

GENEALOGY OF NIHILISM

Philosophies of nothing and the
difference of theology

Conor Cunningham



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PREFACE

This book does not seek to present a complete historical genealogy of nihilism, even though there is a loose chronology directing the progression of the chapters. What is rather offered is a genealogy which endeavours, first of all, to isolate certain crucial historical moments in the history of nihilism, moments which at time reveal clearly an intermittent development of prior influences. In the second place, I seek to isolate in all these moments a certain peculiar logic at work.

What am I to do, what shall I do, what should I do, in my situation, how proceed? By *aporia* pure and simple.¹
(Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*)

There is, I suggest, an *aporia* involved in finitude. How do we know that to *think* is significant? Or rather, how do we know that *thought thinks*? It seems we require a 'thought of thinking'. However, if thought requires its own thought, then it can either be another thought or something other than thought. The former would initiate an infinite regress, for the supplementary thought would require its own thought, and so on, while the latter would ground thought in that which is not thought. But this means that all thinking would rest upon its own absence: thoughtlessness. This would, it seems, return us to the previous position. There, thought had presumed its own significance, which is not to think at all.

The aforementioned quandary can be seen throughout the history of philosophy. We pay witness to it in the dualisms employed to cope with this *aporia*. For example: Lacan and Deleuze ground sense in non-sense; Derrida grounds the Text in the Nothing, which is said to reside outside it; Heidegger grounds Being in *das Nicht*; Hegel, finitude in the infinite; Fichte, I in Non-I; Schopenhauer, representation in will; Kant, phenomenal in the noumenal; Spinoza, Nature in God, and God in Nature. The pervasiveness of such dualisms testifies to the importance of this *aporia*. What I suggest is that each of these philosophical dualisms

rests within a monism that governs their generation. Part II argues that theology is able to avoid such dualisms and their concomitant hidden monisms, through a Trinitarian understanding of creation, which contends with the *aporia* of thought in a more beneficial manner. With regard to philosophy, it is suggested that despite the diversity already indicated, two basic ‘traditions’ are developed to deal with the *aporia*.

The first tradition is that which seeks to supplement thought only with another thought: *I think thought thinks*. This I equate with ontotheology. Ontotheology initiates an infinite regress; consequently, all its questions are asked by an answer: *the something*. (Plato addresses a similar problem in the *Meno*.) The second tradition is that which endeavours to contend with this *aporia* by supplementing thought with something other than thought. This I refer to as *meontotheology*. This is an appropriate name because it stems from what is termed *meontology*. *Meontology* is evident in the work of Plotinus when he places the One beyond being, which means that being is grounded in non-being (*meon*). When Deleuze grounds thought in what he calls ‘nonthought’ he appears to place his philosophy within a *meontotheological* legacy. The same goes for Heidegger when he speaks of Being by speaking of *das Nicht*. This tradition does not, therefore, evoke the notion of *the ultimate something* employed by ontotheology. Instead, *the ultimate nothing* governs its logic. In contrast to ontotheology, questions are not asked by one final answer: *the something*. Rather, there is but *one question* asked an infinity of times by *the nothing*. It is argued that both traditions are nihilistic. But I suggest that the first leads to nihilism, while the latter is the realised *logic* of nihilism.²

The Nothing as Something

Being is by nature what-is-not (*das Nichtseyende*).³
(F. Schelling)

[A]ll that exists lives only in the lack of being (*manque-à-être*).⁴
(Jacques Lacan)

It is possible to argue that the logic of nihilism is made manifest in the age-old metaphysical (ontotheological) question: *why something rather than nothing?* The logic of nihilism reads this question with a particular intonation. That is, why something? Why not nothing? Why can the nothing not do the job of the something? This leads me to define the logic of nihilism as a sundering of the something, rendering it nothing, and then having the nothing be after all *as something*.⁵ Indeed, each of the philosophical dualisms involved above can embody this logic. For example, Spinoza, who is discussed in Part I, Chapter 3, has a dualism-within-monism of a single substance that is God or Nature. It is argued

that this epitomises the logic of nihilism because each is never present except in the other: *God is made manifest in Nature, Nature manifests in God*. This allows Spinoza to have both in the absence of each. And this is to construe the nothing as something. Another example is that of Hegel, whose work is examined in Part I, Chapter 5. Hegel has a dualism within a monism of *Geist* that is both the finite in the infinite and the infinite in the finite. This is more easily understood if one uses the analogy of a *Gestalt* effect of aspect perception. Take the example of Jastrow's *duck-rabbit*.⁶ One either sees the duck *or* the rabbit – never both at the same time. The mind oscillates between the two. But what must be remembered is that the appearance of two (God or Nature, duck or rabbit) disguises the *one* picture upon which they are made manifest. In this way there is only ever one, but this one picture is able to *provide* the appearance of two despite their actual alternating absences: nothing *as* something; the completely absent rabbit as duck, which is yet equally the completely absent duck as rabbit. Likewise, the finite or the infinite are but *Geist*, God and Nature are but *Substance*. Yet *Geist* only occurs as the insistent nothing of the infinite, which is also the insistent nothing of the finite; *Substance* only occurs as the insistent nothing of God, which is alternatively the insistent nothing of Nature.

An important word in this book is *provide*. 'Provide' etymologically stems from the word *videre*, meaning to see, and *pro*, meaning before. This word is employed in relation to nihilism so as to bring out the logic of the nothing *as* something. It performs this task because it can be made to suggest that nihilism 'provides' what it does not itself have – namely being. In this way for Spinoza, God 'provides' Nature and vice versa. This provision is referred to as the *provenance* of nihilism.

Nihilism, therefore, endeavours to have the nothing *as* something; it provides something out of nowhere. Such notions sound abstruse, and yet are characteristically exemplified in modern fields of learning. An example would be in the philosophy of mind, where an almost fanatical effort is made by some to reduce consciousness to nothing, at least nothing significant – yet still maintain that this pre-conscious essence of consciousness *provides* consciousness. Certain forms of evolutionary biology do the same in so far as they articulate the person purely in terms of genetic makeup, natural selection and so on. A notion such as the *genome* can act as a mechanism that allows phenomena to be reduced to their parts, while permitting the whole to remain as an epiphenomenon. Thus from one perspective the genome is an invisible abstract 'nothing', but from another the epiphenomenon of the biological body is itself the nothing; again we have two mutually exclusive aspects: genetic duck or actual rabbit. This is what one commentator calls the univocal Esperanto of the molecule.⁷ Even the search for life elsewhere in the universe embodies the logic of the nothing *as* something. It does so because such

efforts are, in some sense, guided by a wish to relativise life here: if we find life elsewhere life is no longer as significant. Cosmology often repeats such sentiments in a different form, because the pursuit to understand the beginning of life does in a sense eradicate that beginning; the before the universe is before 'before', just as we now have the living without life, and consciousness without consciousness. As one Nobel Prize-winning biologist puts it: 'Biologists no longer study life'⁸ – which is another way of paraphrasing Michel Foucault's observation: 'Western man could constitute himself within his language . . . only in the opening created by his own elimination.'⁹ Indeed, life has become a 'sovereign vanishing point' within every organism.¹⁰ Are we not become, as Doyle says, '[A] meat puppet run by molecular machines?'¹¹ Is this what Blanchot means when he says that 'our suicides precede us'?¹² Discourses, such as Biology, appear now to be dealing with cadavers.¹³ This is the nothing *as* something.

Part I traces a somewhat loose genealogy of the logic of nihilism as it has been defined above. Chapter 1 begins with Plotinus, for it is he who takes the One beyond being. It could be suggested that Plato is also guilty of this, but as Gadamer has pointed out: 'Plato's one is not at all a Neoplatonic *hen* (One).'¹⁴ This is true because Plotinus' One is *epekeina noeseos*, which involves a 'double beyond';¹⁵ the Plotinian One is beyond being (*ousia*) and also beyond thought (*noesis*).¹⁶ By contrast, for Plato the Good is the unifying one of the many,¹⁷ which grounds the Logos. Consequently, I place the 'beginning' of the genealogy developed below with him. It is Plotinus' *meontology* which spells the 'beginning' of the logic of nihilism. Yet this is true only when Plotinus' *meontology* is combined with the Neoplatonic understanding of causality, whereby *one comes from one*, and the element of causal necessity that this involves.

From Plotinus I turn to Avicenna, Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham, each of whom, it is argued, develops the logic of the nothing *as* something. What is important in this chapter is the introduction of the idea of a *univocity of non-being*. The univocity of non-being embodies the indifference being comes to display in relation to both God and actuality. That is to say, Avicenna develops the notion that metaphysics is about being, and that being prescinds from a consideration of both God and creatures, as it is indifferent to both. It is suggested that this notion, which is carried further by Ghent, Scotus and Ockham, is secretly a corollary of the Neoplatonist understanding of causality, its *meontology* and its necessitarianism. It is really because being, taken in mainly conceptual terms as univocal, does not concern itself more with existence than with nonexistence, that it does not concern itself more with God than with creatures, and is thereby unable truly to think their difference. Bearing in mind the *meontological* impulse which governs the birth of this logic, it seems fair – conceptually if not

historically – to characterise this univocity as one of non-being rather than being.

Part I, Chapter 2 examines the notion of intuitive cognition as found in Scotus and Ockham, doing so in the hope of demonstrating the logic of the nothing *as* something at work in this Scotist–Ockhamist doctrine. Chapter 3 turns to the work of Spinoza, and substantiates the points made above in relation to Spinoza’s monism. Chapter 4 discusses Kant, arguing that his philosophy embodies the logic of the nothing *as* something, in so far as each of the *Critiques* ‘provides’ something in the distinct absence of that which is purportedly given. For example, the first *Critique* endeavours to ‘say’ something about ‘truth’, in such a way that truth is made to apply only to a world of appearance. In a way, then, the ‘nothing’ that does not appear ‘provides’ appearances, which yet as only appearances are themselves ‘nothing’. Chapter 5 examines the work of Hegel. Just as Kant causes everything to *disappear*, Hegel causes everything to *vanish* within a univocity of *Geist*, which has two alternating modes: the finite and the infinite. Chapter 6 discusses Heidegger’s understanding of Being. Since Heidegger’s Being rests on *das Nicht* it is argued that his philosophy falls within a Plotinian legacy. The last chapter of Part I offers an interpretation of Derrida, one that suggests that his philosophy combines both Plotinus and Spinoza. In so doing, he too develops the logic of the nothing *as* something, which he fails to deconstruct; Derrida has a dualism of Text and Nothing, which is akin to Spinoza’s Nature and God, and this dualism likewise remains within a monism – now of *différance*, the new substance.

It is hoped that by the end of this section what will be apparent is the meontological (*meontotheological*) impulse involved in nihilism. For each thinker will, to some degree, have been shown to have a constitutive ‘Nothing’ that resides outside the ‘Text’ it enables. When Derrida comes to state that there is ‘nothing outside the text’, what may well seem now obvious is the ‘traditional’ nature of such a tactical pronouncement. Here are a number of examples. Plotinus has the One, as non-being, outside the ‘Text’ of *nous*; the same goes for Avicenna, whose essenceless God resides outside or before the generation of intelligence. Ghent, Scotus and Ockham develop and employ, to a greater or lesser extent, an intensional modality, one that places possibility outside the domain of the real, including God. Descartes, somewhat under the influence of Scotus’ and Ockham’s conception of divine omnipotence, constructs the ‘Text’ of the *cogito* by his ‘method of doubt’ which enables him to suspend (or bracket) existence. Spinoza has Substance reside outside the aspectual ‘Text’ of God or Nature, and it is this Substance which forces God to appear only in Nature, and Nature to appear only in God. Kant constructs the ‘Text’ of the phenomenal only by the no-thingness of the

noumenal which lies beyond it. Hegel has the ‘Text’ of the finite by placing the infinite ‘outside’ it, to the degree that every finite manifestation is both enabled and negated by this infinitude. Husserl generates the ‘Text’ of the phenomenal only by bracketing (*epoché*) the question of existence; Heidegger has the ‘Text’ of Being only by invoking *das Nicht*; Deleuze has the ‘Text’ of sense only by having a non-sense outside it; both Sartre and Lacan have existence only within the lack of being. Levinas can only exist in a manner which is *otherwise* than being, which means that he too must have something constitutive outside the ‘Text’ of being; Badiou has the ‘Text’ of what he calls the event, by way of the *void* which resides outside it. Consequently, we can understand why Badiou asserts that man is ‘sustained by non-being (*non-étant*)’.¹⁸ From the above it seems fair to suggest that Derrida’s position is not atypical: what Part II of this book will have to cope with is a possible riposte, one that argues that theology’s doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* places it, too, within a similar predicament. Another important point is that the Plotinian notion of causality, in which only one comes from one, plagues most of the thinkers who appear below. For example, Derrida’s nothing can only allow for *one* text; this univocity appears again and again throughout the following chapters.

Part II, Chapter 8 offers a preliminary critique of nihilism, one which is heuristically useful but less than conclusive. I then begin to develop an alternative logic ungovernable by the logic of alternating absence, and irrefutable by it. This is a theological logic. It takes the form of a discourse that articulates itself in terms of analogy, participation, the transcendentals, and divine ideas. Chapter 9 takes up many of the themes of Chapter 8 and seeks to deepen their validity. It examines what it means to have knowledge of something, arguing that knowledge relates to difference. Consequently, paradigmatic knowledge is God’s knowledge of creation, as this knowledge knows difference to the extent that it is able to create difference, and other knowledge is only possible as an approximation to this: so as participation in divine and angelic knowledge and as anticipation of the *beatific vision*. Chapter 10 re-examines the logic of nihilism, arguing that its logic of nothing *as* something can be construed in a somewhat positive light, in so far as this logic can point to the idea of creation *ex nihilo*: nihilism’s notion of creation *ex nihilo* is presented with particular reference to Deleuze and Badiou, and then to Sartre, Lacan and Žižek. In this way, there is a certain place for a *meontotheological* logic, which, however, cannot stand on its own, for on its own it too becomes monistic. It must be supplemented by ‘theo-ontology’ – yet the non-dominance of God by being retains a certain meontological moment; but this moment does not simply take us *beyond* being, rather, being is itself beyond.¹⁹ In other words, being *qua* being *is* beyond. This is what Blondel called the ‘beyond

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of thought; not something beyond thought, but the beyond *of* thought, which being is.²⁰

The 'discovery' that nihilism offers the possibility of a doctrine of creation should not wholly surprise us, for was it not Newman who spoke of the 'dispensation of Paganism'? Consequently, Paganism was an ore to be mined for the truth it contained. Indeed, this caused Newman to move away from an approach that was 'either/or', to one of 'both/and'. This is certainly to be encouraged. Yet it may be fair to suggest that Radical Orthodoxy deepens this principle. For it too calls us to move from 'either/or' to 'both/and'. Yet this move is somewhat radicalised, to the degree that it becomes an approach of 'both/and – either/or'. For is it not true, that if God is said to be anywhere, God is nowhere; but if God is somewhere, God is everywhere?

Notes

- 1 Beckett (1955), p. 291.
- 2 The word nihilism was first used by Jacobi; see Gillespie (1995), pp. 275–276, fn. 5.
- 3 Schelling (1997), p. 141.
- 4 Lacan (1992), p. 294. See Part II, Chapter 10 for a discussion of Lacan.
- 5 Although I did not derive my usage of this phrase from Schelling, he too speaks of the nothing *as* something. There is a similarity in meaning, in that the word 'as', in nothing as something, is meant to signify that the nothing is not actually something but is *as if it were*; see Schelling (1994), pp. 114–118.
- 6 See Jastrow (1900).
- 7 Doyle (1997), p. 42.
- 8 Jacob (1973), p. 306.
- 9 Foucault (1973), p. 197.
- 10 Foucault (1971), p. 277.
- 11 Doyle (1997), p. 36.
- 12 Blanchot (1986), p. 5.
- 13 For the idea that living beings are approached in modern discourse as if they were cadavers, see Part II, Chapters 8 and 10.
- 14 Gadamer (1986b), p. 137.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Badiou (2001), p. 14. For Badiou on the nature of the event see Badiou (1988).
- 19 On theo-ontology see Marion (1995) and Milbank and Pickstock (2001), p. 35.
- 20 *L'Action* (1936), pp. 308–309; quoted in Schmutz (1999), p. 182; italics mine.

Part I

PHILOSOPHIES OF
NOTHING

It is fitting to say and to think this: that what is is. For it can be, whereas nothing cannot.

(Parmenides, Fragment Six)

The sophist runs off into the darkness of that which is not.

(Eleatic stranger, in Plato's *Sophist*)

One sticks one's finger into the soil to tell by the smell in what land one is. I stick my finger into existence – it smells of nothing.

(Kierkegaard, *Repetition*)

1

TOWARDS NOTHING

Plotinus, Avicenna, Ghent, Scotus and Ockham

This chapter examines some aspects of the work of Plotinus, Avicenna, Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. My intention is to draw out the operation of the logic of nihilism. I do not for a moment argue that the thinkers discussed here are truly 'nihilists'. All that is being endeavoured here is to argue that there is an element in each of their work that does attempt to have nothing be *as* something.

Audacity: to be without being

For both Plotinus and Heidegger, the Nothing is the impetus of our approach to what is most real in the world, although beyond essence and existence: the One, or Being. This is also an important point in Derrida's analysis.¹

(Eli Diamond)

In Hesiod's *Theogony* we are told the tale of a divine drama involving tolmatic patricide and mutilation, which is the very advent of the world. Ouranos, the highest god, fathers wild children whom he hates. Because of this hate, Ouranos buries these children in the bosom of the earth, where they lie like seeds. The earth sets out to free these children. She encourages Kronos, 'a most terrible child',² who is the first son, to attack his 'lecherous' father.³ Kronos does so, castrating Ouranos in the process. In this way Kronos takes his father's place, and he in turn fathers sons with Rheia after forcing himself upon her.⁴ These children are 'glorious', yet Kronos fears them for they might avenge Ouranos their grandfather. As a result Kronos swallows all the children, keeping them within himself. But Rheia hides one of these sons, who is called Zeus. Zeus is allowed to grow in strength and resolve, until the time when he attacks his father, binding Kronos with chains and emancipating his brothers.

Plotinus utilises this myth to explain the eternal procession of all from the One. For Plotinus Ouranos is the One, while Kronos is Intellect and

Zeus is Soul.⁵ The myth encapsulates, in Plotinus' rather sanitised version, the movement of emanation, which arises *contra* the Gnostics by way of contemplation, and not discursive and agonistic activity. The One produces Kronos without need, but instead out of a plenitude which overflows. This mode of 'making' is external to the progenitor. When Kronos in turn gives birth to a 'beautiful progeny' he does so within himself, but for Plotinus this is not, as for Hesiod, a result of hate. For Kronos is said to love and adore his sons. Indeed, it is this love which causes Kronos to swallow them – thought remains inside the mind. But one 'stands apart': this is Zeus (Soul). And it is this standing forth which makes manifest the external world. Furthermore, this last child, who brings about the corporeal world, imitates his grandfather (Ouranos) since his generation is apparently external. For Plotinus the One would flow forever were it not for the castration carried out by Kronos. This castration restricts the flow of the One which in turn allows for the advent of the intelligible. It is this 'calling halt' that enables the dualism of subject-object, which is the basis of thought *per se*. If there was no cessation, then there would be no possible conceptualisation or *noesis*. But because this occurs within the belly of Kronos ('fullness'; Saturn) there would still fail to arise any visible world.⁶ Plotinus has Zeus perform this task by 'standing forth' in the most audacious of manners. Yet here again there is no internecine strife. For Plotinus, Kronos hands over the governance of the world to Zeus in a most willing manner.⁷ Nonetheless it will be argued that this myth epitomises the immanence involved in nihilism. For what proceeds from the One, which is beyond being and beyond preceding, must in a sense remain within its placeless providing.

Thus since Non-being is the father of all that *is*, there is a sense in which the *reditus* (to non-being) precedes the *exitus* (to being).⁸ In other words, that which comes from the One 'follows' a (me)ontological return which ensures that its necessity does not infringe the simple, autarchical, supremacy of the One. This means that what emanates from the One, being, *is not*, in so far as to *be* is an inferior mode of *existence* compared to Non-being which is the only entity that really *is* (the really real). It is for this reason that Non-being can necessarily produce being without infringing simplicity, because to be is nothing. And as comparatively nothing, being does not actually escape the One, but remains immanent to it; being is in this sense an internal production. This is made possible by the protective negations which Plotinus employs at a methodological level throughout the *Enneads*.

To need: Nothing

The One *cannot* be alone (this is also the case with Avicenna's God, Henry of Ghent's, Duns Scotus', William of Ockham's, Suarez', Spinoza's, Kant's and Hegel's).⁹ If this is true, how will Plotinus account for that which is 'produced' without reducing the status of the One? In other words, how can the One remain One? This ancient problematic here gives rise to certain philosophical moves which predispose the generation of the aforementioned nihilistic logic. Plotinus develops a *meontological* philosophy in which non-being is the highest principle. The One is beyond or *otherwise than being*.¹⁰ This will, it is hoped, protect its simplicity. The consequence of such a move is a series of negations which will give rise to a fully immanentised realm, one that may accommodate the nihilistic logic of nothing *as* something.

We can identify at least four prophylactic negations. The first is that of 'tolmatic' language, which is to say, language that implies a fall from a state of grace: *to be is to be fallen*. Although Plotinus sets himself against the Gnostics on just this point he cannot, it seems, help but utilise their logic of creation as a fallen state. By so doing, he ensures that that which *is* becomes subordinate to that which is not, a consequence to be continually repeated. The second negation arises because in simply not being the One that which *is* is not: *to be is not to be*. So all that which emanates from the One is nothing, because it has being. The third negation is the 'negation of negation': the ineluctable return to the One. This return, as has been said, in a sense precedes every exit. The fourth negation concerns a series of repetitions of the original negation of the One itself. At some point each hypostasis imitates the One in its contemplative non-production of that which is.¹¹ Plotinus, *contra* the Gnostics, relies on contemplation to engender production. But the nature of this contemplation is, in a sense, non-production, since being consults nothing (the One) and repeats nothing in the innermost core of everything.

Thus that which proceeds from the One returns to the One – is always already returning. This desiring return is the contemplation of each emanation's nothingness. In this way the return precedes every departure, for every departure is but the 'embodiment' of a return. But this *provision* will be incomprehensible unless we remember Hesiod. For it was in recalling the *Theogony* that we learnt of Kronos giving birth to sons *within* himself. Now we have also learnt that it is characteristic of both the One and the Soul to produce externally. Yet I have argued that we can only understand the emanation from the One as that which, in a sense, takes place within its cavernous belly. How is this reconcilable with the idea of external generation?

The One's differentiation from all else cannot be spatial, for that would set something over and against it. So difference must, it seems, take place within and through the One: 'The One does not sever itself from it [all else], although it is not identical with it.'¹² (Hegel argues for a similar understanding in relation to the infinite and the finite.)¹³ Plotinus is unable to posit an ontological difference: we see this to the degree that the One can produce only one effect, doing so necessarily. That is to say, the One re-produces itself in every emanation: the One is non-being and *being is not*. In this way the One produces nothing ontologically different from itself. For all difference, that is, being, fails to register a real distinction between itself and its cause. Why? Because any reality a being might be said to have would be its non-being, for only the One's non-being is truly real (or *really real*). Difference between the One and what falls beneath it is noticed only by an aspectual differentiation: like the aforementioned *Gestalt* effect of the *duck-rabbit*; but it must be remembered that both aspects manifest themselves on *one* picture.

Plotinus does hint strongly at the notion of a 'cavernous' – internal – *provision*, as he states that the universe is in the soul and that the soul is in the intelligible.¹⁴ For each causes only one effect which must remain immanent to the cause as a result of causation's merely ontic logic. What is meant by this is that the One must look to an external logic, or rubric, which dictates and explains what difference is. In this way the One does not *create*, for the One cannot create difference, but must, instead, be protected from it. (It is argued in Part II that this is not the case for the Trinitarian God of Christian theology, for the Trinity creates difference from divine sameness.)¹⁵ Furthermore, Plotinus asserts that the 'authentic [all] is contained within the nothing'.¹⁶ Bréhier comments on this idea by speaking of the reabsorption of all into 'undifferentiated being'.¹⁷ So too does Bouyer.¹⁸ We know that for Plotinus the One is *otherwise than being*,¹⁹ and that every addition is from non-being.²⁰ Indeed, we have only been as persons because of non-being.²¹ This does suggest that the place of being is within the cavernous *belly* of non-being. Plotinus calls the world the soul's cave, and more pertinently he suggests that 'to depart does not consist in leaving in order to go elsewhere'.²² It seems that the many which flows from the fecundity of the One does so only within the One. Indeed, as Gilson suggests, that which is *provided* 'loses itself in the darkness of some supreme non-being and of some supreme unintelligibility'.²³

One: Audacity

Let us take a closer look at the idea of the One. We know that what is outside the One, in tolmatic terms, is by way of a certain audacity, a wish

to be apart from all else: To 'desire to exist independently. It wearies of dwelling with another and withdraws into itself.'²⁴ These are, as Torchia points out, 'illegitimate acts of self assertion'.²⁵ This audacity is usually interpreted from the perspective of the One. But the positioning of the One as opposed to all else below is more ambiguous. The One (like Avicenna's God) cannot be alone. The One cannot be alone because that which proceeds from its plenitude does so necessarily. Furthermore, the One may well require that which emanates so that it can itself *be* the One. For Plotinus the One is self sufficient, yet this autarchical status may be achieved only by default. If there were no emanations there would be the nihilism of pure undifferentiated 'being' which may threaten the possibility of the One.²⁶ As Plotinus says, 'something besides unity (the One) there must be or all would be indiscernibly buried, shapeless within that unbroken whole'.²⁷ If there was only the One it might be unable to be the One, for we know for certain it must produce. But if the One requires company, that which accompanies it must be nothing because of this necessity, if simplicity is to be protected. In being nothing the One and the many are equivalent; this many is but the one that comes from the One. In this way the one that is produced is nothing. The One needs this one which is nothing. But in needing nothing it needs nothing but itself (for the One *is* non-being).

From this it may well be possible to consider the One as the first audacity. For the One endeavours to be apart from all else as the One. The One is this desire to be within itself and apart from all else. Furthermore, it is the desire to *be* without being. The One endeavours to be apart from all else but within the presence of a necessarily produced other from which it seeks to withdraw. If this is true, then the One may curiously be the idea of finitude: a finite immanent reality. The One is its unity, the *many* its difference (in the same way that Spinoza's God is the unity of Nature's many).

If the One is the first audacious unity, then we can think of this unity as the idea of a reality, a given, about and from which nihilism can speak. The One is, then, by way of a foundational circumscription that is definitive or absolute. As the finite leaves the One, standing apart from it, the One leaves the finite, standing apart from it. We must consider the One as the formation of the finite in an absolute sense. Finitude projects itself, becoming something it is not. What it becomes is indeed the finite, the idea of a stable place, fully present, *viz.*, immanent to itself. This finitude must be 'One' if it is to sustain its self-identity and so exclude appeals to a transcendent source.

To accomplish this, the 'finite' must become nothing, for only in becoming nothing will it avoid transcendence. If it is nothing, about what would transcendence speak? If finitude were something it would also be 'nothing' (as gift).²⁸ But in being nothing, being nothing in being at all,

it can speak itself utterly and completely. If this is the case, then the flight from the One is also the flight of the 'One'. The audacious standing apart of the finite from the One is the constitution of the finite as 'One'. We must remember that the Greeks used the term 'one' because they did not have a figure for zero.²⁹ Plotinus' One can be beneficially considered as zero.³⁰ For example, Plotinus argues that 'the One is not one of the units which make up the number two'; Avicenna will later follow this lead in saying that 'the smallest number is two'.³¹ The One and the finite are both within the belly of the other, each generated by way of contemplative *provision*. The fall away from the One is a fall within the One. This fall is designed to recall that which is fallen before it falls. So it is always a fall within immanence.

If all that *is* comes by way of the One's non-being, then this One is possible only because of the world's 'non-being' (in this way the world, like Zeus, imitates the One). The One needs company, the world needs unicity. The nothingness of the world allows the Plotinian God to be accompanied, but to be accompanied by nothing, so protecting the supremacy and simplicity of this divinity. Likewise, the non-being of the One generates the world. There is a mutual constitution (*Deus sive natura*).³²

There is, then, in Plotinus an inverted monism: what is other than the One is nothing, while the One is non-being. So there is in effect a univocity of non-being, one which is developed by Avicenna before being passed on to others.³³ It has been argued by a number of commentators that Plotinus is not monistic. For example, Gilson calls the accusation of monism an 'enormous mistake'.³⁴ But this is because Gilson fails to realise that what is other than the One, because of the nature of this alterity, cannot offer any ontological difference. The world slides towards the approaching God who is unable to be alone. Furthermore, the One can only produce one. In this way Plotinus' One remains very much within ontotheology's being. Plotinus replaces ontotheology's being (*the something*) with non-being (*the nothing*): different letters making the same word. This is his *meontotheology*, which is why we can agree with Cornelio Fabro when he asserts that the 'Neoplatonist idea of God . . . vanishes in the swamp of pantheistic monism'.³⁵ For monism is, it seems, the correct expression of pantheism. Likewise, Anton Pegis argues that 'God and the world so penetrate one another in the philosophy of Plotinus . . . that the famous flight of the One from being is the only way in which God can find freedom from the world'.³⁶ But in fleeing so, the world must inevitably follow. Indeed, it must be there waiting. For this return is its very beginning, its inception (*exitus*). In this sense, the pantheistic monism we can find in Plotinus is best thought of as a pan(a)theism. The *henological*, in this sense, leads to the *meontological*. It seems we are to have a god and a world within the foundational absence of both (dreams of

which Spinoza is made).³⁷ The nothing *as* something has become everything.

The work of Plotinus is reconsidered in Part I, Chapter 7. The rest of this chapter will briefly trace similar Plotinian compulsions in the work of some other historical figures.

Avicenna needs nothing

Avicenna (*Ibn-Sina*) was directly influenced by Plotinus.³⁸ He took from the Neoplatonists the idea that being was equivalent to the intelligible (in this sense creating was thinking), and his emanation scheme closely echoes the Plotinian one. For Avicenna, as for Plotinus, from the One, in this case God, there could come only one effect (*ex unu simplici non fit nisi unum*).³⁹ This was thought to be necessary for the protection of divine simplicity. The one effect which did arise was that of the first intelligence. (For Avicenna this first intelligence was comparable to an archangel.) This first intelligence, in knowing God, created another intelligence. It was this duality that would allow the proliferation of subsequent intelligences (there are ten) and, indeed, of intelligence. The procession ceases at the level of the sensible as it is too impure to generate another heaven or intellect. The last of the intelligences was the 'Agent Intellect', or the *Dator Formarum* (*wahib al-suwar*). This Intellect emits all possible forms which are received by matter suitably disposed to receive it. For Avicenna, form is that which is created, not that whereby something is created. It is from this that the infamous accidentality of being (*wujud*) stems.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the act of creation, or emanation, of the intelligence of the world is eternal and necessary. Contingency will not be ontologically recognised, it being but a matter of quiddity (*mahiyya*). The contingency we do witness is but the activity of matter.⁴¹

This emanation scheme is accompanied by an important historical dichotomy: '*tasawwur*' and '*tasdiq*'. These are *imaginatio* (*repraesentatio*, or *informatio*) and *credulitas*, respectively. The first is only predicative (what is it?), while the second is assertoric (is it?).⁴² It is this division which both Gilson and Goichon argue engenders the Avicennian doctrine of being as an accident, for it is extrinsic to every essence.⁴³ We understand this notion better when we remember that for Avicenna there were three ways to consider an essence. The first was an essence considered in the mind. The second was an essence in a sensible thing. The third, and most controversial, was an essence considered in an absolute manner. That is, neither in a mind nor a thing but in itself. Furthermore, the essence, so considered, was allocated an appropriate, or proper, being (*esse proprium*).⁴⁴ As Owens says, 'The proper being is essential to it . . . something that of itself has being but not unity'.⁴⁵ Indeed, this being was

given ascendancy in the world of Avicenna over being in reality, or even being in the mind.⁴⁶

This third way of understanding an essence is easier to understand if we recall that for Avicenna an essence was possible through itself, considered in an absolute manner, but was necessary through another (*possibile a se necessarium ex alio*):⁴⁷ 'When we consider the essence of a thing itself quite apart from any condition, the thing itself is possible of itself' (Avicenna).⁴⁸ As Harm Goris says, 'Avicenna had claimed that the nonexistent about which we say something must at least have logical being in the mind.'⁴⁹ This logical being is the being of a possible essence. It is for this reason that Avicenna insists that *equinitas ergo in se est equinitas tantum*.⁵⁰ An essence comes before unity proffered by the mind or the sensible enraccination. (Duns Scotus' common nature will operate like this.)

From this issues a certain univocity of being.⁵¹ Back comments that Avicenna insists 'we have a particular non-sensible intuition of being'.⁵² Avicenna articulates this idea through an allegory of the man born blindfolded who floats in the air yet still attains a knowledge of being.⁵³ Gilson argues that 'if the proper object of the intellect is being it must be able to comprehend it through a single act, and consequently to know it, in the same sense, whatever the species of being understood'.⁵⁴ This means, as Goichon says, that 'if the idea of being presents itself to the intellect before being separated in the idea of God or that of the idea of the creature, we shall surely find in the initial notion a certain irreducible content'.⁵⁵ As we will see below, existence has shifted from existentiality to an essential realm. For specificity resides only in the difference of the specific essence. This simply means that ontological difference is but a difference of essence; *this* essence rather than *that* essence. Gardet makes the point clearly, arguing that 'all [the] monistic postulates of *Ibn-sina's* thought converge beyond a certain metaphysical ontology towards univocity of being'.⁵⁶ This monism will be discussed below. For Avicenna it was the case that *ens prima impressione imprimitur in intellectu*. Consequently, being, not God, was to be considered the proper object of metaphysics. As a result commentators such as Jean Paulus find in Avicenna a precursor to Duns Scotus' univocity.⁵⁷

The upshot of this univocity was a loss of the sensible realm. As creation emanates from the creator, being is only given to intelligence, to the extent that the creator does not give being directly to the sensible realm.⁵⁸ Indeed, as Goichon states, Avicenna is 'visibly embarrassed about passing from the intellectual relation with the thing known to the realization of the thing created'.⁵⁹ The problem is that God only knows things in so far as they are universal.⁶⁰ This causes Avicenna to insist that 'being has a relation with things in so far as they are intelligible, and not in so far as they exist in the concrete sense'.⁶¹ For every possible essence

to be known, and in this sense to-be, it must lose its particularity, its sensible embodiment and its contingency. (This is a consequence of Avicenna's Plotinian attitude to matter, which construes it as something negative, if not evil.) Each essence, as known, will be a deracinated, necessary, intelligible. This means that there cannot be modes of being, only a difference of essences and that these essences, which are forced to provide adequate ontological differentiation, are themselves *otherwise* than themselves. For these essences must become *necessary* in order to be at all. So the possible essence is only a possible essence in being necessary, and so is, in this sense, God. It is for this reason that Aquinas insisted that the '*conversio ad phantasmata*' is also a continual return to the sensible source. Goris makes the point that the 'expression "*conversio ad phantasmata*" is meant as a polemic contrast with Avicenna's (Neoplatonic) "*conversio animae ad principium in intellectum*".⁶² Aquinas rejects Avicenna's approach as it seems to render the sensible unnecessary for actual understanding.⁶³ Because being is not given directly, nor necessarily, to the sensible, God only has a relation with the intelligent universal. Consequently, the sensible is somewhat superfluous. For this reason the world may only be by moving towards God to the point of absorption.

As Aquinas noted, Avicenna stated that everything except God had in itself a possibility for being and non-being.⁶⁴ The potential for non-being was prevalent to such an extent that every essence was said to have a positive orientation to non-being, or what Gardet called 'a non-postulation to being'.⁶⁵ For Avicenna, everything with a quiddity is caused.⁶⁶ It is for this reason that everything with the exception of the necessary Being has quiddity, and these quiddities are possible through themselves: 'To such quiddities being does not accrue except extrinsically'.⁶⁷ As a result, we can agree with Gilson that essences are measured by their lack of existence. Indeed, they are this lack of existence.⁶⁸ It is for this reason that God does not have an essence, but is instead pure existence (*Primus igitur non habet quidditatem*).⁶⁹ Every essence, it seems, presents us with a paradox. Let me elaborate. As an essence articulates itself it suffers dissolution, for there is a loss of the concrete, of particularity, existentiality and contingency. The positive orientation to non-being may be paradoxically its '*esse proprium*'. For each essence only *is*, it seems, in not being. This negation occurs at two levels. First of all, only God is being; consequently all essences are caused. In being caused we understand that they are nothing in themselves. Second, the intelligent expression of each essence is only had by its dissolving; every articulation is ontologically a disarticulation. Essences are possible in themselves to the degree that these possibles are 'God's data, given to, not by Him'.⁷⁰ In this sense, God gives each its to-be but not its to-be-able-to-be.⁷¹ Yet an essence is nothing and its being cognised is its

undoing; the essence is only as it loses itself. Possibility becomes necessity (a necessity that seemed already to lie implicitly within that very 'self-given' possibility).

God: Without essence

We know that every essence (which is a nothing that is possible in itself, irrespective of God) is caused. God in not having an essence is uncaused, or is necessary. But this cause of Avicenna's begins to look more and more like that of Plotinus'. The essence is nothing in that it is only '*ab alio*', or it is only by being another, *viz.*, God. Furthermore, it is nothing, in that its expression involves dissolution. This means that essence does not infringe divine simplicity. God, who has no essence, uses essences, essences which are nothing, to enable a world other than God. For the essentialised notion of being guarantees the *nothingness of being*, while God who necessarily causes essences ensures the *being of nothing*. Cronin says something similar: 'In the world of Avicenna an actualised essence or possibility is one to which it happens that it exists. But even as actual the possible *qua* possible is not. Just as *nothing happens* to the possible *qua* possible when it becomes singular or becomes universal, so *nothing happens to the possible when it happens to exist*.'⁷² Avicenna's God causes nothing to be. This is the true meaning of being as an accident, or more accurately, being accidental.

For Avicenna it is understood that an essence is possible through itself while it is necessary through another. Yet if this is the case then it may be correct to argue that God is necessary through Himself but is possible through another. This becomes more tenable when we realise that the aforementioned univocity of being engenders a monism that renders the term God (and world) unstable. Avicenna states that 'God is called *Primus*; this term designates *only* the relation of his being to the universal'.⁷³ Consequently, there is no real creation apart from God in an absolutely ontological sense. As Zedler comments, God for Avicenna 'is first *only* in the sense that other beings must come after him'.⁷⁴ This may mean that the appellation 'First being' is but nominal, as nothing ontologically distinct comes after God. Goichon argues that Avicenna 'does not really escape the reproach of assuming, in this way, beings which are not truly distinct from the first being. The creation flows towards the same being which presents itself only with a difference of degree'.⁷⁵ This God cannot be separate from the world, as the essences which are the world are God's ideas stemming from his simplicity; therefore they are his possibilities and finally his own possibility. They are the only way God can create a being which does not offend simplicity. But because of this the nothingness of being (which essences are), and the being of nothingness (God's causation of essences), ineluctably link God and the world. Each

slides towards the other as there is literally nothing to offer resistance. This is what Gardet calls Avicenna's 'impossibility'.⁷⁶ For Zedler this means that the 'world for all eternity dogs the footsteps of the Avicennian God; but more than that, it also tugs him in its direction'.⁷⁷ The possibility of the essences betrays their 'divinity', while the necessity of God illustrates the 'worldliness' of this (Neoplatonic) divinity. As with Plotinus each is the other, and both endeavour to make the something nothing and to make this nothing *as* something.

Henry of Ghent: the possibility of nothing

In Henry of Ghent we find a disciple of both Plotinus and Avicenna.⁷⁸ Indeed, Ghent's work can be characterised as an 'Avicennian attempt to salvage Neoplatonism', as Clarke puts it.⁷⁹ There are a number of important steps taken by Henry of Ghent that are essential to the shape of this story. The one that concerns us here is his treatment of divine ideas.⁸⁰ Henry was part of a group of scholastics who asserted that the divine ideas are relations of reason (*relationes rationis*) *vis à vis* the divine essence. In this way Ghent was similar to St Thomas Aquinas. (When Ockham comes to criticise those who advocate a *distinctio rationis* he selected Henry of Ghent as their representative.) For Ghent there are two moments or acts of knowing. The first is God's knowledge of his own essence; this knowledge is absolute and complete. The second act of knowing is God knowing what creatures are possible. But God in this moment also knows the possible being which creatures have in themselves. In this sense, God knows creatures both as identical to himself and as distinct from himself. As in the work of Aquinas, this possibility is articulated in terms of divine imitability: the creatures are so many ways that the divine essence can be imitated; in this their possibility lies. In actual fact this similarity with Aquinas is somewhat illusory, but this is only apparent when we consider subsequent moves made by Ghent.⁸¹

The most significant conceptual shift stems from the influence of Avicenna. Avicenna, as we know, had argued for a non-sensible intuition of being, and that this being was the proper object of metaphysics. Ghent incorporated this primacy. Indeed, his doctrine of analogy was constructed to cope with the Avicennian 'impression' of being (although 'being' is perhaps better characterised as *'res'*, as this was the highest transcendental for Ghent, as it had been for Avicenna).⁸² Ghent realises that if being is prior to either God or creatures then being must be something common to both.⁸³ But this raises difficulties, as it appears to generate a *tertium quid*, one which may threaten the primacy of God in terms of truth and even ontology. To overcome any difficulties, Ghent produces a 'community of analogy'.⁸⁴ There is no real being apart from

God or creatures, yet being is a common concept under which both fall. And this common concept is not univocal but analogous, because the commonality actually stems from a cognitive lack. For the mind produces two concepts which are distinct. One of these is *privatively undetermined being*;⁸⁵ this notion of being *can* become determined. The other concept is *negatively undetermined being*; a negativity that is inherent and incurable, hence it is not merely privative. This means that the first concept of being is *undetermined* while the second is really *indeterminable*. The former applies to creatures, the latter to God. The commonality we witness at this level arises from a failure to distinguish these two concepts. So the commonality is a matter of *indistinct conception*. We prescind from determination, thus allowing the 'confusion' to remain. It is this confusion, or indistinct conception, that allows Ghent to develop an analogous concept of being.⁸⁶ Scotus will take this further, arguing for a univocal concept appropriate to both God and creature – although Jean Paulus questions whether Ghent's doctrine of analogy avoids univocity.⁸⁷

The second and more relevant area of influence was Ghent's adoption of Avicenna's manner of conceiving essences absolutely. He does so in an effort to protect the objectivity of these essences; this is his Neoplatonic bias. Accordingly these essences are, *à la* Avicenna, allocated an *esse proprium*, which in the hands of Ghent becomes an *esse essentiae*. It is this move which will begin to alter radically the doctrine of divine ideas. To overcome the necessitarianism of Avicenna, Henry posits a realm of unactualised essences. By doing so the ineluctable realisation of a possible essence is removed; God freely chooses which of these essences is to be actualised. If an essence is actualised its *esse essentiae* becomes the being of existence (*esse existentiae*).⁸⁸ But this meant that Ghent had begun to separate the ideas from the divine essence. If they were different, then God, to be God, did not have to realise them. It also meant that these essences became more individual, as each distinct essence had its own distinct existence; this autonomy will be radicalised by Ockham. The possible essences, in possessing their own distinct existence and in being absolutely distinct, form part of an infinite pool of possibles.⁸⁹ They are without doubt formed by God's self-knowledge, but the nature of this self-knowledge has changed. For now self-knowledge conferred a new distinction upon the possible essences. The possibles are no longer the divine essence, but only what the divine essence knows as possible through its self-knowledge; the divine knowing does not know these possibles *as* the divine essence, because in being possible they are considered to have their own being, namely, the being of non-simple essences. For Aquinas, by contrast, the possible relations of imitability are identified with the divine essence, as essences do not have an *esse essentiae*.⁹⁰ Henry could not allow these essences to be exactly identified with the divine essence because he remained under the spell of

Avicenna.⁹¹ If they were identified in this way they would become necessary. Separation was thereby the only road left open.⁹²

Ghent divided the divine ideas into 'the essences of things in the divine knowledge as objects known . . . which are really other than (*secundum rem aliae*) the divine nature', and 'the *rationes* by which these are known, which are really identical with the divine nature'.⁹³ Pegis, commenting on this dichotomy, says that this is Ghent's 'true Avicennianism, distinguishing in the doctrine of divine ideas the *respectus imitabilitas in divina essentiae* and the *rerum essentiae in divina cognitione*'.⁹⁴ Ghent develops his own terminology to deal with this conundrum, that of an *idea* and its *ideatum*. As Ghent says,

the ideas in God exercise causality in every way over the things of which they are forms, by constituting them in both their *esse essentiae* and their *esse existentiae*, and this according to the mode of the exemplary formal cause, therefore the relation of the divine idea to its *ideata* . . . is according to the first genus of relation, which is that between the producer and its product . . . so that it follows from the divine perfection that from the ideal ratio in God, the first essence of the creature flows forth in its *esse essentiae*, and second, through the mediation of the divine will, this same essence flows forth in its *esse existentiae*.⁹⁵

The ideas are not *exactly* identifiable with the divine essence. As Sylwanowicz says, according to Ghent 'we can think of a created essence in itself apart from its dependence on the Creator first, before we ask the question whether its being (*esse*) is created or uncreated'.⁹⁶ This is obvious if we recall the indistinct conception of being. Ghent says that 'according to Avicenna being is imprinted in the mind by the first impression even before an understanding of either creatures or God is impressed in it'.⁹⁷ For Ghent, following Avicenna, this indistinct conception of being affords him the possibility of treating essences in themselves. He makes it clear whom he is following in such a consideration: 'Following the position excellently expressed by Avicenna in his *Metaphysics*, according to which the ideas signify the very essences of things'.⁹⁸ We can understand this better if we realise that for Ghent 'reality', as it were, comes in three 'levels'. First of all, there is what is actual; *res existens in actu*. Second, there is also what is merely imaginable, for example a chimera; *res a reor reris*. The third type of *res* was that which lay between the merely imaginable and the actual. This was the realm of the possible; *res a raturudine*.⁹⁹ The realm of the possible 'possessed an ontological density'.¹⁰⁰ And this ontological density is the aforementioned *esse essentiae*. These possibles,

with their appropriate being, become more understandable when we consider Ghent's conception of possibility.

Ghent offered three definitions of possibility. The first was that possibility (as something noble) depended on God's active power, while impossibility did not (as it was less than noble). The second found both dependent. The third definition, which seemed to go unnoticed by either Scotus or Ockham, was that a 'thing's ability or inability to be made is prior to any thing's ability or inability to make it'.¹⁰¹ The ideas were then possible in themselves, at least on this interpretation. Even if they are not, they are necessary in terms of the divine intellect which *must* think them. But this residual separateness has to be resolved by Ghent on pain of offending divine simplicity. His solution is to make these ideas *nothing*. For Henry there are degrees of nothing. What is possible but not actual, is less of a nothing than impossibles. The former are *non-ens* while the latter are *purum non-est*. That which is impossible is always *maius nihil*. The divine essence gives both the *esse essentiae* and the *esse existentiae*. But the former is given, in some sense, necessarily. For this reason, the ideas are not wholly identifiable with the divine essence. Consequently, they must exhibit some degree of nullity. This, it seems, is the nothing *as* something which we have already encountered.

Duns Scotus and William of Ockham: univocity of Non-Being

Duns Scotus¹⁰² was influenced by Henry of Ghent to such a degree that Gilson states that it is hardly possible to read Duns Scotus 'without having [Ghent's] writings at hand'.¹⁰³ The other great influence on Scotus was that of Avicenna.¹⁰⁴ From the latter Scotus inherited his notion of being,¹⁰⁵ his definition of essence,¹⁰⁶ and even of possibility with regard to these essences.¹⁰⁷ From the former Scotus was to inherit the view that the infinity of God was a positive perfection, that matter was also positive, and that the human being had a plurality of forms. Furthermore, the model of analogy Scotus criticised was Ghent's.¹⁰⁸ Scotus also conceived the divine knowledge in terms of moments, a conception that Ghent, following Avicenna's Neoplatonism, had also employed. As Marrone says, 'Duns adopted, nearly lock, stock and barrel, this vision of reality and ontological densities'.¹⁰⁹

For Scotus of the *Lectura*, there were two atemporal moments (instants of nature) in the divine knowledge. For Scotus of the *Ordinatio*, which was written later, these two moments were each subdivided. For the *Lectura* the first moment consisted in God giving cognitive being to what the divine gaze knew as creatable. In the second moment God gives the creatable object *esse existentiae* by an act of will.¹¹⁰ In the *Ordinatio* the first logical subdivision of the first moment is the divine production of

intelligible being. God understands His own essence absolutely, or in itself. The second logical subdivision finds the intelligible object possible in itself. The order of these two is only logical, it is not temporal.¹¹¹ In the second moment, itself subdivided, God's intellect compares its own intellection to whatever intelligible is understood. This causes in itself a relation of reason. The second subdivision is the divine reflection on this relation of reason, which causes the relation to be known. And so all knowledge is virtually contained within God's knowledge of his own essence.¹¹²

These possible creatures do not, *contra* Henry of Ghent, possess *esse essentiae*, for the simple reason that for Scotus to have this type of being is to have a real being. An essence, for Scotus, was a great deal more than nothing. This was a result of the univocity of being, which itself stems from his formal distinction that simultaneously initiates a new logical modality of possibility (this is discussed below).¹¹³ Were the possible creatures essences, then God would depend upon them as eternal objects for his knowledge. Instead Scotus insists that they are nothing: '*lapis ab aeterno intellectus non est aliquid, sed nihil*'.¹¹⁴ They do, as nothing, retain a type of diminished being (*esse diminutum*), that of *esse objectivum*, which they have only in being known in the divine intellect.¹¹⁵ This type of being cannot be thought of as positive. Yet we can agree with Cronin when he says that possible essences 'possess within divine intellection, as objects standing over against the divine knowing subject, the being which is proper to each's intelligible essence'.¹¹⁶ Gilson appears to concur when he says that 'the divine ideas are God's *secundum quid*, that is, relatively and comparatively. In other words each of them is in God, but it is not God *qua* God . . . [for] there is an essence of ideas *qua* ideas . . . they cannot [then] purely and simply be God'.¹¹⁷

Ockham

Ockham comes to the question determined to remove even *esse objectivum* from these possible creatures.¹¹⁸ Ockham criticised the traditional identification of the ideas with the divine essence. This criticism was fuelled by his overall concern to eradicate all metaphysical community and so enforce his ontology of indistinction, with its impervious singularity. It was this move that facilitated Ockham's particular conception of omnipotence, but it can be correctly expressed in the reverse: it was Ockham's novel version of omnipotence which gave rise to this ontology.¹¹⁹

The 'Venerable Inceptor' argues that the attempt to identify the ideas with the divine essence is incoherent.¹²⁰ His analysis employs the usual Ockhamian methodological presuppositions: principle of annihilation and numerical identity, enforced by the principle of non-contradiction. If

the ideas are the divine essence they must either be that essence exactly or they can be relations of imitability. If they are the divine essence in a real and precise sense, then there can only be one idea as there is only one essence. If they are relations of divine imitability, which would allow for a plurality, they must be real relations. But the problem with this is that the Trinity is the only real relation in the divine essence. So they can be relations only of reason. If they are *relationes rationis* then they cannot be identical with an *ens reale* such as the divine essence.¹²¹ A combination of real relation and a conceptual relation of imitability would fail because a composite cannot be identified with its parts.

For Ockham the ideas are exemplars or patterns that are known in the production of something. The word 'idea' is a connotative term. Consequently, it has only a nominal definition: principally signifying one thing directly (*in recto*) and signifying another obliquely (*in oblique*). It is this secondary signification that generates the illusion of a positive entity. This illusion is quickly dispelled when the term's primary signification is recalled, revealing its nominal quiddity (*quid nominas*). In this sense the word idea will only really signify a creature that is producible by God. The 'idea' is the thought of this creature which the divine intellect knows. This 'idea' functions as a pattern which is the exemplar of that creature. But this pattern is, in the Divine intellect, nothing other than the creature itself. We must remember that there can be no appeal to metaphysical concepts such as existence in the Thomist sense. The ideas are not means by which God knows something and the ideas are not likenesses of the creatures. Instead the ideas are the creatures themselves.¹²² The word idea is employed to signify God's intelligent thought of them as creatable and so as other than himself. As God thinks of the creature that is creatable he thinks of that creature. So we understand an idea as God's knowledge of what is creatable by him, and that these ideas are in themselves nothing; they are nothing but themselves.¹²³

The word idea directly signifies the creature and in a secondary sense signifies the realisation of that possible creature by God, and his knowledge of it. God knows through these ideas only in the sense that they terminate the act of knowing. That is, without them nothing would be thought. But this is simply a tautology: for something to be thought something must be thought and that which is thought is that which is thought. The full connotative nature of the word becomes apparent as the primary signification continually draws us back to the creature itself. In Ockham's world there could only be God or the individual creature, there can be no *tertium quid*. Thus when God creates the creature all he has thought of in that creation has been the creature. So the idea is only other from the creature as God's knowledge of what is possible for him to create. There is a distinct lack of any metaphysical community, for the

creature does not *à la* Aquinas participate in God's act of to-be, nor is there a participation in any real universal community of essences.

What a creature *is* is itself. This is why we have the employment of a factual understanding of what 'is', because a fact is the conceptual tool needed to speak of what 'is' without relying upon other metaphysical concepts. Factuality allows a simple univocal mantra, as one only repeats the fact, so to speak. In this sense, an idea of a creature (that is only itself and as known by God) is nothing. The difference between the realised and an unrealised fact is only the fact.¹²⁴ The fact of its-self makes all the difference; but this difference, in being the individual fact, is no difference at all. What is meant by this is that the fact, as a possible creature, is its own possibility, and so when it is freely actualised by God it remains the same, and change is external to its own possibility. The only alteration is an act of God's will. This means that the something remains the *a priori* nothing it always was, even before or without God. This will be explained and elaborated on below. What we must accept at this stage is that for Ockham the ideas are nothing but the creatures themselves. Consequently, before the creatures are, the idea of them is at this point nothing. As McGrade points out, 'pure nothing plays as significant a role in Ockham's ontology as does the void for Democritus'.¹²⁵

One consequence of Ockham's penchant for terminist logic is that there are three ways in which the word nothing can be employed: (a) syncategorematically, as a negative universal sign; (b) categorematically, in so far as it does not signify anything which actually exists; (c) lastly, as it depicts that for which existence is impossible.¹²⁶ Chimeras fall under the third use. When Ockham calls a creature a *purum nihil* it is meant in a categorematic sense. This indicates that, although a creature did not exist from all eternity, it could have existed from all eternity, and so it does exist as the nothing which the idea of its-self actually is. As Maurer points out, Ockham did not actually say that a divine idea is a nothing, 'but he implies this by a statement that a creature known from all eternity by the divine mind as something creatable is *unum nihil*, for a divine idea is precisely something creatable to which God can give real existence'.¹²⁷ As we know, Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus both tried to render ideas nothing, but it was Ockham who managed to empty nothingness of all somethingness.¹²⁸ The nothingness of the divine idea is nothing but a pure and absolute possibility. The internal intelligibility of this possibility came from that very possibility alone. Ockham could utilise this notion to replace the need for an order of essences or even of being. As Maurer says, 'Ockham had to take the divine ideas more seriously than Scotus, because for Ockham the divine essence is not the exemplar of creatures.'¹²⁹ The implications of this are enormous and will be discussed below. The ideas

are now only the creatures themselves, which are not anchored in the divine essence, but reside outside this essence as a possibility unto themselves, and yet, in being so, they are nothing. But the danger here is that if the negative implication of nothingness is weakened (if that can occur) then these ideas will possibly displace God, in that they will, in a Platonic sense, condition God's intelligibility and in the end his possibility.¹³⁰ At this stage it seems correct to invoke Anton Pegis' invective that Ockham represents 'Platonism minus the ideas'.¹³¹ We will discover that this absence becomes more determinate than any Platonic idea ever did. Below we move from a discussion about divine ideas to one about Scotus' formalism, doing so in an effort to draw out some of the implications touched upon above. Following this we return to Ockham in an analysis concerning modal logic.

Possibly: Nothing

Duns Scotus initiated a new understanding of reality in terms of formality; a formality to become enshrined in the Scotist univocity of being.¹³² Following Avicenna, Scotus argued that the first object of the intellect is *ens qua ens*. In making this move, existence was to become essentialised, as the difference between existence and essence came to be understood only as a formal distinction.¹³³ (Although it may be fairer to say that this is a pregnant implication in Scotus, which is later developed by Scotists.) Existence was itself an intrinsic mode of essence, becoming rather more conceptual than existential; being became what was thinkable.¹³⁴ This univocity of being could only be permitted if intrinsic modes of being could allow for internal differentiation without the mere addition of external difference – which would offend the status of being as the supreme transcendental. Thus according to modal distinctions, the difference appropriate to God and creature arises from the intensive degrees which an essence could attain. So God's being was qualified by the intrinsic mode of infinity – in which univocal being was 'virtually' included. This meant that God was rendered distinct without employing specific *differentiae* which would improperly suggest that being was a genus common to God and creatures. The concept of being which both God and creatures fall under is not, therefore, proper to God; it becomes so only under intrinsic qualification. Thus 'God is being' is a logical statement that nonetheless has some ontological purchase in that being is a formal reality in God: God as infinite being is lawfully a fully determinate metaphysical statement.

Scotus radically redefines the existent object and the balance between the universal and the singular. For him the object is composed of two aspects that exhibit a plurality of forms within every actuality – singularity of substantial form being denied (the common Franciscan view). An

object consists of a common nature and a contracting difference, also known as an *haecceity*, that makes it singular.¹³⁵ The two aspects are formally distinct.¹³⁶ They can be conceived apart and are thus distinguishable. The phantasm presents to sensitive cognition the object's singularity: 'The phantasm represents with its entire function the object as something singular to the imagination.'¹³⁷ As this phantasm is sensory it can never bring about the reception of a thing's form, which is its universal aspect. Cognition of the thing's universality is achieved by the production of the intelligible species. The phantasm is sensory, so it cannot communicate to the intellectual faculty, while the intelligible species is a product of the agent intellect.

It is this formal element that prefigures modernity. As Alliez says, 'it is in his formalism that Duns Scotus would already singularly escape every form of the *via antiqua*'.¹³⁸ Scotus conceived the object in terms of multiple forms. Every object was composed of parts that had themselves a partial being, one which in terms of *potentia absoluta* was easily separated by the mind from its 'host' unity. These partial beings are formally distinct from the object, so the object becomes disembodied as it is forced to inhabit a world determined by the possible. As Alliez says, 'in the Scotist world everything that is conceivable apart possesses an objective reality, and in this respect has in God a distinct idea orientated toward a possible production'.¹³⁹ Each object loses its ontological unity, a unity only partially regained by practical representation. Linked with the formal distinction is the univocity of being, which asserts that the primary object of cognition is 'being' as ontologically drained, since indeterminate and neutral. Because each reality is mediated by a logical sameness of being, knowledge of being starts to usurp the primacy of theology. And since univocity thereby operates already as the possibility for all knowing, the measure of knowing begins to be a clear and distinct grasp of logically distinguishable items. In this way the primacy of adequation involving a real relation between knower and known starts to fade. Cognition is no longer necessarily about actual objects, but by way of the *potentia absoluta* is possible in principle without one (Scotus hints at this, and Ockham develops it much further). This means that veridicality will stem from successful representation, which can be mimicked by illusion, since a species is now thought of more as a mimesis of the known object. What is cognised becomes now literally the object of cognition, *viz.*, the object is terminated by the act of cognition rather than an intentional ecstasis. Alliez argues that this re-conception of the object of cognition is itself 'the birth of the object'.¹⁴⁰ And it is an object that 'negotiates its own modernity'.¹⁴¹ Because it arrives within the act of cognition any fundamental notion of adequation is implicitly scuppered by the Scotist formalism. For how can one locate actuality if actuality itself is now defined in terms of 'real-possibles'? This is to some degree a precursor to

the Cartesian reversal from ‘*ab esse ad nosse valet consequentia*’ to ‘*a nosse ad esse valet consequentia*’. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins described Scotus as the ‘unraveller’ and it seems, in a rather pejorative sense, that this is true.

To Be: Nowhere

A new [modal] approach emerged from the idea of an omnipotent God.¹⁴²

(S. H. Knuuttila and L. Alanen)

Being is fundamentally univocal for Ockham, i.e., actual being and possible being are not two kinds of being, but rather two aspects of the same kind of being.¹⁴³

(H. Lagerlund)

After the condemnations of 1277 there was a methodological application of the idea of an omnipotent God as a hypothetical counterpoint to that which was regarded as reality.¹⁴⁴ As Klocker says, ‘what the world *de facto* is became entirely subordinated to what it could have been and what it might become’.¹⁴⁵ In this sense, every actuality became a limited expression of the possible. For Duns Scotus this meant that whatever existed was now to be considered in terms of alternative states of affairs. This, inevitably, was the secularisation of modalities.¹⁴⁶ What we witness at this time is a radical shift from an extensional (referential) modality to an intensional (sense-orientated) one, which is itself the advent of the concept in its modern form.¹⁴⁷ The starting point for Scotus was logical possibility (*possibilitas logica*);¹⁴⁸ interestingly it was Scotus who first introduced the term. That which existed had now to be considered not as actual but as factual for the univocity of being flattened the distinct sides of existentiality, essentialising being in the name of the possible: ‘Realisation in the actual world is no longer the criterion of real possibility.’¹⁴⁹ Any particular entity contained within itself its own dissolution, for it was composed of a plurality of forms which possessed their own appropriate being. This new modality took these quasi-forms and realised them counterfactually, such that the object from which these possible forms were taken could not legitimate its own unity over these alternatives. In other words, the very possibility of an intensional modality forbade the provision of any legitimacy to the actual. (We see here the beginnings of the Nietzschean corollary, for that which ‘is’ will be forced to fight for its place in this world, as numerous alternatives struggle to disturb it.) The possible (including compossible states of affairs) possesses an intensional being given to it by God who bestows it by thinking its possibility, yet that which receives is always already

potentially intelligible.¹⁵⁰ Ockham wrote, 'If it is possible it is possible before it is produced in intelligible being.'¹⁵¹ It is this which begins to complete the Scotist unravelling.

Scotus declared, 'I do not call something contingent because it is not always or necessarily the case, but because its opposite could be actual at the very moment it occurs.'¹⁵² Yet to define contingency in terms of counter-factuality is to misplace it. For to do so introduces a contorted form of necessitarianism, since that which is is not necessary *here* but it is necessary in itself. The aprioricity generated by a conception of the possible as not anchored in the essence of God will perforce insist on the necessity of that which is thought. There is no longer any actual contingency but instead virtual necessity. As Scotus says, 'I do not say something is contingent but that something is caused contingently.'¹⁵³ This illusion of contingency stems from a notion not involving any particular entity but rather the *hic et nunc* in general. It is this which is rendered contingent, not *a* here and now but *the* here and now *in toto*, which is regarded as the instantiation of one possible order, not as a series of unique actualities which establish their possibility only with their actuality.¹⁵⁴

It is this loss of the 'here and now' which produces what Alliez calls an 'order with no Sunday'.¹⁵⁵ This is because every would-be Sunday is displaced by the simultaneity of other possibles that do not simply struggle from outside the 'Sunday' but rise up from inside, as monstrous parts become wholes. This *mereological* (part-to-whole) nightmare means that 'identifiability is not bound to any single world'.¹⁵⁶ There can be no qualitative legitimacy invoked for the presence of one rather than another. As Burrell says, 'Scotus looks more at features of things than at things themselves.'¹⁵⁷ Consequently, Scotus looks at the world as a 'conceptual system'.¹⁵⁸

This diremption of the here and now precipitates an *a priori* realm, articulated by the ruminations of an intensional modality. The possible, in being potentially intelligible (*esse intelligibile*), is independent of God and does not receive this potential from God. Instead the creature is possible in itself. Ockham argues, in an Avicennian manner, that 'possible being is something a creature has of itself'.¹⁵⁹ Things are now intrinsically possible in an absolute sense.¹⁶⁰ However, this possibility is only of itself formally speaking. It remains *principatively* dependent on God, and yet this seems to mean very little:¹⁶¹ 'A creature is possible, not because anything pertains to it, but because it can exist in reality.'¹⁶² Scotus appears to argue that the possible becomes an *a priori* condition of intelligibility, one which would be untouched by the non-existence of God: 'This logical possibility could remain separately in power by its own nature even when there were, *per impossibile*, no omnipotence to which it

could be an object.¹⁶³ For Scotus and Ockham the proposition 'the world will be' is independent of the actual world.¹⁶⁴ The possibility of such a proposition is determined by the compossibility or impossibility of *terms*. In other words, possibility is a matter of the non-repugnance of terms.¹⁶⁵ For this reason we can agree with Alanen when he says that for Ockham possibility is a 'predicate of propositions and not of things'.¹⁶⁶ These propositions, which epitomise this modern modality, are called neutral propositions.¹⁶⁷ God does not allocate a truth value to propositions until after the first instant of nature. (This is somewhat analogous to a notion of being which prescinds from determination, which is to say that both being and possibility occupy a place before existence and God.) Furthermore, God must think these propositions. As R. van der Lecq says, 'God produces things in their intelligibility, but the act of production is not an act of God's free will; it is an act of his intellect and therefore necessary, according to Scotus.'¹⁶⁸ Knuuttila argues that for Scotus 'God necessarily thinks about whatever can be thought about'.¹⁶⁹ We must remember that for Scotus the divine intellect 'is not an active power'.¹⁷⁰ If there was no world nor '*per impossibile* no will . . . the ontologically relevant matrix of synchronic possible states of affairs would remain the same' (as Beck puts it).¹⁷¹ Suarez later occupies a similar position when he says that eternal truths which are known by God 'are not true because they are known by God, but rather they are thus known because they are true . . . [T]hey are eternal, not only as they are in the divine intellect but also in themselves and prescinding from it'.¹⁷²

Aquinas refuses such an option: 'Yet if one considered [the possibility] that both intellects [Man's and God's] might vanish (which is impossible), the concept of truth would in no fashion remain (*nullo modo veritatis ratio remaneret*).'¹⁷³ Knuuttila and Alanen state that 'until the early fourteenth century possibilities were treated as having a foundation in God; in the modern theory they were dissociated from this ontological backing'.¹⁷⁴ Not only are possibilities independent of God, but 'Divine actuality disappears behind the infinite variety of what is possible', as Klocker puts it.¹⁷⁵ Essences, conceived as the logical possibility of terms, are the foundation of this logico-epistemic modality.¹⁷⁶ As Klaus Jacobi argues, the 'semantics of possible worlds is expressly or implicitly bound up with a metaphysics of essence'.¹⁷⁷

Because this intensional modality is a logical modality it does not require a cause (it is in a sense *causa sui*).¹⁷⁸ The possible is no longer defined by the actual, but is now more defined than the actual. This is the ascendancy of the law of non-contradiction.¹⁷⁹ The 'law' (what is possible) is prior to the 'law-giver' (God).¹⁸⁰ The consequence of this is the loss of language, matter, and time. Scotus, Ockham, and indeed Ghent,¹⁸¹ advocate an Avicennian understanding of possibility. For each

understands possibility as intrinsic to what is possible, *viz.*, what is possible is possible by definition, hence it is an intensional modality. What we see here is a loss of creation, causation, actuality, and contingency. Instead there is the elaboration of a merely 'diacritical' being. In other words, the 'world' appears only within the occult workings of terms which afford some nominal notion of cognitive representation.¹⁸² Within this 'tradition' being is essentialised, in that what counts as being is less than existence – being becomes an *a priori* realm of possible essences. Further, this essentialised being becomes factualised. As Gilson says, 'Scotus forbears any attempt to characterise the actual existence of things, treating that *fact* as more like a presupposition'.¹⁸³ In a similar vein Burrell makes the point that a consequence of this modal shift is that 'possible worlds become as engaging as the actual world, since nothing distinguishes actual from possible except the mere fact that it happens to exist'.¹⁸⁴ Such an understanding is also prevalent in Ockham.

Ockham had two cognitive theories: that of the *fictum*, or objective-existence theory; and the *intellectio*, or mental act theory.¹⁸⁵ Each required the positing of unactualised possibles. By eventually moving to the second theory, Ockham endeavoured to reduce these entities to one act of cognition. But as he himself realised, this required that the Divine cognition be equally of all things. Yet Ockham thinks that God's act is more akin to the rational act than the nonrational. So the divine act cannot be equally of all. What Ockham must then do is transfer the onus onto the working of terms, so as to provide the requisite difference. Essences become 'beings', then these become merely logical phenomena. As Ockham says, 'logical potency represents a certain way in which terms can be combined by the mind'.¹⁸⁶ Alanen, commenting on this passage, argues that for Ockham 'possibility in the absolute sense is . . . a predicate of propositions and not of things'.¹⁸⁷ It is, as Adams says, 'just that God and creatures are eternally apt to be signified by the terms'.¹⁸⁸ Whatever is understood (and it seems this goes for God's self-understanding) is 'nothing although understood'.¹⁸⁹ Even for Scotus the 'relation of compossibility and impossibility of the terms are and remain the same regardless of whether the things signified exist or whether there is my intellect to combine them'.¹⁹⁰ The operation of these terms in generating intelligibility depends, literally, on nothing (acting *as* something). As Scotus says, 'everything which is unqualifiedly nothing includes in itself the essence of many'.¹⁹¹ For Ockham this nothing is just as operational. McGrade argues, 'Ockham has plenty of nothing, and nothing is plenty for him'.¹⁹² As already said, this logical intelligibility, in being logical, does not require a cause. Furthermore, it relativises *this* world by engendering possible worlds. Ross argues that 'creation has no place at all because all possibilities are equally real and equally actual'.¹⁹³ Possible worlds deny actuality in terms of a view-pointed perspectivalism. In other

words, being is now world-relative. Furthermore, logical modalities endeavour to remove all tensedness from propositions, rendering lived discourse atemporal. This endemic formalism (and its accomplice possibilism) fails to interpret terms in any first-order sense of understanding. So we can see that there is indeed a loss of actuality, contingency, and time: a lack of tenses is deemed veridically irrelevant because of view-pointed actualism and the self-causation of logic. Instead we must insist, with Ross (because these systems are not ‘theologically neutral’¹⁹⁴), that there are no empty possibles. Even if we entertained the notion of empty possibles we would be unable to name them, as there would not be enough transcendent determinacy to allow for indexical context. Consequently, they would remain logically inaccessible. Furthermore, it must be understood that being is not exhausted by kinds, nor kinds by cases.¹⁹⁵ As Ross insists, ‘God settles what might have been in so far as it is a consequence of what exists’.¹⁹⁶ Consequently, an intensional logic is dependent on the actual nature of things which permit such modal abstractions. The intensional content ‘parasitises’ the real world.¹⁹⁷ The possible is understood in terms of actual knowledge *a posteriori*, because ‘power is known through its acts’.¹⁹⁸ However, we must not define possibility *a posteriori* but only what is possible, otherwise we remain vulnerable to Lovejoy’s ‘principle of plenitude’, which argues that what is possible is realised in actuality.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, to do so would be to advocate merely a statistical understanding of possibility. This is a distinction clearly articulated by Klaus Jacobi.²⁰⁰ It is this which most advocates of intensional modalities misunderstand. As a result they treat intensional logics like a big extensional logic, in that they make intensional names into ‘things’²⁰¹ and so take us to places to which we should not go, indeed to the feet of nothingness, where formal ‘Satanic notations whisper the ontologies’.²⁰² Instead the formal must serve the actual. Logic should be interpreted meta-linguistically, according to lived usage and first-order expressions.²⁰³ Aquinas accepts a logical or intensional understanding of modal notions, but these are parasitic on the ‘semantic richness of first-order language’, as Goris puts it.²⁰⁴ For this reason, the intensional meaningfulness of discourse rests on an understanding of the actual world.²⁰⁵ As Schmidt puts it: ‘Truth, and truth about real being, is the end and final cause of logic.’²⁰⁶

Ens infinitum: ens univocum²⁰⁷

Every other being distinct from the infinite being is called ‘a being’ by participation because it *captures a part* of that entity present there perfectly and totally.²⁰⁸

(Duns Scotus)

For Scotus there is a somewhat weaker distinction between essence and existence than there is for Aquinas. Two theses will be argued in this section. The first is that for Scotus there is no *real distinction* in a creature, nor in God. That much is incontrovertible, but this is extended to suggest that there is in effect, for Scotus, no real distinction *between* God and creatures. So the second thesis is that there is, then, effectively for Scotus, only a formal distinction between God and creatures. We can think a difference, so there is one, but this difference is but a formality.

The basis for the above is what has been referred to as the univocity of non-being. If Plotinus' *meontology* is combined with Avicenna's understanding of being as the subject of metaphysics, a univocity of non-being is approached; especially if it is remembered that Avicenna's being prescinds from both God and creature, universal and particular, actual (existent) and possible (non-existent). Furthermore, it was argued above that Henry of Ghent located the divine ideas somewhat outside the divine essence – a move which facilitated an embryonic espousal of an intensional modality. As we saw, this modality was taken up and developed by Scotus and Ockham. It can be witnessed in Scotus in his advocacy of a univocity of being and the formal distinction, along with the advent of *a priori* logical possibility. Ockham betrays the presence of this modality in his advocacy of a logical possibility, which does not depend on the existence of God. This possibilism manifests itself in his nominalism and in his subsequent dependence on the logic of terms and propositions.

Taking the above moves in conjunction with the notion of a univocity of non-being is not outrageous. Such a univocity is witnessed in so far as being is also that which is not, in an existential sense. For essences are eternal; or as Gilson puts it: 'Essences always exist.'²⁰⁹ Richard Cross, an extremely sympathetic reader of Scotus, argues that possibilities 'have their properties without their needing to exist in any sense, whether as thought objects or as extra mental reality'.²¹⁰ This echoes Scotus' understanding of contingency. For Scotus, as we have seen, does not say that there *are* contingent things, but merely that things are *caused* contingently.²¹¹ This causation has more to do with synchronic contingency than that of actuality. That is to say, contingency is not a circumstance of something existing after not existing, but that *this* configuration is contingent; for in a sense every possibility is eternal. Consequently, a possible always exists. In this way contingency cannot rest on actual objects being contingent, for all beings are, in terms of their possibility, necessary, that is, *a priori*; necessary in their pure possibility without reference to the actual. As a result it is the *configuration* of possibilities caused by God's will that allows for contingency. Such a configuration remains immanent to its being represented thus and so. This will be explained below.

Scotus' formalism, along with the axiomatic absolute power of God, causes all beings to lose their substantial form. Each entity is always other than itself, or it has an other *in* itself. For each being has a legion of forms which exist. They may not actually exist in an existential sense – nonetheless they still exist as eternal essences. What, then, enables the cognitive presentation of a singular entity that has within itself many other existents is re-presentation. By this I mean that cognition is a matter of construction, that is, re-arrangement. For this reason Alliez says that 'everything that does not imply contradiction is in a certain fashion *res* because every reality, even empirical, not only experiences a composition, but also depends on a constitution of a point of view'.²¹² Scotus tells us that as a finite being is less than the infinite, it represents a part of that infinitude. It is for this reason that Gilson is correct to call Scotus' metaphysics 'practical'.²¹³ Cognition is practical in that it must 'make' that which is cognised, to the degree that any cognised object has a number of unrealised synchronic possibilities which could have been configured by a different re-presentation. Alliez argues that not only has re-presentation become absolute, but the subjective and objective realms have in Scotus become the same: 'Because the Scotist doctrine of the plurality of distinct forms *a parte rei* applies indifferently to the domain of being and to the soul, those two aspects, objective and subjective, say the same.'²¹⁴ Why is this the case? Because reality does not logically exclude cognition in the absence of an object, a state of affairs reflected in the virtuality of every being. What is meant by this is that every being is virtually more, less, or different because it lacks a single substantial form. Consequently, every entity is composed of a plethora of forms that are realised formally, which means that they possess a certain type of being. The formal thought of an essence, which is a logical possibility, exists; but we do not always cognise it; though this essence is there only formally it is nonetheless real. In this way, every cognition, that is, representation, involves an absent concrete object. The object which we represent is not there to the degree that it is only within our representation, in so far as it is also other than how we do represent it. This is a consequence of the object's aforementioned virtuality.

We now turn to the notion of infinity, so as to elaborate the notion of the univocity of being, and to further explicate the virtual nature of every entity.

Infinity

From the plenitude of its 'virtual quality' *the infinite is measuring everything* else as greater or lesser to the degree that it approaches *the whole* or recedes from it.²¹⁵

(Duns Scotus)

The real goal of the tendency which is dragging men and things toward *pure quantity* can only be the final dissolution of the present world.²¹⁶

(René Guénon)

Following Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus treats infinity as a positive perfection.²¹⁷ Ghent had thought that it was a negative term but a positive affirmation.²¹⁸ As Davenport puts it: ‘In an absolute sense, Henry argues, the word “infinite” negates a negation, and is therefore strictly equivalent to an affirmation.’²¹⁹ A more positive understanding of infinity was bequeathed to Ghent, Scotus and Ockham by Augustine’s two conceptions of quantity: *quantitas molis* (quantity of bulk), and *quantitas virtutis sive perfectionis* (quantity of perfection). The first was augmented by the application of a standard unit. The latter was the rationalisation of intensive phenomena, for example, colour.²²⁰ Aquinas only allowed this second type of infinite to apply to spiritual perfection.²²¹ Furthermore, this application was negative. In Aquinas, as Davenport says, ‘There is no single continuously increasing quantity . . . [I]n place of the “smooth” *scala perfectionis* envisaged by Augustine, proceeding by degrees . . . Thomas presents a discontinuous system.’²²² Davenport may not be correct about Augustine, but it is true that Scotus makes the notion of an intensive infinite fundamental to his system.²²³ For Scotus, infinity is not only a perfection but is the simplest of concepts we have of God.²²⁴ It is for this reason that we should understand that Scotus’ infinity is an intrinsic mode. That is, it does not come by addition; instead it is intensive and actual.²²⁵ For Aquinas, infinity is understood as a negatively relational property, which is to say that God is infinite because God lacks any relation to a limiting entity, such as matter; consequently, infinity is a negative perfection.²²⁶ But for Scotus it is actual, that is, it is all at once, which means that this infinity is not constituted by the relativity of a non-relation. What is important for us here is how we read this Scotist infinity.

*A small infinity*²²⁷

It is only inasmuch as I am infinite that I am limited.²²⁸

(Maurice Blanchot)

Richard Cross suggests that ‘an uncharitable account would be that Scotus’ God is just a human person writ large’.²²⁹ Yet this is exactly the reading offered by Louis Bouyer: ‘The thrust [of Scotus’] thought inevitably makes this infinity nothing but an infinite magnification of what we are.’²³⁰ Thus it in effect rests upon an understanding of infinity which suggests that its quantitative logic requires that the infinite share a

sliding scale with the finite. When one reads what Cross has to say on the matter of infinity he appears to concede, whether knowingly or not, such a conception: 'It is ultimately one of Degree' – even if, to be sure, for Scotus an infinite degree is not comparable with any finite degree.²³¹ This notion of infinity will be explored below in an effort to draw out the difficulties involved in its conception and in its application to God. Part II, Chapter 10 returns to the matter. This should be kept in mind so that what is written here is not simply taken as conclusive. (For example, it is argued in Part II, Chapter 10 that Gregory of Nyssa's use of infinity is important.)

What is suggested here is that if infinity is a quantitative matter of degree then it cannot allow for a real ontological difference. For we can certainly say x is more than y , but we cannot say that to be more is 'more' in a qualitative sense. If it is said 'I love my wife *more* than I love you', does it mean that this is a better love by reason of its quantity? Maybe not, because one does not love one's wife more, rather one loves her differently. The word *more* merely distracts; one could love obsessively, pathologically, and that would not be necessarily good; indeed, it may be an inferior form of loving. Can Scotus not argue that his *more* is qualitative? Maybe, but a sympathetic and, with regard to this topic, his most sophisticated interpreter, argues decisively that Scotus' conception of infinity is purely quantitative.²³² What is important is that the problem of a shared scale, or frame of reference, reappears. In an earlier quotation we saw Scotus define the infinite as the measuring in degrees of what approaches or recedes from *the whole* which is the infinite. The problem with infinity is that it always seems to be *ordinal* (if so it is subordinate to the series of which it is the n th value). But according to Scotus, infinite being 'exceeds any finite being whatsoever, not by some assigned proportion, but beyond every assigned, or assignable proportion'.²³³ Nevertheless, Davenport, commenting on infinite being, says that although the infinite 'cannot be reached by finite steps, it belongs conceptually to the same univocal "measure" of excellence to which the finite belongs'.²³⁴ A consequence of this is, as Scotus argues, that 'everything finite, since it is less than the infinite, represents a *part*'.²³⁵ This appears after all to confirm the implication that the difference of the infinite relies on the limitations of the finite. So, when Scotus says that the infinite is above every assignable proportion, this may not mean that the infinite is beyond every proportion, for it is only beyond every *assignable* proportion. It can only be conceived, and indeed only exists in its essence, in contrast to the finite; in this way it is dependent in its distinct reality on the limitations of the finite. It is logically possible that a proportion could exist yet remain unassigned, for there is indeed a proportion, it is simply not available. There is therefore

a 'measure' that lies outside the infinite and the finite and the measure is, of course, being.

But Scotus explicitly asserts that 'God and creature share in no reality'.²³⁶ He also declares that 'Every created essence [is] nothing other than its dependence with regard to God.'²³⁷ How do we reconcile this with the possibilism mentioned earlier according to which essences always exist, for there would be the same logical possibilities even if God did not exist? Yet the two aspects do not conflict, for indeterminate being is itself the 'arch possibility' whose insistence engenders the real according to an outlook that is at bottom both essentialist and logicist. Hence God and creatures do share in a certain 'non-reality', whose nullity is nonetheless fundamental.

Rudi Te Velde has written an interesting article comparing Scotus and Aquinas in relation to nature and will.²³⁸ What is of relevance for us is the fact that Te Velde argues that for Aquinas nature includes a natural inclination to transcend itself. For nature depends on God, and in this way is like part to whole. Consequently, in seeking its own good, nature will seek the universal good. The creature *is* by way of participation, the consequence of which is that the creature is more directed to God than it is to itself. For Scotus there is no such inclination and no notion of self-transcendancy; nature is for him more immanent. It is possible to suggest that the reason that nature does not move *towards* God in Scotus is because nature or 'reality', with all its essences, is in a certain sense not dependent on God, because it is, as a 'part' of the infinite, 'self-possessed'; a slice of being in its own right. (In this way an echo of Avicennian Neoplatonism is sustained; nature is, in this sense, a piece of divinity.)

It may be for such reasons that Alliez speaks of Scotus in terms of a 'constructive monism',²³⁹ while Goodchild simply calls Scotus' monism a 'strange monism'.²⁴⁰ Goodchild makes the point that some Scotist scholarship makes the mistake of conceiving the univocity of being in a Neoplatonic manner. He correctly argues against this, for the simple reason that in Scotus one and being are diverse, and must remain so;²⁴¹ these transcendentals are separate. Is the interpretation of Scotus offered here guilty of the same mistake? Maybe not, in so far as it is being argued that the univocity of being logically implies a univocity of non-being. Consequently, I am arguing that for Scotus *being is not* (since it is a partially determined essence), and that *there is but one being*, which in its unity is formally distinct from itself, such that univocity of being again for this reason 'is not' being; already as one being it departs from pure existence. This is the *meontotheology* of nihilism's logic: nothing *as* something. It is this which finite and infinite share. Certainly it was not Scotus' intention to develop a metaphysical system that permits such an interpretation, but this does not mean that such an interpretation is illegitimate. We have eternal essences, a nature not inclined towards its

maker, and a univocity of being which is there to rid us of being, by making it indifferent. This points us in the direction of Descartes in terms of the practical representation of cognition, and Spinoza and Hegel in so far as God and Nature, infinite and finite, are seen as an aspectual dialectic of a monistic whole in the fashion of Jastrow's *duck-rabbit*. One 'picture' gives two aspects, distracting us forever from the one that moves, and moves us, between these aspectual perceptions. This will become more cogent as this book proceeds, especially in Part II, Chapter 10.

The next chapter discusses Scotus' and Ockham's doctrine of intuitive cognition, in an effort to corroborate this chapter's idea that there is a latent univocity of non-being, in so far as intuitive cognition provides a further example of the logic of nihilism: nothing *as* something.

Notes

- 1 Diamond (2000), p. 201.
- 2 Hesiod (1993), line 136.
- 3 *Ibid.*, line 138.
- 4 *Ibid.*, line 457.
- 5 Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. S. Mackenna (1991), III. 5, 2. and V. 8, 12 (hereafter Enn.).
- 6 One is here reminded of the painting by Rubens entitled *Saturn*.
- 7 Enn. V. 8, 13.
- 8 As Pegis (1942) says, 'The whole of being must be considered not only as being but also as non-being, for non-being is the mysterious co-principle of its interior intelligibility', p. 157.
- 9 See Part I, Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.
- 10 By employing such a phrase I am endeavouring to implicate the work of Levinas within this tradition. See Levinas (1991). I would also be keen to include Jean-Luc Marion within the same; see Marion (1991). See Part II, Chapter 10 where Levinas is briefly discussed.
- 11 This idea of non-production is important because it embodies the notion of the nothing *as* something. Throughout this book I refer to this non-production as provision. I employ this word because of its suggestive etymology. For the word provide stems from the word *pro*, which means before, and the word *videre*, which means to see. In this way I intend to suggest that the *provenance* of nihilism is to provide before provision. For example, the provenance of nihilism enables us to *be without being*, say without saying something and so on. One need only think of Saussure, for whom language was bereft of positive terms. This provision is, then, the nothing *as* something. See Part II, Chapter 10.
- 12 Enn. V. 3, 12.
- 13 The reason why the One (or Hegel's infinite) is not apart from all that falls beneath it, yet is not identical to it, is because of their proximity. That is to say, the One is *so close to the many*, ontologically speaking, that the many

cannot form a wholly separate identity from which the One could be completely apart or with which the One could be equated. The same goes for the finite in Hegel. For Hegel does not simply equate the infinite with the finite, nor does he argue that they are separate. This is because the finite is too ontologically close to the infinite to be able to develop a separate identity (an ontological difference) that could accommodate either severing or joining. See Part I, Chapter 5.

- 14 Enn., V. 5, 9.
- 15 See Part II, Chapter 9.
- 16 Enn., VI. 4, 2.
- 17 Brehier (1953), pp. 101 and 106.
- 18 See Bouyer (1999), p. 210.
- 19 Enn. V. 2, 1.
- 20 *Ibid.*, VI. 5, 12.
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*, IV. 8, 3; VI. 5, 12.
- 23 Gilson (1952a), p. 20.
- 24 Enn. IV. 8, 4.
- 25 Torchia (1993), p. 11.
- 26 This is the problem facing the omnipotent God of Ockham and Descartes.
- 27 Enn. IV. 8, 6.
- 28 In Part II, Chapter 10 the possibility of nihilism being read in terms of givenness is considered. In this way the nothing *as* something could be interpreted as a sign of creation.
- 29 See Kaplan (1999).
- 30 I agree with Gadamer when he argues that Plato's one is not Plotinus' *hen* (One). For Plato's one and indeed the Good are the dialectical unity involved in the many. In this way the one is more about the dialectic between *peras* (limit), and *aperion* (unlimited, indefinite); see Gadamer (1986b), pp. 28–29, and p. 137. More generally see Klein (1968).
- 31 Avicenna, *Nadajat*, p. 365; Plotinus *Enneads* V, quoted in Afnan (1958), p. 114.
- 32 Such mutual constitution continually reappears throughout this book. For example, in Spinoza God is Nature, while Nature is God; in Hegel the finite is the infinite, the infinite is the finite; in Derrida the Text is defined by the Nothing outside it, while the Nothing is defined by the Text to which it is 'exterior'.
- 33 As Pegis (1942) argues, 'From Platonic realism to nominalism the line of descent is both direct and inevitable', p. 172. I would argue that it is Neoplatonism which leads us to nominalism. Plato leaves open other possibilities, and such interpretations are beginning to be explored by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock.
- 34 Gilson (1952a), p. 23.
- 35 Fabro (1970), p. 100. In this article Fabro argues that Neoplatonism leads to 'Death of God' theology.
- 36 Pegis (1942), p. 174. See also Azcoul (1995), pp. 86–101, who also argues that Plotinus is both a pantheist and a monist.
- 37 Gerson argues that to read Plotinus as espousing a *henology* is to ignore the specific causation of finite being, as opposed to being in general; see Gerson (1994), pp. 236–237, fn. 44. On *henology* see Aertsen (1992b).

- 38 For a translation of Avicenna's *Metaphysica*, taken from the *Al-Shifa* (the *Healing*), see Avicenna (1973b); for a French translation see Anawati (1978). For a translation of the *Logica*, see Avicenna (1974). There are also two other translations of works on logic: see Avicenna (1973a) and (1984). Translations from the *Metaphysics Compendium*, which is a summary of the *Shifa*, are from secondary literature. For a general biography, with an introduction to Avicenna's works on theology and accompanying translations, see Avicenna (1951).
- 39 This principle embodies a notion of creation involving a double necessity. First, that of mediated creation, and second, necessary emanation, because the Necessary Being creates only by nature.
- 40 See Zedler (1948), p. 149; see also *idem* (1976); more generally see *idem* (1981).
- 41 'Avicenna does not recognise contingency as an ontological modality, but only as a condition in the nature of things', Goichon (1948), pp. 58–59. For Avicenna 'modality is determined on the level of quiddities in themselves', Back (1992), p. 237.
- 42 These questions come from Aristotle's four questions in the *Posterior Analytics*: *an sit, quid sit, quia est* or *quale est*, and *propter quid sit*.
- 43 'To those things which have quiddities that are possible *per se*, being, does not accrue except extrinsically but the first principle does not have any quiddity', Avicenna, *Metaphysica*, tract. viii, cap. 4, fol. 99r. *Esse* is 'something that happens to an essence, or something that happens to its nature', *Metaphysica*, tract. v, fol. 87, quoted by Zedler (1976), p. 509. For Averroes' critique of Avicenna on being as an accident, see the eighth discussion in *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, in Averroes (1954), p. 235. For the place that Gundissalinus, Avicenna's Latin translator, played in Aquinas' interpretation of Avicenna's understanding of being as an accident see O'Shaughnessy (1960).
- 44 *Metaphysica*, tract. i., cap. 66, fol. 72, vi. See Owens (1970), p. 4.
- 45 Owens (1970), p. 4.
- 46 'In Avicenna the *esse proprium* of the essence enjoyed a priority over being in reality and its being in the mind', Owens (1970), p. 11.
- 47 An essence was 'in itself possibly existent. For if it had not been possibly existent in itself it never would exist at all', *Metaphysics Compendium*, bk. I, pt. 2, tract. 6, 54–56; quoted by Adams (1987), p. 1068; 'Every being which is necessary through another not itself, is possible in itself', *ibid.*, cap. III, p. 69; quoted by Owens (1970), p. 4.
- 48 *Metaphysics Compendium*, cap. II, 69; quoted by Smith (1943), p. 342.
- 49 Goris (1996), p. 153.
- 50 *Metaphysica*, tract. v, cap. 1. This horse is the animal found in Avicenna's *Logica*: 'Animal is in itself a certain something, and it is the same whether it is sensible or understood in the soul. But in itself its being is neither universal nor singular . . . animal in itself is whatever animal is understood in the mind to be, and according to what animal is understood to be, it is animal only. But if in addition to this it be understood to be universal or singular or something else, then in addition to what animal is, there is understood something that happens to animality', *Logica*, 1, fol. 2rb; 'Equinity in itself is nothing but equinity, for in itself it is neither one nor many, nor existing in concrete

- individuals nor in the mind', *Metaphysica*, tract. v, cap. 1. For this reason, being is something 'that happens to essence or something that accompanies its nature', *Logica*, 1, fol. 87ra. This beast reappears in Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus.
- 51 This univocity is more apparent if we understand that the extrinsic nature of being cannot but make everything be in a univocal manner, but, more importantly, for Avicenna the intellect receives a primary impression of being which naturally prescind from divine or creaturely consideration. Being is a flat eternal plane without beginning or end (see *Metaphysics Compendium*, I, 1, tract. 7). Being only leads us to the essences, which are eternal yet deserving of non-being.
- 52 Back (1992), p. 243.
- 53 See Goichon (1956), pp. 109–110 for a translation of the text: *Shifa*, I, 281.
- 54 Gilson (1927), p. 104; *idem* (1929–1930).
- 55 Goichon (1969), p. 13.
- 56 Gardet (1951), p. 555; quoted by Goichon (1969), p. 13.
- 57 See Paulus (1938), p. 55.
- 58 See Goichon (1969), p. 21.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 God 'comprehends the particular things in so far as they are universals', *Nadjat*, 404, quoted by Goichon (1969), p. 22. In contrast see Aquinas *De Veritate*, q. 2, a. 5 and a. 6.
- 61 *Shifa*, 593, quoted by Goichon (1969), p. 21.
- 62 Goris (1996), p. 200, fn. 136.
- 63 See Goris (1996), p. 201, fn. 137.
- 64 Aquinas, *De Potentia*, q. 5, a. 3.
- 65 Gardet (1951), p. 549. Quoted by Goichon (1969), pp. 31–32, fn. 1. Avicenna argues that essences 'do not deserve to be . . . they deserve privation', *Metaphysica*, tract. viii, cap. 6. See Gilson (1952a), p. 78.
- 66 'Everything having a quiddity is caused', *Metaphysica*, tract. viii, cap. 4, fol. 99r.
- 67 *Metaphysica*, tract. viii, cap. 4; quoted in Zedler (1976), p. 510.
- 68 See Gilson (1952a), p. 81.
- 69 See *Metaphysica*, tract. vii, cap. 4, fol. 99r. See also Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*, ch. 5; Gilson (1952a), p. 80; (1978), p. 127; (1994), p. 456, fn. 26; Burrell (1986), p. 26. What the necessary existent does have is *anniyya*; see Frank (1956) for the history and meaning of this term. *Anniyya* appears to mean existence. There is little doubt that Avicenna did allow for an understanding of being which considered it an accident, but in fairness to Avicenna it may be better to consider such a 'doctrine' a blunder; see Burrell (1986), p. 26. This blunder seems to have been a sure sign of the limitations of Avicenna's metaphysical system. Anawati (1978) blames the development on Avicenna starting 'with essence in such a way as to arrive at the existing (*esse*) which effects it as though it were an accident', p. 78. Macierowski (1988) challenges this interpretation of Avicenna, arguing that Avicenna did not mean to assert that the first necessary being did not have an essence; this article contains a collection of translated texts relevant to the issue. But, as O'Shaughnessy (1960) argues, 'even the most favourable construction put on Avicenna,

- however, cannot obscure the fact that in his metaphysical system the real order tends often to appear as a projection of the logical', p. 679. The absolute consideration of an essence, for example the animal in the *Logica*, which becomes the horse in the *Metaphysica*, and the *Metaphysics Compendium*, generates a realm apart from God. These essences considered in an absolute manner, along with the first impression of being, engender a realm before a consideration of God. We are able to consider essences as the truth of things. But these essences are possible in themselves, and so are independent of God. Furthermore, being, in its first impression, does not involve a consideration of God. For this reason, being, not God, is the subject of metaphysics. What this seems to mean is that essences, as eternal possibilities, independent of God, and being as a first impression on the soul, allow for an understanding of truth and being apart from God, even though these essences have no truth or being, as such; see Cronin (1966), p. 177. All that which is, accrues being extrinsically. Yet in so doing they are in no need of being, or rather being is of no concern. This is especially pertinent when we consider that being, which is accidental to all that is, is God yet can be rightly considered apart from God. Here we have the nothing *as* something. Metaphysics is about being, but being, because it is considered apart from God, leads us to the essences which are eternal; eternally nothing, even when they are. As a result we can agree with Paulus (1938), when he says that in Avicenna, 'Epistemology commands and subsumes ontology', p. 12. Metaphysics becomes, in a sense, the science of non-being *qua* non-being.
- 70 Smith (1943), p. 347. Cronin (1966) concurs, saying, 'In the doctrine of Avicenna the possible in itself is set over and against God . . . for God the possible is a datum given to, not by, Him', p. 175. Francis Cunningham finds the idea of a realm of independent possibles in Avicenna 'libelous': see F. A. Cunningham (1974), p. 197.
- 71 Smith (1943), p. 357.
- 72 As Cronin (1966), pp. 176–177; italics mine. See *Metaphysica*, tract. viii, cap. 6, fol. 100ra.
- 73 *Metaphysica*, tract. i, cap. 2, 5; quoted by Zedler (1948), p. 134; italics mine.
- 74 *Ibid.*, italics mine.
- 75 Goichon (1969), p. 26
- 76 Gardet (1951), p. 557; quoted by Goichon (1969), pp. 27–28.
- 77 Zedler (1948), p. 139.
- 78 'Henry drew his inspiration both from Avicenna and Neoplatonism', Clarke (1982), p. 124. Pegis (1968) speaks of Ghent's 'preference for Avicenna', p. 246; see also Pegis (1942), where he speaks of 'the Avicennian persuasions of Henry of Ghent', p. 170. Marrone (1985) argues that 'the origin of [Ghent's] ideas went back to Avicenna', and, 'Henry's thought seems to have been particularly sympathetic to Neoplatonism', pp. 105, 141; Paulus (1938), suggests that Ghent paid 'a greater attention to Neoplatonic theories', p. 148, and Ch. 2 generally.
- 79 Clarke (1982), p. 124.
- 80 See Paulus (1938), pp. 87–103 for a discussion of Ghent on ideas.
- 81 See Part II for a discussion of Aquinas.
- 82 See Paulus (1938), pp. 52–60.

- 83 See *Summa Theologiae*, q. 2, a. 21; cited in Dumont (1998), p. 300.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 301.
- 85 On this see Davenport (1999), pp. 98–99.
- 86 Ghent develops his notion of indistinct conception in *Summa Theologiae*, q. 2, a. 21–24. See also Marrone (1988), p. 33.
- 87 See Paulus (1938), p. 65.
- 88 On Ghent's *esse essentiae*, see Cronin (1966), pp. 178–186; Marrone (1985), pp. 105–113.
- 89 Maurer (1990), p. 370.
- 90 Paulus (1938) argues that Aquinas, unlike Ghent, knows only the divine essence as the source of divine ideas, see p. 101; see Pegis (1942), p. 176.
- 91 As Pegis (1942) says, concerning Ghent's doctrine of divine ideas, 'Avicenna has the ascendancy over St Augustine. And this Ascendancy means . . . an introduction of the Platonic forms into the divine intellect as an order of essences, really distinct from the divine essence and really distinct in their essential being', p. 175. See Maurer (1990), p. 370; Pegis (1969) and (1971).
- 92 This is why Clarke (1982) accuses Ghent of deontologizing the divine ideas; see p. 124.
- 93 *Summa Theologiae* (hereafter *Summa*), q. 68, a. 5, 7–14; quoted by Clarke (1982), p. 124.
- 94 Pegis (1942), p. 175.
- 95 *Summa*, q. 68, a. 5, 7–14. This passage is quoted by Pegis (1942), pp. 176–177; and Clarke (1982), p. 124.
- 96 Sylwanowicz (1996), p. 188.
- 97 *Summa*, q. 2, a. 21; quoted in Brown (1965), p. 121.
- 98 *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. IX, 2; quoted in Paulus (1938), p. 91, n. 1; Pegis (1942), pp. 175–176; Clarke (1982), p. 124.
- 99 As Marrone (1988) says, Ghent 'wanted to create some sort of ontological category half-way between fiction and actuality', p. 38.
- 100 Marrone (1996), p. 177.
- 101 *Quodlibetal Questions*, V, q. 3; see Adams (1987), ch. 25.
- 102 For Scotus' texts see Scotus (1950). Relevant translations are *A Treatise on God as First Principle* (1966); *God and Creatures* (1975); *Philosophical Writings* (1987); *Contingency and Freedom, Lectura*, 1, 39, see Vos (1994); *Duns Scotus Metaphysician* (1995).
- 103 Gilson (1955a), p. 447.
- 104 As Gilson (1927) says: 'The doctrine of the univocity of Being is represented in Duns Scotus' eyes by Avicenna's Philosophy', p. 147; but Gilson does make the point that the two philosophies must not be confused. The true difference resides in Scotus' formalism, see *ibid.*, p. 187; see also Gilson (1952b), pp. 84–94 for a comparison of Duns Scotus and Avicenna. See also Marrone (2001), vol. 2, pp. 493–494.
- 105 'Duns Scotus has not radically altered the Avicennian notion of being', Gilson (1952a), p. 89.
- 106 *Ibid.*, p. 84. 'Duns Scotus adopts the whole metaphysics of essence from Avicenna', Klaus Jacobi (1983), p. 107. The term 'metaphysics of essence' comes from Gilson (1952b), p. 109.
- 107 See Adams (1987), p. 1075.

- 108 See Burrell (1973), pp. 96–101.
- 109 Marrone (1996), p. 178.
- 110 *Lectura*, I, d. 43, q. un, n. 22; see Marrone (1996), p. 181.
- 111 See Knuuttila (1996), who puts it like this: ‘Scotus thought that God first knows His essence in itself and then thinks about whatever else could be (the distinction is logical not temporal). It is only “after” this act of thinking about possible beings in themselves that God thinks about the relation of ideas to His essence’, pp. 135–136. Cronin (1966) makes a similar point when he argues that for Scotus an *esse intelligibile*, for example a stone, has a relation to the ‘divine intellection, whereas yet there is no relation of the divine intellection to the stone’, p. 191. Knuuttila (1996) concurs, stressing that ‘it is important to notice that the objects of knowledge in the second instant of nature [that is, second subdivision of the first moment], are introduced in *esse intelligibile* and known in themselves directly, without recurrence to what took place in the first instant of nature’, p. 136. Normore (1996) argues that for Scotus God creates the basis for logical possibilities, but that the repugnance and non-repugnance of these possibilities are independent of God.
- 112 See *Ordinatio*, I, d. 35, q. u, n. 32.
- 113 For a discussion of divine ideas in Scotus see Gilson (1952b), pp. 279–306.
- 114 *Reportata Parisiensia*, I, d. 36, q. 2, n. 29.
- 115 This *esse objectivum* is *esse intelligibile*.
- 116 Cronin (1966), pp. 198–199.
- 117 Gilson (1952a), p. 86. Elsewhere Gilson makes the point that God’s ideas of creatures ‘are not views of His essence nor even of His imitability’, Gilson (1991), p. 160.
- 118 For Ockham’s texts see (1967). For relevant translations see *Summa Logicae*, 2 vols., (1974), (1980); *Philosophical Writings* (1990); *Quodlibetal Questions* (1991); *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals* (1994). This last contains a translation of part of Ockham’s *Ordinatio*.
- 119 The exact nature of Ockham’s idea of divine Omnipotence is controversial. People such as Courtenay argue that it was a traditional version, in that it did not, in articulating the dichotomy of *potentia ordinata*/*potentia absoluta*, employ the latter as a form of action. But it appears that, for Ockham, this capacity is itself active, as everything in the Ockhamian world comes under its constant activity. In this sense *potentia absoluta* is an axiomatic *active capacity*. As Ozment (1980) says of the distinction, it is ‘the most basic of Ockham’s theological tools’, p. 38. See Courtenay (1984a) and (1990); Pernoud (1970) and (1972); Adams (1987), pp. 1186–1207; for criticisms of Adams’ view see Gelber (1990). Those who argue that the use of the distinction leads to sceptical ends include the following: Kennedy (1983), (1985), (1988) and (1989); Oakley (1961), (1963), (1968) and (1979); Randi (1986) and (1987); Funkenstein (1975a), (1975b), (1986) and (1994); van den Brink (1993). See also Dupré (1993); Gillespie (1995).
- 120 ‘Venerable Inceptor’ is a name by which William of Ockham goes in the medieval textbooks.
- 121 See Maurer (1990), p. 370. See also Adams (1987), ch. 24.
- 122 *Ordinatio*, I, d. 35, q. 5.
- 123 *Ordinatio*, I, d. 43, q. 2.

- 124 *Ibid.*
- 125 McGrade (1985), p. 154.
- 126 *Ordinatio*, I, d. 36, q. 1.
- 127 Maurer (1990), p. 376.
- 128 See Pegis (1942).
- 129 Maurer (1990), p. 377.
- 130 When Platonism is referred to, its most pejorative interpretation is implied.
- 131 Pegis (1942).
- 132 'There is a science which investigates being, and one science studies a univocal subject', *Metaphysics*, IV, q. 1, n. 2; 'Scotus works with a notion of being which is common and univocal', Gilson (1952b), p. 454; 'Scotistic metaphysics is constructed on the concept of being because there is no other idea which will permit us to attain God', Gilson (1927), p. 100. See also Shircel (1942); Barth (1965); Hoeres (1965); Marrone (2001), vol. 2, ch. 15.
- 133 For a discussion of the Scotist essentialising of existence see Gilson (1952a) and (1952b).
- 134 The lineage of such a notion may well run from Plotinus, when in the *Enneads*, he equates being and intelligence; of course the equation of being and thought had been made by Parmenides. This move was taken up by Avicenna who sought to consider essences in an absolute manner. Simultaneously he conceived being as somewhat univocal and accidental; univocal in terms of an irreducible intuition of being, and accidental in that knowledge was not affected by any existential notion of being, as it remained epistemically indifferent to being. Ghent follows Avicenna's lead, for he too considers being in an almost univocal manner, as his analogous concept of being arises from the first impression of the intellect, *à la* Avicenna, prescinding from determination. Scotus adopts this and extends it. It is not outlandish to see Descartes and Kant on the horizon, although this is not exactly the trajectory of this thesis. This legacy passes easily to the likes of Bertrand Russell: 'Being as that which belongs to every conceivable object of thought . . . Whatever can be thought of has being', Russell (1903), pp. 449, 451.
- 135 As Ross (1986) argues, this mode of individuation will fail because it requires 'deeper individuals', p. 328.
- 136 On Scotus' notion of formal distinction see Grajewski (1944), Wolter (1965).
- 137 *Ordinatio*, I, d. 3, q. 1, n. 357.
- 138 Alliez (1996), p. 201.
- 139 *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- 140 *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- 141 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 142 Knuuttila and Alanen (1988), p. 2.
- 143 Lagerlund (2000), p. 110.
- 144 Pierre Duhem is traditionally seen as offering a strong interpretation of the Parisian condemnations, while Koyré offers a weaker reading, limiting the extent of their subsequent influence. Grant has recently restated the stronger reading: Duhem (1985); Koyré (1957), (1949), (1956); Grant (1979), (1982), (1985). Murdoch (1974) says the condemnations led to the push of 'questions beyond the confines of the physical possibilities licit within Aristotelian

- natural philosophy into the broader field of what was logically possible', p. 72. McColley (1936) states that 'There occurred in 1277 one of the most important events recorded in history', p. 399. See also Wippel (1977); Hissette (1977); for an English translation of the Parisian text see Hyman (1983).
- 145 Klocker (1992), p. 108.
- 146 Knuuttila and Alanen (1988), p. 2.
- 147 This is the interpretation proffered by the 'Helsinki School', under Hintikka and Knuuttila, his pupil. See Knuuttila (1978), (1981a), (1981b), (1982), (1993), (1995) and (1996); see also Alanen (1985) and (1988); Hintikka (1981). Knuuttila is of the opinion that medieval thinkers employed a statistical understanding of modality, hence a merely extensional one. Klaus Jacobi argues that Aquinas *et al.* did not hold a merely statistical understanding of modality; see Jacobi (1983), p. 94. Goris (1996) concurs with Jacobi, pp. 257–275. Sylwanowicz (1996) argues that Scotus did not hold an intensional modality as Knuuttila *et al.* conceive it.
- 148 *Ordinatio*, I, d. 2, p. 2, q. 1–4, n. 262; *Ordinatio*, I, d. 43, q. un, n. 16 (hereafter Ord.).
- 149 Knuuttila (1982), p. 354.
- 150 As Vos (1994a) says, '*Possibilitas logica* is an irreducible ontological quality of things themselves. Only in so far as the aspect of factuality is concerned is God's will the cause of contingent things . . . The *potentialis realis* of God is the cause of the factual existence of contingent beings, and is not the cause of their *possibilitas logica*', p. 30.
- 151 Ord. I, d. 43, q. 2. See Lagerlund (2000), p. 94.
- 152 Ord. I, d. 2, p. 1, q. 1–2, n. 86; cited by Knuuttila and Alanen (1988), p. 35.
- 153 Ord. I, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, n. ad. 2. This encourages Burrell to call this view of contingency 'voluntarist': (1990), p. 252. For a different view of Scotus' understanding of contingent causality see Sylwanowicz (1996).
- 154 Vos (1994) insists that 'Discovery of synchronic contingency marks the start of Scotus' career as a scholar', and it was this 'synchronic contingency that can be regarded as the cornerstone of so-called possible worlds semantics', pp. 6, 30. On synchronic contingency in Scotus see Vos (1985), (1998a), (1998b); Dumont (1995).
- 155 Alliez (1996), p. 225.
- 156 Knuuttila (1986), p. 210.
- 157 Burrell (1990), p. 111.
- 158 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- 159 Ockham, Sent. I, d. 43, q. 2; cited by Knuuttila and Alanen (1988), p. 38. As Lagerlund puts it: 'For [Ockham] possibility does not depend on the existence of the world or on the existence of God's mind or any other mind'; Lagerlund (2000), p. 92.
- 160 See Alanen (1985), p. 175.
- 161 Ord. I, d. 43, n. 5–7.
- 162 Ord. I, d. 43, q. 2; cited by Alanen (1985), p. 182.
- 163 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 36, q. 60–61.
- 164 See *Lectura*, I, d. 39, q. 1–5 n. 69.
- 165 See Scotus, Ord. I, d. 7, q. 1, 27; see Alanen (1985), p. 178.

- 166 Alanen (1985), p. 175.
- 167 See Vos (1994), pp. 28–33; Beck (1998).
- 168 van der Lecq (1998), p. 92.
- 169 Knuuttila (1996), p. 137. See Ord. I, d. q. 4, n. 262, 268.
- 170 Ord. I, d. 43, q. u, 6.
- 171 Beck (1998), p. 128.
- 172 Suarez (1983), pp. 200–201. On Suarez see Marion (1981). Descartes seems to oppose Suarez on just this point, for it is said by him that God forms truth like a king who lays down rules in his kingdom. Yet, as Marion makes clear, Descartes has not challenged Suarez' basic presupposition, namely, that these ideas are exterior to God; (1981), pp. 134–139. Furthermore, Descartes' protection of the divine transcendence does not stop the Cartesian God from being subjected to other 'laws'. Gillespie (1995) makes the point well: 'Deception . . . is the consequence of imperfection and no such imperfection is found in God. That is to say, deception requires self-consciousness, which is the basis for distinguishing oneself from others. God, however, is not self-conscious. God thus is no deceiver . . . [Descartes'] God is an impotent God, not an omnipotent God, a God who has lost his independence and become a mere representation within human thinking', pp. 61–62. See also Marion (1998).
- 173 *De Veritate*, q. 1, art. 2.
- 174 Knuuttila and Alanen (1988), p. 41.
- 175 Klocker (1992), p. 114.
- 176 As Cronin (1966) says about Scotus: 'He inherits from and maintains the essentially platonic thesis of Avicenna and of Henry of Ghent, namely, that for whatever is conceivably intelligible there is given that conceivably intelligible essence', p. 199. Van der Lecq (1998) concludes that 'Scotus commits himself to a certain kind of reality of the possibles', p. 97. These possibles are, as McGrade (1985) argues, 'really nothing. They are beyond being', p. 154. For the Platonic legacy of Avicenna, Ghent, Scotus and Ockham, see Paulus (1938), p. 135; Pegis (1942); Gilson (1952b), p. 111. (It may be more accurate to describe this legacy as Neoplatonic.)
- 177 Klaus Jacobi (1983), p. 107.
- 178 See Alanen (1985), p. 175; see also Karger (1980), pp. 250, 256.
- 179 If Henry of Ghent had intended to overcome the necessitarianism of Avicennian essences, which must in being possible become realised, he did so (as did Scotus and Ockham) by letting them exist necessarily in the *a priori* realm of logical possibility. Avicenna's essences do in the end retain their necessity, doing so in being a nothing *as* something.
- 180 In a sense we can begin to read Kafka's tale 'Before the Law', as an allegory depicting modernity's death of God.
- 181 'Henry was but a hair's breadth from the strictly logical definition Duns would later provide', Marrone (1996), p. 184; see also Marrone (1988).
- 182 As Blumenberg (1983) says, reality 'became an amorphous sea of particulars, on which the concept creating understanding had to set up orientation marks', p. 519. This is what Blumenberg calls Ockham's 'phenomenalism', *ibid.*, p. 189.
- 183 Gilson (1952b), p. 248; italics mine.

- 184 Burrell (1990), p. 118. Blumenberg (1983) refers to the notion of a plurality of worlds as: ‘The idea [which] was to become one of the essential factors in the disintegration of the metaphysical idea of the cosmos, preparatory to the modern age’, p. 156.
- 185 See Boehner (1958), pp. 96–110; see also Adams (1977), pp. 144–176.
- 186 Quoted by Alanen (1985), p. 178.
- 187 *Ibid.*
- 188 Adams (1987), p. 1051.
- 189 Ord. I, d. 36, q. 1.
- 190 Alanen (1985), p. 180.
- 191 Ord. I, d. 43, q. un, n. 18.
- 192 McGrade (1985), p. 154. McGrade is here playing on Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*.
- 193 Ross (1989), p. 268.
- 194 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- 195 See Ross (1990), p. 189.
- 196 Ross (1986), p. 319.
- 197 See Goris (1996), p. 188, fn. 10.
- 198 *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- 199 See Lovejoy (1960).
- 200 See Klaus Jacobi (1983), p. 193.
- 201 See Ross (1986), p. 317.
- 202 Ross (1989), p. 271.
- 203 See Moody (1975), pp. 371–392.
- 204 Goris (1996), p. 275.
- 205 *Ibid.*, p. 274.
- 206 Schmidt (1966), p. 318. According to Schmidt, Aquinas does understand logic as intensional, but only on a ‘secondary plane’, *ibid.*
- 207 On *ens infinitum* see Catania (1993).
- 208 *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 5.57; italics mine. The language of ‘capture’ resonates with Plotinian audacity.
- 209 Gilson (1952a), p. 86.
- 210 Cross (1999), p. 176, fn. 36.
- 211 See Ord. I, d. 2, q. 1, a. 2, ad. 2.
- 212 Alliez (1996), p. 210.
- 213 Gilson (1952b), p. 303.
- 214 Alliez (1996), p. 210.
- 215 *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 5.57; italics mine.
- 216 Guénon (1953), p. 139.
- 217 As Caffarena puts it: ‘Entire la teología natural de San Tomas, centrada alrededor del Ser Subsistente, en que la Infinitud como nota expresa no juega papel preponderante, y la de Duns Escoto, toda centrada en al Ens Infinitum, puede ocupar un puesto intermedio, que explique en parte la evolucion, Enrique De Gante’; quoted by Davenport (1999), p. 99, fn. 39; see also Caffarena (1958).
- 218 See Gilson (1955a), p. 449.
- 219 Davenport (1999), p. 152. For Ghent’s understanding of infinity see Gilson (1952b), p. 208.

- 220 See Davenport (1999), which is an examination of the idea of this intensive infinite.
- 221 See *Summa Contra Gentile*, 1, 43.
- 222 Davenport (1999), pp. 65–66.
- 223 See Vignaux (1976), pp. 264, 497; Bonansea (1983), pp. 135–138.
- 224 Ord. 1.3.1.1–2, n. 58.
- 225 See *Quodlibetal Questions*, q. 5; *Tractatus de Primo Principio*, chapter 3.
- 226 *Summa Theologiae*, 1, q. 7, a. 1.
- 227 For an excellent analysis of quantitative logic see Guénon (1953), (2002).
- 228 Blanchot (1986), p. 64.
- 229 Cross (1999), p. 45.
- 230 Bouyer (1999), p. 260.
- 231 Cross (1999), p. 39.
- 232 See Davenport (1999), ch. 5.
- 233 *Quodlibetal Questions*, V.
- 234 Davenport (1999), p. 280.
- 235 *Quodlibetal Questions*, V; italics mine.
- 236 Ord. 1.8.1.3, n. 82.
- 237 *Opus Oxoniense* II, d. 17, q. 2, n. 5.
- 238 Te Velde (1998).
- 239 Alliez (1996), p. 212.
- 240 Goodchild (2001), p. 164; see also Smith (2001).
- 241 *Ibid.*, p. 165.