3

PHENOMENOLOGY AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

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3.1. Phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism

The history of the relationship between Phenomenology and medieval philosophy is, for the most part, the history of the relationship between Phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism. It was indeed Neo-Scholasticism that rediscovered medieval philosophy — and, to some extent, even created it as an object of the history of philosophy — in the 19th century (see Maierü-Imbach 1991). It is, therefore, “in”, “through”, and to some extent “against” Neo-Scholasticism that Phenomenology encounters medieval philosophy.

To all initial appearances, however, enormous differences separate Phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism, even though each of the two did come to count among the most impressive movements in philosophical thought in the 20th century. Phenomenology takes as its starting point a concern of a radically theoretical nature basically devoid of all historical points of reference; it asserts the need for a philosophical thinking without presuppositions and involves a rejection of all metaphysics. Neo-Scholasticism, by contrast, has a very precise privileged point of historical reference (namely medieval philosophical thinking, especially that of Thomas Aquinas); it is inspired above all by a religious-denominational allegiance (namely to Roman Catholicism); and it sets as its goal the re-establishment of a substantial and cogent metaphysics.

It remains a fact, however, that many and diverse points of contact existed, and exist, between Phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism which have so far been the object only of the most casual and occasional investigation by scholars and largely only with reference to figures and aspects of the two schools of thought which possess a macroscopic relevance.

One such under-considered aspect is the fact that, where Phenomenology took account of the achievements of medieval philosophy, this occurred principally through the former’s contact with Neo-Scholasticism. It is not by chance that Phenomenology’s relation to medieval philosophy is one which very often passes via Christian – and particularly Roman Catholic – theology. We find this, for example, in the “pre-history” of phenomenology in the work of Franz Brentano. But it is also to be found in the recent so-called “tournant théologique” of French Phenomenology; and also in the work of those principal figures of Phenomenology in whose thinking medieval philosophy enjoys a degree of presence: from Max Scheler, through Martin Heidegger, to Edith Stein.
Moreover, there is not to be found in Phenomenology – or at least there is to be found there only in a very marginal and secondary position and in a derivative form – any neutral interest in the history of philosophical thought. Phenomenology’s relationship with the history of philosophy is a relationship above all of the theoretical and speculative kind: that part alone of the past is studied that might possibly be of use in establishing philosophy “as a rigorous science”. The history of philosophy, that is to say, is not useful to the Phenomenologist as a topic in its own right. There goes to confirm this reading a particularly perspicuous testimony offered by a student and eventual academic assistant of Husserl, the founder of the Phenomenological school, namely, Edith Stein: “Husserl was not much interested in [confronting and comparing his work with that of other authors]. He was too taken up with his own thoughts to be able to devote his energies to probing into other eras […] He used to say, laughing: ‘I educate my students to become systematic philosophers and then I’m surprised when they don’t want to write works on the history of philosophy’” (Stein 2002, 219).

But, looked at a little more closely, this is an orientation which partly characterizes Neo-Scholasticism as well, since this latter looks to the medieval past as a supposed “Golden Age”, the theoretical cogency of which is energetically deployed against the crises and the alleged directionlessness of modernity. It is on this level, then, that we might examine the possibility of a first point of contact between the two movements. A second point of encounter, which has led in turn to at least a potential dialogue between these two currents of thought, can be firmly identified in the approach to basic philosophical questions that is introduced by Husserl in his Logische Untersuchungen. In this work, in fact, Husserl argues for a philosophical stance that can be understood – and was in fact understood by his first disciples – as a “realist” one in the epistemological sense of this term. Husserl propounds in this early work a vigorous critique of all psychologism and many of his students and followers have considered the more “idealistic” approach displayed in Husserl’s work from the Ideen on to be a “turn” that ought not to have occurred.

For Neo-Scholasticism it was precisely psychologism – and “subjectivism” in general – that represented one of the principal errors committed by modern thought as a whole, beginning with Descartes and followed by Kant. Neo-Scholasticism, therefore, advocated a return to the metaphysical realism that had characterized the medieval era. This said, however, it must be noted that some of the first foundations of the Phenomenological project had been laid by an approach which – at least in a general sense – might be defined as “psychologist”: namely, in the work of that thinker who inspired Husserl more than any other, Franz Brentano.

3.2. Franz Brentano

It is well known that Brentano was one of the main sources of Husserl’s thinking. Having undergone a philosophical training and formation very much within the context of that rediscovery of medieval thought which stands at the origin of Neo-Scholasticism, it was highly characteristic of Brentano that he should have gone on to author a treatise which was to play a fundamental role in this latter movement’s reappraisal and renewal of metaphysics – namely, Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles (1862) – at the very same time as he was developing that theory of intentionality which was to become so decisive for Phenomenology (see Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkt, 1874).

In the former of these two works Brentano undertakes an analysis of that subdivision of “being” into four fundamental modes which is famously developed in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: namely, 1) accidental being (ὄν κατὰ συμβεβηκός) and being in itself (όν καθ’ αὐτό), 2) being as true (ἀληθές) or false (ψεῦδος), 3) being as potentiality (δυνάμει) and actuality (ἐνεργεία),
4) the being of the categories (τὰ σχήματα τῆς κατηγορίας). Brentano addresses his efforts to analysing whether it is possible to make out a more fundamental and original sense of being and to distinguish this sense in terms of the Aristotelian categories. The categories, in their turn, are traced back by Brentano to the most fundamental of all categories, which is substance (οὐσία). Brentano’s discussion here, and the position that he arrives at, re-open, in the modern era, a question that had been lengthily discussed in that medieval era when philosophy had been dominated by Scholasticism: namely, the question – perhaps the fundamental question of medieval thought – of the analogia entis.

The Aristotelian project of constructing a science of beings qua beings is based on a delicate equilibrium between mutually opposed requirements: that, on the one hand, of escaping the conception of being as something of a single type or mode, preserving the irreducible multiplicity of this latter notion’s meanings; but at the same time, on the other hand, maintaining that continuity and univocity of sense that is a necessary presupposition of any discourse which claims to be scientific. In order for a syllogism to be valid, one and the same term must be assumed to be being used in one and the same sense – i.e. with the same definition – in both of the syllogism’s premises. But to claim that being is something that can be predicated of a thing entirely univocally tends indeed to make of being something of a single type or mode and to lead to ontological monism. To contend, moreover, that the predicates that apply to created things can be legitimately stated to hold true also of God Himself tends to deny all transcendence. The question of “the several senses of being”, then, has a direct theological implication. The analogy entis, or “analogy of being”, was the fragile architrave around which there came to be constructed the various edifices that attempted to establish metaphysics as the science of being: the characteristic common to these two intellectual enterprises consisted in the aspiration to maintain both that constancy and univocity of meaning that is necessary to the construction of syllogisms (and thus of science in general) and, at the same time, a recognition of the real diversity of the beings that make up the universe. In a similar way the attempt was made to establish theology as a science: one might indeed legitimately predicate something of God, while maintaining nonetheless – according to the dogmatic definition laid down by the fourth Lateran Council – that the imperfection of any such predication must always be of a greater order than its perfection. The question was eventually to be passed down to 20th-century Phenomenology and Martin Heidegger was to state: “[The] first philosophical writing through which I worked again and again from 1907 on was Franz Brentano’s dissertation: Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles” (Heidegger 1962, xi. Brentano was, for Heidegger, “[his] first guide through the philosophy of the Greeks during the years at secondary school” (Heidegger 1959, 93).

In 1874, however, as we have also noted, Franz Brentano published his Psychology from an Empirical Viewpoint. Here, Brentano takes issue with the approach founded on mathematics that was preponderant among the psychologists of his day and which derived principally from a rapprochement of the psychological with the physical. Psychology, at this time, was looked on as a kind of physiology of the human mind. Brentano pushed for a shift in philosophers’ attention away from that which was contained in consciousness toward the acts of this consciousness: that is to say, toward the mode in which consciousness referred to that which it contained. The operation of distinguishing the observation of the individual acts of consciousness from the passive registration of the content(s) of this consciousness is defined by Brentano as “internal perception”. Psychical phenomena differ from physical or physiological ones in being always directed to a content immanent to them: this peculiar quality of the psychical was, famously, defined by Brentano using the term “intentionality” and was, needless to say, to exert a decisive influence on Edmund Husserl. But this apparent invention of intentionality on the part of Brentano seems,
in fact, rather to have been a discovery – one which was perhaps influenced also by his studies in the thought and philosophy of the Middle Ages (see Perler 2004). Beyond and aside, then, from the possible direct medieval influence on the origin of this theory and on the use of the term “intentionality”, it seems certain that the reaction against the reduction of psychology to a sub-sphere of physiology treatable entirely by the mathematical method was influenced by an approach which derived from Brentano’s broader vision of the world.

3.3. Max Scheler

The anti-psychologistic arguments of the Logische Untersuchungen clearly represent an especially significant point of contact between Husserl’s early Phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism. The programmatic formula: “back to the things themselves” and, more generally, the method of research based on the description of the essences intended in cognitive acts initiated a philosophical current that took precisely a certain realism as its fundamental theoretical motif and found expression above all in the work of the so-called “Göttinger Circle” among Husserl’s students and disciples: i.e. in the writings of such thinkers as Adolf Reinach, Hedwig Conrad-Martius, Alexander Pfländer, Theodor Haering and Dietrich von Hildebrand.

Not a few among these philosophers who devoted their efforts to exploring and expanding this first form of Phenomenology – which was not yet of a “transcendental” character – were to develop a phenomenology of religion wherein investigative attention was directed specifically to the peculiar eidetic structure of religious experience and of its correspondent noema. This was certainly true, first and foremost, of Max Scheler. We may say, then, that the original form of Phenomenology is characterized by a strong interest in religious questions. Although we do see in various individual cases a rapprochement with the Roman Catholic church, it is by no means always the case that these early Phenomenologists, even where they address themselves to religious questions, refer directly to medieval or Scholastic thought, since it is also a key concern of theirs to maintain the autonomy of the Phenomenological method. This fact not only provides a general point of reference by which to compare and contrast Phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism; it also clearly brings out what is perhaps one of the most fundamental dichotomies that need to be taken into account in any analysis of the relation between the two currents of thought: if, on the one hand, the common aspiration toward understanding consciousness in terms of a certain philosophical realism opens up remarkable possibilities of rapprochement between these two schools of philosophy, a no less remarkable line of division is drawn between them by that anti-metaphysical tendency that is inherent in Phenomenology’s emphasis on precisely the “phenomenal” aspect of its method (a tendency which, not by chance, was later to lead Phenomenology to develop in a “transcendental” direction).

Surely paradigmatic in this regard is Max Scheler’s book Liebe und Erkenntnis (1915). According to Scheler, in Christianity, the human state of being is the object of a love that precedes all theory, all knowledge and therefore all philosophy. The Christian lives in this love and embraces it. The spiritual revolution that Christianity represented was not, Scheler argues, followed by a theoretical elaboration truly adequate to this revolution; Greek philosophical thought immediately advened to contaminate the intuition forming the Christian message. It is only with Augustine that a first attempt is made to give adequate expression to the utter novelty and the complete existential upheaval that the Christian experience had brought into the world. Thomas Aquinas, however, signifies for Scheler a regression into intellectualism: although he distinguishes between the vis appetitiva and the vis intellectiva, he maintains that knowledge precedes will.
In the essay *Ordo Amoris*, published posthumously, Scheler develops these reflections further, emphasizing the importance of the emotions in the process of cognition. The axiological significance attributed by Scheler to the *ordo amoris* makes it possible to found a material value-ethics upon an objective order conforming with the subjective order of human affectivity. Scheler’s descriptions of love here were clearly a source of inspiration for other thinkers of Phenomenological orientation, some of whom, as we have noted, eventually drew close to Christian theology, such as, for example, Dietrich von Hildebrand. Furthermore, in the famous text *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1928) Scheler seeks to develop a new metaphysics and, in particular, a “metaphysics of the human”. The perspective outlined here, however, is neither a Scholastic nor an ontological one but rather one of a general opening to transcendence counterposed to the immanentism typical of the natural sciences. In particular, Scheler attempts to identify what specifically differentiates human being from the being of other animals by reference to such essential human characteristics as love, will, freedom and the openness to the Absolute.

In the essay *Vom ewigen im Menschen* (1921), Scheler explicitly describes Phenomenology as an approach capable of freeing the essential core of Augustine’s Christianity from those Greek ontological categories and Scholastic categories that had accreted around it. Scheler describes the various possible relationships that have been proposed, throughout the history of thought, as existing between religion and philosophy, and distinguishes systems of identity (be it total or partial) from dualistic systems recognizing the two to be diverse things. Thomas Aquinas is described by Scheler as an advocate of a partial identity between the two. And indeed, we do find in Thomas Aquinas a partial identification of the object of religion with the object of metaphysics or natural theology. Through philosophical reason, contends Thomas, Man can arrive at a certain knowledge of God’s existence on which it is possible to found a “natural religion”; he cannot, however, ever know the intimate essence of God except through His revelation in Christ. In Scheler’s view, both the systems advocating an identity of philosophy with religion and those advocating an absolute difference between the two are insufficient. Philosophy and religion must be autonomous from one another but can communicate; Scheler advocates, therefore, the system that suggests a conformity without identity. A significant influence on this, Scheler’s reading of the matter appears to have been exerted also by the thought of Erich Przywara, the first exponent of Neo-Scholasticism to enter into a profound and important dialogue with Phenomenology.

### 3.4. Edith Stein

Erich Przywara also undoubtedly exerted a decisive influence on the philosophy of Edith Stein, Husserl’s first academic *Assistentin* in Freiburg, who followed a path that was entirely her own, leading from Phenomenology to Neo-Scholasticism, making the explicit attempt thereby to bring Thomas Aquinas and Husserl into relation with one another. Stein, who had attended Max Scheler’s lectures during her years as a student in Freiburg and had also entered into contact with Adolf Reinach, Hedwig Conrad-Martius and Dietrich von Hildebrand (all thinkers who embraced a Christian perspective) converted to Roman Catholicism and decided to undergo baptism in 1922 following her reading of the works of Teresa of Ávila. After her conversion she entered into contact with Erich Przywara, who urged her to engage also with the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Stein decided to begin this engagement at the point where Phenomenology and Thomism are usually perceived to stand at the farthest distance from one another: namely, in the sphere of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. For this reason Stein set about translating the
Quaestiones disputatatae de veritate. Initially, indeed, this engagement was a difficult and laborious one for Stein. She had great difficulty in grasping the structure, the form and the method of medieval Scholastic thought.

That this first encounter with the thought of Thomas Aquinas was an extremely irritating experience for this philosopher whose own thought had become so closely entwined with the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl is testified to by the remarks with which she prefaces, in the manuscript of her translation, her own rendering of the first Quaestio. It is worth citing the passage in its entirety because it is highly indicative of the enormous distance that had opened up between Phenomenological thought and medieval philosophy (and this, indeed, precisely in the work of a thinker whose thought was later to mark the point of the two currents’ greatest proximity to one another!):

If one approaches it from the direction of modern epistemology it is extraordinarily difficult to arrive even at a simple understanding, let alone at a full critical appreciation, of the epistemology propounded by Saint Thomas. Those questions which occupy for the modern epistemologist an absolutely central position – such as the Phenomenologist’s “what is knowledge, essentially?” or the Kantian’s “How is knowledge possible?” – are not, by Thomas, posed ex professo at all; one must laboriously seek out an answer to them – assuming that it is possible to answer them at all – from various remarks scattered throughout Thomas’s writings. On the other hand, questions are addressed in these writings which lie entirely outside of the horizon of the modern philosopher and appear, at first glance, to be inconsequential [...]. But I believe that one cannot rest content with such conclusions. Even if just kernels of truth are to be found here respectively on one side and the other, there must also be a bridge between these two sides. Certainly, we must follow Saint Thomas down the paths which he himself took if we are to acquire from his work something that relates to our problems. But this goal of gaining something that can indeed be applied to our present-day problems is one that we must never lose sight of. We must endeavour to discover whether, in what we find in Saint Thomas, there is also to be found an answer specifically to our questions – or, if not that, then a basis for rejecting the very manner in which, in modernity, these questions have been posed. Thus, it is imperative that we examine the Quaestiones from beginning to end in terms of the guiding theme: “What is knowledge?”

(Stein 2008, XI)

In any case, Stein did succeed in drawing progressively intellectually closer to Aquinas and to Scholasticism and in assimilating the forma mentis of medieval thought. She undertook many other translations of Aquinas and contributed greatly to enriching the studies carried out by Neo-Scholasticism. Edith Stein’s researches into Scholasticism culminate in the lengthy 1931 draft of Potenz und Akt. It was this manuscript that she submitted, unsuccessfully, in the same year in Freiburg, as her qualification for a professorial position (Habilitierung) but it also went on to form the basis and point of departure for Endliches und ewiges Sein, the systematic magnum opus of this period of her thought.

Very informative as regards the encounter between the two philosophical worlds is an essay that Stein submitted for a 1929 Festschrift dedicated to Husserl (Husserls Phänomenologie und die Philosophie des hl. Thomas von Aquino. Versuch einer Gegenüberstellung). A first version of this essay, written in the form of a dialogue between the two philosophers, has been preserved but was rejected by the Festschrift’s editor, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger insisted that the piece be
reworked into the traditional essay form. But quite aside from the charming “framing narrative” that she gave to the original version – Thomas Aquinas, in his Dominican habit, pays a visit to the Professor emeritus Husserl in his study – both texts treat in much the same way the six topics that counted, for Edith Stein, as decisive areas of encounter and confrontation between the two “philosophical worlds”, namely: 1. Philosophy as rigorous science; 2. Natural and supernatural reason; faith and knowledge; 3. Critical and dogmatic philosophy; 4. Theocentric and egocentric philosophy; 5. Ontology and metaphysics, empirical and eidetic method; 6. The question of “intuition” – the Phenomenological and the Scholastic method.

The form of presentation of the argument here reflects the thorough reading of Aquinas which had underlain Stein’s work as his translator. At the same time, we recognize the basic outlines of Stein’s own interpretation of Aquinas, the specific character and content of which is owed, to a significant extent, to the comparison and confrontation with Phenomenology, which is always implicitly present in Stein’s mind. This shows forth especially in the emphasis placed on epistemological problems and on problems of phenomenological constitution, as well as on methodological questions. Likewise highly characteristic of Edith Stein’s interpretation of Aquinas’s work is the way in which this latter is read by her in strictly and consistently philosophical terms. For Stein, the necessity of reading Aquinas’s work in this way is never in doubt. Quite rightly, she emphasizes the fact that for Aquinas, no less than for Husserl, philosophy needed to be a “rigorous science”: a demand going hand in hand with the claim that it is possible to develop a philosophical worldview purely out of the resources of natural reason alone. Quite correctly, she stresses the fact that, in Aquinas, faith somehow refers to rational knowledge, which can reflect on and about these acts of faith as it can about all other possible acts. The extremely nuanced treatment given to the theme of abstract and intuitive knowledge reveals the epistemological interest that had also been clearly evident in her elucidations of the epistemology-related *Quaestiones* in her *De veritate* translation. As regards, however, the questions of the substantial and formal dependence of philosophy on faith and of the necessarily theocentric foundation also of the former, she broadens the notion of a specifically and peculiarly philosophical knowledge-claim in such a way that the thought of Aquinas himself would have thereby to be assigned not to the properly philosophical realm but rather to the theological. What Edith Stein is primarily concerned to do, however, is to sketch a general outline of Aquinas’s philosophy vis-à-vis that of Husserl, so as to be better able to bring out the differences between the two.

Edith Stein maintained an original and personal approach even in her summaries and syntheses of broad bodies of thought. This is the case, for example, of *Potenz und Akt*, which represents an original Phenomenological re-reading of the essential categories of Thomism in the sense of a dynamic ontology, inspired by teleology and by the metaphysics of Hedwig Conrad-Martius. It is also the case of *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, which displays clear traces of her contact with Étienne Gilson and, above all, with Jacques Maritain at the conferences held in Juvisy by the Société Thomiste on the topic of Phenomenology. The orientation that Stein gave to her thought was that of a Christian philosophy in a strong sense of both these terms: i.e. a thought in which philosophy and theology are not at all separable from one another and need both to make their contribution to the search for truth. Stein’s *magnum opus* opens with an intellectual exercise strongly recalling a key theme of Augustine’s: namely, that of the search for the existence of God in what we experience of the depths of our own human soul – and in particular in our inward consciousness of time in its phenomenological process of appearing. It then proceeds to an “ascent to the meaning of being”, before finally concluding with a re-descent back into the realm of the created world, read as a model and image of the divine Trinity. In these writings, then, a Thomistic metaphysics and a certain “exemplarism” of Franciscan inspiration and tradi-
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There are even to be noted – for example as regards the *principio individuationis* – certain influences of Scotist origin. Stein’s knowledge of medieval thought has clearly, by this point, grown and matured to an impressive extent and was later to deepen and enrich itself still further through an engagement with mystical theology and with the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagiticus.

3.5. Martin Heidegger

A trajectory which might be seen as, in a sense, the “reverse” of that taken by Edith Stein was followed by Martin Heidegger, whose path of development took him from an initial intellectual formation in medieval and Scholastic studies to a thinking situated within the framework of Phenomenology. It is well known that the thesis which Heidegger submitted for his own *Habilitierung* was a work on *Die Kategorien und Bedeutungslehre des Duns Scotus* (1916), although it was later discovered that the text that Heidegger addressed himself to here, and that he took for the work of Duns Scotus, was actually authored by Thomas of Erfurt) and also that his work depended in some degree on the thought of Roman Catholic theologians like Carl Braig.

Heidegger uses as an epigraph for the concluding section of this *Habilitierung* essay a quotation from Novalis that reads: “Everywhere we seek the Unconditioned (*Das Unbedingte*) but always find only things (*Dinge*)”. Clearly, a theme like this can be considered as paradigmatic for Heidegger’s later thought: a search for “Being” that, starting out from a finite perspective, inevitably finds always only finite “beings”. But this theme also clearly recalls the problem addressed by Brentano of the multiple senses of being. The theme of “the categories” is plainly the theme of how the single and absolute sense of “being” tends to dissolve into multiplicity in reality; and of how it is possible to hold these now-multiple meanings of “being” together into a kind of unity after all. We are dealing here, on closer examination, with the medieval and Scholastic theme of the *analogia entis*, which can thus be seen as the original path or groove of thought upon which Heidegger’s speculations elaborated and built. The young Martin Heidegger was intellectually formed and moulded by a cultural context of Neo-Scholastic type and his later insistence on “the question of Being” and on ontology most likely have their deepest roots here.

There has, in fact, often been noted the relationship existing between Heidegger’s thought and Roman Catholicism as well as with Christian theology as a whole. It is not by chance that the young Heidegger, at the time when he was just approaching a Phenomenological position, was also interested in certain religious themes and that, indeed, his first courses in Freiburg were devoted to just such themes. Heidegger sought to develop a phenomenology of the religious life of the very earliest Christian congregations, something he believed could be achieved through an analysis of the Pauline corpus. He also, however, came to pay special attention to Christian mysticism, above all in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart and Luther. Heidegger appears, then, to adopt, very early on, an “intimistic” and mystical line in these matters and to reject the Scholastic tradition. Also for Heidegger, then, as already for Scheler, it is Augustine’s thought that seems to constitute an important point of reference in the elaboration of a relation to theology and religion that no longer depends upon the ontological categories of Scholasticism.

In particular, the influence of Eckhart on Heidegger appears to be very relevant here, both as regards the description of the experience of fear as a “limit experience” and as regards the fundamental tendency toward a transcending of merely representational thinking. Eckhart’s distinction, too, between God and “the divine” may have exerted an influence on Heidegger’s critique of ontotheology. But the example of Luther too seems to have played an important role in the
thought of the young Heidegger inasmuch as Luther's writing is paradigmatic of the hermeneutics of facticity. In Heidegger's later work, however, Luther features only as just another element in the story of occidental metaphysics' decline into a “forgetfulness of Being”.

In Heidegger's lectures on the *Grundprobleme der Phaenomenologie* (1927), medieval thought was to be treated as just one of the four theses proposed regarding Being in the history of philosophy: in particular, so Heidegger claimed, what characterized this thesis was the division between essence and existence and the dichotomy between the being of the Creator and that of created beings. Nonetheless, Heidegger was to devote a specific lecture course to the history of philosophy *von Thomas von Aquin bis Kant* (1926/27) and in many of his writings he was to pay special attention to the Middle Ages and to the so-called “Second Scholasticism” (to Scotism, for example, or to the role played by the thought of Suárez in the formation of the modern concept of ontology and of general metaphysics as science of the *ens inquantum ens*).

Heidegger's fundamental theses regarding the Middle Ages – although their evaluation of this epoch is a substantially negative one – tend to oscillate around the notion that Scholasticism and medieval thought in general did not bring any really relevant alteration to those understandings of Being, truth and metaphysics that dated back to the age of Plato and Aristotle, merely adding to these the notion of God conceived of as the Supreme Being. The technical philosophical terminology of the Latin-speaking Middle Ages seemed, in its turn, to Heidegger to be merely a kind of vulgarization of the philosophical vocabulary of the Greeks. Regarding the question of truth, as has often been noted, Heidegger took progressively greater and greater distance from the Thomist understanding of this notion, following a line which – even if, in the early phases of the German thinker’s thought, it prompted him to share the theory whereby the intellect (and thus Man in general) represents the principal locus of truth – led him, later, to place more and more sharply in opposition to one another “*veritas*”, considered as *adaequatio* and objectivization, and “*alétheia*”, the Greek notion of truth on which Heidegger built a theory of “unveiling” or “unforgetting” (see Esposito–Porro 2001).

It is noteworthy, then, above all how Heidegger’s mature thought was to play a decisive role in prompting a thorough crisis of Neo-Scholastic thought, despite a series of authors – beginning with Karl Rahner – having sought to synthesize with one another the Thomist and the Heideggerian perspectives. In particular, it was Heidegger’s critique of so-called “ontotheology” – i.e. thought founded on the nexus between God and Being – that dealt a very heavy blow to the Neo-Thomist model. The Scholastic metaphysical tradition had, in fact, postulated “being” as a primary term – inasmuch it was the most general conceivable term, applicable to all that exists – while at the same time also referring to “God” as just such a primary term, inasmuch as God must be conceived of as eminent over all beings: it was the ambition of Scholastic metaphysics to firmly maintain both the identity of these two orders with one another (God is the *being par excellence*, and indeed, in a sense, the only entity really worthy to bear this denomination “being”) and, at the same time, their difference (the distance between the Creator and His creatures is unbridgeable; were it not, one would inevitably lapse into monism or pantheism) (see Vv. Aa. 1995).

It can immediately be seen how – underneath the specific terms “being” and “God” that are used here – this discourse on “ontotheology” strongly evokes that on the *analogia entis*. In this model, too, a fragile architrave must support a massive and ponderous structure: it is asserted that there exists a continuity and a communication between the immanent order of the world and divine transcendence, but at the same time it is claimed that there is also an unbridgeable separation and distance between the two. This, it might be argued, is to claim both too much and too little. And Heidegger, with his critique of the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics, does indeed deal a decisive blow to this model, thus throwing Neo-Scholasticism definitively into crisis.
3.6. The rapprochement between Neo-Scholasticism and Phenomenology

Neo-Scholasticism, on the other hand, only very slowly discovers an interest in Phenomenology. Although, as we have noted, there is to be observed already in the course of the 19th century a blossoming of studies contributing to the rediscovery of the legacy of the medieval and Scholastic tradition, this movement really begins to gain impetus only with the promulgation of the papal encyclical *Aeterni Patris* in 1879. Early Neo-Scholasticism was sometimes characterized by an “ideological” attitude: that is to say, by (in many respects) a closed-off attitude to, and even an outright rejection, of modernity. Very rare, at first, were speculatively original attempts at entering into a real encounter with other intellectual currents. Among the few exceptions here were Joseph Maréchal, who set about looking for a starting point that Neo-Scholasticism might share with those thinkers who adopted a transcendental stance of the Kantian type (see *Le point de départ de la métaphysique: leçons sur le développement historique et théorique de la connaissance*, 1922–6) and Erich Przywara, who believed there could be made out in the question of the “analogy of being” a metaphysical principle that might unite the modern transcendentalist approach and the Scholastic one, an hypothesis in the course of the investigation of which he entered explicitly into dialogue also with Phenomenology (see *Analogia entis. Metaphysik*, 1932).

It is only in the 1920s and 1930s that we see a change of direction in Neo-Scholasticism in which these bolder attempts acquire a greater weight within the movement and there can be seen to develop a marked interest among Neo-Scholastics also, and indeed precisely, in Phenomenology. Testimony to this are the early works of Sofia Vanni Rovighi, a pioneer of the reception of Phenomenology within the Italian Neo-Scholastic milieu (see *La filosofia di Edmund Husserl*, 1939), initiatives like that of the Société Thomiste, which chose precisely Phenomenology as the theme for its first *Journée d’études* in Juvisy in 1932 (see *La phénoménologie. Journée d’études de la Société thomiste*, 1932). This encounter, in which various prominent figures of the Neo-Scholasticism of the day participated – including Jacques Maritain, Daniel Feuling, Gottlieb Söhngen, Marie-Dominique Roland-Gosselin and also Edith Stein – is highly representative. The report on the proceedings of the *journée* reveals both the great interest in Phenomenology that had developed among Neo-Scholastics and their caution regarding contact and rapprochement with the younger movement. The usefulness of Phenomenology for Thomism is perceived to lie rather in the new movement’s methodology than in the concrete results to which Phenomenological analysis had hitherto led.

Around the same time, various developments occur that are decisive for any consideration of the relations between Neo-Scholasticism and Phenomenology. One of these is the incipient separation between, on the one hand, the systematic approach to the thought of Thomas Aquinas and, on the other, the historical-philological approach to medieval thought generally. Although these approaches were initially present side by side in many authors of the period, they were, in the course of time, to prove more and more difficult to reconcile with one another. While historical research into medieval thought has developed into a flourishing branch of studies that manages now to do without the ideological and speculative inspiration that characterized, at least in part, Neo-Scholasticism in its early stages, the purely theoretical approach to the works of Aquinas seems to be at home now either, on the one hand, in intellectual milieux characterized by a traditionalist allegiance to certain specific religious denominations or, on the other, in the circles of so-called analytical philosophy. Both these latter cases are instances of milieux whose approach is tendentially ahistorical.

This dichotomy begins to emerge in the 1920s and 1930s. On the one hand, the debate regarding just how the theoretical value of Aquinas’s philosophy is to be interpreted enters a
new and decisive phase; we see a transition from a predominance of the view that Aquinas’s understanding of “being” was basically identical with that propounded by Aristotle to an ever-greater emphasis on the originality of Aquinas’s doctrine of the actus essendi. Whereas figures such as Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Francesco Olgiati, Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, Gallus Manser, Joseph Gredt and Aimé Forest continue to defend the former thesis, the latter thesis, to the effect that Aquinas’s doctrine of the actus essendi – according to which “being” constitutes the highest perfection and consummation, the act which realizes essence – was a philosophically innovative one, is defended above all by Étienne Gilson (with his thesis of a “metaphysics of Exodus”), Jacques Maritain and Cornélion Fabro. Likewise belonging to this latter current are Joseph de Finance, Louis-Bertrand Geiger, Louis De Raeymaeker and the more speculative writings of Gustav Siewerth, Heinrich Beck and Bernhard Lakebrink.

There also arose in this period a whole series of institutions, research centres and collections of publications that were to contribute significantly to forming and shaping the study of the history of medieval philosophy: the Albertus-Magnus-Institut in Bonn, the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, the Mediaeval Academy of America with its journal Speculum; then the Commissio Scotistica, the critical editions of Eckhart and of Nicholas of Cusa, the Bibliothèque Thomiste and the Bulletin Thomiste published by the Dominicans of Le Saulchoir, the Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge and the Études de philosophie médiévale published under the editorship of Étienne Gilson. Building on that concern for intellectual rigour that had characterized it from the start, Neo-Scholasticism developed, with time, in such centres as these a predominantly historical-philological manner of approaching its object of study.

Finally, in the 1920s and 1930s, the thought of Martin Heidegger acquired a role of the first rank. Heidegger’s recreation of Phenomenology in terms of his own project of ontology appeared, from the perspective of Neo-Scholasticism, to be a project of decidedly ambiguous value and benefit. On the one hand it seemed to open up unexpected perspectives for a thought that had always aspired to place the question of the validity of the “question of being” once again on the philosophical agenda without becoming entangled in the “transcendental question” in the sense in which it had been raised by Kant (i.e. the need to pose, before any question of knowledge, that of the conditions of possibility of knowledge). On the other hand, this new Heideggerian philosophy of Being decidedly rejected the possibility of addressing the “question of being” using the concepts of classical (and thus also of Scholastic) metaphysics.

The interaction of these various tendencies with one another produces different effects. The relationship between Neo-Scholasticism and Phenomenology, which was, as we have said, just beginning to come to maturity in this period, becomes, as it were, twisted into an almost exclusive relationship between Neo-Scholasticism and the thought of Heidegger, with the original Husserlian inspiration being left out of account. A large number of authors aligned with the Neo-Scholastic current now, directly or indirectly influenced by Heidegger, set about achieving some form of reconciliation between Aquinas’s understanding of being as actus essendi (this latter interpreted after the manner of Gilson and of other Neo-Thomists of this period) and the “ontology” of Heidegger. These include Karl Rahner, Emmerich Coreth, Bernhard Welte, Theodor Steinbächel, Bernhard Lakebrink, Gustav Siewerth, Max Müller and Johann Baptist Lotz. The possible forms of thought opened up by this influence are highly various and original. This group of authors, admittedly, who played an important role in Roman Catholic thought in the years around the time of Vatican II, were mostly soon forgotten. Not only did the historical-philological approach — represented above all by Cornelia de Vogel, Werner Beierwaltes, Klaus Kremer and Pierre Hadot — bring to light, in the next generation of scholarship, the degree to which Aquinas’s understanding of being had already been that of the Neo-Platonists (particularly of Porphyry, Proclus, the Pseudo-
Dionysius and the *Liber de causis*), so that it was no longer possible to ascribe this understanding to him as entirely original. Heidegger’s own critique of Scholasticism’s understanding of metaphysics also became much harsher in these years, culminating in his famous critique of the ontotheological constitution of metaphysics (see Heidegger 1957, 51–79). The thesis that Heidegger advances in this essay represents a watershed in respect of relations between Neo-Scholasticism and a Phenomenology to which Heidegger had given an “ontological” (in all the various senses that can be ascribed here to the term “ontology”) twist.

### 3.7. The “tournant théologique” of French Phenomenology and Jean-Luc Marion

The following generation of authors, then, appear to renounce from the very start the aspiration to reconcile Aquinas’s understanding of being with Heidegger’s and to probe even more deeply the question of how far categories like “ontotheology” can lay claim to historical validity. Highly significant in this sense are the writings of François Courtine and Olivier Boulnois. Those writers, on the other hand, who choose to inherit and take over this earlier problematic attempt to think it through in a manner that goes beyond both Aquinas and Heidegger: Marco Maria Olivetti runs through the “analogical” question in a manner which conceives of it as an “analogy of the subject” (see *Analogia del soggetto*, 1992), Bernhard Casper attempts to develop a philosophical-religious thinking that draws on the *Neues Denken* of Franz Rosenzweig and on the philosophy of Levinas (Casper 1981), and Jean-Luc Marion makes an explicit attempt to conceive of “God without being” (see Marion 1982).

It has been, above all, this form of thought developed by Jean-Luc Marion that has proven highly controversial and given rise to passionate debates and discussions. Marion, together with Levinas, Ricoeur and Henry, is assigned the role of the “accused” in Dominique Janicaud’s polemical critique of a supposed “theological turn” in recent Phenomenology (Janicaud 1991) – an accusation, however, that only goes to confirm the importance and the interest of Marion’s work in contemporary philosophical debate. Already in *L’idole et la distance. Cinque études* (Marion 1977) Heidegger’s ontotheological critique – and thus that whole tradition that is conceived of by Heidegger as running from Hölderlin through Nietzsche – is used to develop an approach whereby the “theological question”, in its narrower sense, can be rethought. “The death of God” means, for Marion, rather the death of that idolatrous idea of God formed by the metaphysical tradition. The true biblical God, he argues, reveals Himself rather through a withdrawing and a distance, as a father does. This is why God can, and indeed must, be thought of without recourse to the concept of being; God reveals Himself hereby, however, as not “one” God; this is the dual meaning expressed by the title *Dieu sans l’être*. For Marion, it is rather only through the idea of love that the theological question can be once again taken up at all. Love, however, is also proposed by him as a philosophical theme in its own right and he explores love’s phenomenology even beyond its theological background (see *Prélègomenes à la charité*, 1986 and *Le phénomène érotique*, 2003). In this sphere, what above all characterizes and distinguishes Marion’s project is that he attempts to conceive of a singular, univocal notion of love, one which transcends and replaces the multiple and connotatively distinct forms (*caritas*, *agape*, *eros*) in which the tradition has attempted to think this concept. Marion does not, however, deny the dialectic of these forms but rather describes it in great detail. For Marion, the logic of love is incomprehensible; but this is not to say that it does not exist. It is simply that this logic is not the logic of the world and not the logic that the philosophical tradition, and metaphysics, have tried to think. His very recent work on Augustine (Marion 2008) confirms this theoretical line with a reading of the work of the great Church Father. If the “I” is there, where it loves, then this locus of love becomes,
for the “I”, something more intimate than the “I” itself. This, on Marion’s interpretation, is the key theme of Augustine. The book can also be read as a Phenomenological reading of the Confessions. For Augustine, God is not an object of discussion but the locus itself of the discussion; he speaks always to God, never about Him, so that, even if our present epoch is just in the course of withdrawing from metaphysical discourse, Augustine, for his part, had never entered into it; this is why he can be so contemporary. A confessio is a discourse received through love, which is given back, likewise through love, to the confessing subject. That is to say, the dialectic of giving and of love is here rediscovered. This work thus constitutes a masterful synthesis of the three lines of research followed by Marcion: the philosophical–historical, the Phenomenological and the theological.

To what extent is Marion – and to what extent are Casper and Olivetti – authors who can still be considered Neo-Scholastics? And to what extent are they Phenomenologists? The speculative scope and breadth of these attempts, and the long periods of time comprised by both the currents that these writers have behind them, certainly make it difficult to classify them in terms of these categories. The aspect of the Neo-Scholastic tradition, in particular, appears to be less vital in these writers. Precisely, however, because they are freed of the burden of “defending” the speculative validity of Scholastic thinking, there is often to be observed in these authors a reference to and reliance on this thinking as something that continues to be an effervescent source of inspiration. Phenomenology, then, to which they tend to make more direct and explicit reference, is really used here as a means by which to draw out into the light a, as it were, “hidden” meaning to be found in the texts and in the thought of the Scholastic tradition. Certain recent efforts of Emmanuel Falque move in this direction, inasmuch as he exercises himself in the practice of reading also Scholastic motifs in a Phenomenological manner (see Falque 2008).

Likewise, the overcoming of the tendency to accord a privileged attention to the work of Heidegger allows a rediscovery of, and a throwing of new light on, the entire heritage of Phenomenology, including its Husserlian origins. Once again it is Marion who, with his “Phenomenology of giving”, seeks a synthesis of the approaches of both thinkers (see Marion 1989).

Thus if, on the one hand, Phenomenology was accused, already in the era of its first emergence, of being an attempt to found a “new Scholasticism” and has undergone, in more recent years, what has been polemically described as a “theological turn”, (Neo-)Scholasticism itself, on the other hand, has undergone – and this above all in respect of that which remains most alive and vital in it of its speculative side – what we might, in parallel to the younger movement’s “theological turn”, call a “Phenomenological turn”.

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