According to some historians of philosophy, the 14th century portended the destruction of metaphysics, rather than a new beginning. The main culprit was supposedly the emergence of what was later to be called “nominalism,” a way of doing philosophy which was, among other things, characterized by its parsimonious ontology. Moreover, “jurisdictional concerns” would have contributed to the decline, since many issues traditionally raised in metaphysics properly belonged to the authority of theology. This picture of the crisis of metaphysics is seemingly confirmed by the remarkable paucity of commentaries on the *Metaphysics* from the second half of the 14th century onward.

One of the few commentaries that has come down to us originated at the University of Paris and was written by John Buridan (ca. 1300–61). Although historians of philosophy agree that Buridan’s commentary has been extremely important and influential, their appraisals of its metaphysical character vary widely. According to Joël Biard, Buridan’s metaphysics is in fact a natural theology, comparable to what was called a

1 In this chapter, I shall not use the predicate “nominalist” for Buridan, nor for his contemporaries or their philosophical points of view, because of the misleading and anachronistic character of the term. For some reflections on the use of the term “nominalism,” see William J. Courtenay, *Ockham and Ockhamism. Studies in the Dissemination and Impact of His Thought* (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters) 99 (Leiden, 2008), pp. 1–19.


“rational theology” a few centuries later. Peter King argues that Buridan applied semantics to metaphysical questions with an incredible degree of rigor, “even to the point of casting doubt on metaphysics as a discipline independent of semantics.” Jack Zupko tends to agree with King, claiming that, even though Buridan “established a safe harbor for Aristotelian metaphysics in the Faculty of Arts,” his tendency to view traditional problems in metaphysics as consequences of confusions of logic or language weakened metaphysics’ sphere of operation. Rolf Schönberger claims that Buridan’s metaphysics cannot be called ontology, since we search in vain for a structural analysis of (the term) “being.” As regards the problem of the subject-matter of metaphysics, Albert Zimmermann claims that Buridan, whom he describes as “one of the most important representatives of 14th-century nominalism,” brought the development of this problem to an end and at the same time to a new beginning, due to his new explanation of the problem. Finally, Gerhard Krieger takes Buridan’s Ethics and his ideas on the will as a starting point from which to enter his metaphysics. Krieger argues that Buridan’s “transformation of metaphysics” is an anticipation of Kant, since Buridan supposedly defended the primacy of “practical reason” and human freedom as decisive for his metaphysics.

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6 See Zupko, John Buridan, p. 145.
7 Schönberger concludes from this omission that “being” is not a metaphysical theme in actu exercito of metaphysics but, rather, a theme within Buridan’s philosophy of science, because the term “ens” would only occur where the subject of metaphysics is considered. See Schönberger, Relation als Vergleich, pp. 353–54.