

Is Thomism Radical Enough?

A Response to Alan Darley

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Alan Darley has implored Radical Orthodoxy to become “more radically Thomistic” by recovering the principle of non-contradiction. Aristotle, he argues, had prohibited all contradictions by an indirect argument against denying this prohibition. But Darley neglects to recognize how this argument already operates as a viciously circular formalized dialectic. Plato developed this dialectic into the self-determination of Intellect; Plotinus suspended it from the divine hypostases; and Proclus systematized it as the creative *hypercontrariety* that imparts every determination. Thomas Aquinas sublated all contrariety into the divine impartation of individuated acts of existence. This impartation of existence into entities may have produced an *aporia* of existence: if existence is multiple then it is contrary to the individuality of every entity; but if existence is unitary then it may conceal the creative contrariety of participation. The further radicalization of Thomism may require the *aporia* of existence to be resolved through a Neoplatonic dialectic.

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Thomism or Radical Orthodoxy

Radical Orthodoxy may be typified as a Platonic, Augustinian, and Dionysian response to the nihilistic tendencies of Deconstruction and Post-modernism. John Milbank has described, in an essay that may be read as a manifesto for the movement, how the “end of modernity... means the end of single system of truth based on universal reason” and the end of “the modern predicament of theology” that opens up “infinitely many versions of truth” that allows “theology to make a kind of half-turn back to pre-modernity.”¹ This ‘half-turn back to pre-modernity’ is - at once - also

a half-turn forward to a post-modern Platonism. Catherine Pickstock, in particular, has consistently celebrated Plato as the ancestral hero in the drama of Radical Orthodoxy, (henceforth RO).² His central theory of participation (*methexis*), in which many imperfect exemplifications reflect, imitate, or participate in one perfect paradigm, is meant to re-establish restore the bonds of being that have been broken, dissolved, and annihilated by the ‘pagan agon’ of postmodern nihilism.³ James Smith thus describes Platonic participation as the definitive “crescendo of the [Radical Orthodoxy] symphony.”⁴

Alan Darley has seized upon the appa-

rent triviality of this half-turn behind modern rationalism towards post-modern Platonism to argue that Radical Orthodoxy has “displaced the authority of Thomas” into a “Cusanean tributary from the Neoplatonic river.”⁵ On no less an authority than Saint Thomas Aquinas, he pronounces that the first principles of knowledge, and pre-imminently the Principle of Non-Contradiction, can be infallibly, immediately, and incontestably known: where Thomists have traditionally prohibited all contradictions, Radical Orthodoxy appears to have claimed for theology the special privilege of exceeding this prohibition for the purpose of restoring the possibility of theology - after nominalism, secularism, and postmodernism - through an analogical language that is always already suspended by a metaphysic of participation. Hence, it seems that Radical Orthodoxy is guilty of violating the Principle of Non-Contradiction, betraying the teachings of Thomas Aquinas, and perhaps even trespassing beyond the bounds of Catholic orthodoxy.

If Aquinas’ prohibition was eternally and universally binding, then no historicist re-narration of a theological ‘post-post-modernism’ could plausibly trespass beyond it. Yet Radical Orthodoxy has insisted that there may be a compelling case to question its universal jurisdiction: consider that a contradiction may arise from any coincidence of contraries, such as the coincidence of one and many; identity and difference; or rest and motion. Indeed, all that is required to form a contradiction is for some coincidence of contraries to be formulated into an affirmation and denial of one and the same proposition. Once we acknowledge that no contrary is, in any way, beyond the purview of language, then any instance of

contrariety may be formulated into contradiction: for if a contradiction is a coincidence of contraries; contraries are present whenever there is any identity of differences; and every participation involves an identity of one participated paradigm and many different participants; then participation must always produce an originary contradiction. We may thus easily observe that participation involves the contradiction of imparting the intelligibility and being from one universal paradigm into many particular participants, while analogy likewise involves the contradiction of imparting the meaning from one universal analogon term into many particular analogate terms.

Darley similarly observes that John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Johannes Hoff have each proposed specific instances in which theology must violate the Principle of Non-Contradiction: for Milbank, these are the universal forms and the analogy of being; for Pickstock, the participation of the finite in the infinite; and for Hoff, the coincidence of opposites between the perceiver and the perceived.⁶ Darley admonishes each author for neglecting to strictly adhere to the Principle of Non-Contradiction and suggests that any and all of their apparent contradictions can and should be resolved by distinguishing between two or more subjects: he thus distinguishes between the universals derived from the divine ideas; prior and posterior participation; and even the real distinction between God and the world. Since it appears that Aquinas may have already had a “better solution” to each of these problems, Darley concludes that there can be no need to “go down this Cusanean *cul de sac*” that denies the Principle of Non-Contradiction, trivializes all distinct determinations; and falls into the “modern

nihilism” of a “mutated Neoplatonism.”⁷

Centuries after the principles of logic had been cast in stone, the Principle of Non-Contradiction has now curiously re-emerged at the epicentre of competing Aristotelian and Platonic orthodoxies: Thomism denies any possibility while Radical Orthodoxy affirms some possibility of exceeding the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Darley has claimed, on behalf of Thomism, that the Principle of Non-Contradiction can be principally known through Aristotle’s indirect argument. In the following paper, I will first show how this indirect argument for the Principle of Non-Contradiction proves under closer scrutiny to involve a viciously circular formalized dialectic; second, how a more virtuous dialectical circle was further developed by Plato, suspended by Plotinus’ hypostases, and systematized into Proclus’ hypercontraries; and, finally, how Thomism may have, by concealing these creative hypercontraries, produced an intractable *aporia* of existence. I will conclude by recommending that, not merely Radical Orthodoxy, but even Thomism must radically reaffirm the Principle of Non-Contradiction as creative hypercontrariety, exit the cave of finitely axiomatized understanding, and sing a new song of infinite speculation before the divine dialectic of the Trinity.

Contra Aristotle on Contradiction

The haste to establish philosophy as a science with secure axioms has concealed the fact that it was Plato, rather than Aristotle, who first formulated the prohibition on the possibility of believing contradictions: in the *Republic*, Socrates commented that “it is obvious that the same thing will never do or suffer opposites in the same respect in relation to the same thing and at the same time.”⁸ In the *Meta-*

physics, Aristotle first describes the Principle of Non-Contradiction as an ‘unhypothetical’ (*anupotheton*) principle “which every one must have who knows anything about being.”⁹ Plato had first introduced unhypothetical principles in the *Republic* when he described how the soul could investigate the intelligible order of ideas “by means of assumptions”, from first principles “down to a conclusion”, and “from its assumption” then, “progressing systematically through ideas”, to a first “principle that transcends assumption.” He then illustrates how “students of geometry” treat their first postulates, or axioms, as “absolute assumption[s]” that are “obvious to everybody.”¹⁰ Yet philosophers, he insists, are even more “compelled to employ assumptions in the investigation” and to investigate “those realities which can only be seen by the mind.”¹¹

Plato describes this most philosophical art of dialectic, which discursively moves from hypotheses to unhypothetical principles, as “truer and more exact than the object of the so-called arts and sciences”, such as geometry “whose assumptions are arbitrary starting points.”¹² Aristotle seems to allude to this passage in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics* when he describes how the ‘science of the philosopher’ uses the unhypothetical principle that “everyone must know” as the “most certain principles of all things.”¹³ But where Plato had cast these unhypothetical principles as those of an originary beginning that is meant to be recollected at the end of the process of dialectical reasoning, Aristotle recasts them as merely the axiomatic starting points and assumptions for any possible deduction.¹⁴ Aristotle thus presents the Principle of Non-Contradiction as the unhypothetical first principle, ultimate axiom, and

“starting-point even for all the other axioms” for the purpose of prohibiting dialectic, contradiction, and the dissolution of all determinations in Heraclitean flux.¹⁵ He states that “the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect”; and that “it is impossible for any one to believe the same thing to be and not to be.”¹⁶

Since axioms are postulated as absolute assumptions, and the Principle of Non-Contradiction is the ultimate axiom, it must - by definition - be entirely indemonstrable. Yet for the purpose of responding to those who “through want of education” demand that it should be demonstrated, Aristotle offers an indirect argument: where in a direct argument a conclusion is affirmed, in an indirect argument a contrary conclusion, that may be affirmed by another, is meant to be reduced to a contradiction and rejected as false so that its contrary may be affirmed to be true.¹⁷ Aristotle immediately proceeds to argue that it is impossible for anyone to meaningfully deny the Principle of Non-Contradiction because, for in the very act of making any determinate and true statement - even a statement that denies this principle - the speaker must tacitly presuppose that determinate statements are possible, true, and not also false.

Aristotle’s indirect argument for the Principle of Non-Contradiction has won almost universal acceptance and secured, for this most certain principle, its indelible place as an incontestable axiom of logic.¹⁸ Neither I, nor the luminaries of Radical Orthodoxy, have any intention of denying the Principle of Non-Contradiction. Rather, we wish re-examine its place, function, and scope of application within theology. Under closer scrutiny,

Aristotle’s indirect argument appears to proceed through two hypothetical stages: at the first stage, he argues that a determinate statement may only be possible if we hypothesize that, for any determination, one determination is true and its contrary determination is false; and at the second stage, he argues that this truth and falsity of determinations is only possible if we also hypothesize the Principle of Non-Contradiction to prohibit the coincidence of contrary true and false determinations.¹⁹ Hence, Aristotle contends that determinations must be hypothesized for the possibility of statements, and the principle of non-contradiction must be hypothesized for the possibility of determinations.²⁰ Aristotle has thus discursively deployed hypotheses, contradictions, and even a formalized dialectic for the very purpose of refuting the use of contradiction in dialectics and establishing a non-discursive and unhypothetical first principle.²¹

Both Plato and Aristotle have used contradiction in dialectics to move from hypotheses to hypothetical first principles, but Aristotle purports to prohibit contradiction for the purpose of precluding dialectic: where Plato’s dialectic had deployed theses and counter-theses in a dramatic discourse for the purpose of exposing and resolving contradictory *aporiae*, Aristotle has formalized Plato’s discursive theses into ostensibly non-discursive propositions for the purpose of indirectly demonstrating a proposition by reducing its contrary to a contradiction. Yet where Plato’s speculative dialectic could ascend, through the speculative resolution of successive *aporiae* towards a totally self-subsisting and self-demonstrative principle of the Good, Aristotle’s formalized dialectic must remain inadequately demonstrative, for the simple reason

that there may always remain alternative propositions that he has not yet considered, reduced, and rejected.

The most decisive objection to Aristotle's indirect argument for the Principle of Non-Contradiction is, however, that he has circularly deployed determinations for the purpose of demonstrating their very possibility: for since the function of disjunction (i.e. A or B) always involves at least two determinate disjuncta (i.e. A and B); and an indirect argument always involves a disjunctive syllogism (i.e. A or B; not B; therefore A); every indirect argument must presuppose some determinate propositions.²² An objection may be raised, in Aristotle's defence, that he is undoubtedly compelled to assume the possibility of determinations, since all language and logic involve the use of some determinations. But if this hypothesis is also meant to act as the first stage of his indirect argument, then Aristotle must have circularly presupposed the truth of the first hypothetical stage of the argument before he has even made the argument. For the cogency of Aristotle's indirect argument to be preserved from collapsing into vicious circularity, the Principle of Non-Contradiction must be suspended from some superior source that promises to impart non-contradictory determinations into all of the variegated spheres of intelligibility and being.

Hypercontareity in Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus

Aristotle could not have easily admitted the vicious circularity of his indirect argument without also violating his own canonical prohibition against circular argumentation – *petitio principii*.²³ Yet Plato has even more audaciously proceeded through this very circular movement from hypotheses to the unhypothetical

principles on a dialectical ascent towards the supreme Principle of the Good itself. The Good alone is, for Plato, the onto-noetic source of all determinations in which the very possibility of hypothetical and discursive thinking is supremely secured.²⁴ After briefly glossing over the topic in the *Republic*, Plato further develops the method of this art of dialectic in his later dialogues, and especially in the *Sophist*.²⁵ After considering a “clash of argument” between the materialist ‘Giants’ and the idealist ‘Friends of the Gods’, he advises that “only one course remains open to the philosopher”: to annul the extreme incompatible while preserving the moderate compatible elements of each antithesis in some ‘third’ intermediary synthesis, “like a child begging for ‘both’ at once.”²⁶

Plato christens this supremely philosophic art of resolving arguments a “guide on the voyage of discourse” and the “science of dialectics.”²⁷ He initially exhibits it by dividing and combining the “most important” Ideas, beginning with the five ‘Arch-Ideas’ of Existence, Rest, Motion, Sameness, and Difference.²⁸ His analysis of Motion leads him to conclude that everything in motion, including discursive thinking, involves some participation of differences in and through the ontologically superior self-identity of the supreme Arch-Idea of Existence itself. Once the Arch-Idea of Difference itself is linked by participation to Existence itself, and all differences have been suspended by participation, then each and every difference may be reconceived as various, asymmetrical, plastic, and participative relations of non-being to being.

Parmenides had previously conceived of non-being and negation as absolutely contrary to the one and only Being that could be asserted. Once Plato has, to the

contrary, reconceived of non-being as essentially related by participation to Being, then he can similarly reconceive of how negations are essentially related to positive assertions: for since Parmenides, no less than Plato, had linked the possibility of thinking and speaking to ontology, Plato's transformation of absolute non-being into relative non-being also allows him to transform absolute negations into relational negations.²⁹ Since every negation is a relational negation, and every relation is determined by its participation in some superior paradigmatic Idea, Plato's relational negations can be recognized as genuinely dialectical determinative negations.³⁰

Plato's new conception of relative non-being and relational negation also implies a new meaning for the negations involved in contradictions. Previously, Parmenides had prohibited any contrariety in Being, Socrates had prohibited contradictions in speech, and Aristotle would, later on, extend this prohibition to any and all beings that could be thought or spoken.³¹ Yet once all of the relational negations of thought and speech have been recognized as determinative negations that partake in plastic relations of relative non-being to being, then even the negations involved in ostensibly contradictory judgments (i.e. P and not-P) can be reimagined as a mutually determinative negations that may be conjoined in a unity of opposites to determine some synthetic identity of differences.

Once Plato had transformed all relational negations into determinative negations, and every determinative negation into some participative identity of differences, then he could also begin to speculatively reconstruct every entity in motion through a dialectic of contradictions arising from the determinative negations of

opposed propositions.³² Contradiction is no longer merely the furthest limit upon legitimate discourse, but is rather the inner animating spirit of every discursive construction. This constructability of contradictions from determinative negations allows Plato to reconceive of the old Socratic prohibition on contradictions, far more robustly than even Aristotle's indemonstrable and ultimate axiom, as the supreme principle of the divine Intellect, or *Nous*, that uniquely orders, shapes, and determines every facet of the Cosmos.³³

Plato describes, in the *Timaeus*, how the Cosmos has been discursively constructed through an originary dialectic of the divine Intellect.³⁴ Plotinus fully apotheosized this principle of Intellect as the second of three divine hypostases, proceeding from the supreme principle, the One. He insists, even more than Plato, that Intellect is completely non-discursive: "There can be no planning over the eternal."³⁵ It is thus meant to non-discursively impart determination, difference, and contrariety, into the Soul; and it is through the supremely philosophic art of dialectic that the intelligible Ideas are meant to be divided until the soul has "has traversed the entire Intellectual Realm: then, resolving the unity into the particulars once more, it returns to the point from which it starts."³⁶

Plato and the Platonists had thus, not simply prohibited contradictions, but rather more radically insisted on the indispensability of contrariety for every determination of discursive thinking: for all discursive thinking involves differences in motion that may be formulated into contradictions; and only contradictions can motivate dialectics. Aristotle had, in his criticism of the misuse of dialectics, conflated this contrariety of dialectics, in

which this contrariety of difference is essential for the discursive thinking, with radical Heraclitean flux, in which any and all attributions are contradictory; every determinate attribution is trivially true and false; and all determinate distinctions collapses into a completely indeterminate monism that subsumes everything into its own abysmal nothingness.³⁷

Plato may, to the contrary, be understood to paraconsistently avoid triviality and accommodate some contradictions within specific eidetic constraints.³⁸ Since every instance of contradiction occurs in and through the thought of some Idea - even the supreme Idea of the Good - the explosive force of any and all contradictions must be eidetically constrained in and through the formal limits imparted by the Ideas.³⁹ It was thus the heirs of Plato, far more than those of Aristotle, who have always championed this power of speculative reason to construct, move, and know the Cosmos. It was accordingly left to the last great Neoplatonist, Proclus of Athens, to fully develop this more radical insistence on the essential importance of contradiction for determinate, discursive, and dialectics.

Aristotle had canonically distinguished between contraries (e.g. some S is P and Some is not P) and contradictions (e.g. all S is P and some S is not P).⁴⁰ Yet Proclus recognized that, since Aristotle's contradictions had only obtained between mutually exclusive subjects within the categories of the material world, there must also be higher levels of hyper-contrariety: thus rising above Aristotle's material contraries, he described the contraries in Heaven that naturally coexist; the contraries in the Soul that circle one another; and the contraries in the Intellect that are "creative in company with one another."⁴¹ Proclus thus attributed to the

Intellect and its intelligible Ideas the ordinary source of difference, discursive thinking, and "even for contraeity."⁴² Since every participation relation between one paradigm and many participants involves differences that may be formulated into contradictions, this paradigmatic impartation of every difference through discursive dialectics must involve a kind of creation through contradictions, which we may call creative 'hypercontrariety'.⁴³

Proclean hypercontrareity is thus the creative cause of, not only every contradiction, but even of every determinate entity. Since the One is the supremely simple paradigmatic cause of all complex effects, the creative causation of the One must produce a primordial hypercontrareity between the One beyond Being and the One from which flows forth all beings. Yet this creative hypercontrareity does not make every opinion trivially true and false because every specific effect is also meant to be eidetically constrained by and determined through a system of intermediary generic Ideas. Since, finally, this creative hypercontrareity is meant to operate at every level of participation, even the intermediary Ideas can cooperate through a derivative dialectic of creative contrariety to motivate a dialectical circle from the participated to the participants and back again.

Aporia of Existence for Aquinas

After neglecting to recognize this Platonic Principle of creative hypercontrareity in the metaphysics of Platonic participation, Darley has spuriously assailed Christian Platonists, from Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena to Eckhart and Cusa, for violating the more abstract, derivative, and dependent Aristotelian Principle of Non-Contradiction. He describes how "Dionysius conceives of the law of non-con-

tradition and the law of identity as inapplicable to God.”⁴⁴ But Dionysius does not merely insist that God operates above and beyond the Principle of Non-Contradiction: there is no special pleading for theology to violate the canonical norms of philosophy. Dionysius has rather insisted on making even this most certain of principles even more essential by transforming the creative contrariety of pagan hypostases into the “super-essential divine generation” of the Christian Trinity: previously the Neoplatonic Intellect had created contraries that had descended downward into evermore eristic materiality; but after the Incarnation this ‘divine differentiation’ could be spirally sublated, through the interpersonal relations of the Trinity, into ever richer syntheses: for example, we may say that the first difference of the Father from the Son is mediated through the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Dionysius similarly describes how the “Divine Unity... before all distinctions of One and Many... gives definite shape to existent unity and to every number” before returning into “Its utter Self-Union and Its Divine Fecundity” in the Trinity.⁴⁶

Since so many of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity seem patently contradictory, we may suspect that the indiscriminate use of Aristotle’s Principle of Non-contradiction, may owe more to Avicenna than to Aquinas.⁴⁷ Indeed, long after Christian theology, like Platonic philosophy, had dispensed with any hypostatized axiom of non-contradiction, it was fatefully reintroduced in the Muslim metaphysics of Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. Avicenna separated the subject-matter of metaphysics (i.e. being qua being) from the object of its supreme principles (i.e. God), and granted metaphysics, rather than theology, the exclusive prerogative to demonstrate the apodic-

tic axioms of discursive and determinative reasoning. Once the Principle of Non-Contradiction had been elevated to an ‘infallible’ first principle, then the ‘divine differentiation’ of creative contrariety proceeding from the Trinity could be reduced to a set of purely syntactic and semantic distinctions within being itself.⁴⁸ This reduction of the creative hypercontrariety of the Trinity to the contradictions of an increasingly formalized semantics may arguably have heralded the final dissolution of participation, analogy, and even the very possibility of theology by William of Ockham and his successors.

Saint Thomas Aquinas opened *On Existence and Essence (De Ente et Essentia)* with the warning that “a small mistake in the beginning is a great one in the end.” Darley’s mistake of prioritizing the Aristotelian-Avicennian Principle of Non-Contradiction over the Platonic-Dionysian Principle of creative hypercontrariety may have produced a great *aporia* for the Thomistic concept of existence (*esse*).⁴⁹ This *aporia* of existence results from the the possibility of producing a contradiction from any distinction between one and many: is existence multiple and contrary or one and consistent? If existence is multiple then it may be contrary to the simple unicity of, not only God, but even any subsistent entity; but if it is unitary then it may conceal, in its simple self-consistency, the divine differentiation of the Trinity, as well as any creative contrariety of participation. Aquinas has, in Darley’s estimation, adopted the Avicennian Principle of Non-Contradiction for the purpose of determinately sublating every multiplicity into the singularly individuated acts of existence: God, in his own subsisting existence (*ipsum esse subsistens*), is thus meant to immediately impart an

individual act of existence (*actus essendi*) into every existing thing (*ens commune*).

Thomists have long disputed the precise metaphysical mechanics for this divine impartation of existence (*esse*): Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and the Existential Thomists have altogether insisted on the mysterious simplicity of this act of existence; but Cornelio Fabro has traced its “theoretical nucleus” to the Proclean triad of essence, causality, and participation; and Klaus Kremer has even claimed to find evidence, in the Aquinas’ commentary on Dionysius’s *Divine Names*, that it “proceeds directly” from the emanative existence (*esse commune*) of the Plotinian One.⁵⁰ How Existence is meant to impart acts of existence into many entities may be the biggest mystery of Thomistic metaphysics. Yet this much seems clear: if existence is meant to be immediately imparted without discursive mediation, then it need never be discursively explained. But if the impartation of existence into entities cannot be explained, then it seems impossible to ever begin to explain the participation of entities in existence, and this *aporia* of existence must remain forever irresolvable.

Although the Thomists may purport to expound upon the relation between existence (*esse*) and entities (*ens commune*) in terms of participation, they seem unable to begin to explain the central metaphysical pillar of participation without developing a Platonic dialectic of creative contrariety. To circumvent this conundrum, Aquinas may have sought to explain participation in terms of an exemplary causation. For example, the Angelic Doctor writes:

“[A]ll things other than God are not their existence (*esse*), but share in existence (*esse*); and so it is

necessary that all things, which are diversified according to a diverse participation in *esse*, in such a way that they are more or less perfectly, be caused by a first being (*ens*) which is [exists] in a most perfect way.”⁵¹

Once, however, the Platonic metaphysic of participation has been reduced to a more Avicennian metaphysic of exemplary causation, in which the relation of paradigm and participant is superseded by the relation of cause and effect, then it seems that creatures could never begin to explain the relations of participation.⁵²

One possible response would be to claim that the Thomistic impartation of existence through exemplary causation is meant supersede any discursive comprehension of participation. But if, as Aquinas seems eager to agree, every causal relation essentially involves a participation of similitude between the effect and its cause (*omne agens agit sibi simile*), then the incomprehensibility of participation must also render exemplary causation, and indeed any putative impartation of existence, entirely incomprehensible.⁵³ The suppression of the Neoplatonic dialectic of creative hypercontrariety may then arguably threaten to retrospectively expose Thomism to the possibility for Scotus to reduce participation to univocal being; Ockham to eliminate all relationality; and finally for Hume to eliminate even all causality. To escape from this late medieval reduction of analogical participation to an arelational and univocal ontology, Thomists should reject the reduction of the Platonic-Dionysian to the Aristotelian-Avicennian Principle of Non-Contradiction, and more radically reaffirm their Neoplatonic inheritance of participation, dialectics, and analogy.

Radicalizing Thomism

Neither Thomas nor the Thomists may, of course, be legitimately faulted for dissolving and dispersing the traditional metaphysics of participation into the detritus of dispersed, fractured, and collapsing elements. But Avicenna's reduction of Dionysius' Trinitarian 'divine differentiation' and creative hypercontrareity into an indifferent, free-floating, and seemingly non-Trinitarian axiom of Non-Contradiction may be argued to have prepared the path for Ghent, Scotus, and Ockham to break the bonds of the great medieval synthesis.⁵⁴

The first fissure of this pending collapse may have resulted from a recognition of this *aporia* of existence: for since a contradiction may arise from any coincidence of one and many, it seems that this impartation of one existence (*esse*) into many entities (*ens*) could produce contradictions at every level of Thomistic metaphysics. And since Aristotle's Principle of Non-Contradiction prohibits every possible contradiction, it seems that an uncompromising application of this principle could render impossible, not only the venerable old tradition of Thomism, but perhaps even any possible theology involving universals, participation, and analogy.

Resolving the *aporia* of existence in

Thomistic metaphysics may require nothing less than the radical reaffirmation of the Neoplatonic dialectic of creative contrariety: Platonic dialectic may plastically reconstruct Aristotle's viciously circular indirect argument into the virtuously circular self-determination of the divine Intellect; Proclean hypercontrariety may impart contraries from the highest hypostases to the lowliest materiality; and Dionysian divine differentiation may divide and reunite contrary differentia in the image of the Trinity.

Each and every difference of existence that is imparted into entities may, on this Trinitarian model, be spirally sublated into ever richer syntheses that creatively exceed, without adding anything to, the divine existence: Milbank and Pickstock have thus described how "a created exterior can be entirely assumed into the divine *esse* without abolition, and yet without adding to the Godhead."⁵⁵ We should, therefore, not at all reject, but even more radically reaffirm the Principle of Non-Contradiction in and through the creative hypercontrareity and divine dialect of the Trinity. Rather than seeking to thomisticize Radical Orthodoxy, we should rather seek to radicalize Thomism, and join these competing claimants to orthodoxy in common cause against the pagan *agon* of postmodern nihilism.

Notes

1. John Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short Summa in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions". *Modern Theology*, 7:3 (April, 1991), 225-227.
2. Catherine Pickstock. *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 3.
3. Conor Cunningham. *The Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 179-202.
4. James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 74.
5. Darley, Alan. "Is Thomism Radical Enough?"
6. John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2004), 135; Catherine Pickstock, "Duns Scotus," in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (London: Routledge, 2009), 130; Johannes Hoff, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 42.

7. Alan Darley, "Is Thomism Radical Enough?"
8. Plato, *Republic*, 436b. Bailey observes that Aristotle's prohibition of any possible contradiction in *the Metaphysics* (1005b19-31) is "modally stronger" than Plato's prohibition on the possibility of believing any contradiction in the *Republic* (436e8-437a2). See D.T.J. Bailey, "Plato and Aristotle on the Unhypothetical", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30, (2006), 107-108.
9. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.3, 1005b14. For a comparison of the use of unhypothetical principles by Plato and Aristotle, see D.T.J. Bailey's "Plato and Aristotle on the Unhypothetical," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 30 (2006), 101.
10. Plato, *Republic*, 510b-c.
11. Plato, *Republic*, 510e-511a.
12. Plato, *Republic*, 511c.
13. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1005a20-1005b16. Baltzly and Bailey have each observed that Plato and Aristotle use the term 'unhypothetical' only once in the *Republic* (510b7, 511b6) and the *Metaphysics* (1005b14). See Dirk Baltzly. "Aristotle and Platonic Dialectic in *Metaphysics Gamma*", *Apeiron*, 32 (4), 171-202; D.T.J. Bailey, "Plato and Aristotle on the Unhypothetical", 101.
14. Graham Priest has observed that the Principle of Non-Contradiction cannot be any ordinary axiom that is meant to be postulated as the first premise of a deductive argument since it is "principle of all the other axioms." Aristotle appears to acknowledge this when he writes: "The impossibility of joint affirmation and denial is presuppose in no proof (syllogism) unless the conclusion itself was also to have demonstrated such." See Graham Priest, "To be and not to be - that is the answer. On Aristotle on the Law of Non-Contradiction", in *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy 1* (1998), 95; See also Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, A11, 77a10ff.
15. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1005b34.
16. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1005b19-25.
17. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.4, 1006a16. See *Prior Analytics*, 28a7-23.
18. The most persuasive reason to accept Aristotle's Indirect Argument may be that to deny it seems to imply the acceptance of a radical Heraclitean flux that trivializes all opinions, attributions, definitions in meaningless maelstrom that collapses into monism where "nothing really exists." See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1007b18-30.
19. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.4, 1006a1-25.
20. Graham Priest has similarly recognized that the "most plausible interpretation" for the indirect argument is that it is meant to function as a 'transcendental argument', in which we must hypothesize the Principle of Non-Contradiction to explain the fact that there are determinately meaningful statements. See Graham Priest. "To be and not to be - that is the answer. On Aristotle on the Law of Non-Contradiction", In *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy 1* (1998), 100-101.
21. Both Plato's dramatized and Aristotle's formalized dialectic each use contradiction, but Aristotle prohibits any possible contradiction: where Plato's dialectic had deployed theses and counter-theses in a dramatic discourse for the purpose of exposing and resolving contradictory *aporiae*, Aristotle has formalized Plato's discursive theses into non-discursive propositions for the purpose of indirectly demonstrating one proposition by reducing its contrary to a contradiction.
22. Graham Priest has similarly argued that this indirect argument against any possible contradiction must ultimately "beg the question." He declines to develop a more robustly dialectical interpretation of Aristotle's indirect argument, but briefly acknowledges that the "most plausible interpretation" for Aristotle's indirect argument might be a 'transcendental argument', which requires that, to explain "the fact that there is meaningful discourse", we must hypothesize the Law of Non-Contradiction. See Graham Priest. "To be and not to be - that is the answer. On Aristotle on the Law of Non-Contradiction", In *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy 1*, (1998), 99-101.
23. Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, 64b28-65a26.
24. Proclus emphatically argues that the Ideas, and supremely the Good itself, are absolutely necessary for scientific, dialectical, and discursive thinking: "If the intellectual Forms were to cease to exist, the forms in the soul would no longer exist either... Far more, then, than the sciences of definition and demonstration would this science be totally without substance, if souls do not possess really-existent reason-principles... We will then be abolishing the whole of Dialectic if we do not admit the existence of really-existent reason-principles in souls." See Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Murrow and Dillon trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 335-336.
25. Socrates plausibly alludes to Plato's 'unwritten doctrine' of dialectic when he comments that he is "omitting a great deal" and "shall have to pass over much." See Plato, *Republic*, 509c.
26. Plato, *Sophist*, 250c.
27. Plato, *Sophist*, 253b-d.
28. Plato, *Sophist*, 254d-255e.
29. Plato describes how whenever we say that something is not, we tacitly mean that the non-being that is signified by negation is related by participation some positive assertion of Being: "It must, then, be possible for 'that

which is not' to be [something] not only in the case of motion but of all other kinds... [H]ence we shall be right to speak of them all on the same principle as things that in this sense 'are not', and again because they partake of existence, to say that they 'are' and call them things that have being." See Plato, *Sophist*, 256de.

30. Proclus seems to have also recognized determinate negations in Plato's *Sophist* when he introduces hypernegations: "It is quite clear what relation Plato himself in the *Sophist* (258ab) declared Not-Being to have towards Being... there is a case where it [assertion] takes second place to it [negation], when negation expresses that type of Not-Being which is Beyond Being." Since hypernegations are superior to and determining of assertions, Proclean hypernegations imply determinative negations, which we may call determinative hypernegations. See Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 426.

31. See Parmenides, *On Nature*, VI-VIII; Plato, *Republic*, 436b; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.4.

32. Plato, *Sophist*, 256e.

33. Stephen Menn describes how, after briefly introducing Anaxagoras' *Nous* in the *Phaedo* (96a), Plato critically revised the concept of *Nous* in the *Statesman* (273b), the *Philebus* (26e), the *Timaeus* (28a6), and the *Laws* (966e) to become the functional equivalent of the Demiurge because it had assigned material causes to the formal cosmic order indifferent to the best, the Good, and any form of reason. The *Demiurge* and *Nous* are each the formal cause of order in the World-Soul (26e, 27b, 273b, 530a, 265c, 28a, 28c) and the king (*basileus*) of the world (274e, 28c, 28d, 272e), who gives order to heaven and earth (28d, 30c, 97c, 98a, 30c, 97c, 28e, 966e, 967b) for the highest good (30a, 37d). See Stephen Menn, *Plato on God As Nous* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 4-7.

34. Plato, *Timaeus*, 35a-41c; See also *Philebus*, 25e-31c.

35. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.7, 3.

36. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1, 3; I.3, 4.

37. Aristotle clearly associates the contrariety of both the "dialecticians and the sophists" with Heraclitean flux. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.2, 1004b18-16; 4.3, 1005b19-33.

38. Graham Priest's defence of dialetheism against Aristotle on the Principle of Non-Contradiction might retrospectively suggest Plato's dialectic as a predecessor of paraconsistent logic. Yet Plato's dialectic could, by contrast, be considered far more ontologically robust since, for Plato, any 'true contradiction' must be formally constrained and paradigmatically identified with ontologically superior Ideas. See Graham Priest. "To be and not to be - that is the answer. On Aristotle on the Law of Non-Contradiction", In *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* 1 (1998), 91-130. For Aristotle's argument for the trivializing implication of contradiction in dialectics, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4.3-4, 1005b 19-31; 1007b 18-29.

39. Proclus seems to have suggested eidetic constraints upon contradictions in his commentary on the 'Order of the Negations' in Plato's *Parmenides*, in which writes that "negations begin from the top and proceed in accordance with the order of the divine realms, of all of which the One is the producer." See

Proclus, Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 1088-1089.

40. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 9, 18a28-20b12.

41. Proclus, Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 113-114. Proclus summarizes that "the contraries in Matter flee one another; those in heaven coexist, but by accident of the fact that their common subject is receptive of both; the contraries in souls exist with one another as such, for their essences are in contact; and those in Intellect even participate in one another."

42. Proclus, Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 109-110: "For the cosmos necessarily comes from things harmonized with one another; and every harmony is a conjunction of things unlike and different, a proportion which is, as it were, a likeness among the unlike. Necessarily, then, the Demiurge has also the Idea of Unlikeness; for he who generated things that are subordinate to one another and that consequently differ from one another also harmonized the whole cosmos by means of Likeness. Likeness and Unlikeness, then, are primarily in the Demiurge, or to speak more clearly, they have their source in him. Consequently the power of producing both like and unlike things must belong to the Ideas... There is then a demiurgic Likeness and Unlikeness, the former analogous the cause of the Limit, the other correlative with the Unlimited. The former brings things together (which is why he says [132f], "The like is like to the like"); the latter is separative, delighting in procession and variety and movement, and at the extreme is responsible even for contrariety."

43. The term 'hypercontrareity' does not, to my knowledge, appear in the writings of Proclus. I have chosen to adapt John Martin's discovery of a Neoplatonic scalar logic of 'hyper-negations' to describe Proclus' use of super-material contraries. See John Martin, *Themes in Neoplatonic and Aristotelian Logic: Order, Negation and Abstraction: Order, Negotiation and Abstraction* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 28, 71. Proclean hypercontrareity must be irreducible to ordinary contradictions between two propositions because the Principle of Excluded Middle, which is presupposed by the mutually exclusive terms of any ordinary contradiction, cannot nomologically constrain the impartation of creative hypercontrareity from participated into participants. It cannot constrain creative hypercontrareity because Platonic participation is not a material but a formal distinction of genetic priority and posteriority: the participated is ontologically necessary for the intelligibility and being of the participant even as it is formally distinguished as genetically prior to the participant. See Proclus, Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 250: "Forms both are present to their participants through imparting a share in

themselves, and are not present by reason of their transcendent essence, even so in the case of the second problem we shall say the Forms both commune with their participants and do not commune with them.”

44. Darley, Alan. “Is Thomism Radical Enough?”

45. John Milbank has similarly described how the ‘first difference’ of the Father from the Son is intermediated through the ‘second difference’ of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son. See John Milbank, “The Second Difference: For a Trinitarianism without Reserve”, *Modern Theology*, 2, 3, (1986), 229-230.

46. Pseudo-Dionysius of Areopagite. Dionysius, the Areopagite, *On Divine Names and Mystical Theology*, trans. C.E. Rolt (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920) 188.

47. Consider that the Trinity is one God in three divine persons, the Incarnation is one person with divine and human natures, and the Eucharist appears as a leaven host but with the underlying substance of Christ.

48. Lawrence Horn describes how Avicenna made the Aristotelian contradiction of categorematic terms the “primary opposition” to “divide the true and the false between them.” See Laurence R. Horn, *A Natural History of Negation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 35-40.

49. Fabro and Bonansea distinguish two late-antique traditions of Neoplatonic metaphysics of participation: the Arabic Neoplatonic tradition, stemming from Plotinus and Porphyry, involving an ascent to the One; and the Thomistic tradition, stemming from Iamblichus and Proclus, involving a dialectical descent. See Cornelio Fabro & B.M. Bonansea, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation”, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 27, 3 (1974), 460. Thomas Aquinas seems to distance himself from any immediate knowledge of the first Principle of Non-Contradiction when he describes how the discursive intellect is directed by principles that are only grasped at the lowest level in participated entities. See *De Veritate*, Q.8, A.15; See also, Erich Przywara, *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics, Original Structure, and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann, 2014), 200.

50. Cornelio Fabro. “Platonism, Neo-Platonism and Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies” In *The New Scholasticism*, American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, 48 (1974), 77-81. See Klaus Kremer. *Die neuplatonische Seinsphilosophie und ihre Wirkung auf Thomas von Aquin*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966) 353-360; See also S. Thomae Aquinitatis *In librum beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, trans. Ceslas Pera, Pietro Caramello, and Carlo Mazzantini (Turin: Marietti, 1950).

51. Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 44, A.1. Quoted in Stephen L. Brock, “On Whether Aquinas’s “Ipsum Esse” is “Platonism”, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 60, 2 (2006) 294.

52. Darley attempts to paraphrase Aquinas’ participation metaphysics by distinguishing the participation relation between the prior divine actuating cause from the posterior creaturely actuated effect (i.e. *per posterium et per participationem*). See Alan Darley, “Is Thomism Radical Enough?” However, Darley neglects to recognize how Proclus had long ago recognized that every participation relation, including those involved in the analogy of being, proceeds, through creative contrariety, from one identical paradigm into many distinct exemplifications. See Proclus, Proclus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*, 109-110.

53. Philipp W. Rosemann, *Omne Agens Agit Sibi Simile: A “repetition” of Scholastic Metaphysics* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996) 221.

54. Conor Cunningham. *The Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology* (London: Routledge, 2002), 9-26.

55. John Milbank & Catherine Pickstock. *Truth in Aquinas*. (London: Routledge, 2001), 85-87: “We see this because we now have seen that a created exterior can be entirely assumed into the divine esse without abolition, and yet without adding to the Godhead.”