup>28</sup> Marion’s pursuit of a charity beyond being is therefore predicated on a mistake: “love... only exceeds the ontological, if Being has already been strictly correlated with knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> Marion accepts the modern correlation of being with “conceptual mastery,” but Milbank insists that Christian theology must reject it.<sup>30</sup>

### *Marion’s critique*

Marion’s silence in the face of Milbank’s work makes it very difficult to say how he might engage in the disputes we are raising here. Regarding the first dispute about analogical attribution, there is nothing at all in his writings that would constitute a relevant response to Milbank’s approach, as far as I can tell. Regarding this second dispute over theological ontology, however, there is some relevant material in his dogged critique of Gilson’s theology.

Marion observes that Gilson construes God as “being itself”: not merely as “a being” but as one who manifests himself “in fact *as* being.” Marion condemns this Gilsonian position as straightforward ontotheology.<sup>31</sup> He rejects the defense that Gilson’s God is “beyond entity” (in the Commentator’s terms, beyond Second being,) because “any

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<sup>28</sup> “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 40–1, 44–5; “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 473–4, 490, italics omitted. Cf. *BR*, 75–6.

<sup>29</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 141, italics omitted.

<sup>30</sup> “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 43–4.

<sup>31</sup> “TA&OT,” 59.

familiarity with being ascribes him to this metaphysical constitution [of ontotheology],” for “how could God amount to ‘to be’ without assuming the figure of an entity whatsoever?”<sup>32</sup> If God is being itself in a Gilsonian sense, then God reduces to entity and therefore to idolatry. Though it sits extremely awkwardly in the context of his own equivocal reading of Aquinas, and though it appears to be a somewhat half-hearted gesture, I noted in my exposition that Marion points to Fabro’s “truly theological determinations” of First *esse* as an alternative to Gilson’s ontotheology. Marion thus distinguishes between a (salutary) participatory and an (unsalutary) existentialist construal of divine *esse*.<sup>33</sup> However, if we transfer this argument to Milbank—and it is the only relevant critique that I can discern in Marion’s work—it plainly falters. Milbank explicitly agrees with Marion that a participatory *esse* in Fabro’s style is preferable and he clearly shares Marion’s objection to Gilson’s identification of Thomist *esse* with Heidegger’s *Sein*.<sup>34</sup> As I will argue in dispute #3, the true objection which Marion makes to theology in Milbank’s style is finally a *prudential* one.

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<sup>32</sup> “TA&OT,” 72n55. See also the parallel comments in *I&D*, 215–6; *In the Self’s Place*, 294–6, 386n64.

<sup>33</sup> I take this to be the relevant contrast between Gilson and Fabro here, though Marion gives no indication himself as to what specifically distinguishes Fabro’s salutary Thomism from Gilson’s ontotheologically perverted Thomism. Marion’s suggestion that this difference between Gilson and Fabro is sufficient to condemn one as sub-Christian idolater and elevate the other as true theologian seems to me profoundly implausible.

<sup>34</sup> Milbank, “Truth and Vision,” 110–11n120. At “TA&OT,” 73n57, Marion condemns Gilson’s somewhat infamous comment that “the Being of Heidegger is the true one, not because it is defined against God, but because it is defined as God, being just another name for the Judeo-Christian God of Exodus” (trans. Morrow, “Aquinas, Marion, Analogy, and Esse,” 36–7).

*Evaluation*

*Marion's Love without being.* In my judgment, Milbank's critique of Marion here is compelling. Marion's insistence on an absolute difference between First and Second being misses the "not-other" character of transcendence and, as Milbank suggests, it is difficult to see how the assertion of an absolute Other does not devolve into a mere other.<sup>35</sup> God may be "wholly other" as the saying goes, but this otherness cannot be of the same kind as that which we find among the entities of creation, lest God be bound to the totality of the world as its mere opposite. "God is not different *like that*: if divine difference were the negation of all finite predicates," Rowan Williams rightly argues, "God would be the other belonging to a discourse about the finite world."<sup>36</sup>

Milbank is also correct to argue (following Balthasar's critique of Marion, which I noted in chapter 2.C) that from a Thomist point of view God's love and goodness cannot be dichotomously carved from his being; they are each convertible indications of the divine simplicity.<sup>37</sup> Marion asks whether "with respect to Being, does God have to behave like Hamlet?" and answers No, because "God is love" and therefore

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<sup>35</sup> Many other readers have noted this unfortunate dynamic in Marion—see John D. Caputo, "Wholly Other—Almost: Différance and Hyperbolic Alterity of God," in *The Otherness of God*, ed. Orrin F. Summerell (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 190–205; Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (London; New York: Verso, 2012), 327n1; David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty Of The Infinite: The Aesthetics Of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 237–241; Puntel, *Being and God*, 303–30, 403–6.

<sup>36</sup> Rowan Williams, "Balthasar and Difference," in *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology*, ed. Mike Higton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 83.

<sup>37</sup> See *ST* Ia.6 "The goodness of God" and Ia.20.1 "Whether love exists in God". Cf. my discussion of Balthasar's critique of Marion in chapter 1.C.

“God loves before being.”<sup>38</sup> Marion is right that God need not behave like Hamlet, but he is wrong about why. As my exposition in chapter 1.B indicated, Marion conceives the divine existence as a voluntary concession to creatures. Only this God, *Marion’s* God, must decide to be or not to be and so behave like Hamlet, whereas the God of Christian orthodoxy just is as love, and is so without any idolatrous and voluntarist projections of human deliberation. God *is* love, and hence Marion’s claim for a “radical reversal” between Exodus 3 and 1 John 4 is false—there is no reversal here, only repetition and elaboration. As Tony Kelly puts it, God’s is a “Loving Be-ing” and “*Ipsum Esse Subsistens* emerges... to be in a radical sense, *ipsum Amare subsistens*.”<sup>39</sup> Or, as Balthasar puts it, God’s love “is not the absolute Good beyond being, but is the depth and height, the length and breadth of being itself.”<sup>40</sup>

This critique remains relevant even in light of Marion’s mature reading of Aquinas because, while he allows an equivocal predication of *esse* to God, he maintains the singular priority of love as a perfection univocally shared with creatures. But Aquinas straightforwardly rejects Marion’s proposal in advance: “it is manifest that

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<sup>38</sup> *GWB*, xx.

<sup>39</sup> Kelly, “The ‘Horrible Wrappers’ of Aquinas’ God,” 202. On this score Puntel rightly asks: “Why does Marion not contemplate the idea... that God understood as *love* is the full *explicatum* of the term “Being” as the *explicandum*? Were he to do so, then the peculiar radical separation of Being from God, which Marion makes the center of his philosophy and theology, would disappear, and all the questions and problems triggered by that separation would be visible as pseudo-questions and pseudo-problems.” (*Being and God*, 315; cf. 326–30.) Cf. D. C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 47.

<sup>40</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 145.

God loves everything that exists. Yet not as we love,” for our love is attracted to goodness whereas “the love of God infuses and creates goodness.”<sup>41</sup> Apart from the Thomist objection, Marion’s univocity of love is unjustifiable on his own terms. Marion declares that “the idol consigns the divine to the measure of the human gaze” – surely this applies also to the human gaze of love.<sup>42</sup> He claims that “between God and humans everything remains ambiguous except, precisely, love,” but how is this clarity of love any different from the clarity of idolatry?<sup>43</sup> How is the univocity of love not pure Feuerbachian projection? “Love” – a name which Marion agrees is “the most prostituted of words” – must of course become an idol under the rule of univocity, and it does so perhaps more than ever in this sexualised age.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, Marion’s dim view of Second being as exhausted by conceptual reason is a red herring from a Thomist point of view. Aquinas of course believes that being “is the proper object of the intellect” and affirms the coordination of being and thought, even extending it to God’s infinite comprehension of his own infinite being.<sup>45</sup> But this does not mean that Clauberg’s thesis, which Marion takes as determinative for his account of Second being, is a Thomist one.<sup>46</sup> Aquinas’ coordination of being and

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<sup>41</sup> *ST* 1a.20.2.c.

<sup>42</sup> *GWB*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 222; “What Cannot Be Said,” 118.

<sup>44</sup> *Being Given*, 324.

<sup>45</sup> *ST* 1a.5.2.c.; *ST* 1a.14.3 (“Whether God comprehends Himself?”). Cf. *ST* 1a.12.7.c: “God, whose being is infinite... is infinitely knowable.”

<sup>46</sup> Recall Marion’s treatment of Clauberg’s claim for a “strict equivalence between being and the thinkable”—see chapter 1.A.

thought in no way implies that Second being is exhausted or limited by intelligibility in a Cartesian sense. This is because Second *esse* is created, and created in a specific sense. “Natural things are said to be true in so far as they express the likeness of the species that are in the divine mind” and this creational relation lends Second being an ultimately unsearchable depth.<sup>47</sup> Because “being is innermost in each thing” we can say that “God is in all things, and innermost,” and it is this presence of the First at the heart of things that finally tells us why “the essential principles of things are hidden from us.”<sup>48</sup>

*Milbank’s “hyperbolically orthodox” ontology.* In the previous dispute I endorsed Milbank’s account of analogical predication as a salutary Thomist approach. The same cannot be confidently said of his mature theological ontology. The key difficulty here is the risk of pantheism implicit in Milbank’s deliberate collapse of the gap between First and Second being which he performs by folding creation into the Trinitarian processions, complicating the Creator-creature distinction and denying any autonomous integrity to the created order.<sup>49</sup> Milbank’s theology, if it is to stand

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<sup>47</sup> ST 1a.16.1.c.

<sup>48</sup> *Commentary in Aristotelem, De anima* I.1.15, trans. Ralph M. McInerny, ed., *Aquinas: Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima* (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1994), 5. Cf. Josef Pieper: “Because Being is created, that is to say creatively thought by God, it is therefore ‘in itself’ light, radiant, and self-revealing—*precisely because it is...* According to the doctrine of St. Thomas, it is part of the very nature of things that their knowability cannot be wholly exhausted by any finite intellect, *because these things are creatures*, which means that the very element which makes them capable of being known must necessarily be at the same time the reason why things are unfathomable.” (*The Silence of St. Thomas*, 65–6.)

<sup>49</sup> This problem has been noted by other readers—see, for example, Smith, *Introducing Radical*

as a conscientious Thomist account of double being, must answer to Aquinas' critiques of pantheism. In SCG I.26 Aquinas argues "that God is not the formal being of all things," taking up Denys' statement that "the being of all things is the super-essential divinity" and rejecting the *perversus* interpretation of those who read this as an identification of God with *esse commune*.<sup>50</sup> If this were so, he points out, the divinity "will not be over all but among all, indeed a part of all." But this is unacceptable because, as Denys himself insists, God is "distinct from all things and raised above all things," and we should rather say only that "there was in all things a certain likeness of the divine being (*quaedam divini esse similitudo*) coming from God." As Aquinas puts it elsewhere: "the Godhead is called the being [*esse*] of all things, as their efficient and exemplar cause, but not as being their essence [*essentiam*]." <sup>51</sup> Milbank's position, especially his Eckhartian ontological univocity "at the level of the infinite," appears to overstep Aquinas' limits here.<sup>52</sup>

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*Orthodoxy*, 185–229; Triffett, "Plurally Possessed: Gift and Participation in the Theo-Ontology of John Milbank," 136–231.

<sup>50</sup> SCG I.26.10, quoting *De caelesti hierarchia* IV, 1: *Esse omnium est superessentialis divinitas*.

<sup>51</sup> ST 1a.3.8.3 ad. 1. Other texts in which Aquinas resists a pantheistic collapse of First *esse divinum* into Second *esse commune* include ST 1a.3.4, 1a.3.8, 1a.104.1; *Expositio in Dionysium De divinis nominibus* II. lect. 3 and 4. Fran O'Rourke notes that there is up to 70 instances in this latter text where Aquinas warns against a pantheistic interpretation of Denys' treatise (*Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, 255).

<sup>52</sup> Milbank's interaction with Rudi te Velde on this matter is illuminating. Velde insists that for Aquinas creatures participate in a "similitude" of the divine being and thus "Thomas distances himself explicitly from any pantheistic interpretation of participation." Milbank objects that this view underplays the radicality of Thomist participation and creation *ex nihilo*—see Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 146n49; Milbank, *BSO*, 100–2n196. The worries about pantheism that Velde finds in Aquinas are the same worries I am raising here.

I hesitate to say that Milbank's position straightforwardly offends against Aquinas or devolves into pantheism, for some commentators agree with Milbank in seeing a fundamental compatibility between Eckhart's and Aquinas' ontologies.<sup>53</sup> However, Milbank's choice to elevate his hyperbolically orthodox thinkers does represent a certain theological risk, and the risk is particularly acute in his appropriation of Eckhart. For, in collapsing the yoke of First and Second and positing a univocity of being at the level of the First, Milbank sails perilously close to the immanentism that he so vigorously critiques in Heidegger and others. Give it but a nudge, and Milbank's infinite First, stacked with the whole weight of created and uncreated being, could be all too easily inverted, turning on its axis to drop all the weight of being down to the Second. This done, there is little to stop a neo-pagan German lopping off the First ("I have no need of that hypothesis!") to enjoy Milbank's re-enchanted, theophanic creation without God, univocal now at the level of the finite.<sup>54</sup> There is, after all, a reason why the Meister's work found such a warm

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Burrell, *Faith and Freedom*, xx–xxi, 139–40, and "Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language," 40–44. Interestingly, Burrell resists the univocity reading of Eckhart that Milbank celebrates. Aertsen is more circumspect, noting significant divergences but also rejecting the charge of pantheism to Eckhart—see "Ontology and Henology in Medieval Philosophy," 132–9.

<sup>54</sup> My suggestion here has some affinity with Cyril O'Regan's observation that in his exchange with Žižek in *The Monstrosity of Christ*, "Milbank walks the tightrope when he accepts... that Eckhart can stand proxy for Catholicism in general" ("Žižek and Milbank and the Hegelian Death of God," *Modern Theology* 26, no. 2 (2010): 285). I am also raising similar concerns to those of Balthasar in *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 9–47, where he notes that in Eckhart's theology "it is difficult to understand how there can exist a world outside God" and suggests that this is an outcome of upsetting "the state of balance... in Thomas's ontology" (12–3). Indeed, Milbank's stream of hyperbolically orthodox thinkers corresponds quite precisely with the second of two unfortunate intellectual lines which Balthasar finds in the "Parting of the Ways" after Aquinas (the first being

reception in Heidegger and the death of God tradition, and surely the Church's nervousness about Milbank's hyperbolically orthodox thinkers is not without some justification. Again, this is not necessarily to condemn Milbank's position—I only note the danger, and suggest that more work and clarification is required if Milbank is to maintain a theologically orthodox distinction of First and Second.

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the ontotheological line from Scotus to Kant). Milbank is not unaware of this demurral from Balthasar's genealogy—see *TST*, xxiv–xxxii.

### Dispute #3: Theology after Heidegger

One wants to ask just why Marion takes Heidegger so seriously.

- John Milbank<sup>55</sup>

Does taking Thomas Aquinas seriously require that we should think of God starting with being or think of being starting with God?

- Jean-Luc Marion<sup>56</sup>

#### *Marion: the destiny of being*

One of the most striking leitmotifs in Marion's work is his declaration that theology must take account of our contemporary philosophical situation. Marion's diagnosis of this situation follows Heidegger's: we are undeniably and inevitably in the postmodern age, living and thinking after modernity and after Nietzsche. We live in the age of nihilism, "the times in which nihilism makes epoch."<sup>57</sup> We have seen the death of God,<sup>58</sup> and we have witnessed the end of metaphysics.<sup>59</sup> We are thus,

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<sup>55</sup> "Gift and the Mirror," 266.

<sup>56</sup> "TA&OT," 67.

<sup>57</sup> *I&D*, 252. Similar formulations are dotted through Marion's writing—see, for example, *Prolegomena to Charity*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 5–6: "It is worth noting here that our time—that of nihilism..." Or: *The Reason of the Gift*, 69: "the epoch of nihilism in which we live..." See also: "The Impossible for Man," 17–20; "Descartes and the Horizon of Finitude," in *Descartes and the Modern*, ed. Neil G Robertson, Gordon McOuat, and Thomas Vinci (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007), 212; *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 18 ; *GWB*, 18 and 38–40 ; "Faith and Reason," in *The Visible and the Revealed*, trans. Christina Gschwandtner (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 145–154.

<sup>58</sup> See *I&D*, xxxv–80; *GWB passim.*; "What Do We Mean by 'Mystic'?", in *Mystics: Presence and Aporia*, ed. Christian Sheppard and Michael Kessler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4–5; "The Question of the Unconditioned," 17–20; "Metaphysics and Phenomenology"; "The Impossible for

theologically speaking, in an age of post-theism or ana-theism.<sup>60</sup> One should not underestimate the importance that Marion ascribes to this analysis. For Marion it is insuperable; it determines the possibilities of philosophical thought. The end of metaphysics is “in no way an optional opinion; it is a fact of reason. Whether one accepts it or not, *it inevitably holds sway over us.*”<sup>61</sup> “The ‘death of God’ remains an *unsurpassable* horizon in this time of nihilism.”<sup>62</sup>

These convictions fundamentally shape Marion’s approach to the question of God and being. This is displayed with particular clarity in “TA&OT,” where Marion castigates the “blind” Thomists who do not recognise that “inscribing the divinity of God within being henceforth imposes on this God to take part in the destiny of being,” a destiny which leads from Aquinas to Scotus, Ockham and Descartes, then Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz and Kant, and eventually, when “*ontologia* finally exhausts itself into nihilism,” to Nietzsche.<sup>63</sup> Having made this claim, Marion

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Man,” 20–3; “God and the Gift”.

<sup>59</sup> See “The ‘End of Metaphysics’ as a Possibility,” in *Religion After Metaphysics*, ed. Mark Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); “On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy,” 73–6; “The End of the End of Metaphysics”; “The Hermeneutics of Revelation,” in *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers*, by Richard Kearney (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004); “‘Christian Philosophy’: Hermeneutic or Heuristic?,” 1999, 262–3; “On the Gift: A Discussion Between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion,” 74–5; “Metaphysics and Phenomenology”; “§25. The Destitution of Metaphysics” in *DMP*, 333–345.

<sup>60</sup> See “The Question of the Unconditioned,” 19–20. Marion refers to “ana-theism” as Richard Kearney’s “fortuitous formulation.”

<sup>61</sup> “Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 578, my italics.

<sup>62</sup> “The Question of the Unconditioned,” 19, my italics.

“Metaphysics and Phenomenology,” 578.

<sup>63</sup> “TA&OT,” 60.

anticipates an objection:

It is not enough to claim in response that one has only to go back to the “authentic” Thomistic conception of *esse* to escape this contract—it would also be necessary to be able to do so. And we may imagine that such an access to the “authentic” *esse* would be for us today neither that easy nor powerful enough to have us resist the inexorable attraction of nihilism, the danger of which consists precisely in the extent to which it devalues the “authentic” *esse*. (In fact, if it were to dissolve only an “inauthentic” *esse*, what would this matter to us?) Not to listen to a question, this is not enough to prove to have already answered it, still less to have gone beyond it. In a large part of “Christian philosophy,” being remains the last resort, the supposedly unshakable rock on which apology would always lean. But does not one see that being can also become—and historically has already become—a stumbling block, a millstone attached around the neck of one’s enemy before throwing him into the water? Should we blind ourselves to the point of asking being—in a full era of nihilism—to save God?<sup>64</sup>

The Heideggerian convictions here are not hard to discern. Being “historically has already become” a compromised and dangerous notion, a millstone and stumbling block; it is bound to a “destiny” and a “contract” of such “inexorable” force that retrieving an “authentic” Thomist conception of *esse* is simply not something we are “able to do.”<sup>65</sup> As Marion later observes, the challenge is to “get such an understanding of *esse* that it could reasonably claim... to aim toward whatever it might be that we name God;” but this would require that “being (taken as *esse* or

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<sup>64</sup> “TA&OT,” 60–1.

<sup>65</sup> Marion points to Lotz, Rahner, and above all Gilson here as exemplary instances of *failed* theological attempts to do this. Marion refers to Gilson’s infamous comment that “The Being of Heidegger is the true one, not because it is defined against God, but because it is defined as God, being just another name for the Judeo-Christian God of Exodus” (trans. Morrow, “Aquinas, Marion, Analogy, and Esse,” 36–7) and notes that “I directly oppose the tactics of Gilson... as if Christians were interested, in their quest for God, first and only by being! May not Revelation give us more than being, which, after all, remains still the issue of philosophy?” (“TA&OT,” 73n57; cf. *I&D*, 212n13).

otherwise) still has sufficient quality or dignity to enunciate whatever it might be about God, which would be more of value than straw.”<sup>66</sup> Marion very clearly believes being has lost this dignity and that therefore we should speak about God without being.<sup>67</sup> After the wanderings of its long ontotheological exile, being simply has too much baggage.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “TA&OT,” 67.

<sup>67</sup> Thus, I would resist Tamsin Jones’ judgment that “it is not the language of being in itself that Marion objects to, but rather its reigning supremacy to define and determine what can and cannot become phenomenal” (*A Genealogy of Marion’s Philosophy of Religion: Apparent Darkness*, 136). Rather, we should say that Marion *does* object to the language of being in itself *because of* the reigning supremacy to define and determine that being has claimed in the modern period. Indeed, as I will argue momentarily, a decisive issue of the Milbank-Marion debate—in my view *the* issue—is Marion’s unwillingness to allow precisely the sort of distinction between modern conceptions of being and “the language of being in itself” that Jones suggests. Marion shows his hand here in a very revealing footnote, where he comments that, “*Despite its title*, Erich Przywara’s *Analogia entis* has indicated [Christian transcendence] in an exceptionally strong fashion” (“In the Name,” 158n65, my italics). On the contrary, it is Milbank’s project which aims to develop a non-modern language of being.

<sup>68</sup> There is an interesting ambiguity as to how exactly Marion interprets the Heideggerian destiny of being. Is it a full-blown prophetic narrative of Western intellectual history, such that the meaning of “being”—and the actual experience of being itself—has been determined by some quasi-mythological force, as Heidegger appears to assert in his later work? (Marion’s “The End of the End of Metaphysics” gives some credence to this view.) One can object that this grants a ridiculous authority to Heidegger’s oracular pronouncements. Or is it simply a shorthand way of referring to an apologetic difficulty for theology, an acknowledgement that the effective history of the word “being” means that it will naturally be heard to mean something other than one would intend? One might riposte here that there is simply too much at stake to divorce God from being for the sake of apologetic success and that this is rather a call to the hard pedagogical work of *changing* what “being” might mean. A third option between mythology and terminological baggage is to view Marion’s polemic as a prudential judgment based on the history of ideas. If it was talk about *ontologia* which broke Christian theology from within, if that is what being did to God in the past, why should we try it again? I think this third option is most likely Marion’s intention.

*Milbank's critique: against Geschick*

For Milbank, on the other hand, “one can question all residual Heideggerean notions of a fated philosophical destiny.”<sup>69</sup> Contra Marion, theologians should indeed retrieve the “authentic” *esse* from the doctors of the tradition without worrying about any “inexorable attraction of nihilism.” This is precisely the conviction that underlies Milbank’s proposal of a rival conception of being to that of Heidegger.

Milbank perceives Heideggerian assumptions beneath many elements of Marion’s constructive theology. Marion’s strictly pre-ontological Creator “too hastily takes Heidegger's ontology for granted,” thus “handing being and the world over to futility, boredom and nullity,” and imposing a gulf “between infinite and finite [which] must tend to a quasi-manichean refusal of finitude.” Milbank worries that “an ontological and political Manicheanism hovers” close by.<sup>70</sup> Marion too easily accepts the legitimacy of modern calculative reason and the “upshots of onto-theology that have already drained the world and science of any loving warmth.”<sup>71</sup> This move justifies the “extra-ontological space” Marion clears for God, but it “is only required within the logic of a strictly immanentist construal of the ontological difference.”<sup>72</sup> Milbank argues that the dismal character of being in our

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<sup>69</sup> “Gift and the Mirror,” 255.

<sup>70</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 157–8n48; “Truth and Vision,” 26, 43; “Stanton #4,” 27. Kenneth Schmitz says similarly, judging that Marion’s conclusions, “while expressly ‘beyond’ Heidegger, nevertheless trail his ontology in their train” (“The God of Love,” 495).

<sup>71</sup> “Gift and the Mirror,” 255.

<sup>72</sup> “Can a Gift Be Given?,” 142.

time of nihilism must, from a Christian point of view, be judged contingent and not necessary, a reflection of intruding sin and not a nullity always inherent in being.<sup>73</sup>

For Milbank, being may be construed theologically in a manner otherwise than Heidegger's and Marion's problem is that he refuses to recognise this possibility—he simply takes Heidegger too seriously.

### *Marion's concession*

As I noted at the outset of this study, Marion has never replied to Milbank in writing. As far as I am aware, some brief comments in a 2005 interview with Rupert Shortt constitute his only on-the-record response to Milbank.<sup>74</sup> Here Shortt presses Marion directly with some of the contentions that Milbank has raised against him. "Plenty of people, both inside and outside the tent of Radical Orthodoxy," Shortt observes, "deny that the tradition put 'the Good' above 'being' before Aquinas" and instead claim that "the really crucial shift is not in terms of where you put the stress on one transcendental or other: it's towards univocity."<sup>75</sup> Marion answers:

[Y]ou are completely right to say that a large part of this debate is about the univocity, or equivocity, of what we predicate both to the world and to God. My point is just that it is much easier to envision the transcendence of God according to love than according to being, because we know that charity and the Good are far above us, far transcendent to us. If we want to achieve

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<sup>73</sup> "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 52n54. In one of the more, shall we say, delicate moments in their dispute about God and being, Milbank takes up this theme in order to contest Marion's phenomenology of the orgasm—see Milbank "Gift and the Mirror," 271, and Marion *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 127–138, 151–162.

<sup>74</sup> "God and the Gift," 143–7.

<sup>75</sup> "God and the Gift," 145.

non-univocity, it's more reasonable and more rational in relation to the Good than in relation to being. It is simply that... At any rate, I do feel that my position is in fact the only one to face the actual situation of philosophy after deconstruction and postmodernism. Because there may be an idolatry of being as well. And as I've indicated, the Christian revelation is not about being: it's about charity.<sup>76</sup>

Shortt next asks, "What's wrong with saying that the ontological difference *can* be read theologically, provided the right philosophical safeguards are in place?" Marion replies:

I don't disagree. You can indeed reinterpret being and metaphysics from a more Christian point of view. It's just that we don't really need to do so. In any event, even if we feel ourselves impelled to do this we don't do so from the point of view of being: in fact to do that we have to step back from pure ontology and the pure question of being and to invest on being transcendence, infinity, charity, creation, participation, and so forth, all notions which are not included in being. You can indeed say that there is no contradiction between a certain assumption about being and Christian faith. But this does not mean that you understand Christian faith from the point of view of being. It means that you understand being from the point of view of Christian faith.<sup>77</sup>

We can discern in these comments a more conciliatory attitude almost never articulated in Marion's writing, one which opens the possibility of a non-idolatrous interpretation of being. As my exposition in chapter 1 indicated, Marion insists always on a God "without being," whether by denial of *esse* or strictly equivocal affirmation. Though it is very difficult indeed to square with his relentless and caustic polemic against Christian ontological speculation, Marion makes the stunning concession here that we in fact *may* speak about God "with being" since "there is no

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<sup>76</sup> "God and the Gift," 146.

<sup>77</sup> "God and the Gift," 147.

contradiction between a certain assumption about being and Christian faith.”<sup>78</sup>

Milbank describes his whole theological project in one place as the elaboration of “a non onto-theological theological ‘ontology’ or ‘metaphysics’” and in another as an attempt to “develop a fully-fledged ‘Trinitarian ontology’.”<sup>79</sup> This kind of project is precisely an attempt to “reinterpret being and metaphysics from a more Christian point of view.” Thus it would seem that Milbank’s theological project is permitted by

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<sup>78</sup> Marion’s gesture toward Fabro’s “truly theological determinations” of *esse* and (on a sympathetic reading) the analogy material in *I&D* are the only other possible concessions I have noticed in Marion’s constructive work. There are a few relevant passing comments in his historical work. Marion allows that “Aquinas did not identify the question of God, nor that of his names, with Being, or at least with *Being as metaphysics understands it* within its ‘concept of Being’” (*GWB*, xxx, my italics). He allows that Augustinian beauty “does not concern the horizon of Being but the question of love—unless it be necessary to say rather that the horizon of Being is *resumed, revisited, and revised* on the basis of the question that love addresses to it” (*In the Self’s Place*, 129, my italics). Also in the context of discussing Augustine, Marion accepts Gilson’s claim that “the identification of God and Being is the common possession of Christian philosophers as Christian” on the condition that we say “Christian thinkers diverge about Being only inasmuch as they see it first *as Christians*, on the basis of another authority” (*In the Self’s Place*, 386n64, Marion’s italics). In my concluding chapter I will refer to two more similar instances. At these moments—and, again, these are the only moments of which I am aware—Marion appears to *allow* for a theological interpretation of being rival to that of Heidegger and the moderns, but as in the Shortt interview, does not recommend its pursuit.

<sup>79</sup> *TST*, xxv–xxvi n41; “The Gift and the Given,” 447. Incidentally, these self-descriptions point to what is in my view one of the most significant problems in Milbank’s work (though it is beyond the scope of this study), namely his extraordinary prioritisation of ontology as a mode of articulating Christian doctrine. This criticism has also been raised by such diverse readers as Kevin Hart *Postmodernism*, 146–7, Adam Kotsko “‘That They Might Have Ontology’: Radical Orthodoxy and the New Debate,” *Political Theology* 10, no. 1 (2009): 115–124, and Rusty Reno, “The Radical Orthodoxy Project,” *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion & Public Life* no. 100 (February 2000): 37–44. Can it possibly be satisfactory, for instance, to explicate “revelation” as “reflection upon events in performance and in utterance that are deemed to reconfigure our perception of transcendental being as such” or to sum up the Incarnation as a means to “reconfigure the real ontological relation of finite to infinite being”? (“Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 477.) Marion’s declaration that “the Christian revelation is not about being; it’s about charity” is a good word here. But one must also immediately insist against Marion that though the content of Christian revelation does indeed concern more than being, it does not concern less.

Marion, even if he thinks it wrongheaded. We may re-imagine ontology in theological terms, according to Marion, but “we don’t really need to do so,” for it is “more reasonable and more rational” to speak about God in ways other than being. Marion’s objection to Milbank’s approach is then a prudential one—positing a God “without being” remains the better way because this “position is in fact the only one to face the actual situation of philosophy after deconstruction and postmodernism.”

### *Evaluation*

It is here with their two contrasting visions of the way that theology should proceed after Heidegger that we most clearly see the one French genealogy of modernity at work in our protagonists. Marion and Milbank accept the same historical description about the failures of modern philosophy and theology, but give different normative prescriptions. Being, it is agreed, has lost its charm—Milbank proposes to save it, polish it up and restore it to theological legitimacy; Marion judges that we should leave it behind. Which prescription is to be preferred?

There are obvious strengths to Marion’s approach. His career-long development of a phenomenology of love is clearly a vast and original achievement. He takes the full measure of modern philosophy, especially Husserl and Heidegger, and in a way not dissimilar to the practice of the patristic theologians, he brings the Christian tradition

into fruitful dialogue with contemporary thought.<sup>80</sup> In this respect, Marion's approach does indeed "face the actual situation" of our times and is to be applauded for it.

However, does Marion appreciate exactly what he is giving away when he says that "we don't really need to" give a Christian reading of being? At stake here, implicitly, is the entirety of Second being—nothing less than the whole blooming, buzzing abundance of created existence itself—and in the hope of gaining a God "far above us," according to a very particular and by no means incontestable brand of transcendence, Marion is willing to grant it all to Heidegger and the moderns without a fight. One perhaps thinks of hungry Esau trading his inheritance for the bowl of stew—how far Marion has wandered from Balthasar's "affirmation of being"!

There is, as Milbank's critique intimates, a profoundly "gnostic" logic to this style of post-Heideggerian theology.<sup>81</sup> God is construed as the opposite of a nihilistic

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<sup>80</sup> Philip Rosemann, for example, admires Marion's attempt to "deepen the Christian intellectual tradition once again, by learning the philosophical language of our day" ("Postmodern Philosophy and Jean-Luc Marion's Eucharistic Realism," in *Transcendence and Phenomenology*, ed. Peter Candler and Conor Cunningham (SCM Press, 2008), 102). Cf. Rosemann's "Tradition and Deconstruction," *Philosophy and Theology* 25, no. 1 (2013): 79–107.

<sup>81</sup> In addition to Milbank, multiple commentators have noticed this implication of Marion's approach. See Felix Ó Murchadha, *A Phenomenology of Christian Life: Glory and Night* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 26–30; Mark Manolopoulos, *If Creation Is a Gift* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 60–1; Kathryn Tanner, "Theology at the Limits of Phenomenology," in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 201–33; William Desmond, *God and the Between*, 242n3, 283–4 and "Being True to Mystery: On Saturated Phenomena and the Hyperboles of Being," unpublished manuscript (Villanova University, 2012),

creaturely existence, without any likeness of analogy to it, and piety consists in escaping (“outwitting”) this idolatrous Second being by cultivating a principled indifference to it. The gnostic move is demanded by the character of Marion’s being: finite, univocal, nihilistic, empty, coextensive with and exhausted by conceptual intelligibility.<sup>82</sup> In some work Marion suggests a yet darker vision of being as a contaminating disease: “from the point of view of the erotic reduction, being and its beings appear as contaminated and untouchable, irradiated by the black sun of vanity.”<sup>83</sup> Marion is even willing to say with Levinas that “being is evil.”<sup>84</sup>

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41–2, <https://www1.villanova.edu/villanova/mission/theoinstitute/proceedings.html> (accessed 10 December 2013); Graham Ward, “The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion,” in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), 121–126; Jean Grondin, “Au Lieu de La Métaphysique? Les Méditations Augustiniennes de Jean-Luc Marion,” *La Vie Des Idées*, 2009, [http://www.laviedesidees.fr/IMG/pdf/20090105\\_marion.pdf](http://www.laviedesidees.fr/IMG/pdf/20090105_marion.pdf) (accessed 17 June 2013); Joeri Schrijvers, *Ontotheological Turnings?: The Decentering of the Modern Subject in Recent French Phenomenology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 148–158, 178, 213–21; Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*, 1st ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 255–9; James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 103n23; and in a somewhat different spirit, John D. Caputo, “The Hyperbolization of Phenomenology: Two Possibilities for Religion in Recent Continental Philosophy,” in *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Kevin Hart (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 76–89.

<sup>82</sup> As I indicated in chapter 1, Marion allows for an infinite Thomist *esse*, but this Thomist First is set at an equivocal distance from Second being, which remains strictly modern and Heideggerian.

<sup>83</sup> *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Marion takes up this Levinasian formula in his essay “From the Other to the Individual”. He asks “how are we to justify the violence of this formula and to protect it from the misinterpretation of a gnostic reading?” (43). Marion goes on to give an attractive reading of Levinas’ account of inter-personal relations, finding in Levinas’ mature account of the other as an “individual” an anticipation of his own notion of pre-ontological charity. But it is precisely that: *pre-ontological*. The human other is loved—and in this respect Marion and Levinas are not “other-worldly”—but she is not loved in her actuality, not in her *being*, only in her secret invisibility. Marion never doubts the Levinasian “horror of being” nor questions the interpretation of being that provokes it, instead taking it as a presupposition for thinking and loving beyond being. Marion’s reading of “being is evil” remains a gnostic one (is any other reading possible?) and his own theology, which he clearly

One might object that Marion's phenomenology of givenness answers this complaint—surely it provides a positive account of creation that overcomes the nihilism of being. But there is little solace here. As I indicated in chapter 1, Marion's primordial giving saves only the sublime, invisible hearts of things, which lie beyond being, leaving the realm of actual, historical, visible beings in their Heideggerian nullity. "It is no longer a matter of seeing what is," Marion declares, because actual things are the mere "ontic support" for a sublime phenomenon which "in the end... *is not*."<sup>85</sup> Marion's phenomenology proposes a sort of "horizontal" platonism to match the "vertical" platonism of his theology, thus repeating his gnosticism in an "intra-worldly" mode: to apprehend the primordial giving of beings one must outwit, elude and see past the vain nullity of their being. There is certainly an enchantment and a glory here, but it is found only behind the stained veil of material existence. The finitude of Second being is *fallen* from the saturated beyond of being. On Marion's account, being is a contaminant and so we must find "a God not contaminated by Being."<sup>86</sup> Being is without God and so we must seek a God without

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judges to be consonant with the Levinasian formula, has the same character. Milbank makes the necessary reply here: "Not invisibility, but visibility – which as beauty is *not* reducible to 'my aim', guarantees the otherness of the other" ("Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 39).

<sup>85</sup> *Being Given*, 3, 47–8. Joseph O'Leary insightfully remarks that Marion is interested in "only the shadow" of concrete, historical beings (*Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 190).

<sup>86</sup> "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 20/21, no. 2/1 (1998): 26, italics omitted.

being.<sup>87</sup>

But, of course, for Christian theology being is never without God.<sup>88</sup> This reply seems so obvious one wonders how Marion manages not to see it. For Christian theology Second being is nothing other than Creation, the Creation that God loved, made *ex nihilo* and blessed as very good. It is emphatically not the formal, mathematicised strata of Descartes, nor the shrivelled *conceptus univocus entis* of the modern tradition, nor the nihilistic and idolatrous “screen” of Heidegger; it is certainly not the evil of

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<sup>87</sup> Jeffrey Bloechl expounds (and apparently endorses) the logic of this move in “Being Without God,” in *Words of Life: New Theological Turns in French Phenomenology*, ed. Bruce Ellis Benson and Norman Wirzba (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 30–41.

<sup>88</sup> This theological conviction must not be misunderstood as a glib optimism or naive sentimentality. That we live in a modernity shrunk by calculative reason (Heidegger) as nauseously dislocated selves (Sartre) confronted by unprecedented suffering and evil (Levinas), and in a world shot with vanity and boredom (Marion and Qohelet)—these remain valid insights. They mean—as such insights have always meant—that we confess the created goodness of being sometimes only through tears, and that at times perhaps we cannot speak it at all. But nonetheless, Christian theology confesses that God is one and good and that created being is, like him, good. Even in its fallenness, being remains a sign and analogy of God. For, as Rowan Williams carefully argues, “‘the divine’ is not present in creation in the form of ‘hints of transcendence’, points in the created order where finitude and creatureliness appear to thin out or open up to a mysterious infinity, but in creation being itself – which includes, paradigmatically, creation being itself in unfinishedness, time-taking, pain and death. The crucified Jesus is, in this context, the ground and manifestation of what analogy means.” (“Balthasar and Difference,” 80.) This point also suggests, I think, a weakness in Milbank’s approach. Could the ontology of “peaceful Arcadian tension,” which Milbank finds in his gentle drive through bucolic Nottinghamshire (“Double Glory,” 160–176,) be uncomplicatedly confirmed when surveying, say, a slum in Mexico City or the horror upon Golgotha? Milbank’s vision must be eschatologically tempered, perhaps in the way that David Bentley Hart suggests: “the Christian should see two realities at once, one world (as it were) within another: one the world as we all know it, in all its beauty and terror, grandeur and dreariness, delight and anguish; and the other the world in its first and ultimate truth, not simply ‘nature’ but ‘creation’: an endless sea of glory, radiant with the beauty of God in every part, innocent of all violence. To see in this way is to rejoice and mourn at once, to regard the world as a mirror of infinite beauty, but as glimpsed through the veil of death; it is to see creation in chains, but beautiful as in the beginning of days.” (*The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 60–1.)

Levinas. Being is, as Denys says, a gift of God, “the most excellent of all his gifts.”<sup>89</sup> It is, as Aquinas says, the perfection in which “all created perfections are included... for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, it is “the highest perfection of all,” the “actuality of all acts, and therefore the perfection of all perfections.”<sup>91</sup> The Christian should not try to outwit, escape or see through being, but rather, as Augustine instructs, we should “give thanks to God for being,” for all things are “good, from the very fact that they are.”<sup>92</sup> To give thanks is simply to follow the logic of Christian creation, a logic which Anselm sums up with elegant concision: “since the highest good is the highest being, it follows that every good is being and every being is good.”<sup>93</sup>

Marion’s project is in this respect a massive exercise in straw-manning, even if a

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<sup>89</sup> *Divine Names* V.5 (820b) trans. O’Rourke, “Being and Non-Being in Pseudo-Dionysius,” 61.

<sup>90</sup> *ST* Ia.4.1.c.

<sup>91</sup> *De potentia* 7.2.a.9 trans. *On the Power of God* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934), 12.

<sup>92</sup> *De libero arbitrio* (“On the Free Choice of the Will”) 3.7.21, trans. Emilie Zum Brunn, *St. Augustine: Being and Nothingness* (New York: Paragon House, 1988), 38–9.

<sup>93</sup> “On the Fall of the Devil,” in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans, trans. Ralph McNerny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 196. My argument from creation here may be confirmed with an argument from the Incarnation. God in Christ takes on creaturely being in the earthiest, most ontic sense—the sweaty, bleeding concrete particularity of a human being. He does not confine himself to a sublime, hidden core behind the flesh of Christ, whose “disfigured appearance”, Marion claims, is “given as a transparency, in order that we might regard there the gaze of God” (*The Crossing of the Visible*, 62, my italics). No, God dwells on the surface of Jesus. He is this Jewish peasant body. Christ’s divinity is perceived by the eye of faith in the creaturely being of Jesus, not in spite of it, and thus God confirms the Genesis blessing of *adamah*, now with his very self. Of course the Incarnation does more than affirm Second being, but it does do this—it displays in the most radical manner that God is not otherwise than being. On this point, see Kathryn Tanner’s parallel argument in “Gift and the Mirror,” 218–227.

richly erudite and fecund one.<sup>94</sup> For if Second being is conceived as the good gift of creation—and for the Christian *there is no other way* to conceive it!—then it is not otherwise than God in the Levinasian sense, and therefore God need not be otherwise than being or without being. The Christian theologian (and, I think, the Christian philosopher) is not permitted to cast this conviction off at will, certainly not to hold a considered preference against it. To do so is to convert the gift and icon of being into an idol.<sup>95</sup>

The root problem here is that Marion's entirely salutary, "serious" engagement with the Heideggerian inheritance is not matched by an equally serious consideration of theology's capacity to answer Heidegger on its own terms. Instead Marion speaks in the Shortt interview of Heidegger's "pure ontology" and "pure question of being." But whence comes this "pure" vision of being? The myriad rival phenomenologies after Husserl surely put the lie to any allegedly objective ontology. In fact Marion makes this point himself in order to reject Heidegger's arbitrary methodological atheism and to refute contemporary atheist objections to his own

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<sup>94</sup> Milbank puts this point succinctly: "Marion persists in speaking as if 'Being' has always been used in a primarily existential post-Scotist sense, whereas for the previous tradition... Being is the plenitude of what is genuinely desirable." ("Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," 46.)

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Balthasar: "How can someone who is blind to Being be other than blind to God?" (*My Work: In Retrospect* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 85, quoted in Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason*, 84). Also Cf. William Desmond: "We say God is beyond being, but if so beyond, what can we say of God but nothing, and if nothing, then when we look at the world we see nothing of God there. It appears to us then as a Godless scene, and the religious reverence that would guard divine transcendence ends up atheist. God without being becomes being without God." (*God and the Between*, 284.)

phenomenology—“it is necessary to learn to see otherwise,” he says.<sup>96</sup> Marion also speaks of a legitimate “battle” between different phenomenological “interpretations of the same data.”<sup>97</sup> But he forgets all this entirely in his own theological treatment of being. When Marion claims that the key aspects of Milbank’s rival ontological conjecture—“transcendence, infinity, charity, creation, participation, and so forth”—are just “not included in being,” he grants an unjustified authority to Heidegger’s supposedly pure approach to the data.<sup>98</sup> From the point of view of Christian theology, these aspects are included in being, always and already. Marion rightly complains that Gilson all too easily identifies the Christian God with Heidegger’s Being, but he has himself all too easily done the same with Christian creation.<sup>99</sup>

Marion suggests that “taking Thomas Aquinas seriously” will mean that we “think of being starting with God,” rather than “think of God starting with being.”<sup>100</sup>

Quite—but this is precisely what Marion does not do when he uncritically adopts Heidegger’s vision of Second being and posits an abyss of equivocity to save God

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<sup>96</sup> *GWB*, 42–4; “The Banality of Saturation,” 388.

<sup>97</sup> “The Hermeneutics of Revelation,” 27–8. In this dialogue, Richard Kearney observes: “There are no extraphenomenological or extrahermeneutical criteria that you can appeal to as a metaphysical foundation or ground or cause that proves you right and the others wrong... We all operate from beliefs, faiths, and commitments; all our philosophizing is preceded and followed by conviction. Before we enter the realm of philosophy, we are already hermeneutically engaged.” Marion responds: “Yes, may I repeat that point in another way. There is no other argument to choose between different interpretations of the same data than the power of one interpretation in front of the other. This is a very fair battle, where the winner, posited at the end, is the one able to produce more rationality than the other, and you are convinced simply by the *idea vera index sui et fallacia*.”

<sup>98</sup> “God and the Gift,” 147.

<sup>99</sup> “TA&OT,” 73n57.

<sup>100</sup> “TA&OT,” 67.

from it. On the contrary, taking Aquinas seriously will mean seriously questioning Heidegger's account of being, for who said that Heidegger "has a corner on being"?<sup>101</sup> If Aquinas is truly taken seriously, the proper question to ask is not "does God give himself to be known according to the horizon of Being or according to a more radical horizon?,"<sup>102</sup> but rather, is there a horizon of Being more radical than Heidegger imagined? Precedent for such an inquiry may in fact be found in the Anonymous Commentator, who argues that understanding the conjunction of being with the One is like understanding man as "rational animal." The meeting of rationality with animality changes our conception of both notions, and so "also in this case: both the *One* has changed with *substance* and *substance* with the *One*."<sup>103</sup> Analogously, in the Christian context we must say that *God* has changed with *being* and *being* with *God*. All prior conceptions of either God or being, whether Neoplatonic, Heideggerian, Levinasian or whatever, must be modified in light of their conjunction in the doctrines of Trinity, creation *ex nihilo* and Incarnation.<sup>104</sup> Marion's refusal to take up

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<sup>101</sup> William Desmond's phrase in *God and the Between*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> *GWB*, xxiv.

<sup>103</sup> Fragment V, trans. Bechtel, *The Anonymous Commentary*, 58.

<sup>104</sup> David Bentley Hart makes an insightful contrast between Marion's approach and what he calls an inquiry into "Nicaean ontology," which is exactly the sort of thing I am advocating here. Hart writes: "my concerns differ from those of Jean-Luc Marion... The question that concerns me is not how the fathers came to 'denominate' God 'within the horizon of being' or 'within the metaphysics of being *qua* being.' Rather, my interest is in the question of how 'being' had to be reconceived by Christian thinkers within the horizon of the relation between the transcendent God and creation; and my conviction is that the development of Christian thought led inevitably to the dissolution of the idea of 'being' as a metaphysical 'object' within the economy of beings and rendered the very idea of 'being' analogical between God and creatures, and for that very reason impotent to comprise the difference dividing them." ("The Hidden and the Manifest: Metaphysics after Nicaea," in

this inquiry leads to the manifold problems I have traced in his work, and his peculiar fidelity to Heidegger here comes at the cost of infidelity to the theological tradition that he claims. He is right to say that “there is no contradiction between a certain assumption about being and Christian faith,” but Marion needs to see that there *is* a contradiction between Christian faith and certain assumptions about being.

On this last question of post-Heideggerian theological method, then—the most fundamental of the disputes between Marion and Milbank—it is again Milbank’s approach that must preferred. Marion allows a reinterpretation of being “from a more Christian point of view,” but makes a conscientious choice not to pursue the theological possibility that he permits. The requirement to posit God strictly beyond being, the reduction of analogy to equivocity, the gnostic disinterest in visible, material being: all of these follow from Marion’s unbending commitment to the Second being offered by Heidegger and the moderns. On this decisive point Milbank’s approach shows itself clearly preferable. Heidegger’s account of being should be answered not with a theological *appendix*, but with a theological *rival*.

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We have now examined the three disputes that constitute the heart of the Marion-Milbank debate about double being. On the first dispute about analogical

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*Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2008), 192–3n1).

attribution I concluded that Marion's equivocal predication of *esse* is inadequate from a Thomist point of view and that it is Milbank's recognition of analogical inklings of divine perfections in Second being that is to be preferred. On the second dispute about theological ontology I concluded that both protagonists have difficulties attaining to the Thomist vision of double being. In cutting the Commentator's ontological yoke between First and Second, Marion falsely divides charity from being and erects a new idol of love; in collapsing the Commentator's yoke, Milbank runs the pantheistic risk of cancelling the transcendence essential to Christian theology. On the third and most fundamental dispute about how theology should proceed after Heidegger, I concluded firmly in favour of Milbank. Marion's unwavering fidelity to Heidegger and the moderns in his construal of Second being entails a gnostic abandon of created being, a price too high for an orthodox Christian theology to pay.

I doubt that the purpose of entering into an intellectual debate of the kind I have in this thesis is to elect a winner. However, if one felt compelled to do so, one would have to say that our winner is Milbank. Even with the weaknesses that I noted in the second dispute and elsewhere in this study, Milbank's approach shows itself more persuasive and more promising than Marion's. The results of all three disputes contribute to this conclusion, but it is above all the third issue of post-Heideggerian theological method that determines it. For it is here that we find the root of Marion and Milbank's differences, here that the theological possibilities of their projects are

circumscribed, and here that we must begin our own contemporary apprehension of double being. Milbank convincingly takes this last and most fundamental dispute and with it he takes the debate.

## CONCLUSION

### *Interpreting the debate*

Who, today, is not a Neoplatonist?

- Jean-Marc Narbonne<sup>1</sup>

The primacy of the origin could yield to the priority of the gift without the rationality of discourse having to founder. And the fact that contemporary philosophy is focused on the pre-ontological meditation, as it were, of the gift (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and in a different style, Derrida or Bruaire) confirmed this sufficiently enough for theology not to fear giving its blessing to it.

- Jean-Luc Marion<sup>2</sup>

The challenge, then, for theology remains that of understanding human expressive being as a locus of revelation, without loss of divine transcendence or omnipotence. This may mean re-capturing many themes from the gnostics. We should remember that Irenaeus only arrived at his historical and aesthetic theory of redemption as recapitulation, or the entering into and re-ordering of the estranged human image, by way of his polemic with the gnostic Valentinus who could be said to have presented such insights in distorted guise. It is often said that we should do to Marx what Aquinas did to Aristotle; without gainsaying such an aim, I would like to add that we must do to Hegel what Irenaeus did to Valentinus.

- John Milbank<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Levinas and the Greek Heritage," in *Levinas and the Greek Heritage, Followed by One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, ed. Jean-Marc Narbonne and Wayne Hankey (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 3.

<sup>2</sup> "De la «mort de Dieu»," 129, my trans. "La primauté de l'origine pourrait le céder à la priorité de la donation, sans que la rationalité du discours ne doive pour autant sombrer. Et le fait que la philosophie contemporaine se concentre sur la méditation pour ainsi dire pré-ontologique du don (Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas, et, dans un style différent, Derrida ou Bruaire) le confirma assez pour que la théologie ne craigne point de s'y consacrer."

<sup>3</sup> "Boehme's Mysticism," *Religion* 18, no. 1 (1988): 93.

The first two chapters of this thesis demonstrated that Marion's account of God, being and analogy cuts the Anonymous Commentator's yoke between First and Second by proposing an equivocity of being, while Milbank's account collapses the this gap between First and Second with a primordial univocity of being. I argued that these accounts reveal a preference in Marion for God's radical transcendence from Second being and a preference in Milbank for God's radical immanence to Second being. In chapter 3 I evaluated these contrasting approaches to double being and concluded finally in favour of Milbank. Thus I have answered the bulk of the inquiry which this thesis set out to address: *What is the nature of the analogy between First and Second being according to Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank? How do their accounts differ, why, and which is to be preferred?*

One element of this question remains outstanding and it is the purpose of this concluding chapter to address it: *why* do Marion and Milbank's account of double being differ? To do this we must step back from the details of the debate to consider the most basic aims of Marion and Milbank's theological projects in the context of wider contemporary thought, for it is only with this broad perspective that we may satisfactorily grasp what is at stake for our protagonists in their contestation of double being. I will make three points here. The first is that Marion and Milbank's accounts of double being may be seen as apologies to two different generations of Continental philosophers—Marion to the *soixante-huitards*, Milbank to the “post-Continental.” The second point concerns an historical judgment that each

makes about ontology in the Christian theological tradition and the third concerns a contrast in, for want of a better word, theological *impulses*. These three elements are reciprocally related in each thinker and may be taken together as an illuminating way of interpreting the whole of Marion and Milbank's debate about double being, particularly their respective emphases on the First's "transcendence from" or "immanence to" Second being. I will then conclude by noting, in the light of this interpretation, a few possibilities for mediating between their two projects.

### *Two apologias*

Whether consciously or not, Marion and Milbank both take on the mantle of the patristic apologists. Despoiling the Egyptians and reasoning with the Greeks, they present Christian theology as the fulfilment of the best intuitions of their philosophical contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> Marion's treatments of Denys, Anselm, Augustine and Aquinas are clear instances of defensive *apologia*, attempting to answer the critiques which have been or might be brought against the tradition by the postmodern philosophers. At other times Marion goes onto the offensive (in his responses to Levinas and Derrida in *I&D*, for example), arguing that his theology

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<sup>4</sup> Both explicitly adopt this apologetic orientation at least occasionally. Marion's early essay "Evidence and Bedazzlement" and "In the Name" lecture are two instances. Milbank's discussion of "the 'apologetic' task for Radical Orthodoxy" in "Grandeur of Reason," 391-2 and his recent essay "An Apologia for Apologetics," in *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy and the Catholic Tradition*, ed. Andrew Davison (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) indicate the apologetic interests of his work. Milbank's widely noted debates with Slavoj Žižek, perhaps the one philosophical "celebrity" of our present moment, elicit an obvious comparison to Marion's apologetic sorties with Derrida, the previous "celebrity."

positively attains what his confrères only unsuccessfully attempted. Milbank takes the apologetic stance with even greater gusto, claiming theological treasures in philosophies that do not even know they possess them. Badiou may be “read in one direction against Badiou himself” to reveal a “concealed underlying homology of socialism, materialism, Platonism, and Christianity.”<sup>5</sup> Creative reading may uncover “a different, latent Žižek... a Catholic Žižek.”<sup>6</sup> Orthodox theology may find itself “actually more Laruellian than Laruelle himself”<sup>7</sup> for “Christian theology *is* just such a ‘non-philosophy’” of the kind Laruelle desires.<sup>8</sup> For both Marion and Milbank, the core of their apologetic enterprise is their vision of double being, and they articulate these visions in a fashion deliberately consonant with some key philosophical convictions of their contemporary interlocutors.

*Marion: apologist to the soixante-huitards.* In the preface to the first English edition of *GWB*, Marion observes that his book was “deeply marked” by “the test of nihilism which, in France, marked the years dominated by 1968,” and that it constituted an intervention in “the confrontation between the philosophical prohibitions of nihilism and the demanding openings of Christian revelation.”<sup>9</sup> Marion’s God without being project began in this ’68 context and he has continued in this vein, recommending Christian revelation to his Continental contemporaries. More specifically, Marion’s

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<sup>5</sup> “Return of Mediation,” 238.

<sup>6</sup> “Double Glory,” 113.

<sup>7</sup> “Mystery of Reason,” 92.

<sup>8</sup> *SM*, 92, 96.

<sup>9</sup> *GWB*, xix.

God without being project may be construed as a Christian repetition of Levinas' "otherwise than being" reply to Heidegger. Levinas rejects Heidegger's determination of phenomenology as "the science of the Being of entities—ontology," and his binding of philosophy to the "question of being."<sup>10</sup> Compelled by the ethical demand, he transgresses Heidegger with a new thought of transcendence: a "passing over to being's *other*, otherwise than being. Not *to be otherwise*, but *otherwise than being*." This move is necessary because, for Levinas, the "intelligibility of transcendence is not ontological." Levinas' transcendence also refers us to God, but not on Heidegger's terms—God "can neither be said nor thought in terms of B/being, the element of philosophy behind which philosophy sees only night," but can only be sought among "what is beyond B/being."<sup>11</sup>

Marion judges Levinas to be "the greatest of French philosophers since Bergson" and looks to him as a student "before a master."<sup>12</sup> He explicitly adopts Levinas' definition

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), §7, p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 3; "God and Philosophy," in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 77.

<sup>12</sup> "From the Other to the Individual," 43; "A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference," 26. Marion says in the latter essay: "[I am] claiming for myself the same relation to Emmanuel Levinas as that which Levinas himself acknowledged to Heidegger" (37n4). Other important indications of Marion's relation to Levinas may be found in "From the Other to the Individual"; "The Voice Without Name: Homage to Levinas," in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (Fordham Univ Press, 2000), 224–242; *I&D*, esp. 216–220; "The Intentionality of Love," in *Prolegomena to Charity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 71–101; "Substitution and Solicitude: How Levinas Re-reads Heidegger," in *The Reason of the Gift* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 50–68. Christina Gschwandtner rightly

of transcendence as “otherwise than being,” noting that “the central concept of distance” in his early work “could claim to come from [Levinas]” and even declaring that “*God Without Being* made its own the intention of *Otherwise than Being*, namely, to hear a God not contaminated by Being.”<sup>13</sup> This paradigm is also at work in Marion’s famous interchange with Derrida: both parties seek a philosophy which may think, speak and see without being, otherwise than being.<sup>14</sup> With these thinkers Marion discerns an injunction to think transcendence and, after Heidegger, to think transcendence otherwise than being. This, I suggest, is the most basic presupposition in his account of double being and the spur to his pursuit of a divine Love without being. Marion observed in 1986 that “contemporary philosophy is focused on the pre-ontological meditation, as it were, of the gift” and proclaimed that Christian

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observes that Marion’s affinities with Levinas are so many and so obvious as to almost “go without saying.” (“Ethics, Eros, or Caritas?: Levinas and Marion on Individuation of the Other,” *Philosophy Today* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 1.)

<sup>13</sup> “A Note Concerning the Ontological Indifference,” 37n2 and 26, italics omitted. The character of Marion’s whole oeuvre makes this affinity with Levinas plain, but two other particularly lucid indications may be found in the “Otherwise than Being” section in his early essay “In the Name,” 145–8, and the “A Question Outside of Being” section in his recent essay “The Impossible for Man,” 19–20. In the latter Marion says that the “transcendence” achieved in metaphysical philosophy “is defined as what does not rise beyond being” and argues that this approach “must be transcended if God is whom we have in mind.”

<sup>14</sup> “How not to say or speak?” asks Derrida, at one point, “Otherwise, and implicitly: how not to speak Being (how to avoid speaking—of Being?)? How to speak Being otherwise? How to speak otherwise (than) being?” (“How to Avoid Speaking: Denials,” ed. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, trans. Ken Frieden (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 133n3). Derrida’s condemnation of negative theology on the grounds of its hyperessentiality is an upshot of these ruminations. The Levinasian inheritance remains very much alive in Derrida’s own work, I think, even as he transforms the “otherwise than being” theme in his elaborations of *différance* and *Khôra*. Marion himself confirms all this when he says that his theology opposes “the primacy of the *Seinsfrage*” and therefore “my enterprise remains ‘postmodern’ in this sense, and, in this precise sense, I remain close to Derrida” (*GWB*, xxi).

theology should bless this enterprise.<sup>15</sup> Marion's vision of double being is an attempt to do just that, and this vision is the cornerstone of a Christian *apologia* to his contemporary philosophical interlocutors.

*Milbank: apologist to the post-Continentalists.* If Marion's audience is the generation of philosophers who think at the end of metaphysics, Milbank's audience is that generation which thinks *after* the end of metaphysics—not Derrida and Levinas,<sup>16</sup> but those such as Badiou, Žižek, Laruelle, Agamben, Meillassoux, Brassier and Latour.<sup>17</sup>

Following a recent study by John Mullarkey, one may roughly call this generation of thinkers "post-Continental."<sup>18</sup> Milbank shares with these thinkers a range of

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<sup>15</sup> "De la «mort de Dieu»," 129, my trans., my italics. The full passage is cited above as an epigraph.

<sup>16</sup> In his early work, well before any "post-Continental" movements stirred, Milbank was trenchantly critical of Marion's cohort even as he borrowed a great deal from them. For Milbank's critique of Levinas see, for example, "Soul of Reciprocity Part One"; "Gift, Relation and Participation: Plato versus Lévinas". For his critique of Derrida see, for example, *The Religious Dimension in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744, Part 2: Language, Law and History* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 86–92; "Pleonasm, Speech and Writing," in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 55–83; and of course the infamous final sections of *TST*, where Milbank happily states "I deliberately treat the writings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault and Derrida as elaborations of a single nihilistic philosophy." (278)

<sup>17</sup> An exemplary text treating each of these thinkers: Badiou: "The Return of Mediation, or The Ambivalence of Alain Badiou," *Angelaki* 12, no. 1 (2007): 127–143; Žižek: "Double Glory"; Laruelle: "Mystery of Reason"; Agamben: "Paul Against Biopolitics," *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7–8 (2008): 125–172; Meillassoux: "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics"; Brassier: "Mystery of Reason"; Latour: "Stanton #8".

<sup>18</sup> See John Mullarkey, *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London; New York: Continuum, 2006). Milbank himself uses some similar designations, describing the context of his work as "post-analytic and post-phenomenological" ("Only Theology Saves Metaphysics," 475) and "post-postmodern" ("Beauty and the Soul," 10; "Problematizing the Secular"). Two essays by Graham Ward, one written in 1997 and the other in 2012, also mark this generational distinction—"Theology and Postmodernism," *Theology* 100, no. 798 (1997): 435–440; "Theology and Postmodernism: Is It All Over?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 2 (2012): 466–484.

complaints against their *soixante-huitard* forebears: that the phenomenological reductions of Husserl and his followers do not work;<sup>19</sup> that philosophy must consciously embrace “the natural” and the natural sciences;<sup>20</sup> that philosophy should make a “speculative turn” to metaphysics after a long hiatus in the wake of Heidegger and the linguistic turn;<sup>21</sup> that philosophy must provide a thoroughgoing political ontology.<sup>22</sup> However, the most important generational shift is put succinctly by Mullarkey:

Put simply, this change amounts to an embrace of absolute immanence over transcendence, the tendency of previous Franco-German thought being to make immanence supervene on transcendence.<sup>23</sup>

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In the latter essay Ward notes that in the later generation of Continental thinkers (he names Badiou, Agamben and Žižek,) the flow of inter-disciplinary exchange is reversed: “Postmodern theologians put to theological use a variety of postmodern thinkers and developed new critical dialogue partners from them. But with these three thinkers, we have an explicit turn of postmodern philosophy to theological thinking as a resource for the development of their own modes of contemporary reflection” (467).

<sup>19</sup> I touched on this theme in chapter 2.A. Milbank endorses Wilfred Sellars’ critique of the “myth of the given” and Ray Brassier’s development of it, and welcomes Badiou’s rejection of any “foundational donation,” including Marion’s phenomenology of givenness—see “Mystery of Reason,” 80–82; “Stanton #6”; “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics,” 460–475.

<sup>20</sup> Milbank points to Badiou, Laruelle, Brassier and Latour on this score. See particularly “Grandeur of Reason,” 391–2 and “Stanton #8”.

<sup>21</sup> See Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011) for an overview of this development. Milbank treats this at some length across his Stanton Lectures and in “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics”. It should be noted that Milbank is equally critical of the anti-metaphysical mainstream in Continental and analytic philosophy of the twentieth century.

<sup>22</sup> As Mullarkey puts it, “everybody wants their ontology to be a political ontology too.” *Post-Continental Philosophy*, 3. Milbank agrees with the judgment of Badiou, Peter Hallward and other secular leftists that “the philosophy of difference grounds only a social *agon* and therefore is complicit with late capitalism” (*TST*, xxi). Cf. “On Theological Transgression”; *BR*, 80.

<sup>23</sup> *Post-Continental Philosophy*, 1. Mullarkey also comments: “Philosophy has seemingly come back down to earth from the inconsequential heavens of transcendence. Immanence means relevance, even when that relevance comes through the abstractions of mathematics (Badiou) or epistemology

Milbank shares this post-Continental concern and his vision of double being aims at the same goal of an absolute immanence.<sup>24</sup> His God remains “a transcendent God,” but at every turn he is at pains to show that this transcendence is a means of articulating the divine immanence—for “the unique mark of a philosophy of transcendence,” he says, “is to leave mediation as ultimate.”<sup>25</sup> Milbank’s explorations of Eckhartian infinite univocity, Cusan coincidence of opposites and Damascius’ mediatory One are clear expressions of this. While Marion sees the French genealogy’s diagnosis (ontotheology) and responds with a Levinasian balm (to think transcendence otherwise than being,) Milbank sees the diagnosis and responds, in a certain sense, in the reverse: not the First’s transcendence “far above” Second being as Marion has it, but God’s non-contrastive immanence to Second being.

Of course this transcendence/immanence contrast which I am suggesting must be hedged with qualifications, not least because Marion and Milbank would both embrace Philipp Rosemann’s lapidary formula: “transcendence is the superlative

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(Laruelle).” (3) This claim for a generation-wide shift in philosophical predilections obviously elides all sorts of interesting complexities. The immanence of Deleuze and Henry, for example, sits quite awkwardly on this schema.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Milbank is quite happy to own his affinities with contemporary secular philosophy: “how *like* nihilism (and theology is half-in-love with its dark twin), yet how unlike...” (“On Theological Transgression,” 161). But he firmly insists that “enchanted transcendence is furthermore to be preferred to the enchanted immanence or pantheism of the pre-romantic Goethe and other ‘radical enlightenment’ Spinozists, or more recently of Heidegger.” (“The Politics of the Soul,” 16.)

<sup>25</sup> “Stanton #6,” 25. He elsewhere suggests that in light of his approach to transcendence “one can see how the clash of naturalistic and religious visions is a clash that is somewhat capable of mediation.” (“Hume versus Kant,” 288.)

mode of immanence.”<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, their contrasting philosophical interlocutors drive this shared conviction in opposite directions with regard to being: one Levinasian God without, one post-Levinasian God with being. In each case a theological account of double being is put to work as an *apologia* to a particular set of Continental thinkers.

### *Two historical inferences*

This generational contrast between “transcendence from” and “immanence to” being coheres with a contrast in historical judgements. In “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” Milbank regrets that Marion “appears to draw back from the obvious inference” which Milbank thinks should be drawn from the French genealogy, namely that the Christian tradition before Scotus avoided ontotheology by “identifying God with Being.”<sup>27</sup> The inference that Marion does draw from the French genealogy, as is evident in his various expositions of salutary premodern theologians, is precisely the contrary: the tradition avoided ontotheology by *refusing* to identify God with Being. We have then, in Marion and Milbank, two neatly opposed historical inferences, with each justifying a particular way forward for contemporary theology—a God without being, a God with being. Of course, the foregoing chapters demonstrate that this apparently straightforward contradiction

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<sup>26</sup> Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile*, 295. Marion, for example, describes Distance as “the separation that unites” (*I&D*, 199) and comments that God’s transcendence is matched by his “radical immanence—under the figure of the *interior intimo meo*.” (“Phenomenology of Givenness and First Philosophy,” 24.) The above discussion of Milbank confirms his agreement on this point.

<sup>27</sup> “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics,” 41.

covers over a multitude of subtleties with regard to the being at issue (First or Second? what is the character of the Second?) and the nature of analogy which is in play. However, we may still discern in these inferences a substantial theological divergence. Levinas' comment about the nature of transcendence marks the divide, and indeed captures in a phrase the entire Marion-Milbank dispute: "Not *to be otherwise*, but *otherwise than being*."<sup>28</sup> For Marion, the tradition followed the latter line, and so must we; for Milbank, the tradition followed the former, thinking "being" otherwise, and so should we.

#### *Two theological impulses*

Lastly, Marion and Milbank's respective accounts of double being reflect a contrast of what one might call theological *impulses*. In response to the univocity diagnosis delivered by the French genealogy, the deepest impulse of Marion's theological project has been to advocate and celebrate the First, and at all costs to preserve the transcendence of the First from the deleterious influence of the Second. Marion's shifting readings of the tradition, particularly his shifting views of Aquinas, indicate this clearly—we watch as Marion adjusts his reading strategies on the run, as it were, in pursuit of the one constant objective of a God uncontaminated by Second being. Milbank, on the other hand, has always been occupied by the Second, with the First serving as a means of preserving and celebrating the Second. As he suggests in the 1988 passage I cited at the outset of this conclusion, Milbank has from the very

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<sup>28</sup> Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 3.

earliest aimed to re-enchant the creaturely life of Second being. In a modernity drained of wonder, he seeks to elevate material, historical and cultural life as a participation in and expression of the life of God, and to do so within the ambit of theological orthodoxy—to do with Hegel what Irenaeus did with Valentinus.<sup>29</sup> This is one of the key moves in his controversial pursuit of an “alternative modernity” and it is on continual display across his oeuvre, from the earliest publications on Vico, to his watershed *TST*, through to his latest *Beyond Secular Order*.<sup>30</sup> His mature account of double being and analogy continues this career-long pursuit by further compressing the gap between First and Second being.

In the debate about double being, then, we can perceive a contrast at the most elemental level of theological intuition and philosophical proclivity. To speak very crudely, but not entirely untruly: in our nihilistic modernity, Marion wants to save God and Milbank wants to save the world.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. *BR*, ix: “I have always tried to suggest that participation can be extended also to language, history and culture: the whole realm of human *making*. Not only do being and knowledge participate in a God who is and who comprehends; also human making participates in a God who is infinite poetic utterance: the second person of the Trinity. Thus when we contingently but authentically make things and reshape ourselves through time, we are not estranged from the eternal, but enter further into its recesses by what for us is the only possible route.”

<sup>30</sup> This “alternative modernity” attempts to fuse premodern theology with typically postmodern concerns such as language, body, culture, history, materiality, the critique of reason and so on. See particularly “An Alternative Vision of Modernity” in *Vico Part 1*, 327–8; “The Two Rival Constructions” in *BSO*, 208–11; “On Baseless Suspicion: Christianity and the Crisis of Socialism,” *New Blackfriars* 69, no. 812 (January 1, 1988): 4–19; “New Divide”; “The Linguistic Turn as Theological Turn,” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); “Grandeur of Reason,” 385–6; “Invocation of Clio,” 13–21.

*Prospects for mediation*

The interpretation of the Marion-Milbank debate that I have proposed here indicates three profound contrasts in their intellectual projects, but this must not lead us to forget the remarkable breadth of shared intellectual ballast that I noted in my introduction. Above all they share the French genealogy's diagnosis of modernity and a conviction that Christian theology may contribute to the philosophical aporias of our time. Even with their significant differences, there are possibilities for mediation along these lines.

On Milbank's side, it seems to me that his mature and more discriminating reception of the Western henological tradition may allow for a more sympathetic treatment of Marion's phenomenological theology and others of its ilk. Despite his trenchant critiques, Milbank clearly holds Marion's work in high regard,<sup>31</sup> and if he can see past Marion's Levinasian allergy to being, there are rich resources in Marion's account of a donating Love and primordial Trinitarian distance for a contemporary theological ontology which are not incompatible with Milbank's desire for a radical divine immanence. Milbank's hasty assertion that the phenomenological reductions are simply impossible might also find itself qualified were Marion's work is approached in this manner.

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<sup>31</sup> Milbank has described Marion's work as by turns "excellent," "superb," "penetrating," "incredibly subtle and complex" and "brilliant and astounding" ("Soul of Reciprocity Part One," 344, 355, 386n32; *BR*, 117; "Truth and Vision," 104n58).

However, it is on Marion's side that I see the greater prospects. As my discussion in dispute #3 indicated, I think that the crux of the debate between Marion and Milbank concerns whether being may or may not be construed in non-modern and non-Heideggerian terms. Marion concedes that this may be done, but elects not to do so. Were Marion to shift on this point he would open up a much more fruitful dialogue with theology of Milbank's ilk and, in my opinion, allow for a more vital engagement with the theological tradition.

In fact, the impetus for such a shift may already be found in Marion's work. In one place Marion argues that Pascal eludes ontotheology and metaphysical rationality precisely when he "introduces a new sense of *Being*"—"our Being unintelligible to us." For Pascal,

Being, which here signifies a way of Being and beingness, must not be referred to the order of metaphysics (the second order), but to that of charity (the third). On account of this displacement, Being will have to submit to other requirements besides those of the question of Being. As with truth, Being will fall under the jurisdiction of charity.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, "for Pascal, the question of Being is not exhausted simply within the horizon of metaphysics" because a philosopher who has been "converted" by charity will interpret being otherwise, according to love.<sup>33</sup> A sense of being not exhausted by Cartesian intelligibility, a question of Being which outruns the horizon of Heidegger

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<sup>32</sup> DMP, 341.

<sup>33</sup> All quotations in this paragraph are from DMP, 342-4.

and the moderns, an ontology that is at home in the order of love—is this not precisely what is lacking in Marion’s approach? Marion does not take his reading of Pascal in this direction; he suggests that charity “deserts” metaphysics and “leaves it destitute,” abandoning it to “widowhood.” But one can and should press the Pascalian critique further. In “submitting Being itself to the ordeal of love,” Marion can do more than abandon being and metaphysics; he can let the ordeal of love *renew* them. To do less than this, to leave the second order to its unreconstructed Cartesianism—or in Marion’s case, Heideggerianism—is to cut short the Pascalian conversion. Philosophy must, as Marion agrees, “let itself be instituted in charity, no longer simply in the second order.” (And beyond this, the ordeal of love must extend even to the first order of bodies, labour and passions.) Pascal’s “new sense of *Being*” should be scrupulously embraced because, for a philosopher converted by charity, it is not an optional or discretionary sense of being, but the true sense of being—why tarry with a false one? Such an embrace would mean relinquishing the sense of being as a finite, poor and nihilistic “contaminant.” This would be a costly requirement for Marion no doubt, for if modernity’s ossified conception of being is permitted to fracture in this way then the logic of his whole “without being” project would need to be restrung. But it is a cost that would, I am sure, be amply repaid by a yet more rigorous pursuit of Love.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> In a 2009 text Marion comes tantalisingly close to embarking on this line of thought. He writes: “the events par excellence accomplished by creation and resurrection take on an ontological status, or rather a meta-ontological one in that they contradict the laws of *ontologia* for themselves and for all other beings as well (creation and resurrection being brought to bear by definition on being in

“Theology plays the role of the guardian of philosophy,” writes Marion in one place, “in order that philosophy may remain at the peak of its destiny,” echoing Balthasar’s declaration that in this “age which has forgotten both Being and God” the Christian “is called to be the guardian of metaphysics in our time.”<sup>35</sup> Were Marion to follow his Pascalian overcoming of metaphysics to its proper end in a new embrace of being, he would more fully attain to his own methodological vision, satisfactorily answer to the Balthasarian call to remember *both* God and being, and indeed find himself much nearer to Milbank, who similarly affirms that theology “fulfils and preserves philosophy.”<sup>36</sup>

Derek Morrow has observed that “for their part, Thomists will rightfully want some further explanation” from Marion as to how his position squares with Aquinas’ participatory metaphysics and *res / modus* distinction—“further mutual

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its totality). Indeed, once the indifference of God to the human (and therefore metaphysical) delimitation of the possible and the impossible is attested, therefore the indifference of God to the rules of *ontologia*, all that is (the world) finds itself reinterpreted on the basis of what *gives* it being or which allows it to be, even *against* the this-worldly determinations of the being of beings, since it receives being on the basis of an instance which surpasses all merely ontological determinations of what is. Created or re-created, what is comes from, above all, the gift of God and no longer only from the laws which the thought of *ontologia* assigns to being.” (“On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy,” 58–9.) If Marion would just bite the bullet and say that the Christian “reinterpretation” he describes here constitutes an *alternative ontology* and not merely a “meta-ontological” alternative, he would be on the way. Were Marion to do this, his project would find itself closely alongside William Desmond’s career-long pursuit of “the promise of *agapeic being*,” as Desmond himself observes in a recent paper (“Being True to Mystery,” 42).

<sup>35</sup> Marion, “On the Foundation of the Distinction Between Theology and Philosophy,” 76, italics omitted; Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 655–6.

<sup>36</sup> “Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi,” in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 1999, 37n49, italics omitted.

understanding could result if this avenue were more fully explored.”<sup>37</sup> This is certainly true, and Morrow’s pointer to ontology and analogical predication as two primary troubles in Marion’s account is astute. However, as I argued in chapter 3, it is the question of “a new sense of *Being*” which is the root of these troubles and it is at this point, first and foremost, that any critical mediation between Marion and Thomistic thinkers like Milbank must begin.

*Being is double: two contemporary variations*

I conclude, then, where we began, with the Anonymous Commentator. His conjecture of a double being, a First absolute εἶναι yoked to a Second determinate ὄν, constitutes the West’s first identification of God with being and it has proved to be pregnant with all the key themes which have emerged in the course of this study. The Commentator speaks of “the very great separation of the inconceivable hypostasis” from the realm of Second being; he also speaks of its “not resting” on the “purity” of its transcendence but instead “bringing it around to being.”<sup>38</sup> These twin themes of transcendence and immanence inherent in the Commentator’s conjecture are received, repeated and adapted by Marion and Milbank in distinctive ways. Marion posits a First strictly beyond Second, cutting the Commentator’s yoke with an equivocity of being and elevating God as the pre-ontological, charitable source of Second being. Milbank construes God as being itself in a radical fashion, collapsing

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<sup>37</sup> Morrow, “Aquinas according to the Horizon of Distance,” 77.

<sup>38</sup> Fragments I and V, trans. Bechtel, *The Anonymous Commentary*, 40, 59.

the gap between First and Second to affirm the paradoxically intimate immanence of God to Second being.

Thus we can see the Commentator's conjecture at work in the service of two formidable and kindred theological projects, each provoked by the French genealogy and each proposing Christian theology as a salutary possibility in the contemporary intellectual situation. Double being is parsed in different ways in each to produce two strikingly different solutions: one God with, one God without being.

"Being is double," declared the ancient Commentator, and his echo is still heard today.

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