

When Does Ontotheology Begin? Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus¹

Olivier Boulnois, *École pratique des hautes études, France*

The purpose of this essay is to compare the metaphysics of Aquinas and Scotus by considering Heidegger's interpretation of metaphysics as ontotheology. When does metaphysics as ontotheology begin? This question is certainly not new, and has already received an array of answers. First of all there is Heidegger's own answer that ontotheology is constitutive of the history of metaphysics. Therefore, ontotheology had already begun with Aristotle and even, in a sense, before him. Secondly, there are those who say that ontotheology had begun at a precise moment in the history of metaphysics. In this case, it remains to be decided at which moment it begins. One possible answer to this question is that by E.-H. Weber, who makes Henry of Ghent the beginning of ontotheology: "The fact remains that his understanding of God-Being [*Dieu-Être*] as the first object of our knowledge and, thereby, the basis for all knowledge constitutes the first actual ontotheology of the Latin world."² Another possible answer to this question is that given by Alain de Libera, who attributes the beginning of

1. [Olivier Boulnois, "Quand commence l'ontothéologie? Aristote, Thomas d'Aquin et Duns Scot," in *Revue thomiste* 95, no. 1 (1995): 85-108. Translated by Nathan R. Strunk. Editorial notes are in brackets. When possible, English translations have been cited for the sources cited by Boulnois. I also wish to acknowledge Hadi Fakhoury for bringing this translation to completion with his outstanding editorial guidance.]

2. Edouard-Henri Wéber, "Eckhart et l'ontothéologie: histoire et conditions d'une rupture," in *Maître Eckhart à Paris, Une critique médiévale de l'ontothéologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984), 13-83 [p. 80]. The text cited above can be supplemented by the following: "an ontotheology postulating an immediate intuition of an absolute God-Being [*Dieu-Être*] as the first act of intellection" (p. 53); and, "Although he integrated many of the givens of Aristotelian empiricism, the master of Ghent subordinates these givens to a theological Platonism transformed by an ontotheology unfettered by Neoplatonic negativity" (p. 79); other texts attribute an "ontotheological positivism" (p. 81) to both Duns Scotus and Henry of Ghent; "John Duns Scotus shares...this ontotheology that defines the reality of God exclusively through the notion of Being or Pure Existence" (p. 82).

ontotheology to Henry of Ghent's immediate successors. Citing Heidegger – “The science of being as such is intrinsically onto-theological”³ – de Libera writes, “for a medievalist, this characterization of the essence of Aristotelian metaphysics is actually just one of many Latin interpretations of Avicenna that became established in the university and that, by way of twentieth century Neo-Scholasticism, had decisively pervaded the Heideggerian vision of metaphysics; namely, Scotism. In fact, it is according to Scotus – as an interpreter of Avicenna and not according to Aristotle himself – that metaphysics is presented as a science that has for its object being in common and the most eminent being, God.”⁴ There is still a third possibility that maintains that ontotheology is an ambiguous term that has in one sense its beginning with the metaphysical project as such, but in another sense begins at a precise moment in the history of metaphysics. It is this last route that I wish to pursue here. Two questions arise: In what sense can we speak of ontotheology in both cases? When does it begin in each case?

Methodological Problems: The Concept of Ontotheology

What is ontotheology? Is there a concept of metaphysics as a discipline that is common to every historical instance? Is there only one concept of metaphysics? At the very least, this is what ontotheology means to Heidegger. Let me summarize his thesis according to four propositions:⁵

3. Martin Heidegger, “Hegel et son concept de l’expérience,” in *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 161. [Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 146.]

4. Alain de Libera, *La Philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 72-73. One could cite the entirety of page 73, and most notably the following: “This problem of the univocity of being, which in a sense sidesteps both the ‘Greek-Latin’ question of transference *in divinis* and the Aristotelian problematic of the multiple meanings of being, cannot stand as the paradigm for the ‘original onto-theological constitution’ of metaphysics inherited from Aristotle. Rather, basically Christian, it also essentially stems from the history of Avicennism though, of course, this does not comprehensively explain the whole history of onto-theology.” Also see the comments in O. Boulnois, *Jean Duns Scot: Sur la connaissance de Dieu et l’univocité de l’étant* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), 78-80.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann Verlag, 1992), 19 (Introduction):

(1) “Die Metaphysik sagt, was das Seiende als das Seiende ist. Sie enthält einen λόγος (Aussage) über das ὄν (das Seiende). Der spätere Titel ‘Ontologie’

1. “Metaphysics states what beings are as beings. It offers a λόγος (statement) about the ὄν (beings). The later title ‘ontology’ characterizes its essence, provided, of course, that we understand it in accordance with its proper significance and not through its narrow Scholastic meaning.” This is Heidegger’s first thesis; namely, there is a general essence of metaphysics as an autonomous discipline that is more prevalent and broader than the Scholastic and historical denomination of “ontology,” which describes a particular science in a specific epoch, the 17th century. Thus, there is an ontology that is not necessarily “ontology.”

2. “Its representing concerns beings as beings.” According to this second thesis, ontology begins precisely when there is a philosophical consideration of beings qua beings. However, this is only possible if there is a *representation* of being, a theory of being insofar as it is duplicated in an intellectual second presence.

3. “In this manner, metaphysics always represents beings as such in their totality; it represents the beingness of beings (the οὐσία of the ὄν).” For the third thesis, ontology is the most universal science of all, because it concerns all things without exception.

4. Nevertheless, there is another side to metaphysics. “But metaphysics represents the beingness of beings in a twofold manner: first as the totality of beings as such with respect to their most universal traits (ὄν καθόλου, κοῖνον); but, secondly and at the same time, as the totality of beings as such in the sense of the highest or divine being (ὄν καθόλου ἀκρότατον, θεῖον).” Therefore, metaphysics is both ontology and theology. However, in what sense does metaphysics take on this “twofold manner”? On this point,

kennzeichnet ihr Wesen, gesetzt freilich, dass wir ihn nach seinem
eigentlichen Gehalt und nicht in der schulmässigen Verengung auffassen.”

(2) “Ihr Vorstellen gilt dem Seiendem als dem Seiendem.”

(3) “In solcher Weise stellt die Metaphysik überall das Seiende als solches in
Ganzen, die Seiendheit des Seienden vor (die οὐσία des ὄν).”

(4) “Aber die Metaphysik stellt die Seiendheit des Seienden in zwiefacher Weise
vor: einmal das Ganze des Seienden als solchen im Sinne seiner allgemeinsten
Züge (ὄν καθόλου, κοῖνον); zugleich aber das Ganze des Seienden als solchen im
Sinne des höchsten und darum göttlichen Seienden (ὄν καθόλου
ἀκρότατον, θεῖον).”

[For English, see Martin Heidegger, Introduction to “What is Metaphysics?,” in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 287.]

Heidegger entertains two interpretations of metaphysics.

For the first interpretation, there are two moments in metaphysics; namely, a universal moment in which one speaks of beings in general and a second moment in which one speaks of a species of being, divine being. This interpretation amounts to the same as the distinction between a *metaphysica generalis*, which treats beings as such, and a *metaphysica specialis*, treating a specific being (i.e. God), which, by reason of this distinction, is regarded both as being and divine. This interpretation is supported by the first three theses above, which admit a general theory of being qua being without appealing to a specific science of God. However, this distinction is not what is most original or interesting in Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics.

There is a second interpretation of metaphysics, which he presents here and which does not refer to the traditional, Scholastic division of metaphysics. It is the idea of a double signification of every metaphysical consideration, and not only that of a twofold domain of metaphysics. Anytime we consider the totality of being, we always regard it in a dual manner: through its general attributes and as "supreme being." Rather than being made from two parts, metaphysics is implicitly always constituted through this dual consideration of being. This explains why there is only one concept of metaphysics: it is not made of two parts whereby two conceptions of being with different objects are adjoined, but rather in every aspect metaphysics involves the dual aspect of being qua being in general and qua eminence. It is always "dimorphic."

According to Heidegger the three principal traits of metaphysics are representation, universality, and eminence. They are bound together by a mutual relation. "Because it represents beings as beings, metaphysics is, in a twofold and yet unitary manner, the truth of beings in their universality and in the highest being."⁶ Because metaphysics is a representation of beings *qua beings*, it is a representation of beings through a being and therefore a *representation* of beings. This is why there is an "ontotheological essence of

6. Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, 19. "Die Metaphysik ist in sich, und zwar weil sie das Seiende als das Seiende zur Vorstellung bringt, zwiefach-einig die Wahrheit des Seienden im Allgemeinen und im Höchsten. Sie ist, ihrem Wesen nach, zugleich Ontologie im engeren Sinne und Theologie." [Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 287. Note that Boulnois cites an additional sentence in the original not quoted in the body of the article: "According to its essence, metaphysics is at the same time both ontology in the narrower sense, and theology."]

metaphysics”: metaphysics depends on a phenomenological equivocality of being that is simultaneously content and form, the contents and container, of all our thoughts and perceptions.

We ought not to forget that this interpretation is not merely a historical claim concerning metaphysics as a science. The concept of ontotheology is developed in a later introduction (1949) to the important conference, “What is Metaphysics?” (1929). Consequently, the introduction serves a dual purpose: to explain the past and show how it leads to the present, that is, from the concept (then surpassed) of metaphysics for Heidegger in 1929, and to the actual concept of the surpassing of metaphysics in 1949, when this text was published. The concept of the “essence of metaphysics” is a teleological concept intended to show how Heidegger’s interpretation is historically true. In the later introduction, the concept of ontotheology explains the abandonment and failure of the concept of “fundamental ontology” – the backdrop for the Heideggerian recovery of a metaphysical ideal. It would be pointless to continue bracketing *theologia* in a new *ontology* (a “fundamental ontology”) since it is impossible to separate one from the other.

Heidegger had already developed this insight⁷ in his interpretation of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the winter semester course of 1930-1931, Heidegger remarks: “*Ontology* is the speculatively conceived and thus speculatively grounded interpretation of being, but in such a way that the actual being [*Seiendes*] is the absolute Θεός...The speculative [Hegelian] interpretation of being is *onto-theo-logy*.”⁸ God himself as absolute knowledge of the absolute is the essence of being and of λόγος. Thus, for Hegel the concept of ontotheology assumes responsibility for and determines the destiny of metaphysics so that the history of metaphysics culminates in Hegel’s speculative interpretation of being. This interpretation is quite

7. Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*, GA 29/30 (Frankfurt-sur-le-Main, 1983). [Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, and Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001).]

8. Martin Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, GA 32 (Frankfurt-sur-le-Main, 1980), 141. [Martin Heidegger, *Hegels Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 98. It should be noted that the ellipsis omits the following sentence, “It is from the being [*Sein*] of the absolute that all beings and the λόγος are determined.”]

clear, but a question remains: can one say that the end of metaphysics in Hegel's interpretation of metaphysics is the universal status of metaphysics in general?

In 1930-1931, Heidegger expresses very revealing reservations on this subject. He writes, "We know also that Aristotle already brought philosophy in the genuine sense in very close connection with θεολογική ἐπιστήμη, without being able to explain by a direct interpretation what the relationship is between the question concerning ὄν ἢ ὄν and the question of θεῶν."⁹ The point is apparent: we cannot find an explicit link between ontology and theology in the works of Aristotle. This link is created by the interpreter (Heidegger) from a circuitous perspective: it is deduced from the end of metaphysics in Hegel's philosophy and carried over to the beginning of metaphysics in Aristotle, which Hegel is meant to complete.¹⁰

Can we take up this conception and assume this deduction? Can we say that there is an *essence* of metaphysics, a common program underlying everything called metaphysics in the history of Western thought? (For example, in the theory of metaphysics developed by Thomas Aquinas and Scotus?) Is there a single and universal essence of metaphysics?

My second concern stems from the terminology used by Heidegger. The term "ontotheology" had a long history before him.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant uses the term "ontotheology," but it is not part of the conception of metaphysics; he wants to define a particular kind of theology, following (as was customary at the time¹¹) the vocabulary of Wolff. Kant states, "If by theology I mean the cognition of the original being, then this theology is of two kinds. One kind is based on mere reason (*theologia rationalis*); the other kind is based on revelation (*theologia revelata*)."¹² If the first understands its object through pure reason

9. Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 141-142. [Eng. trans., 98.]

10. Heidegger, *Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 183. [Eng. trans., 126: "The inquiry into the ὄν was onto-logical ever since its beginning with the ancients, but at the same time it was already with Plato and Aristotle onto-theo-logical, even if it was correspondingly not conceptually developed."]

11. For example, D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* (1759).

12. E. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, II, 3, 7 (A631/B659) (Darmstadt, 1975), 556: "Wenn ich unter Theologie die Erkenntnis des Urwesens verstehe, so ist sie entweder die aus blosser Vernunft (*theologia rationalis*) oder aus Offenbarung (*revelata*)." [Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 609.]

with pure transcendental concepts (like *ens originarium*, *realissimum*, *ens entium*), it is called transcendental theology. The transcendental theologian, who can be called a deist, assumes that we can know in any event the existence of a first being through pure reason, but that the concept we obtain is only transcendental: he conceives it as a being that has complete reality, but is not capable of being determined any further. The name God “simply represents” a *cause of the world* and not a free creator. When the existence of this supreme being is derived from experience in general, this knowledge is called cosmotheology; when it cognizes this existence “through mere concepts without the aid of the least experience...it is called ontotheology” (the ideal of pure reason).¹³ To summarize: ontotheology is for Kant a theory of God obtained by pure reason with pure transcendental concepts, which imply God’s existence as *ens realissimum*. To put it even more precisely: ontotheology is a theory of being wherein being makes possible what Kant calls an “ontological proof.”

Can we extend this concept, which for Kant describes a part of natural theology, to every development of metaphysical science? Can we extend this conception of metaphysics, corresponding to a particular stage in the history of metaphysics (that of Leibniz and Wolff, of which Kant is thinking here) to every period of metaphysics? This sense can readily apply to Hegel for whom total actuality is ultimately nothing but an immense ontological proof. However, can we extend this concept to two thinkers as distinct as Thomas Aquinas and Scotus, knowing moreover that the former entirely rejects the validity of the argument by Saint Anselm, and the latter requires it be “coloured” by other premises? This is why we must focus on the interpretation of metaphysics given by Thomas Aquinas and Scotus, and that from a historical point of view.

The Three Dimensions of Aristotelian Metaphysics

Heidegger’s interpretation of ontotheology is a response to the problem of the unity of Aristotelian metaphysics as it had been framed by Natorp and Jaeger. Can we only say that the *same* essence of metaphysics runs

13. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, II, 3, 7 (A632/B660): “Oder glaubt durch blosser Begriffe, ohne Beihülfe der mindesten Erfahrung, sein Dasein zu erkennen, und wird *Ontotheologie* genannt.” [Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 610.]

throughout the fourteen books much later called metaphysics by a flummoxed librarian? Heidegger states, “In the metaphysics of Aristotle, the unconcealedness of beings as such has specifically developed in this two-fold manner (*Metaphysics*, Γ, E, K).”¹⁴ According to him, such a dimorphic account of being is already present in the principal books of Aristotelian metaphysics. But is it really this simple?

In general, a close connection between ontology and theology is a very common interpretation hardly unique to Heidegger. For example, this is also Tricot’s interpretation: “From the very beginning of the treatise (A, 1), metaphysics had been defined as the science of first principles and first causes. Pursuant to this question [i.e. what is metaphysics?], Aristotle answers in the opening of Book Γ that the object of metaphysics is being qua being and its essential attributes.”¹⁵ However, other questions remain: what is being qua being? Is it universal being or a particular being? In Book E, Aristotle indicates that being qua being is absolute being, and thus “the true name of metaphysics is theology.”¹⁶ Here, we have a very good example of what Heidegger meant when he asserted that Aristotle “had already brought philosophy in the genuine sense in very close connection with θεολογική ἐπιστήμη, without being able to explain by a direct interpretation what the relationship is between the question concerning ὄν ἢ ὄν and the question of θεῖον.” What Heidegger adds to this generally traditional interpretation is that he novelly explains this continuity by a dimorphic account of being. However, is this account completely justified?

If we briefly consider the three books mentioned by Heidegger (Γ, E, K), we discover varying problems.

Book Γ begins with an important thesis: “There is a science that studies being qua being.”¹⁷ This is not a particular science since particular sciences only consider a specific aspect of being, but rather a universal and

14. M. Heidegger, *Was ist Metaphysik?*, 19: “Die Unverborgenheit des Seienden als seines solchen hat sich in der Metaphysik des Aristoteles eigens in dieses Zwiefache herausgebildet (vgl. Met. Γ, E, K).” [Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 287.]

15. Aristote, *La Métaphysique*, I, ed. Jules Tricot (Paris: Vrin, 1974), 324.

16. Aristote, *La Métaphysique*, 324: “Metaphysics studies being qua being in its plentitude and in its totality. [...] But this universality does not exclude individuality, and the true name of metaphysics is theology.”

17. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Γ, 1, 1003a20. [Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Books I-IX*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 271, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 147.]

common science. This is precisely what will later be called ontology. If we seek the first principles of being, we will discover them included in this science. The first principles are also the most common principles.¹⁸ This science has nothing to do with intelligible or separated substances like God and the intelligences. Book Γ does not exactly allow for Heidegger's dimorphic interpretation. Instead, it describes a universal science, the science of being qua being, which will much later be called ontology. Though it does mention a "first philosophy" (theology) and a "second philosophy" (physics), it does so just to say: "...none of the other sciences contemplate being generally qua being; they divide off some portion of it and study the attribute of this portion."¹⁹ Therefore, theology is distinct from metaphysics as a particular discourse and not a dimorphic reverse-side of a common discourse. First philosophy, or theology, considers an aspect of being and is a special, particular part of the science of being qua being or what will later be called general metaphysics.

Book E lends more support to Heidegger's (as well as Tricot's) interpretation. It begins by reflecting on the difference between the science of being qua being and particular sciences, especially physics, mathematics, and theology, and concludes that there is a connection between ontology and theology: "...if there is a substance which is immutable, the science which studies this will be prior to physics, and will be primary philosophy, and universal in this sense, that it is primary. And it will be the province of this science to study being qua being; what it is, and what the attributes are which belong to it qua being."²⁰ Clearly, we have here a key text for an interpretation of the link between ontology and theology. It is a very Platonic text: theology being the science of the first principle, it can become – like the science of the good according to Plato – a science of all things because it is the science of their principle (i.e. the Good). This is why Tricot and Heidegger's interpretation focuses on Book E, but does it justify what Heidegger intends, that metaphysics is simultaneously and under the same conditions – in a dimorphic way – an ontology and a theology?

This is very doubtful. The apparent meaning of this text is that there

18. Cf. Pierre Aubenque, *Le Problème de l'être chez Aristote* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), 220.

19. Aristotle, *Metaph.* Γ , 1, 1003a22 ss. [Eng. trans., 147.]

20. Aristotle, *Metaph.* E, 1, 1026a28-32. [Eng. trans., 297-299.]

are two different sciences; a general science, ontology, and another specific science, theology. Yet, knowledge of a principle is *a fortiori* knowledge of its consequences. The tentative unity of these two sciences is governed by a Platonic idea: the science of the principle orders the science of all things. This is why “first philosophy” or theology, which considers things “immutable and separated from matter,”²¹ intermixes with the “science of being qua being”: the highest particular object of ontology is the very same object of theology. Theology treats being qua being because it deals with its most eminent aspect. However, this does not mean that ontology and theology are identical; it only shows that the second science is part of the first. They are rivals, yet distinct. Thus, this assertion does not confirm the *ontotheological constitution* of metaphysics. It merely correlates the two sciences, ontology (or metaphysics) and theology.

The third book mentioned by Heidegger, Book K, is truly *the* key text. It expands upon the assertion of Book E: the science of being qua being is “universal because of its priority.”²² This text goes a step further toward Heidegger’s interpretation by affirming that one and the same science is both ontology and theology. “There is a science of being qua being and the separately existent.”²³ However, this text’s authenticity is disputed. First, for philosophical reasons: it asks whether the science of being qua being should be considered a universal science,²⁴ which is already evident for Aristotle. Second, for philological reasons advanced by Natorp, Moraux, and Aubenque. Thus, the interpretation of metaphysics as ontotheology seems to be the endeavor of a student striving to unify, by way of a Platonic argument, the varying aspects of Aristotle’s thought. It therefore already belongs to a certain kind of commentary on the *Metaphysics* rather than to the principal intention of Aristotle.

Thus, the concept of ontotheology is very useful if one wishes to understand one predominant interpretation of Aristotle, but it lacks rigor for explaining the unity of Aristotle’s metaphysics. Even if one thinks the *Cor-*

21. Aristotle, *Metaph.* E, 1, 1026a16. [Eng. trans., 297.]

22. Aristotle, *Metaph.* K, 7, 1064b13. [Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Books X-XIV*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 287, trans. Hugh Tredennick and G. Cyril Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 89.]

23. Aristotle, *Metaph.* K, 7, 1064a28. [Eng. trans., 87.]

24. Aristotle, *Metaph.* K, 7, 1064b9. [Eng. trans., 89: “The question might be raised as to whether the science of being qua being should be regarded as universal or not.”]

pus aristotelicum includes Book K, one must still show how the systematic unity in it can explain the different aspects described in Book Γ and Book E.

Can one say that this identification had been made by later commentators of Aristotle? Had it been made by Thomas Aquinas? Had it been made by Scotus? In other words, is there an ontotheological constitution of metaphysics in these two authors?

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas mentioned a synthesis of metaphysics understood precisely as theology. It is supported by a Neoplatonic interpretation. This interpretation is cited in his commentary on *The Book of Causes*, which was initially attributed to Aristotle before Aquinas showed how it had been inspired by Proclus. In his commentary on the fourth proposition of *The Book of Causes*, Thomas writes that for the Platonists “the more common something is the more it is separate”²⁵; furthermore, the more common it is, the more it is participated in by that which is posterior to it. Thus, the Platonists arrive at a first principle, which is the One and the Good itself, separated from everything that proceeds from it. Following from this common and separate principle is common being. Consequently, being is common and separate, but created by the One and participates in him. For this interpretation of metaphysics, knowledge of immaterial substances is the object of metaphysical inquiry. Ontology is simultaneously theology, because the more one considers common being the more one considers being as separated. The more one considers separate being as such, the more one considers its participation in a first principle, God. According to this interpretation, we could possibly say that this is an ontotheology in a dimorphic sense of the term, because being and God are two sides of the same phenomenon. And yet, we could not say definitively that there is an ontotheology, because there is no place for a neutral ontology. Every conception of being simultaneously is a consideration of God, since we must consider how it participates in God. I propose calling this interpretation a *theo-ontology* since it is the divine that

25. Thomas Aquinas, *In librum De causis expositio*, prop. 4, § 98, ed. C. Pera (Turin: Marietti, 1955), 28: “Secundum positiones platonicas [...] quanto aliquid est communius, tanto ponebant illud esse separatum.” [Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1996), 30.]

determines and saturates the interpretation of the *ōv* and not the other way around.

However, the question remains: Is this interpretation that of Thomas Aquinas? No, since Thomas only mentions it in a commentary as a Neoplatonic position inspired by Proclus and Denys, and thus not as his own theory.

In fact, even if he does not explicitly reject this notion, Thomas developed another, more complex theory of metaphysics, which we can find in the Prologue to his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. It is organized around the idea that all particular sciences are ordered toward a single, unnamed science that is the most intelligible because it "treats the most intelligible objects."

"Most intelligible objects" has three meanings.²⁶ First, it signifies "the

26. Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicae Aristotelis expositio*, Prooemium, § 4, 5, 6, ed. R. Imbach, *Prologe zu den Aristoteles-Kommentaren* (Frankfurt-Am-Main, 1993), 100 [cf. ed. Cathala (Turin: Marietti, 1950) p. 1]: "Maxime autem intelligibilia tripliciter assumere possumus.

Primo quidem ex ordine intelligendi. Nam ex quibus intellectus certitudinem, accipit, videntur esse intelligibilia magis. Unde, cum certitudo scientiae per intellectum acquiratur ex causis, causarum cognitio maxime intellectualis esse videtur [...].

Secundo ex comparatione intellectus ad sensum. Nam, cum sensus sit cognitio particularium, intellectus per hoc ab ipso differre videtur, quod universalia comprehendit. Unde et illa scientia maxime est intellectualis, quae circa principia maxime universalia versatur. Quae quidem sunt ens, et ae quae consequuntur ens, ut unum et multa, potentia et actus [...].

Tertio, ex ipsa cognitione intellectus. Nam cum unaquaeque res ex hoc ipso vim intellectivam habeat, quod est a materia immunis, oportet illa esse maxime intelligibilia, quae sunt maxime a materia separata [...], sicut Deus et intelligentiae."

["Now the phrase 'most intelligible objects' can be understood in three ways. First, from the viewpoint of the order of knowing; for those things from which the intellect derives certitude seem to be the more intelligible. Therefore, since the certitude of science is acquired by the intellect knowing causes, a knowledge of causes seems to be intellectual in the highest degree [...].

Second, the phrase can be understood by comparing the intellect with the senses; for while sensory perception is a knowledge of particulars, the intellect seems to differ from sense by reason of the fact that it comprehends universals. Hence, the science is pre-eminently intellectual which deals with the most universal principles. These principles are being and those things which naturally accompany being, such as unity and plurality, potency and act [...].

Third, this phrase can be understood from the viewpoint of the intellect's own knowledge. For since each thing has intellective power by virtue of being free from matter, those things much be intelligible in the highest degree which are altogether separate from matter [...] as God and the intelligible substances." Quoted from Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary*

first causes.” This science is called first philosophy (*prima philosophia*). Second, it signifies “universal principles” such as being, unity, and the transcendentals. This science is called metaphysics (*metaphysica*). Evidently, Aquinas is here drawing upon Book Γ of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Third, it signifies “those things separate from matter”: God and intelligent substances. This science is called theology (*theologia*).

Heidegger, who commented on this text during the winter semester of 1929-1930 just before he conceived the concept of ontotheology, is very critical towards Thomas Aquinas.²⁷ For Heidegger, these three disparate sciences do not constitute a *science* because they do not constitute a single science. There is no substantial reflection on the status of what is common to the three sciences because the unity of these three equivocal meanings is obtained only through faith. Only an account presupposing a reciprocal implication of ontology and theology can provide a favorable view of this science. (Heidegger does not use the word “ontotheology” here, but he puts in place all the milestones that will lead to the term.)

In fact, for Thomas, these sciences are not united because they lead to the same object (God), they are united because they begin from the same subject. One must be careful: these three aspects do not define the *subject* of metaphysics. According to Aristotle, every science has a *subject* and researches its principles (*Posterior Analytics*). These three sciences do not correspond to a different subject, to a genre, or particular domain. They correspond to an *object*, a point of view or way of *seeing* something that is different for each one. There is, then, a convergence of the three metaphysical accounts; namely, being is the subject-genus of these sciences. One and the same science must study the subject-genus and the causes of this genre. This is why the same science that studies being studies the immaterial substances, which are the universal causes of *ens commune*, the subject of this science.

Thomas’ commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate* shows how these three trajectories of metaphysics are genuinely coordinated.

on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN.: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), xxix-xxx.]

27. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 44.

1. Causality

“Does divine science treat of what exists without matter and motion?”²⁸ The same science must consider both *ens commune* and the principles of all things *secundum quod in ente communicant* [insofar as they share in being]. It considers principles insofar as they are the principles of all things, common principles. There are two kinds of commonality according to Avicenna’s *Sufficientia*. The first kind is by predication when something in common is predicated to all its subjects as when one says, “The form is common to all forms.” Another kind is by causality when one says, “There is only one common principle that is common to everything that can be engendered from it.” The second kind of commonality refers to the pre-eminence of a common cause. This cause is common because it is first as we have already seen in Book E of Aristotle.

For this understanding of commonality everything can be derived from a universal first principle of being, perfectly actual and without matter. This principle, therefore, is divine.

However, the divine itself is considered in a twofold manner, bringing about a twofold science. First, the divine is studied as principle: it is considered by philosophers on the basis of its effects. Thus, the divine is studied by the science of being qua being. What Aquinas calls divine science belongs here. Second, the divine can be considered in itself as it is knowable insofar as it reveals itself. Thus, it is considered by *Scriptura sacra*.

The principal object of first philosophy is the principle of its subject: that which is separate from matter (God). It is an ontotheology if we understand by this the passage from that-which-is-common to its common principle, from being to God (with a twofold domain). However, we ought not to maintain that first philosophy considers God insofar as God is participated by being (i.e. in a dimorphic manner).

On the contrary, the theology of sacred scripture explicitly has that-which-is-separate-from-matter, God, for its subject. Christian theology is not included in the ontotheological structuring of the first division of meta-

28. Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4, ed. B. Decker (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 190. Henceforth cited as *Super librum De Trinitate*: “Utrum divina scientia sit de his quae sunt sine materia et motu” [Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences: Questions V and VI of his Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986), 46.]

physics. However, as we know from Thomas Aquinas himself, the object of theology is not simply a part of the object of ontology: *esse subsistens* is not a part of the general concept of *esse*. As we have seen above, *esse subsistens* has a causal priority so that its *esse* is not part of *ens commune*, but is rather the principle of any created participation. *Ens commune* has a created *esse*, distinct from the *esse* of the Creator. Therefore, God is not included in the subject of metaphysics; rather, God is the principle of this subject.

Since God is the principle of the subject of metaphysics, God is the end of metaphysics as a science. It can be reached by a *reductio*, a return to a principle that is universal because it is simple. “The human intellect knows universal being. For this reason, it naturally desires to know its cause, which is God alone.”²⁹ This inclination steers the intellect toward a God who is beyond common being (though not beyond being), because it is *ipsum esse*, the cause of every being, *ens commune*.

2. Separation

The issue of separation is developed in Thomas Aquinas’ commentary on Boethius.³⁰ In this text, Boethius exposit the objects of physics, mathematics, and theology. Physics is based on that which moves and is not separated from matter (*inabstracta*): its subject cannot be separated from matter. Mathematics is based on that which is without movement yet not separate from matter. Theology is based on that which is without movement and inseparable (*abstracta*).³¹ There are, however, different types of abstraction listed in q. 5, a. 1:

First, certain things depend *secundum esse* on matter and therefore they *must* exist in it. Among these things are those that cannot be considered (*secundum intellectum*) apart from it like physical objects, and those that

29. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, III, c. 25 (Turin: Marietti, 1961), no. 2066, 33: “Intellectus autem humanus cognoscit ens universale. Desiderat igitur naturaliter cognoscere causam ejus, quae solum Deus est.” [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles, III: Providence, Part I*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 102.]

30. Aquinas, *Super librum De Trinitate*, expositio cap. II, 160. [Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 14.]

31. In fact, Aquinas interprets as *inseparabilis* where Aristotle has *choriston* (separated), but he understands it in the same manner: the divine is inseparable because it is absolutely separated from matter. It cannot be separated from it because it cannot be with it (cf. *Super librum De Trinitate*, 160). [Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 14.]

can be abstracted from it that do not require matter to be comprehended (*secundum intellectum*) like mathematical objects.

Second, there are certain things that do not depend on matter *secundum esse* for they can exist without it. Among these are those that have never been in matter like God and the angels, which belong to what Aquinas calls “theology.” There are yet others that are not necessarily in matter like being, substance, quality, and potency and act, which are transcendental objects that belong to what is now called “ontology.”

Philosophical theology is based on a subject which is “that-which-is-not-necessarily-part-of-matter,” which can be called “transcendental,” and leads to that which is purely transcendent. Thus, metaphysics is the science of the transcendental, but the study of the divine is its purpose and fulfillment.³² There is also a double sense of separation, leading from abstract being to separated divinity. This avenue leads to the God beyond common being, because God is absolutely separate, more separate than the transcendentals.

3. Universality

Is a union with theology the ultimate purpose of metaphysics as in *The Book of Causes* or in Avicenna? Not exactly. The unity of metaphysics is given through an aspect of its subject: common, universal being, separate from matter and movement. However, there are two kinds of separation: an object that cannot be necessarily separate or necessarily, absolutely separated being. In the first case, we consider the subject of this science, which is being, and we follow what Thomas calls metaphysics. In the second case, we consider the principle of this subject, which leads us towards what he calls divine science. The second dimension is included in the first. However, it is not the ultimate meaning of metaphysics. It is presented in a restrictive manner by Thomas: “Now although the subject of this science is being in general, the whole of it is predicated of those things which are separate from

32. Cf. Jan A. Aertsen, “Die Lehre der Transzendentalien und die Metaphysik, Der Kommentar von Thomas von Aquin zum IV, Buch der *Metaphysica*,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 35 (1988): 293-316, to which I owe my analysis of [Aquinas’] commentary on Boethius. Also see *Super librum De Trinitate*, expositio cap II, 160, and q. 5, a. 1, 161 ss. [Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 14.]

matter both in their intelligible constitution and in being (*esse*).”³³ Even if the subject of metaphysics is being, even if it is principally an ontology, it can also be extended through its totality (in a dimorphic manner) to a theological dimension since God is an abstract [*abstracta*] object, but in another sense.

This ontotheological position is inspired by Aristotle, Book E.

The divine is a universal principle in a twofold sense: it is a universal cause (the principle of everything else) and, when it causes, it causes the universal being of everything. Thus, each being has its own *esse*, which is that which is most intimate to it and is the formal principle of its subsistence. The closer a form is to its principle, the more it is both universal and intimate to the thing in question.³⁴ God is simultaneously the principle cause and the formal principle. God is not only a cause, but also the giver of forms. God not only creates the forms that are the principles of action in creatures, but maintains their power and their activity.³⁵

In this interpretation, being is universal because it is first. The more being is universal, the more it is elevated in the hierarchy of being. The more it is common, the more it is proper to a particular thing. The more it is transcendent, the more it is immanent. The more it is anterior, the more it is simple and perfect.³⁶ Being is simultaneously the most eminent and

33. Thomas Aquinas, *In Met.*, Prooemium, § 8, 102 (Turin, p. 2): “Quamvis autem subjectum hujus scientiae sit ens commune, dicitur tamen tota de his quae sunt separata a materia secundum esse et rationem.” [Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN.: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), xxx.]

34. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae I Pars*, q. 105, a. 5: “Et quia forma Dei est intra rem, et tanto magis quanto consideratur ut prior et universalior, et ipse Deus est proprie causa ipsius esse universalis in rebus omnibus quod inter omnia est magis intimum rebus, sequitur quod Deus in omnibus intime operetur.” [Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1948), 519: “And since a form of a thing is within the thing, and all the more, as it approaches near to the first and universal cause; and because in all things God himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things; it follows that in all things God works intimately.”]

35. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae I Pars*, q. 105, a. 5: “Deus non solum est causa actionum in quantum dat formam quod est principium actionis [...] sed etiam sicut conservans formas et virtutes rerum.” [Eng. trans., 519: “And thus all agents act in virtue of God himself; He is the cause of action in every action...preserving the forms and powers of things.”]

36. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae I Pars*, q. 82, a. 3: “Quanto autem aliquid est simplicius et abstractius, tanto secundum se est nobilius et altius”; cf. also *ibid.*, ad 2: “illud quod est prius

the most universal, because it is both the act of everything and that which is most perfect in each of them. “[The Platonists maintained that] the more common something is, the more separate it is.”³⁷ This Platonic synthesis is a form of ontotheology par excellence, which I have called a theo-ontology.

This perspective is still accepted in the *Summae theologiae 1 Pars* (before 1268), but, as we have seen, it is rejected in the commentary on *The Book of Causes* (1272). The gap, of course, is not only chronological, it derives from different problematics and different contexts. One must recognize that the oeuvre of Thomas is not a system deduced from a singular principle. The purpose differs when it is a theological ascent toward the first principle (*Summa theologiae*) or a philosophical and philological exegesis of Aristotle.

By and large, in his commentaries on philosophy Thomas casts serious reservations on this subject perhaps in deference to the authority of the author on which he is commenting.

In his commentary on Book E (between 1270 and 1272), he writes: “However, we must remember that even though things which are separate from matter and motion in being and in their intelligible structure belong to the study of first philosophy, still the philosopher not only investigates these but also sensible things inasmuch as they are beings.”³⁸ One could, of course, consider a simpler synthesis of theology and philosophy like the interpretation of Avicenna, which combines separate divine being with separate being. “Unless, perhaps we may say, as Avicenna does, that common things of the kind which this science considers are said to be separate from matter in being [as in the divine], not because they are always without mat-

simpliciter et secundum naturae ordinem est perfectius.” [Eng. trans., 415: “Now the more simple and the more abstract a thing is, the nobler and higher it is in itself...”; ad 2: “But what precedes absolutely and in the order of nature is more perfect...”]

37. Thomas Aquinas, *In librum De causis expositio*, IV, iv, no. 98, 28: “Quanto aliquid est communius, tanto ponebant illud esse separatum.” [Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington D.C.: CUA Press, 1996), 30.]

38. Aquinas, *In Met.*, IV, 1, no. 1165 (ed. Turin, 298): “Advertendum est autem quod licet, ad considerationem primae philosophiae pertineant ea quae sunt separata secundum esse et rationem a materia et motu, non tamen solum ea sed etiam de sensibilibus, in quantum sunt entia, philosophus autem perscrutatur.” [Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN.: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), 402.]

ter, but because they do not necessarily have being in matter, as the objects of mathematics do.”³⁹ However, this is only a hypothesis, and for Thomas, a false hypothesis: it is based on the Platonic interpretation, which does not distinguish between two levels of abstraction. Founded on the subsistence of ideas, it accepts that essences really subsist and ignores the difference between mathematical abstraction and the separateness of absolute divinity. Ontology cannot be based on a theology.

4. Ontotheology

We are now ready to answer the initial question. If there is an ontotheological aspect of metaphysics, it is secondary, merely a concession. Why? Because Thomas Aquinas rightly rejects the dimorphic interpretation of being leading to a singular, ontotheological science. Theology has a higher rank than ontology, but it is not part of the scope of ontology even though it is its principle and its end.

In the commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, we have a noetic explication of this particular position. In this text Thomas explains the difference between *ratio* and *intellectus*.⁴⁰ *Ratio* involves sensible experience and is always discursive. This is why physics is a purely rational science. Since humans are rational animals, we could say that humans are physicists-animals. *Intellectus* is the kind of knowledge proper to spiritual substances. It is the beginning and end of the rational process. As a simple act of the intelligence of simple intelligibles, it is attained through a *resolution* or an analysis. Just as commonality is twofold (through causality or universality as in q. 5, a. 4), so also analysis is twofold. There is a *resolutio secundum esse* (an analysis according to the act of being), which leads to the highest causes, immaterial substances. There is also a *resolutio secundum rationem* (an analysis according to concepts), which leads to the most universal forms, common being and the transcendentals. The first is the aim of theology; the second is the aim of what Thomas calls metaphysics, and which we would call ontology.

39. Aquinas, *In Met.*, IV, 1, no. 1165: “Nisi forte dicamus, ut Avicenna dicit, quod huiusmodi communia de quibus haec scientia perscrutatur, dicuntur esse separata secundum esse, non quia semper sint sine materia; sed quia de necessitate habent esse in materia.” [Eng. trans., 402.]

40. Aquinas, *Super librum De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1, p. 201. [Eng. trans., 63ff.]

As we know,⁴¹ being is the most common object of thought; this is why it is simultaneously the proper subject of metaphysics and the proper object of the human intellect. However, knowledge of God in himself exceeds the power of the human intellect. God is the cause of being qua being,⁴² and not a part of it. Since God is the principle of everything yet without being part of that which he causes (Thomas rejects the notion of *causa sui*), God is the principle preceding all things, and we can only consider him relatively or negatively. A theological resolution exceeds the limits of our intellect. This is why analogy is so important for Thomas, and why our consideration of ontology stops with theology. The first aspect (that of being in general) stops where the second begins (that of God as the principle of being). In this sense, Heidegger is correct in his analysis of the Prologue to the commentary on the *Metaphysics*: metaphysics is not a singular science. The rational analysis of terms cannot be traced to a singular intelligible principle. However, this is also why Heidegger was wrong in his general definition of ontotheology, because this shows precisely that metaphysics is not an ontotheology.

Thus, the birth of metaphysics is not identical with discovering a first mover, which can be reached through another rational science, through physics.⁴³ Metaphysics begins with the consideration of abstract being, in matter yet capable of considering separated from it, and stops where separate *esse* begins, divinity, because this *esse* is the cause and principle of everything that metaphysics can consider. God remains beyond metaphysics.

This is why metaphysics does not allow for an ontological proof. An ontological proof implies that the *esse* (existence) of God can be grasped through its *ratio* (its concept). However, God is not included in our *ratio* of being; God is its principle. Contemplation of the principle in itself does not belong to metaphysics.

There cannot be a Platonic synthesis [of theology and ontology]. There are two different sciences, which ought not be confused even if the second

41. Aquinas, *De veritate* q. 1, a 1 and *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 78, a. 1.

42. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1, q. 44, a. 2: “Et ulterius aliqui erexerunt se ad considerandum ens in quantum est ens, et consideraverunt causam rerum non solum secundum quod sunt haec vel talia sed secundum quod sunt entia, [...] secundum omne illud quod pertinet ad esse illorum quocumque modo.” [Eng. trans., 230: “Then others there were who arose to the consideration of being as being, and who assigned a cause to things, not as these, or as such, but as beings [...] according to all that belongs to their being at all in any way.”]

43. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.

completes the first.

To all these objections we must also add the status of metaphysics for Thomas. Everything Thomas does aims toward theology, and metaphysics is for him only a program, given through several definitions of the science (especially in his commentary of Boethius' *De Trinitate*) and his commentary on Aristotle. He never developed a metaphysics on its own. We could even say more: Aquinas does not give to metaphysics the status of a rigorous science save in a broad sense. A rigorous science is based on univocal concepts, but as Thomas emphasizes being is not univocal. Metaphysics only works with analogical terms therefore it is only a science in a broad, relative sense.

Duns Scotus

By contrast, in Duns Scotus we have a univocal concept of being, which changes everything.

Duns Scotus also critiques the Neoplatonic synthesis,⁴⁴ but he is actually much more radical for two reasons.

First, the Neoplatonic synthesis is based on the idea that being is the most universal effect. And yet, this idea masks a *fallacia* [fallacy], a logical discrepancy concerning the meaning of “universal.” Scotus cites Avicenna: a cause and an effect can be universals according to power (*virtus*), according to perfection or according to predication. A universal of predication can be predicated of many things (*de pluribus*), a universal of potentiality is that which is most perfect in itself, and contains in itself more perfection than other things.

Being is not more universal according to perfection, but only according to predication. Being, when it is included among several other things, is not more perfect than those things with which it is included. Therefore, being is ultimately more universal according to predication, and its cause is more universal according to perfection. By contrast, God is the most universal cause according to perfection. If being is the most universal cause according to predication, this implies that an effect can only be the effect of being. However, nothing prevents being (the most universal effect according to predication) from being produced by an imperfect cause. God is first

44. Duns Scot, *Opus Oxoniense*, IV, d 1, q 1 § [7], ed. Wadding, t. 8, p. 10 a.

according to perfection, possessing being in the highest degree. However, being is first according to predication.

Thus, Scotus raises the very same objections that Thomas did against the Neoplatonic synthesis, but he does so in a more radical way: he directs his critiques against Thomas as well.

Second, Scotus critiques another thesis of Thomas: *esse simpliciter est proprius effectus Dei* [existence itself is the proper effect of God]. For Thomas, God alone gives *esse* to particular beings, and creatures can only prepare this divine gift by causing composition. For Scotus this is false, because every efficient cause that causes a composite being simultaneously causes its existence. Therefore, a composite being can be the efficient cause of *esse* for another composite being. A composite being can be caused by an agent without God giving the *being* of that composite being. Reciprocally, nothing can compel God who is absolutely free, which means that by divine right, in God's absolute power, God does not have to give being to a composite whose being has nevertheless already been produced by its cause. One could say simultaneously that this composite is and is not. In order to avoid these absurdities, we must recognize that causing a composite and giving it being are two sides of one and the same act.

Therefore, Scotus does not accept the traces of Neoplatonism still present in Thomas' interpretation. For Thomas, existence itself (*esse simpliciter*) is the proper effect of God and, thus, being (*esse*) is the proper end of creation. This is why God alone can create, giving being to each thing. Because God is subsisting *esse*, God can give *esse* universally to be participated in by all beings (*entia*). The commonality of being is simultaneously the principle of its causal participation. It explains why God transcends creation. The principle of universality is also the principle of causality.⁴⁵

For Scotus, it is very different and very simple. In the order of predication, the commonality of being extends to all things including God. God is included in the concept of being, which is first in the order of predication. God is not anterior to this concept, because there is nothing anterior to it in this order. God deserves the name First Being. But in the order of perfection, God is anterior to creatures. The two orders are coherent, since in

45. As mentioned by Etienne Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot, Introduction à ses positions fondamentales* (Paris: Vrin, 1952), 347: "For the argument of Aquinas to make sense universality had to be understood in a causal sense."

the order of causality and perfection God is understood as *ens primum*, the cause of everything else (creation), but in the order of predication, God is included in being, which is both the first object of the human intellect and of metaphysics. Through being, the predicative object of metaphysics, there is a relation of causality between the first term, God, and the second term, creation.

According to Thomas, the two orders are coordinated: the divine understood as *ipsum esse* is simultaneously a principle of commonality and causality. For Scotus, one order is subordinated to the other: the primacy of potentiality or causality is included in being, and subordinated to the primacy of predication. This has consequences in three domains: the status of the first concept, the universality of being, and the inclusion of God in a concept.

1. The Primacy of the Concept

In Scotus we can find that there is a univocal and common concept of being underlying the analogy of the term “being.” Underlying the term (*vox*) there is a univocal concept since all terms rely on an original imposition for their meaning. Being (*ens*) has been imposed through association with a simple notion, the *ratio essendi*. “‘Being’ (*ens*), however, is imposed from the act of being (*essendi*). But the act of being seems to be a simpler aspect (*ratio*) than the act of standing under (*substandi*). And therefore ‘being’ first occurs to the intellect with respect to that aspect (*rationem*) from which there is an imposition of the name, since it is the most simple.”⁴⁶ On the basis of the equivocity of the term “being,” we can deduce a simple and unequivocal concept, the act of being. There are two ways of conceiving being: “Otherwise, it is said that the same essence can be conceived under diverse meanings of conceiving and in one way a concept can be certain, and in another not. For being signifies the same thing that substance does. However, it happens that one can conceive the same essence under the aspect of being (*ratio essendi*) from which the name ‘being’ is imposed,

46. Duns Scot, *Super Praedicamenta*, q. 4, § (13) (ed. Vivès, 449b): “*Ens autem imponitur ab actu essendi, sed actus essendi videtur ratio simplicior quam actus substandi, et ideo ens primo occurrit intellectui quoad rationem a qua est nominis impositio, quia simplicissima.*” [John Duns Scotus, *Questions on Aristotle’s Categories*, trans. Lloyd A. Newton (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2014), 80.]

and not by conceiving it under the aspect of substantiality, from which the name ‘substance’ is imposed.”⁴⁷ Even if being is an equivocal term when predicated of substance and accident, there is a simpler meaning of being wherein it signifies only “to be” (existence), which precedes the division of the categories.

The univocity of being depends on three theses. First, there is a conceptual unity that represents all things together. Second, this unity is the unity of the *ratio essendi*, which is common and more certain than anything else and anterior to that which is uncertain. Third, this unity can consequently be predicated of everything real, of substance as well as accident, of God as well as creatures.

2. The Universality of Being

For Scotus, the subject of metaphysics is being and the transcendentals. Thus, he follows the very same path as Thomas. “This we call ‘metaphysics’, which is from ‘meta’, which means ‘transcends’, and ‘ycos’, which means ‘science’. It is, as it were, the transcending science, because it is concerned with the transcendentals.”⁴⁸

However, there is still a twofold meaning of the term *transcendens*. “The transcendent is whatever has no genus under which it is contained.”⁴⁹ Thus, it is legitimate to understand and to translate *transcendens* as “transcendental”: a term designated for being, unity, truth, etc. insofar as they extend beyond the limits of every genre and every category. Yet, we can also understand the term *transcendens* as signifying a transcendent being, God. Regarding the first sense of *transcendens*, the object of metaphysics is

47. Duns Scot, *Quaestiones super Metaphysicam* IV, 1, § [14] (ed. Vivès, 154b-155a): “Et uno modo potest conceptus esse certus, alio modo non; ens enim significat idem quod substantia tamen contingit concipere eandem essentiam sub ratione essendi a quo imponitur hoc nomen ens, et non concipiendo illam sub ratione substantialitatis.” [John Duns Scotus, *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, trans. Girard J. Etzkorn and Allan B. Wolter (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute Publication, 1997), 275.]

48. Duns Scot, *Quaestiones subtilissimae in Metaphysicam*, Prologue, § 5 (ed. Vivès, 4). [Scotus, *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, 7-8.]

49. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio*, 1 d 8, § 114: “Transcendens quodcumque nullum habet genus sub quo contineatur.” [For English, see <http://www.aristotelophile.com/current.htm> as of 1/7/2018. The translation is by Peter L.P. Simpson.] Cf. Olivier Boulnois, *Jean Duns Scot: Sur la connaissance de Dieu et l'univocité de l'étant* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), 242].

a common concept, indifferent and neutral, representing being in its totality. Regarding the second sense, the object of metaphysics is a specific being, determinate and infinite, that is known through its own concept. This two-fold sense of metaphysics provides a hinge between the two parts.

3. God in a Concept

Another consequence of Scotus' concept of univocity is the inclusion of God in a concept. If the concept of being is the first to form our intellect, God must be understood as a being among other beings, and not as the transcendent principle of every being. God is a *being*, and not the pure act of *existence* ("to be"). God is a *transcendens*, he is not beyond the transcendentals. This is why all the attributes of God, precisely for this reason, are transcendentals. "But it is not necessary that a transcendent, as transcendent, be said only of whatever being is convertible with the first transcendent, namely with being."⁵⁰

There is not a dimorphic metaphysics, being and the divine are not two sides of the same phenomena, but our knowledge of God adds a determination to the concept of being, if we can understand it precisely, as distinguished from all other things. There is a proper concept of God such that all that is positive, all perfections, can be predicated of God.

4. The Ontotheological Structure

The Scotist discovery of univocal being that is predicated of both God and creatures alike profoundly changed the status of metaphysics. Being becomes the object of a transcendental, neutral, indifferent, and universal knowledge. It is anterior to every theological consideration. If our knowledge of God implies knowledge of a univocal concept, the contrary is not true: the concept of being does not indicate any reference to the priority of God. Thus, metaphysics, the science of being qua being, can become – with its first object – an ontology, which will be anterior and indifferent to every philosophical theology.

Does this mean that our knowledge of God is now excluded from metaphysics? Certainly not: the knowledge of God comes at the end of

50. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio*, I, d 8, § 115: "Non oportet autem transcendens, ut transcendens, dici de quocumque ente nisi sit convertibile cum primo transcendente, scilicet ente." [*ibid.*]

metaphysics. But this science is expressed in the knowledge of being in a mediated manner as the end of a complex inquiry: “Every metaphysical inquiry about God proceeds in the following way: it considers the formal notion (*ratio*) of something, then it removes from that formal notion the imperfection that it has in creatures while retaining the formal notion [as such], to which it then attributes completely the highest perfection and in this way it attributes that notion to God.”⁵¹ In this new space of transcendental univocity, differing quiddities are the objects of three ways distinguished by Denys: affirmation (the way of perfection), negation (the way of imperfection), and causality or eminence (a way of supreme perfection). Thus, metaphysics occupies a place between the two senses of priority implied in a “first philosophy.” The priority of predication has for its subject being, which is the most simple and first object in the order of knowledge. The priority of causality or perfection leads to the principal object, God. There is a close link between ontology and theology, but the first science is autonomous, which can be considered independent and prior to every theological consideration. This new level of independence is obtained through a univocal conception of being. Being embraces God, and our knowledge of being does not depend on an analogous participation in God.

For this reason we can speak of an ontotheological structure of metaphysics: there are two parts of metaphysics: one is common to all its objects, the other is specific because it pertains to one part of being.

“Therefore, a entire transcendent metaphysics will be prior to the divine science, and there will be four theoretical sciences, one transcendent and three special sciences.”⁵² Consequently, theology as a special science is posterior to metaphysics, a transcendental science. This is far from the priority given by Thomas to the principle of common *esse*. Here, we have the first division of metaphysics into two modern sciences: ontology as *metaphysica generalis* and theology as *metaphysica specialis*. The first science is

51. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio*, I, d 3, § 39: “Omnis inquisitio metaphysica de Deo sic procedit, considerando formalem rationem alicuius et auferendo ab illa ratione formali imperfectionem quam habet in creaturis, et reservando illam rationem formalem et sic attribuendo illud Deo.” [John Duns Scotus, *On Being and Cognition: Ordinatio 1.3*, trans. John Van der Bercken (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 56. Bracket and italics in original quote.]

52. Duns Scot, *In Metaphysicam*, I, q 1, § 47 (ed. Vivès VII, 36 a): “Metaphysica transcendens est tota prior scientia divina, et ita essent quatuor scientiae speculativae, una transcendens, et aliae tres speciales.” [Scotus, *Questions on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, 57.]

independent of the latter, and the second is subordinated to the first. This is precisely what Heidegger rightly called ontotheology in the second sense.

5. Duns Scotus or Henry of Ghent?

Thus far we have responded to the initial question. There is definitely a historical beginning to the ontotheological structure of metaphysics.

However, there remains still another question, an ancillary, historical yet important question: when precisely did it begin? If the turn toward ontotheology is already complete in Duns Scotus, couldn't one also say that it was already in place before him, and that he is only teasing out its most drastic implications? This is the position of E.-H. Weber, who we have already considered, but it is also that of P. Porro. For both interpreters, Henry of Ghent developed the first ontotheology.

Using a distinction already outlined by others between an ontotheological foundation (in the commentators on Aristotle) and an ontotheological structure (in Duns Scotus),⁵³ Porro points out that ontotheology is “evidently taking on here two different senses: the, so to speak, Heideggerian sense (and if in this sense it is true that metaphysics as ontotheology is inescapable, then it is legitimate to speak of a single internal transition from an ontotheological foundation to an ontotheological structure), and the more original and narrow ‘Kantian’ sense in which the term ontotheology names a metaphysics that appropriates and is based on the ontological argument. In this case, the innovation of Duns Scotus is the beginning of modern ontotheology, mediated, naturally, by way of Suarez.”⁵⁴

If the defining feature of Henry of Ghent's metaphysics is that the issue of the existence of God is made part of his essence, it is clear that this is “a decisive step on the way to ontotheology.”⁵⁵ In this case, the ontotheological turn is first made in Henry of Ghent, and Duns Scotus “did nothing more

53. O. Boulnois, *Jean Duns Scot: Sur la connaissance de Dieu et l'univocité de l'étant* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1988), 75: “If the relation between ontology and theology is present in Scotist metaphysics, the autonomy of the first science makes it legitimate to speak of an ontotheological structure rather than a foundation; that is, an architectonic arrangement by which parts are distinguished and conjoined.”

54. Pasquale Porro, *Enrico di Gand, la vie delle proposizioni universali* (Levante: Bari, 1990), 127.

55. Porro, *Enrico di Gand*, 130.

than radicalize...certain motifs already available to him.”⁵⁶ Porro continues, “[i]f the principle of the possibility of the existence of a being is entailed within being itself as a simple non-contradiction of the concept, the way toward the modern formulation of the ontological proof is already cleared.”⁵⁷

It is undeniable that Henry of Ghent’s metaphysics (before Duns Scotus’) realizes one of the principal traits of ontotheology as defined by Kant: making possible an ontological proof. Nevertheless, upholding an analogy between being (*ens*) derived through abstraction and God’s subsisting existence (*esse*) prevents Ghent from satisfying the two other fundamental traits of ontotheology: knowing the totality of being in a single representation and including God in the same concept of being.

Therefore, determining the beginning of ontotheology requires nuance; everything depends on where one places the emphasis: if in the Kantian sense one calls “ontotheology” every instance of metaphysics that admits the ontological proof, then the ontotheological turn had occurred long before Scotus and we ought to consider Henry of Ghent with respect to this turn. If one takes “ontotheology” in the more precise sense defined by Heidegger, ontotheology begins with Scotus, and in this case the decisive question concerns the univocity of being.

Conclusion

Heidegger’s interpretation is ambiguous. However, it is effective precisely because of its ambiguity, and because its ambiguousness is meant to describe an ambivalence within metaphysics itself.

The concept of ontotheology has a twofold meaning. First, it refers to the essence of metaphysics as a science under a dimorphic account, since it contemplates at the same time and from the same point of view the human and divine. Second, it refers to the history of metaphysics insofar as it gradually unfolds a link between two domains, being in general and one of its parts, the divine. For reasons of clarity, I have called the first sense an ontotheological foundation and the second an ontotheological structure, even though Heidegger uses both expressions indistinguishably. However, this ambiguity is essential to his argument to make history correspond to an

56. Porro, *Enrico di Gand*, 131.

57. Porro, *Enrico di Gand*, 136.

essence of metaphysics through a rigorous teleology. The first sense of ontotheology explains the second, because the dimorphic constitution of “Aristotelian” metaphysics unfolds according to an expressly bipartite structure in Scholastic metaphysics (inspired by Scotus).

Let us now return to our overview of history; we can distinguish four periods:

First, it must be acknowledged that Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* only partially meets the Heideggerian definition of ontotheology. Except indirectly in one book, Book E (Book K is likely apocryphal), the Aristotelian account of metaphysics does not turn toward a unified ontotheology.

Second, in contrast, this inseparable foundation of ontology and theology is present in the Neoplatonic theory of metaphysics, and it continues in Avicenna and the *Liber de Causis*. Therefore, it is established in the wake of the *Theology of Aristotle*, a Neoplatonic synthesis of aspects taken from Proclus and Plotinus, in order to arrive at the ultimate identification of metaphysics and theology, of Aristotelianism and Platonism. This ontotheological foundation considers God to the degree it considers being according to an analogy between the recipient of being and its participation in being par excellence.

Third, on the other end of this evolution, metaphysics based on Scotus corresponds to that which I have called an ontotheological structure (linking together a universal science with a specific science), which entails an ontological, neutral, and non-theological account of being. It remains to be seen how this was linked to acceptance of the ontological proof (this is the second meaning of ontotheology). And yet, this structuring still contributed to a dimorphic interpretation of being because of an ambiguity concerning the meaning of “transcendental.” It could either mean a separate, absolute being or the universality of common being.

Fourth, however, for Thomas Aquinas neither the first nor the second interpretation of metaphysics works. For him there is an account of common, transcendental being. There is also a causal account of principles as well as an account of a separate divinity. What is for Heidegger a disparate *mélange* is in fact a collaboration of different sciences. We have ontology and philosophical theology, not a unified science called ontotheology.

Thus, we see that Heidegger’s teleological interpretation works by virtue of its ambiguity. If we study ontotheology in Aristotle, it is not for the purpose of finding an essence of metaphysics that extends to all others, but

only for its overall development and subsequent interpretation. If we study ontotheology's historical development, it is not for metaphysics in general, in its essence, but only for a certain period from Scotus to Kant.

Nevertheless, Heidegger's approach has proved very useful. If we historicize the concept of ontotheology, we are obliged to offer a critique that complicates it. We would not have been able to reconstitute our understanding of it had it merely been left alone.