

METAPHYSICS IN MODERNITY

A (Very!) Condensed Story of the “Parting of the Ways”

{TAS’ outline in sequential numbering; Desmond’s treatment interposed in Roman numerals}

1. 13th-14th Century: *The Initial Parting*

1.1. The analogy of being is occluded behind the univocity of being.

1.1.1. *The Analogy of Being*

1.1.1.1. CASE STUDY: Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) – Analogy of Being

1.1.1.2. Giles of Rome (1247-1316) – Its initial concealment

1.1.2. The Univocity of Being

1.1.2.1. **CASE STUDY:** John Duns Scotus (c. 1266-1208)

1.1.2.1.1. God as the incomprehensible act of to-be becomes concealed behind God as a highest being among other beings.

1.1.3. The Equivocity of Being (Nominalism):

1.1.3.1. William of Ockham (c. 1285-1348)

2. The 15th Century: *The spread of universities and intra-order debates.*

3. The 16th Century: *Three Unintended effects of the Reformation*

- 3.1. After 1520, explicitly Christian claims about God in relationship to the natural world were sidelined because they were implicated in irresolvable doctrinal controversy.
- 3.2. Promoted a “logical corollary” to the univocity of being, with the effect of removing the sacramentality of existence and sacramental mediation.
 - 3.2.1. **CASE STUDY:** Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) on the Eucharist and Real Presence

- 3.3. The doctrinal disputes promoted an attempt at offering an account of the natural world that excluded Gods’ self-revelation as disclosed in his extraordinary actions in history, because Christians disagreed about the meaning and ramifications of those actions. As such, the univocity of being assumed an unprecedented importance.

3.4. The 17th and 18th Centuries – *high tide for the univocity of being and God as ‘a being’ among beings*

3.4.1. CASE STUDY - Francisco Suarez (1548-1617)

- 3.4.1.1. Relation to Thomas (analogy of being) and Scotus (univocity of being)
- 3.4.1.2. The influence of Suarez’s *Metaphysical Disputations* influence in Europe, especially Spain, France, and Germany.
- 3.4.1.3. Cf. Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655) [priest, philosopher, astronomer, and mathematician]: wrote in support of Suarez’s position on univocity: “Is there a possibility for abstracting some concept which would be superior to God? And why not, since no one denies that the concept of being is superior to God.”

3.4.2. God as Mathematician and Univocal

- 3.4.2.1. Johann Kepler (1571-1630) [astronomer and mathematician]: (1) “Mathematical reasons are coeternal with God”; “The reasons of geometry are coeternal with God” (22). (2) “Before the creation of the world, geometry [being] coeternal with the mind of God, being God Himself (for what is there in God that is not God Himself?) supplied God with exemplars for the creation of the world” (23). (3) God created the world, in short, “by practicing an eternal geometry,” (24) for “God geometrized in creating” (25). (4) Kepler arrives at a new definition of God – a new definition which allows him to free mathematics from any restriction in its application to the interpretation of the physical world. In fact, through his new definition, he guarantees for the human mind a knowledge that is “of the same kind as that of God,” including God’s knowledge of himself.
- 3.4.2.2. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642): “the knowledge [of the human understanding] equals the divine [knowledge] in objective certitude: ... to make myself better understood, I say that the truth we know through mathematical demonstrations is the same as that truth the divine wisdom knows” (27).
- 3.4.2.3. Marin Mersenne (1588-1648): the identity of mathematics and the divine understanding: mathematics constitutes the language and activity of God himself.

IV. RATIONALIST AND EMPIRICIST VOIDINGS: DIANOETIC AND AESTHETIC UNIVOCITY (DESMOND)

- 4. CASE STUDY: RENE DESCARTES: a “clear” and “distinct” (*univocal!*) idea of God, now pressed into the service of a philosophical anthropology (note how one can find *two* metaphysics in Descartes, and how he configures the relation between the two):**

4.1. God as within the same causal landscape as other beings, and thus explainable only as “Cause of Himself”

4.1.1. Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677)

4.1.2. Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716)

4.1.3. Nicholas Malebranche (1638-1715)

4.2. God as the Supremely Perfect Being, the Supreme Being and the Collapse of True Transcendence

4.2.1.1. The return of the “demiurge” conception of God.

4.2.1.2. Deists in England such as John Toland (1670-1722) and Mathew Tindal (c. 1657-1733) in England, Henri de Boulainvilliers (1569-1722) and Voltaire (1694-1778) in France; and later Thomas Paine (1737-1809) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) in the United States. In all these cases, the transcendent God had been assimilated to the natural world and then marginalized through natural causality, in sharp contrast to the way in which God was and is still regarded by Christians who reject metaphysical univocity.

5. 18th and early 19th Centuries: *some final comments about the effects of univocity of being*

5.1.1. Leibniz → Christian Wolff (1679-1754) in Germany, Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) → Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

**V. VOIDING BEING AND TRANSCENDENTAL POSITING: THE KANTIAN EQUIVOCATION
(DESMOND)**

**VI. BEING NOTHING AND THE WHOLE: HEGEL'S SPECULATIVE COMPLETION
(DESMOND)**

VII. THE OVERDETERMINACY OF BEING AND TRANS-DIALECTICAL METAPHYSICS (DESMOND), or what we have called *the analogy of being* in this course.

CONSEQUENCES OF THIS ACCOUNT OF “GOD”

Consequences: “God is no longer “GOD” but “god”

1. Loss of God’s true transcendence, his radical otherness, and his absolute freedom – an absolute freedom to be who he is in himself, but also, to give himself in a radical and astonishing way. God is not transcendent enough or free enough to *transcend his own transcendence*, and to give himself to us in self-emptying love. Such a God cannot by any means be the God of Jesus Christ.
2. Loss of the sacramentality of existence.
3. Disfiguration of the meaning of “mystery.” Mystery is no longer about free gift of a person but about unknowability
4. God is imagined to belong to the *same* conceptual *and* causal reality *as* his creation, which means that if natural regularities could be explained through natural causes without reference or recourse to God, then clearly the more science explains, the less would god be necessary as a causal or explanatory principle.
 - 4.1. The common belief that science and revealed religion are incompatible
 - 4.2. → The exclusion of God in connection with progress in science
 - 4.3. → Fundamentalist emphasis on ‘gaps’ in science or things we cannot understand in science because they see them as openings for God.
 - 4.4. → Loss of purposeness (teleology).
5. The re-interpretation of the meaning “literal” such that it becomes “literalist.”
6. God is in competition with us.
7. Loss of recognizing the cost of God’s loss. .