

FUNDAMENTALS OF PHILOSOPHY

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"Medieval Philosophy
From Augustine to Nicholas
of Cusa"

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SUZANNE STERN-GILLET

or to

McKirahan, R.D. Jr. (1994) *Philosophy Before Socrates*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company. Together with a comprehensive selection of the fragments and *testimonia* in translation this guide provides an introduction, a commentary and a presentation of Presocratic views in context.

Amongst Plato's dialogues, you are advised first to read

The *Apology*, the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic* in either the Oxford Classics or the Hackett translations.

Central excerpts of Aristotle's works are provided in either:

Ackrill, J.L. (ed.) (1987) *A New Aristotle Reader*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (numerous reprints).

or in

Irwin, T. and Fine, G. (eds) (1996) *Aristotle: Introductory Readings*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

For a detailed survey and comprehensive survey of Greek philosophy from the Presocratics to Aristotle, it remains best to turn to the six volumes of:

Guthrie, W.K.C. (1963–83) *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

From Augustine to Nicholas of Cusa

Dermot Moran

INTRODUCING THE MEDIEVAL WORLD: MULTICULTURALISM, MONOTHEISM AND RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

This chapter is an introduction to the diverse, complex and exciting world of medieval thought and learning. It aims to provide a sketch of the historical development of philosophy and to give some specific examples of philosophical reasoning in that period. Medieval intellectuals were as active in philosophy as their classical counterparts and there is no good reason for the current neglect of this period in the undergraduate philosophy curriculum. On the other hand, it is not easy to read medieval texts; one needs considerable background historical knowledge of the classical philosophical tradition, familiarity with scripture, contextual awareness and linguistic expertise – not just in Greek, Latin or Arabic, but also modern European languages – in order to penetrate fully into the nature of medieval thought. Moreover, even with huge growth in our knowledge of medieval philosophy in the past 150 years, the extant corpus of medieval philosophy – by no means fully identified or complete – is far more vast than the entire classical legacy. Critical editions of the central writers (even those of Aquinas and Duns Scotus) are incomplete, and there is a paucity of English translations. Due to the neglect of medieval philosophy in the Anglophone world, most of the best scholarship is in German, French, Italian, or other European languages. Finally, there is no longer a single model of approach to medieval philosophy.¹ We can no longer categorise it in terms of a few central themes – Christian philosophy, the problem of universals, the revival of Aristotle, and so on. Medieval philosophy is as diverse as contemporary philosophy. In this chapter, therefore, we can only scratch the surface of the medieval philosophical heritage.

The term 'Middle Ages' (Latin '*medium aevum*', 'the middle period'), was first used in the Renaissance period in a disparaging sense to designate what was then considered to be the rather stagnant, superstitious period between the end of classical era and the enlightened 'modern' period. Seventeenth-century exponents of the New Philosophy – Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), René Descartes (1596–1650), Francis Bacon (1561–1626), and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) – all defined their new approach in opposition to the medieval scholastic tradition, denying the existence of Aristotelian forms or species, or the value of explanation in terms of final causes, and so on. Interest in medieval thought thenceforth declined until the Romantic movement again stimulated interest in it. Among Catholic scholars, the revival of interest in medieval philosophy was greatly encouraged by the anti-modernist movement. Pope Leo XIII, in his Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) recommended that all Catholic philosophers should give special consideration to the work of St Thomas.² The resulting intellectual movement, Neo-Thomism, portrayed St Thomas Aquinas as the highpoint of Catholic rationality whose views could be opposed to the secular rationalism and materialism of the so-called 'modernist' outlook. For Neo-Thomists, Aquinas was, to adapt Dante's phrase (originally applied to Aristotle), 'the master of those who know', and other philosophers of the period (e.g. both the nominalist William of Ockham and the Neoplatonic mystic Meister Eckhart) were deemed doctrinally suspect and ignored.

New research has entirely changed that picture. Careful scholarship and analytic philosophical methods have helped greatly to identify commonalities and continuities especially between the Scholastics of the thirteenth century and contemporary philosophy (in issues of logic, semantics, metaphysics, ethics, and so on). Furthermore, it is now recognised that this medieval period is characterised by extraordinary diversity; it is multi-cultural and multi-faith. It encompasses not just the mainly Christian culture of North Western Europe, communicated in Latin, but also the Eastern Byzantine Empire which stretched from Turkey through the Balkans, whose culture was also Christian but whose language was Greek (and hence preserved elements of late Greek Neoplatonic thought), as well as the Jewish and Islamic cultures of the Middle East, India and Central Asia – Ibn Sina, 980–1037, known in Latin as Avicenna, for example, was from Buchara in Uzbekistan – whose languages included Aramaic, Arabic, and Hebrew. Together, the Byzantine and Arabic cultures (both Islamic and Jewish) absorbed and continued the heritage of Greek philosophy in the new context of the religions of the Book.

The medieval period is also very long, extending well over a 1,000 years, roughly from St Augustine (354–430), writing in the latter years of the Roman empire³ up to the end of the seventeenth century. Strictly speaking, Augustine and Boethius belong to the late Roman Empire, nevertheless, because of their attempts to synthesise classical wisdom with Christian faith, they had enormous influence on

later philosophers in the Christian West and need to be studied by anyone interested in medieval philosophy. Augustine, for example, is the single most important authority for all medieval Christian philosophy. It is customary to divide medieval era into three periods: Early, High and Late Middle Ages. In the Early period – roughly from the fourth century to the middle of the twelfth century⁴ – Platonism predominated in the Christian Europe while an eclectic Neoplatonism mixed with Aristotelian and other Hellenic elements was developing in the Middle East, chiefly in Baghdad. The High Middle Ages (roughly the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries) were characterised by the revival of Aristotle through the vast programme of translation from Arabic sources, the growth of the universities, the rise of the mendicant teaching orders (Dominicans and Franciscans), the development of philosophical schools (chiefly, Thomism, Scotism, nominalism), known collectively as Scholasticism.⁵ Finally, Late Medieval philosophy (the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries) includes writers of the Italian Renaissance (Marsilio Ficino, 1433–99, Pico della Mirandola, 1463–94), who advocated a humanism inspired by Plato, as well as reformers such as Thomas More (1478–1535) and Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), who promoted a new religious humanism, and sceptics such as Michel Montaigne (1533–92). There also increasing recognition that the philosophy of particular periods, e.g. the Twelfth Century, or the so-called 'Northern Renaissance' (Nicholas of Cusa, the Rheinisch mystics), constitutes unique constellations that deserve to be studied separately.⁶ In Germany and in the Lowlands mystics such as the Dominican, Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and the Catholic Cardinal, Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) were important for developing new ways of thinking about the divine, outside of the traditional Aristotelian categories. Reformers such as Martin Luther and Calvin are significant for their challenges to Catholic theology in a manner which continues the medieval tradition of disputation and debate. The counter-reformation also produced significant philosophers. In Spain, a writer like Francisco Suarez (1548–1617) produced one of the last great scholastic syntheses and influenced writers such as Descartes and Malebranche. There are Scholastic survivals well into the seventeenth century.

Whereas the issue of the existence and nature of the divine had been discussed by classical philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, the emergence of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) meant that theological matters took centre field during the medieval period. Central to medieval philosophy is discussion concerning the existence and nature of God, the meaning of creation (creation *ex nihilo*), the nature and purpose of human beings. Augustine, Anselm, Maimonides, Averroes, Aquinas, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, all offered proofs of the existence of God. But there was also a considerable sense of the fragile and contingent nature of creation. According to Augustine, for example, all created things bear the stamp of their maker and display traces (*vestigia*) of the divine

Trinity. Creatures testify to their very dependency on the divine. As Augustine puts it, each creature cries out: 'God made me' (*Deus me fecit*). Muslim philosophers, especially Avicenna, sought to draw a sharp distinction between the necessary being of God and the contingent nature of created beings giving rise to the distinction between essence and existence. Aquinas takes up this tradition and argues that in all creatures there is a real distinction to be found between essence and existence, between *what* a thing is (its quiddity, *quidditas*) and the fact *that* it is, a distinction not to be found in God. Some of the most exciting philosophical departures originated where the three great monotheistic faiths and cultures intersected, e.g. in twelfth-century Spain. The Islamic philosopher Abu'l Walid Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Rushd (1126–98), known in the Latin world as Averroes, is perhaps the most famous of the Cordoba philosophers. There are examples in medieval philosophy of dialogues between Jews, Muslims and Christians concerning the nature of God and creation. Abelard for instance composed such a work.⁷ Ramon Llull (1232–1316) was an important interface with Islam, and, in the fifteenth century, the Christian Nicholas of Cusa, influenced by Llull, wrote two works on the relations between Islam and Christianity, *De pace fidei* (*On Peaceful Unity of Faith*) and *Cribratio Alkorani* (*Scrutiny of the Koran*).⁸ For Cusanus, Moses, Christ, and Mohamed are three divinely illumined, if unequal, bearers of a single revelation.

The revival of Aristotle in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries created a philosophical and scientific revolution of inestimable importance for the growth of European intellectual culture. In a few decades the Christian West assimilated what the Arabic tradition had built up over three centuries. This in itself was an extraordinary intellectual achievement. It laid the foundation for European pre-eminence in scientific knowledge right through to the twentieth century. Moreover, the rise of scientific knowledge was a particularly Christian development; even the universities are particularly Christian institutions, as Alain de Libera has emphasised.⁹ But it is important not to see all of medieval philosophy exclusively in terms of the transmission of the Aristotelian heritage. Although the extremely rapid revival of Aristotle inaugurated a new philosophical tradition and reorganised the very structures of scientific knowledge and education, the more ancient tradition of Neoplatonic thought continued to flourish throughout the medieval period, often associated with the more conservative theological faculties in the university (e.g. Robert Grosseteste at Oxford). Platonism permeated the philosophy of the Church Fathers, the writings of Anselm and Abelard, the Twelfth-Century Renaissance and the Italian and Northern Renaissance.¹⁰ Another version of Neoplatonism in the form of the Christian mystical writings of Pseudo-Dionysius influenced philosophers and theologians from John Scottus Eriugena to Aquinas and Grosseteste to Nicholas of Cusa.

The scientific advances of the modern period are not all to be credited to the revival of Aristotelian texts such as the *Physics*. Modern science has roots in the scientific practices of monks in Oxford, Padua, Bologna, and elsewhere. Indeed the mathematical treatment of nature, which inspired Kepler and Galileo, stems from late medieval Pythagorean Platonism opposed to Aristotelian empiricism, as the argument between Platonic Galileo and the Aristotelian Cardinal Bellarmine clearly shows. Whereas, for mathematical reasons, Galileo maintained that the sun did not really rise and set, Bellarmine maintained that our sense organs were reliable and would not mislead us about such a basic observable fact.

It is also important to remember that the doctrines and texts gathered under the names of Plato and Aristotle do not necessarily conform to our understanding of these figures. In general, up to the twelfth century, medieval philosophers tended to agree with Cassiodorus' maxim, '*Plato theologus, Aristoteles logicus*': Plato was considered primarily as a theologian, an expert on the divine, eternal, immaterial, intelligible realm, a classifier of the orders of angelic and demonic beings, whereas Aristotle was primarily a logician, a classifier of the forms of argument and of the categories into which everything real is divided. The 'Aristotle' that entered into Paris and Oxford through the Arabs in the thirteenth century was in fact a conglomeration of genuine Aristotelian texts together with a vast set of Neoplatonic commentaries compiled in the setting of Islam. It was not until the Renaissance that humanist scholars such as Lorenzo Valla began to separate out the genuine Platonic and Aristotelian texts, identify forgeries (e.g. the works of Pseudo-Dionysius) and establish the basis for the editions we know today (e.g. the Stephanus edition of Plato).

Medieval philosophy by its very nature is characterised by a very complex relation to the written word, to the text. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all believed in revelation in the form of the divinely inspired book (Torah, New Testament, Koran). Obedience to the divine required careful studying of the revealed word. There is therefore considerable stress on authority of the written text, and this reverence for authority was also applied to the classical heritage, e.g. to the writings of Aristotle and Plato in particular. Although there are genuinely original and novel forms of thought in the medieval period, in general a high emphasis was placed on securing arguments through appeal to learned authority. Since religious orthodoxy was enforced, often by secular authorities, dissent was severely punished, and thus there are no public declarations of atheism or even radical scepticism in the medieval period. Nevertheless, despite the reverence for tradition and the concern to be orthodox, philosophical debate was often extremely vigorous as is evidenced in the arguments between Abelard and William of Champeaux (c.1070–c.1120), for instance, or in the criticisms which Ockham levels against both the Thomists and the Scotists. It is entirely wrong to think of the philosophy of the period as lacking

in intellectual sophistication, or slavish in following theological orthodoxy, or as monolithic in form or content. In the medieval schools and universities, philosophy was practiced in its own right and was not restricted simply to the service of theology. The thirteenth century produced the first modern intellectuals – individuals (e.g. Roger Bacon) capable of taking an informed critical stance towards the inherited body of learning, often at great personal risk (e.g. Ockham had to flee Avignon in fear of his life).

Although framed by theological interests, medieval philosophy is not exclusively theological in content. While the relation between God and creation was of special interest, within this overall framework questions could arise about being, knowledge, value, the nature of space and time, and so on. Medieval philosophy had a special preference for metaphysical issues, but there are treatises on cosmology, anthropology, epistemology, ethics and political philosophy. Great debates took place, and indeed were encouraged, in all the central areas of philosophy: on the nature of substance, properties and relations; on the nature of the intellect and the will; on freedom and determinism, on the nature of signs and words; on the morality of private property, on the nature of authority; on the relation between the individual and the state; on the eternity of the world; and so on and on.

Medieval philosophers were especially concerned with the preservation and transmission of knowledge. Considerable advances were made in the organisation of knowledge (e.g. the liberal arts), leading to the establishment (in the Christian West) of the university as the prime means for the transmission of scientific learning (a status the institution of the university retains today despite the application of business models). Typical of the Middle Ages is the treatise, the encyclopaedia or compendium of disputed questions. Enormous treatises, such as Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, were expected to treat on all questions relating to theological issues. Logic (or dialectic) also had an important place in medieval philosophy, both in the earlier commentaries on Boethius, in the dialectic of Anselm and Abelard, and in the later development in Ockham, Walter Burleigh, William of Sherwood and Peter of Spain. Nominalism produced analyses of the language of thought which anticipate contemporary methods of analysing propositions. Meanwhile, in Northern Italy in the late fourteenth century, the translation of the complete works of Plato by Marsilio Ficino and the re-discovery of Plotinus and Proclus led to a new Renaissance, characterised by humanism.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that studying medieval philosophy requires gaining familiarity with the world-view of the age. The medieval world is a closed, hierarchical and rather small place compared to the infinite space of Newton which so terrified Pascal. Medieval philosophy assumes the existence both of a sensible, temporal and an immaterial, eternal order. Human beings possess bodies and souls and hence belong in some way to both the temporal and the eternal orders.

Moreover, human reason is finite but is reliable and can achieve truth, and certainly is adequate to grasp the essential truths necessary for life in this world. There are no overt sceptics or relativists in the medieval tradition. In general, the medieval philosophy accepts a view of the universe as ordered hierarchically, from highest level, God, down to the lowest level, unformed matter or nothingness, in one great chain of being.¹¹ This hierarchical order was inherited from Neoplatonism but given a distinctive religious rendering. The term *hierarchy* means a 'sacred order' and was first used by the anonymous sixth-century, possibly Syrian, Christian Neoplatonist, Dionysius the Areopagite, to express the orders of angels and celestial beings who ringed around the Godhead. This celestial hierarchy, as Dionysius termed it, was mirrored on earth by the hierarchy of human nature, the animal, vegetable and mineral domains. Human social life itself mirrored this natural order so that kings, princes, noblemen, commoners, servants, etc. were all ordered in a natural hierarchy according to the natures. For instance, in his *Monologion*, St Anselm writes that anyone who does not understand that a horse is better than a tree and that a man is better than a horse is not rational:

if anyone considers the natures of things he cannot help perceiving that they are not all of equal excellence but that some of them differ by an inequality of gradation. For if anyone doubts that a horse is by nature better (*melior*) than a tree and that a man is more excellent (*praestantior*) than a horse, then surely this [person] ought not to be called rational.¹²

FAITH AND REASON

During the late Greek and Roman periods, philosophy had come to be understood as the inclusive knowledge of everything. Cicero, for instance, had defined philosophy as 'the knowledge of all things divine and human' and this definition became an endlessly repeated truism in medieval writers such as Isidore of Seville, Alcuin and others, right down to Descartes. According to the Ciceronian model, philosophy was seen as an encyclopaedic wisdom – in line with the Hellenic educational ideal of *encyklios paideia*, an educational formation which encompassed everything. But the knowledge of everything (*cognitio omnium*) still had to accommodate religious faith. As religious philosophy emerged and struggled to accommodate the classical heritage, the issue of the relation between faith and reason became a central theme.¹³

Tertullian (c.160–220), born in Carthage, was the first Christian theologian to write in Latin. He strenuously opposed the articulation of faith in terms of philosophy in his *On Prescription Against Heretics* with his famous question: 'what has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and

the Church? What between heretics and Christians?¹⁴ For Tertullian, faith was sufficient, the genuine Christian believer had no need of pagan eloquence and philosophy. Yet, Tertullian was not immune to philosophy. For example, in *Adversus Praxean* he conceived of God as a kind of vaporous material spirit (Greek: *pneuma*) in the manner of the Stoics, and in his *De Anima* argued for the soul as a kind of material substance (following the Stoics) against the Platonic conception. Tertullian thus illustrates a typical medieval dilemma. Even to oppose philosophy, as Peter Damian or Al-Ghazali did, meant to enter philosophical disputation.

Philosophy understood etymologically means 'love of wisdom' (*amor sapientiae*), and since, for Christians, Christ is the very incarnation of eternal wisdom, true philosophy meant the love of Christ. Augustine, following St Paul, contrasted the worldly wisdom or 'foolishness' of Greek pagan philosophy with Christian wisdom. Indeed St Paul refers to Christ as wisdom using the Greek word '*sophia*' in I *Corinthians* 1:24. St Paul had said that Christian wisdom founded on faith will appear to be a mere foolishness to those whose only standard is the wisdom of the world. Augustine expands on this idea: true wisdom cannot merely be knowledge of earthly, temporal things but actually must be the desire for eternal things. For Augustine, the philosopher seeks to transcend the world and not solely to know it. A Christian, Augustine, for example, maintained, must love Christ as much as anything, otherwise, his knowledge is vain and empty, mere *vana curiositas*.

For Augustine, particularly early in his career, true religion and true philosophy were one and the same, as he wrote in *Of True Religion (De vera religione)*,¹⁵ and by philosophy here he meant Platonism. In the same work (*De vera religione*, iv. 7), Augustine claimed one need only change a few words to see how closely Plato resembled Christianity. According to his *Confessiones (Confessions)* Book VII.xx.26,¹⁶ Augustine's conversion to Christianity had been influenced by his reading 'books of the Platonists' (*libri platoniorum*) – most likely Marius Victorinus' translations of Plotinus and Porphyry – texts which convinced Augustine that truth was incorporeal, that God was eternal, unchanging, the cause of all things – in his mind paralleling truths revealed in St Paul's epistles.

It was Augustine who finally put paid to the view that faith could proceed without philosophy. For Augustine, the legacy of Plato and others should be integrated into Christian culture, just as the 'spoils of the Egyptians' were taken with them by the Israelites as they fled their captivity in Egypt. Augustine writes in *On Christian Doctrine* (Book II.XL.60):

If those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things which are indeed true and are well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessors and converted to our use. Just as the Egyptians had not only idols

and grave burdens which the people of Israel detested and avoided, so also they had vases and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if to put them to a better use.¹⁷

Philosophers after Augustine no longer had any qualms about incorporating elements of classical philosophy, even if at times they used philosophical and dialectical techniques to draw attention to the limits of rational argument in trying to convey divine truth.

Christians who followed the Neoplatonic tradition tended to regard faith as preparatory to true knowledge. A line from Isaiah in the Latin version of the Old Testament, '*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*' ('unless you will have believed, you will not have understood'), became a motto for medieval writers. For example, in a Sermon (No. 212, *Patrologia Latina* 35, Col. 1, 690) Augustine urged '*credite ut intelligas*' ('believe so that you may understand'), and St Anselm echoed this with his *credo ut intelligam* ('I believe so that I may understand'). But this stress on faith left considerable room for unaided reason, *recta ratio*. Followers of the Aristotelian tradition which re-emerged in the thirteenth century, on the other hand, distinguished between truths that were supremely intelligible in themselves (*per se*) and those which could be grasped by our finite intellects, intelligible 'to us' (*quoad nos*). For Thomas, nothing in revelation could contradict reason in itself, although it might appear irrational to us. Some Parisian followers of Averroes – Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia are usually mentioned in this context – on the other hand, have been associated with the notorious doctrine of 'double truth', i.e. the co-existence of two contradictory truths – truths grasped by reason and philosophy and truths propounded in theology.¹⁸ While Christian philosophers struggled to interpret Aristotle faithfully, they were also constrained not to go against Christian doctrine and this often led to a tension between what Aristotle said and what the Church teaches as true. One way to deal with this, is to hold that Aristotle is right philosophically speaking but not theologically speaking. It is noteworthy for instance that when Ockham is commenting on Aristotle's *Physics* he makes it clear that he will expound what Aristotle said or what he ought to have said, consistent with his principles, and won't get into the issue of whether or not it is in conflict with Christian faith.

Another and less controversial claim in medieval philosophy (especially up to the twelfth century) was the commonplace that there were two non-conflicting sources of truth – the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature – both of which need to be interpreted in sophisticated ways, but with a stronger emphasis on scripture than on nature. This hermeneutic approach, coupled with a Neoplatonic suspicion of the temporal and material, has led historians to see Christian philosophy as leading to what E.R. Dodds has called 'other-worldliness', devaluing the scientific study of

things for their own sake which was at the heart of the researches of Aristotle for example, and focusing exclusively on the knowledge of God and the immortal soul. There is a certain truth in this characterisation especially when applied to Neoplatonic philosophers, nevertheless, the Neo-Aristotelian revival gave rise to a considerable interest in the sciences at Oxford and elsewhere, where there was a definite interest in the nature of the physical world, for its own sake.

In keeping with the theme of faith and reason was the related theme of the constraints on the interpretation of sacred texts. Medieval philosophers inherited from the classical era a vast and complex tradition of grammar, rhetoric, and hermeneutics. It was also generally accepted that texts were multilayered and polysemic and could be interpreted in different ways. Efforts to harmonise the words of Scripture led to the development of sophisticated treatises on interpretation and semiology, e.g. St Augustine's enormously influential *De doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*, written between 396 and 427) which influenced Cassiodorus, Hugh of St Victor and Peter Lombard in setting down principles for reading scripture. In the theological tradition, four ways of interpreting Scripture – the literal, the allegorical, the symbolic and the anagogical – achieved something like canonical status.¹⁹ But one must be careful – even the so-called 'literal' reading of Scripture could be highly speculative as Augustine's literal commentary on the meaning of Genesis (*De Genesi ad litteram*) shows.²⁰

THE ORIGINS OF MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

The foundations of medieval philosophy were laid during the late classical philosophy. In Alexandria, especially, religious scholars, steeped in Hellenism, sought to explore the meaning of the Jewish sacred writings using the grammatical and philosophical techniques of the Greek philosophers, drawing parallels between the creation accounts in Genesis and the stories of Plato's *Timaeus*.²¹ Philo Judaeus (c.15 BC–AD 50), who had apparently no influence on the Jewish tradition, read the Bible in its Greek translation (*Septuagint*) and drew on Platonic and Stoic ideas to articulate his notion of the transcendence of God and of the nature of human beings as made in the image and likeness of God and aiming to achieve assimilation (*homoiosis*) with God. God is true being and 'He Who Is' (Exodus 3:4). God operates through the logos. God first created an intelligible world.

Initially, Christian writers, notably St Paul, show a marked hostility towards philosophy understood as pagan wisdom. Paul contrasted Greek philosophy (as arrogant foolishness) with the wisdom and truth of Jesus. Nevertheless, he absorbed philosophical conceptions current in his time. Thus, his epistles contain allusions to Greek (mostly Platonic and Stoic) philosophical ideas, e.g. concepts of natural

law in the *Second Letter to the Romans*, the discussion of immortality in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians* 3–5, or the claim that existence of God may be proved by natural reason from the examination of natural things (*Romans* 1:20), a text much cited by medieval philosophy. St Paul employed a number of contrasts that are later taken up by Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine, e.g. the contrast between the exterior and interior man, between the carnal and the spiritual, the old and the new.

As Christianity spread, Christians gradually began to address the surrounding Hellenic civilisation in its own terms. Within a century, Christian 'apologists' were arguing before hostile audiences for the truth and reasonableness of Christian revelation using arguments drawn from philosophy.²² One such apologist was Justin Martyr (d. 162–8), who as a Greek philosopher, born in Samaria, but who converted to Christianity, possibly at Ephesus, relied heavily on Greek philosophical arguments in presenting the case for Christianity.²³ Three works survive: two Apologies, the first directed to the emperor, Antoninus Pius, and a dialogue with a Jew, *Dialogue with Trypho* where he compares the Biblical God with the god of the philosophers. *The First Apology* recounts his search for the truth, first with a Stoic teacher, then with a Peripatetic, followed by a Pythagorean and then a Platonist. For Justin it was obvious that philosophers must investigate the nature of the deity, the aim of philosophy was 'the vision of God'.

Christian philosophers borrowed heavily from ancient Greek and especially Platonic accounts of the immortality of the soul to spread the Christian message of personal immortal life. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215) wrote a number of works which advocated a philosophical approach to faith, notably *Stromateis* (*Miscellany*). Origen (c.185–c.254) combined Christian ideas with a philosophical structure derived from Platonism in his work, *On First Principles* which portrayed God as Oneness or Unity.²⁴ Clement and Origen saw no great clash between Platonism and Christianity, since both doctrines considered that this temporal world was not the whole of reality, that true reality was immaterial, timeless and perfect; that the eternal was to be valued over the temporal; the changeless over the changing. Both believed in the immortality of the soul and that it has the chance of eternal happiness. Both believed that there is a single source from which all things originate, and so on.

With the emergence of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire in the era of Constantine, philosophical discussions of the Christian religion demonstrated a new confidence and sophistication. By 392, the Roman Senate had voted to abolish pagan cults. The division of the Roman Empire into a Greek East and a Latin West had the effect of partitioning the development of philosophy. Plotinus (205–70/71) was a typical example of the new hybrid – a Greek-speaking pagan, born in Egypt, who studied with Ammonius in Alexandria, and then lived and

taught in Rome from 245 to his death. He attracted both vehemently pagan and Christian disciples. Porphyry, for example, wrote an attack on Christianity.

In the fourth century, in the Greek speaking Eastern part of the Roman Empire, Cappadocia, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil and Gregory Nazianzen incorporated Plotinus in their development of a Neoplatonised Christianity, while in the Latin West, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, Jerome, and others, developed Christian philosophical cosmologies drawing from the writings of Clement of Alexandria and other earlier Christians. Ambrose's sermons, in particular, show heavy borrowings from Plotinus. These men came to be known as the Fathers of the Christian Church and they laid down the form that Christian philosophy and theology would develop in the succeeding centuries.²⁵

PAGAN SURVIVALS: PLOTINUS, PORPHYRY AND PROCLUS

It would be wrong to characterise the development of Christian philosophy in the West as a long direct line of uninterrupted progress in the clarification and systematisation of basic Christian concepts. A vigorous pagan movement incorporating late Hellenistic religions co-existed side by side with Christianity during the early centuries. This counter movement reached its pinnacle in the third and fourth centuries CE with the writings of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus. Various attempts were made to re-establish paganism, most notably by the Emperor Julian.²⁶ Plotinus (205–70 CE) was a pagan philosopher who taught at Rome, who knew a great deal about Christianity, but was not drawn to it. He systematised the thought of Plato into a monistic, hierarchical metaphysics where all things come from the One which in itself is above intellect and above all predication. His pupil and literary editor, Porphyry (233–309), who came from Tyre, was openly hostile to the Christians and wrote a treatise, *Against the Christians*, which unfortunately no longer survives.²⁷ Porphyry attacks the trustworthiness of the Bible as a prophetic document, concentrating on the Book of Daniel, which he claimed was not written in the sixth century BC as Christians believed, but in the second century AD. Rather than prophesying events it was actually describing actual events. He also attacked the allegorical method of reading the Bible which Philo, Clement and the Alexandrian school had popularised. Porphyry is dismissive of the Christian understanding of the *logos* as expressed in the prologue of the Johannine Gospel. Iamblichus (c.242–327), who taught at Apamea in Syria, was interested in the mystery religions, in the cult of Isis and Osiris and in theurgy, the practice of invoking demons. His *On the Mysteries* had considerable influence in Renaissance times.²⁸ Iamblichus' philosophical contribution included a programme for teaching Plato and Aristotle and a strong commitment to neo-Pythagorean number symbolism.

Proclus (c.410–85), head of the Platonic Academy at Athens, was the last great pagan philosopher practising in the West. While his own works (notably *Elements of Theology* and *Platonic Theology*)²⁹ did not have direct influence on Latin thought until translated by William of Moerbeke and commented on by Nicholas of Cusa, nevertheless he exercised a covert influence (circulating under the name of Aristotle) through an Arab compilation, *Liber de causis*,³⁰ translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona in Toledo. Roger Bacon (c.1212–92), Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome (1247–1316), Henry of Ghent (d. 1293), Siger of Brabant, and Albert the Great all wrote commentaries on it.

Perhaps more importantly, Proclus entered the West through the writings of an anonymous fifth- or sixth-century Syrian Christian follower who went under the name of Dionysius the Areopagite. This author, while purporting to be the first convert of St Paul at Athens, mentioned in Acts 17:34, propounded a Proclean Neoplatonic Christian monism in his four treatises, which were first translated by Johannes Scottus Eriugena and later by John Saracen.³¹ From Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa, this author was wrongly identified with Saint Denis, patron saint of France and supposed founder of the important medieval French abbey of St Denis (Lorenzo Valla eventually showed the work to be a forgery). Dionysius' works had an important influence on medieval theology and spirituality. Eriugena, Albertus, Aquinas, Grosseteste and others wrote commentaries on him. In his *Divine Names* Dionysius argues that many of the appellations for the divine in sacred scripture cannot be taken literally. It is not literally true that God is a lion, or gets angry or has a face. For the God who transcends all predication, negations are often more true or more apt than affirmations. For Dionysius, it is more true to say that God is not rather than that God is, since God is 'above all the things that are and are not'. *The Mystical Theology* goes even further, God is to be thought of as above being and non-being.

The Neoplatonism of Plotinus, Porphyry and Proclus, influenced medieval philosophy in subterranean ways. Two extremely influential books in the medieval period – the *Theology of Aristotle* (actually a compilation from Plotinus) and the already mentioned *Liber de causis* (taken from Proclus) – both circulated under the name of Aristotle. Neoplatonism was Christianised especially by Augustine and Boethius. Coming towards the end of the Roman period, and representing a powerful if eclectic synthesis of Christian ideas, formulated in the language of Roman classical learning, the writings of Augustine of Hippo acted as a conduit for information concerning the opinions of the ancient Greek philosophers and in particular concerning the views of late classical writers such as Plotinus, Porphyry and other Neoplatonists (e.g. Marius Victorinus). That Augustine was not very impressed by the work of Aristotle is recorded in the *Confessions*. On the other hand, he was originally inducted into philosophy through the reading of Cicero's lost work

Hortensius and was deeply impressed by Neoplatonism, which he felt to be in sympathy with the intellectual and spiritual aims of Christianity. So close were the similarities between Plato and Scripture on the nature of God, the act of divine creation, the immortality of the soul, the corruptibility of the body, and the salvation of the good soul, that, initially, Augustine assumed that Plato must have learned from Moses. For Augustine, only the Platonists saw that God was eternal, immutable, immaterial, infinite and the creative source of all things. In the *City of God*, Book 8 Chapter 5, he writes: 'no one has come closer to us [Christians] than the Platonists . . . who have said that the true God is the author of all things, the illuminator of truth, and the giver of happiness'.³² Augustine, above all, wants to combat the Stoic doctrine that God is a material body.

However, gradually Augustine began to realise that Neoplatonism had a deep distrust for the body and for human history which could accommodate neither the Christian concept of the incarnation of God the Son in the historical personage of Jesus Christ nor the notion of God's salvific role in human history. Augustine in his *Retractions* (*Retractationes*),³³ expresses regrets concerning various formulations of his belief that seemed too Neoplatonic; however he never abandoned Neoplatonism completely. Indeed, his own sanitised form of Neoplatonism was to become the standard cosmology for the medieval period until the rediscovery of the writings of Aristotle in the middle of the twelfth century.

Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (480–524) was the last philosopher to write within the framework of the Roman Empire, albeit an Empire now controlled by the Visigoths. Born into a patrician family, Boethius studied philosophy at Athens and possibly at Alexandria, and later, in 510, became an advisor to the Ostogoth Theodoric, Governor of Rome, but suspected of treason, he was arrested in 523, imprisoned and eventually put to death. Boethius' aim was to reconcile the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and, to this end, he translated and commented on Aristotelian works. His later influence came especially through his commentary on Aristotle's logical writings and on Porphyry. He wrote works explicating Christian theological concepts, *On The Trinity* (*De Trinitate*) and *On The Catholic Faith* (*De Fide Catholica*).³⁴ While in prison he wrote the dialogue, *Consolation of Philosophy* (524),³⁵ in five books, which extolled the value of philosophy in helping someone to face adversity, and became one of the most popular philosophical works in the medieval period. The 'consolation' of philosophy is that this world is a mere fleeting shadow compared with the true, timeless eternal world. The philosopher who knows this will not be perturbed by the vicissitudes of this world. Although the work is not explicitly Christian it was taken as extolling Christian virtues of resignation and fortitude. The fifth book contains an important discussion concerning divine foreknowledge and human freedom (paralleling the views of Augustine) which exercised a strong influence on Christian thought in the following centuries.

THE SOURCES OF MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

The early medieval period in the Latin West is a period of beginning and recovery – a struggle to re-establish the very basics of knowledge lost in the decline of the Greek and Roman empires. Medieval philosophy grows upon the ruins of classical thought and one can apply to the Middle Ages generally the saying attributed to Bernard of Chartres by John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon* III, 4, namely, that we [moderns] know more because we are like dwarfs standing on the backs of giants [the classical tradition].

Although philosophers in the Eastern or Byzantine part of the Roman empire continued to write in Greek up until the ninth century and beyond, most of this material was unavailable to the Latin-speaking West, and thus philosophers in the West had to rely on what could be gleaned from compilations found in the writings of Romans such as Cicero, Seneca, and in standard handbooks of the Liberal Arts such as the popular allegory, *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, written by the North African writer Martianus Capella, or another popular work by the fifth century writer Macrobius, whose *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, a discussion of Cicero's *Republic*, contained a discussion of the nature of the soul in Platonic terms. Cicero, for example, translated and summarised various Platonic dialogues including the *Republic* (*Res Publica*) as well as compiling a lot of information on the Sceptics in his *Academica*. But the majority of actual texts of Greek philosophy were not available to Western European medieval philosophers. In classical times, in the system of education, knowledge was divided into a number of different arts (Latin: *artes*) or disciplines (*disciplinae*), taught in a certain sequence. The Roman writer Varro puts these forward as a group of nine arts, including grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, medicine and architecture. More frequently, following Martianus Capella, these arts were considered to number seven (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy, grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) – the seven bridesmaids of the woman Philology who is betrothed to the God Mercury in Martianus' popular allegory, *The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*. These arts were usually divided into two groups according to the focus of their subject matter: the group of three or *trivium* which dealt with words (*verba*) and the group of four or *quadrivium* which dealt with things (*res*). In the High Middle Ages the liberal arts were taught in the Arts Faculties of the Universities as a preliminary to the study of Theology. Medicine was taught in a separate Faculty as is the case in today's universities.

Of Plato's dialogues, up until the middle of the twelfth century, only a portion of the *Timaeus* survived in Latin translation (translated by Cicero in the second century, it circulated most broadly in the fourth-century fragmentary translation of Chalcidius).³⁶ Curiously, it was ignored until it suddenly came into vogue again in

the twelfth century as philosophers developed Neoplatonic Christian cosmologies at the schools of Chartres and St Victor. In the twelfth century also, translations of the *Phaedo* and *Meno* became available, but again these did not have much impact until the full revival of Plato in Northern Europe which took place until the fourteenth century, largely through the efforts of Marsilio Ficino and the Florentine Academy, which contributed greatly to the development of the Renaissance.

With regard to Aristotle only a summary of his *Categories* was available in the earliest medieval period. Gradually, medieval philosophers (e.g. Alcuin in the ninth century), came to know Aristotle's *On Interpretation* (Greek: *Peri Hermeneias* or Latin: *De interpretatione*) as well as Porphyry's *Introduction* (*Isagoge*) and Boethius' logical commentaries. Taken together these works were collectively known as the *logica vetus* or 'old logic'. In the middle of the twelfth century, translations of Aristotle made from Arabic translations became available, largely through the endeavours of an important group of translators in Spain, including John of Spain, Gerard of Cremona and Gundissalinus among others. By the thirteenth century, scholars had become familiar with a larger range of Aristotelian texts, including the *Topics*, *Analytics* and the *Sophistical Refutations*, collectively known as the *logica nova* or 'new logic'. But it is noteworthy, that even Averroes did not have access to Aristotle's *Politics*, which did not become available in the West until 1260. In the thirteenth century these translations were replaced by new translations directly from the Greek, made principally by the Flemish Dominican, William of Moerbeke (d. 1286).

The absence of actual texts of Plato and Aristotle meant that medieval authors had to rely very heavily on secondary sources – most notably Augustine, whose *City of God* provided a very useful potted history of classical philosophy. But medieval philosophers proved to be remarkably adept at utilising these scant resources to develop speculative philosophical systems of extraordinary scope and vitality, as found, for example, in the *Periphyseon* of John Scottus Eriugena.

JOHN SCOTTUS ERIUGENA (c.800–c.877)

Although in general in North Western Europe, the so-called 'Dark Ages', i.e. the centuries following the collapse of the old Roman order, did not produce much intellectual or scholarly activity of any kind, one figure in particular stands out as a brilliant and sophisticated philosopher and theologian, namely, Johannes Scottus Eriugena, an Irishman who came to prominence in France in the ninth century, and is considered to be the most important philosopher writing in Latin between Boethius and Anselm. The revival of learning in ninth century France was stimulated by Charlemagne's educational reforms which sought to establish elementary schools

attached to religious houses. Charlemagne's advisor Alcuin of York (died 804) began the tradition of Carolingian philosophy and theology which reached its heights with the philosophy of Eriugena.

John the Irishman (who signed himself 'Eriugena') was probably educated in the Irish monastic tradition (Ireland, being outside the Empire, had escaped the ravages following the collapse of Roman administration) but emigrated to France where he soon became palace master at the court of the Carolingian king, Charles the Bald. He wrote a *Commentary on Martianus' Marriage of Philology and Mercury* as well as a polemical treatise *On Divine Predestination*, which, on account of its optimistic interpretation of Augustine's concept of predestination, was condemned by several Councils in France as verging on Pelagianism.

A Christian Neoplatonist, Eriugena developed a unique synthesis between the Neoplatonic traditions of Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine.³⁷ Most unusual in the Latin West at that time, Eriugena knew Greek and his translations of the works of Dionysius (especially the *Divine Names* and *Mystical Theology*), commissioned by the King of France, as well as other Greek Christian texts (notably Gregory of Nyssa and Maximus Confessor) provided access to a theological tradition hitherto unknown in the Latin West, namely the Eastern Christian tradition of negative theology (inspired by Plotinus). In his major dialogue *Periphyseon* (*De divisione naturae, On the Division of Nature, c.867*),³⁸ he developed an original cosmology with Nature (*natura*) as the first principle. Nature, the totality of all things that are and are not, includes both God and creation, and has four divisions: nature which creates and is not created, nature which creates and is created, nature which is created and does not create, and nature which is neither created nor creates. These divisions participate in the cosmic procession of creatures from God and their return to God. As everything takes place within Nature, God is present in all four divisions.

In the *Periphyseon*, Eriugena enthusiastically incorporated many Greek Christian theological concepts. God is conceived of as a nameless One beyond being, who cannot really be spoken of, whose first act is to create himself by a kind of self-externalisation or self-emanation, from non-being into being. The creation of the universe proceeds as a timeless unfolding (*proodos, exitus*) from this divine first principle through the Primary Causes into their spatial and temporal effects until the process reaches the limit with unformed matter. All things remain in being due to the first principle and all seek to return to it in the general return of all things (*epistrophe, reditus*). All created things are copies of the Ideas (called Primordial Causes) in the mind of God and so too human nature is originally a Platonic Idea in the divine mind. However the human failure to understand its true nature as from God due to the distraction of created, temporal images (*phantasiai*), leads to the Fall into the spatio-temporal realm of sense. However, through intellectual contemplation (*theoria*) and divine illumination (which is the divine self-manifestation,

theophania), humans may achieve salvation and a return to their perfect state (also known as heaven). To the very few it will be given to achieve unification (*henosis*) with God, also known as *deification* (*theosis*, *deificatio*). This Greek Christian notion of deification emphasises the unity without remainder between the blessed and God. This is a radicalisation and interpretation of the Augustinian theme that God became man so that humans can become God.

Eriugena influenced contemporary philosophy in France, notably at Laon, Auxerre and Corbie but had no detectable influence on writers such as Anselm. The *Periphyseon* again became popular in the twelfth century, circulating in the paraphrase of Honorius Augustodunensis, *Clavis Physicae*. Eriugena influenced twelfth-century thinkers including Hugh of St Victor, Alanus of Lille, Suger of Saint-Denis and William of Malmesbury. In the thirteenth century, the *Periphyseon* was associated with the writings of David of Dinant and Amaury of Bène, two theologians at the University of Paris, and condemned with them in 1210 and 1225. In the later Middle Ages both Meister Eckhart of Hochheim (c.1260–c.1328) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401–64) were sympathetic to Eriugena and familiar with his *Periphyseon*, but others condemned his work as a form of pantheism.

THE ELEVENTH CENTURY: ST ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033–1109)

Eleventh-century philosophy continued to be framed within the outlook of Saint Augustine, since there was still no direct access to classical authors and Eriugena's Greek inspired Platonism were generally ignored. Instead the school curriculum was formed by various standard handbooks or compilations summarising the seven liberal arts. Despite this paucity of original material, a number of eleventh-century philosophers, most notably Anselm, Lanfranc, Peter Damian and Gaunilo, made important contributions by pursuing a rigorously dialectical (i.e. logical) method of argument based on rational premises which led to the twelfth-century flowering of dialectic in the work of Abelard and others. Peter Damian (1007–72), who raged against secular philosophy, actually made some significant advances. Discussing the question of whether God, who is understood to be all powerful, had the capacity to make something which has already happened not in fact have happened at all, i.e. whether God could change the past or whether the past had a certain kind of necessity, Peter Damian analyses the nature of possibility and necessity. He distinguishes between that necessity which is 'the consequence of statements' and actual necessity. If it is raining now then necessarily it is raining. This is the necessity of statements. Actual necessity, on the other hand, means whatever must be the case in all circumstances. God's power is not bound by the necessity of statements and

hence God could change the past since the past is contingent and not something which must at all times be the case.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) is best known for his argument for the existence of God, versions of which re-appear in Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, as well as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz. On the other hand, it was rejected both by Thomas Aquinas and by Kant, who labelled it the 'ontological argument', meaning thereby that it is an argument from the mere conception of a thing to its reality or existence, a move Kant thought was illicit. Anselm's argument also brings to light difficulties in understanding the meaning of some of the basic philosophical notions like *existence*, *possibility*, *necessity*, notions central to metaphysics. In actual fact Anselm offers not one, but a number of different arguments for the existence of God in his *Monologion*.³⁹ In a subsequent work, *Prosologion*, he seeks to reduce his main arguments for the existence of God to a single proof.

In the *Monologion* Anselm claims to be following Augustine's *De Trinitate*, a work which examined the ways in which the mystery of the divine Trinity can be contemplated in the nature of created things. According to Augustine, all created things bear the stamp of their maker and display traces (*vestigia*) of the divine Trinity. Anselm, too, is seeking to discover the nature of God and his existence from created things. He begins with the Neoplatonic assumption that there is a hierarchy evident in nature: some things are better, more valuable, and so on, than other things. From the thought of this hierarchy of things, we can form the thought of 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. The *Monologion* argument goes as follows: given that there are different goods in the world, although they actually differ in that some are better than others, nevertheless there must be some quality which they share if they are all to be called good. This quality they share must itself *cause* those things to be good in their respective ways. They are good *through* this cause, they participate in this quality. But this quality must be itself good on its own or *through itself* (*per se*) or else we would have an infinite regress of goods that were better than each other without a highest good. There must therefore be something which is perfectly good, and this we call 'God'. The form of this argumentation is clearly Platonic, going back to Plato's *Phaedo*, and indeed, in the thirteenth century, Aquinas will employ this form of argumentation in his fourth way of demonstrating the existence of God (*Summa theologiae*, Ia.2.3). Anselm concludes his argument in the *Monologion* as follows:

Therefore, necessarily, there is a nature which is so superior to some [other] or some [others] that there is no [nature] to which it is ranked as inferior.

This prefigures the definition of God in the *Prosologion* as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'.

While Anselm believed he had given a number of satisfactory arguments, a 'connected chain of many arguments' for the existence of God in the *Monologion*, in the *Proslogion* he announced that he now wanted to put forward a 'single argument' (*unum argumentum*) which on its own suffices to prove the existence of God.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that he begins the *Proslogion* saying he is following faith and seeking understanding, in fact he is offering a purely rational demonstration. He claims to proceed 'by rational means alone' (*sola ratione*) as he says in *Why the God-Man? (Cur Deus Homo?)*. Indeed, Anselm often invokes the 'necessity of reason' indicating that he accepts that rational arguments in themselves are compelling.

Anselm's strategy in the *Proslogion* argument is to offer a definition of God which will be acceptable to both believer and non-believer, and then to show that what is referred to in the definition must exist, because the alternative is impossible. This kind of argument is called a reduction to absurdity, *reductio ad absurdum*. He begins by referring to 'the Fool' (*insipiens*), or ignorant one, in the Psalms, who has said in his heart that there is no God.⁴¹ Anselm's Fool is a disbeliever who accepts that the very notion of God is coherent (i.e. not self-contradictory), and is merely asserting that no being answering that description actually exists. Anselm's next step is to try to get agreement about what the concept of God means:

We believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought.

Medieval authors always relied heavily on traditional authorities and Anselm is no exception. For this definition, Anselm drew on the Roman philosopher, Seneca, who in his *Eight Books of Natural Questions*, answers the question 'What is God?' as follows: 'his magnitude is that than which nothing greater can be thought'. Augustine has several variations on this formula in his *On free Choice of the Will*, in *On Christian Doctrine* 1.7.7, 'something than which there is nothing better' (*aliquid quo nihil melius sit*), and in the *Confessions* Book VII.4.6.

Anselm employs various formulations: God is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) or 'that than which a greater can not be thought' (*quo maius cogitari nequit*). God is the greatest conceivable being, a greater being cannot be conceived. But Aquinas in fact was doubtful whether this was an adequate definition of God or even whether most people would regard it as the meaning of the term 'God'. In his *Summa theologiae* 1a.2.1.2, he says:

Someone hearing the word 'God' may very well not understand it to mean 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', indeed some people have believed God to be a body.

The phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' (*id quo maius nihil cogitari potest*) in both English and Latin is deceptively complex. It involves a negative comparison: God is that being *than* which *nothing* greater can be conceived; no greater being than this is conceivable. Occasionally, Anselm reformulates it in positive terms: God is the greatest (most perfect) being conceivable. But his more considered position is found in *Proslogion* Chapter XV: God's being transcends our human powers of conceiving of Him; God is greater than can be thought, i.e. God is greater than any conceivable thing, and His greatness consists in part in being unthinkable. Indeed in his reply to a challenge from Gaunilo, an otherwise little known monk of Marmoutier, who wrote a refutation of Anselm, *Pro Insipiente (On Behalf of the Fool)* Anselm stresses that the positive version 'greater than everything' (*maius omnibus*) is not equivalent to the negative phrase 'that than which nothing is greater'. The first merely says God is the greatest being, and the second says God is greater than the greatest.

Anselm accepts the medieval hierarchical assumption that one thing may be said to be absolutely better than another thing: immutable things are better than mutable things. Incorporeal things are better than corporeal things (following Augustine). 'Better' here means possessing more perfections or attributes. In his *Reply to Gaunilo*, Anselm explains:

For we believe of the Divine being, whatever it can, absolutely speaking, be thought to be better than not to be. For example, it is better to be eternal than not eternal, good than not good, goodness-itself than not goodness-itself.

Anselm's definition also contains a reference to human understanding or thinking. What does the phrase 'can be thought' mean? Anselm does not think he is using the term 'conceive' or 'think' here in the psychological sense, to mean mentally entertain or imagine. Rather he means what is logically or conceptually possible. Indeed, Anselm distinguishes between imagining and conceiving. Our imagination is indeed limited, but our ability to conceive is limited only by the law of contradiction. I can conceive of anything that is logically possible. Anselm thus identifies conceivability with logical possibility. God is the highest being conceivable hence God is the greatest possible being.

Anselm then develops the argument in the following way: to talk intelligibly about God requires understanding the term 'God' even if denying His existence. Second, the term 'God' means 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Now, Anselm introduces a new premiss: 'but whatever one understands exists in the understanding' (*quod intelligit in intellectu eius est*). Anselm says explicitly that what is understood is in the understanding:

Observe then that, from the fact that it is understood, it does follow that it is in the mind. For, just as what is thought is thought by means of a thought, and what is thought by a thought is thus, as thought, in thought (*in cogitatione*), so also, what is understood (*quod intelligitur*) is understood (*intelligitur*) by the mind (*intellectu*), and what is understood by the mind is thus, as understood, in the mind (*in intellectu*). What could be more obvious than this?

This assumption is very problematic. Anselm appears to believe that whenever something is understood, then that thing itself exists in the mind. He admits that fictional or imaginary or 'false' things (*falsa*) have no existence outside the mind, but he appears to believe that they have something we might call 'mental existence'. But, from the fact that I understand what a table is, it does not follow that there is actually a table in my mind. Speaking of something being 'in' the mind is metaphorical. Anselm is operating with the assumption that there are at least two kinds of existence, which we might term 'mental' and 'actual' or 'real' existence:

For it is one thing for an object to exist in the mind (*in intellectu*), and another thing to understand that that object actually exists.

Anselm explicates this distinction with an example of a painter:

Thus, when a painter plans beforehand (*praecogitat*) what he is going to execute, he has [the picture] in his mind (*in intellectu*), but he does not yet think that it actually exists (*esse*) because he has not yet executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it.

The painting exists twice: first, as it is in the artist, and then again as it is in physical reality. Anselm assumes that somehow it is the same painting which has a dual existence: in the mind (in Latin variously *in intellectu* or *in mente*) and in reality (*in re*). By analogy with the painter who thinks beforehand of his painting, Anselm now suggests that someone who is considering the very notion of a God has actually got GOD (the entity) in his mind. Hence GOD has at least got mental existence or exists 'in the understanding' (*in intellectu*). Anselm here exploits an ambiguity. When we think about GOD, what have we got in our minds? Is it GOD – the actual entity – which is in our understanding? Or is it rather the *concept* of a God, that is *meaning* of the term 'God' which is in our understanding? Anselm wants us to believe the former; i.e. that GOD itself, is in our understanding and so to conclude that once we think of God we must admit that GOD exists – at least in our understanding; that GOD has at the very least got mental existence.

Anselm now proceeds: we can in fact think of something greater than mental existence. Whatever possesses *both* mental and real existence must be better than that which possesses mental existence alone. Sometimes Anselm is just claiming that something which exists in two ways is better than something that exists in one way. If we call mental existence 'a' and real existence 'b', then the argument is of the form: 'a+b>a'. But sometimes Anselm does argue that real existence is better than merely mental existence. Here the argument is of the form 'b>a'. Gaunilo reproduces this latter reasoning in his summary of Anselm's proof:

For if this same being exists in the mind (*in intellectu*) alone, anything that existed also in reality (*in re*) would be greater than this being, and thus that which is greater than everything would be less than something and would not be greater than everything, which is obviously contradictory.

Since God possesses all perfections and those in the highest measure, God must possess the highest measure of existence as one of those perfections. That highest perfection is possession of both real existence and mental existence. Therefore God, if God is to fulfil the very definition we have accepted for Him, must have real existence as well as mental existence. We know already that God has mental existence and we have now proved that God has real existence. Therefore God exists.

A second version of this argument in *Proslogion* Chapter Three turns on the distinction between God possessing existence and God necessarily existing. This modal version of the proof is considered to be considerably stronger. Anselm himself elsewhere showed interest in the metaphysics of modal terms – the meaning of necessity, possibility, and so on, concepts that also received considerable attention among Muslim philosophers (e.g. Avicenna) writing roughly at the same time.

TWELFTH-CENTURY RENAISSANCE

The schools of Chartres and St Victor

The so-called twelfth-century philosophical 'renaissance' took place in France and was centred in the Cathedral schools of Notre Dame, Chartres and St Victor, and involved the revival of learning in a new institutional setting. The Cathedral schools – especially St Victor and Chartres – grew in importance and eventually would supply teachers to the new universities of the thirteenth century. The philosophy of the period is characterised by a vigorous Platonic cosmological speculation inspired by the *Timaeus* (renewing interest in a work that had been ignored for more than five hundred years), and also by an interest in dialectic and the liberal arts, based

on readings of Boethius, Macrobius and Martianus Capella. The twelfth century also saw the dawn of a new understanding of nature, attempting to understand it for its own sake and not merely as a mirror of Scripture. Drawing on Calcidius' *Commentary on the Timaeus*, twelfth-century Platonists (Bernard of Chartres, Thierry of Chartres, and William of Conches) developed an account of the world in terms of the four elements and in terms of complex number symbolisms, stressing the relation between macrocosm and microcosm, and harmony between the divine and created spheres.

From the Middle Platonists onwards, Christians had noticed the parallels between Plato's *Timaeus* and the account of creation in Genesis. Moreover, Plato's literary method of exposition was similar to Christian parable; both use fables and symbols (*integumenta*, 'coverings') which require interpretation. The most prominent twelfth-century Platonist William of Conches, who probably taught at Chartres between 1120 and 1150, wrote the most extensive medieval commentary on the *Timaeus*. He also commented on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and composed two systematic works, *Philosophia mundi* and a revised version entitled *Dragmaticon*, set in the form of a dialogue between the Duke of Normandy and the Philosopher. For William, the *Timaeus* is a unified theological work displaying the beneficence of the creator. God has established an unvarying natural law which is discoverable at the heart of things. For William, God creates the intellectual realm and allows other causes (e.g. stars) to govern the lower world, thus proposing a doctrine of mediated creation at variance with Augustine's single-act view. William of Conches explicitly connects Plato with Pythagoras, and argues that since number possesses the highest perfection, nothing can exist without number.

William saw himself as expanding on the teaching of Plato:

It is not my intention to expound here the words of Plato, but to set down here the view of natural scientists (*physici*) concerning substances; but even if I have not expounded Plato's words, I have said all that he said about elements, and more.

(*Dragmatico*)⁴²

He attempts to define the elements and addresses the question as to whether they are perceptible by the senses and corporeal and whether the division of matter ends with these indivisibles (atoms). William takes the view that the four elements are corporeal, unchanging substances which however are only found in combination. The elements then are corporeal but actually grasped by intellect since they are too small to be perceived by the senses on their own. Though they are unchangeable, they are created. God first made the four elements from nothing and then everything else out of the four elements, except the soul of man, which God made directly.

A major challenge to Christianising Plato's cosmology was to interpret the role played by the Platonic Demiurge. Christian Platonists were initially quick to identify the Demiurge with the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity. This allowed them to make a further identification between the Holy Spirit and the world soul (*anima mundi*), which in the *Timaeus* enlivens the material cosmos. William of Conches initially, in his *Commentary on Macrobius*, I 12, 12, quite boldly identified the world soul of the *Timaeus* with the Holy Spirit, as Abelard was alleged to have done. The Council of Sens had condemned the identification, attributing it to Abelard. William appears to have grown more cautious, simply offering a number of different views in his *Philosophia* Book One (the world soul is the Holy Spirit, or a natural force implanted in things by God, or a certain incorporeal substance in bodies) and making no reference to the world soul in his *Dragmaticon*.

Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia* is a partly versified, allegorical account of the creation of the world that makes use of many Platonic ideas from the *Timaeus*, including that of a world soul, personified as Endelichia (who also appears in Martianus Capella and Cicero), but in a manner quite different from William of Conches. Bernard has a world of ideas (Noys) and a domain of unformed matter (personified as Silva – Calcidius' term for 'matter'). Gradually Noys imposes order on Silva until the whole world has been made. The sensible world imitates the intelligible; man is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Bernard portrays Plato as beginning with two principles: *unitas et diversum*, unity and diversity. Another Platonic cosmology in versified form was Alan of Lille's (c.1120–1203) *De planctu naturae*, a dialogue between the poet and Nature, influenced by Bernard Silvestris.

Peter Abelard (1079–1142): The Master of Dialectic

One cannot underestimate the importance of Abelard as providing the paradigm of the gifted, independently minded dialectician who revelled in disputation. He is also perhaps the most famous medieval philosopher, largely because of his doomed love affair with Heloise. We know a lot about his life because he left an autobiography, *Historia Calamitatum* (*The Story of My Misfortunes*).⁴³ Abelard was born into a noble family in Brittany in 1079, and while living in the house of Fulbert, the Canon of Notre Dame, he had an affair with Fulbert's niece, the young Heloise, when he became her private tutor. When she became pregnant, and following the birth of the child, Abelard secretly married her. He persuaded her to go to a monastery for her safety, but members of Fulbert's family attacked and castrated him. Heloise remained a nun after this and Abelard entered the monastery at St Denis where he became active in encouraging the monastic vocation. The bodies of Abelard and Heloise now rest in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

Abelard studied dialectic with Roscelin of Compiègne (c.1050–c.1120) and William of Champeaux (c.1070–1120), the most famous Paris master of his day and a renowned logician. Abelard sided with Roscelin and disagreed with William on the subject of the status of universals and eventually broke away to set up his own school of dialectic. William understood species and genera to be as real as individual things whereas Abelard, following Roscelin, saw them as mere verbal sounds that ultimately referred to individual things. He then studied with Anselm of Laon but also disputed with him. Dialectic at the time consisted of a sophisticated development of the classical logical corpus (the so called *logica vetus* or 'old logic') – Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation* together with Porphyry's *Isagoge* and Boethius' *De topicis differentiis* (*On Diverse Topics*) as well as the works of late classical liberal arts writers such as Martianus Capella. Abelard's logic held that logic was about things said (*verba*) as opposed to things (*res*), and on account of this Abelard has been seen as anticipating nominalism. It paid particular attention to the sentence (as did Stoic logic) and to what is asserted in a sentence, namely the *dictum* ('what is said') as opposed to the *dictio* (act of asserting). For Abelard, the force of the copula in a traditional judgement is to bring about the 'saying', otherwise the sentence would merely be a collection of words.

Abelard also wrote on theology and ethics. His account of the Trinity got him into trouble with Church authorities but he seems to have greatly enjoyed the controversy. His dialectical work, *Sic et Non* had a strong influence on Peter Lombard's *Book of Sentences* (*Liber Sententiarum*, c.1155–8) which became a standard introduction to theological reasoning in medieval universities. In this work in four books, Peter Lombard (died 1160), Bishop of Paris, compiled citations from the Fathers relating to various questions. Opposing opinions are ranked beside one another in a manner which would be copied by the Scholastics of the next century.

THE ISLAMIC TRADITION FROM THE EIGHTH TO THE TWELFTH CENTURIES

While all medieval scholars recognise the importance of the Islamic and Jewish contribution, there is great controversy over its precise significance.⁴⁴ There is even debate about whether it is more accurate to speak of 'philosophy in Arabic' rather than Islamic philosophy, since many of the writers in Arabic were Jews and Christians. Mohammed died in AD 632 and, in less than a hundred years, Islam had spread by militant conquest across North Africa to Spain and eastwards to India. Islam encountered Greek philosophy in the Greek intellectual centres in Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt giving rise to a distinctive Islamic philosophy begins in the eighth century in Baghdad. All the works of Plato and Aristotle as well as

their commentators were known in the Islamic world, and the emphasis was on finding agreement between these two authorities. Schools of translators translated this Greek science and philosophy into Arabic. Islamic philosophy emerged with the dialectical theologians in the schools of Baghdad and Basra. Great Islamic philosophers include the Neoplatonist Persian philosopher, Al-Kindi (796–873), who was active in Baghdad, Al-Razi (d. c.932), Al-Farabi (872–950) who developed Aristotelianism, Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037) who combined the Neoplatonism of Al-Kindi with the Aristotelianism of the Farabi school, Al Ghazali (1058–1111), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) who lived in Cordoba in Spain.⁴⁵ Islamic philosophers were interested in the nature of prophecy and divine illumination.

Ibn Rushd was enormously influential in the Latin west in the thirteenth century and especially important for his refutation of Avicenna's views of the relevance of philosophy to theology. Thomas Aquinas and others regarded him as *the* commentator on Aristotle. His view of the nature of the separated intellect inspired a group of thirteenth-century philosophers known by modern scholars as 'the Latin Averroists'. Even in his life he was a controversial figure and was banished from Moslem Andalusia to North Africa although he was subsequently rehabilitated. Nevertheless, he lost the battle with the Muslim theologians who continued to regard him as doctrinally suspect (e.g. on the doctrine of personal immortality). By the eleventh century philosophy had already declined in Baghdad, and, after Averroes, Muslim philosophy generally went into a decline from which it has never recovered.

Islamic philosophy emphasised the unity of God and studied how God can be both one and also possess attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience and so on. The relation between the divine and human free will was also discussed as was the nature of the human soul, and the problem of the relation between divine creation found in the Koran and the Aristotelian teaching of the eternity of the world (Al-Farabi). It is within Islamic philosophy that the discussion of essence and existence emerged, an issue of central importance to Aquinas and Scotus. Avicenna is important for placing emphasis on the necessity of the divine existence which had important consequences for both Aquinas' and Scotus' proofs of the existence of God.

MEDIEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Jewish philosophy emerged in the Middle Ages largely in consort with Islamic philosophy.⁴⁶ Jewish philosophy did not prosper in Byzantium but, as a protected minority in Islam, Jewish thinkers flourished in Baghdad and Egypt, and later in Andalusia in Southern Spain, writing in Arabic and familiar with both the classical Greek tradition as well as with Islamic philosophy. The growth of Jewish thought

was hampered by persecution and the absence of dedicated institutions of learning such as universities. But Jewish translators in Provence and elsewhere played an important role in the transmission of classical texts into Northern Europe. Jewish philosophers included Isaac Israeli (c.855–c.955), Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021–c.1070), Crescas, Gersonides (1288–1344) and Moses Maimonides. As we have seen, Philo Judaeus, although he may be counted as the first Jewish philosopher, had no direct influence on Jewish thought as such, although he had a considerable influence on the early Christian Fathers including Clement and Origen. The first Jewish philosopher of the Moslem period was Saadia Gaon (882–942), who was born in Egypt and headed the rabbinical academy of Sura near Baghdad. Jewish Neoplatonism is represented by Isaac Ben Israeli and Ibn Gabirol. Isaac Israeli was probably born in Egypt and has left four works, including the *Book of Definitions*, which shows similarities with the work of Al Kindi, and offers a version of Plotinian Neoplatonism where God is identified with the One. Isaac Israeli had an influence on Albertus Magnus. Solomon Ibn Gabirol (1021–51), known as Avicenna in the Latin world, who was born in Malaga and lived mostly in the towns of Andalusia. He wrote religious poetry and his *Fons vitae* (*Fountain of Life*), translated from the now lost Arabic original, circulated primarily among Christians. It was commented on critically by Thomas Aquinas in his *On Spiritual Creatures* (*De spiritualibus creaturis*) and denounced by Albertus Magnus in his *De intellectu de intelligibili* for preaching that the intellect was material. For Aquinas, the main import of the *Fons Vitae*, a work which sought to explain both the unity and diversity of all things, was its advocacy of a doctrine which became known as *universal hylomorphism*, the view that all things are composed of matter and form, and that spiritual creatures therefore possess a 'spiritual matter'.

Moses Maimonides (c.1135–1204) is the most important Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages. He was born in Cordoba, but was forced to move from Andalusia. In 1154 he travelled to Jerusalem and then to Cairo, where he became a court physician. An important interpreter of Aristotle, his *Guide of the Perplexed* is a major summa, written first in Arabic in 1190 and translated into both Hebrew and Latin.⁴⁷ Aquinas was deeply influenced by Maimonides's discussions of the existence of God and the nature of the divine attributes. Following Maimonides, Gersonides attempted to refine problems he found in Maimonides's teaching, often making use of Averroes. Hasdai Crescas (c.1340–1410) began the critique of Aristotelian ideas. There were Jewish philosophers working in Spain until the expulsion of the Jews in 1492.

THOMAS AQUINAS (c.1224–1274) AND THE NEO-ARISTOTELIAN REVIVAL

Aquinas's philosophy was shaped by the methods of teaching of the newly established universities as well as by his membership of the Dominican Order (founded in 1217). All the great thirteenth century philosophers – Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Roger Bacon, Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, Duns Scotus – were all associated with the university of Paris. The University of Paris had received its Charter in 1200 and the first Dominican Chair was established in 1229. The university was a corporation, not unlike a medieval guild. While its main purpose was to produce theologians, it also was a centre for the production and transmission of scientific knowledge. Students like Aquinas first enrolled in the arts faculty and then progressed to theology. University instruction took the form of the reading aloud and exposition of classical texts (*lectio*) and the holding of vigorous debates (*disputatio*) where certain theses were defended or rebutted (e.g. 'that the world does not have a beginning in time'). A prerequisite for the Master's degree in theology involved writing a commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Aquinas not only wrote such a commentary, but also lectured on the *Sentences* in Paris from 1252 to 1256.

Thomas Aquinas wrote during the thirteenth-century revival of the writings of Aristotle in western Europe. Although he was steeped in the Neoplatonism of his teacher Albertus, and was familiar with the writings of Augustine, Boethius, Dionysius the Areopagite, and the *Book of Causes* (*Liber de causis*), his real interest lay in the interpretation of Aristotle and in reconciling his philosophical opinions with the truth as revealed by his Christian faith. Aquinas went to considerable effort to obtain reliable translations of Aristotle. William of Moerbeke helped to supply him with better translations. But in his writing, Aquinas was a radical Aristotelian.

Aquinas was born into a prominent political family in Roccasecca, near Naples. At the age of five, his family placed him in the Benedictine Abbey nearby in Monte Cassino where his uncle was the Abbot. In 1239, at the age of fourteen or fifteen, he entered the arts course at the University of Naples, where, under the tutelage of the Irish-born philosopher, Peter of Ireland (Petrus Hiberniae), he began the study of Aristotle, whose works had resurfaced in the Latin West. In 1244, he joined the newly-founded mendicant order, the Dominicans, against the wishes of his family who kidnapped and forcibly detained him for over a year in the family castle. He eventually persuaded them to release him and he rejoined the Dominican house in Naples. In 1245, his superiors sent him to Paris, where he remained until 1248, possibly studying with Albertus Magnus, known as 'the universal doctor' on account of his immense erudition. In 1248, Albertus was sent to Cologne to establish a Dominican *studium generale* (which, though not a university, became an important

intellectual centre) and Thomas may have accompanied him. Certainly he studied with Albertus in Cologne after 1248. Sometime between 1248 and 1252 he was ordained. In 1252, Thomas went back to the University of Paris to continue his graduate study of theology. The Paris theology faculty was hostile to the new mendicant orders, the Franciscans and the Dominicans, and initially refused him his Master's degree, but, after papal intervention, they recanted. From 1256 to 1259 he taught as a Master of Theology at Paris, then he travelled in Italy to Orvieto, Rome, and Viterbo. In 1269, he returned to Paris where he taught until 1272. In 1274 he died in Italy near Naples, where he had been sent to set up a theology faculty at the University of Naples. Isolated statements from his writings were included in a general condemnation of 219 philosophical theses issued by Stephen Tempier, Bishop of Paris, in 1277. The Dominican order, however, adopted many of his works in their teaching and Aquinas's work was rehabilitated in 1324 by the Archbishop of Paris. Subsequently, he has been recognised as one of the foremost Christian philosophers, and, in the nineteenth century, Pope Leo XIII decreed that his works should form the basis of Christian intellectual formation, leading to the development of the Neo-Thomist movement. Central to the Neo-Thomist interpretation is the emphasis on Aquinas as a philosopher of being. God is understood as pure being, *esse purus*, pure act of existence, whose entire essence is realised in existing. All created things participate in being through an act of existing, *actus essendi*, which actualises their potential (but previously non-existent) natures. This distinction between essence and existence, superimposed upon the Aristotelian principles of form and matter, brings about a new metaphysical account of being.

Aquinas wrote commentaries on selected books of the Bible. He wrote important and original philosophical commentaries on Aristotle – twelve commentaries in all – of which the *Metaphysics* and *On the Soul* (*De anima*) are among the most significant. In these commentaries, Aquinas shows considerable knowledge not only of Aristotle, but also of his Muslim commentators, especially Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and also the Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides. Thomas himself is always a critical reader who shows his independence of these authorities. For instance, Averroes had interpreted a passage in Aristotle's *De anima* as meaning that there was a single intellect for all humans. Aquinas, on the other hand, defended the view that each human being has an individual intellect, a view which he took to be more in keeping with Christian teaching on the person.

In attempting to reconcile Aristotle with Christian faith, Aquinas also had to face the question as to whether the Aristotelian doctrine of the eternity of the world was compatible with the Biblically-inspired concept of creation from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). Aquinas argued that the concept of a creation does not in itself rule out the possibility that the world always existed in time. He argued that the concept of creation required only that the world have a 'total cause' for its being.

Aquinas held many disputations, including on the nature of truth (*De veritate*), on the power of God (*De potentia Dei*), on evil (*De malo*), and on the nature of the soul (*De anima*). Early in his career, he wrote his first purely philosophical treatise, *On Being and Essence* (*De ente et essentia*) which develops concepts found in Aristotle's *Categories*.⁴⁸ But his most important works are his two great summaries of philosophy and theology, the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (1259–65)⁴⁹ which summarised arguments to convince non-believers to convert to the Christian faith, and the *Summa theologiae* (begun 1266 and unfinished at his death), which addressed in systematic fashion questions concerning the nature of God, creation, human nature and the nature of salvation.

The *Summa theologiae* has a structure which reveals its origins in school discussion. A question is proposed, such as 'does God exist?', and then certain arguments are put forward opposing an affirmative reply (called 'objections'). This is followed by an opposing statement, called a '*sed contra*' ('but on the other hand . . .') which usually quotes an authority who supports an answer contrary to the opposing 'objections'. This is followed by a section where Aquinas articulates his own position, the '*respondeo*' ('I answer') and finally he gives a list of replies to the first set of objections.

Aquinas on the Five Ways

Aquinas's discusses the existence of God in many of his works, beginning with the *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, including the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (hereafter, 'SCG') and *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, 'ST'). The SCG develops two of the arguments at some length, whereas in *Summa Theologiae*, Part 1 Question 2 Article 3 (henceforth ST 1a. 2.3) Aquinas puts forward 'five ways' (Latin: *quinque viae*) to demonstrate the existence of God in an extremely condensed and sketchy fashion.⁵⁰ In this chapter we shall focus solely on the First Way. First of all, Aquinas disagrees with Anselm's *a priori* approach to proving the existence of God from the mere examination of what is entailed in the very concept of God. Instead, Thomas' proofs are based largely on his understanding of arguments found in Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics* and take the existing real world as their starting point (hence Kant called these kinds of arguments 'cosmological'). Aquinas wants to show that events in the real world, such as the existence of change, require causes and that by a chain of argument it can be shown that a first cause must exist. He takes it for granted that this first cause of all is what Christians call 'God'.

The First Way (the proof from movement)

The first argument is called the argument 'from motion' (Latin: *ex motu*) or change, and Aquinas thought this way was more obvious (*manifestior*) than the other ways. Aristotle (especially his *Physics* Book 5. 226a) distinguished between three kinds of change: (a) *locomotion*, i.e. physical change of place (such a stone rolling down hill or water flowing); (b) *change of quantity*, such as a plant growing larger or a leaf shrinking; and (c) *change of quality* which Aristotle calls 'alteration', i.e. a leaf changing colour. All kinds of change are included in Thomas' concept of *motus*.

Aquinas begins by claiming that it is evident to our senses that some things are in a process of change: 'Some things in the world are certainly in process of change: this we plainly see.' Change, as such, is an observable fact. In SCG 1.13 his example is the sun moving: 'That some things are in motion – for example, the sun – is evident from sense' (SCG 1.13.3). Aquinas believes that change requires an explanation – a cause. He next claims everything which is changed is changed by something else: 'Now anything in process of change is being changed by something else.' Aquinas, following Aristotle, believes that, in order for change to take place in the most general terms, something must come to have a characteristic it did not have before, for example, water boiled in a pot goes from cold to hot. Water gains the characteristic or property of 'being hot'. Aquinas says:

it is a characteristic of things in process of change that they do not yet have the perfection towards which they move, though able to have it; whereas it is a characteristic of something causing change to have that perfection already.

A cause is that which *actually* possesses the characteristic (Aquinas uses the term 'perfection' to mean a property or characteristic) it is about to impart to the thing which will undergo change. Thus a hot ring on a stove is *actually* hot and it imparts heat to the pot which imparts heat to the water in the pot. Before the water becomes *actually* hot we can say that it is *potentially* hot; it is the kind of thing which is *capable* of being hot in the right circumstances. Something can undergo a specific change according to Aristotle and Aquinas, only if its nature is capable of supporting that change.

Aquinas assumes that nothing can change itself, since it would then both actually have the quality or characteristic it wanted to bring about in itself and also not have the quality (since change *means* that a thing gains a property it did not have before). This is impossible; if a wall is actually white it cannot change its colour to white. Aquinas concludes from this that nothing can change itself. Therefore everything which is changed is changed by another. Actually, Thomas Aquinas does acknowledge that some things do move themselves. Following Plato and Aristotle, he thinks

of the soul as a self-moving principle. So he could say that the stick is moved by the arm and the arm is moved by the soul but that the soul moves itself. But he finally thinks even self-moving causes require explanations and so posits a first cause. This move has got him into difficulty with some critics.

Aquinas recognises that there is a chain or sequence of changes and hence a chain of causes of change:

Of necessity therefore anything in process of change is being changed by something else. Moreover this something else, if in process of change, is itself being changed by yet another thing; and this last by another.

Aquinas claims that an infinite chain of causes is impossible and the changing 'must stop somewhere'. For both Aristotle and Aquinas, if there is to be a genuine causal explanation, there must be a first cause. Aquinas takes an example from Aristotle's *Physics* 8.5 256a: a stone is moved by a stick and the stick is moved by a hand, which in turn is moved by a man. In this simple sequence the man is the first mover and without him moving, nothing else would subsequently move. Both Aristotle and Aquinas think that a chain of causes which went on endlessly would not be capable of being sustained, because unless there is a first cause there is no subsequent cause. It belongs to the very meaning of causation, that we explain everything with reference to a first. Aquinas then finds it inconceivable that an infinite series of causes could be possible.

Part of the problem is that there are at least two different ways in which a series could be infinite. The actual example which both Aristotle and Aquinas invoke (the hand moving the stick which moves the stone) illustrates the case of a chain of *simultaneous* movers. In other words there is no temporal succession: each cause acts simultaneously with the next. The hand is in motion at the same time as the stick and the ball. This kind of causation is often referred to as 'vertical': one cause underlies another in a vertical chain. Other kinds of causal chains would have temporal succession, often referred to as 'horizontal' causation. For example, the ancients considered the case of human reproduction, for every son there is a father, so the father causes a son and that son may himself go on (at a later time) to cause a son, and so on. But here not all the causes are simultaneous. Over generations, the earlier causes die off and cease to exist. Aquinas then had to face the problem of how this causal chain could keep going. Could there be an infinite series of fathers, especially since Aristotle taught that the world was eternal?

Muslim philosophers, notably Avicenna, proposed a solution to this problem, a solution which Aquinas adopted in SCG, based on a distinction between accidental (*per accidens*) causation and real or intrinsic (*per se*) causation. The father is the real cause of the son existing in the first place, so the father is said to be the cause

of the son *qua* (as) human being. But the father is strictly speaking not the actual cause of the son himself going on to become a father. The father is the *accidental* (*per accidens*) cause of the son's becoming a father in his own right. A cause is *per accidens* when what causes it is not precisely responsible for what it appears in turn to cause the effect to do. Thus for example, if one person (A) is hammering and then passes the hammer to the second person (B), it is merely accidental that A is the cause of B's hammering. Similarly the father is the cause not of the son's ability to bring about another son but rather the father is the cause of the being of the son and only accidentally the cause that the son is himself a father to another son. For Aquinas, the real *per se* cause of the son's becoming a father is God. Therefore no matter whether there is an infinite series of fathers there is still only a finite chain of causation, since God is the first cause required to sustain the chain of causation. Clearly this view of causation is at the heart of Aquinas' proofs and it has been regarded as problematic by many philosophers.

Why does Aquinas hold that an infinite series of causes is impossible? We can easily imagine an infinite chain of causes stretching back endlessly with no first point. As a matter of fact, Aquinas himself was not completely opposed to the view that the world might have existed eternally and that there might always have been change. In ST 1.46.2. 7 he explicitly supposes that the generation of one human from another is endless. He is really arguing that an explanation which stays at the level of causes which themselves have causes (what Aquinas called 'intermediary' causes) is not a genuine explanation. For Aquinas, as for Aristotle, a true explanation must go back to a first cause or first principle. This is discussed in more detail in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Aquinas rejected an infinite sequence of causes on the grounds that an explanation that never terminates in a first principle is not an explanation. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle said that if we desired each thing for the sake of the next and this went on endlessly then we could never get started. There must then be something we desire for its own sake, and all other things are desired for the sake of that thing we desire for its own sake. In the *Physics*, Aristotle gives arguments against the possibility of an infinite series of movers or causes. Aquinas concludes that for any change there must be a first principle which causes that change, but which is itself unchanged, and this he says is God. God is the cause of change which is not itself changed. Aquinas says: 'and this is what everyone understands by God'. Hence he concludes that God exists.

Now, there are many problems with this argument. First we have the assumption that anything which changes requires a cause of that change. Why does Aquinas rule out random or accidental change? It might be that things start causing one another after a while but that the initial situation was one of mere chance occurrence. Second, we have the assumption that a chain of causes cannot go on *ad infinitum*, this assumption has been seen as untenable. Third, we have the assumption that all

the causes go back to a single first cause. Why could there not be a whole host of different types of first causes? That which causes the physical material world to exist, need not be the same cause as that which produced living beings. Aquinas just assumes all chains of causation will dovetail back to a single starting point, but this assumption is not supported by argument. Finally, many people might not accept that this first cause is God. After all, a huge cosmic explosion or 'big bang' might be the cause of everything which subsequently exists in the universe, this does not mean that that first explosion is God.

A more grievous problem, which has been pointed out by Anthony Kenny,⁵¹ is that Aquinas's argument depends on an analysis of causation which goes back to Aristotle. According to this analysis, it belongs to the meaning of the concept of cause that a cause will actually possess the property that it will impart to the effect. Thus fire must actually be hot to cause the stick which is put in the fire to become hot; but modern science has rejected this analysis of causation. The grain which makes a cow fat is not itself fat; microwaves can generate heat without themselves being hot and so on. Aquinas, according to Kenny, is not giving a straight-forward metaphysical analysis, but rather is giving an analysis which presumes a classical and discredited physics. His argument, therefore, does not stand alone but rather presupposes a whole world view.

THE LATER THIRTEENTH CENTURY AND THE RISE OF THE SCHOOLS

Late in the thirteenth century, especially at the University of Paris, philosophers began to organise into schools. In fact, the existence and uniformity of these schools has been challenged, but it is certainly the case, that the Franciscan and Dominican Orders which now controlled Chairs of theology, tended to have their own traditions of instruction and followed their own masters. Thus the Dominicans followed St Thomas whereas Duns Scotus and Bonaventure were the masters for the Franciscans. But one should not exaggerate this tendency; William of Ockham for instance was a severe critic both of Thomas and of Duns Scotus. Besides Paris, new centres of learning were developing, notably at Oxford and Bologna. Oxford especially produced Robert Grosseteste (1170–1253) who became Chancellor of the University. Born in Suffolk, he translated and commented on the books of Aristotle, but his own theological interests were Augustinian and Neoplatonic. He wrote an important work, *De luce*,⁵² which makes light to be both the metaphysical and physical first principle of the cosmos – light is the first form of all things.

JOHN DUNS SCOTUS (c.1266–1308)

Little is known of the life of Scottish philosopher and Franciscan priest, John Duns Scotus, except that he achieved considerable renown as a teacher and commentator in the course of a short life, becoming known as 'the subtle doctor'. He entered Oxford probably in 1288 to study theology, and was ordained a priest in 1291. He was active in Oxford in 1300 as a bachelor in theology giving lectures on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and participating in disputes. He then went to the University of Paris in 1302 where he began new commentaries on the *Sentences*, but the following year was expelled from France, caught up in a dispute between the King and the Pope over the taxation of Church property. He may have spent time in Oxford or Cambridge, but he returned again in 1304 to Paris, when he was recommended for the Franciscan Chair of Theology. But within a few years, for unknown reasons, he was removed from the Chair and sent as lecturer to the Franciscan convent in Cologne, where he died in 1308. In his short life he attracted many disciples, and wrote a great many works, most of which were still being revised when he died. Many of his writings are in reaction to the works of Henry of Ghent (c.1240–93), the most important Paris master of his time.

Scotus' philosophical writings include discussions on Porphyry and on Aristotle's logical works, a lengthy set of questions, much revised, discussing Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (only books I–IX are authentic), and a short discussion of questions on Aristotle's *De anima*. His theological writings include various commentaries on the *Sentences* (including the *Ordinatio*, the *Lectura*; and the *Reportatio parisiensis*, recent scholarship is sorting out the various versions and editions) two sets of theological disputations, *Quaestiones quodlibetales* (Quodlibetal Questions), written at Paris and the *Collationes* (*Collations*), and two treatises, *De primo principio* (*On the First Principle*),⁵³ a lengthy proof of the existence of God, and *Theoremata* (whose authorship has been questioned).

It is impossible to summarise Scotus' philosophy. He wrote on metaphysics, on the nature of being, God, the transcendentals, on freedom of the will, and on many other issues. In metaphysics, he championed the univocity against the more standard analogical understanding of being. That is to say, Aquinas, Henry of Ghent and others followed Aristotle in holding that the meaning of being changes depending on the kind of thing of which it is predicated. God and creatures both have being but in different ways. Nevertheless, there is a relation or proportion or analogy between the manner in which God has being and that in which creatures have being. Scotus opposed this arguing for the *univocity* of being, that it has the same meaning for God and for creatures. Scotus' argument for the existence of God is the most complex of medieval arguments and has attracted a huge secondary literature. Scotus argues for the 'triple primacy' of God – as efficient and final cause and as

most eminent of beings. Scotus is also known for his subtle discussion of the principle of individuation. He defends the need for a principle of individuation, whereby essences which in themselves are neither universal nor particular are instantiated through a specific principle which gives them their individuality of 'thisness' (*haecceitas*). His realist position on universals would be attacked by Ockham. Indeed, Scotus was the most quoted figure in fourteenth century Scholastic philosophy.

WILLIAM OF OCKHAM AND NOMINALISM

The growth of nominalism and of an interest in science is associated with the Merton School of Franciscans at Oxford. The so called 'problem of universals' first arose in relation to the interpretation of Aristotle's *Categories* and especially a commentary, the *Isagoge* or Introduction, written on that work by Porphyry, which was translated into Latin by Boethius. In the *Categories* Aristotle has claimed that a substance could be an individual entity, e.g. this man, but also that the general or universal term 'man' also indicated a substance. This raised the question as to whether universals were as real as individuals. A debate about realism and nominalism erupted in the ninth century and again in the twelfth century with the writings of Abelard, it continued through the fourteenth century and can rightly be seen to be a major theme of medieval philosophy.⁵⁴

William of Ockham (c.1285–1347)

William was probably born in Ockham, a village in Surrey and probably entered the Franciscan order as a child. He would have followed the Franciscan plan of instruction, probably in London, where he was ordained. He also studied in Oxford where he completed his baccalaureate and between 1317 and 1319 lectured on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, on which he wrote at least four commentaries. He also produced commentaries on Aristotle's logical works, probably while teaching in the Dominican *studium generale* in London and he may have begun his *Summa Logicae* around that time. However, he never became a Master and in 1324 he was investigated for heresy, an accusation made against him by a provincial in his own order who referred the case to the Pope then in Avignon. Ockham spent several years at Avignon before being forced to flee, together with the Franciscan General who supported him, Michael of Cesena in 1328. He took refuge in Munich under the protection of Louis of Bavaria where he spent the rest of his life writing theological and political tracts.

Ockham is best known for his reductionist metaphysics which rejected the Platonic reality of universals and sought to reduce ontological commitment. For Ockham, as he puts it in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, 'plurality is not to be posited without necessity', a saying which probably gave rise to the formulation usually associated with him, namely 'Ockham's razor': 'entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity'. Ockham maintained that only singulars actually exist, and he denied the reality of all the Aristotelian categories except for substance and quality. There are strictly speaking no 'actions' although things act. Moreover, there are only singular substances or qualities, an individual white thing not 'whiteness' exists. He is opposed to the hypostatisation of qualities into universal entities. He offers a semantic theory for treating universals which does not give them ontological status. Universals are concepts, ways of speaking about things.

MEISTER ECKHART OF HOCHHEIM (1260–1327)

Eckhart is important as someone who was educated in the tradition of Paris philosophy but also went on to speak and write in the vernacular, in his local German, and some of his key concepts – detachment (*Abgeschiedenheit*) and releasement or 'letting be' (*Gelassenheit*) were first formulated in his Middle High German in sermons he gave mostly to convents of nuns. He was born probably around 1260 and joined the Dominican priory in Erfurt at the age of 15. By 1294 he was in Paris commenting on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard meaning that he had already secured his Arts Degree at this time. At some point he left Paris to become Prior of the Dominican house at Erfurt, where he probably wrote his first surviving German work *Talks of Instruction*. In 1302 he returned to Paris to take up the Dominican Chair in Theology, previously held by St Thomas Aquinas (the other Chair of Theology was reserved for a Franciscan). Few works (aside from some *Questions*)⁵⁵ survive from this time although he probably wrote his Latin commentaries on Scripture at this stage. A year later, he was made Provincial of the new Dominican province of Saxonia, a post he held until 1311, when he returned to Paris to take up his Chair again. He held this post for two years during which he probably wrote his scriptural commentaries. However, he was moved again, this time to Strasburg, where he served as Vice-General with the responsibility of overseeing women's convents – including many Beguine communities. It was here that he wrote the *Liber Benedictus*. In 1323 he arrived in Cologne probably as Head of the Dominican *studium generale* there (founded by Albertus in 1248). In 1325 there was an investigation into his work by the theologian Nicholas of Strasburg, his junior in the Dominican Order, and it was found to be orthodox (this may have been an attempt to stave off a full inquisition). Nevertheless, the Franciscan Bishop of

Cologne ordered an inquisition into Eckhart's writings in 1326, and he was charged with heresy. Eckhart was the only Dominican ever to appear before the Inquisition. He responded to his accusations, arguing that he might be in error, but could not be a heretic, because he lacked the will. His case was referred to the Pope John XXII (then at Avignon and who was also reviewing the case of Ockham). Eckhart set out with some other Dominicans to walk to Avignon in 1327 to present his own case, but he died in Avignon probably in the winter of 1327/8. On 27th March 1329 the Papal Bill, *In Agro Dominico* (In the fields of the Lord) listed 28 articles, 17 which were said to be heretical and 11 of which sounded evil and gave rise to the suspicion of heresy.

A Dominican, Eckhart was influenced by Dominican thinkers such as Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Ulrich of Strasburg (c.1220–77) and Dietrich of Freiburg (1250–c.1320), a tradition that stressed the importance of intellect. In his treatise *On the Intellect and the Intelligible*, Albertus had written: 'human beings, precisely as human, are essentially intellect'.⁵⁶ Both God and the soul are thought to be intellectual by nature and to be pure intellects, and it is in this respect that the human mind is the image of God (an important medieval theme). Intellect here means something like consciousness or awareness or grasp or understanding. And the highest form of intellection is considered to be self-knowledge.

Eckhart was also influenced by Augustine, Proclus, Avicenna and Maimonides. He belongs to the mystic tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena, Albertus, the author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross. Following the Neoplatonic tradition, Eckhart emphasises God's unity and simplicity – likened to a 'desert' due its complete absence of features. God is not in any place, not 'here or there'. We only know what God is not and for that reason he says, quoting Augustine, 'all Scripture is vain'. Meister Eckhart has the strong conviction that we are blocked from appreciating the extraordinary transcendent and immanent nature of God by our limitations. This is why he prays: 'I pray God to rid me of God'.

Following Augustine, Eckhart claims that we must discover God within ourselves: 'I do not find God outside myself'. The metaphysical justification is Neoplatonic. For Eckhart, the soul in some sense remains a part of God or God remains in the soul; God is said to be the 'ground of the soul'. Eckhart's first principle is always this extraordinary transcendent goodness and grace of God, but he immediately adds to this principle the wondrous claim that the human soul has an equally high-ranking noble origin and dignified nature – an intrinsic nobility, which means that deep within each of us there is a perfect reflection of the divine purity; in Eckhart's terms: a 'little spark' in the soul, an 'interior castle', a 'nobleman'. The assertion that the human soul carries something divine within it – something 'uncreated' as Eckhart would often say – led to a suspicion that Eckhart was elevating human nature to the same level as God, and these accusations feature in his condemnation.

As with Eriugena, the act of God's creation is said to be timeless and eternal. There is a special event of understanding which he calls 'the birth of the Son in us'. According to Augustine, whom Eckhart quotes, this birth is always happening in us, it is an eternal birth. In an important sermon, number 53 in the critical edition of Joseph Quint, a sermon which dwells on the Scriptural text: *Misit dominus manum suam*, Eckhart focuses on detachment as one of the central themes of his preaching:

When I preach, I am accustomed to speak about detachment, and that a man should be free of himself and of all things; second, that a man should be formed again into that simple good which is God; third, that he should reflect on the great nobility with which God has endowed his soul, so that in this way he may come to wonder at God; fourth, about the purity of the divine nature, for the brightness of the divine nature is beyond words. God is a word, a word unspoken.⁵⁷

God is, in Eckhart's compelling image, 'an unspoken word', and hence all speaking must somehow be in vain.

NICHOLAS OF CUSA (1401–1464)

Nicholas of Cusa ('Cusanus') is an extraordinary figure. A reforming Catholic, eventually Cardinal, who participated in Councils of the Church and acted as a papal emissary, he was a scholar and book collector, a mathematician and scientist. Mostly self-taught in philosophy, and writing when nominalism was in the ascendancy, he wrote original works of Neoplatonic Christian mysticism, emphasising the infinity, transcendence, and unknowability of the divine. God is the 'Absolute Maximum', the 'coincidence of opposites' (*coincidentia oppositorum*), the 'not other' (*non aliud*), the unity of being (*esse*) and possibility (*posse*), for which Cusanus coins the term *possest*. Cusanus was an eager collector of manuscripts.⁵⁸ His eclectic reading and avid interest in new topics marks him out as a Renaissance man, indeed, he was known to the Italian Humanists who were his contemporaries. In his mathematical speculations he has been seen as a forerunner of the seventeenth-century Scientific Revolution.

Born in Cues, on the Moselle river east of Trier, Germany, in 1400–1, he may have studied at Deventer, founded in 1379 by Gerhard Groote, and run by the Brothers of the Common Life.⁵⁹ In 1416 he entered the University of Heidelberg, then a centre for nominalism and conciliarism, and then went to Padua, famous for law, medicine, mathematics and science, in 1417, where he received his doctorate in law in 1423. In 1425 he entered the University of Cologne, where the dominant

tradition came from Albertus Magnus and there were vigorous disputes between the Albertists, Thomists and nominalists. As a secretary to a German Bishop, he participated in the Council of Basel (1431–37) and in 1434 wrote *De Concordantia Catholica* which included proposals for the reform of Church and state and is an important Conciliarist document. Later he shifted to the papal side. In 1437 he travelled to Constantinople to invite the Byzantine church to a council, while there he met the Emperor, and acquired the *Theologia Platonica* of Proclus. On his journey back to Venice he had a vision which inspired the treatise, *De docta ignorantia* (*On Learned Ignorance*, 1440, hereafter 'DI'), a work in which he developed the Augustinian view that God is better known by not knowing, by arguing for a kind of knowledge which recognises the contradictions of thinking about the divine and resolves them by considering God as the 'coincidence of opposites'.⁶⁰ Cusanus simply begins by characterising God as *maximum absolutum*, 'all that which can be' (*omne id quod esse potest*, DI I.v.11). He is actually everything which is possible (DI I.xiii.14). God or the 'Godhead' (*deitas*) is 'infinite oneness' (*unitas infinita*, DI I.xiii.14). As such God is 'incomprehensible', because our minds must use oppositions and these do not apply to God. The maximum is 'incomprehensibly understandable and unnameably nameable' (DI I.v.13). God is 'beyond all opposition' and 'free of all opposition' (I.v.12).

In 1444 he wrote his first dialogue, *De Deo abscondito* (*On the Hidden God*). In 1450 Cusanus went to Rome where he wrote *Idiota. De sapientia et de mente* (*The Layman on Wisdom and the Mind*, 1450),⁶¹ and several mathematical works (including one on squaring the circle). In 1453 he wrote *De visione Dei* (*On the Vision of God*). In 1452 he became bishop in Brixen, where he enforced reforms but got caught up in local battles. In 1459 he returned to Rome, where he was held prisoner for a time by some of his Brixen enemies. After his release, he withdrew from politics. In his last years, he wrote the important works *Dialogus de possest* (1460)⁶² and *De li non aliud* (1462), where he argues that God is 'not other'.⁶³ In 1464 he died in Todi. Cusanus' specific originality consists in his use of nominalist claims about God's infinite and unlimited power, combined with the Scholastic claim that God is pure being (*esse*) and pure actuality (*actus purus*), to make the claim that God is the infinite actualisation of all possibilities, and hence reconciles all oppositions and indeed in beyond all oppositions. Cusanus takes these themes from Proclus, Dionysius, Eriugena, Albert and Eckhart, but wraps them in the language of late Scholasticism and presents them with scientific and mathematical embellishments. His writings break the form of Scholasticism and point towards the new philosophy of Descartes.

EXERCISES

- 1 Medieval philosophy has been characterised as 'faith seeking understanding'. Discuss.
- 2 The Platonic tradition prepared the way for Christianity since it held similar views on the nature of God, creation, the soul and the body. Discuss.
- 3 Explain and discuss Eriugena's fourfold division of nature. Does it amount to pantheism?
- 4 Outline critically one of Anselm's arguments for the existence of God.
- 5 Discuss the merits and defects of St Thomas Aquinas' First Way for demonstrating the existence of God.
- 6 Write an essay on the impact of the Aristotelian revival on Christian philosophy in the thirteenth century.
- 7 Write an essay on the conception of the divine in Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa.

NOTES

- 1 It has even been questioned whether it makes sense to speak of 'Christian philosophy' or 'medieval philosophy'. The very sense of philosophy has to be considered in discussing medieval authors.
- 2 For an account of this encyclical in relation to the debate over Christian philosophy, see Joseph Owens, *Towards a Christian Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1990), esp. pp. 63–75.
- 3 It is difficult to set a precise date on the break-up of the Roman Empire; various dates are significant, e.g. the sack of Rome by Alaric the Visigoth, which took place in 410 and prompted Augustine to begin the *City of God*; or, 524 – the execution of Boethius, the last great Roman senator and intellectual, who was working in a Roman Empire governed by the Ostrogoth Theoderic; or, 529 – the date of Emperor Justinian's decree to close the pagan Platonic Academy at Athens.
- 4 For further information on this period see A. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) and John Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy 480–1150* (London: Routledge, 1983).
- 5 See A. Kenny, N. Kretzmann and J. Pinborg (eds), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- 6 See, for instance, P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth Century Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Alain de Libera, *La Mystique Rhénane. D'Albert à Maître Eckhart* (Paris: Seuil, 1994).
- 7 See P. Abelard, *Dialogus inter philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum*, ed. R. Thomas (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1970), trans. P.J. Payer, *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979).
- 8 See Jaspèr Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa's De pace fidei and Cribatio Alkorani* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1990). In the *Cribatio*, written after the fall of Constantinople, Nicholas traces the errors of Islam to the Nestorian heresy.
- 9 Alain de Libera, *La Philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 367.

- 10 See Raymond Klibansky, *The Continuity of the Platonic Tradition during the Middle Ages* (London and Millwood, NY: The Warburg Institute and Kraus International Publications, 1982) and Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 Vols (Notre Dame, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986).
- 11 See A.O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
- 12 Anselm, *Monologion*, ch. 4, in J. Hopkins, *A New Interpretive Translation of St Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), p. 67.
- 13 See E. Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938).
- 14 See E. Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, op. cit., p. 9.
- 15 Augustine, *Of True Religion*, trans. J.H.S. Burleigh (South Bend, Indiana: Gateway Editions, 1959).
- 16 St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), p. 154.
- 17 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), p. 75.
- 18 Scholars now deny that Siger and Boethius actually taught the doctrine of two truths. The source of this accusation is Ernst Renan, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme* (Paris: Durand, 1852). For a more critical view, see Alain de Libera, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme. Que sais-je* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991).
- 19 See Henri de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'écriture* (Paris: Editions Montaigne, 1959).
- 20 See St Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. J.H. Taylor, 2 Vols (New York: Newman, 1982).
- 21 See D.T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).
- 22 'Apologia' meant a formal statement made before a judge on behalf of a defendant. See E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), p. 9.
- 23 On Justin Martyr, see Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 11–14; see also H. Chadwick, 'The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: Justin: the Gnostics', in A.H. Armstrong (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, op. cit., pp. 158–67.
- 24 Origen, *On First Principles*, trans. G.W. Butterworth, introduction by Henri de Lubac (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966).
- 25 Although women were quite prominent in Greek and Roman life, and included many prominent Christians, they had no detectable influence on early medieval philosophy, until the twelfth century when we meet a figure such as Heloise. Augustine had serious intellectual conversations with his mother and both he and Jerome were in correspondence with prominent Christian women regarding theological and spiritual matters, but there is a general absence of women from Patristic philosophy. Indeed, one of the great pagan women philosophers – Hypatia – was murdered by a Christian mob incited by St Cyril.
- 26 See E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience, from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).
- 27 It was banned by a number of edicts of Christian emperors beginning with Constantine. See Andrew Smyth, 'The Pagan Neo-Platonists' Response to Christianity', *Maynooth Review* 14 (December 1989): 25–41.

- 28 Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, trans. T. Taylor (London, 1821, reprinted Hastings: Chthonios Books, 1989).
- 29 Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans. E.R. Dodds, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963).
- 30 See *The Book of Causes*, trans. from the Latin by Dennis J. Brand, 2nd edn (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984). The anonymous author probably worked in Baghdad in the ninth or tenth centuries. An alternative candidate for authorship is Ibn Daoud, a twelfth century Spanish Jew. Aquinas, following his contact with William of Moerbeke's translation of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (completed 1268), recognised that the *Liber de causis* could not be an Aristotelian text and refers to its author as 'one of the Arab philosophers'. In fact, one of Aquinas' last works is his commentary on the *Liber de causis* (1272), see St Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles Hess and Richard Taylor (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).
- 31 See Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (London: Paulist Press, 1987).
- 32 Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 318–19.
- 33 Augustine, *Retractions*, trans. M.I. Bogan, Fathers of the Church Vol. 60 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1968).
- 34 See Boethius, *The Theological Tractates and the Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. H.F. Stewart and E.K. Rand (Cambridge: Loeb Library, 1918).
- 35 See Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962).
- 36 Plato, *Timaeus* [Chalcidius' Latin translation], ed. J. Waszink (Leiden: Brill, 1975).
- 37 See Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
- 38 See I.P. Sheldon-Williams and J.J. O'Meara (eds), *Eriugena: Periphyseon (The Division of Nature)* (Montreal/Paris: Bellarmin, 1987).
- 39 A translation of the Monologion is to be found in S.N. Deane, *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), pp. 35–144 and also in Jasper Hopkins, *A New Interpretive Translation of St Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), pp. 47–212.
- 40 M.J. Charlesworth, *St Anselm's Proslogion* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).
- 41 It is noteworthy that his invoking a figure from the Psalms as public expressions of atheism or agnosticism would have been extremely dangerous in medieval times.
- 42 William of Conches, *A Dialogue on Natural Philosophy (Dragmaticon Philosophiae)*. Italo Ronaca and Matthew Curr (eds and trans.) (Chicago, University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). This passage is translated in P. Dronke (ed.), *A History of Twelfth Century Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 309.
- 43 See John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- 44 See S. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds), *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996).
- 45 On Ibn Roshd see Dominique Urvoy, *Ibn Roshd (Averroes)* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- 46 See Isaac Husik, *A History of Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Athanenum, 1976).
- 47 See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. from the original Arabic by M. Friedlaender, 2nd edn (New York: Dover, 1956).

- 48 *On Being and Essence* is translated in Robert Goodwin (ed.), *Selected Writings of St Thomas Aquinas* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 33–67.
- 49 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Anton C. Pegis, 4 Vols (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).
- 50 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae Volume One. The Existence of God: Part One Questions 1–13*, ed. Thomas Gilby O.P. (New York: Doubleday, 1969).
- 51 A. Kenny, *The Five Ways* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).
- 52 See R. Grosseteste, *On Light*, trans. C.R. Riedl (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1942).
- 53 John Duns Scotus, *A Treatise on God as First Principle*, trans. A.B. Wolter, 2nd edn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).
- 54 See Paul Vincent Spade (ed.), *Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994).
- 55 See the first two sets of questions (on the divine existence and understanding) in Meister Eckhart, *Parisian Questions and Prologues*, trans. Armand A. Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974).
- 56 S. Tugwell, *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 59.
- 57 E. Colledge and B. McGinn (eds), *Meister Eckhart: The Essential Sermons, Commentaries, Treatises and Defence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), p. 203.
- 58 Nicholas' collection included Plato (*Phaedo, Crito, Apology, Republic, Laws, Parmenides and Seventh Letter*), Origen, Tertullian, Augustine, Ambrose, Calcidius's *Commentary on the Timaeus*, the *liber de causis*, part of Eriugena's *Periphyseon*, Avicenna's metaphysics, Albertus Magnus, Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Sentences*, Henry of Ghent's *Quodlibeta Theologica*, Moerbeke's translations of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* and *Commentary on the Parmenides*, as well as Grosseteste's translations of Dionysius's *Mystical Theology* and *Celestial Hierarchy*, and several works by Eckhart.
- 59 E. Van Steenberghe, *Le Cardinal Nicolas de Cues* (Paris, 1920), pp. 6–7. Thomas à Kempis lived at Deventer and later Erasmus went to school there.
- 60 J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and Appraisal of De docta ignorantia* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 3rd corrected edition, 1987).
- 61 Nicholas of Cusa, *The Layman on Wisdom and the Mind*, trans. M.L. Fuehrer (Toronto: Doverhouse Editions, 1989).
- 62 *De possest* is translated in J. Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), as 'On Actualized-Possibility'.
- 63 J. Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on God as Not-Other: A Translation and Appraisal of De Li Non Aliud* (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 1983).

FURTHER READING

Students who wish to gain an understanding of the philosophy of the Middle Ages should read at least one general survey of the period. It is also worth reading the entries for individual medieval philosophers in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 10 vols., ed. E. Craig (London: Routledge, 1998). They should also have a basic familiarity with the *Categories* of Aristotle, the *Timaeus* of Plato, and the main tenets of Neoplatonism. Augustine's *Confessions* is certainly worth reading to understand Augustine's early sense of the relationship between Christianity and Neoplatonism, while Book Eleven gives Augustine's famous meditation on the nature of time. Similarly, Boethius's

Consolation of Philosophy, especially Book Five, is a useful introduction to the problem of divine foreknowledge. Students should then read selections from Eriugena, Anselm, and Abelard, before studying the rise of Aristotle. The thirteenth century sees an explosion of authors but most courses concentrate on Aquinas with some reference to Scotus and Ockham.

General Surveys of Medieval Philosophy

- Armstrong, A.H. (ed.) (1970) *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Copleston, F.C. (1972) *Medieval Philosophy*, London and New York: Methuen.
- Copleston, F.C. (1983) *A History of Philosophy*, Volume II, *Augustine to Scotus* and Volume III, *Ockham to Suárez*, London and New York: Search Press and Paulist Press.
- Gilson, Etienne (1955) *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, London: Sheed & Ward.
- Gilson, Etienne (1966) *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, New York: Charles Scribners' Sons.
- Haren, Michael (1992) *Medieval Thought: The Western Intellectual Tradition from Antiquity to the Thirteenth Century*, 2nd edn, London: Macmillan.
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