

Postmodernity and Univocity: A Critical Account of Radical Orthodoxy and John Duns Scotus. By Daniel P. Horan, OFM. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2014. ix + 219 pp. \$29.00 (paper).

Theology, as an intellectual discipline, is highly narrative in character. It often proceeds on the basis of a genealogical, “history of ideas” approach to explicating a particular view—its origin and derivation, context and significance, implications and subsequent effects. When theology is done in this mode, getting the theological story right becomes even more imperative. Daniel Horan argues in his fascinating new book that when it comes to the story that the theological movement known as Radical Orthodoxy tells about the medieval Franciscan philosopher–theologian John Duns Scotus (1266–1308), the narrative interpretation afforded his work is simply wrong. It is, in fact, more than wrong. As Horan observes, it is *obstinately* wrong. And, as his work implies, it may be *fatally* wrong, as the erroneousness of what Horan calls Radical Orthodoxy’s incorrect “Scotus Story” threatens to undermine the validity of the overall theological project that is predicated upon it.

In their Scotus Story, Radical Orthodox theologians maintain that Thomas Aquinas’s (1225–1274) analogical approach to God-talk preserved

the prevailing Neoplatonic participatory metaphysics. In Aquinas, the contingent being of finite entities is held to derive from its direct, analogical relation to the non-contingent Being who is God. In this relationship, “being” must be understood equivocally, as the finite being of created entities and the infinite Being of God are utterly different. By contrast, Radical Orthodox theologians maintain, Scotus’s assertion that such an analogy only works if finite being and infinite Being are understood univocally as being of the same kind (and so can be perceived as being authentically and reliably related), though crucially differentiated, is an illegitimate equation of finite creatures’ being with God’s Being. This makes finite being the same as and independent of divine Being in a way that was never asserted previously. Scotus’s univocal idea of being, they claim, permitted the conception of a till-then unknown space standing apart from the divine, a realm that came to be called “the secular.” Radical Orthodoxy’s Scotus Story thus positions Scotus as the anti-Aquinas, the first philosopher to separate metaphysics and theology and, because of this, as the figure who paved the way for modernity and postmodernity. This, they argue, places Scotus at the head of an intellectual line that led eventually to Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and the various nihilisms of postmodernism. Radical Orthodoxy’s overall effort is aimed at defeating the line of thinking that Scotus initiated and at undoing the “secular” world they believe it legitimates.

For the theologians associated with Radical Orthodoxy, especially its progenitor, John Milbank, who articulates the Scotus Story most clearly in his influential programmatic volume, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990), Aquinas and Scotus thus represent the two sides of a metaphysical binary. Aquinas is its positive, Neoplatonic-Augustinian, philosophically realist pole, Scotus the negative, “postmodern,” philosophically nominalist one. In the years since *Theology and Social Theory* was published, serious scholarly critique of the version of Aquinas that Radical Orthodoxy presents—a somewhat idiosyncratic reading of Aquinas that Horan, following John Caputo, calls “Cambridge Thomism”—has attempted to correct this problematic interpretation of the Angelic Doctor. Many articles and books have been devoted to this endeavor. What has not been as readily forthcoming is a similar corrective of Radical Orthodoxy’s Scotus Story. That is the important additional work that Horan seeks to carry forward.

Horan’s view is that Radical Orthodox theologians read Scotus “eisegetically” (p. 106), just as they do Aquinas, interpreting both to fit their theological needs and preexisting positions, often despite the contexts, meanings, definitions of terms, and basic intentions of the two medieval scholastics themselves. In terms of Scotus, Horan advocates a return to Scotus’s actual texts, as so many scholars—inside and outside the Radical Orthodoxy camp—do not read them but instead rely on (often questionable)

secondary sources about them. Étienne Gilson, an eminent scholar who is himself a somewhat problematic expositor of Scotus, also has noted this problem. "Of a hundred writers who have held Duns Scotus up to ridicule," Horan quotes Gilson as writing, "not two of them have ever read him, and not even one has understood him" (p. 148). According to Horan, Radical Orthodox theologians are no exception.

To the extent that some gestures toward a corrective have been offered, they have had little effect. In commenting on Milbank's recent *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (2014), Horan writes: "The most fascinating dimension of this book . . . is that the entire first section is an elaborate representation of the Scotus Story that acknowledges absolutely *none* of the critiques that Scotus scholars have leveled against Milbank's reading of Scotus since *Theology and Social Theory* was published in 1990" (p. 192).

The seeming unwillingness of Radical Orthodox theologians to acknowledge, let alone engage, corrections to their account of Scotus makes Horan's volume an even more significant contribution than his nuanced tracing of the salient theological issues involved already does. Given the wide reach and influence of Radical Orthodoxy and its Scotus Story, which Horan expertly brings to the surface for his readers, and the highly contentious project that the movement advances, it is essential to attend to careful, compelling, highly readable work such as Horan's, particularly if Radical Orthodox theologians themselves do not, so that we can evaluate properly and respond appropriately.

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