DUNS SCOTUS ON COMMON NATURES AND "CARVING AT THE JOINTS" OF REALITY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By
Andrew C. Helms

__________________________________________
Richard Cross, Director

Graduate Program in Philosophy
Notre Dame, Indiana
March 2016
© Copyright 2016

Andrew Chad Helms
Despite the puzzles of interpretation it engenders, John Duns Scotus’s theory of common natures is widely cited as an example of scholastic “realism.” Common natures serve a variety of functions in Scotus’s system, providing the “real unity” which serves as the subject for Aristotelian science. The “proper passions” of substances – characteristics which serve to identify substances by type, but do not formally belong to the essence of a subject – are ontologically dependent on common natures according to kind. And Scotus operates on the assumption that it is the description of created subjects according to their common natures which is the most fundamental description of them. Thus, for Scotus, common natures and their relations determine what we might call the “structure” of reality.

But not every “subject of a science” is a common nature. According to Scotus, “being,” the subject of “metaphysics,” does not have the same real unity as the natural groupings under the ten categories of Aristotle. As a consequence of this, the “transcendental passions of being” include predicates which do not possess the “real unity” of a common nature, because they are too abstract or generic to do so. I will
undertake three primary tasks in this dissertation. First, I will provide a description of the role of common natures in Scotus’s system. Then, I will discuss the rule or criterion by which Scotus posits common natures to account for certain cases of univocal predication – as opposed to cases of univocal predication for which he doesn’t posit common natures. Ultimately, I will discuss the difference between two types of “structure” in Scotus’s system: the case of distinct “quidditative components” in the essence of a subject, and the case of a subject and its passion. In both cases, the relata are “formally distinct.” In the former case but not the latter, they are related by “act-potency composition.” Ultimately, common natures explain the structure in the created world, but not every relatum in a structural relation is a common nature.
To AmyRose Castillo Helms, whose patience and love made this dissertation possible.
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1: Duns Scotus on When to Posit a Common Nature ........................................... 32
  1.1 The Role of Common Natures ................................................................................. 38
  1.2 The Scope of Common Natures: Supremacy of the Categories ......................... 43
  1.3 The Scope of Common Natures: Sufficiency of the Categories ......................... 58
  1.4 The Nature of Real Agreement ............................................................................ 64
  1.5 The Divine Essence: An Infinite Common Nature ............................................. 67

Chapter 2: Some Varieties of the Real Relation of Similarity ........................................... 70
  2.1 Similarities Classified According to Foundation .................................................. 74
  2.2 Similarities Classified According to Structure ...................................................... 86
  2.3 Correlation of the Preceding Classifications ....................................................... 94
  2.4 Similarity between God and Creatures: The Vestige ......................................... 98
  2.5 Similarity to God vs. Dependence on God ......................................................... 103

Chapter 3: Natural Properties vs. “Perfections Simpliciter” .......................................... 109
  3.1 Overview: Ontological and Semantic Divisions ...................................................... 113
  3.2 Categorial Predicates Imply Limitation and Naturalness .................................... 118
    3.2.1 Categorial Predicates Imply Limitation ....................................................... 118
    3.2.2 Categorial Predicates Track the Natural Properties ..................................... 122
  3.3 Perfections Simpliciter Do Not Imply Limitation ................................................. 130
  3.4 Perfections are not “Natural Properties” in sense (2) ....................................... 134
  3.5 Can Theological Predication be “Fundamental”? .............................................. 146
  3.6 Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 149

Chapter 4: Is Scotus a True Aristotelian?
  Challenges to the Fundamentality of Aristotelian Substance ................................... 151
  4.1 The Goal of Aristotelian Science: Describing Reality Fundamentally ............. 154
  4.2 Parsimonious, Paradigmatic, & Profligate Aristotelianisms ............................. 161
  4.3 “Metaphysical Miracles” and Scotus’s Aristotelianism ...................................... 167
  4.4 Assumption and Fundamentality ........................................................................ 184
  4.5 Carving at the Joints, Fundamentality, and Natural Properties ...................... 187
Chapter 5: Structure and the Object of Science

5.1 A Metaphysical Framework: Cataloguing Scotus’s Distinctions

5.1.1 Scotus’s Taxonomy of Distinctions

5.1.2 An Ordering of Scotist Distinctions

5.2 Scotus’s Account and Taxonomy of Aristotelian Science

5.2.1 Objects of Sensory Powers

5.2.2 Objects of Sciences

5.3 The Formal Distinction and the Proper Object of Aristotelian Science

5.3.1 The Case of Dimensive Quantity

5.3.2 The Case of the Transcendental “One”

Chapter 6: An Account of Creative Causality

6.1 Scotus on Creative Causality

6.2 Scotus on the Nature and Content of the Divine Ideas

6.3 The Divine Ideas, Possibility, and Potency

Conclusion

Bibliography
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been completed without the gracious support and friendship of many individuals. The philosophical communities at the University of Notre Dame and at Texas A & M University gave me a wonderful place in which to learn the methods, goals, and etiquette of philosophical exchange.

All the philosophers who were members of my dissertation committee at one time or another – including Richard Cross, Stephen Dumont, Fred Freddoso, Therese Cory, John O’Callaghan, and Sam Newlands – contributed valuable insights and raised questions that challenged me and benefited the project. I am especially grateful to Richard Cross, who donated many of his afternoons to initiate me into Scotus’s *Ordinatio* and freely gave me papers to read, tips about where to find important Scotus texts, and suggestions for improving my work. Any errors which remain in the work are my own.

Several philosopher friends, including Eric Hagedorn, Philip Swenson, Ron Belgau, Matt Getz, David Pattillo, and many others, gave me practice in honing my discussion and presentation skills.

I am also grateful to my wife, AmyRose Castillo Helms, to my parents, Douglas and Selah Helms, and to my family for their forbearance and generous love through the entire progress of my graduate studies.
INTRODUCTION

Nominalists hold that the metaphysical machinery which universals involve is always too heavy to warrant the theoretical expense of positing universals. According to nominalists, a proper scientific ontology would reject such strange, multiply-located entities as universals are supposed to be. But perhaps at least some of the theoretical costs of universals can be mitigated by a policy of economy with respect to universals. Whether or not he is motivated by such considerations, Duns Scotus posits common natures corresponding to some univocal predications, but not others. In this, he is like some contemporary realists, who posit universals for some predicates, but not for others. Thus, if Scotist common natures are equivalent – or at least sufficiently analogous – to the “immanent universals” posited by contemporary realists like D. M. Armstrong, then we may say that Scotus restricts his appeal to universals to explain a (relatively) small class of predications. ¹ This means that Scotus is a “sparse property theorist” rather than an “abundant property theorist.”

But, if one is a sparse realist, then how should one determine which cases of predication warrant explanation in terms of a universal or a common nature? The answer one gives to this question is the meta-theory which logically precedes the project of identifying the predicates that correspond to universals. In the discourse of some

contemporary realists, this project is also described as the project of finding the “natural properties” – which, in some accounts, are identified with the properties that “carve at the joints” of reality. In this broad outlook, it is at least a necessary condition for “naturalness” that a property be not “gerrymandered.” This approach suggests that if universals are ever theoretically warranted at all, then we should only posit the universals that belong to the smallest set of candidate universals which is needed to underwrite all of the predications in the class of predications that are taken to be the “natural” or the “joint-carving” predications. Some possible elaborations of this basic idea are that we should only posit universals to explain the similarities that characterize pairs of things in association with their most “fundamental” description; or perhaps, to explain the similarities that would characterize pairs of things, regardless of human conceptualizing.

Duns Scotus is committed to a similar outlook, although he rejects certain assimilations that are easy to make in the course of describing it. Scotus rejects any assimilation of “joint-carving” properties with “natural” properties, since he thinks some predications imply structure without corresponding to multiply exemplifiable properties. And he thinks that “natural” properties do not necessarily coincide with “fundamental” descriptions, since some natural predications correspond to Aristotelian accidents that are – within the natural course of events – less fundamental than substances. But he is still a

---


partisan of the outlook that restricts the appeal to universals, or “common natures,” to a narrowly delimited class of predications. And this means that he also faces a systemic need to articulate which cases of predications require common natures, how to decide which ones do, and why common natures are required in these cases.

Someone might think that there is not much that can be said about this matter beforehand, but that we must somehow empirically determine which properties are “natural.” But this is only to adopt an empiricist meta-theory about when to posit universals. There are several possible ways to work this out, varying from an attitude of optimistic reliance on human intellective power to abstract the true quiddities of things directly from sense experience, to a less confident modus operandi that looks to the basic posits of our current best theory in physical science to decide what “quiddities” we should posit. These empiricist approaches, of course, are different from any Platonic view in which the soul innately knows what properties there are, and what they are like.

In this study, I address the following main questions: for which predicates does Duns Scotus posit common natures, and why those predicates? What considerations determine Scotus’s decision to posit a natural property, in those cases in which he does? I will show that his methodology is somewhere in between those of the above two empiricist attitudes. I will also propose and advocate for a candidate Scotist criterion that determines the positing of a common nature.

However, there are a few different issues that need to be clearly distinguished in order to make headway: the metaphysical role or function of common natures in Scotus’s philosophy, and how they are supposed to fulfill this role; the systemic scope of common

---

natures – i.e., the delineation of the particular cases in which Scotus posits common natures, as opposed to the ones in which he doesn’t; the scope and kinds of similarity relations, as they are grounded by common natures or not; the delineation of different kinds of “structure” in Scotus’s thought, as they involve common natures as relata or not; Scotus’s epistemological story about how we come to be acquainted with common natures; and the way in which Scotus thinks about fundamentality and the parts of substance, in comparison to orthodox Aristotelianism.

Here is a brief outline of the dissertation, according to its handling of these issues. First, in chapters 1 and 2, I will discuss the scope of common natures in Scotus’s metaphysics, and how that contrasts with the scope of similarity relations. The scope of common natures corresponds to the list of predicates from Aristotle’s categories. Thus, for any two things, they share a quiddity if and only if they fall under the same categorial predicate. However, there is a difference between specific and generic quiddities: the “real unity” that characterizes a common nature, belongs properly to a specific quiddity rather than a generic quiddity.7 Scotus agrees with other medieval philosophers in holding that God does not fall under any categorial genus, but he thinks that God is “similar” to creatures in certain ways. Therefore, the scope of common natures is smaller than the scope of similarity relations.

Then, in chapters 3 and 5, I will explore the different cases of “structure” in Scotus’s metaphysics, as their relata are quidditative or not quidditative; and I will show what is distinctive about the cases of structure that obtain between different common

---

7 Lect. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 12, nn. 18-19.
natures, as opposed to the cases of structure that obtain between subjects and their passions. The former but not the latter involves “act-potency composition.”

Scotus treats categorial predicates and transcendental predicates quite differently. Only predicates from the former class properly designate common natures. As I construe Scotus’s thinking about “structure,” he thinks there are two different cases of it: (1) For pairs of distinct common natures that are exemplified by the same individual, those natures may be thought of as distinct “quidditative items” related by “act-potency composition” within the individual thing that exemplifies them – whether essentially and “per se in the first way,” or merely denominatively, as a separate form that modifies the supposit. (2) Transcendental predicates, on the other hand, correspond to different “perfections” or “properties” that are generated by the individual’s nature. This latter kind of entity is merely a function or power of some subject’s particular quiddity \textit{ad extra}, and is not involved in the subject’s metaphysical constitution. Thus, if two things do not share a nature, but have a similar effect, they may be univocally describable by the same “perfection” term.

The term “perfection” is general enough to refer to any positive entity; but categorial natures are determinate quiddities, according to which the individuals that exemplify and are constituted by them, fall into natural kinds; while a transcendental perfection, or what we might call a “perfection passion,” is merely a function or power of some subject’s particular quiddity \textit{ad extra}, and not involved in the subject’s

---

8 Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 11 (Wadding, 6.2, 767); Cf. Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 17 (Wadding, VI.2, 772).

9 Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 113-115 (Vatican, IV, 205-207); In Metaph. V, qq. 5-6, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 1, 5-6.
which it differs from the case of structure between different quidditative items, see chapters 3 and 5. Richard Cross has pointed out that Scotus follows John of Damascus in thinking of the divine attributes as being “things around the essence.”\(^{10}\) In my view, the perfection passions – whether proper or coextensive with “being” – bear a similar relationship to created essences.\(^{11}\) For according to Scotus, the coextensive transcendentals require their own foundation in reality, just as much as proper predicates do.\(^{12}\)

By contrast, a distinct common nature is properly apt uniquely to terminate an “adequate” cognition.\(^{13}\) An “adequate” cognition is one that expresses the full metaphysical content of the characterized item which is its object, whether that item is a complete substance or a “formality” or “reality” within that substance.\(^{14}\)

In chapter 4, I show how Scotus’s thinking about substance, accidents, and the essential parts of substance, is different from that of orthodox Aristotelians. In this chapter, I also situate Scotus within the history of philosophy, more generally.

In chapter 5, I will also discuss the metaphysical role that common natures have within Aristotelian science, and Scotus’s story about the way in which we come to know about common natures.

\(^{10}\) Cross, “Duns Scotus on Knowing and Naming God: An Essay on the Reception of Greek Patristic Theology in Western Scholasticism.”


\(^{12}\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) In Metaph. VII, q. 15, n. 16 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 298-299); Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223). Cf. Ord. prol., pt. 3, nn. 142-144 (Vatican, I, 96).
In chapter 6, I discuss how Scotus’s account of creative causality bears on the question of how common natures originate – as ideas in God’s mind.

Scotus’s philosophy thus requires that the object of scientific knowledge be constituted by a determinate “common nature” or “quiddity,” which generates the various “perfections” – i.e. external effects and extrinsic characterizations – that it has. In scientific practice, the “principle of parsimony” functions as a theoretical constraint that is founded upon the power of our intellect to mirror the structure of the real world. Thus, science manifests the intrinsic intelligibility of the world by explaining an object’s manifold perfections in terms of its single quiddity. However, according to Scotus, there are limitations to this knowledge. The human intellect, in its current state, cannot access the content of “substantial quiddities” – it can only identify their presence, as manifested by their sensible accidents or “properties.” Therefore, human cognitive powers are such that scientific knowledge bears at least a structural conformity with the world. This is a conclusion that mediates between optimism and skepticism. Furthermore, some version of “quiddities” seems to be an important precondition for any realist account of science.

Addressing these issues is necessary to help us eliminate wrong answers and thus determine Scotus’s actual criterion for positing a common nature. In the remainder of this introduction, I will sketch at greater length the answers for the more important of the issues mentioned above. Then I will present and defend my proposed Scotist criterion for positing common natures.

First, consider the preliminary questions: what is the theoretical function of common natures, according to Duns Scotus? And how do they fulfill this function?

---

In answer to the preliminary questions, let us consider the metaphysical role of Scotist “common natures,” as well as what we might call their “metaphysical résumé” – i.e., the distinctive properties in virtue of which they are able to fill this role. In chapters 1 and 3, I argue that for Scotus, created common natures are supposed to be the “natural properties,” since Scotus holds that a common nature is the shared basis for all those predications that describe individual things as they are members of a single natural kind.\footnote{Martin Tweedale, \textit{Scotus vs. Ockham: A medieval Dispute Over Universals}, vol. 2 (Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 395-396, 398-399. Note there is a perfectly good sense in which the divine nature is a “common nature,” but that it is not a natural property, since it is uniquely exemplifiable.} For Scotus, common natures are shared metaphysical constituents of individual created things, accordingly as they fall – determinately, in only one possible way – into non-artificial classes of increasing generality.\footnote{Marilyn Adams, “What’s Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?” \textit{Journal of Analytic Theology} 2 (2014), p. 6; Tweedale, \textit{Scotus vs. Ockham}, vol. 2.} (That is just to say – “…as they fall into \textit{natural kinds}.”) A common nature should not be thought of as a “mereological part” of the things that have it, but as an \textit{abstract} component that is essential to and constitutive of the concrete things that have it.\footnote{Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus on Universals, Sameness and Identity.”} According to Scotus’s technical language, a “distinctive individual” is a metaphysical component in some created thing, which can roughly be described as the “particular instance” or “trope” of the common nature that is essentially constitutive of that thing.\footnote{Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 148 (Vatican, IV, 226). Tweedale, \textit{Scotus vs. Ockham}, vol. 2, 403.} Thus, every creaturely common nature, if it is multiply instantiated, will be “divided”\footnote{Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, nn. 195-197.} into several “distinctive individuals” that are constitutive of the particulars in some categorial kind, insofar as they fall into that kind; and which
are – altogether – the collective bearers of a “real less than numerical unity” that Scotus ascribes to this sort of entity.²¹

Following Avicenna, Scotus teaches that a common nature is “of itself” neither one nor many. However, in its actual existence, he says that it is “contracted” to singularity by its association with some particular “individuating difference.”²² Scotus holds that the “less than numerical unity” of a common nature is real, and is distinct from the “numerical unity” that is proper to an individual, on the grounds that the common nature must have a reality of its own in order to be the basis of “agreement” between individual things of the same species.²³ Since Scotus thinks that no unity of any sort falls within the essential specification of a common nature, it follows that any unity which the common nature has will be a “proper passion” that is predicated of it “per se in the second way” – i.e., predicated of it as a consequence that necessarily follows upon its actual existence without being included in its quidditative specification.²⁴ The “distinctive individual” of any common nature will thus be “formally distinct” – i.e., quidditatively and notionally discrete, but metaphysically inseparable – from the haecceity which accompanies it.²⁵ Thus, any created individual will contain one abstract component which is the primary bearer of numerical unity – i.e., the haecceity; and another abstract component which is the bearer of “less than numerical unity” – i.e., the


²² Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 1, 5-6.


²⁴ Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 34.

²⁵ Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, n. 188.
common nature. The concrete entity as a whole will therefore have numerical unity, from the haecceity.

In chapter 5, sections 2 and 3, I consider another aspect of the metaphysical role filled by common natures. Given their role in constituting individuals, common natures are *ipso facto* the theoretical posits that Scotus thinks that he needs in order to ensure the infallibility of Aristotelian science. For science is not of the particular, but of the universal. Scotus thinks that the various kinds of “proper passions” that a science takes as the *termini a quo* and *ad quem* for its demonstrations, inhere in the subject of a science by virtue of its common nature or “quiddity” – which of course all its individuals share.

The distinctive “property” of any substance-kind, identified by Aristotle as the object of science, is a function of the common nature that constitutes that substance.

Furthermore, Scotus thinks that all the transcendental predications that are *de re* necessary to a subject are metaphysically derivative from its common nature: every common nature “includes ‘being’ quidditatively,” thus ensuring that all the “passions of being” are predicated of the individual subject of that common nature *in quale*.

Furthermore, as chapter 5 shows, Scotus thinks that different common natures provide the unity of the “primary objects” of various sorts of cognitive powers, habits,

---

26 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, nn. 169-170, n. 175.


28 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, nn. 145-146; nn. 193-194.

29 Scotus, In Metaph. I, q. 9, nn. 37-38 (Franciscan Institute, II, 174). In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 53 (Franciscan Institute, III, 22). In metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 76 (Franciscan Institute, III, 30).


and dispositions. Thus, for example, the power of sight would take “color” – a general quiddity that is inherent in more specific quiddities – as its object. Physical science studies corporeal substances, insofar as their different quiddities give rise to *mobility*; and mathematics studies them, insofar as they are *quantified*. The science of metaphysics, however, does not take as its subject any determinate quiddity, but rather demonstrates the “passions of being” as they inhere in every possible essence. Thus, “being” may be the primary object of metaphysics, even though the term does not correspond to any definite quiddity.

The natural necessity with which common natures give rise to their “proper passions” ensures the infallibility of science’s demonstrations, since a “natural cause” always tends to one effect. However, as a Christian philosopher, Scotus holds that God may sometimes interfere with the usual consequences of a thing’s nature. Thus, Scotist common natures underwrite a broadly Aristotelian view of nature, in which natural laws manifest a thing’s preternaturally defeasible intrinsic tendencies, rather than being reducible – as in a Humean view – to exception-less regularities. Which “passions” are

---

32 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 20-22.
33 Cf. Scotus, In Metaph. I, q. 9; In Metaph. VI, q. 1.
34 Scotus, In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 47 (Franciscan Institute, III, 19-20).
35 Ibid.
absolutely or metaphysically necessary to a given quiddity, and which are only naturally
necessary to it, must be decided on a case-by-case basis. However, “passions” always fall
outside\(^ {38}\) the quiddity or common nature with which they are associated by natural law or
metaphysical necessity (as the case may be); and they are sometimes conceived as being
caused by it.\(^ {39}\)

In answer to the main questions, I argue that Scotus adopts an empirical approach
to the matter of when a common nature is required, insofar as he holds the human
intellect has the ability to abstract the true natures of at least some things.\(^ {40}\) However, for
Scotus, one must rely upon one’s epistemic access to the common natures of individual
accidents, in order to know or say anything about the quiddities of substances.\(^ {41}\) As
shown in chapter 1, Scotus thinks that the list of the ten categories of Aristotle – as
extended through predicates of lessening generality, all the way down to individual
substances or accidents by the mediation of a “Porphyry’s tree” in each category – is an
artefact of this intrinsic sorting ability. According to Scotus, individual accidents and
individual substances belong equally to this list, according to their mutually-ordered and
hierarchically classifiable natures. Although Scotus thinks it is possible to refer to
substantial quiddities, this is not because he thinks we have direct epistemic access to


\(^ {39}\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 200 (Vatican, IV, 265).

\(^ {40}\) Cf. Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 276 (Vatican, III, 168; cf. Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical
Writings [Hackett: Indianapolis, 1987], p. 129).

\(^ {41}\) Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 140-145 (Vatican, III, 87-90); cf. Giorgio Pini, “Scotus on the
them. Rather, we are enabled to refer to substantial quiddities through our epistemic acquaintance with the “properties” and accidents of those quiddities, as we infer the necessity of some determinate kind of ultimate quidditative subject to which certain regularly occurring complexes of accidental properties are distinctively attributed.

What is the scope of common natures, according to Scotus? In other words, in what range of cases does Scotus take univocal predication to require an underlying common nature? In his commentary on *Metaphysics*, Scotus says that the ten categories of Aristotle represent the “supreme division” of created reality into kinds, and elsewhere he says that any two things under a category “agree” with one another. On these grounds, one might reasonably conclude that he posits common natures in a one-to-one correspondence with the list of predicates falling under the ten categories. However, there are also passages in which Scotus denies that genera have the same “real unity” as species do. In these passages, he seems to differentiate between species and genera; only the former, and not the latter, have the distinctive “real less than numerical unity” which Scotus ascribes to a common nature. One possible reading of these passages is that genera do not have the same degree of unity which is possessed by the species – leaving open that they might have a much lesser degree of real unity. However we decide to read these passages, we find that Scotus also calls the genus-reality a distinct “quidditative”

---


43 Ibid.

44 Scotus, *In Metaph. V*, qq. 5-6, n. 76 (Franciscan Institute, III, 465); *Quaest. Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis* Q. 7, nn. 9-10 (Franciscan Institute, 1999, I, 309).

45 Lect. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 12, nn. 18-19.
component that belongs to the metaphysical constitution of every created entity.\footnote{Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 219 (Vatican, IV, 275).} Furthermore, “quiddities” seem to be roughly equivalent to “common natures” in Scotus’s technical vocabulary. Perhaps, then, there are two possible interpretations that can explain this evidence: (1) Scotus thinks that there are no generic common natures at all, and that the only common natures belong to infima species; or (2) Scotus thinks that genera have “real unity” which is less even than the “real less than numerical unity” possessed by an infima species. In chapter 1 and the first few sections of chapter 3, I have taken the second option, arguing that Scotus posits distinct common natures for the generic and specific predicates that describe the same thing.

However, it is also possible to take the other route and to argue that Scotus does not posit common natures for genera, but only for species. This option seems to fit better with his insistence that genera do not have the same kind of unity possessed by a species. But this option leaves the question of what makes a genus different from “being.” After all, Scotus thinks that “being” is a univocal concept which has no real unity, even though it is a first intention and a “real concept” with conceptual unity. And it also leaves an unwieldy distinction between “quiddities” and “common natures”: only the latter, and not the former, would have “real less than numerical unity.”

I have also argued that Scotus posits quiddities for all and only the predicates falling under the Aristotelian ten categories, including predicates that denote substances, accidents, and the essential parts of substance.\footnote{i.e., matter and substantial form.} Thus, Scotus is not nearly as “sparse” as other medieval Aristotelians, who hold that “essence” belongs exclusively to Aristotelian
primary substances, or that items in the accidental categories are mere modes of
substance.⁴⁸ Scotus is importantly different from Aquinas here, because Aquinas thinks
the categories are distinguished by their *modi praedicandi* – i.e. that they differ according
to merely linguistic or conceptual modes – whereas Scotus thinks each category is
distinguished from the others by signifying its own unique type of essence.⁴⁹

Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 4, Scotus thinks substances have a natural
aptitude to be more metaphysically fundamental than accidents. This shows that Scotus
does not restrict the class of “natural properties” to the properties that constitute the
“most fundamental” descriptions of things. In Scotus’s view, even primary substances
themselves are only contingently fundamental, since Scotus holds that it is at least
metaphysically possible that every created substance be “assumed” by a divine person –
at once.⁵⁰ However, Scotus retains a lesser sort of fundamentality for Aristotelian
primary substances, in that he thinks that everything else has a natural tendency to be
attributed to primary substances, while primary substances do not have a natural tendency
to be attributed to anything else.⁵¹

To get a good grip on Scotus’s doctrine of common natures, it is helpful to look at
the contrasting cases of predication, and how they work. Chapters 3 and 5 handle this

⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, Metaph. VII, lect. 12; ST I, q. 50, a. 4, ad 1; Henry, Summa, a. 27, q. 1, ad 5;
Quodl. I, q. 9 in corp.; Quodl. X, q. 7, in corp.; cf. infra lib. IX, q. 14, n. 77.

⁴⁹ Thomas Aquinas, Metaph. V, lect 9; XI, lect. 9. Note that each categorial predicate has both an
abstract and a concrete form. Thus each category will also contain its own type of thing, which can be
considered concretely as a thing really separable from the substance or accident it happens to be with, and
also abstractly as a unique type of common nature that requires to be paired with a haecceity to be a
concrete thing of its sort. Cf. Scotus, In Praed. Q. 11, In Metaph. V, qq. 5-6, Ord. 2, p. 1, d. 3, q. 4, nn. 89-
91.

⁵⁰ Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 127 (Vatican, IX, 57).

Variations on Aristotelian Substance,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes 79*
(2005), 15-52.
matter. Scotus thinks that predicates in a different class – called “transcendents” – do not correspond to common natures. This second class of predicates includes very general predicates such as “being” and the predicates that are necessarily coextensive with it, as well as certain “pure perfection” terms that apply univocally to God and to some sub-set of creatures who occupy a comparatively nobler position on the “great chain of being.” Analogously to predicates that correspond to common natures, predicates in this second class always require their own foundation in reality that is at least formally distinct from its subject, and they thus imply some “structure” in reality. However, they do not correspond to just one “natural property” in their different predications. Rather, the attribute of (e.g.) “wisdom” in God includes an infinite mode, while the accident of wisdom in the creature does not. Thus, for Scotus, “pure perfections” are gerrymandered in reality, however much their concepts are univocal.

One might think, for any number of reasons, that the traditional Aristotelian list of predicates that fall under the ten categories (in whatever version) is not a good listing of the natural properties. However, I will show that Scotus believed that some traditional version of this list is the outcome of correctly classifying things according to shared metaphysical constituents of the same type, by abstracting the quiddities from things that are epistemically accessible to us through sense. Thus, predicates in the Aristotelian categories list the common natures, which are the accidental and substantial “quiddities” that ultimately explain the characteristics that substances have.

52 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4.

53 I have benefited here from an essay by Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus on Knowing and Naming God: An Essay on the Reception of Greek Patristic Theology in Western Scholasticism,” 25-27, as well as from Cross’s book Duns Scotus on God (Ashgate, 2005), 253-254.
Given Scotus’s particular pronouncements from case to case about when a common nature is and is not required, we can infer his meta-theory – or at least the principle that determines his actual practice – about when it is appropriate to posit a common nature. First, consider an abstract desideratum that must apply to any such meta-theoretical criterion. Supposing that we do not come to know the natural properties as a result of Platonic metempsychosis and anamnesis, it is clear that such a criterion has to be empirically detectable and applicable. For empirical investigation is the only way we come to be acquainted with the natural properties: we do not start out with innate knowledge, and we cannot deduce the list of natural properties a priori from a set of self-evident truths.

Looking at Scotus’s verdicts in particular cases, we can see that his criterion is not “posit a common nature if and only if there is an ability to cause the same concept in two different cases,” and not even “…ability to cause same first-intention concept,” because Scotus thinks a pair of things can fulfill those conditions without having a common nature.54 Things that are dissimilar in every substantive respect can cause the same concept “being.”

Nor is Scotus’s criterion “similitude,” since – as we see from chapter 2 – any two beings are at least minimally similar, for the same reason. “Being” is not a quidditative component in a thing.55 The ability to cause this concept may be a formally distinct perfection in a thing, distinct from its ability to cause other non-synonymous concepts, in the same way that God’s perfections are formally distinct; but “being” is not some type of

54 I introduce the idea of a “first intention concept” in chapter 2.

55 Richard Cross, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” Antonianum 76:1 (2001), 13. “This means that for Scotus, the concept [i.e. being] as such is a vicious abstraction, an abstraction that does not apply to any real extramental property of the thing.”
real component in the thing, distinct from its own proper nature. Otherwise, it would follow that God and creatures would share some quidditative component.

One might propose that we pick the concepts that the entity causes when “causing to its full capacity.” According to Scotus’s way of putting things, these are the concepts that exhaust an individual entity’s quidditative content. But this proposal doesn’t work either, because then there would be no generic natural properties – the only natural properties would be the infima species properties. Yet Scotus does posit distinct quiddities for genera, which are supposed to terminate their own “adequate cognition.”

These inadequate proposals lead me to suggest the following:

Proposal: “posit a natural accidental property if and only if the two things can cause the same first-intentional adequate concept through abstraction from sense experience, and posit a natural substantial property in the cases where there is a regularly occurring congeries of perceptible accidents.”

An “adequate concept” is one that expresses the full intelligible content of the characterized item which is its object – whether this object be a complete substance, or some abstract “formality” in that substance. An alternative statement of this criterion is, “posit a natural property if and only if two things are similar in virtue of something which tends (natum est) to fall under one adequate first-intentional concept.” The idea here is that, for any two things that are intrinsically such that they fall under the type of concept in view, they must be able to do so in virtue of some natural property they share.

---


57 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223).

58 Ibid.; In Metaph. VII, q. 15, n. 16 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 298-299); Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223). Cf. Ord. prol., pt. 3, nn. 142-144 (Vatican, I, 96).
This criterion allows us to posit a distinct quiddity for generic properties as well
as specific properties, since it is possible to have an adequate concept of the genus-reality
in an individual thing, as a complete “formal object” of cognition. But it rules out
certain first-intentional transcendental concepts like “being” (and “goodness”) since on
Scots’s account “being” is not a concept adequate to any reality, but is only
“quidditatively included” in the genus-reality. (Similarly, “goodness” is a non-adequate
concept that is “predicated qualitatively” of the complete nature.) Even if there is some
formally distinct perfection in a thing, in virtue of which the thing can cause the concept
“being,” this character will be formally included in the thing’s complete quiddity, and
will not be capable of terminating an “adequate” concept. For, “being” and “goodness”
are imperfect and non-adequate concepts in relation to some concrete thing: that is, they
are concepts which do not refer to any distinct metaphysical component in the thing (cf.
Chapter 3, 5).

I briefly consider some possible objections. Someone might suggest that the
concept “finite being” would pass the criteria, when it shouldn’t – for Scotus doesn’t
think it is appropriate to posit some common nature corresponding to this concept. But
“finite being” is certainly a first-intentional concept, and perhaps it is rendered adequate
by including the “finite” mode. If so, then my criterion entails that “finite being” is a
common nature. But this clearly can’t be right, because Scotus holds that all the
categories are “primally diverse,” and also that categorial entities are all “finite beings.”

---

59 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223): “si ponamus aliquem intellectum
perfecte moveri a colore ad intelligendum realitatem coloris et realitatem differentiae, quantumcumque
habeat perfectum conceptum aequalitatem conceptui praeae realitatis, non habet in hoc conceptum realitatis
a quo accipientur differentia, nec e converso – sed habet ibi duo objecta formalia, quae nata sunt terminare
distinctos conceptus proprios. Si autem tantum esset distinctio in re sicut realitatis et sui modi intrinseci,
non posset intellectus habere proprium conceptum illius realitatis et non habere conceptum illius modi
intrinseci rei…”
think I can explain this case in a way favorable to my proposal: the specific nature of
some created being is not some reality distinct from that being’s “finite mode.” All
created natures include finitude, but “finitude” is not some constituent, over and above
the created nature it characterizes (cf. chapter 3). So there is not some element in a
penguin, distinct from penguin nature itself, by which the penguin is a “finite being to
whatever degree.” Rather, the being in the penguin is rendered “finite to the precise
degree to which penguin nature is apt to render finite,” by penguin nature. This seems to
require that there is a definite degree of finitude, distinctive of penguin nature, which is
only notionally distinct from penguin nature.

The second objection is that, to posit distinct quiddities for genus and species,
entails that each thing would be made up of two subjects: a genus-reality, and a
difference-reality. And then every definition would be inherently redundant: “rational
animal” would be synonymous with “rational being, animal being,” and would thence
include “being” twice over.60 But this consequence can be resisted, by holding that only
the genus-reality, and not the difference-reality, “includes being quidditatively.”61 That
is, only the genus-reality includes the idea of being a subject. The difference-reality, on
the other hand, contains the idea of being a “modification” of some already-named
subject – so it is the sort of property that is predicated “per modum denominantis.”62 But

60 This problem is parallel to the “problem of the differences of being” as described by Giorgio
Pini, “Univocity in Scotus’s Quaestiones Super Metaphysicam: the Answer to a Riddle,” Medioevo 30
(2005), as described on page 101 of that article; and my answer is parallel to how Pini portrays Scotus as
responding to that problem, on pages 106-107.

Dumont, “The Univocity of the Concept of Being in the Fourteenth Century: John Duns Scotus and

62 Wolter, The Transcendentals and their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus (Franciscan
Institute, 1946), pp. 79-80. He quotes Scotus’s Super Universalia q. 12, nn. 5-6.
both of these can still be spoken of as multiply-exemplifiable “properties” or “ways to be.” In order to describe this, perhaps it would help to stipulate a distinction between “quiddities” and “natures,” according to which only the former properly includes the idea of being a subject. Having made this distinction, it makes some sense to say that the genus-reality and the difference-reality are distinct \textit{natures}, but \textit{not} distinct \textit{quiddities}. Indeed, maybe there are, in addition to the ultimate difference-reality, as many genus-realities in an individual thing as there are sub-genera under which the individual falls, where only the highest reality “includes being quidditatively.” Thus, even though genus-reality and species-reality are distinct formal objects of cognition, they are not distinct “beings.” They could both be described as “quidditative components” that are combined to make up some complete quiddity, and certainly they are distinct “formal objects of cognition.”

For, according to my proposed criterion, genera have to correspond to natures, too – or at least to natural properties – in order for individual things to cause a concept that is adequate to the genus-reality. Scotus thinks we need distinct \textit{quidditative items} and common natures for each accidental category in order to ensure the integrity of the different sciences.\footnote{In metaph. I, q. 9, n. 22 (Franciscan Institute, II, 171): “Item, Philosophus dicit in Elenchis quod hic est accidens: “cognoscis Coriscum, et ille est veniens, ergo cognoscis venientem.” Stant ergo simul quod cognoscis venientiam quae est in Corisco et accidens, et tamen ignoras subjectum eius. Sic ex parte ista simul stant quod physicus cognocit mobile istud accidens, et tamen ignorant corpus.” – Each accident is intelligible on its own, with its own essence. Otherwise, physical science will only have accidental entities as its objects. 

Cf. In Metaph. I, q. 9, nn. 37-38 (Franciscan Institute, II, 174): “Dico quod mobilitas non est formalis ratio subjecti, sed quidquid consideratur in scientia naturali. Cuius probatio est quia subjectum, secundum rationem subjecti, prius est naturaliter passione. Tunc passio non est formalis ratio considerandi ipsum, ex quo est posterius. Mobilitas autem est passio in scientia naturali. Dico ergo quod quiditas ignis cum illo quod appropriat – quidquid sit illud – ut sit proprium subjectum motus, consideratur in scientia naturali. Illud autem quod appropriat ipsum ut sit subjectum motus, non est motus, quia prius naturaliter habet rationem illam quam sit subjectum motus.” – Here, Scotus says that ‘mobility’ is not the formal ratio...} Individual things must always be the subjects of the predication for
each categorial species and genera, but the unity of an individual cannot be the only real unity; for, Scotus thinks that Aristotelian sciences are individuated according to the sort of unified common nature that constitutes the “formal object” of each. Quiddities first impress their whole infima species on our sense; but intellect can also abstract further, and discern generic realities that are shared between multiple quiddities. E.g., “animal” is a real property that is shared by humans and dogs. We share certain operations in common – e.g., respiration, digestion. These operations as they are carried out by dogs and humans have an intrinsic similarity that is not created by the mind’s consideration, and that is best explained by positing a natural property.

The way to answer the objection, then, is that a genus-reality and a species-reality are not distinct “quiddities” on their own, in the sense of each including “being” quidditatively; but that they are distinct “natural properties.” If they are each quiddities on their own, then every definition is redundant. But the genus-reality is a formal object of cognition on its own, apart from the difference-reality; and the difference-reality is a formal object of cognition, apart from the genus-reality. Each of them corresponds to

\[\text{of the subject which is mobile, but only its proper passion. Mobility is a passion of fire, therefore not in fire’s quiddity. Natural science considers fire according to its quiddity, but motion is a different essence than fire, and natural science shows how the two are connected.}\]

\[64 \text{“In every categorial hierarchy, disregarding anything belonging to any other hierarchy, there is the notion of species. For no theory pretends that the species in some genus is established by reason of an accident...But it belongs to the notion of a species that it be predicable of several items differing in number. Therefore, in every categorial hierarchy there can be found something intrinsically individual and singular of which the species is predicated—or at least there can be found something not predicable of many. Otherwise, if nothing can serve as a subject like this, then nothing in this hierarchy will be a most specific species, to the very notion of which it belongs to be predicable.” Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 90 (in Paul Spade, Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals, 80). – Items in each category are real things and individuals, of which species and genus can be predicated. N. 91 of the same passage is an argument that a per accidens unity doesn’t have an essence of its own.}\]

\[65 \text{In Metaph I. 9, nn. 29-30 (Franciscan Institute, II, 172): “Et similiter, ex quo diversas scientiae habent diversas rationes formales, non potest esse una ratio formalis per se considerata ab una et alia. Item, ad unitatem scientiae requiritur unitas rationis formalis (saltem primae, non tantum in se sed ut comparatur ad materialia quorum est ratio)...”}\]

22
some natural property, though not perhaps to a complete “quiddity” that “includes being quidditatively.”

A final concern is that perhaps there is no principled way for Scotus to be able to tell from sensory experience that some concept is “adequate.” Scotus rules out the concept of “accident” as being inadequate, since he thinks it does not correspond to any common property shared by all the accidental entities. But why is this? It is somewhat hard to make the case that there is no common definition that the word corresponds to. And if so, why not some real formality in the thing? And why not, therefore, some super-generic common nature, corresponding to the term “accident”?

Scotus may answer this objection by pointing out that to be an accident is “to have a tendency to inhere in a certain way.” So, to say that “something is an accident,” may be thought of as an open sentence, because it leaves unspecified the exact way in which the entity is supposed to inhere. “Whiteness,” for example, is something that has a tendency to inhere in the manner proper to a quality. And so, to say that whiteness is an “accident” is to consider it under a super-abstract concept, which does not convey the full intelligible content that is contained in that instance of whiteness, qua accident.

Ultimately, Scotus’s system requires that the intellect must have the intrinsic ability to abstract real natures, at least of the accidental variety; and it must be able to posit substantial quiddities with some degree of reliability, if only by inference from the regularity of certain sets of accidents. Otherwise, the “real agreement” between things with respect to some natural property would never be manifest. The intellect can’t access substantial quiddities, but must at least be able to access their “proper passions.” In order for this to be a reliable cognitive process, there must be some firm connection between
proper passions and substance species. This connection is investigated more closely in chapter 5.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will give a more thorough summary of the specific topics and content of each chapter, in order.

In my first chapter, entitled “Duns Scotus on When to Posit a Real Universal,” I address the question of the “scope” of common natures. I argue that Scotus posits common natures for all the predicates falling under the Aristotelian categories – whether substantial or accidental, generic or specific. That Scotus posits distinct quiddities for genera, is in line with Scotus’s principle that all things that “really agree” must share in something real, since he thinks that all things in one genus have “some agreement” with each other. I draw on texts from Scotus’s commentaries on Aristotle’s logical works, as well as his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, to show that Scotus holds to the Aristotelian categories as a “primary” division of finite reality, and that each genus has its own “less than numerical unity.” For Scotus, the fact that the list of ten categories is a “primary” division entails that it cannot be demonstrated *a priori*. Although Aristotle says that “within a genus lie many equivocations,” this statement may be explained within the context of the differences that Scotus makes between the metaphysician, the logician, and the naturalist/physicist, with respect to their differing criteria for evaluating “univocity.”

---


substance.\(^{69}\) It is fully consistent with this reading, however, that Scotus’s metaphysician is able to appreciate the unity of a categorial genus, and that transcendental predicates like “being” do not have the same degree of unity that is possessed by a genus. (Scotus also holds that the essential parts of substance – matter and substantial form – have their own common natures, but that these items belong in the category of Substance “by reduction.” For a fuller treatment of this, see chapter 4). According to Scotus, God belongs in no Aristotelian category.

In the second chapter, entitled “Some Varieties of the Real Relation of Similarity,” I address the following question from Scotus’s perspective: How should one decide when to posit universals, i.e. natural properties? One natural and intuitive proposal to make is that we should posit a natural property if and only if there is some relation of similarity that something bears to another, regardless of being considered by a mind. But this is another instance in which Scotus forges a way of his own. For Scotus the scope of similarity relations is broader than the scope of natural properties; some things are truly similar on his account which do not share the same natural property. However, as I will show in this chapter and the next, the similarity that falls outside the scope of common natures is a unique and special case of similarity. And there is a well-delimited class of similarity relations that Scotus thinks are uniquely associated with common natures.

In this chapter, I also catalogue the various types of similarity that Scotus thinks may accrue to pairs of things, in relation to different types of predicates that apply to those things. I classify these similarities doubly: (1) according to foundation, and (2) according to metaphysical constitution. Scotus has a special term for the type of

\(^{69}\) Scotus, In Metaph. I, q. 9, nn. 37-38 (Franciscan Institute, II, 174).
similarity that is generated by sharing some common nature: he calls it “agreement in something real” (*convenientia in reale*). The “something” is, of course, a common nature, with its distinctive “real less than numerical unity.” By contrast, some transcendental predicates apply univocally to God and creatures, substance and accidents, apart from any correlation with “agreement in something real.” “Agreement in something real” is generated by sharing metaphysical constituents of the same type – whether formal or material. The similarity that Scotus admits between God and creatures, or between items from different categories, seems more mysterious, insofar as it has no explanation in terms of *any* shared metaphysical components. The similarity between God and creatures is also unusual in Scotus’s general account of similarity, in that it does not involve a “symmetrical” bearing of real relations of similarity on the part of both *relata*, but only on the part of the creature toward God.

In chapter 3, entitled “Natural Properties vs. Perfections *Simpliciter*,” I further compare and contrast the case of categorial predication with the univocal predication of transcendental “pure perfections” concerning God and creatures. I argue that Scotus thinks that the categorial predicates are the “natural properties” because they give rise to a similarity relation that obtains in virtue of the same metaphysical basis in both *relata*, regardless of whether anyone conceptualizes. As seen from chapter 2, the transcendental predicates track a genuine type of similarity between the things that fall under them, but this is a similarity precisely in virtue of a shared aptitude to fall under a common concept, and not according to a shared real basis. Thus, although “pure perfections” are univocal on the side of language, they are gerrymandered in reality. The reason that different things that are “primarily diverse” may fall under the same concept, is because that
concept is “imperfect” and “inadequate” – i.e., it does not express the quiddity of the thing under its proper or best description.\textsuperscript{70}

I distinguish between different senses of “carving at the joints” in order to address the question: “does theological predication carve at the joints?” Theological predication “carves at the joints” in the sense of implying structure – God’s exemplification of some “attributal perfection” which is “formally distinct” from the divine essence. Theological predication does not describe God fundamentally, nor does it pick out any shared natural properties.

In chapter 4, entitled “Is Duns Scotus a True Aristotelian? Challenges to the Fundamentality of Aristotelian Substance,” I address the question: How does Scotus’s Aristotelianism compare with other versions of Aristotelianism? First, I sketch the broadly Aristotelian commitments that Scotus shares with Aristotle and other Aristotelians. Then I show that Scotus makes several innovations that appear to threaten the primacy or metaphysical fundamentality of Aristotelian primary substances.\textsuperscript{71} I list the five or so “metaphysical miracles” that impel Scotus to revise the orthodox Aristotelian picture. He thinks that substantial form, prime matter, and accidents in each accidental category have each their own proper “\textit{res}” – i.e., each can be the \textit{relatum} of a real distinction. Thus, it follows that each of these things has its own “quiddity” as well. Scotus also thinks that a single substance may be shared by multiple suppositis, and that a single supposit may be the ultimate subject of predication for multiple substances. However, there is a sense in which Scotus is “broadly Aristotelian”: he thinks that

\textsuperscript{70} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3.

substantial form, prime matter, and accidents have a natural aptitude to exist in primary substances; and primary substances have a natural aptitude to be ultimate subjects of predication for their parts and accidents. One significant case in which this tendency is overridden is the Incarnation.72

In the fifth chapter, “The Formal Distinction and the Object of Science,” I give Scotus’s taxonomy of Aristotelian “real” theoretical sciences. I ask: what set of necessary and sufficient conditions is necessary for something to be the object of a “real” science? The answer differs from science to science. Notably, metaphysics does not deal in any particular type of common nature, while physics and mathematics do.

For purposes of this discussion, I give Scotus’s necessary and sufficient conditions for a “formal distinction” to obtain; then, I list and document the different versions of Scotus’s three most famous distinctions – the real distinction, the formal distinction, and the modal distinction. There are at least two types of formal distinction, one involving act-potency composition, the other not. I argue for a certain set of necessary and sufficient conditions definitive of the formal distinction, which ensures that the modal distinction is not just a lesser type of formal distinction. Only the former truly “carves at the joints.”

I then address several cases of propria that constitute the formal objects of the different sciences, and try to determine for which of these types of distinction they are the proper relata, in relation to their subjects. I show that there is a difference in the degree to which the proper objects of metaphysics, physics, and mathematics “carve at the joints.” Metaphysics, the most general science, demonstrates the “passions of being” –

which are not different common natures, but are different “perfections” stemming from
the same quidditative item. Physics and mathematics, on the other hand, deal in items that
are really distinct from their subjects – i.e. real accidents of “quantity” and “mobility.”

In the sixth chapter, “An Account of Creative Causality: Duns Scotus on God’s
Containment of Possibilia,” I explore Scotus’s account of creative causality. Scotus does
not think that there is anything real in God that corresponds to a creature, whether of an
absolute or a relative nature. Rather, God’s perfection is such that any particular issue of
creative power would have no effect on any of God’s intrinsic characters. There are not
different powers or perfections in God, corresponding to the different possibilia God
could make. Further, created reality is contingent, and God bears no “real relations” ad
extra.

As part of the account of creative causality, I give some treatment to the doctrine
of divine ideas, since there are instructive links between this doctrine and the issue of
universals. “Universals” have sometimes, among Christian philosophers, been associated
with the exemplar forms in God’s mind; but for Scotus, the referent of a universal
concept is the common nature which is immanent in created things, and not the exemplar
idea in God. But we may still ask: What is the ultimate origin of the “quidditative”
elements that Scotus thinks are involved in the composition or the quidditative content of
common natures or created essences?

As an intelligent agent, God creates things according to a plan.\textsuperscript{73} God knows all
possible created essences prior to the existence of any of them, as they are “virtually
contained” in the divine essence. However, God knows them because they are

\textsuperscript{73} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 36, q. un.
antecedently logically possible, not because they are somehow caused to be possible in virtue of the extent of God’s power.\textsuperscript{74} And such knowledge does not entail any “real existence” possessed by these essences, whether as a distinct “intelligible species,” i.e. a bearer of semantic content in God’s mind, or as a real character possessed by God.\textsuperscript{75} For Scotus makes a distinction between God’s knowledge and the knowledge of created beings: angels and human beings require distinct intelligible species corresponding to each of the things known, while God knows all things by means of the infinite, formally single, divine essence.\textsuperscript{76} Thus, although all created quiddities imitate God, they do so in virtue of the coextensive transcendentalss, and not in virtue of their most determinate quidditative characters.

Therefore, the cause both of created essences and of divine ideas is to be found in the infinite divine essence, although it is a different sort of cause with respect to each of them. There is no one-to-one correlation between the divine attributes and created essences. Rather, the divine essence “quasi-principiates” ideas of created essences in such a way that each created essence is constituted by quidditative elements which God does not formally exemplify. God knows these created essences, prior to any real existence that they have. I contrast Scotus’s view of the divine ideas with the views of other medieval philosopher-theologians on this topic, and then I attempt to explain Scotus’s view of the relation between the divine ideas and possibility. Scotus thinks that God’s creative causality “quasi-principiates” the divine ideas in intelligible being, but that God

\textsuperscript{74} Richard Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus on God} (Ashgate, 2005), 62-63, 73.


\textsuperscript{76} Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 2, q. 3, n. 395 (Vatican, VII, 592).
does not determine the way in which these ideations interact to establish metaphysical possibility and impossibility. Rather, he freely chooses which possible natures to instantiate.

\[77\text{ Cf. Richard Cross, Duns Scotus on God (Ashgate, 2005); pp. 75-77.}\]
CHAPTER 1:
DUNS SCOTUS ON WHEN TO POSIT A REAL UNIVERSAL

Duns Scotus is notorious among medieval philosophers for being a realist about universals, which he calls “common natures.” However, this leaves certain questions open, concerning the scope and function of common natures – since Scotus thought that common natures can be posited corresponding to some predicates, but not others. In this chapter, I will address this matter: for which predicates did Scotus think common natures should be posited? Although there is some conflicting evidence, I will argue that he thought “quiddities” should be posited for each of the predicates falling under the ten categories of Aristotle – the generic concepts as well as the specific concepts. However, for Scotus, the quiddities under generic concepts are not as “unified” as the quiddities under the concepts of the infima species. Therefore, the metaphysical machinery of “real less than numerical unity” that distinctively characterizes “common natures” in Scotus’s official discussion of them, Ordinatio II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 1, 5-6, is paradigmatically associated with infima species, and not with genera.

As noted in the introduction, there are textual problems for any interpretation that ascribes to genera the “real unity” that belongs to a common nature. Scotus says that a genus does not have the same unity that a species does, and that “in a genus there lie many equivocations.”¹ However, in this chapter, I propose a possible interpretation which

¹ Lect. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 12, nn. 18-19.
incorporates some of the counterevidence into a fuller picture. Scotus may hold that
“univocity” can be evaluated, not just from two, but from three perspectives: the logical,
metaphysical, and physical perspectives. A reading that takes advantage of this tenet in a
certain way, could allow for an Aristotelian genus to be univocal for the metaphysician,
but analogous or equivocal for the physicist. However, this reading is not conclusively
backed by the texts; I only advocate it as a position which it is open for Scotus to hold.
Yet there is clear textual data that Scotus thinks that genera correspond to “quiddities,”
even if these quiddities do not have the same “real unity” possessed by species. I will
also show that Scotus thinks that the ten categories are a sufficient division of reality
according to “(real) agreement” or “agreement in something real.” That is, falling under
some particular categorial concept is both necessary and sufficient for “(real) agreement.”
Furthermore, Scotus thinks that even the generic concepts from the Aristotelian
categories refer to some real formal object, a “quidditative formality” in the thing.

In Duns Scotus’s philosophy, there are two classes of predicates: predicates that
correspond to “quiddities” and predicates that do not. Quiddities are analogous to “real
universals.” I am using “real universal” as equivalent to the term “universal” as used by
contemporary philosophers who take a realist position on the problem of universals.

---

2 Cf. Stephen Dumont’s description of the Scotist Antonius Andreas, in “Transcendental Being:

3 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 219 (Vatican, IV, 275).

4 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223).

5 For purposes of this paper, I give the following definitions:

- A “predicate” is a multiply applicable term or concept; for example, ‘human’.

- A “real universal” is a reality that exists in many individuals and in some way
explains the fact that they are what they are. According to realist views, then, a real universal that
is in some sense “one and the same” will characterize many individuals. Thus, if realism is true
However, although Scotus also uses the term “universal,” he does not use it to refer to real universals thus defined. Rather, he uses it as a term of art to refer to the predicate or concept – i.e. the bearer of semantic content – that is predicatable of many things. Yet Scotus also posits entities similar to the universals posited by contemporary realists, but he refers to them as “common natures” or “quiddities.” In Scotus’s view, the predicate ‘human’ applies to Socrates and Xanthippe just because the same common nature of humanity – though not numerically the same one – characterizes both of them; whereas on the other hand the term ‘being’ will apply both to Socrates and to God, even though there is no such nature common to both. For those to whom this way of speaking is strange, the important thing to take away is that Scotus takes a realist view regarding some predicates but not others. In this respect, Scotus resembles some contemporary realists.

Why would Duns Scotus think that some predicates correspond to common natures, while others do not? Further, how does he decide which ones do? In his celebrated discussion of individuation from *Ordinatio* II, distinction 3, part 1, question 1,

and humanity is one of the real universals, then Socrates shares what is in some sense “one and the same” humanity with Xanthippe.

- “Real similarity” is a similarity that characterizes two or more things, regardless of whether any mind thinks about those things.

- For any two things that are “similar,” their full description will include some of the same descriptive notes.


7 Scotus, *Ord. II*, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 18, n. 34, n. 39 (Vatican, VII, 398, 404, 408.)

8 *Lect. I*, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 129 (Vatican, XVII, 46). In *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, p. 1, qq. 1-2, nn. 26-45 (Vatican, III, 18-30), Scotus also argues that there is a concept ‘being’ that is univocal to God and creatures.

the way that Scotus argues for the existence of common natures might well lead readers to believe that he thinks they only correspond to the *infima species* falling under the Aristotelian categories. Further, if one approached these passages from prior acquaintance only with Thomas Aquinas, one might even conclude that Scotus limits the sphere of common natures to the Aristotelian category of Substance. However, as I will show, there is good textual reason to think that Scotus posits “quiddities” along both dimensions. I will argue that Scotus thinks the set of predicates that correspond to common natures is equivalent to the whole set of predicates falling under *all* ten categories of Aristotle, from highest genera all the way down. (For Scotus, the divine nature may also count as a real common nature that characterizes the divine persons. This is a special case, however, and is the only candidate for being a common nature other than the common natures corresponding to the categorial predicates.)

This reading of Scotus on universals is slightly different from that expressed by Richard Cross, when he writes:

> Consider, for example, the genus *animal* as related to two of its species, *dog* and *cat*. . . *Animal* and *being* are just concepts; they do not pick out any real properties of things.

On my reading of Scotus, what Cross says here is true of ‘being’, but not of genus concepts like ‘animal’. Rather, genus concepts, just as much as species concepts,

---

10 At least one recent study appears to draw one or both of these conclusions; see Todd Bates, *Duns Scotus and the Problem of Universals* (Continuum Studies in Philosophy, 2010), 57ff. Bates seems to interpret the *Ordinatio* discussion of individuation as being an argument for the reality of what he calls “substantial natures.”


correspond to their own distinct “quidditative component” in the thing, appreciable by the
metaphysician – though not the natural philosopher, or physicist. Thus, in addition to the
common natures for species concepts, there are also common natures for genus concepts
– a sort of “super universal.” 13 After all, it is clear that Scotus holds there is a genus-
reality in each categorial thing, formally distinct from its differentiating reality and thus
distinct from the species-reality. 14 As Giorgio Pini says,

[T]here is an important difference between a genus and being. Things belonging to a genus have some real feature (i.e. a
formality) in common. Possessing such a real feature accounts for
both their belonging to the same genus and their being different
from things belonging to another genus. 15

Thus, for Scotus, generic concepts as well as specific concepts correspond to common
natures.

But (someone might ask) what of the passages in which Scotus says that a genus
“contains many equivocations”? 16 Wouldn’t these passages indicate that there is no
common nature underlying the genus as it is instantiated in all its different species? As I
will argue, Scotus makes a distinction between different perspectives from which

13 I am indebted to Richard Cross for this phrase.
14 Cf. Scotus, In Metaph. VII.19; 14 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223): “si
ponamus aliquem intellectum perfecte moveri a colore ad intelligendum realitatem coloris et realitatem
differentiae, quantumcumque habeat perfectum conceptum aequatam conceptui praeae realitatis, non
habet in hoc conceptum realitatis a quo accipitur differentia, nec e converso – sed habet ibi duo objecta
formalia, quae nata sunt terminare distinctos conceptus proprios. Si autem tantum esset distinctio in re sicut
realitatis et sui modi intrinseci, non posset intellectus habere proprium conceptum illius realitatis et non
habere conceptum illius modi intrinseci rei…”
(Vatican, VII, 397).
univocity may be evaluated. Thus, things may be “univocal” from one perspective and not univocal from another.

The important point is that quiddities have a special job to do – explaining “(real) agreement” or “agreement in something real.” “(Real) agreement” is not just equivalent to similarity in general, but is rather a special sort of similarity, associated with a shared formal component that is of the same categorial type – whether specifically or generically. Thus, Scotus posits quiddities, not to explain “similarity” simply speaking, but rather a certain type of similarity. As we will see, this is the sort of similarity that occurs exclusively intra-categorially, and the sort that occurs in virtue of shared formal components – whether specifically or generically – of the same type. Although Scotus thinks there is real similarity between God and creatures, its metaphysical account will have to be different from the metaphysical account of “agreement,” since in Scotus’s view, as we saw, God and creatures “agree in nothing that is in any way one and the same.”

My argument in this chapter will follow these steps: First, I will show that Scotus posits quiddities just to explain what he calls “agreement” between different things, and that quiddities ultimately fill this role by having a “real less than numerical unity” at some taxonomic level. Then, I will show that in Scotus’s view agreement between

17 For the main argument of this chapter, I want to leave open the question of how Scotus thinks there can be real similarity between God and creatures. However, it may end up being the case that the argument sheds light on this issue. Suppose that, for Scotus, there is some descriptive note that objectively characterizes both God and creatures. As a good candidate for an instance of real similarity between God and creatures, we might think of the transcendental “pure perfections,” such as wisdom. After all, Scotus thinks such terms have some sense for which they apply univocally to both; see Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2, nn. 26-45 (Vatican, III, 18-30). On the supposition advanced, it follows that in Scotus’s view at least some cases of real similarity will not be explained by common natures. As I will show, however, it is still true that Scotus posits common natures to explain all the similarity relations *within the Aristotelian categories*. Consequently, categorial terms such as ‘wisdom’ will be based on a common nature insofar as they characterize creatures, but not as they apply both to God and creatures.
creatures occurs only within an Aristotelian category; further, agreement always occurs between any two items in an Aristotelian category. If so, then there must be natural properties corresponding to the more generic predicates in a category as well as to the *infima species*. There may also be agreement “in an intention” or concept, but Scotus distinguishes this from “agreement in something real.” Then, I will show that Scotus takes the *Categories* to be a sufficient division of reality according to kind. Then, I will attempt to show that Scotus’s “agreement” is equivalent with real similarity associated with shared form. If I succeed in showing these things, then I will have shown that Scotus posits common natures to account for real similarity between created things, and also that the categories are the most general grouping of created things according to real agreement. Thus, assuming that the metaphysical role of real universals is to explain real agreement, it follows that for Scotus, the categories govern the real universals. That is to say, all created things that have universals as part of their metaphysical makeup are contained under some one of the categories. This is all consistent with holding that species have a higher degree of “real unity” than genera.

1.1 The Role of Common Natures

As I will show in this section, Scotus posits common natures to explain what Scotus calls “agreement” – Latin verb *convenire* – between things. An intuitive way of explaining “agreement” is the idea of “having something in common.” In Scotus’s technical terminology, for two things to be “primarily diverse” is the contradictory opposite of “agreement”: things that are “primarily diverse” have nothing at all in common and do not agree.
In Scotus’s picture, common natures explain real agreement by having a “real unity,” i.e. a reality of their own, in many individual things of the same kind. Although real, this unity is also “less than numerical.” That is to say, a common nature, though unified, is not as unified as an individual thing, since it characterizes many individual things. This “real less than numerical unity” is important because it shows that Scotus admits the existence of real universals as defined above. For in the scheme of thought accepted by most medieval philosophers, everything that has reality has unity, and vice versa. Thus, to say that the nature has its own unity that is not reducible to that of the individual that has it is to say that the common nature really exists:

\[
\text{[I]n the thing [i.e., in reality] the nature according to [its primary] entity has true real being outside the soul. And according to that entity, it has a unity in proportion to it.}^{18}
\]

In the context, the unity Scotus wants to ascribe to the common nature is a real but less than numerical unity.

Scotus holds that there are at least two aspects in an individual thing – the common nature, which explains its agreeing with other individuals of the same kind, and another aspect that accounts for its difference from those other individuals. Scotus refers to this individual aspect as an “individuating principle.” According to Scotus, the individual aspect in Socrates – call it “Socrateity” – and the individual aspect in Xanthippe – call it “Xanthippeity” – cannot have anything in common. For Scotus subscribes to the principle that two different items having something in common must also have something different that is the ultimate reason for their difference. Further, in

---

order to be the ultimate reason for the difference between Socrates and Xanthippe, Socrateity and Xanthippeity shouldn’t also require an explanation of their own difference. Scotus argues that if every pair of differing items had something in common, then there would need to be infinite regress of differentiating factors.¹⁹

In addition to factors that explain difference between things, however, Scotus also holds there must also be factors that explain agreement in case things agree. He gives several arguments to establish the existence of something with “real less than numerical unity” in creatures. The way that Scotus argues for common natures, makes clear that the “real less than numerical unity” of the common nature is precisely the theoretical posit that is needed to explain “agreement” between things that share in the common nature:

[I]f there is only a real numerical unity in this thing, then whatever unity is in the thing is of itself numerically one. Therefore, this thing and that one are primarily diverse according to every kind of entity there is in them. For they are diverse and agree in nothing in any way one.²⁰

Scotus assumes for this argument that there are some things that are not primarily diverse from one another. However, this entails that there is an item that is “in some way one” in both of them. Such an item is necessary if they are to “agree.” In context, this is the Scotist common nature.

Further evidence that Scotus posits common natures to explain agreement comes from his famous discussion of common natures and individuating principles from the second book of the Ordinatio:

¹⁹ Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, n. 170 (Vatican, VII, 475).

²⁰ Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 26 (Vatican, VII, 401; translation from Spade, 62).
Every difference among the differing is reduced ultimately to some items that are diverse primarily. Otherwise there would be no end to what differ. But individuals [in the same species] differ, properly speaking, because they are diverse beings that are yet something the same. Therefore, their difference is reduced to some items that are diverse primarily. Now these primarily diverse items are not the nature in this individual and the nature in that one, because what items formally agree by is not the same as what they really differ by…  

This passage directly implies that the nature of something is that by which it “formally agrees” with something else of the same kind. According to this usage, for any characteristic F, any individual x, and any item y, to say that “y is that by which x is formally F” is to say that y in and of itself is the aspect or element of x that explains x’s being F, disregarding any external associations. Thus, to say that common natures are “that by which things formally agree,” is to affirm that common natures themselves, apart from association with any other factor outside of them, are the reason that things agree.

The way that a common nature does the work of accounting for agreement between two different things is by having “less than numerical unity” as it is in both of those things. At least one passage, however, constitutes a problem for this interpretation:

In the same item that is one in number there is some kind of entity from which there follows a unity less than numerical unity is. Such unity is real, and what such unity belongs to is of itself formally one by numerical unity. I grant therefore that this real unity does not belong to anything existing in two individuals, but in one.  

---

21 Scotus, *Ord. II*, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, n. 170 (Vatican, VII, 475; Spade, 101-102).

22 Scotus, *Ord. II*, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, n. 172 (Vatican, VII, 476; Spade, 102).
The passage is puzzling in that it seems to suggest, contrary to the interpretation here given, that the common nature with less than numerical unity only exists in one individual and not in many. This apparent discrepancy can be accounted for by distinguishing between two aspects of a common nature: sometimes Scotus refers to the reality that exists with less than numerical unity in many things, while sometimes he refers to the individualized aspect of it that exists in just one of these individual things: a “distinctive (*propria*) individual.” That Scotus views a created universal as in some sense “divided” into individual things that are its “subjective parts” is clear from his discussion on individuation. But as the discussion there makes clear, each of these individual things formally includes a haecceity, in addition to the individualized part of the common nature called a “distinctive individual.” But it is also possible to consider all of the “distinctive individuals” in a given species as in some way composing the common nature of that species, since in Scotus’s view it has no reality “over and above” them: if all the individuals in a given species were to be destroyed, the common nature of that species would no longer have real existence outside the mind. According to the second passage, then, “less than numerical unity” follows on this entity as its proper passion. Thus the set of these parts in some sense constitutes the common nature, even though this particular set of parts is contingent and there are other possible sets of parts: “constitution is not identity.” Admittedly, this will be a strange case of constitution: none of the parts will be essential parts. If this interpretation of a notoriously puzzling doctrine is correct, we may read that these parts *each* have less than numerical unity as a proper passion in

---


addition to the individual unity that they get from the individuating principle, and also that they are the bearers, collectively, of less than numerical unity. On this reading, the “distinctive individual” of human nature that exists in Xanthippe will be really the same with Xanthippe, but formally distinct from her since it will not include Xanthippeity.

Thus, I have shown the link in Scotus’s writings between agreement and the positing of common natures. To spell it out as explicitly as possible: a given common nature will characterize a set of things if and only if all the things in the set “agree with one another in something real.” Furthermore, the possession of the common nature will in some way explain the agreement between the things; they agree because of the common nature that they have.

1.2 The Scope of Common Natures: Supremacy of the Categories

Next, I will show that for Scotus, the ten categories of Aristotle govern agreement between created things. On the interpretation of Scotus that I will argue for, agreement always characterizes things intra-categorially, but never inter-categorically.

First, here is a brief introduction to the ten categories. In different books, notably the Categories and the Metaphysics, Aristotle offers listings of items that he calls “categories” and that became known in the Latin of the Middle Ages as “predicaments.” The list of the categories varies between its occurrences, but for Scotus the list looks like this:

Substance, Quantity, Quality, Relation, Action, Passion, When, Where, Position, Having (or Possession).
“Substance,” the first item on the list, is important because Aristotelians think of substances as being unique among the other categorial items. Within some Aristotelian traditions, a substance is something that “does not depend” on something else in order to exist. By contrast, items falling under the remaining nine categories are called “accidents” and are paradigmatically envisioned as “existing in” and “depending on” a substance. Notably, Scotus finds the traditional Aristotelian way of defining ‘substance’ and ‘accident’ in terms of “depending” and “not depending” on another being to be inadequate. For all created substances necessarily depend in some robust existential sense upon the divine substance. Furthermore, in addition to this universal creaturely dependence, in Scotus’s doctrine of the Incarnation the assumed human nature – a human substance – depends, contingently and supernaturally, on another substance: it depends on the Word in a mode similar to how an accident depends upon a created substance (albeit without actualizing any potency in the Word). Therefore, the Scotist definition of ‘substance’ must distinguish substances from accidents in a way that allows the assumed human nature to be a substance, and therefore can’t rule out actual dependence on another substance. Therefore the definition has to incorporate “...does not have aptitudinal dependence” on other substances. In the final analysis, therefore, the Scotist definition of ‘substance’ looks something like this: “a substance is a complete per se being which does not have a natural aptitude to depend on some other per se being.” On the other hand, ‘accident’ would be defined as “something which has a natural aptitude to

---

25 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 14 (Vatican, IX, 5).

26 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 15-16 (Vatican, IX, 6-7); cf. Richard Cross, Duns Scotus on God (Ashgate, 2005), 163.

27 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 28 (Vatican, IX, 13).
depend upon a created substance.” While Scotus thinks it is metaphysically possible that accidents exist apart from substance in the transubstantiation of the bread and wine, they still have a natural aptitude to depend upon created substance which created substance itself does not have.

The words in the list above are also called the *genera* and are taken by many – including Scotus – to be the *suprema genera*, i.e. the “highest kinds.” As I will show, this means they govern agreement relations. In his commentary on the categories, Scotus says that for any two things in a given Aristotelian category, those things agree; further, nothing will agree with something from a different category. This passage addresses the question “from what is the unity of a genus taken”:

n.9] But since every to univocal [term] there corresponds in reality some unity – otherwise there would be something univocal to substance and accident – it is doubtful what is that one in reality from which is taken the univocation of a genus.

n. 10] And it can be said that all [things] of one genus have some agreement among them in substance, which they do not have with other [things] of other genera, which is known from the identity of operation or passion in singular [things]. That is in the species imperfect and potential, since diverse species have diverse perfective forms. Therefore something material in all the species – whether it be matter or incomplete form existing in all [the things] of this genus and not of another, which is the principle of some operation or passion in them – that is the one [item] in reality [from which the unity of a genus is taken]. Which, when the intellect considers [it] (not as in a “this”), it considers it to be essentially and according to itself in [things] differing in species and it attributes to it the intention of a genus – and by however much the genus is more common, by so much is the unity of that [item] in reality lesser.28

---

28 “[Unde sumitur univocatio generis] – sed cum omni univoco correspondeat in re aliqua unitas – alter accidenti et substantiae esset aliquod univocum – dubium est quid sit illud unum in re a quo sumitur univocatio generis. Et potest dici quod omnia unius generis aliquam inter se convenientiam habent in substantia, quam non habent cum aliis aliorum generum, quod cognoscitur ex identitate operationis vel
The passage affirms the existence of some real item from which a genus-concept is taken, in addition to the item from which a species-concept is taken; and further, this item brings about an “agreement in something real” – it is “something one in reality” from which a genus-concept is taken. As this passage shows, not only does Scotus posit common natures for infima species; he also posits them for genera.

Scotus’s change of mind on the univocity of being might be cited as a reason not to use this passage as evidence, since this passage belongs to his early stage – in which he did not affirm a univocal concept of being. Indeed, the assertion at the beginning of the passage that “to every univocal [term] there corresponds in reality some unity” indicates that Scotus does not at this point believe that ‘being’ can be univocal. However, I want to argue that the Quaestiones Super Praedicamenta 7.10 passage, although it is relatively early in the Scotistic canon, still affords good evidence that Scotus thinks that the genera correspond to real universals.

The scholarly consensus is that Scotus had an early stage and a late stage with respect to the issue of univocity. In his early stage, as Giorgio Pini shows, Scotus belongs to an English tradition of Aristotelian commentators who held that the only concepts of being were proper to a category, while substance and accidents also shared a relation of passionis in singularibus. Illud est in speciebus imperfectum et potentiale, quia diversae species habent diversas formas perfectivas. Aliquid ergo materiale in omnibus speciebus – sive sit materia sive forma incompleta existens in omnibus huius generis et non alterius, quod est principium alicuius operationis vel passionis in eis – est illud unum in re. Quod cum intellectus considerat (non ut in hoc), considerat ipsum secundum se essentialiter esse in differentibus specie et ei attribuit intentionem generis – et quanto genus communius tanto illius in re minor est unitas.” Scotus, Quaest. Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis Q. 7, nn. 9-10 (Franciscan Institute, 1999, I, 309; my translation).
attraction inasmuch as accidents depend on substance. In this sort of view (which is pretty clearly Scotus’s earlier view), only the metaphysician, not the logician, may predicate ‘being’ analogously of the ten categories; this is because only the metaphysician may take that real ordering of “attribution” into account. In his later stage, developed in his theological works, he came to admit an “imperfect” concept of being univocal to all of the ten, such that this undifferentiated quidditative concept would be included in differentiated proper concepts that would describe substance, on the one hand, or a given type of accident on the other.

In the interpretation that I want to argue for, which is consistent with this consensus, Scotus changes his mind between the early and the late stages about the conceptual order but retains the same view with respect to the real order. That is to say, after first holding that ‘being’ is predicated merely analogously, he later comes to admit that there is a concept ‘being’ that is univocal to all the categories; at the same time, he retains the view that a reality with less than numerical unity is shared within – and only within – each Aristotelian category. Indeed, in his later theological works, we can see this more or less clearly: in his discussion of individuation from book II of the Ordinatio – Scotus says the categories are “primarily diverse” from one another, but he never says this about two items within the same category. But both stages in Scotus’s evolution are


30 Quaest. Super Praed., q. 4, n. 38 (Franciscan Institute, I, p. 285): “intelligendum tamen quod vox, quae apud logicum simpliciter aequivoca est, quia scilicet aeque primo importat multa, apud metaphysicum vel naturalem, qui non considerant vocem in significando sed ea quae significantur secundum illud quod sunt, est analoga, propter illud quod ea quae significantur, licet non in quantum significantur; tamen in quantum existunt habent ordinem inter se. ideo ‘ens’ a metaphysico in IV et VII Metaphysicæ ponitur analogum ad substantiam et accidentes, quia scilicet haec quae significantur, in essendo habent ordinem; sed apud logicum est simpliciter aequivocum, quia in quantum significantur per vocem, aeque primo significantur.”
consistent with holding that each Aristotelian category has its own less than numerical unity. Indeed, this is what the passage is about. An indication that the passage describes the real order rather than the conceptual order is that it mentions a unity *in re*. And as Scotus’s discussion of individuation makes clear, this is precisely what is necessary and sufficient for the status of common nature.

In this passage, then, is a statement that everything under an Aristotelian category has “some agreement” with everything else under that same category. The italicized passage also seems to state that agreement does not extend to things under different categories. However, the passage is ambiguous in that respect: the words of the passage could mean (i) that there is absolutely no agreement between things in different categories, or (ii) merely that there is *some* agreement within a category that is not shared outside of that category. On interpretation (ii), it might be possible for things from different categories to agree with each other. However, there are excellent reasons for preferring (i) to (ii) as the correct interpretation of the passage: At least two other passages – one of which belongs to the later, theological works – explicitly affirm that the categories are “primarily diverse” – i.e. that no two categories agree in anything.31 If the categories are all primarily diverse from one another, then surely it follows that any two entities from different categories are also primarily diverse. As these further passages will also show, Scotus affirms this inference as valid.

If Scotus thinks there is some agreement between all the items in one category and also that common natures are needed to explain *any* case of agreement, then it would appear that Scotist common natures must come in degrees of generality. Thus, in addition

---

31 Scotus, *In Metaph.* V, qq. 5-6, n. 76 (Franciscan Institute, III, 465); Scotus, *Ord.* II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 89 (Vatican, VII, 433-434).
to the common nature that explains the application of an *infima species* like ‘human’, for example, there would also be a more general common nature explaining the application of ‘animal’, as well as a most general common nature explaining the application of ‘substance’, in every case in which those terms are truly applied; and likewise for the other categories.

An objection might be raised here. As is clear from elsewhere, Scotus thinks that some things can “agree” in a concept even without sharing a common nature.\(^{32}\) How do we know he doesn’t have such a merely conceptual agreement in mind in this passage? Further, Scotus denies that there is “comparison” within a genus, although he says there is within a species; and the reason he gives is that a species signifies one nature while a genus signifies many:

According to the Philosopher [in book] VII of *Physics*, the unity of a genus is distinguished from the unity of a species, because according to an atomic species there is comparison and not according to a genus, because an atomic species signifies one nature, but a genus does not, in which “there lie many equivocations.”\(^{33}\)

Furthermore, Scotus says that what is defined in a genus is an intention (i.e. a concept).\(^{34}\) These texts together might be taken to imply that a genus has no real unity of its own, and *ipso facto* does not correspond to a single most general common nature. In that case, the

\(^{32}\) *Scotus, Ordinatio I*, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 163 (Vatican, III, 100-101, my translation).


\(^{34}\) *On Porphyry’s Isagoge*, q. 14 (Franciscan Institute, I, 67-73).
item in which things in a genus would agree would be an intention or concept, and then this would not be a real, mind-independent agreement.

However, it seems most plausible that Quaest. Super Praedicamenta q. 7, n. 10 entails that a genus does have a real unity of its own, just as a species does – indeed, at the end of this passage we see that Scotus mentions its “lesser” but real unity. Plausibly, this unity implies this existence of a real common nature that is more general, relative to the common nature corresponding to the infima species. Indeed, a lesser but real unity is precisely what licenses the realist thesis with regard to the common nature corresponding to an infima species.

It is true that this question introduces complicated issues that delve into Scotus’s views about the difference between the logical, metaphysical, and physical (or natural) points of view, and the differences between logical, metaphysical, and physical “univocity,” “analogy,” and “equivocity.” In Scotus’s system, it is easier to get logical univocity than physical univocity, since it is easier for things to agree with respect to a determinable conceptual ratio than with respect to what Scotus calls their “ultimate completive form” – which is the substantial form that puts them in their infima species.35

35 Quaest. super Praed. Aristotelis q. 7, n. 11 (Franciscan Institute, I, 310.) “[A]ll that which through one ratio comes to the intellect, according to which it is said of many, is said to be univocal to the logician; with the physicist it is not every such, but only that which is one according to the ultimate completive form. From whence it is said [in book] VII Physics: ‘in a genus there lie latent many equivocations’, which yet the logician would not say. Whence, if it be said ‘according to every univocal comparison occurs’, it is to be understood only concerning what is univocal according to the physicist, which is only the species specialissima, not concerning every univocal according to logical consideration in the way that the genus is univocal” (my translation).

On my interpretation of Scotus, however, the metaphysician is intermediate between the logician and the natural philosopher with regard to the constraints upon some term’s being “univocal” for her. Thus, if a term is univocal for the natural philosopher, it is also univocal for the metaphysician and the logician; and if a term is univocal for the metaphysician, it is also univocal for the logician. However, a term may be univocal for the metaphysician while being equivocal for the natural philosopher; and a term may be univocal for the logician while being equivocal for the metaphysician and the natural philosopher. This leaves open the possibility that for Scotus, a metaphysician – albeit not a natural philosopher – may say that a genus is univocal.

On this reading, Scotus’s later view may be portrayed by a threefold scheme:

**Logical perspective:**
- univocity: some predications are univocal if they share the same conceptual content
- analogy: some predications are analogical if they overlap in some (but not all) conceptual content
- equivocity: some predications are equivocal if they overlap in no conceptual content

**Metaphysical perspective:**
- univocity: some predications are univocal if they signify essences that have some real unity between them.
- analogy: some predications are analogical if they signify essences that are related by attribution (see below).
- equivocity: some predications are equivocal if they signify essences that are neither univocal nor analogical.

**Natural perspective**
- univocity: some predications are univocal if they signify essences that have the same “ultimate completive form” and thus belong to the same species
- analogy: some predications are analogical if they signify essences which are in the same genus and are related by attribution (see below).
- equivocity: some predications are equivocal if they signify essences that are not in the same genus.

Logical analogy as I define it here may seem problematic, since the early Scotus denies that it exists. At one point, Scotus says that from a logical point of view, there is no mean between univocity and equivocity.\footnote{QQ. Super Librum Elenchorum, Q. 15, n. 20 (Franciscan Institute, II, 338): “Logicus etiam dicit quod omnes species unius generis in suo genere univocantur. Sed naturalis dicit quod “in genere latent multae aequivocations.” Unde logicus considerat res ipsas ut sub ratione cadunt. Sed inter idem et diversum non cadit medium, et ideo logicus medium non ponit inter aequivocum et univocum. Unde per hoc ad formam argumenti dicendum quod, quia primus philosophus res considerat secundum suas quidditates, et in re est ita quod quaeram res ad invicem habent habitudinem, ideo dicit philosophus quod ens analogice dicitur de substantia et accidente. Sed quia logicus considerat res ut sub ratione cadunt, ideo dicit quod ens aequivoce dicitur de substantia et accidente. Unde Porphyrius dicit quod “si quis omnia entia vocet, aequivoce non univoce nuncupabit.”} However, this is only in the earlier works. As to

\begin{quote}
Cf. \textit{Ibid.}, nn. 17-18 (Franciscan Institute, II, 336): “ad quaestionem dicendum quod quantum est ex parte vocis significantis, non est possibile vocem significare unum per prius et reliquum per posterius, nam significare est aliud intellectui representare. Quod ergo significatur, prius ab intellectu concipitur. Sed omne quod ab intellectu concipitur, sub distincta et determinata ratione concipitur, quia intellectus est quidam actus, et ideo quod intelligit ab alio distinguit. Omne ergo quod significatur, sub distincta ratione et determinata significatur. Hoc patet: nam materia prima quae de se est ens in potentia, si intelligitur, oportet quod intelligatur sub ratione distincta. Et si ita sit de materia, multo fortius hoc erit verum de omni alio. [n.18] si ergo dictio analoga vel vox imponitur diversis, necesse est quod sub ratione distincta et determinata eis imponatur. Si ergo dictio analoga, sub diversis rationibus, diversis imponatur. Necesse est quod ea, quantum est ex parte vocis significantis, aequaliter repraesentet. Unde in re potest esse analogia, sed in voce significante nulla cadit prioritas vel posterioritas. Quia aliqua est proprietas quae magis convenit uni rei quam alteri. Sed non est aliqua proprietas quae magis conveniat substantiae vocis quam
\end{quote}
whether Scotus ever affirms (or could ever affirm) an analogy of concepts, see Cross, “A Brief Note on Analogy”: “Compositional concepts can, of course, overlap… [Scotus] is happy to talk of analogous concepts, and to assert that an account of analogous concepts, to be coherent, must involve overlapping concepts.” 38 Again, with regard to two concept that are not primarily diverse, Cross argues that in *Ordinatio* 1, d. 8, p. 1, q. 3, n. 64, Scotus reasons in this way: “[I]t is precisely their not being primarily diverse – their not being equivocal – that makes them analogous. And for this, according to Scotus, each concept must be compositional, and the pair overlapping.” 39 Cross sums up: “And this, I submit, is Scotus’s account of analogy: two distinct concepts, overlapping at some univocal concept.” 40

*Quaestiones super Praed.* q. 7 n. 11 shows that natural univocity is a matter of sharing the same *ultimam formam completivam*. On the other hand, the same passage shows that *logicians* understand ‘univocal’ to characterize a predication that has the same conceptual content in different applications. 41


39 Ibid., 151.

40 Ibid., 152.

41 *Quaest. super Praed.* Aristotelis q. 7, n. 11 (Franciscan Institute, I, 310.) “[A]ll that which through one ratio comes to the intellect, according to which it is said of many, is said to be univocal to the logician; with the physicist it is not every such, but only that which is one according to the ultimate completive form. From whence it is said [in book] VII *Physics*: ‘in a genus there lie latent many equivocations’, which yet the logician would not say. Whence, if it be said ‘according to every univocal comparison occurs’, it is to be understood only concerning what is univocal according to the physicist, which is only the *species specialissima*, not concerning every univocal according to logical consideration in the way that the genus is univocal” (my translation).
Early on, Scotus says the metaphysician may consider analogy – i.e. as occurring with respect to terms that signify essences that have a certain real ordering of dependence, or of priority and posteriority, one upon another. This understanding of metaphysical analogy seems to be carried over to his later works, in which this extra-mental dependence relation is called attributio, analogia, or proportio and is supposed to hold between God and creatures, or between substance and accidents, or between the Word and the assumed human nature. This same type of relation is also supposed to obtain between the first species in a genus and all the other species; for example, between “one” and all the other numbers (each subsequent number is, so to speak, composed of and therefore posterior to “one”). Thus, we see that physical analogy – which presumably obtains only within a genus – might be a sub-species of metaphysical analogy – which sometimes characterizes essences that are not in the same genus.

---


44 Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 83 (Vatican, IV, 191): “dico quod attributio sola non ponit unitatem, quia unitas attributionis minor est unitas univocationis, et minor non concludit maiorem; tamen minor unitas potest stare cum majore unitate, sicut aliqua quae sunt unum genere, sunt unum specie, licet unitas generis sit minor quam unitas specie. Ita hic, concedo quod unitas attributionis non ponit unitatem univocationis, et tamen cum ista unitate attributionis stat unitas univocationis, licet haec formaliter non sit illa exemplum: species eiusdem generis habent essentialem attributionem ad primum illius generis (X Metaphysicae), et tamen cum hoc stat unitas univocationis rationis generis in ipsis speciebus. Ita – et multo magis – oportet esse in proposito, quod in ratione entis, in qua est unitas attributionis, attributa habeat unitatem univocationis, quia numquam aliqua comparantur ut mensurata ad mensuram, vel excessa ad excedens, nisi in aliquo uno conveniant. Sicut enim comparatio simpliciter est in simpliciter univoco (VII Physic.), ita omnis comparatio in aliqualiter univoco.” Cf. Scotus, Ordinatio III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 64 (Vatican, IX, 30). Here Scotus says that the human nature of Christ and the Word have a “proportion” to each other, insofar as the human nature “depends” upon the Word.

45 Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 162 (Vatican, III, 100).

46 Scotus, Ordinatio II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 11-12 (Vatican, VII, 396; Spade, 59-60): “According to the Philosopher, Metaphysics X, [I, 1052b18], ‘In every genus there is something one and primary that is the metric and measure of all that are in that genus.’ This unity of what first measures is a real unity…Now this unity belongs to something insofar as it is first in the genus…”
The definition of metaphysical univocity is what I am taking the *Quaest. Super Praed.* q. 7 n. 10 passage to show, at least in part. This passage explains that the univocity of generic terms must be based upon some unity in reality. This unity is less than that of the unity of a species, since it is not based on sharing the same type of “ultimate completive form.” Therefore, it is not a unity that is great enough for the natural philosopher to call a genus “univocal” from her perspective. However, it may be taken as a “real unity,” nonetheless.

This picture would seem tidy and complete, but there is some counterevidence. At one point, in the first *Ordinatio*, Scotus denies that the metaphysician may say that a genus is univocal – though he concedes that it is univocal for the logician:

Likewise, the philosopher VII of Physics says that ‘in a genus there lie equivocations,’ on account of which there cannot be comparison according to genus. But there is not equivocation so much for the logician, who posits diverse concepts; but as for the real philosopher, there is equivocation, because there is not there the unity of a nature. So, therefore, all the authorities which are in *Metaphysics* and *Physics*, which would concern this matter, could be explained, on account of the real diversity of those [items] in which there is attribution, but with which the unity of a concept abstractable from them is consistent, as is clear in the example. – I concede then that the whole which is an accident, has an essential attribution to substance, and yet from this and from that a common concept may be abstracted.47

---

47 “Consimiliter, philosophus VII Physicorum dicit quod ‘in genere latent aequivocationes’, propter quas non potest esse comparatio secundum genus. Non tamen est aequivocatio quantum ad logicum, qui ponit diversos conceptus, sed quantum ad realem philosophum, est aequivocatio, quia non est ibi unitas naturae. Ita igitur omnes auctoritates quae essent in Metaphysica et Physica, quae essent de hac materia, possent exponi, propter diversitatem realem illorum in quibus est attributio, cum qua stat tamen unitas conceptus abstrahibilis ab eis, sicut patuit in exemplo. – Concedo tunc quod totum quod accidentes est, attributonem habet essentiale ad substantiam, et tamen ab hoc et ab illo potest conceptus communis abstrahi.” Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 163 (Vatican, III, 100-101, my translation).
Although Scotus here asserts that for the real philosopher a genus is equivocal, this is not the main point of the passage. Rather, it is that the fact that substance and accident are related by attribution does not entail that it is impossible to abstract from them a concept ‘being’ that is univocal for the logician. Thus, although this passage is superficially inconsistent with the overall picture I have sketched, I don’t think it negates the possibility that Scotus could consistently ascribe to the scheme.

Further, I think that we are licensed to assume that since, in the *Quaest. Super Praed.* 7.10 passage, Scotus does not qualify “agreement” in any way, and given that the passage also talks about a lesser unity *in re*, it is a real agreement as opposed to a merely intentional agreement that he has in mind. Since Scotus posits common natures to explain the real agreement between things in an *infima species*, this makes it more plausible that he thinks there are “quiddities” for the more general predicates as well.

A passage confirming this hypothesis comes in Scotus’s discussion of whether there are distinct items in an individual thing that correspond to the concepts of genus and of difference. Scotus affirms that there are, indeed, such items that are really different from one another in that their difference is not manufactured by the mind; but his teaching is that they will be only formally distinct. In this passage Scotus also affirms that the formal distinction has grades, and therefore that *relata* of the formal distinction can be distinct from one another to a greater or lesser degree:

> But the real [i.e. formal] difference is supposed to have degree. For [the difference] of natures and of [their] supposits is greatest; that of natures in one supposit is intermediary; and that of diverse perfections or *rationes* of perfective [items] that are unitively contained in one nature is least.48

---

48 “Sed realis differentia ponitur habere gradus. Est enim maxima naturarum et suppositorum; media naturarum in uno supposito; minima diversarum perfectionum sive rationum perfectionalium unitive
In what cases are there formally distinct “natures in one supposit,” as the passage mentions? It seems unlikely that Scotus is thinking here of the Christological case, since Christ’s divine and human natures will be really distinct – in the sense of separable – rather than merely formally distinct. The same considerations make it implausible that he is speaking of the inherence of different substantial forms in the sort of substance that is composed by many such forms: since the natures of different substantial forms are separable, they will be really distinct and not merely formally distinct. Most likely, then, the passage may motivate that Scotus thinks there are multiple quiddities in a thing corresponding to the more or less general concepts that apply to it.

One might construe Scotus as holding that the genus and species are distinct common natures just because they are formally distinct items in reality. They meet the conditions for being formally distinct in that the species includes definitional content that is not formally included in the genus: the differentiating reality and the genus reality do not overlap at all in their formal notions. But being a formally distinct item in reality is not sufficient for being a real universal, or quidditative component: that interpretation would have Scotus positing many more quiddities than he in fact does. For, as we will see in later chapters, Scotus thinks that “goodness” is its own descriptive note, included qualitatively or virtually as a mode of every type of essence – thereby satisfying the condition for being formally distinct from the other elements in a thing, just as genus and difference realities do. Yet, equally clearly, “goodness” is not a real universal. From Scotus’s perspective, there is no common nature of “goodness,” since there is nothing

contentarum in una natura.” Duns Scotus, In Metaph. VII, q. 19, n. 44 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 370; my translation).
that all the different types of essence share. This is clear in his repeated assertion –
carried over to the later, theological works – that the categories are “primarily diverse.”
Thus the formal non-identity of genus and species realities is necessary but not sufficient
for them to be different universals. In Scotus’s view, what is additionally necessary is the
“unity in re less than numerical” of a common nature. Neither ‘being’ nor its passions
have this; but, as I’m arguing, all categorial genera and species do.

1.3 The Scope of Common Natures: Sufficiency of the Categories

Now I will make a case that for Scotus there are no real universals outside the
categories. In a few places, Scotus treats of the “sufficiency of the categories”
(sufficientia praedicamentorum) as a division of finite reality. I say finite because Scotus
thinks that God, who is infinite, does not fall under any category. This thesis is
explained by Scotus as entailing two others: (1) that there are only ten most general
categories of things, and (2) that there are at least ten most general categories of things.
Thus, to affirm the sufficiency of the Aristotelian categories, as Scotus understands it, is
to affirm that each category is necessary and that all together they are collectively
sufficient as a division of finite reality according to kind. In his commentary on the
Categories, Scotus clearly affirms (1): “It is to be said that there are only ten most
general [categories] of things, whose distinction is not taken according to something
logical alone, but according to those essences themselves.”

50 Duns Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3 (Vatican, IV, 205-207).
51 Duns Scotus, Quaest. Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis, Q. 11, n. 26 (Franciscan Institute, I,
350-351; my translation).
the distinction is according to something logical alone, he is saying that the distinction between the categories is objectively “there” in reality and is not a division that is manufactured by the mind.

In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, Scotus endorses (2) as well. The context is a note in which he addresses certain ways other medieval philosophers would try to demonstrate the sufficiency of the categories “by division” – i.e., by dividing and subdividing being until we get the ten categories. Scotus thinks such “divisive ways” of demonstrating the sufficiency of the categories are not legitimate, since they presuppose that there are divisions of reality that are prior to the categories:

> Therefore by holding a division [i.e. of reality into the ten categories] to be sufficient, it would have to be said that that very division is primary. *Neither is there some two-membered or three-membered [division] prior to it; nor can [the division into the ten categories] be demonstrated.*

52

Since the categories are the highest kinds, the “supreme genera,” this also means that there is no kind that subsumes all of them – indeed, for any two of them, there is no kind that subsumes those two. For, as this passage later asserts, they are “primarily diverse,” i.e. there is nothing in which they all “agree” with each other. The passage goes on to argue that the categories are an immediate division of being: there is no division of the categories according to agreement that is prior to their division into ten. Thus, although someone might group two or more of the categories together, that group will never constitute another category since the categories do not agree. A consequence of this, as

the passage points out, is that the division of reality into the ten categories cannot be
demonstrated – it must therefore be, in some manner, empirically discovered.

Another passage, from the discussion on common natures and individuating
principles, explicitly affirms that the categories are primarily diverse, and also that items
from different categories are primarily diverse. In this passage, Scotus uses the term
“categorial hierarchy,” which seems to signify, for a given Aristotelian category, the set
of all the predicates from most to least general in that category, plus all the individual
items that fall under that category.

In every categorial hierarchy there are contained all that pertain to
that hierarchy, disregarding everything else that is not something
belonging essentially to that hierarchy. (This is proved because any
two such hierarchies are primarily diverse, and so nothing
belonging to the one does so through the other’s hierarchy.) But
just as there belongs to that hierarchy, insofar as it is limited at
both the top and the bottom (according to the Philosopher,
Posterior Analytics I. [20, 82a21-24]) a first predicate, of which
nothing else is predicated, so too there belongs to it a lowest
subject, to which nothing else is made subject. Therefore, in every
categorial hierarchy the singular or individual is not established
through anything belonging to any other hierarchy.53

This passage clearly affirms what we might call the “autonomy” of each of the
categories:

Categorial Autonomy: The nature of any item within one category
does not include any item from within a different category to be
what it is.

Categorial Autonomy entails that no categorial item essentially includes something that is
an item from a different category. Here, then, it is even more clear that the fact that the

categories are primarily diverse entails that any two items from different categories are also primarily diverse, since in this passage Scotus argues from the primary diversity of the categories to the thesis of Categorial Autonomy.

Thus, Scotus holds that all the Aristotelian categories are “primarily diverse” from each other. Here, someone might disagree with Scotus with some appearance of plausibility, by arguing: “Don’t all the so-called ‘accidents’ have some real agreement, qua accidents? After all, they all have ‘dependence on a substance’ in common!” As I will now show, Scotus rules this response out of court. Although Scotus grants that all accidents depend on a substance, for him this doesn’t entail that they really agree in anything. Rather, he says, an accidental category doesn’t agree with any other accidental category any more than an accidental category agrees with substance. In a passage from one of the logical commentaries, Scotus presents a view according to which the categories don’t agree in anything real. We can see however that for him this does not exclude the possibility of agreement in a common concept:

[I]t can be said that accidents agree in something intentional as ‘they are attributed to a substance’ or ‘posterior to substance’; in which accident does not agree with substance. Or it can be conceded, if there were a name equivocally signifying substance and the other most general categories, let it be ‘a’, the division of being into ‘a’ and ‘when’ would be equally appropriate as that into substance and accidents, because on both sides [the division would be] of [something] equivocal into equivocal and univocal.\(^\text{54}\)

\(^{54}\) Duns Scotus, *Quaest. Super Praed. Aristotelis*, Q. 11, nn. 29-30 (Franciscan Institute, I, 351-352, my translation): “ad aliud potest dici quod accidentia conveniunt in aliquo intentionali ut ‘attribuuntur substantiae’ vel ‘posterius substantia’; in quo non convenit accidens cum substantia. – Vel potest concedi, si esset nomen aequivoce significans substantiam et alia generalissima, ut a, aequo conveniens esset divisio entis in a et ‘quando’ sicut in substantiam et accidens, quia utrobiique aequivoce in aequivolcum et univocum.”
For Scotus, then, there is no grouping of all the accidental categories according to something they all agree in *qua* accident. Grouping by *real* (as opposed to intentional) agreement only occurs within each category; otherwise, there may be grouping by agreement, but only in “something intentional.” Thus, there is grouping by agreement of things within each category, but not of items from multiple categories.

Scotus repeats this view in another place as well. To an argument that a division of being into “substance” and “accidents” is prior to the division into ten categories, Scotus responds:

> To the other [argument], [i.e. that if there were no division into “substance” and accidents” it would follow that “similarly the division into substance and accidents would not be truer than this: (1) some entity ‘when’, (2) some [entity] ‘not-when’]: that it is true that “there would not be a truer division,” *nor do accidents agree more among themselves than with substance, because in both cases [that] in which they agree is equivocal.*

To say that things agree in something equivocal is to assert that they only agree in a concept, and not in a common nature. Thus, Scotus is asserting that for any two items from different categories, those two items don’t agree in anything real. Therefore, as he argues here, there is no proper division of the categories by agreement into less than ten.

In this same passage, however, Scotus also mentions an alternative view according to which there is something in which the categories agree, but that is not part of their content *in quid* but only *in quale*:

---

Otherwise: I concede that the division be more appropriate, and that the nine genera agree more among themselves. Yet this is not in something said from itself in quid but in quale. For many things are said concerning the nine genera denominatively which are not said concerning them and substance univocally, and yet they are said concerning those [i.e. the nine accidental genera] univocally, denominatively only. But nothing is said univocally concerning them, i.e. the nine accidents, in quid. From whence if the division be through a univocal [item], this is only concerning things said of them denominatively.56

Scotus seems to offer this second view as an alternative to the flat denial that the categories agree in anything at all. At any rate, the second view seems difficult to understand. To say that the accidental categories agree in something said “denominatively” or in quale is presumably to say that they agree in something that constitutes them qua difference; but it can be asked – what does this item that is said in quale differentiate each accidental category from? Presumably not from each other, since it is being offered as what they agree in. Then it must be something that differentiates them from substance. (For a more complete handling of this perplexity, see chapter 3). In any case, the view would seem to entail that the ten categories are grouped together under one genus and distinguished from each other by differences. This is a conclusion that Scotus does not want to endorse, since he explicitly says earlier in the same passage that the division into the categories is primary – and explains that as entailing that there is no genus prior to the categories. So it’s difficult to see what the alternative view amounts to.

It does not seem that Scotus decides between these two alternative views here; so at least he retains the view of the commentary on the *Categories* as a plausible one.

So far, I have offered support for premises in an argument that the categories contain the things characterized by real universals. I have made a case that Scotus holds to each of the following theses:

1. Any two things under a given category agree.
2. Whenever a created thing agrees with another created thing, both will be under the same Aristotelian category.
3. Agreement is what common natures are posited to explain.

For Scotus’s adherence to thesis 1, see *Quaest. Super Praed.* q. 7, n. 10, cited above.

Thesis 2 is supported by the sufficiency of the categories thesis plus Categorial Autonomy. Thus, if common natures are Scotus’s version of real universals, then for Scotus, theses 1-3 entail that the Aristotelian categorial hierarchies, from generic to specific predicates, are a listing of all the predicates that correspond to real universals in created things.

To this point, an important question has still been left open: just what does real agreement amount to, for Scotus?

1.4 The Nature of Real Agreement

At this point, my argument is most speculative, since I know of no text where Scotus explicitly defines “agreement.” Sometimes Scotus speaks of agreement and sometimes he speaks of similarity, without ever explicitly connecting them. However,
there is not much else that agreement could be, other than the type of similarity associated with shared form or prime matter.

Further, in a text that occurs in the discussion of the “real less than numerical unity” that Scotist common natures have, Scotus makes clear that there is an explanatory link between common natures and “sameness” / “similarity” / “equality”:

The same, the similar, and the equal are all based on the notion of one, so that, even though a similarity has for its foundation a thing in the genus of quality, nevertheless such a relation is not real unless it has a real foundation and a real proximate basis for the founding. Therefore, the unity required in the foundation of the relation of similarity is a real one.57

This is part of one of the arguments that Scotus gives for the existence of something with a real less than numerical unity in creatures. Since, as context makes clear, this entity is a Scotist common nature, the passage shows that Scotus thinks a function of common natures is to explain similarity in the things that share them.

The passage is problematic in that it seems to suggest that similarity only occurs between things “in the genus of quality,” or perhaps between substances too but only in virtue of qualities that they bear. However, I think that this is mere appearance only, and that Scotus would admit that things in other categories can bear a relation of similarity to each other. In another passage, he says “…the main reason for … likening or similarity is the form itself shared between the generator and the generated…[F]orm is properly assimilative…”58 Since the passage asserts that forms as such explain similarity and since

57 Scotus, *Ord.* II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 18 (Vatican, VII, 398; Spade, 61).

58 Scotus, *Ord.* II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, nn. 210-211 (Vatican, VII, 494; Spade, 113).
there are forms that constitute the things in every category, it follows that things in any
category can be similar to each other.

However, it is important to bear in mind that Scotus thinks prime matter also has a
“quiddity” of its own, insofar as it is a real being and the substratum for substantial
change.\textsuperscript{59} Thus, it is probable that the prime matter which is involved in composite things
will also “agree” and be similar.

Thus, in the final analysis, Scotus holds that common natures explain agreement
between created things, and that common natures explain similarity between created
things. Further, the assertion that form explains similarity would seem to entail that
common natures explain similarity, since a certain type of form is included in the
specification of a common nature. On the supposition then that agreement is equivalent to
similarity in virtue of shared form, here is the finalized argument:

1. Any two things under one Aristotelian category agree.
2. Whenever a created thing agrees with another created thing,
both will be under the same Aristotelian category. (Categorial
Autonomy, sufficiency of the categories)
3. Agreement is the distinctive \textit{datum} which common natures are
posited to explain.
4. Agreement is equivalent to similarity in virtue of shared form or
prime matter.
5. It follows from these premises that Scotus thinks that the
categories govern common natures.

That is, all \textit{finite} things that are constituted by common natures fall under the categories,
and the categorial predicates correspond to real universals that characterize them.

\textsuperscript{59} Scotus, Lect. II, d. 12, q. un.
Then we might also be tempted to conclude that according to Scotus, the categorial predicates are the *only* ones that correspond to universals, and that *all* the things that include real universals in their metaphysical make-up belong to the categories. However, there is a counterexample to this latter thesis. The thesis that for Scotus the categories govern the real universals ends up being true for all real universals except one – the divine nature.

1.5 The Divine Essence: An Infinite Common Nature

Trinitarian persons afford a counterexample to the thesis that for Scotus the categories govern agreement and similarity relations. For two divine persons must surely “agree” in virtue of the divine nature, which in orthodox Trinitarian doctrine – according to Lateran IV – remains numerically one and undivided in all three persons. If this is so, then not only do they share a nature, they share the very same individual instance of the divine nature. Furthermore, Scotus holds that the divine nature does not fall under an Aristotelian category: as he says, God and creatures share in no reality. If everything under a category shares in some reality with everything else under that category, then

---

60 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 31, q. un., n. 17 (Vatican, VI, 210): “ideo videtur proprie posse concedi ibi [i.e. in Deo] similitudo secundum essentiam (non in quantum ‘quid’, sed in quantum est actus et quasi forma, qua personae sunt Deus), et etiam similitudo secundum attributa omnia, quae sunt quasi proprietates huius naturae…et tunc, sicut ex natura rei est fundamentum aequalitatis et distinctio realis extremorum (et ista relatio sine operatione intellectus), ita de similitudine.”


62 Lect. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 129 (Vatican, XVII, 46): “It is clear, therefore, from what has been said, that God and a creature are really primarily diverse, and agree in no reality … and yet they will agree in one concept …”

Cf. Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 82 (Vatican, IV, 190): “Ad tertium patebit in tertio articulo ‘quia deus et creatura non sunt primo diversa in conceptibus’ [cf. infra n. 95-127]; sunt tamen primo diversa in realitate, quia in nulla realitate conveniunt, -- et quomodo possit esse conceptus communis sine convenientia in re vel realitate, in sequentibus dictetur [scil. post tertium articulum, cf. infra n. 137. 138-150].”
clearly it follows from this that God can’t be included under a category. But then here is a case of the agreement relation between items that are not subsumed under any Aristotelian category.

Admittedly, two divine persons agree if anything does. Therefore, I will accept this as a restriction or qualification: On the view that I am presenting as Scotus’s view, the categories govern all agreement, similarity, and universals among created things. However, this clarification does not make a big difference to the overall picture, since after all the divine nature affords the only case of an extra-categorial common nature. According to the way Scotus argues for divine unicity, necessarily, there is no more than one individual infinite nature.63 If the categories are said to be a “sufficient division of reality” and God falls outside the categories, the most plausible interpretation is that they are a sufficient division of all finite reality. Thus, no realities will fall outside of the ten categories except God. Thus, the only similarity and agreement relations that are not governed by the categories will be the ones that characterize two divine persons qua divine, and possibly between God and creatures or between God’s ideas and creatures – though if there are similarity relations of these latter sorts, it is clear that Scotus thinks they can’t be grounded by a common nature.

This leaves open the question of how many similarity relations between divine persons can be grounded by the divine nature; but Scotus thinks that diverse relations of similarity between the persons can be sustained by the same common nature.64 In the

---


64 Ord. I, d. 31, q. un., n. 15 (Vatican, VI, 208-209).
created case, it seems plausible that a single type of common nature can sustain multiple similarity relations between things of the same species.
CHAPTER 2:
SOME VARIETIES OF THE REAL RELATION OF SIMILARITY

How should one decide when to posit universals, i.e., “natural properties”? One attractive proposal is that we should posit a natural property, if and only if there is some relation of similarity that something bears to another. Then, we could posit that some natural property is exemplified on both sides, to explain the relation of similarity. But this is another instance in which Scotus forges a way of his own. For Scotus, the scope of similarity relations is broader than the scope of natural properties; on his account some things are truly similar which do not share the same natural property. However, as I will show in this chapter and the next, the similarity that falls outside the scope of common natures is a unique and special case of similarity, in Scotus’s account. And there is a well-delimited class of similarity relations that Scotus uniquely associates with common natures.

In the previous chapter, I left it open whether on Scotus’s account there is any way in which God and creatures are similar. Recall that it seemed as though, if Scotus thinks there is a way in which God and creatures are really similar, that would apparently undermine the motivation for his realism. For, as it seemed, the theoretical reason for positing common natures was to explain similarity. But if God and creatures share in no common nature and are also similar, then there is at least one case of similarity in Scotus’s view that is not explained by a common nature. But then we might very well ask
Scotus, “Why should we posit common natures in the first place, if they aren’t needed to explain similarity as such?” A systemic incoherence seems to result, thus propelling William Ockham towards his famous rejection of common natures in favor of whole-cloth nominalism.

In this chapter, I will argue that Scotus admits the existence of several distinct types of “similarity,” which can be classified according to different foundations, as well as according to different metaphysical characterizations of their structure. Thus, Scotus posits common natures, not to explain “similarity” simply speaking, but rather a certain type of similarity – dubbed “(real) agreement” by Scotus. As we saw from the texts in the first chapter, this is the sort of similarity that occurs exclusively intra-categorially. Plausibly, there are two sub-types here, since categorial entities may be similar either in virtue of shared formal components “of the same type,” whether specifically or generically; or in virtue of their prime matter – since, according to Scotus, prime matter has a “quiddity” of its own. Although Scotus thinks there is real similarity between God and creatures, its metaphysical account will have to be different from the metaphysical account of “(real) agreement,” since in Scotus’s view, as we saw, God and creatures “agree in nothing that is in any way one and the same.” At the end, I will begin to investigate more particularly the peculiar sorts of similarity that Scotus thinks to obtain

1 Scotus, Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 11-13 (Vatican, XIX, 72): “[Probatur quod materia est.] Primum ostenditur per rationem Philosophi… omne agens naturale requirit passum in quod agens agit…illud passum, in quod agens agit, transmutatur ab opposito in oppositum; hoc oppositum non fit illud oppositum, ita quod nihil commune remaneat in utrique…sicut igitur in transmutatione accidentali transmutans aliquid, movet illud ab opposito in oppositum, manens idem sub utroque oppositorum, ita oportet in generatione quod generans transmutet aliquid a forma in formam, manens idem sub utroque; illud dicitur esse materia.”

Cf. Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 47-48 (Vatican, XIX, 86): “…Unde si materia esset separata, nihil de novo haberet, sed tantum negationem compositionis vel coniunctionis eius cum forma, sicut si accidens sit separatum a subjecto suo. Ideo respondeo quod secundum illud esse quod haberet si esset materia separata, est perfectibilis a forma.”
between creatures and God, thus setting up the investigation of "pure perfections" in chapter 3.

We must first investigate Duns Scotus’s doctrine of similarity. For Duns Scotus, generally speaking, similarity is a relation between different things. In Scotus’s system, a categorial relation is a real thing – i.e., an individual form – really distinct from the thing it relates, and therefore capable of causing real change “toward another” in it. For Scotus, similarity in general will be of this sort. A transcendental relation, on the other hand, such as the creature’s dependence upon God, will be really identical but formally distinct from what it relates. A thing’s self-identity, however, will be a merely mind-dependent relation, corresponding to no reality in the thing. Thus, according to Scotus, things are not really similar to themselves.

As a preliminary note, I also need to introduce a feature of Scotus’s philosophical terminology. Scotus, along with several other 13th c. medieval philosophers, distinguishes between terms/concepts of “first intention” and terms/concepts of “second intention.” This distinction is between concepts that are solely caused by the nature of the real thing being considered in the concept, and concepts that are caused by the activity of the mind precisely as it compares or relates two other concepts – an operation that presupposes the

---

2 “I say that…with regard to a relation there is a change, for it is not intelligible that a new form come to something unless it be changed by that form. And so that to which the new form of relation comes is not changed with respect to itself but with respect to the other [extreme]; and as a form is a being and perfects, so something must be changed by it. And so that to which a relation comes is changed in being ‘toward another’, such that it is now ‘toward another’ differently than before; and this is to be changed by a relation.” Scotus, Lectura II, d. 1, q. 5, n. 214 (Vatican, XVIII, p. 71; translation in Mark Henninger, Relations: Medieval Theories 1250-1325 (Oxford University Press, USA, 1989), 88).

3 Ord. II, d. 1, q. 5, n. 260 (Vatican, vii, p. 128).

4 Henninger, Medieval Theories of Relations, 70-71.

5 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1. n. 18, “[T]he unity required in the foundation of the relation of similarity is a real one. But it is not numerical unity, since nothing one and the same is similar or equal to itself.” (Spade, 61).
simple cognition of a unitary nature in the formation of concepts of first intention.\(^6\) (Since concepts are the meanings of terms, this definition should also make clear which terms are first or second intention terms.) In this way, the concept “human” is a first intention concept, but “genus” is a second intention concept. For, something is a human apart from consideration by a mind. Of course, the actual predication “Xanthippe is human” requires a mind; but, importantly, the content of the concept “human” does not require any operation by the mind other than “reading (that content) off” the thing (so to speak); and this is characteristic of first intention concepts as opposed to concepts of second intention.\(^7\) By contrast, to say “animal is a genus” is just to take all the species concepts that fall under “animal” – “human,” “horse,” etc. – and to relate them to “animal” as to a genus – i.e., to say that they are the species of which ‘animal’ is the genus.\(^8\) This cannot be done except by the mind’s operation of comparison or judgment.

\(^6\) “[E]very second intention is a relation of reason – not just any relation of reason, but pertaining to the extreme of an act of the compounding and dividing intellect; that is, relating [conferentis] one thing to another (this is clear, because a second intention – as everyone says – is caused by an act of the intellect dealing concerning a thing of first intention, because it cannot cause [anything] concerning an object except only a relation or relations of reason.” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 23, q. un., n. 10 (Vatican, v, p. 352; my translation): “Quia omnis intentio secunda est relatio rationis, non quaecumque, sed pertinens ad extremum actus intellectus componentis et dividentis vel saltem conferentis unum ad alterum (hoc patet, quia intentio secunda - secundum omnes - causatur per actum intellectus negotiantis circa rem primae intentionis, qui non potest causare circa objectum nisi tantum relationem vel relationes rationis)…”

\(^7\) “[A] second intention, since it is a being of reason, is only caused by the consideration [negotians] of the intellect), for that to whose knowledge the thing moves before all consideration by the intellect, is not a second intention. However, a res moving the intellect moves to the negation of its own opposite, prior to consideration by the intellect, because such negation follows the thing as a matter of its own nature [ex natura rei] prior to consideration by the intellect…” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 23, q. un., n. 17, text. interpolatus (Vatican, V, 358, my translation): “…quia secunda intentio, cum sit ens rationis, solum causatur per intellectum negotiantem), nam illud ad cuius notitiam movet res ante omnem negotiantem intellectus, non est intentio secunda, sed res movens intellectum movet ad negationem sui oppositi ante negotiationem intellectus, quia talis negatio consequitur rem ex natura rei ante negotiationem intellectus…”

\(^8\) “[I]t is impossible to understand a relation and for [it] not to be toward some term and correlative, just as every second intention requires a correlative (as species looks back to genus for its correlative, and particular to universal, and so concerning others)…” Duns Scotus, Ord. I, d. 23, q. un., n. 10 (Vatican, V, 353; my translation): “…quia impossible est intelligere relationem et non esse ad aliquem terminum et correlativum, sicut omnis intentio secunda requirit correlativum (ut species respicit genus pro
Thus, this secondary operation presupposes concepts of first intention, that it may relate them to one another.

I also want to point out that a pair of things can be similar in one respect, but dissimilar in another respect. Thus, similarity is not an “all-or-nothing” matter. It follows from this that there can be degrees of similarity between things. For example, two human beings are much more similar than a human being and a donkey, although there is still some generic similarity between a human and a donkey qua animal.

2.1 Similarities Classified According to Foundation

In Scotus’s doctrine of similarity, there are at least two ways of grouping the different types of similarity: we can categorize types of similarity according to their different sorts of foundation, as well as according to whether a given instance of similarity has real existence in both its relata or only in one.

Importantly for the first classification, Scotus always draws a real distinction between the real relation of similarity and its foundation. He argues that in general, a real relation is a thing that is really distinct from the thing that is related by it. Since similarity is a type of categorial relation, it follows that similarity will always itself be a really distinct thing -- i.e., a form that is sui generis. Scotus’s arguments for this view make use of the separability criterion for real distinction: If a relation is really nothing other than its foundation, it will be inseparable from it and will therefore exist in whatever circumstances its foundation does. But for real categorial relations, their...

---

9 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, qq. 4-5, n. 200ff (Vatican, VII, 101ff).
foundations can exist without them. Therefore, in all these cases, a relation must be something over and above its foundation. In like manner, Socrates can exist without bearing the similarity relation to Plato (for Plato might not exist when Socrates does). It follows from this in Scotus’s view that the similarity of Socrates to Plato must also be a real thing over and above its foundation.

Thus, it is clear that for Scotus, the sharing of similarity-grounding characteristics is not in itself what similarity consists in—although that may be a necessary and perhaps a sufficient condition for a certain type of similarity. With regard to the metaphysical analysis of similarity (as I will cover in more detail in the next section), Scotus holds that similarity usually consists in the bearing of a real relation by something towards that with which it is similar: in cases of similarity between created things, each thing bears a real relation toward that with which it is similar. However, in cases of similarity between God and creatures, there is only a relation in the creature toward God and not in God toward the creature. For, in Scotus’s view, God doesn’t bear any real relations towards creatures. Thus, God’s similarity to the creature does not consist in the bearing of a real relation on the part of God towards the creature, but only on the part of the creature towards God.

In general, Scotus thinks it is a necessary condition for similarity to exist that there be the appropriate sort of foundation in reality. For a significant class of similarity

10 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, qq.. 4-5, n. 205 (Vatican, VII, 103-104).
11 Ibid.
13 “The same, the similar, and the equal are all based on the notion of one, so that, even though a similarity has for its foundation a thing in the genus of quality, nevertheless such a relation is not real unless it has a real foundation and a real proximate basis for the founding. Therefore, the unity required in
relations, as is clear from chapter 1, this foundation will be a Scotist common nature.

However, as I will now show, Scotus thinks there is also some distinct set of similarity relations that do not require a common nature for their foundation.

For what follows, it is important to consult Scotus’s list of transcendentals. Scotus defined “transcendental” as “whatever is not determined to being in a (particular) genus,” and accordingly lengthened the traditional list of transcendentals.¹⁴ Scotus listed four classes of transcendentals: (1) Being; (2) The “passions” or “attributes” of being – i.e., unity, truth, goodness; (3) The “disjunctive transcendentals” – i.e., “necessary-or-contingent,” “finite-or-infinite,” etc.; (4) The “pure perfections” – i.e., properties which are all possessed by God and are always better to have than not to have, such as “wisdom.”¹⁵ What is distinctive about predicates in all four of these classes is that they do not belong in the categories – or at least, that they have a non-categorial application; and hence (given chapter I), they do not necessarily correspond to common natures in every application. However, they are still importantly descriptive in some way that I will elaborate in the next chapter.

Here is a classification of similarity relations according to different sorts of foundation, from what we might call “less demanding” to “more demanding.” That is, the examples of similarity earlier in the list are more “gerrymandered” or less truly similar than examples later in the list:

---

¹⁴ Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, p. 1, q. 3 (Vatican, IV, 205-207).

1. Two things are similar as a result of sharing some characteristic.

2. Two things are similar as a result of sharing in “being” or in one of the simple attributes of being (here excluding the disjunctive transcendental).

3. Two things are similar as a result of sharing some non-trivial characteristic.

4. Two things are similar as a result of sharing some non-trivial characteristic, as a matter that does not depend on consideration by a mind and such that the characteristic is not gerrymandered.

5. Two things are similar as a result of sharing some form of the same type (whether generically or specifically).

I am using the term “characteristic” quite broadly and pre-theoretically to mean anything at all that can be attributed to something, including attributions that are coextensive with “…is a being” or “…is self-identical.” This seems to be a usage of the term “characteristic” that makes it equivalent to Peter van Inwagen’s “sayables.” In this way, the transcendental that are simply-simple passions of “being” might be “characteristics” and thus would make for similarity according to candidate 2, but there would also be some additional “characteristics” – including the disjunctive transcendental, and any number of gerrymandered properties – that only make for “similarity” according to definition 1 and not definition 2. In definitions 3 and 4, I am using the term ‘non-trivial characteristic’ to refer to any characteristic whose extension is narrower than that of “…is a being” or “is self-identical.” Note that, although the simple attributes of being as well as the disjunctive transcendental both would count as “trivial characteristics” and also as “passions of being” in the strict sense, they are different in that the disjunctive transcendental are gerrymandered.
Given their allowance of gerrymandered similarities, I view candidates 1 and 3 as being poor candidates for similarity, and given that Scotus views similarity as a mind-independent matter, I believe that he would do so as well. Since I am thinking of similarity as a mind-independent matter, and since gerrymandered characteristics seem to be “created” by the mind in some sense, I have engineered the different definitions such that the preferred ones (2, 4, and 5) rule out gerrymandered characteristics. Thus, definition 2 allows the simple passions of being to make for similarity while ruling out the disjunctive transcendentals; whereas definition 1 allows both kinds of transcendental to make for similarity.

These five definitions are also meant to proceed from weaker to stronger candidate versions of “similarity.” Thus, any two things that are similar in any sense of “similar” that is later in the list, will also be “similar” in all of the preceding possible senses of the term – though certainly not by proceeding in the opposite direction.

As I noted, the important difference between the first and second definitions is that the first, though not the second, would admit that two things can be similar in virtue of some mind-dependent or gerrymandered characteristic. One of the reasons for preferring definition 2 over 1 as an interpretation of Scotus’s views on similarity is that Scotus argues that “being” and the simple passions of being are first-intention concepts; they are not caused by the mind’s comparing and relating of first-intention concepts.16 It is less plausible to think of the disjunctive transcendentals in this way, since they are composed of simpler concepts, both of which don’t necessarily characterize the referent of the whole expression. By contrast, the fact that something is “a being” is arguably not

---

16 Ord. 1, d. 8, p. 1, q. 3, n. 136 (Vatican, IV, 221).
dependent on its being thought of as “a being” by the mind – especially since “being” is a first intention. However, it is certainly reasonable to think that “being” doesn’t “carve at the joints” at all, since there are plausibly pairs of beings that are not similar in any substantive respect. Thus, although “being” and the simple attributes of being certainly aren’t gerrymandered predicates, the second sense of “similarity” still seems initially like a weak candidate for the name “similarity.” However, we will see that Scotus actually does have a sense for the term “similarity” that corresponds to the second sense, but that this similarity is what I will call “trivial.”

The third admits any pair of things that share some characteristic that has a narrower extension than “…is a being” or “…is self-identical,” but also leaves it open that either or both things might have this characteristic merely as a result of being considered by a mind or sharing some gerrymandered characteristic. In this way two things might be similar insofar as they are both “recognized by Xanthippe” or are “not-Socrates.”

The fourth admits any pair of things that share a non-trivial characteristic, but not as a result of being considered by a mind. Scotus says God and creatures are “wise” in the same sense of the term; thus, on the fourth candidate definition of similarity, God and creatures could be similar in virtue of being wise, even without sharing a common nature corresponding to wisdom. The attribute “…is wise” is certainly not necessarily coextensive with “…is a being,” and therefore it is not “trivial”; and yet neither does Scotus want to explain it by positing some common nature that God and creatures share – yet Scotus also does not want the attribution of wisdom in a univocal sense to God to be a matter that depends on the mind’s consideration.
The fifth admits only any pair of beings that share the same Scotist common nature. (Recall that I argued there are common natures for all generic as well as specific predicates falling under Aristotle’s categories.)

Now, I want to give textual evidence for as many of these versions of similarity as are really in Scotus, using the texts to describe each of them as thoroughly as possible. I will argue that Scotus holds that there are distinct and irreducible varieties of similarity of types 2, 4, and 5, but not of types 1 or 3.

First, consider types 1 and 3. These types of “similarity” would be (possibly) mind-dependent, and in that case could be based either upon disjunctive concepts, or concepts of second intention according to the schema I set up in the introduction. But consider that if there is such a thing as mind-dependent similarity, it doesn’t seem appropriate that it should come up in a discussion of the real universals. For the project of finding the real universals, as we saw that Scotus conceives of it in Chapter 1, is that of “carving reality at the joints” – that is, it is the project of finding the divisions of things that would be “there” even if not considered by a mind. Furthermore, it doesn’t seem as if Scotus could coherently endorse any type of similarity that is mind-dependent. For him, given that similarity is a real relation, it follows that similarity is something that characterizes things ex natura rei, i.e. naturally prior to any consideration by a mind. Therefore, it seems justifiable to leave 1 and 3 aside. I would argue this conclusion follows just as much for the “disjunctive transcendentals” as for any other gerrymandered...

---

17 For example, “similarity with oneself” would probably be a second intention based upon a first intention. I owe this insight to discussion with Richard Cross.
predicates, since they are just as obviously constructed by the mind.18 One might still wonder, however, whether Scotus commits himself anywhere to thinking that the disjunctive transcendental, in themselves, could make for any degree of similarity, qua passions of “being.”19 Quite possibly, the disjunctive transcendental could make for similarity on the grounds that they are univocal, in just the same way Scotus thinks that “being” and its attributes do. However, any such similarity would have to be both “weak” and “trivial” in senses that I will explain in section III.

That Scotus thinks there is such a thing as similarity in the senses of 2 and 4 is seen from the following passage:

[I]f you say that we conclude something of God through the concept of an effect, where only a proportion is enough and not a similitude, this does not answer, but confirms the argument; because by considering God under the notion of a cause, he is well known from creatures proportionally, but in this way nothing of perfection is known of God...But attributes are pure perfections said formally of God, therefore such are known of God not only by the way of proportion, but also through the way of similitude, so that it is necessary to posit some concept common in such to God and creatures, of the sort that is not common in the first way of knowing God through the way of causality.20

---

18 “These disjunctive attributes are mere abstractions, and any one of each disjunct is just what Scotus calls a mode of its possessor, not a real extramental property but a modification of an abstract non-disjunctive transcendental.” Richard Cross, “Where Angels Fear to Tread: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy,” Antonianum 76 (2001), 23. I will handle the whole issue of “intrinsic modes” at greater length in chapters 3 and 5.

19 That they are “passions of being” is clear from Ord. I, d. 39, q. 1; in Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings (Hackett: Indianapolis, 1987), 8.

20 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 78 (Vatican, IV, p. 188; my translation). “Et similiter, si dicas quod de Deo concludimus aliquid per rationem effectus, ubi sufficit tantum proportio et non similitudo, - hoc non respondet, sed confirmat argumentum, quia considerando Deum sub ratione causae, ex creaturis bene cognoscitur proportionaliter, sed hoc modo non cognoscitur de Deo aliqua perfecti, quae est in creatura formaliter, sed causaliter, scilicet quod Deus sit causa talis perfectionis. Attributa autem sunt perfectiones simpliciter dictae de Deo formaliter, - ergo talia cognoscantur de Deo non solum per viam proportionis sed etiam per viam similitudinis, ita quod oportet ponere aliquem conceptum communem in talibus Deo et creaturae, qualis non est communis in prima via cognoscendo Deum per viam causalitatis.”
In this passage, Scotus implies that every concept univocal to God and creatures must be based upon some real similarity. Specifically, he is addressing the pure perfections, the sharing of which clearly entail some real similarity of type 4. However, the passage also bears upon Scotus’s acceptance of similarity of type 2. For, since Scotus thinks that “being” is said formally of God, the passage entails that an analogy or proportion between God and creatures is not enough for the univocal application of that concept; rather, there must be a real similarity between God and creatures qua “beings” (and likewise for “good” and for the other simple transcendentals coextensive with being).²¹

Further, that there is similitude of type 2 is precisely what seems to be suggested by a phrase Scotus uses – “a similitude of univocation.”²² The phrase implies that there is some real similitude that provides the real basis of the simple transcendental concepts coextensive with “being” that Scotus thinks are univocal to God and creatures. Of course, such a similarity will not be based on any form that God and creatures share. Nonetheless, insofar as there as a common univocal concept, there will also be some real species of similarity corresponding to it.

Further evidence that Scotus accepts similitude of type 2 is that we find Scotus clearly asserting that “being” and the simple passions of being are first intentions rather than second intentions; that is to say, they are real concepts that are not caused by the action of the mind, but by some mind-independent aspect of the thing.²³ Therefore, it follows that in Scotus’s view, there is a real aspect in a thing by which it is “a being” and


²³ Ord. 1, d. 8, p. 1, q. 3, n. 136 (Vatican, IV, 221).
“good,” etc.; and everything that exists will therefore share in these univocal descriptive notes.

It is equally evident that Scotus wants to affirm a “similitude of univocation” for pure perfection terms, such as “wisdom.” It is notable that these terms, although Scotus counts them as “transcendentals,” are not coextensive with “being.” Thus, any similarity that characterizes God and creatures qua wise would be a “non-trivial similarity” and would thus fit description 4 rather than 2. Equally clearly, such a similarity couldn’t be that of type 5, since God and creatures share no common nature, and thus no form.

Ultimately, therefore, all these considerations confirm Scotus’s acceptance of real similarities both of types 2 and 4 – where in neither case is an underlying common nature required.

Evidence that Scotus accepts that there is an independently identifiable class of similarity relations corresponding to candidate 5 comes in his famous discussion of common natures and individuation. One of the arguments for the existence of a common nature having “real less than numerical unity” goes like this:

The same, the similar, and the equal are all based on the notion of one, so that, even though a similarity has for its foundation a thing in the genus of quality, nevertheless such a relation is not real unless it has a real foundation and a real proximate basis for the founding. Therefore, the unity required in the foundation of the relation of similarity is a real one.²⁴

From the context of this argument as being part of the case for the existence of real common natures, it is plain that Scotus thinks that there is a distinct class of similarity relations that require a common nature for their foundation. And if this weren’t enough,

²⁴ Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q.1, n. 18 (Vatican, VII, 398; Spade, 61).
the discussion of “real agreement” in Chapter 1, showed that this relation is a sub-type of similarity that marks out the structure of each Aristotelian category.

This is a good place to bring up the aforementioned systemic challenge for Scotist realism: Why posit common natures to explain similarity if there are cases of similarity they don’t explain? But in response, Scotus might ask: If common natures are needed to explain “similarity,” is the similarity for which they are needed just any type of similarity at all? Scotus’s answer is clearly negative for similarities 2 and 4; Scotus has cases of each of these types of similarity for which he does not think it is necessary to posit common natures. So then, it must be exclusively for cases of similarity of type 5 that he posits common natures. And this type of similarity comprises a distinct, independently identifiable set of real relations which will coincide with the set of all non-trivial, natural similarities among creatures, which is also equivalent to the set of all intra-categorial similarity relations (we saw from Chapter 1 that similarity among creatures is only ever categorial similarity). This makes sense, because according to a view of “essence” that Scotus shares with Aquinas, the common natures or “essences” of created substances, embrace the composite of form and matter. If form is the factor that organizes prime matter (or, for accidental form, inheres in a substance) to constitute a thing of a given sort, it stands to reason that the form (as the determinative factor) would be “properly assimilative” and the ultimate explanation why they are similar. We can also see now that similarity of type 5 is equivalent to the relation of “agreement” as presented in Chapter 1, which, according to Scotus, the Aristotelian categories entirely govern.

A small problem arises here. I have argued that for Scotus, intra-categorial similarity is to be explained by the sharing of some formal component of the same type.
In response, someone might point out that Scotus’s doctrine of prime matter is new and revisionary, in that he admits that prime matter has an actuality of its own. Scotus thinks that this is a necessary condition to preserve the coherence of the Aristotelian analysis of change: prime matter must be independently identifiable from the composite – an actual thing – in order to be the constant substrate of various substantial forms.²⁵ If this is the case, then why can’t prime matter be an explanation for similarity, just as well as form? In response to this worry, I shall only concede that two things possessing prime matter as part of their make-up might very well be similar in virtue of that fact, consistently with Scotus’s doctrine of universals and similarity as stated thus far. Thus, it might be true that form is not always the only explanation for similarity; on this supposition, having an actuality of the same type – i.e. prime matter – might also give rise to similarity. However, this additional sort of similarity would in any case only apply to pairs of material things – and probably only to material substances, as accidents are, strictly speaking, mere forms. Thus, given what I argued in chapter 1, any two things which both possessed prime matter as a constituent would already have been similar, by virtue of both being in the Aristotelian category of “Substance.” On the supposition advanced, the only new thing we would be saying is that they are similar to each other, both in virtue of having forms in the category of substance, and in virtue of having prime matter as a constituent.

In his famous discussion of individuation, Scotus says, “…the main reason for … likening or similarity is the form itself shared between the generator and the

²⁵ Duns Scotus, Quaest. subtil. Metaphysicorum VII, q.5; Ord. II, d.12,q. un.
generated…[F]orm is properly assimilative…” 26 This might suggest that if prime matter contributes to the explanation of the similarity between material substances, it only does so as a function of what it receives from the substantial forms involved in the constitution of those substances. But, given that Scotus thinks matter has a quiddity of its own, this can’t be the whole story. If matter has this quiddity, then a bit of matter can be similar to another bit of matter, in virtue of that fact.

2.2 Similarities Classified According to Structure

As I mentioned, on Scotus’s view there is also a binary classification of similarity according to metaphysical characterization.

(1) Scotus thinks that in cases of similarity between creaturely things, the “similarity” between them amounts to a “respect” or real relation that each created thing bears towards something with which it is similar. 27 Scotus thinks that the real relation of similarity that Plato bears to Socrates, is simultaneous with the relation of similarity – a distinct thing – that Socrates bears to Plato. 28

(2) Whenever there is a case of similarity between God and a creature, however, there is a real relation of similarity in the creature toward God, but not in God toward the creature. As Scotus says, “[E]very relation of a creature to God is non-mutual, but God is

26 Scotus, Ord. II, d.3, pt. 1, qqs. 5-6, nn. 210-211 (Vatican, VII, 494; Spade, 113).

27 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 4-5, n. 205 (Vatican, VII, 103-104).

28 Scotus, Lect. II, d. 1, q. 4-5, n. 253 (Vatican, XVIII, 85-86): “Dicendum quod non est procedere in infinitum in diversis relationibus secundum rem, sed standum est in secundo; quia conceditur ‘Socrates est idem Platonii, et ista identitas est similis vel eadem secundum speciem identitati qua Plato e contra est idem Socrati; ista igitur identitas est eadem alteri’. Qua identitate? Dico quod identitate quae non differt a se, sed se ipsa. Unde illa relation necessario est eadem identati super quam fundatur.”
only spoken of as ‘to the creature’ because the creature is to him...”29 Scotus’s reason for this will be discussed further in chapter VI, but the current lesson is that God and creatures are similar only because of the real relation in the creature toward God. Now apparently Scotus thinks it is right to say of God that God is “similar to a creature” in virtue of the creature’s bearing this real relation of similarity toward God. Scotus understands this to occur in a way similar to the way in which Aristotle thinks that what is known is related to the knower – i.e., that the known thing is not intrinsically modified or really characterized by the knowledge that the knower comes to possess regarding it.30 He is very clear, in line with other medieval theologians like Aquinas, that God never bears any real relation toward a creature.31 Thus, paradoxically, it follows in Scotus’s view that God can be really similar to a creature without bearing a real relation of similarity to a creature. Scotus calls the type of similarity by which creatures are similar to God “imitation.”32 Thus, it follows on Scotus’s view that there is a type of similarity which only entails a real relation in one of the relata.


31 Cf., e.g.: “Therefore, because God lies outside the whole order of creatures, and because all creatures are ordered to Him and not vice versa, it is clear that creatures have real relations to God, whereas in God there are no real relations of Him to creatures, but only relations of reason, insofar as the creatures are related to Him.” Aquinas, ST I, 13, art. 7; translation by Alfred Freddoso.

Cf. Duns Scotus, Ord. I, distinction 30, q. un, nn. 49-51 (Vatican, VI, 192): “Ad secundam quaestionem respondeo quod in Deo non est aliqua relatio realis ad creaturam. Cuius ratio accipitur ex perfecta simplicitate et ex perfecta necessitate Dei…Ex his sequitur quod nulla est in eo realitas quae necessario coexigat aliud a se…relatio autem realis de necessitate coexigit ad suum ‘esse’ terminum illius relationis; ergo in Deo non est relatio realis ad aliud a se.”

As precedents for Scotus’s handling of this issue, consider Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s classifications of the different types of relations. As Aristotle points out, the very concept of a “relation” necessitates at least two “extremes” – i.e., at least two arguments for *relata*, with a relation of whatever notion in between, linking the *relata* in the way proper to it. Further, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Scotus all classify relations according to their metaphysical make-up in either extreme.

In the *Categories*, Aristotle points out that all relatives, by definition, have a correlative which “reciprocates” – however, not all are “simultaneous” in so doing. For most relations, both correlatives exist “simultaneously,” as in “double of” and “half of,” “master” and “slave.” There are some special relations, however; for example “being perceptible”, which are not “simultaneous” with their correlatives – e.g., something may be perceptible without actually being perceived. Here Aristotle points out that there is an ontological dependence of perception upon the perceptible; the former may be destroyed without the latter, but not vice-versa. This seems to be the grain of the idea that some relations may be “non-mutual,” in the sense of only involving a real being on “one side” of the equation. As we see here, something real may “point towards” something which does not occurrently exist – as the perceptible has a real tendency to actualize the perceiver, in the right circumstances, regardless of whether it is actually doing so.

---


Aristotle offers more comments about the different sorts of relations in *Metaphysics* V. 15. Somewhat confusingly in light of the *Categories* passage above, “being perceptible” does not in this later passage imply any real relation in the perceptible to the act of perception. Here, Aristotle gives a three-fold division of relations. First, there are the relations of “that which contains something else many times to that which is contained many times in something else, and that which exceeds to that which is exceeded”: for example, “as double to half and treble to a third…”, or “as what exceeds to what is exceeded.” Relations of this first sort, by definition, involve the comparison of quantities, whether numerical or indefinite. Second, there are relations of the active to the passive: “as that which can heat to that which can be heated…” Relations of this second variety imply the orientation of act in one subject towards some determinate potency, whether the actualization is occurrent or merely dispositional. Third, there are relations “as the measurable to the measure and the knowable to knowledge and the perceptible to perception.” Aristotle draws an important contrast between this last class and the first two classes of relations. He says that the things involved in the first two classes of pairs are relative “because their very essence includes in its nature a reference to something else, not because something is related to it…” For the third class of relations, however, “that which is measurable or knowable or thinkable is called relative because something else is related to it.” Aristotle gives an example: for occurrent knowledge, it is required that there be a real relation in the subject of perception or knowledge to the object, but not necessarily in the object to the subject.

---


38 Ibid., 1612-1613.
Thus, there is not “included in its very essence” a relation of the known thing to the knower, since the known thing does not include “being known” in its essence.

As Aquinas interprets him, Aristotle’s teaching with regard to this third class is that relations in this class are non-reciprocal and non-mutual: i.e. they do not require some real “relation-thing” or accident on both sides.\(^\text{39}\) Thus, Aristotle’s third class is important for understanding the way that Aquinas and the medievals conceive of any God-creature relation: any such relation must not actualize any potency in God, and therefore must not modify God in the manner in which an accident modifies a subject.

Aquinas thus adapts Aristotle’s contrast between mutual and non-mutual relations for theological purposes. Aquinas’s own classification explicitly takes account of the way in which the mind may create a relation that wasn’t there before, merely by comparing things. According to Aquinas, there are three classes of relations: (1) relations that are merely mind-dependent in both extremes – of which sort is a thing’s self-identity, since (he thinks) there is no real relation of self-identity, over and above the thing which is self-identical; (2) relations which are real in both extremes; and (3) relations which are mind-dependent in one extreme, but real in the other extreme.\(^\text{40}\)

For Scotus, among real relations, there is also a division between “mutual” relations and “non-mutual” relations, such that “mutual” relations require something real in both extremes, and non-mutual relations do not. Mutual and non-mutual relations seem

\(^{39}\) “And so there is a real relation in the knowledge and sensation, insofar as they are ordered to knowing or sensing real entities. However, these real entities, considered just in themselves, lie outside the order of knowing and sensing, and so in them there is no real relation to the knowledge and sensation; instead, there is only a relation of reason, insofar as the intellect apprehends them as the extremes of the relations of knowledge and sensation. This is why, in *Metaphysics* 5, the Philosopher claims that these entities receive the predication of the relational names ['sensible' and 'knowable'] not because they themselves are related to the others, but rather because the others are related to them.” Aquinas, *ST* I, 13, 7, trans. Alfred Freddoso.

\(^{40}\) Aquinas, *ST* I, 13, art. 7, trans. Alfred Freddoso.
to coincide, respectively, with the second and third items in Aquinas’s list, and, for “mutual” relations, it leaves open the possibility that the thing “on either side” might be of a different notion from the thing on the other – as “father of” is a relation borne by one thing, but towards a thing which bears the relation “son of” and not “father of” to the first thing. However, among mutual relations, we might also say that some are “symmetrical” (aequiparantiae) in the sense of requiring the same thing “on both sides.” The symmetrical ones, e.g. “similarity” in the usual case of similarity, are such that the same type of relation is borne by each relatum towards the other—and such, in most of the cases with which we are acquainted, is similarity.

All this implies that for Scotus, there is a distinct type of similarity which entails that both relata have some relation-entity in them, and a type of similarity which entails that only one of the relata has a relation-entity in it. In context, this entity is the real relation or “respect” in which, for Scotus, similarity consists. Thus, one might plausibly say that Scotus thinks there is a distinct type or species of similarity that is “metaphysically symmetrical” (aequiparantiae).

Scotus makes a reference to the “symmetrical” type of similarity in the course of Scotus’s discussion of the relation of assumption between the Word and the individual human nature of Jesus. Scotus speaks of this particular relationship as a “proportion.” He argues that there is thus a real analogy or proportion between the Word and the human nature, but that this only entails a real relation in the human nature to the Word, and not in the Word to the human nature:

I say that that union does not say per se something absolute in a supposit, because whatever absolute [be] understood in either extreme, there is not understood a perfect ratio of union, because
union is not understood “ad se.” Either therefore an absolute accompanies [it] in one extreme or in two, since it is not nothing; that is to say “union” entails a respect [i.e. to something else]: but [this union] is not common, such as to be of the same notion in either extreme (of which sort is similitude), because the relation in the assumed nature and the assuming person is not of the same ratio. But the person assuming has no real relation to the assumed created nature, from distinction 30 of Book I [nn. 49-51]; but on the other hand, unless the assumed nature had some relation to the assuming person, nothing would be understood per se through that union …Therefore that union is a relation of asymmetry [disquiparantiae], real in one extreme, to which in the other [extreme] no relation corresponds at all, -- that is, no real relation.41

The point here is in the italicized part of the passage. According to the passage, “similitude” entails a metaphysically symmetrical structure, in which “something of the same notion” is in the subject on either side. But given that God and creatures are elsewhere said to be “similar” without such a metaphysically symmetrical structure, it plausibly follows that Scotus is speaking here of the first sub-variety of “similitude,” distinct from the type of similarity which characterizes creatures with respect to God.

Another passage that confirms that Scotus usually thinks of similarity as a “metaphysically symmetrical” relation comes in his discussion of the reality of relations:

The minor [i.e. there are many relations without which the foundations can exist without contradiction] is clear in all relations of which the foundations can be without the end terms, as is the

41 Scotus, Ord. III, d .1, pt. 1, q .1, n. 14 (Vatican, IX, 5; my translation). “De primo dico quod ista unio non dicit per se aliquod absolutum in supposito, quia quocumque absoluto intellecto in altero extremino, non intelligitur perfecta ratio unionis, quia unio non intelligitur ad se. Sive ergo absolutum concomitetur in uno extremo sive in duobus, cum non sit nihil, saltem unio dicit respectum: non autem communem, qui sit eiusmodem rationis in utroque extremino (qualis est similitudo), quia non eiusmodem rationis est habitudo in natura assumpta et persona assumente. Persona autem assumens nulam habet relationem realem ad naturam creatam assumptam, ex distinctione 30 I libri; e converso autem, nisi natura assumpta aliquam relationem haberet ad personam assumentem, nihil intelligeretur per se per istam unionem. Nec illa relatio in natura assumpta est tantum res rationis, quia tunc ipsa unio non esset realis. Est ergo unio ista relatio disquiparantiae realis in uno extremo, cui in altero nulla relatio correspondet omnino, vel saltem nulla realis.”

92
case in all mutual relations (e.g. likeness, equality, and such-like). For if this white thing exists, and that one doesn’t, this white thing will be without similarity, and if another white thing should come to be, similarity is in this white thing. And so it can be without it and with it [viz. similarity].

The important thing to take from this passage is that “similitude is a mutual relation.” But this shouldn’t be taken as contradictory to Scotus’s statements that the creature’s similarity to God, is “real” only on the side of the creature. Thus, this passage, along with the preceding passage about cases of God’s similarity to the creature, seem to necessitate that metaphorically speaking there are at least two distinct types of similarity: (A) There is the asymmetrical imitation of God by creatures – which only entails a real relation in the creature toward God, and not in God toward the creature – and (B) there is the “mutual” and “symmetrical” type of similarity here mentioned in passing which entails that there is a real relation of similarity in both of the relata. (The analogy or proportion between the Word and the assumed nature is, of course, not a type of similarity; but in its metaphysical description it is structurally similar, so to speak, to the first type of similarity.)

We could say that the division of similarities into types (A) and (B) is a division by “metaphysical characterization,” since it is a division according to what the similarity

---

42 Ord. II, d. 1, qq. 4-5, n. 205 (Vatican, VII, 103-104; translation by Richard Cross): “Minor etiam apparet in omnibus relationibus quarum fundamenta possunt esse sine terminis, sicut est in omnibus relationibus aequiparantiae (sicut sunt simile, aequale et huiusmodi): si enim hoc album sit et illud album non sit, hoc album est sine similitudine, - et si alius album fiat, in hoc albo est similitudo; potest igitur esse sine isto et cum isto. Similiter est in multis relationibus disquiparantiae: si enim iste sit homo, et talis ut nullus alius subit potestati suae, erit sine dominatione, - et ipse etiam potest esse dominus, servorum accessione, sicut dicit Boethius; et ita est de multis aliis, de quibus omnibus non oportet exempla adducere.”
amounts to, in reality: in the one case, it amounts to the mutual bearing of the same type of “real relation,” symmetrically, by both relata towards each other; in the other case, it amounts to an asymmetrical bearing of a “real relation” by one relatum towards the other. In either case, there must be a real relation of similarity, distinct from its foundation.

This division by “metaphysical characterization” is in contrast to the first division into 5 types, which carved up similarity relations according to the types of characteristics they are founded upon.

2.3 Correlation of the Preceding Classifications

Now, of the five types of similarity that were listed according to foundation, how does that listing correlate with this latter division “by metaphysical characterization”? Obviously any type of similarity that can be between God and creatures will be of type A; and we have seen that here, God resembles creatures by similarity of types 2 and 4. Thus, similarities of types 2 and 4 can also be of type A.

However, not all similarities of types 1-4 need be of type A, since creatures can bear similarities of types 1-4 to each other as well – and Scotus seems to hold that a real relation is just what similarity consists in, for creatures. Therefore, among creatures, similarity must always be “metaphysically symmetrical”. Thus, some similarity relations in types 1-4 will also be of type B.

Type 5 only characterizes similarities between creatures, and presumably will be of type B (for that same reason).

Thus, all relations of type 5 will also be type B, while some relations of type B will also fall under types 1-4.
In a passage previously mentioned, Scotus says “…the main reason for …
likening or similarity is the form itself shared between the generator and the
generated…[F]orm is properly assimilative…”43 This passage suggests that whenever
there is a real relation of similarity in a creature, the form of the creature is what in some
way explains the existence of this real relation. Therefore let us set aside, for now, the
issue of whether prime matter can give rise to similarity relations. Even under this
stipulation, notice that some individual form can’t be the whole explanation for similarity,
since in Scotus’s view that real relation might go in or out of existence according to
whether the external thing to which the creature in question is similar, exists. Thus, the
factors affecting the existence of real similarity are of two sorts: (1) the form in the
creature, i.e. the foundation for similarity, and (2) the existence of a distinct object of the
real similarity.

Thus, we have the following picture: Whenever two creatures sharing the same
type of form are both in existence, the form in each of them automatically generates a
real relation that is “toward” the other one. If one of them is destroyed, the form in the
other ceases to generate that real relation.

With regard to God, presumably the forms in creatures still generate a similarity
toward God, but there is no corresponding form in God generating a real relation of
similarity toward creatures.

I suggest we use the following labels, when speaking about the different cases of
similarity in Scotus’s system. Whenever there is similarity in virtue of “trivial”
characteristics, (i.e. the ones coextensive with “being” or with “self-identity,”) we may

43 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, nn. 210-211 (Vatican, VII, 494; Spade, 113).
call it “trivial similarity.” Whenever there is non-trivial similarity, but not in virtue of some shared form – i.e., the similarity that holds between God and creatures in virtue of the pure perfections, which are not co-extensive with being – we should call it “weak” similarity, given that it is not associated with some shared form of the same type. However, it is still real, insofar as it is constituted by a real relation in the creature toward God. Furthermore, whenever there is similarity that holds precisely in virtue of some shared form or formal component, we may call it “strong” similarity.

Thus, we see that in Scotus’s scheme, there are some instances of similarity that are both weak and trivial – i.e. similarity between things that is explained by the transcendentals coextensive with “being.” Likewise, there are instances of similarity that are weak and non-trivial – as when God and creatures share in the pure perfections. Last, all instances of strong similarity will be non-trivial – and this last type is the one for which Scotus posits common natures, to explain it. Furthermore, we can now see that “strong similarity” will be equivalent with Scotus’s “agreement” that was treated in Chapter 1, and thus seems to be a special sort of similarity, meriting its own special sort of treatment. Thus, common natures have a special job to do – explaining “agreement.” “Agreement” is not just equivalent to similarity in general, but is rather a special sort of similarity, associated with a shared formal component of the same type (whether specifically or generically).

Difficult questions yet confront this scheme. Most problematic: why would created essences and forms generate a real relation of similarity to God, when they typically generate relations of similarity toward things that are in the same Aristotelian category as they are? It is easy to see why two things in a genus or a species would
generate real relations of similarity to each other; they have as constituents forms of the same type, presumably forms that are – intuitively and pre-theoretically – “similar” to each other. Thus, it is easy to see how it would follow that they share the same “descriptive notes,” i.e. that they can be characterized by non-trivial predicates which clearly “carve at the joints” and are not gerrymandered. Of course, Scotus thinks that God and creatures also, share the same “descriptive notes” which “carve at the joints” and are not gerrymandered; but it is harder to see what it is about God, essentially and quidditatively – or qualitatively, for that matter – that would attract the real relations of similarity generated by creaturely forms, in the absence of shared species-membership, and in the absence of shared metaphysical constituents of the same type. Thus, the metaphysical account of the similarity between God and creatures may seem to require further treatment.

In the next chapter, I will discuss this similarity as it gives rise to an intrinsic aptitude for God and creatures to fall under the same “imperfect” concepts. We might wish to know what the explanation for this similarity is supposed to be. However, perhaps Scotus would think it is a mistake to ask “why” this similarity between God and creatures exists, if that means we are looking for some metaphysical explanation for it. Rather, perhaps Scotus thinks that the relation of “imitation” by which God and creatures are similar, is itself “brute” in relation to the fact that God and creatures are able to fall under the same concepts.\(^{44}\) In the rest of the chapter, I will say a little bit more about the

\(^{44}\) Cross, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” 18-19: “No relationship between God and creatures can be real in both God and creatures, because God is not really related to creature at all…So the symmetrical relationship that is the similarity of univocation is mind-imposed. What is its extramental basis? Scotus is not explicit about this, but I think that there is a plausible candidate: the relation of imitation or representation that Scotus consistently distinguishes from the similarity of univocation. Imitation is the similarity of the creatures to their exemplar cause, their being ‘measured’ by it…Furthermore, the divine exemplarity is not specifically located in the divine ideas, but in the divine essence… This evidence is not
similarity relation of “imitation” by which creatures resemble God, and that it is different from the relationship of attributio or causal dependence upon God.

2.4 Similarity between God and Creatures: The Vestige

As we have seen, Scotus thinks that creatures may bear a real relation of similarity to God, both in virtue of the transcendentals coextensive with being, and also in virtue of “pure perfection” transcendentals that are not coextensive with being, such as wisdom. Thus, all creatures are in some way similar to God, and some proper sub-set of creatures is also similar to God in virtue of sharing certain perfections with him. Thus, within the set of relations between God and creatures, there is included a class of similarities of type A according to the second classification, such that this class includes similarities of type 2 and also of type 4 according to the classification of similarities by their foundations.

In a tradition that goes back to earlier medieval thinkers, including Thomas Aquinas and Henry of Ghent, Scotus thinks that all creaturely essences represent God in certain general ways, i.e., under certain shared concepts of a transcendental level, while on the other hand, human essence represents God in a comparatively more perfect way. Corresponding to this distinction between more and less complete relations of representation, Scotus draws a distinction between a “vestige” of the Trinity versus an
“image” of the Trinity. In his scheme, among creatures, only humans bear the imaging relation to the Trinity, although all other creatures bear a “vestige” of the Trinity.

The “vestige” is equally in all creatures, and includes at least a certain partial similarity to the Trinity. All creatures are similar to God under the aspect of being and its passions, since all are equally beings, and thus all exemplify the passions of being.46 These are the similarities that constitute the “vestige” of the trinity, since the only ways in which all creatures imitate God, is limited to being and its attributes.47 The vestige involves a less complete similarity than an image, but it is clear that he thinks of the vestige as a “similitude” of the Trinity in creatures:

Therefore, …I say that a vestige is a likeness of a part of an animal, by which it is impressed in something while it is walking. But an expressed similitude of a part is not an expressed similitude of the whole, because it is not so according to the ratio of the whole in itself, nor is it that by which the whole is immediately known, but only by [defeasible] inference, and from this, that [the vestige] is known to represent something of [the whole] . . . It is also clear that if the whole body were thus imprinted upon dust, as the foot was impressed, the impression left behind would truly be an image and similitude of the whole, in just such a way as the vestige is a similitude of a part.48

45 “Vestige” is Latin for “footprint.”


48 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., n. 293 (Vatican, III, 178, my translation): “Quantum ergo ad hoc dico quod vestigium est similitudo partis animalis, a qua imprimitur in aliquid sibi cedens. Sed similitudo expressa partis non est similitudo expressa 'totius', quia neque secundum rationem 'totius' in se, neque etiam qua 'totum' immediate cognoscitur, sed tantum arguitive, et ex hoc quia cognoscitur illud repreaesentatum esse aliquid istius; et ideo si illud suppositum sit falsum, puta quod illud imprimens esset separatum a 'toto' - ut si pes amputatus a corpore imprimeret vestigium - erraret anima circa 'totum' cuius nata est esse talis pars impressiva vestigii. Patet etiam quod si totum corpus esset ita impressum pulveri sicut pes est impressus, ista impressio derelicta vere esset imago et similitudo 'totius', sicut modo vestigium est similitudo partis.”
After describing the general notion of a “vestige,” Scotus goes on to explain that there is a “vestige” of the Trinity in creatures, in the sense that there is in all creatures a similitude and a representation of certain divine characteristics that are “appropriated” to members of the Trinity. (In an understanding of “appropriation” that Scotus shares with Aquinas, certain characteristics are thought of as having a special affinity for a certain member of the Trinity, insofar as the characteristics bear a certain likeness to the personal property of that person.  

But the creaturely characteristics he selects to make this point, involve some of the coextensive transcendentals:

It is not in relations alone that the vestige [of the Trinity] consists, but in some absolute items, and perhaps also in some relation as its third part. . . as Augustine assigns the parts of the vestige, DT VI, last chapter, he says concerning creatures, “all these which were made by divine art, show a certain unity, form, and species.” . . . These three so taken, represent, under a notion of similitude, three [items] corresponding to them in God, because unity represents the supreme unity of the first principle . . . Form [species] in the creature represents the highest beauty . . . Order or operation in the creature represents the most perfect operation in God, and as to this [Augustine] adds: “and most blessed delight/love.” There can also be many other things assigned in creatures, which represent as likenesses, something appropriated to the persons in divinis. And all such perfections are absolute, and represent certain items that are absolute in God, appropriated to each of the persons.

---

49 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ST I, Q. 39, article 8.

50 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., nn. 298-299 (Vatican, III, 180; my translation): “Nec in solis respectibus consistit vestigium sed in aliquibus absolutis, et forte in aliquo respectu sicut in tertia sui parte, secundum quod assignat Augustinus partem vestigii VI De Trinitate capitulo ultimo ubi dicit de creaturis: "Haec omnia quae arte divina facta sunt, et unitatem quamdam in se ostendunt et speciem et ordinem". Unitas autem est perfectio absoluta, sicut patet per exempla sua ibi, "unum aliquid est, sicut naturae corporum" etc.; species etiam, seu forma, absolutum aliquid est, sicut patet per exempla sua ibidem, "sicut sunt qualitates corporum et doctrinae animarum"; ordo autem alium respectum dicit, sed non ad finem ultimum sed ad operationem, - unde dicit: "aliquem ordinem tenet, sicut sunt pondera, collocationes corporum, et amores aut delictaciones animarum". Haec tria sic sumpta [i.e., unitas, species, ordo] repraesentant, sub ratione similitudinis, tria correspondentia eis in Deo, quia unitas repraesentat summam unitatem primi principia . . . species in creatura repraesentat summam pulchritudinem . . . ordo seu operatio in creatura repraesentat operationem perfectissimam in Deo . . . [n.299] Possunt et alia multa in creaturis
As Scotus explains, the items in the triads are each similitudes of “part” of the Trinity, in the sense that the Trinity of the persons is “in the intellect’s conception” a certain (as it were) “whole,” and each item in the triad correlates with some divine attribute traditionally appropriated to one of the persons. Thus, each transcendental property is (as it were) a “part” of this whole, insofar as the person whose property it is, is a “part” of the Trinitarian “whole.”

It would be a mistake to say that human essence represents God under a “special” concept, since according to Scotus nothing in the created world represents God’s essence under a “special” concept – i.e., “as it is this essence.” Nonetheless, according to Scotus, human essence (sometimes) bears a more complete representation of God than do other essences. Human essence is said to be made in the image of God, on the one hand,

assignari, quae velut similia repraesentat in divinis aliqua appropriata personis...Et istae perfectiones omnes se habent absolute, et repraesentant absolutas perfectiones Dei appropriatas personis.”

51 Scotus holds we naturally have no “special concepts” of the divine essence – i.e., concepts that represent the essence just as “this essence.”: “Third, I say that God is not known naturally by the viator in particular and properly, that is under the notion of ‘this essence’ as it is this in itself...[I]f... creatures do not only imitate that essence under the ratio of a general attribute but also this essence as it is this essence – for so it is more an idea or exemplar than under the ratio of a general attribute – therefore on account of such similitude the creature can be the principle of knowing the divine essence in itself and in particular.”
Duns Scotus, Ord. 1, d. 3, p. 1, q. 1-2, n. 56 (Vatican III, 38-39): “Tertio dico quod Deus non cognoscitur naturaliter a viatore in particulari et proprie, hoc est sub ratione huius essentiae ut haec et in se. Sed ratio illa posita ad hoc in praecedenti opinione, non concludit. Cum enim arguitur quod non 'cognoscitur aliquid nisi per simile', aut intelligit 'per simile' de similitudine univocationis, aut imitationis. Si primo modo, igitur nihil cognoscitur de Deo secundum illam opinionem, quia in nullo habet similitudinem univocationis secundum illum modum. Si secundo modo, et creaturae non tantum imitantur illam essentiam sub ratione generalis attributi sed etiam essentiam hanc ut est haec essentia (sive ut 'nuda' in se est existens, secundum eum) - sic enim magis est idea vel exemplar quam sub ratione generalis attributi - ergo propter talem similitudinem posset creatura esse principium cognoscendi essentiam divinam in se et in particulari.”
as well as to bear an image of the Trinity. The human mind bears an image of the Trinity most perfectly when it contemplates God, and less perfectly when it contemplates itself.\textsuperscript{52}

In Scotus’s system, both sorts of representation of the Trinity by creaturely essences may include types of similarity, which as we have seen will amount to a type A similarity (i.e., an asymmetrical bearing of a real relation of similarity to God, by the creature). For both types of representation sometimes involve at least a certain similarity of type A (i.e., disquiparantiae), while the second type, at least, also involves a further component or factor. As Scotus says,

\begin{quote}
[A]s was said in the question “concerning the vestige”—I say that an image is representative of the whole, and in this differs from a vestige, in that [a vestige] is representative of a part: for if the whole body were impressed on dust—as the foot was impressed—there would be an image of the whole, just as that [vestigial imprint] is an image of the part and a vestige of the whole. But this conformity expressive of the whole is not enough [i.e. for having an image], but imitation also is required, because according to Augustine, \textit{83 Questions, Question 74}, “However much two sheep be similar, one is not an image of the other,” because it did not originate to imitate it [non est natum imitari ipsum]; and therefore it is required that an image originate to imitate that of which it is the image, and to express it.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Thus, in addition to similarity, the image of the Trinity requires a further component, involving “imitation” in a certain special way – an image must be “meant to imitate.”

\textsuperscript{52} According to Scotus in Ord. I, d. 3, p. 3, q. 4 (cf. Ord. II, d. 16, q. un.), the human mind bears an image of the Trinity most perfectly when it contemplates God, and less perfectly when it contemplates itself.

\textsuperscript{53} Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 3, q. 4, n. 575 (Vatican, III, 339, my translation): “Quantum ad primum - sicut dictum est in quaestione de 'vestigio' - dico quod imago est repraesentativum 'totius', et in hoc differt a vestigio, quod est repraesentativum partis: si enim totum corpus esset impressum pulveri - sicut pes est impressum - esset imago 'totius', sicut istud est imago partis et vestigium 'totius'. Sed illa conformitas expressiva 'totius' non sufficit, sed exiguitur imitatio, quia secundum Augustinum \textit{83 Quaestionum quaestione 74}, 'quantumcumque duo ova sint similia, unum non est imago alterius', quia non est natum imitari ipsum; et ideo exiguitur quod imago nata sit imitari ipsum cuius est imago, et exprimere illud.”
Presumably because God created the human mind to achieve a certain perfection by contemplating and communing with God, this description is true of the human mind insofar as it contemplates and loves God as the object of the Augustinian triad of “memory, intellect, and will.” It is unclear whether this teleological characterization applies to the vestige as well.

2.5 Similarity to God vs. Dependence on God

Creatures bear both “trivial” and “non-trivial” similarities to God, insofar as they are intrinsically such as to fall under the relevant sorts of common transcendental concepts. Scotus agrees with Aquinas that creaturely perfection is both caused by God and “pre-exists in a more excellent way” in God, such that God shares in no creaturely common nature.54 For Aquinas, this is the relationship of “analogy,” which is supposed to be inconsistent with a univocal description of the things that are thus related.55 Scotus agrees with Aquinas that creatures bear a mind-independent “analogy” or proportion to God – sometimes known as attributio; but also thinks that such a relationship need not exclude the possibility of a univocal description of the things thus related.56 It is important to be clear about what this “analogy” amounts to; here, it is a metaphysical relationship of dependence and priority, a causal one, rather than a relationship borne by

54 Thomas Aquinas, ST, I, 6, art. 2. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, ST I, 13, 4: “These perfections [that proceed from God to creatures] preexist in God in a simple and unified way, whereas they are received in creatures in a fragmented and diversified way” (Freddoso’s translation). Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 116 (Vatican, IV, 207-208). “Thus therefore, from this alone, that God contains the perfections of all kinds, it does not follow that God himself is in a kind, because to contain in that way does not exclude finiteness (for this expression ‘virtually to contain’, is not ‘to be infinite’), -- but rather, from the absolute infinity of God, this very thing follows, as was previously shown.”

55 ST I, 13, art. 5-6.

56 Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 163 (Vatican, III, 100-101).
concepts. In the usage of the scholastics, there is precedent for using the term “analogy” to refer to a mind-independent property of pairs of real things.  

In an analogy or attributio of real things, the things themselves, apart from consideration by a mind, are related by some real relation of dependence, or of metaphysical posteriority and priority. Scotus and Aquinas both conceive attributio as a relation that is either “many to one” or “one to one” (as the case may be) of metaphysical dependence, in which one essence has this sort of priority in relation to other essences. It may occur either within a genus, or between entities, one of which is outside the whole categorial scheme and the others of which are within it. For example, a relation of this sort is sometimes supposed to hold between God and creatures, or between substance and accidents, or between the Word and the assumed human nature. It is also supposed to obtain between the “first species” in a genus and all the other species; for example, between “one” and all the other numbers (each subsequent number is, so to speak, composed of and therefore posterior to “one”).

57 Thomas Aquinas, ST I, q. 6, art. 2; ST I, 13, 5, ad. 1.

58 Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 83 (Vatican, IV, 191).

59 Thomas Aquinas, ST I, q. 4, art. 3, ad. 3 (Leonine, IV, p. 53). Cf. ST I, 13, art. 5.; ST I, 44, art. 3. Cf. Henry of Ghent, “For other beings are attributed to substance as to their one subject, but all creatures are attributed to God as to their one end, one form, and one efficient cause: to the end by which they are perfected in their well-being, to the form in which they participate so that they are said to have the being of essence, and to the efficient cause from which they have it that the being of actual existence belongs to them without qualification.” Summa Quaestionum Ordinarium 21.2, in Henry of Ghent’s Summa, The Questions on God’s Existence and Essence (Articles 21-24), translated by Jos Decorte and Roland J. Teske, S.J. Latin text, Introduction and Notes by Roland J. Teske, S.J. (Peeters – Paris – Leuven – Dudley, MA, 2005), p. 53.

60 Scotus, Ord. I, d.3, pt.1, q .3, n. 163 (Vatican, III, 100-101).

61 Cf. Scotus, Ordinatio III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 64 (Vatican, IX, 30). Here Scotus says that the human nature of Christ and the Word have a “proportion” to each other, insofar as the human nature “depends” upon the Word because of the assumption relation that the Word bears to it.

Duns Scotus’s arguments for the univocity of certain concepts to God and creatures make a distinction between a “unity of univocation” and this “unity of attribution,” indirectly implying that God shares both a “unity of univocation” and a “unity of attribution” with creatures. As Scotus argues in his mature, theological works, the fact that things are related by attributio need not entail that the terms we use to refer to them are merely analogical: rather, univocal terms may be abstracted from the things related by attributio. For, on Scotus’s view, the “order of signification” need not necessarily follow the real order of the signified essences: our mode of understanding, translation from Paul Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals* (Hackett, 1994), 59-60): “According to the Philosopher, *Metaphysics* X, [I, 1052b18], ‘In every genus there is something one and primary that is the metric and measure of all that are in that genus.’ This unity of what first measures is a real unity…Now this unity belongs to something insofar as it is first in the genus…”

63“I say that attribution alone does not entail unity, because the unity of attribution is less than the unity of univocation, and the less does not conclude to the greater; yet the lesser unity may be consistent with the greater unity, just as some items which are one in genus may be one in species, although the unity of a genus be less than the unity of a species. Thus here, I concede that the unity of attribution does not entail the unity of univocation, and yet the unity of univocation is consistent with that unity of attribution, although they are not formally the same. Example: species of the same genus have an essential attribution to the first [species] of that genus (X of *Metaphysics*) and yet a unity of univocation of the notion of the genus in the species themselves is consistent with this. Thus – and by much more – it is necessary in this case, that in the notion of being – in which there is a unity of attribution – the attributes have a unity of univocation, because things are never compared as what is measured is compared to the measure, or as what is exceeded is compared to what exceeds it, unless they agree in something that is one. For just as comparison is simply in what is simply univocal (VII of *Physics*), so all comparison [occurs] in what is somehow univocal.” Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 83 (Vatican, IV, 191, my translation): “Ad alium, de attributione, dico quod attributio sola non ponit unitatem, quia unitas attributionis minor est unitate univocationis, et minor non concludit maiorem; tamen minor unitas potest stare cum maiore unitate, sicut aliqua quae sunt unum genere, sunt unum specie, licet unitas generis sit minor quam unitas speciei. Ita hic, concedo quod unitas attributionis non ponit unitatem univocationis, et tamen cum ista unitate attributionis stat unitas univocationis, licet haec formaliter non sit illa exemplum: species eiusdem generis habent essentialem attributionem ad primum illius generis (X Metaphysicae), et tamen cum hoc stat unitas univocationis rationis generis in ipsis speciebus. Ita - et multo magis - oportet esse in proposito, quod in ratione entis, in qua est unitas attributionis, attributa habeant unitatem univocationis, quia numquam aliqua comparantur ut mensurata ad mensuram, vel excessa ad exceedens, nisi in aliquo uno convenient. Sicut enim comparatio simpliciter est in simpliciter univoco (VII Physicorum), ita omnis comparatio in aliqualiter univoco.”
and hence of signification, may prioritize certain things which are in reality posterior (and vice versa).64

The early Scotus says the metaphysician may consider analogy – i.e. as occurring with respect to terms that signify essences that have a certain real ordering of dependence, or of priority and posteriority, one to another.65 This understanding of metaphysical analogy seems to be carried over to his later works, and may plausibly be supposed to hold between God and creatures (as I have briefly argued), or between substance and accidents,66 or between the Word and the assumed human nature.67 This same type of relation is also supposed to obtain between the first species in a genus and all the other species;68 for example, between “one” and all the other numbers (each subsequent number is, so to speak, composed of and therefore posterior to “one”).69

---

64 “[For a word to be analogous by being predicated per prius and per posterius] seems impossible. Because it is possible not to be acquainted with what is simply prior, when the name is imposed on what is posterior, because what is simply posterior can be prior to us, and so be understood first and signified first. If therefore, that word [vox] is afterwards imposed on what is simply prior, it is clear that it will signify per posterius that for which it was primarily imposed, because it once signified that thing primarily – therefore, always. For a word that is later imposed, does not change in signifying that for which it was imposed; therefore an order of things does not conclude to an order in the signification of words.” Scotus, Quaest. Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis, q. 4, nn. 32 (Franciscan Institute, I, 282-283, my translation). “Secundus modus analogiae supra dictus videtur impossibilis. Quia contingit ignorare simpliciter prius, quando nomen imponitur posteriori, quia posterius simpliciter potest esse nobis prius, et ita prius intelligi et prius significari. Si ergo secundo vox ista imponatur priori simpliciter, manifestum est quod significabit per posterius illud cui primo imponitur, quia illud semel significavit primo, igitur semper. Vox enim postquam imposita est, non mutatur in significando illud cui imponitur, igitur ordo rerum non concludit ordinem in significatione vocum.”

65 QQ. Super Librum Elenchorum, Q. 15, n. 21 (Franciscan Institute, II, 338). Cf. Quaest. Super Praed... (Franciscan Institute, I, 280-284).


67 Cf. Scotus, Ordinatio III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 64 (Vatican, IX, 30). Here Scotus says that the human nature of Christ and the Word have a “proportion” to each other, insofar as the human nature “depends” upon the Word.

68 Scotus, Ordinatio I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 162 (Vatican, III, 100).

69 Scotus, Ordinatio II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 11-12 (Vatican, VII, 396; Spade, 59-60): “According to the Philosopher, Metaphysics X, [I, 1052b18], ‘In every genus there is something one and primary that is
Thus, we see that physical analogy – which presumably obtains only within a genus – might be a sub-species of metaphysical analogy – which sometimes characterizes essences that are not in the same genus.

However, it is important for Scotus that things really related by *attributio* may also be such that a univocal concept can be abstracted from them. As with God and creatures, Scotus argues that this is the case with respect to substance and accidents. Scotus gives an example of how different species in a genus may be related by *attributio* yet also univocally participants in the *ratio* of the genus, arguing that this demonstrates that the same may be true with respect to substance and accidents:

Likewise, the philosopher VII of Physics says that ‘in a genus there lie equivocations’, on account of which there cannot be comparison according to genus. But there is not equivocation so much for the logician, who posits diverse concepts; but as for the real philosopher, there is equivocation, because there is not there the unity of a nature. So, therefore, all the authorities which are in *Metaphysics* and *Physics*, which would concern this matter, could be explained, on account of the real diversity of those [items] in which there is attribution, but with which the unity of a concept abstractable from them is consistent, as is clear in the example. – *I concede then that the whole which is an accident, has an essential attribution to substance, and yet from this and from that a common concept may be abstracted.*

---


107
Thus, the fact that substance and accident are related by attribution does not entail that it is impossible to abstract from them a concept ‘being’ that is univocal for the logician. And so it is for the other univocal terms – they presuppose a real similarity, a “similitude of univocation,” in addition to whatever relationship of attributio possessed by things so related.

Thus, in Scotus’s view, God and creatures have whatever real similarity is implied by the coextensive transcendentals (“trivial” similarity), as well as whatever similarity is implied by the pure perfections (“weak” similarity). However, both these types of similarity appear to be metaphysically problematic and to demand a special account, since they are not explained by the sharing of some common form as a constituent. As the next chapter will show, this account is that God and creatures are similar insofar as they are intrinsically such as to fall under a common “imperfect” concept.
CHAPTER 3:

NATURAL PROPERTIES VS. “PERFECTIONS SIMPLICITER”

IN DUNS SCOTUS

It is time to address the main questions of this study: What is the distinctive role of common natures in Scotus’s metaphysics? Why does Scotus posit common natures for categorial predicates but not for transcendental predicates? And how does categorial predication compare with transcendental predication with respect to “carving at the joints” of reality? These questions are not independent: as I will argue, Scotus posits common natures as the “natural properties.”

My argument in this chapter will incorporate the conclusions of earlier chapters. In chapters 1-2, I argued that for Scotus, (1) the categorial predicates are the ones that correspond to common natures, and (2) the categories are the highest grouping of things according to “real agreement” (convenientia in reale) – a distinct species of similarity for Scotus. Thus, common natures distinctively give rise to “real agreement.” In the current chapter, I will explore Scotus’s account of the univocal characterization that follows on the similarity relation between God and creatures. This relation involves the sort of similarity that accompanies a common concept, but does not involve “real agreement.” I will argue that for Scotus, recognizing “real agreement” (or the lack thereof) is the way to mark out the “joints” in created reality, in a way that is similar to the project of

---

metaphysics as conceived by Ted Sider. My strategy for fulfilling this aim will be to compare-and-contrast common natures with “perfections” in Scotus’s philosophy. Unlike common natures, perfections do not give rise to “real agreement” among those things that have them; similarly to common natures, they are associated with common predication of the same univocal concept.²

In order to answer these questions precisely, it is necessary first to distinguish between two senses of “carving at the joints.” Unfortunately for those who think that there is only one interesting sense of “carving at the joints,” we will see that these two senses of “carving at the joints” can come apart. (1) In one sense, language “carves at the joints” if and only if it implies some mind-independent structure in reality; e.g., a substance-property structure. (2) In another sense, language “carves at the joints” if and only if it uses predicates that track “natural properties” across multiple instantiations.

With contemporary metaphysicians, I use the term “natural properties” in (2) with the definition: “the properties that are not gerrymandered.”³ In this sense, even God’s attributes will count as “natural properties,” since there is nothing mind-dependent about them. However, Scotus holds that every divine attribute, qua infinite, is necessarily

---

² That predication of perfection-terms is univocal without involving shared metaphysical constituents, is clear from two things Scotus asserts: (1) that God and creatures “agree in nothing that is one and the same,” and are thus primarily diverse (cf. Lect. 1, d. 8, n. 129, Vatican, XVII, p. 46); and (2) that God and creatures have some of the same “pure perfections” – e.g., “wisdom” (cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1-2, nn. 38-39 [Vatican, III, 24; Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, pp. 24-25].) Passages like these indicate that, for Scotus, to predicate some univocal perfection of diverse items, does not imply the shared possession of some common metaphysical constituents by those items, but only diverse realities that fall under the same concept. I have been helped here by a manuscript by Richard Cross: “Duns Scotus on Knowing and Naming God: An Essay on the Reception of Greek Patristic Theology in Western Scholasticism,” as well as Marilyn Adams’s “What’s Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?” Journal of Analytic Theology 2 (2014), p. 6, and Cross’s “Where Angels Fear to Tread: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy,” Antonianum 76:1 (2001), 7-41.

uniquely exemplified by God. Thus, in specifying which “natural properties” are of interest to us for the second definition of “carving at the joints,” we should restrict the scope of discourse to the natural properties that are exemplified by things in the universe – since we are interested in finding predicates that “track” the natural properties across multiple instantiations. I construe that, as a matter of theory rather than definition, Scotus believes that the natural properties within this sphere of discourse are realities with less-than-numerical unity in many individuals, which are metaphysical constituents of the things that have them, and also enter into causal relations with things. To be a natural property in this sense will entail “carving at the joints” in the first sense; but the converse is not true, for some predications that “carve at the joints” in the first sense, will not involve predicates that “carve at the joints” in the second sense.

I will argue that Scotus thinks that true categorial predications “carve at the joints” in the sense of perfectly tracking the exemplification of natural properties, while transcendental predicates do not. This is the special role of categorial predicates in Scotus’s philosophy.

I will also argue that for Scotus, transcendental predication in general, and theological predication in particular, although it does not “carve at the joints” in the sense of tracking the predication of natural properties, “carves at the joints” in a sense that implies some structure in reality: otherwise, Scotus thinks, every theological predication

---

4 I.e., that there are three things (the divine persons) that exemplify the attribute, but that there is necessarily only one individual instance of the “attributal perfection.” Cf. QQ. 5, nn. 7-8 (Wadding, 12:125): “...infinitum...habet in se realiter et per identitatem omnem perfectionem simpliciter, sed non habet in se realiter, et per identitatem illud, quod realiter est distinctum ab eo, ergo ab infinito nulla perfectio simpliciter, sive nullum perfectum simpliciter potest esse realiter distinctum.”

would have to be synonymous. Thus, Scotus’s commitments to univocity and to the intelligibility of semantically differing theological predications, rule out a certain view of divine simplicity espoused by Jonathan Jacobs and Jeff Brower: the “divine truthmaker simplicity” view.\(^{6}\) One benefit of Scotus’s view on this matter, as opposed to the “divine truthmaker simplicity” view, is that it allows the “book of the world” to be “complete.” That is, Scotus’s view allows it to be the case that every true proposition has an explanation in terms of true \textit{fundamental} propositions.\(^{7}\) Another benefit is that Scotus’s view does better than the “divine truthmaker simplicity” view in explaining how predicating semantically different perfections of God can be intelligible.

On Scotus’s account, there are thus two sets of predicates which mutually divide and jointly exhaust all the predicates there are – categorial predicates and transcendental predicates. An important contrast in Scotus’s mind between these two sorts of predicates is that transcendentals do not quidditatively or formally imply \textit{limitation} or positive limiting factors, while categorial predicates do.\(^{8}\) Categorial predicates signify things under the aspect of exemplifying common natures – which are of themselves metaphysically limited. At least some transcendental predicates, by contrast, signify things as exemplifying “pure perfections,” which can appropriately be construed as \textit{gerrymandered disjunctions} of (1) \textit{essentially creaturely characters}, with (2) \textit{formally}


\(^{8}\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167-168 (Vatican, IV, 239); d. 8, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 7-8 (Vatican, IV, 154-155).
infinite characters borne by the divine essence.⁹ A perfection in this sense has no “real unity”; but Scotus thinks that each real item that falls under its extension, is intrinsically such that it can be signified by the same “imperfect” first-intentional concept.¹⁰

In the last section, I will address whether and in what sense Scotus thinks that true theological predication is “joint carving” and “fundamental.” Scotus thinks it is “joint carving” in the sense that it always implies some real structure in the world – i.e., God’s exemplification of some “attributal perfection” which is formally distinct from him.

3.1 Overview: Ontological and Semantic Divisions

To get an easier grip on what follows, it is helpful to note that there are at least two divisions basic to Scotus’s philosophy: One division of what is real, and one division of predicable semantic items.¹¹

Ontologically, Scotus divides actual reality into the infinite and the finite. This division coincides with the division between “primary cause” and “secondary cause.” For convenience, we may speak of the “primary side” and the “secondary side” of reality as a whole. On the primary side, there is infinity, causal and existential independence¹², perfection simpliciter, and necessity; on the secondary side, there is limitation, dependence, imperfection or “mixed perfection” (perfectio non simpliciter, perfectio

---

⁹ Here, by “character” I mean an individualized character or trope; as Scotus calls it, “proprium individuum” of some kind; cf. Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 149, 154 (Vatican, IV, 227, 228).


¹¹ By “semantic items” I do not mean utterances or thoughts, but rather the “contents” of those utterances and thoughts – here, the ones which are “atomic”.

¹² With the important exceptions that God’s attributes quasi-causally depend upon him, and certain Trinitarian persons somehow causally depend on others.
limitata\textsuperscript{13}, and contingency.\textsuperscript{14} At least a necessary condition for the contingency among secondary beings is the freedom of the divine will in creating.\textsuperscript{15} Note, however, that within this secondary sphere, there are at least some limited realities to which some pure perfection terms univocally apply.\textsuperscript{16}

The primary side is necessarily uniquely inhabited by a single essence\textsuperscript{17}; the secondary side could possibly have any number of inhabitants – or none. Everything on the secondary side must be related to the unique inhabitant of the primary side by ultimate dependence, according to every dimension of dependence – efficient causal, exemplar causal, and final causal. By contrast, Scotus argues that nothing on the primary side is “really related to” or affected by anything on the secondary side, since every reality on the primary side is necessary and simple.\textsuperscript{18} (Scotus’s version of divine simplicity is compatible with formal distinction, though not act-potency composition).\textsuperscript{19} On either side, the set of descriptions is necessarily coextensive: necessarily, everything that is limited is also dependent, imperfect, and contingent – etc.

\textsuperscript{13} Ord. I, d. 2, q. 3, nn. 187 (Vatican, II, 241-2), (Wolter, p. 94).

\textsuperscript{14} Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 91 (Vatican, VII, 47).

\textsuperscript{15} Richard Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus on God} (Ashgate, 2005), 57-59.

\textsuperscript{16} E.g., consider a created instance of “wisdom,” which will be an accident in the genus of ‘quality’, but is still such as to cause a 1\textsuperscript{st} intention, imperfect concept, ‘[indeterminate] wisdom’. Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 1-2; Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 138 (Vatican, IV, 222).

\textsuperscript{17} Ord. I, d. 2, q. 3; bracketing for now the doctrine of the trinity, which does not falsify this statement, since the persons all share numerically the same essence.

\textsuperscript{18} Duns Scotus, Ord. I, d. 30, qq.1-2, n. 56 (Vatican, VI, 195): “…quod necessarium ex se…non mutabitur secundum aliquid perfecte idem sibi, quacumque positione possibili facta circa alium a se; quidquid autem est in perfecte simplici, est idem sibi perfecte; ergo necessarium ex se secundum nihil in eo potest mutari, quocumque posito circa alium…ergo nulla realitas in primo mutabitur propter positionem quamcumque circa alium tale quod non est ex se formaliter necessarium.”

\textsuperscript{19} Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3
The secondary side is only contingently the way it is, and thus there are other ways that it could have been. These ways comprise different sets of possibilia in different arrangements, which are also “equivocal secondary objects” of God’s understanding, just as much as the secondary objects that actually exist. However, these do not have to have any real or mind-independent being in order for God to understand them.

The secondary side of reality is also what gets “carved up” into the ten categories. As we saw from chapter 1, these are the “highest kinds” insofar as they represent the highest possible grouping of finite things according to “real agreement.” Every created substance that exists has its own essential “perfection,” as well as an aptitude for some really distinct perfective entity – an accidental form – which may characterize it; but since categorial essences are essentially limited, nothing unique to a categorial essence is shared by God. Thus, although God necessarily has all “pure perfections,” it does not follow that God formally exemplifies “all perfections” in the sense of having all positive characteristics.

---

20 Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 90 (Vatican, VII, 47).

21 Ord. I, d. 36, q. un., n. 39, n. 41 (Vatican, VI, 286, 287).

22 Ord. I, d. 36, q. un., n. 27 (Vatican, VI, 280): “[Deus] praecognovit ergo esse existentiae sicut esse existentiae, - et tamen propter istam relationem fundatam non concedit aliquis ‘esse existentiae’ fuisset verum esse tale, scilicet verum esse existentiae ab aeterno; ergo pari ratione nec concedendum est de esse existentiae.”


24 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3.

25 Certain aspects of Scotus’s christology suggest that this is only a contingent truth, since God might “assume” every created substance.
Scotus’s philosophy also makes use of a division of semantic items. Scotus divides descriptive terms or predicates into transcendental and categorial terms. The categorial predicates are only formally or literally applicable within the secondary sphere of beings. Categorial terms include terms describing common natures, as well as terms describing haecceities as such: haecceities are categorial entities, existing in each of the ten categories. Common natures involve essentially limited components such as matter and forms; and haecceities are “limiting” in the sense of necessarily being uniquely exemplifiable by some particular individual in a given Aristotelian category. (See next section for fuller treatment.)

Transcendental terms are defined by Scotus as terms which are not “limited” to signifying beings within any Aristotelian category. Scotus categorizes transcendentals according to four classes: (1) Being, (2) the passions of being, (3), the pure perfections, and (4) the disjunctive transcendentals. We notice that these are not mutually exclusive designations in every case: all of the passions of being are also pure perfections according to Scotus’s usage of these designations, although some pure perfections are not coextensive with “being.” Furthermore, the disjunctive transcendentals are coextensive with being, but they are different from the simple “passions of being” in that they play an important role in Scotus’s cosmological argument for God.

26 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 89
27 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 113-115 (Vatican, IV, 205-207).
28 Ibid.
29 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 39, q. 1 (Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, 8).
Most transcendental predicates Scotus talks about, by contrast with categorial predicates, do not imply limitation. At least it is true that for Scotus, none of the pure perfections imply limitation. It is important to note that some of these transcendental predicates which do not imply limitation, do not semantically exclude limitation, either: thus, at least some transcendental predicates may be applied to things either in the primary or the secondary sphere of beings. However, since common natures are limited to the “secondary” sphere, it is necessary that these transcendental predicates be semantically but not metaphysically univocal. Thus, at least some transcendental predicates may apply to items in the primary or secondary sphere, while categorial terms may only apply to items in connection with a common nature – and thus, only to items in the secondary sphere.

Now why does Scotus posit common natures corresponding to categorial predicates, and not to transcendental predicates? The answer might be thought to have something to do with the fact that categorial predicates distinctively imply limitation, and (most) transcendental predicates do not; after all, this is a prominent contrast between them. But, given my thesis that common natures are supposed to be the natural properties, someone might ask: how is “limitation” associated with the project of “carving at the joints” in the second sense? It appears that this is so only incidentally, insofar as in Scotus’s scheme, (1) God is necessarily unique, (2) everything distinct from

---

30 A possible exception is “finite being.”
31 Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167 (Vatican, IV, 239).
32 (Some transcendental predicates do exclude limitation: cf. “infinite.”)
33 Cf. Chapter 1.
34 Cf. n. 29.
God is created, (3) everything created will have to be limited and imperfect in some way because dependent, and thus (4) no properties possessed by God are “natural properties” of the sort that was relevant for the second sense of “carving at the joints” – i.e., since we cannot track them across multiple instances.

3.2 Categorial Predicates Imply Limitation and Naturalness

In Scotus’s scheme, categorial predicates denote created essences and everything properly and per se pertaining to them, whether in the first or second way. Categorial infima species denote the essences under their own proper notions, while more generic predicates denote them under notions under which other infima species also fall.35 There are also categorial predicates denoting matter and form, the essential parts of species; as well as categorial predicates denoting things that are predicated of species “per se in the second way” – e.g., “risible” of human beings – which do not correspond to common natures that are distinct from the common natures which give rise to them, but are formally distinct “proper passions” of the things that have those natures.36

3.2.1 Categorial Predicates Imply Limitation

Scotus recognizes the intrinsic mode of finitude and limitation that is essentially included in the natures denoted by each type of categorial predicate, whether generic,37

35 Alternatively, generic predicates denote more general common natures, which are common components of the more specific common natures.

36 Thus, they are not included in the specification of the thing’s essence, but “flow from” it as a matter of natural necessity. This is why they are also called “properties” or “propria.”

37 “[Q]uia genus sumitur ab aliqua realitate quae secundum se est potentialis ad realitatem a qua acciptur differentia; nullum infinitum est potentiæ ad aliquum…” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 103 (Vatican, IV, 200).
specific, or pertaining to the essential parts of a species (matter and form). Scotus holds that necessarily, every matter-form compound is dependent upon some prior efficient cause to assemble it. However, given Scotus’s classical theism, created substances which are pure forms (like angels) will have to be limited and dependent upon the first cause, too.

Limitation also follows from designations of categorial individuals as such. Whereas Aquinas held there were no essences of individuals, but that the essence was contracted to individuality by “signate matter” – something outside the essence of a species – Duns Scotus added “individual essences” to the picture; on his view the “individuating principle” belongs to the complete specification of an individualized categorial nature. It is clear that these created haecceities entail limitation on the part of what primarily exemplifies them. It is plausible enough that being Socrates “limits” someone to not being Plato. At any rate, in the Aristotelian essentialist picture that Scotus shares, since it is metaphysically impossible to be Socrates without being human, being

---

38 Given that Scotus holds that the reality from which the species is taken is also in potentiality to the haecceitistic reality, a similar conclusion follows (cf. above), so the species reality must be formally limited.

39 “Forma in creaturis habet aliquid imperfectionis dupliciter, scilicet quia est forma informans aliquid et quia pars compositi, - et aliquid habet quod non est imperfectionis, sed consequitur eam secundum suam rationem essentialem, scilicet quod ipsa sit quo aliquid est tale.” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 213 (Vatican, IV, 270).

Scotus also reasons that everything that can be part of a whole, is exceeded by that whole; but nothing infinite can be exceeded; therefore nothing infinite can be part of a whole. See Scotus, Ord. 1, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 17 (Vatican, IV, 160). It plainly follows from this that substantial forms, just as much as matter, essentially involve limitation, since in Scotus’s view they have an aptitude to be parts of a whole.

40 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, q. 1, n. 57 (Vatican, II, 163; Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, 45-46.).

41 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 107, 134 (Vatican, IV, 202, 220).

42 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 1-6

43 The qualifier is meant to exclude the case in which a divine person assumes a created essence.
Socrates will at least imply the limitation involved in being human. A confirmation of this is that Scotus thinks each haecceity is formally unique to a certain categorial species; i.e., for any given individuating difference, that difference is probably “brutely” and “per se in the second way” connected with an individual in a certain categorial species.44 (It is important to bear in mind that some individual predicates will refer to a divine person or to a divine essence, and ipso facto do not belong to the Aristotelian categories.45)

Scotus teaches that common natures, of themselves, give rise to limitation; while pure perfections do not.46 Furthermore, every essential component or part of a common nature quidditatively includes limitation.47 Thus, “implying limitation” would seem to be the distinctive semantic mark of predicates that are associated with common natures, while all other sorts of multiply-applicable predicates do not imply limitation.48

That categorial predicates imply limitation is further borne out in Scotus’s contention that all items in the secondary sphere are all “limited” insofar as they are part of a whole.49 He holds that each item in the secondary sphere has a secondary-causal

---

44 Cf. Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 89. By “brutely” I mean to invoke the idea that a determining reality is “formally and of itself incompossible” with being in a different genus or species than the one that it is in; cf. Scotus in Ord. I, d. 43, q. un.; Ord. 1.3.1.3

45 What’s the difference between the relations or personal properties in God and the characteristics belonging to the divine essence as such? The personal properties are not formally pure perfections, because each person has all the pure perfections; but nonetheless they must at least denominatively infinite because they are in God (cf. Quodlibetal Questions, 5: the divine essence includes them by its infinity, but there is formal distinction.)

46 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167 (Vatican, IV, 239).

47 Scotus reasons that everything that can be part of a whole, is exceeded by that whole; but nothing infinite can be exceeded; therefore nothing infinite can be part of a whole. -Scotus, Ord. 1, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 17 (Vatican, IV, 160). It plainly follows from this that substantial forms, just as much as matter, essentially involve limitation, since they have an aptitude to be parts of a whole.

48 An exception may be “finite being” – which is transcendental and also implies limitation.

49 Ord. I, d. 30, q 1-2
orientation or “ordering” to other such items, such that altogether, they make up the
ordered whole which is the created universe.\(^{50}\) For each pair of created things thus
ordered to one another, this orientation is a real relation-thing, which characterizes each
finite thing with respect to other finite things.\(^{51}\) To be part of the whole involves being
characterized by this relation, as a subject is characterized by an accident. Every
individual *creatum* is thus potential to being a part of the world of secondary items, with
their inevitable (though contingent) causal and comparative relations to one another.\(^{52}\) In
order to maintain divine necessity and simplicity, Scotus must deny that God is part of
this whole in the way that secondary items are. For he holds to the principle that no
infinite reality is in potency to some other reality; and for God to be part of the world
would imply that he was in potency to being characterized by such a relation.\(^{53}\) God has
no relations to things outside himself. By contrast, every categorial item is part of this
whole, and thus is finite.

\(^{50}\) “omnia creata – quia limitata – nata sunt esse partes totius universi, quod est ‘unum’ unitate
ordinis…et ideo quodlibet illorum est potentiæ ad istam formam quae est ‘ordo’, ut scilicet habeat
ordinem ad aliam partem: et hoc vel secundum eminenticam quae est in naturis diversis in universo, vel
secundum aequalitatem …vel secundum actionem et passionem sive secundum causalitatem.” Scotus, Ord.
I, d. 30, q. 1-2, n. 70 (Vatican, VI, 200).

\(^{51}\) “Per idem potest responderi ad argumentum de quantitate, quia omne creatum ‘quantum’ – sive
virtute sive mole – ad alium ‘quantum’ etsi ponatur posse habere relationem realem (propter hoc quod ordo,
a quo est unitas universi, potest attendi inter talia quanta), tamen quanti infiniti nulla potest esse habitudo
realis ad quantum finitum.” Ibid., n. 71. “Et confirmatur ratio per aequalitatem, quae est relatio realis in
creaturis…” Ibid., n. 72.

\(^{52}\) Ibid.; cf.: “Quaecumque enim possunt esse partes alucius totius, sunt potentialia ad formam
illius totius, … et etiam, si possunt esse partes alucius unius unitate ordinis, possunt esse potentialia ad
formam illius, a qua illud ‘totum’ est unum secundum ordinem…” Ibid., n. 70.

\(^{53}\) “Non sic autem potest ad agens illimitatum et eius effectum, quia illud agens illimitatum nec est
potentiale ad formam absolutam nec ad relationem, propter eius infinitatem.” Ord. I, d. 30, q. 1-2, n. 70
(Vatican, VI, 201).
3.2.2 Categorial Predicates Track the Natural Properties

We may not think that the Aristotelian categories constitute a good list of the “natural properties”; after all, some of them seem fairly derivative. (For example, consider “possession” or “vesture”; is there any good reason to think this property is not reducible to the qualities had by the garment plus some “relation” of the garment and person?). However, I will now show that Scotus’s ex professo account of the categories entails that the categorial predicates are a sufficient listing of the natural properties which can be exemplified by created things, and thus that the categorial predicates “carve at the joints” in the second sense.

This is different from holding that the categories provide a “criterion” for when to posit a natural properties or common natures. If they did so, then for Scotus to know that some predicate was categorial, would give Scotus a conclusive reason to posit a natural property for that categorial predicate. If anything, the order should be the other way round – Scotus should first have some principled reason to think that something is a natural property, before putting it in the official list. Put differently: the fact that Aristotle’s list is traditional, certainly is not a good argument or reason for thinking that something in that list is a natural property.

Certain epistemological issues will affect the form that such a reason might take. A preliminary approximation of the answer is this: It appears that Scotus thinks the intellect has the ability, through abstraction from sense experience, to recognize the essential nature of some categorial things (whether through abstractive or intuitive cognition), to a degree that is sufficient for it to recognize that relations of “real agreement” must follow upon the exemplification of that nature by any pair of beings.
However, this answer is not applicable with respect to the category of “substance,” since Scotus thinks that abstraction cannot acquaint us with the quidditative content of substances under their proper natures. He thinks we only ever directly perceive accidents.\(^5\) It follows from this that the “agreement” between different substances in the same species that follows on their substantial nature, is inaccessible to us.\(^5\) We might still discern their agreement in accidental characteristics, however; and this is also how we would be able to sort them into different species, assuming that their substantial natures give rise (reliably enough) to a set of characteristics by which we could sort them in this way.

Putting these epistemological issues aside for the moment, I will now draw on my first chapter to argue that, for Scotus, the categorial predicates “carve at the joints” in the sense of tracking the natural properties. As we saw from Chapters 1-2, Scotus’s special terminology for describing the similarity between categorial items, is that two items that fall under the same categorial predicate “agree (\textit{conveniunt}) in something real” or that “they agree in a reality.” I will now argue that for Scotus, a (created) property is natural, if and only if the things that have it, “agree in something real.”

I think a good textual argument for this reading is found in passages that indicate the status of the categories as the “primary division of reality.” These passages appeared in chapter 1, in which I demonstrated that Scotus thinks that the categories are the highest grouping “according to (real) agreement.” In one passage, Scotus says: the fact that the

---


\(^5\) Scotus holds that a relation can’t properly be known, unless its \textit{relata} are also known.
categories are the “primary” division of reality, means that no category “agrees”
(convenire) with any other category “in anything real.” He appears to draw the further
conclusion that any divisions lumping together some selection of things from different
Aristotelian categories are, in a certain important way, arbitrary – i.e., that they are not
any more objectively appropriate than other such (category-subsuming) divisions. Or,
that even if they are not wholly arbitrary, they at least do not divide things according to
“something real” that is a metaphysical component – i.e. “quidditatively contained” – in
them. In this case the things in one grouping might merely “agree in a concept.” But
surely, Scotus appears to imply, a division according to “agreement in something real” is
a better one; or at least, this is suggested by his statement that the categories alone are the
“highest kinds.”

In one passage he talks about a division that is different from the division into the
ten categories: suppose we were to classify all the “accidents” into one category, with
“substance” in its own category. Scotus argues that although we might lump certain
categories together like this, the division into (“accidents” and “substance”) is just as
suitable as one into all the categories that are “not-when” as over against the category
“when.” This implies that both these divisions are objectively inferior to the division into
the ten categories. In response to an objector who says that the best general division of
being is into “substance” and “accidents,” Scotus says:

[I]t can be said that accidents agree in something intentional as
‘they are attributed to a substance’ or ‘posterior to substance’; in
which accident does not agree with substance. Or it can be
conceded, if there were a name equivocally signifying substance
and the other most general categories, such as ‘a’, the division of
being into ‘a’ and ‘when’ would be equally convenient as that into
substance and accidents, because on both sides [the division would
be] of [something] equivocal into equivocal and univocal [italics mine].\textsuperscript{56}

Scotus is apparently telling us that both these divisions “carve at the joints” of reality equally well – i.e., not well at all. This appears to be a function of the \textit{artificiality} or the \textit{arbitrariness} of the groupings that are in view: i.e., the fact that we could equally well \textit{construct} either grouping, without any \textit{corresponding reason existing in reality} to determine that one of them was better than the other. Apparently, then, “accident” is not a joint-carving predicate for Scotus, in that two things that are both accidents need not “really agree” in any quidditative component. Thus, the division that is truly joint-carving is the one into ten – not two – most general categories. Similarly, Scotus implies that although the ten categories “agree in an intention” in that they are “beings,” yet none of them agree in sharing any natural property or multiply exemplifiable metaphysical constituent. This is why “being” is not a genus.

In his commentary on \textit{Metaphysics}, Scotus outlines a similar position, although he also mentions a further possibility according to which there is something in which the nine accidental categories “agree,” but that this item is not predicated of these categorial items “in quid” but only “in quale.”\textsuperscript{57} This item is apparently “ability to inhere” in something else. It does not seem that Scotus decides the issue here; but in both passages, Scotus holds that the things in one Aristotelian category do not “agree” with things in another category \textit{according to their quidditative make-up}. The fact that they might agree according to something said “in quale” does not entail that they share something in their

\textsuperscript{56} In Praed. Q. 11, nn. 29-30, my translation.

\textsuperscript{57} In Metaph., qq. 5-6, nn. 107-108.
quidditative make-up, but only that the quidditative constitutions of both of them, necessarily give rise to certain common outcomes – e.g., the “ability to inhere” or “aptitude to depend” on a substance. But the fact that Scotus thinks the ten categories, and not “substance” and “accidents”, are the “highest kinds” indicates that for him, there is an objective and trumping reason to classify things according to their quidditative content, rather than according to what is said of them “per se in the second way.”

In other passages, Scotus also uses the terminology of “real agreement” to describe relations of similarity that obtain intra-categorically, while arguing that any pair of items from different categories are “primally diverse.” This is a further indication that for Scotus, those are the predicates which hold of multiple things in virtue of some natural property.

It is not too much of a stretch to conclude that for Scotus, the predicates that mark “real agreement” are also the ones that carve at the joints in sense (2). Further, this “real agreement” is contrasted with the “primally-diverse-ness” both of God and creatures, and of one category and another. It is also contrasted with mere “[agreement] in something intentional,” as in the commentary above.

Someone might point out that for two things to be “intrinsically such” (nata sunt) that they can agree “in intention,” is not something that the mind causes – as indeed Scotus thinks that God and creatures are both “intrinsically such” as to fall under the concept “being.” Thus far, no problem: Scotus admits that God and creatures, or substance and accidents, are “similar” in being such that they fall under such umbrella


59 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 89 (Paul Spade, Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals, p. 79).
However, as we have seen, Scotus dissociates this matter from having real metaphysical components or real universals in common. The latter phenomenon is a matter which he labels “(real) agreement,” and restricts to things which fall under a given categorial predicate. The former is merely a matter of falling under a common concept.

I already adverted to a possible objection to my reading of Scotus, in the first chapter. There, I mentioned a passage in which Scotus says that a genus “does not have the unity of a nature.” This passage apparently says that only infima species are associated with common natures, and thus that *infima species* are the only categorial predicates that are joint-carving. On this reading, the *summa genera*, as well as predicates intermediate in generality, would not correspond to common natures, and thus would not be joint-carving.

A different objector might think that what I am presenting as Scotus’s view, entails that there are too many possible ways to carve at the joints – namely, ways which carve at joints that things have under more general aspects, as well as ways which carve at joints that things have under more specific aspects. This objector thinks that parsimony demands that we only posit common natures for categorial predicates that are at the lowest level of generality. A similar objection is this: that the rationality of the project of “carving at the joints” requires that there is really only one way to “carve at the joints.” If there were more than one, then finding reality’s “structure” would be hopeless, since there would be multiple equally good -- but conflicting -- ways of “carving.”

---


61 I.e., items with “less than numerical unity” and reality.

An initial response to the latter objections is to point out that joint-carving may be a matter of degree. That the *infima species* would carve at the joints perfectly, is consistent with holding that more general predicates could also carve at the joints to some lesser degree. The fact that there are multiple ways of “carving up” reality, does not entail that structure is a matter of subjective interpretation. After all, it seems possible that the very structure of reality itself, may dictate that there are: (1) perfect ways of joint-carving, (2) less good ways which still recognize *some* (though not all) of reality’s structure, and (3) ways that do not correspond to any structure at all – and these last would be the gerrymanderings. Of course, the best display of carving would recognize *all* the joints. In a passage that fits well with this suggestion, Scotus says that every item in an Aristotelian category has *some* agreement with every other item in that category: perhaps (we might read) not “the highest degree of agreement possible,” but only “some.”

In response to the textual objection from Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, I already suggested reading this passage to say, merely that genera are not univocal “for the physicist,” while they may still be univocal “for the metaphysician.” As I documented in that first chapter, certain passages build up a convincing case that Scotus holds to a scheme according to which there are at least three different perspectives from which a pair of items may be designated “univocal,” “analogical,” or “equivocal”: i.e., that of the logician, the metaphysician, or the physicist. On this scheme, genera may very well correspond to common natures whose univocal reality the metaphysician may discern.

---

63 *Quaest. Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis* Q. 7, nn. 9-10 (Franciscan Institute, 1999, I, 309).
There are other passages from early in Scotus’s career in which he ascribes some “real agreement” to any pair of items within the same genus.64

Last and most important, I urge that the objector’s reading leaves no way for Scotus to differentiate between the case of the summa genera, and “being” – as Scotus clearly wants to do, insofar as he supposes that the categories and not “being” are the summa genera.65 If, as the objector urges, there should be no common nature associated with the summa genera, then it is hard to see how each summum genus could be significantly different from “being.” After all, “being” is not a kind, and each genus is supposed to be a kind. Suppose, as the objector alleges, that there is some pair of items within the same summum genus which do not have any “real agreement”: then the only “agreement” which Scotus can afford that they have is “agreement in a concept.” But items which fall under “being” already have that, by virtue of the fact that they fall under “being.”

The upshot is that in Scotus’s view, all the categorial predicates track natural properties, though some of them (to the degree that they are more specific) track properties that are more natural than others. Furthermore, not only is “real agreement” (on Scotus’s view) a mind-independent matter, and hence a function of non-gerrymandered properties; it also has to do with sharing certain quidditative components in common.

64 Quaest. Super Praedicamenta Aristotelis Q. 7, nn. 9-10 (Franciscan Institute, 1999, I, 309).

65 Cf. Giorgio Pini, “Scotus’s Realist Conception of the Categories,” Vivarium 43:1 (2005), 101: “So, there is an important difference between a genus and being. Things belonging to a genus have some real feature (i.e. a formality) in common. Possessing such a real feature accounts for both their belonging to the same genus and their being different from things belonging to another genus.”
3.3 Perfections *Simpliciter* Do Not Imply Limitation

Scotus’s scheme assigns transcendental predicates a role that puts them in contrast with the categorial predicates. In Scotus’s system a transcendental predicate is a word whose semantic range is not “limited” to any particular categorial essence, but is unlimited with respect to all of them.\(^6\) It is possible, however, that there are some terms that meet Scotus’s definition of “transcendental” but also imply limitation: consider, for example, “finite being.” The definition holds for each of the four types of transcendental predicate in Scotus’s classification: Being, the passions of being, the pure perfections, and the disjunctive transcendentals. Some pure perfection terms, e.g. “being” and “goodness,” are truly univocally predicated per se, whether in the first or second way, of all things. Some pure perfection terms, e.g. “infinite,” only have a transcendental use, and only apply to the primary object. Others will apply both to God and to the creatures that have an intellectual nature.\(^6\) Thus, certain pure perfections will not be coextensive with being, but will apply strictly to God, or to God and some proper subset of creatures.

For the sake of completeness, we should note that Scotus thinks there are also “personal properties” that uniquely belong to each person of the Trinity, but these are neither categorial, nor are they “per se in the first way” pure perfections.\(^6\) These properties are necessarily really the same with the essence, which is formally infinite; yet

---

\(^6\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 113-115 (Vatican, IV, 205-207).

\(^6\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 115 (Vatican, IV, 207): “ita autem potest sapientia esse transcendens, et quodcumque alid, quod est commune deo et creaturae, licet aliquid tale dicatur de solo deo, aliquid autem de deo et aliqua creatura. Non oportet autem transcendens, ut transcends, dici de quocumque ente nisi sit convertibile cum primo transcendentente, scilicet ens.”

\(^6\) Cf. Quodlibetal Question 5 (Wadding, 12: 117ff).
Scotus says that these properties are not “formally infinite,” nor are they formally “pure perfections.” This follows from their being incommunicable, and the source of difference between the persons. These properties probably fit Scotus’s definition of a transcendental, because they do not fall under the extension of the Aristotelian categories, despite their not (formally) meeting the condition on pure perfections.

Scotus notes that some pure perfection terms, e.g. “wisdom,” may have both categorial and transcendental referents: they may apply both to the primary object, and to some limited range of secondary objects which exemplify the common nature of “wisdom” which is in the genus of quality. However, this common nature is not shared with the primary object, and thus the term – although univocal in its application to God and to some creatures – is not uniformly associated with the exemplification of a categorial common nature. Rather, “being” is said “in quid” of the categorial species of wisdom, since each instance of categorial wisdom is a categorial thing; while the wisdom which characterizes God is a proper passion of the divine essence (and thus “being” is not said “in quid” of it). In other words, a categorial instance of wisdom is a distinct thing, perfective of the substance in which it inheres; but such is not the case for God’s wisdom,

---


70 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 113-115 (Vatican, IV, 205-207).

71 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 153: “Ad ultimum, de sapientia, dico quod non est species generis ut transfertur ad divina, nec secundum illam rationem transfertur, sed secundum rationem sapientiae ut est transcendent.” (Vatican, IV, 228).

72 Ibid., n. 155.
which is really the same with God. Thus, the same word can refer to things with radically differing natures.

There is a small worry to address, here: if pure perfection terms can be applied to creaturely perfections which are wholly limited in reality,\textsuperscript{73} then how can we make “limitation” the distinctive mark of categorial predicates? The answer is that, although accompanied by limitation in creatures, the pure perfection \textit{terms} do not of themselves imply any limitation – though they do not rule it out, either.\textsuperscript{74} That is why they can also be present in God, according to the same univocal “\textit{ratio}” – but this ratio will be a concept, and not a real entity.\textsuperscript{75} Unlike terms that are unique to creaturely essences, pure perfection terms can be predicated of God because they can signify realities that meet Scotus’s definition of a pure perfection: i.e., “such as to be absolutely better than anything which is incompatible with it.” Even if all created perfections are limited in reality, the pure perfection words do not imply limitation because they name something precisely as it is perfective of something in complete well-being:

\begin{quote}
Every creature and every perfection essential to it is limited in quidditative \textit{esse}, and therefore a [divine] attribute is not taken from any such [thing]; for by equal reason, a [divine] attribute would be taken from any created essence; but a [divine] attribute is [only] taken from that which is an accidental perfection of a creature – i.e., in being well – which signifies a pure perfection in an underlying substance – since, although as “some nature” it has a limited mode, yet as perfecting something in its well-being, it does not imply any limitation (and thus is a [divine] attribute).\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73} “…quia omnis perfectio limitata (quae tamen ex se non determinatur ad limitationem, quae est pars capta) est ipsa tota limitata…” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 2, n. 38 (Vatican, IV, 168).

\textsuperscript{74} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167 (Vatican, IV, 239).

\textsuperscript{75} Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4

\textsuperscript{76} “[Q]uodlibet creatum in esse quidditativo est limitatum et quaelibet perfectio eius, sibi essentialis, ideo a nulla tali sumitur attributum (pari ratione a qualibet essentia creata sumeretur attributum,
The idea expressed here is that, when we talk about categorial accidents that are perfective of substances according to their natures, e.g., “(moral) goodness” or “wisdom,” we use language that refers to something precisely as it is perfective, and therefore not insofar as it is limited. Thus, although certain perfections are predicated univocally of God and creatures, God and creatures share in no “reality.”

Thus, I advocate this answer for the main question: Duns Scotus only posits common natures to explain “real agreement,” which is the sort of real similarity that entails that both relata are finite, dependent, and limited. Common natures are the “natural properties” exemplified by beings within the secondary sphere. Common natures as Scotus conceives of them are especially fitted to play this role, since they are comprised of forms, matter, or form-matter composites; and it is easy to see that all such items are dependent in the way that they enter into causal or constitutional relations with other things.77

Scotus apparently thinks of created common natures as being “divided” among all the individuals that share them.78 Someone might read Scotus as holding that for something to be “divided” indicates that there is only a limited amount of it to “go around” and thus that, for any given common nature, its essential features are such that it cannot be exemplified by an infinite number of things. However, this is not exactly what

sed ab illo quod est perfectio accidentalis creaturae – sive in bene esse – sumitur attributum, quae dicit perfectionem simpliciter in subjectam substantiam, -- quia licet ut natura quae dam habeat gradum limitatum, tamen ut perficiens aliud in bene esse eius, nullam limitationem importat, et sic est attributum.”

Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167 (Vatican, IV, 239).

77 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, q. 1, n. 57 (Vatican, II, 163; Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, p. 46)

78 In contrast to the divine nature, which is “communicable without division”; cf. Ord. 1.2.2.4, n. 381 (Vatican, II, 346); cf. Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 36, 39-40.
is meant by a common nature’s finitude, which – as Scotus makes clear – is not merely a matter of having a finite number of items under its extension. Rather, suppose (what is probably counterpossible) that there was an infinite number of (e.g.) horses; it would still be the case that equine nature was essentially limited, because every individual horse is a matter-form composite – something with parts less than the whole.

3.4 Perfections are not “Natural Properties” in sense (2)

To further back up the answer that I have offered, I will now show that Scotus thinks that pure perfections, although they are univocal predicates, are gerrymandered properties.

Scotus thinks that God and creatures “share in no reality,” but also that certain perfection-terms apply univocally to both. But what, according to Scotus, is the difference between a “perfection” and a “reality”? And what does it take for certain predicates univocally to be predicated of two different things, in virtue of both things’ equally containing (exemplifying) items of either type?

The case of univocal predications that correspond to a “reality” is clear enough from what has been said: certain predicates are univocally predicated of different things in virtue of “realities” in those things, if and only if those “realities” are both under the same Aristotelian categorial predicate, and thus have some “real less than numerical unity” between them. Furthermore, in every categorial thing, there is a “reality” corresponding to the genus concept, formally distinct from the “reality” corresponding to

---

89 Quodlibetal Questions 5, nn. 3-4 (Wadding, 12: 118): Here, Scotus argues that an infinite cannot be made up of quantitative parts, because each of these would be less than the whole, and everything in an infinite is such that it lacks nothing.
the specific difference,\textsuperscript{80} which can ground “agreement” to all the other things in the
same genus; and likewise for the specific difference, with respect to things in the same
species. In general, essences within the same Aristotelian category automatically
generate a relation of similarity to other essences as actually existing, thus bringing about
a \textit{symmetrically structured (“mutual”) similarity relation} between any two items in a
category.\textsuperscript{81} This symmetrically structured similarity relation is what “real agreement” is,
in metaphysical terms.

The case of univocal predication concerning things that contain the same
“perfection,” however, is more difficult. Scotus thinks that there is some univocal sense
according to which pure perfection terms can be predicated of God and creatures,
founded upon a real similitude between God and creaturely items.\textsuperscript{82} Scotus thinks it
follows from this that there is a mind-independent distinction between items in God,
corresponding to the different pure perfection terms that are predicated of him. However,
this is not associated with any reality that has “real less than numerical unity” in both
God and creatures – or in different creatures that share a similar perfection, for that
matter. Rather, the realities in God and the realities in creatures to which the perfection
terms refer, have no “real less than numerical unity” among them, but rather plurality.

\textsuperscript{80} In Metaph. 7.19

\textsuperscript{81} Lect. II, d. 1, q. 5, n. 249, n. 252 (Vatican, XVIII, 83, 85).

\textsuperscript{82} Thus, in an unfortunate turn, there are different possible classifications of things according to
“similitude” in Scotus, since one such classification divides everything into “things intrinsically able to be
signified univocally by certain pure perfection terms (e.g. “wisdom”)” and “things not thus able to be
signified,” while another such classification divides things into Aristotelian categories of things having the
same natural properties. Under the first classification, an instance of created wisdom would be in the same
class as God; under the second classification, it would not. Scotus apparently mirrors this divergence in
possible schemes by using different technical language that seems to express the two different types of
similarity by which things are arranged in these two classifications, respectively: (1) “similitude of
univocation,” and (2) “real agreement.”
Thus, for both “realities” and “perfections,” Scotus thinks that both types of items, when plural, are distinguished as a mind-independent matter. It is not the mind that causes a distinction between formally distinct *perfections*, just as it is not the mind that causes the distinction between formally distinct *realities*.\(^{83}\) In general, Scotus thinks that for every pair of non-synonymous concepts that apply to the same thing, where these concepts are first intentions and are not a result of a mental comparison, each concept requires a foundation, such that the foundation for one of the concept is not “in every way the same” as the foundation for the other concept.\(^{84}\) Thus, Scotus thinks there is a formal distinction between God’s “attributal perfections,” and between each attribute and the essence, as well as between “animality” and “rationality” in a human being. And these realities are somehow explanatory of the relevant predications concerning God (in one case) and creatures (in the other).

To explain the invocation of the formal distinction here, I posit that Scotus holds as a general, meta-theoretic principle that “every predication involves (some sort of) identity” between distinct items.\(^{85}\) However, Scotus holds that there are formal distinctions and there are formal distinctions (so to speak). That is to say: there are many degrees of “distinctness,” compatible with “formal distinction.” Scotus argues that the

\(^{83}\) “Ad quaestionem respondeo quod inter perfectiones essentiales non est tantum differentia rationis, hoc est diversorum modorum concipiendi idem objectum formale…nece est ibi tantum distinctio objectorum formalium in intellectu, quia ut argutum est prius, illa nusquam est in cognitione intuitiva nisi sit in objecto intuitive cognito….Est ergo ibi distinctio praecedens intellectum omni modo, et est ista, quod sapientia est in re ex natura rei, et bonitas in re ex natura rei, - sapentia autem in re, formaliter non est bonitas in re.” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, nn. 191-192 (Vatican, IV, 260).

\(^{84}\) “[N]umquam esset hic fallacia accidentis ‘intellectione distinguuntur ista, intellectio est natura, ergo natura distinguuntur’, nisi ratio intellectionis extranearetur rationi naturae, in quantum comparatur ad tertium; ergo illa extraneatio praevenit aliquam distinctionem rationis ab illa, in quantum comparantur ad tertium, et illa praevenit distinctionem rationum inter se.” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 190 (Vatican, IV, 259).

\(^{85}\) By “identity,” I do not have in view the Leibnizian sense of identity as absolute indiscernibility. Rather, only “real sameness.”
formal distinction between divine perfections in God is “less” than the distinction between genus-reality and difference-reality in a categorial thing, in that the former does not involve any act-potency composition.\textsuperscript{86} Scotus clearly says that not every pair of items that are “formally distinct” is on a par with other such pairs. Rather, while a created thing may involve distinct genus and species realities such that the latter “actualizes” the former, God may have formally distinct attributes, though they are not at all related to the divine essence as forms that actualize any potency in it, to be a certain way.\textsuperscript{87}

In God, wisdom is not an accidental perfective form, separable from the subject which it perfects. Rather, on account of the infinity of the divine essence and its attributes, each attribute is “really the same” with the essence, and with each of other attributes.\textsuperscript{88} Scotus says that because each of the divine attributes is formally infinite, the cause of their identity remains even when bracketing the divine essence.\textsuperscript{89} This does not hold, however, for creaturely quiddities, which are only the same with each other by being the same with “some third thing” that they are in – i.e., the supposit which includes them.\textsuperscript{90} Scotus further explains that the essence, necessarily bearing its attributal

\textsuperscript{86} Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 135 (Vatican, IV, 220): “[C]oncedo quod compositio rei et rei non requiritur in ente ‘in genere’, sed requiritur compositio realitatis et realitatis, quorum altera – praecise sumpta in primo signo naturae – est in potentia ad alteram et perfectibilis per alteram: talis autem compositio non potest esse realitatis infinitae ad realitatem infinitam; omnis autem realitas in Deo est infinita formaliter...ergo etc.”

\textsuperscript{87} “Forma in creaturis habet aliquid imperfectionis dupliciter...In divinis autem nihil est forma secundum illam duplicem rationem imperfectionis, quia nec informans nec pars; est tamen ibi sapientia in quantum est quo illud – in quo est ipsa – est sapiens, et hoc non per aliquam compositionem sapientiae ad aliquid quasi subjectum, nec quasi sapientia illa sit pars alicuius compositi, sed per veram identitatem, qua sapientia propter sui infinitatem perfectam perfecte est idem cuiilibet cum quo nata est esse.” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 213 (Vatican, IV, 271).

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., n. 220.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., n. 219.
perfections, may be “that by which” (quo) a Trinitarian person is divine, without informing or being part of the person.\footnote{Ibid., nn. 215-216} It can do this even though it is “really the same” with the person. (By contrast, in created cases, such perfective forms are separable.) According to Scotus, something similar also goes for the divine attributes in respect of the divine essence – they may be “that by which” the essence is such and such, without being separable accidental forms, perfective of the essence.\footnote{Ibid., nn. 213-217} Scotus’s main point here is threefold: (1) that, for some forms which are the “that by which” for different predications, those forms are not necessarily really distinct from one another in order to be “that by which.” (2) Further, the “forms” which are the divine attributes, do not actualize or determine any potency in the divine essence.\footnote{Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 209, n. 213 (Vatican, IV, 269-271).} (3) However, where some predications are non-synonymous, the perfections must at least be somehow mind-independently distinct – even if it is the smallest possible degree of mind-independent distinction.

Thus, Scotus thinks that transcendentally common notions do not correspond to common realities; they only refer to perfections, formally distinct from other such perfections.\footnote{“...intentioni generis correspondet propri a realitas, et non sic [correspondet] alii intentioni communi...” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 111 (Vatican, IV, 204).} God and creatures may formally exemplify diverse realities, formally distinct from other realities borne by either, that fall under the same concept, -- and in that sense, they have the “same perfections,” even if “they do not share in any reality.”
No perfection in God associated with transcendental notions is to be thought of as
“potential” or as “actual” in relation to some other reality.95

Thus, in some sense, the “same perfections” may be exemplified by two natures
that are primally diverse. One example Scotus handles, is that angels and disembodied
human souls necessarily exemplify “intellectuality.”96 In context, Scotus is addressing
what he thinks is a fallacious argument that attempts to explain the difference in species
between an angel and a soul, in terms of their different “modes of understanding” or
“intellectualities.” Although an angel and a soul are distinct in species, Scotus thinks this
difference is not to be explained in terms of “different intellectualities.” Quite the reverse:
Scotus goes so far as to say that the intellectuality of angels and the intellectuality of
souls “do not differ with respect to species.”97 He notes that a parallel case to this,
although of wider application, is the way in which every species equally exemplifies the
passions of being.98 Thus, because angels and souls both have the ability to understand
universals, there is some type of ability that is “indistinct” as it is in both.99

95 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 135 (Vatican, IV, 220).
96 Ord. II, d. 1, q. 6
97 “Potest etiam addi...quod intellectualitas angeli, in quantum intellectualitas, non differt specie
ab intellectualitate animae in quantum intellectualitas, - hoc est quod licet iste actus primus et ille different
specie ut considerantur absolute in se, non tamen secundum illam perfectionem quam virtualiter continent,
secundum quam sunt principia actuum secundorum; quod videtur per hoc, quia sunt circa objecta eiusdem rationis et ad objecta eiusdem rationis (et simile huius est: si anima bovis et aquilae different specie, non
tamen propter hoc vis visiva hic et ibi, in quantum talis perfectio et talis, different specie.” Ord. II, d. 1, q.
6, n. 319 (Vatican, VII, 156).
98 “istud autem est bene possibile, quod continentia aliqua different specie et tamen contenta non
different specie, sicut passiones entis contentur per identitatem in entibus quantucumque distinctis et
tamen illae passiones in eis non distinguuntur specie: unitas enim lapidis (quae non est aliud realiter a
lapide) et unitas hominis (quae est eadem realiter homini) non ita distinguuntur formaliter specie sicut
homo et lapis; immo haec unitas et illa tantum videntur differre numero.” Ord. II, d. 1, q. 6, n. 320
(Vatican, VII, 157).
99 “Hoc etiam declaratur per alid, quia sicut in eodem possunt contineri per identitatem illa
quorum est distinctio formalis quasi specifica (sicut in eadem anima inclunduntur perfectiones intellectivae
However, Scotus ultimately qualifies this radical-sounding conclusion, saying that it is true “with regard to the object” but not “on the part of the foundation.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, “on the part of the object” the intellectualities are the same, but “on the part of the foundation” they differ in species. What are we to make of this?

In this case, Scotus attempts to explain how “intellectuality” can be one perfection, multiply exemplifiable by diverse natures, by pointing out that “intellectuality” as such is marked out by the sort of object to which it is directed, rather than the sort of nature in which it is grounded. Thus, since angels and souls both have the ability to understand the same sort of thing – i.e., a universal – they both have the “perfection” of being intrinsically able to do so. However, this approach does not seem easily applicable to every case in which Scotus wants to say that a “perfection” is multiply exemplified, since not all pure perfections are powers: Consider “goodness” or “unity.”

In general, Scotus’s formula seems to be that a “perfection” does not necessarily have any “real unity of its own” in the sense demanded by Scotus’s explication of common natures, but it can still be denominated by the same concept. In a different case, God and a creature are univocally called “good” in that both of them have the ability to cause the first-intention concept of “goodness,” an actual universal or “intelligible

¹⁰⁰ “tamen potest dici quod potentiae, differentes specie ex parte fundamenti (non tamen ex parte objecti), possunt habere actus differentes specie in quantum illi actus dependent a fundamento illius potentiae, licet illi actus sint eiusdem speciei in quantum dependent ab objectis; et tunc concedetur quod intellectio angeli et hominis, de eodem intelligibili, ex parte objecti est eadem specie, ex parte autem fundamenti – in quantum fundamentum est potentiae ratio agendi – sunt alia specie.” Ord. II, d. 1, q. 6, n. 324 (Vatican, VII, 157).
species”101 that equally refers to all things under the aspect of desirability.102 This indicates that what is necessary for two items to be the “same perfection” is that they both have the intrinsic ability to cause the same perfection-concept.103 However, this wouldn’t be the most determinate concept under which such natures could be known; therefore it must be a concept that is liable to be caused both by finite and infinite being, precisely when they are not causing to their full capacity.104 Thus, Scotus implies that the same first-intention concept can be abstracted from things that share no real properties. In a passage that confirms this interpretation, Scotus indicates that when we understand the “good” that is contained in the concept of “this good” and “that good,” what we have in mind is an intelligible species, equally applicable to uncreated and created goods. It is this concept by which we “measure” particulars, to judge of their degree of “eminence” or perfection.105

Someone might worry that this is a circular answer to the question this section began with: “What does it take for two predications to be univocal concerning the same perfection?” Answer: “Well, just that the same concept is possibly predicated in both cases.” This suggests that the similarity associated with exemplification of the same perfection, is a “brute” similarity – at least in the sense that it does not consist in having

103 “[Q]uia res infinita imperfecte intelligitur in objecto formalis finito, pro quantu illud objectum infinitum natum esset facere in intellectu tale objectum formale, si deminute moveret, sicut et objectum creatum deminute movens natum est idem facere; et ideo est commune utrique, quasi similitudo communis et imperfecta.” Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 143 (Vatican, VI, 224).
104 Ibid.
common metaphysical components with any “real unity of their own.” At least, any “unity” collectively borne by the particulars that fall under this predicate will be a merely conceptual unity: a “unity” of quidditatively diverse items, precisely insofar as they are all intrinsically able to cause the same first-intentional concept. Thus, for Scotus, “unity” and “similarity” are two different things, such that “unity” is stronger than “similarity.”

Having “real unity,” then, is not necessary for univocal predication. All that is required is real similarity of some kind.

It is also important to bear in mind that according to Scotus, whether something has a certain perfection can’t be a mind-dependent matter. It is not owing to some mental comparison of one thing to another that a given perfection is possessed by a thing. Rather, it is the intrinsic character of the thing that makes it so.

It might seem a hard riddle to try to understand how the same concept could apply equally both to God and creatures, and to substance and accidents, when the metaphysical machinery that Scotus invokes to handle univocal categorial predication isn’t available. To put the problem in its starkest terms, remember that Scotus wants to hold that each transcendental is a “real concept” and not just a “concept of reason” – i.e., that whether it refers to God or to creatures, it is such as to be caused strictly by the reality in the thing and does not refer to a concept that is brought about as a result of the mind’s relating two

106 Cf. Marilyn Adams, “What’s Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?” Journal of Analytic Theology 2 (2014), p. 6: “…Scotus separates the issue of whether there is an abstract concept that applies to X and Y from the ontological questions of whether X and Y have any common metaphysical constituents…”

107 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167 (Vatican, IV, 239).
other concepts. In Scotus’s philosophical language, this is to say that it is a first intention rather than a second intention.

On Scotus’s view, a large part of the solution to the problem consists in saying that any transcendental concept as undetermined between God or creatures is an “imperfect concept.” That is to say, it is not adequate to its referents – it doesn’t express their full reality as formal objects of cognition – since it doesn’t express the “intrinsic mode” of finite or infinite, which is a necessary part of that complete formal object. For example, there is only a “modal distinction” between a creature’s being and its finitude, or between God’s being and its infinity; and this distinction between a reality and its intrinsic mode is much less even than the formal distinction between reality and reality, or even between formally distinct perfections in God.

Scotus teaches that the concept “being” as it is common to God and creatures, in either application, only expresses the reality without expressing its intrinsic mode. Thus we might refer to this concept as “[indeterminate] being.” But an intrinsic mode is altogether internal to the real formal object of cognition, not as a proper passion of it, but

---

108 “Transcendentia autem non sunt talia praedicata, quia non sunt de eis problemata specialia…ens autem et res ‘imprimuntur in anima prima impressione’ (secundum Avicennam I Metaphysicae cap. 5), et ideo de conceptibus illis communissimis non sunt problemata per se terminabilia.” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 125 (Vatican, IV, 215).


110 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 138 (Vatican, IV, 222).

111 Ibid.; n. 140 (p. 223): “Si autem tantum esset distinctio in re sicut realitatis et sui modi intrinseci, non posset intellectus habere proprium conceptum illius realitatis et non habere conceptum illius modi intrinseci rei…sed in illo perfecto conceptu haberet unum objectum adaequatum illi, scilicet rem sub modo.”

112 Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 108 (Vatican, IV, 202-203). “…illa autem per quae commune aliquod contrahitur ad Deum et creaturam, sunt finitum et infinitum, qui dicunt gradus intrinsecos ipsius; ergo ista contrahtentia non possunt esse differentiae, nec cum contracto constituant conceptum ita compositum sicut oportet conceptum speciei esse compositum, immo conceptus ex tali contracto et contrahtente est simplicior quam possit esse conceptus speciei.”
as something, well, *intrinsic* to it. Thus, this concept doesn’t tell us all there is to know about the reality it refers to: it doesn’t portray a complete “formal object” of cognition. Scotus makes the point that the intrinsic mode of infinity would remain in the divine essence as a “this,” bracketing any attribute that it has.\(^{113}\) In this case, Scotus is talking about the intrinsic mode of infinity that belongs to the divine essence as a “this,” but the point applies generally to the finite intrinsic modes of created beings. The upshot is that a predication or cognition whose content does not manifest the “intrinsic mode” of some formal object, although may tell us something, does not even portray its formal object as the *complete* formal object that it is.

We can extrapolate that Scotus makes the same move in the case of the pure perfection terms. Thus, a formal distinction of perfections always ensures two formal objects, each of which can by itself terminate an intuitive cognition of it; but a modal distinction merely ensures that there is a *part* or incomplete aspect of one such formal object that presents itself for cognition; thus, the object itself causes a concept that does not capture its full reality. Although such an abortive formal object can be the content of a first intention like “[indeterminate] wisdom” or “[indeterminate] goodness,” Scotus tells us that it cannot by itself terminate an intuitive cognition, but only as cognized along with its mode.\(^{114}\)

\(^{113}\) Cf. Scotus, Quodlibetal Questions 5, n. 4 (Wadding, 12: 119): “Ex hoc sequitur quod infinitas intensiva non sic se habet ad ens, quod dicitur infinitum tanquam quaedam passio extrinseca adveniens ill enti: nec etiam eo modo quo verum et bonum intelliguntur passiones vel proprietates entis: immo infinitas intensiva dicit modum intrinsecum illius entitatis, cuius est sic intrinsecum, quod circumscibendo quodlibet, quod est proprietas vel quasi proprietas eius, adhuc infinitas eius non excluditur, sed includitur in ipsa entitate, quae est unica.”

\(^{114}\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 142 (Vatican, IV, 224).
Thus, every concept commonly predicated of things primally diverse is a “thin” concept, in that it can apply to things as widely diverse in character as we could think of. It does so because it doesn’t refer to the proper essential character the thing has, but only to some outcome in terms of conceivability that arises from that. With respect to “being” and its passions, all things virtually contain these concepts. The “pure perfection” terms that are more restricted in scope, also signify “imperfectly” as they are considered as undetermined to the primary or secondary sphere (referring to a numerically different reality in either case).

It is very easy to see how ‘being’ is a thin concept that doesn’t imply any common metaphysical constituents; once we’ve said that two things are ‘beings’, we haven’t said anything substantive or descriptive about them. All that it takes for something to be a real being, is for its nature (whatever that is) to be instantiated. However, a possible objection may arise with respect to other cases of univocity. What about “goodness”, for example? To say something is “good” is to describe it, however minimally. This is even more so, for certain pure-perfection terms that are not necessarily coextensive with being; consider “wisdom.” These cases at least, one might think, seem to require some real structure, or perhaps even a common metaphysical constituent or real property in all the good things. Scotus answers “yes” to the real structure, but “no” to the common metaphysical constituent.

It is certainly true that for all x, the perfective goodness of x is just x’s being fulfilled or perfect in the way proper to it. But then, someone might object: this language

115 ‘Being’ is supposed to be quidditatively included in the notion of an individual, prior to actual existence; thus, on Scotus’s view, what makes an individual “a being” is its common nature rather than its actual existence. This might be thought still be problematic for God, since Scotus agrees with Aquinas that there is no potency in God. But Scotus means by this precisely that there is no unactualized potency. God will still be a being just because he is actual.
of ‘fulfilled’ or ‘perfect’ is presumably also a transcendental for whose multiple applicability an explanation also needs to be given. One might also worry that an attempt to solve the problem of ‘being’s’ multiple applicability by talking about the instantiation of different characters or natures may leave a similar problem unsolved, since the word ‘character’ might be another transcendental term if we want to speak of God as having a character, and we’d have to find some way of explaining how it could apply to both God and creatures apart from a common reality.

Scotus might very well respond that these are pseudo-problems. The term ‘nature’ does not refer to any particular thing’s character, but only to the internal specification, the ‘quiddity,’ of anything we could think of (and so on for ‘fulfillment,’ ‘perfection,’ etc.). It is very true that to speak of created ‘natures’ is to speak of realities that are intrinsically limited. By contrast, to say that God has a ‘nature’ does not imply that he has some intrinsic goal which is realized by the instantiation of some perfective accident toward which he has an intrinsic aptitude, distinct from the mere instantiation of his essence.

3.5 Can Theological Predication be “Fundamental”?

According to a way of speaking popularized by Ted Sider, the goal of metaphysics is “writing the book of the world.” As he and others tell the story, we do this when we describe it in the ways that are most “fundamental,” that fit best with its basic structure, that “carve reality at the joints,” that are most “ontologically perspicuous,” etc. Now, consider cases of theological predication in classical theism, in which we predicate
pure perfection terms of God. In Scotus’s view, does the predication “God is wise” carve at the joints? It seems to me that this question can be interpreted in different ways.

(1) It can be interpreted to mean, “Does theological predication imply some mind-independent, Siderian, structure in God, in virtue of which the predication is true?” This is the sense that is apparently in play when Jonathan Jacobs denies that theological predication is fundamental (although this implies the denial of other senses as well).116 Jacobs argues that there are no fundamental truths about God. Both he and Jeff Brower hold to this view.117 It is an important terminological point for Jacobs that it is not individual or atomic concepts, but truth bearers (e.g., propositions, if that’s your theory) that represent fundamentally or non-fundamentally.118 On this view, there are indeed truths about God, but they are all made true by God – and not by any structure in reality. They are all non-fundamental truths (in the sense that they are all gerrymandered and do not describe reality in an “ontologically perspicuous” way); and furthermore, they are not made true by any fundamental truths whatsoever; rather, they are simply made true by God. Jacobs expresses his view as equivalent with Brower’s view of “truthmaker simplicity,”119 according to which divine simplicity entails that no true theological predication is fundamental; rather, God alone functions as the truth-maker for theological predications, without having any intrinsic structure that makes them true.


118 Jacobs, “The Ineffable…God,” 5.

119 Ibid., 15.
It is a consequence of this view, as Jacobs points out, that there is a sense in which the “book of the world” is “incomplete.” That is, it entails that there are certain truths – namely, all the truths about God – that are neither fundamental truths, nor explained in terms of fundamental truths. For, according to Jacobs’s view, no truths about God are made true by any structure in reality; rather, they are simply made true by God himself.

This, at least, seems incompatible with Scotus’s view that formally distinct perfections in God make different theological predications true. Clearly, Scotus thinks that true theological predications carve at the joints (in Jacobs’s sense). For Scotus at least thinks that there is some real structure in reality, in virtue of which different truths about God are true. This, of course, is the structure that is expressed by Scotus’s affirmation that the divine essence and its attributes are “formally distinct.”

Scotus would have put the equivalent question in different terms: “Is God’s wisdom formally distinct from God and from other perfections in God?” As we see in the ‘infinite sea’ passage, Scotus thinks that the answer to both questions is “yes.” So there may certainly be a mind-independent “joint” between the divine essence as a “this” and the divine wisdom, and between the divine wisdom and other such attributes; and thus some intrinsic structure in virtue of which different theological predications are true.

(2) The above question can also be interpreted to mean “Does the predicate ‘wise’ track the natural properties, in its various applications to God and to creatures?” As my argument in section IV of this chapter shows, Scotus clearly thinks that it does not; rather, as a transcendental, it is an “imperfect concept,” and can equally refer to natures.

---

120 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, nn. 198-199 (Vatican, IV, 268).
that are primally diverse. This entails my reading of “perfections” as gerrymandered
collections of diverse natures. Any term for such a collection of items will not “carve at
the joints.”

(3) It can be interpreted to mean “Does ‘God is wise’ tell us something
substantive, or really descriptive, about God?” The answer to this will be “yes,” because
Scotus holds that perfect being theology would otherwise be nullified. The predicate
“wise” is truly descriptive, even if it does not carve at the joints. We can make further
inferences about God, when we know that he is wise. Neither is it trivial, for it is not
necessarily coextensive with “being.”

3.6 Conclusion

God and creatures “agree in no positive reality” that is in any way “one” with any
“real less than numerical unity”. Thus, God and creatures are only ever similar in virtue
of “perfections” which they have, and not in virtue of common natures. Perfections,
although they are univocal on the side of language, are nonetheless gerrymandered in
reality. Thus, they are not “natural” properties in David Lewis’s and Ted Sider’s sense.
God’s goodness is not the same natural property as our goodness, since the character of
our goodness depends upon our created nature, which God does not share. Thus,
perfections are not natural properties. Rather, they are marked out by their intrinsic
ability to cause a common concept. Thus, in a sense, two different properties may be “the
same perfection.”

A further difference between God’s perfection and ours, is that our ultimate
perfection is an external accident of our nature: a created thing, although it is “good
insofar as it exists” may yet fail to be good according to the character that its nature dictates to be ultimately perfective of it. God, on the other hand, has no such real distinction between his being and his perfection.
CHAPTER 4:  
IS DUNS SCOTUS A TRUE ARISTOTELIAN?

CHALLENGES TO THE FUNDAMENTALITY OF ARISTOTELIAN SUBSTANCE

In previous chapters, I argued that Scotus subscribes to a project of “carving reality at the joints” by describing it in the most natural way (chapter 3), and that he professes the Aristotelian categories as the correct listing of the predicates which figure in these descriptions (chapter 1). In this chapter, however, I will present challenges to the reading of Scotus as an adherent of the Aristotelian project of describing reality. These challenges stem from the ways in which Scotus demotes Aristotelian primary substances from the kind of ontological supremacy that they enjoy in Aristotle’s and Aquinas’s systems, and his elevation of accidents and the essential parts of substance to a correlatively higher ontological status than they enjoyed in the views of Aristotle and Aquinas. Nonetheless, I will show that Scotus retains a different kind of metaphysical supremacy for substance – such that he may best be described, perhaps, as a highly idiosyncratic and heterodox adherent of the Aristotelian project. ¹ The fact that the ten

¹ Cf. Marilyn Adams, “What’s Metaphysically Special About Supposits? Some Medieval Variations on Aristotelian Substance,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes 79 (2005), p 21: “By the time Scotus and Ockham have reified not only the essential components of primary substances but also their inherent accidents, denied that the individuation of any depends on really distinct others, and recognized that each could exist separately from the others at least by Divine power, what is left of the idea that primary substances are ontologically basic? Haven't Scotus and Ockham rather replaced Categories-metaphysics, with an ontology of really distinct individual things (res)? No! There are too many ways to prove that Scotus and Ockham were enthusiastic Aristotelians. It is because their fundamental metaphysical perspective was decisively shaped by the Categories that they spent so much time problematizing it, not least in working out the implications of Aristotelian physics for its interpretation.”
categories are all “joint-carving” in some way, does not preclude “substance” from being
more fundamental than the other categories: Scotus thinks that accidental entities, though
they are things in themselves, are – in the natural run of things – ultimately “attributed
to” substances. My goal in this chapter will be to describe the extent of Scotus’s
qualifications on the supremacy of primary substances.

The reasons for Scotus’s demoting of primary substances include certain
theological tenets, stemming from Scotus’s reading of certain Christian and Catholic
doctrines.\(^2\) However, it would be a mistake to emphasize the theological element in
Scotus’s revisions of the Aristotelian picture to the exclusion of other elements. His
motivations for making changes are also philosophical, as he works out what he sees as
the implications of the Aristotelian project of describing reality fundamentally. In the
course of pursuing this project, however, he departs from certain claims which Aristotle
and Aquinas found necessary for refuting the mechanists.

It is important to note that Scotus alters the project and presuppositions of science
in ways to which Aristotle and other orthodox Aristotelians would have taken severe
exception. In particular, Duns Scotus introduces four particularly un-Aristotelian
innovations: (1) that prime matter has an actuality or essence of its own, prior to being
informed by a substantial form\(^3\), and (2) that there may be multiple substantial forms in a
complete substance; so, for example, the intellective soul is not the only substantial form

\(^2\) I deliberately use both terms because some of Scotus’s innovations are made on account of more
ecumenical doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation, whereas some of them are made on account of
the doctrine of Transubstantiation.

\(^3\) Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 47-48.
in a human body.⁴ A further Scotist step is that (3) in addition to substances, accidents too are “things,” so that they are not mere modes of substance; and it follows that, as a result of divine power, some kinds of accident may exist, apart from actually depending on any substance.⁵ (4) In a similar but opposite case, Scotus thinks that a primary substance may be “assumed” by another substance, in the manner proper to an accident.⁶ The former two cases are natural states of affairs; the latter two may happen, only in the event that God performs a miraculous act that goes beyond the intrinsic aptitudes of nature.

These innovations, especially the first two, may tempt us to describe Scotus as a mechanist rather than a true Aristotelian. However, there are other things Scotus says that sound more Aristotelian and less reductionist. For example, he thinks that the substantial forms of the bodily organs and of corporeity are included in the “form of the whole” – which is more than the sum of its parts⁷; and they are not mechanistic but formal causes. Furthermore, Scotus embraces the Aristotelian view of the physical world according to which natural objects have intrinsic goals that are basic and ineliminable.

I will first limn the contours of the broad Aristotelian research project whose commitments Scotus shares. Next, I will briefly describe certain claims that are distinctive of the “parsimonious” and “paradigmatic” Aristotelian systems of Thomas

---

⁴ Scotus holds that there are many substantial forms in the human being: the intellective soul, the form of corporeity, and individual forms for each of the bodily organs. Cf. Scotus, Ordinatio IV, d. 11, p. 1, art. 1, q. 2; nn. 278-280.


⁶ Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1.

Aquinas, Peter John Olivi, and Henry of Ghent, which Scotus rejects. In the third section, I will list the “metaphysical miracles” and systematic considerations that impel Scotus to revise the orthodox Aristotelian picture, and I will show the modifications that result from each of them. Fourth, I will briefly focus on Scotus’s treatment of the most striking of these miracles – the incarnation – and draw out its consequences for the Aristotelian project of carving reality at the joints. Fifth, I will sketch the connections between Scotus’s philosophical vision, and the vision of metaphysics as being concerned with “joint-carving,” “naturalness,” and “fundamentality.”

4.1 The Goal of Aristotelian Science: Describing Reality Fundamentally

Jonathan Schaffer, a contemporary neo-Aristotelian, has tried to steer contemporary metaphysics away from so-called “ontological” questions. Schaffer wants to deliver metaphysics from the interminable disputes about which linguistic substantives correspond to real entities to which our best theory “commits” us. By contrast, he argues that what metaphysics is really concerned with, is fundamentality. This stance allows for extreme “permissiveness” with respect to candidate “entities,” as long as the metaphysician maintains proper focus upon the issue of “what grounds what.” According to this vision, metaphysicians should be pursuing questions like: “What are the xs, such that the changes in the xs, explain or ground all the changes?” In Aristotelian language,

---

8 Here, consider the arguments about whether there are really tables, or only “particles arranged table-wise.” Michael Rea is a defender of “universalism,” the thesis that every set of objects compose something; Peter van Inwagen is a defender of “restricted compositionism,” the thesis that items only compose something in a restricted set of cases: in van Inwagen’s view, only when they are involved in a life; and some philosophers defend “compositional nihilism” – the view that composition never occurs.

this is to ask, “what are the *substances*?” Indeed, Schaffer (an avowed Aristotelian about these matters) says, “Substantial metaphysics is unavoidable. One might at least try to do it well.”

On this picture, it is less productive to ask whether tables “really exist,” and more productive to ask what gives rise to tables, and how. Similarly, suppose that quarks are fundamental: then, according to Schaffer, there is an obvious sense in which the things composed of them “exist,” but the interesting thing for metaphysics is that these things are less basic or fundamental than quarks themselves. Small things like quarks need not be the only substance-candidates, however: Schaffer himself advocates “priority monism” – the view that the universe itself is the one substance, thus “grounding” everything else. This is arguably more Aristotelian than holding that quarks are the substances, since Aristotle makes wholes more fundamental than their parts.

Note that “explanation” for the Aristotelian need not be limited to causal explanations. Supervenience of certain types of properties upon other types of properties comes in causal and non-causal varieties, and sometimes stems from different descriptions of the same thing. Something may be described in a way that gets at its fundamental nature and dispositions, beyond which no further explanation of its behavior is to be found, or in a way that signifies what logically follows from that, or in a way that signifies its behavior *ad extra*. The important *desideratum* from a neo-Aristotelian perspective like Schaffer’s is to be able to show how substances ground other realities. In order to do this, one must first identify and give the *best* description of the substances.

This particular type of concern with substance has a superficial affinity with a research project in philosophy of mind that is the heir of the “corpuscularianism” of the

---

10 Ibid., 373.
18th century. According to this view, “secondary qualities” like color and sound are sensations in us that are produced by the interactions of very tiny particles or “corpuscles,” in virtue of their “primary qualities” (shape, hardness, weight, etc.). The resonance with the Aristotelian concern for explanation is obvious, even if one is uncomfortable with the subjectivist conclusion. However, the corpuscularian view of living things is the inverse of a truly Aristotelian philosophy, which makes the substantial whole more fundamental than its parts.

Paradigmatic Aristotelians are committed to a project of sorting different descriptions of reality, where the descriptions are more or less fundamental as they are more or less “substantial.” In paradigmatically Aristotelian systems, to identify the “primary substances” according to the categorial framework is to identify the things that are most fundamental.11 Primary substances are the basic building-blocks of the Aristotelian universe, in that other items such as accidents, properties, and secondary substances depend in different ways upon them; and finding the best description of substantial essences is a matter of finding what pertains to them per se, as opposed to per accidens. Thus, any “Aristotelianism” worthy of the name prioritizes a substantial whole over its essential parts and over its accidents in some way. This is true, even if it does not make the parts and accidents necessarily dependent on substance for their very existence.

According to Aristotelians, a substance is not an “aggregate” of its parts, but is something greater than the mere sum of its parts, such that each part is somehow

---

11 Cf. Aristotle, Categories 5, 2a35, trans. Ackrill: “Thus all the other things are either said of the primary substances as subjects or in them as subjects. So if the primary substances did not exist it would be impossible for any of the other things to exist.”
metaphysically subsidiary to the unitary whole.\textsuperscript{12} According to Aristotle, the parts of a substance cannot themselves be complete substances, since every sum of complete substances is a mere aggregate.\textsuperscript{13} Rather, the parts of substance paradigmatically exist, or are intrinsically inclined to exist, \textit{as members} of a complete substance. Thus, true Aristotelianism makes the parts \textit{somehow} metaphysically dependent on the substance. For Aristotelians, not only elements, but also living things like plants and animals are “fundamental” and “substances.” Furthermore, the elements do not exist “substantially” when they are involved in the life of an animal, but are corrupted and exist only “virtually” in it, since the matter that once constituted them, is co-opted by the substantial form of the living thing; and Scotus is a true adherent of hylemorphism in this respect.\textsuperscript{14} So, for Aristotelians, there is no non-living “stuff” in a living being that is more fundamental than the living being itself.

For Aristotelians, accidents are similar to the essential parts of substance, in having a natural ordering or reference to substances. Accidents have a natural dependence upon substances; however, there is a strong and a weak reading of this dependence. The strong reading is that accidents are just “modes” or aspects of substance. In other words, the strong reading holds that accidents are tantamount to substance, precisely as considered under non-fundamental descriptions of it. The weak reading, to which Scotus adheres, is that accidents have their own reality that is “over and


\textsuperscript{13} Aristotle, Metaphysics VII, ch. 16, 1041a 4-6: “No substance is composed of substances.” In \textit{The Basic Works of Aristotle}, ed. McKeon, 810.

above” that of substance, but that they still have a natural aptitude to depend on substances. For Scotus, this does not entail that every type of accident can exist “on its own,” apart from substance; but merely that every type of accident can be the relatum of a real distinction, vis-à-vis the substance in which it inheres. All that is needed to ensure this, is that the substance itself could exist without that particular individual accident.

Scotus thinks that relations are ontologically dependent on substance because they are ontologically dependent on their relata, though accidents of quality and dimensive quantity may not be.15 Both of these readings are at least broadly Aristotelian in prioritizing substance, although Scotus’s reading may be less paradigmatically Aristotelian, insofar as it reifies accidents.

For Aristotelians, talking about “(substantial) quiddities” versus their “necessary accidents” and “properties” (propria) is a way of talking about descriptions of them that are more and less fundamental, respectively. These philosophers first classify characteristics as they are necessary or contingent characteristics of the subject in view, where the characteristics that are de re necessary to a certain subject are “predicated of it per se,” and its contingent characteristics are “predicated of it per accidens.” However, a second division is between those necessary characteristics that are essential and non-essential. For any subject, whatever is de re necessary to it is predicated of it “per se” in one of two ways: whether (1) as one of the notes in its full quidditative description, i.e. “per se in the first way,” or (2) as a “proper passion” of the notes in this full quidditative description, which is not included among the notes in that quidditative description – and

thus is predicated of it “per se in the second way.” For any subject, its primary per se characteristics are a list of characteristics that make up its essence or nature. Its secondary per se characteristics, on the other hand, do not belong to the essence, but “flow from” it; i.e., they are quasi-causally explained by it. This distinction corresponds to the contemporary one drawn by Kit Fine, between characteristics that belong to a thing’s real definition, and necessary characteristics that do not belong to the real definition.

The class of necessary-but-secondary characteristics is the class of “necessary accidents,” “properties,” and “proper passions,” in medieval Aristotelian jargon. Both essential characteristics and characteristics of this kind are de re necessary to a given subject, but properties are not as fundamental to it, in the sense that the concept of its essential nature does not make reference to them. However, in Aristotelian science, “properties” are conceived as a manifestation of the inner nature, upon which they “follow.” An Aristotelian example of a “property” is “snubness” – a characteristic which flows from the inner nature of “nose,” and relies for its intelligibility upon the proper concept of “nose,” but is not included in that concept. Thus, the predication “a nose is

16 Cf. Aquinas, ST I, q. 76, article 3, trans. Freddoso: “Things derived from different forms are such that either (a) they are predicated of one another per accidens, if the forms are not ordered to one another, as when we say that something white is sweet, or (b), if the forms are ordered to one another, then there will be per se predication in the second mode of per se predication, since the subject occurs in the definition of the predicate. For instance, a surface is a prerequisite for color, and so if we say that a body with a surface is colored, this will be the second mode of per se predication. Therefore, if the form from which something is called ‘an animal’ were different from the form from which it is called ‘a man’, then either (a) one of them would be able to be predicated of the other only per accidens, if they have no ordering with respect to one another, or (b) there would be a predication in the second mode of per se predication, if one of the souls were a prerequisite for the other.”


19 “It is a difficult question, if one denies that a formula with an added determinant is a definition, whether any of the terms that are not single but coupled will be definable. For we must explain them by
“snub” is called “per se in the second way” since the notion of the subject does not involve the notion of the predicate, but the notion of the predicate requires the notion of the subject to be intelligible.\textsuperscript{20} For the Aristotelian, “science” is a practice of infallibly demonstrating the properties that pertain to subjects in virtue of their essential natures, through the prior knowledge of those essential natures under their most fundamental descriptions.

Scotus thinks that proper passions are genuine “accidents” in the sense of falling outside of the definition of that which they characterize, even though they are \textit{de re} necessary to their subject.\textsuperscript{21} Neither, in Scotus’s view, does the complete concept of a proper passion make reference to its subject.\textsuperscript{22} Scotus argues that for “being” to be included in the proper concepts of ultimate differences and proper passions – as it already is in the common concepts which those denominate – would entail that every definition adding a determinant. E.g. there is a nose, and concavity, and snubness, which is compounded out of the two by the presence of the one in the other, and \textit{it is not by accident that the nose has the attribute either of concavity or of snubness, but in virtue of its nature; nor do they attach to it as whiteness does to Callias, or to man (because Callias, who happens to be a man, is white), but as ‘male’ attaches to animal and ‘equal’ to quantity, and as all so-called ‘attributes propter se’ attach to their subjects. And such attributes are those in which is involved either the formula or the name of the subject of the particular attribute, and which cannot be explained without this; e.g. white can be explained apart from man, but not female apart from animal. Therefore there is either no essence and definition of any of these things, or if there is, it is in another sense….” Aristotle, Metaphysics VII, ch. 5, 1030b14-37 (in \textit{The Basic Works of Aristotle}, ed. McKeon [Modern Library: New York, 2001], pp. 788-789).

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} “Item, quaero: qualiter predicatur [proprietas] de subjecto? Vel per accidens, et tunc magis est in genere accidentalis quam passio, quia passio per se predicatur. Si per se primo modo, tunc est de essentia rei; quod est contradictio. Si secundo modo, tunc subjectum cadit in definitione praedicati sicut additum; sed omne tale vere est accidens.” Scotus, In Metaph. V, qq. 5-6, n. 54 (Franciscan Institute, III, 459).

\textsuperscript{22} “Passio ‘per se secundo modo’ praedicatur de subjecto … - ergo subjectum ponitur in definitione passionis sicut additum… Ens ergo in ratione suae passionis cadit ut additum…ergo non est ‘per se primo modo’ in ratione quidditativa eorum… Igitur si ista est per se secundo modo ‘ens est unum’, haec ‘unum est ens’ non est per se primo modo sed quasi per accidens, sicut ista ‘risibile est homo’.” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 134 (Vatican, III, 83).
was redundant. Rather, the description of a subject according to its “proper passion” must always be an *adjectival* one. Thus, proper passions come into language as adjectives that are predicated *per se* of nouns which do not include them in their definitions: e.g., “risible” is predicated *per se* in the second way of “human being.”

4.2 Parsimonious, Paradigmatic, & Profligate Aristotelianisms

As I will show, we can place Scotus within the same broadly Aristotelian tradition I have been describing. However, Scotus makes certain revisionary contributions to the tradition, which alter the character of some of its most distinctive theoretical posits of “matter,” “form,” “substance,” and “accidents,” from their paradigmatic formulations.

If we classify different Aristotelianisms according to a dichotomy of “paradigmatic” vs. “revisionary” in terms of whether they grant possible existential autonomy to the essential parts and characteristics of substance, Scotus falls on the “revisionary” end – he grants possible existential autonomy to prime matter, substantial forms, and absolute accidents. That is, Scotus is “revisionary” in holding that there is at least a metaphysical or “broadly logical” possibility that prime matter, substantial form, and absolute accidents can exist apart from substance.

Furthermore, if we rank different Aristotelianisms along a scale from “parsimonious” to “profligate” in terms of the variety of different types of real entities

---

23 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 161 (Vatican, III, 99-100). Cf. Aristotle: “But there is also a second difficulty about them. For if snub nose and concave nose are the same thing, snub and concave will be the same thing; but if snub and concave are not the same (because it is impossible to speak of snubness apart from the thing of which it is an attribute propter se, for snubness is concavity-in-a-nose), either it is impossible to say ‘snub nose’ or the same thing will have been said twice, concave-nose nose; for snub nose will be concave-nose nose. And so it is absurd that such things should have an essence; if they have, there will be an infinite regress; for in snub-nose nose yet another ‘nose’ will be involved.” Aristotle, Metaphysics VII, ch. 5, 1030b14-37 (in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. McKeon [Modern Library: New York, 2001], pp. 788-789).
that they posit, Scotus’s Aristotelianism falls on the “profligate” end of the scale — he
gives to (1) individual accidents in each one of the nine accidental categories, (2) prime
matter, (3) substantial form, and (4) common natures, each their own proper reality.24
Scotus disagrees with the “parsimonious” and “paradigmatic” Aristotelians, concerning
the ontological status and metaphysical separability of substantial form, accidents, or
prime matter — variously, depending on which interlocutor is in view.

In “parsimonious” formulations of Aristotelianism, the fundamentality *motif* tends
to require that accidents have no reality of their own, distinct from that of the primary
substances in which they exist. For examples of this, see the systems of Peter John Olivi,
(partly) Henry of Ghent, and Thomas Aquinas.25 Parsimonious Aristotelians hold to the
“strong reading” of the ontological dependence of accidents upon substance. According
to these views, accidents have no reality of their own, but are merely modes of

24 Giorgio Pini points out that we can distinguish Scotus’s “realism” about individual items in the
categories, from his “realism” about common natures: “One might maintain that categories are really
distinct kinds of things while disallowing Scotus’s realism concerning universals. Conversely, one might
hold that things in the extramental world are constituted of two formally non-identical constituents [i.e., a
common nature and a haecceity] while rejecting Scotus’s strong realism concerning categories.” Pini,
“Scotus’s Realist Conception of the Categories: His Legacy to Late Medieval Debates,” *Vivarium* 43:1
(2005), 64.

from the standard position that not all categories are distinct essences and extended this consideration to all
categories.” He quotes Olivi, *Quodlibeta*, Venetiis 1509, q. 3, f. 20, as quoted in E Bettoni, *Le dottrine
secundum quod sunt aptae natae intelligi et significare sub diversa coordinatione generum et specierum. Et
tunc si eadem essentia <habet> in se plures rationes aptas natae intelligi per modum diversorum generum in
diversis praedicamentis existentium, tunc nihil inconveniens si secundum unam sui rationem in uno
praedicamento et secundum aliam in alio.”

Pini describes Henry of Ghent’s view in this way: “Substance, Quality, and Quantity have each
their own res…Matters are different for the remaining seven categories, however. Even though each one of
them is composed of a thing and a mode, the thing in question is not proper to them…So, a relation is a
combination of a thing belonging to Substance or Quality or Quantity and a mode proper to the category of
relation. Each one of the other non-absolute categories is a combination of a thing belonging to Substance,
Quality or Quantity together with a relation. Thus, according to Henry, there are only three kinds of things:
substances, qualities, and quantities.” Pini, “Scotus’s Realist Conception of the Categories.” 72. He cites
Henry of Ghent’s *Summa Quaestiones Ordinariae*, a. 32, q. 5, in *Opera Omnia* XXVII, ed. R. Macken
presentation or modes of existence for substance. Aquinas is also a “parsimonious Aristotelian”: Accidents are “essences” only in a qualified sense, because they reduce to aspects or modes of substances. On this view, an accident is a substance precisely as conceived under a non-fundamental and contingent concept.

Both Aquinas and Scotus hold with Aristotle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, and metaphysically prior to them in some way. However, Aquinas’s more “paradigmatic” interpretation of Aristotelian hylomorphism emphasizes this metaphysical dependence of the parts on the whole in a stronger way than Scotus does. Aquinas holds that the essential parts of substance – matter and substantial form – are, in the majority of cases, metaphysically inseparable from substance. Thus, according to Aquinas, particular individuals of matter and substantial form have no metaphysical possibility to exist apart from the substance that they constitute. Rather, they depend upon it for their identity, and also for their existence. Aquinas thinks that for prime matter to be the substrate of substantial change, it cannot have any actuality of its own, but must receive any actuality that it has from substantial form. Furthermore, he teaches that when a new substance is

---


Cf. Aquinas, De Ente et Essentia, c. 12 (trans. Joseph Kenny, 1965): “Because the word “being” is used absolutely and with priority of substances, and only posteriorly and with qualification of accidents, essence is in substances truly and properly, in accidents only in some way and with qualification.”

27 Aquinas makes an important exception for the human soul. Cf. ST I, q. 75, article 6, trans. Freddoso: “Hence, that which has esse per se can be generated or corrupted only per se, whereas things that do not subsist, such as accidents and material forms, are said to be made and corrupted through the generation and corruption of composite things.”

28 “For through the form, which is the actuality of matter, matter becomes something actual and something individual.” Aquinas, De Ente Et Essentia, paragraph 18; translated as “Aquinas on Being and Essence” by Joseph Kenny, O.P. (1965).
generated, the substances that provide the prime matter for the new substance become corrupted, and cease to exist as substances. Aquinas says that the elements that a substance incorporates, do not continue to actually exist as individuals upon being incorporated, but that a substance only “virtually contains” them.\textsuperscript{29} Thus, the capacities of these things are subsumed by the substance, so that the previous substances are no longer the ultimate bearers of those powers.

Aquinas does not recognize the necessity of making the revisions Scotus does, but – in essence – he holds to a “paradigmatic” and “parsimonious” Aristotelian vision of reality, while attempting to use it in describing a Christian history of the universe. However, as we will see next, it is arguable that the theory doesn’t always fit the things that must be described. Thus, from Scotus’s perspective, Aquinas’s synthesis includes epicycles, in which Christian doctrines force puzzling exceptions to the ways in which the theoretical posits of Aristotelian hylomorphism typically behave.

For an example of this, compare Aquinas’s doctrine of the “separate” human soul, with his doctrine of the substantial forms of composite entities in general. Both Aquinas and Scotus take miraculous events to shed light on the metaphysical possibilities that characterize the Aristotelian theoretical posits, from the very start; but Aquinas thinks that in general, the substantial forms of composite entities have no possibility of existing

\textsuperscript{29} Aquinas, ST I, q. 76, article 4, ad 4, trans. Freddoso: “And so, in keeping with what the Philosopher says in \textit{De Generatione et Corruptione} 1, one should reply that the forms of the elements remain in a mixed thing \textit{virtually} but \textit{not in actuality}. For what remains are the qualities which, though less intense (\textit{remissae}), are proper to the elements, and it is in these qualities that the power of the elemental forms resides. And the quality of this sort of mixture is a proper disposition for the substantial form of the mixed body, e.g., the form of a rock or of any type of soul.”

Cf. James Madden, “Thomistic Hylomorphism and Philosophy of Mind and Philosophy of Religion,” \textit{Philosophy Compass} 8/7 (2013): 664–676, 668: “That is, Fluffy’s paw, tail, heart, carbon atoms, quarks, etc. are not present in her composition as individual substances ... These parts of Fluffy are retrievably, potentially, virtually, or nominally present in Fluffy’s composition.”
separately from matter. In Aquinas’s view, the human soul is naturally an exception to this rule, because of its intellectual nature. By contrast, Scotus thinks that not only the human soul, but substantial forms in general, could possibly exist apart from their composites. Thus, Scotus’s view is a synthesis in which the Christian elements repeatedly and explicitly modify the Aristotelian elements — even the doctrine of substance itself. Scotus thinks he must abandon the orthodox formulations of central Aristotelian tenets, in order to accommodate the “metaphysical miracles” required by Christian theology.

I will argue that Scotus is a heterodox adherent of the broad Aristotelian project of finding the substances, and that he agrees with Aristotle and Aquinas — for the most part — about which things are the substances. It is clear that Scotus is a revisionist with regard to important aspects of that very project. For both theological and philosophical reasons, Scotus authors major innovations that contradict the “paradigmatic” and “parsimonious” Aristotelian formulations of substance. In an effort to accommodate Aristotelianism to Christianity, Scotus differentiates between different things that “substance” can mean, and points out that Christian doctrine requires that these different things come apart. Despite all these departures, however, it is still true from Scotus’s perspective that “paradigmatic” Aristotelian physics would be a comprehensive and joint-

---

30 As we will see, this is a metaphysical or broadly logical possibility, rather than a natural possibility. Scotus, In Metaph. VII.16, n. 34, n. 43-46 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 320-325).


32 This is already recognized to some degree by Aristotle: “It follows, then, that ‘substance’ has two senses, (A) the ultimate substratum, which is no longer predicated of anything else, and (B) that which, being a ‘this’, is also separable…” Aristotle, Metaphysics V, ch. 8 1017b23-26, in The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. McKeon (Modern Library, 2001), 761.
carving description of reality, in the possible world where things behaved entirely according to their natural capacities. Furthermore, after undergoing Scotus’s revisions, there is still enough of an Aristotelian philosophy left, to show that Scotus subscribes to the in-principle feasibility of the Aristotelian project of carving reality at the joints and finding the substances.\textsuperscript{33} For Scotus’s system still prioritizes a substantial whole over its parts, in a broadly Aristotelian fashion. As Marilyn Adams puts it: “Scotus…[grants that], in the natural order of things, everything that exists here below either is a primary substance or is a component of a primary substance or inheres in a primary substance. In the natural order of things, nothing here below would exist if primary substances didn’t exist.”\textsuperscript{34} Scotus allows his theological commitments, as well as his philosophical commitments, to modify his formulations of the distinctive Aristotelian theoretical instruments.

As we will see next, there are similarities and differences between Aquinas’s and Scotus’s interpretation of Aristotelian hylomorphism. In some cases, the differences have to do with Scotus’s taking traditional Christian doctrines to have a bearing on the way the very doctrine of substance should be formulated. In other cases, the differences have to do with Scotus’s working out what he sees as the implications of the Aristotelian account of science. Scotus’s interpretation of Aristotelianism raises doubts about whether the paradigmatic Aristotelian primary substances are truly “fundamental” – at least, whether

\textsuperscript{33} That is, putting aside for the moment the epistemological obstacles that, from Scotus’s perspective, block our access to the true quiddity of substances.

they are “fundamental” in the way that the parsimonious and paradigmatic versions of Aristotelianism, took them to be.

4.3 “Metaphysical Miracles” and Scotus’s Aristotelianism

Scotus rejects “paradigmatic” and “parsimonious” Aristotelianisms for two kinds of reasons.

(1) One guiding reason for Scotus’s innovations is to accommodate and describe Christian doctrines which use ineliminable descriptions of events and states of affairs that would be “metaphysical miracles” in a paradigmatically Aristotelian universe.35 Scotus allows the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity to disambiguate between different things that the concept “substance” could mean – whether “an individual of a certain nature,” or “an ultimate subject of predication.” He also holds that the doctrine of the Eucharist shows that some absolute accidents can exist apart from substances, and thus that at least some accidents do not necessarily depend upon substance for their existence.36 Thus, Scotus thinks that a legitimate way of doing metaphysics is to allow one’s Christianity to put theoretical constrains upon one’s formulation of the doctrine of substance itself.37

(2) Scotus also thinks that some of his innovations are required for the coherence of the Aristotelian account of natural science. Scotus thinks that the distinct reality of

35 Ibid., p. 48: “Scotus and Ockham diligently discharge their responsibility to work out the metaphysical implications of doctrines central to the Christian faith. By the time they have finished treating the Trinity and Incarnation, however, the status of being a supposit looks like a metaphysically superficial feature of things here below. Nothing creatable or created is essentially a supposit; rather anything creatable or created could exist without being a supposit.”


37 Adams, “What’s Metaphysically Special about Supposits?” p. 48
prime matter is required for the intelligibility of the Aristotelian explanation of substantial change. But its distinct reality appears to entail that it is at least metaphysically possible that matter could exist apart from any form!

Scotus also holds that the distinct reality of accidents is required for the integrity of Aristotelian physics, as a discipline distinct from metaphysics. Scotus argues that accidents must have some reality of their own: otherwise, since metaphysics takes “being” as its object, it follows either that physics and mathematics will have no objects, or they will only have objects that are only accidental unities – of which there is no science per se.

---

38 Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 11-13 (Vatican, XIX, 72): “[Probatur quod materia est.] Primum ostenditur per rationem Philosophi… omne agens naturale requirit passum in quod agens agit…illud passum, in quod agens agit, transmutatur ab opposito in oppositum; hoc oppositum non fit illud oppositum, ita quod nihil commune remaneat in utrique…sicut igitur in transmutatione accidentalis transmutans aliquid, movet illud ab opposito in oppositum, manens idem sub utroque oppositorum, ita oportet in generatione quod generans transmutet aliquid a forma in formam, manens idem sub utroque; illud dicitur esse materia.”

39 Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 47-48 (Vatican, XIX, 86): “…Unde si materia esset separata, nihil de novo haberet, sed tantum negationem compositionis vel coniunctionis eius cum forma, sicut si accidens sit separatum a subjecto suo. Ideo respondeo quod secundum illud illud esse quod haberet si esset materia separata, est perfectibilis a forma.”


41 According to Scotus, metaphysics does not study quiddities under their proper notions; rather, it studies common notions, i.e. “being” and its passions. Scotus thinks that if quiddities under their proper notions belonged to the study of metaphysics, too, then there would be no object left over for the other sciences to study, other than “entities per accidens” – but there is no science of these: “sequitur si aliae scientiae non considerant nec quidditatem, nec hanc in se, sed tantum secundum accidentia sibi – cum ergo quiditas cum accidentibus sit ens per accidens – sequitur quod omnes aliae scientiae a metaphysica essent de ente per accidens. Sed de illo non est scientia, secundum Philosophum VI [Metaphysics]. Et probo: quia necesse est praecognoscere de subjecto quid est; ens per accidens non habet ‘quid’, quia omne tale vel est genus, vel est in genere. Ens autem per accidentes non est in genere, quia distinguitur contra omnia decem genera in libro VI [Metaphysics].” IN Metaph. I, q. 9, n. 18 (Franciscan Institute, II, 169-170).
Thus, for both secular and sacred reasons, either of which would presumably have been sufficient on its own, Scotus adopts the doctrine of “real accidents” and “real qualities,” with what Descartes would view as a typically non-explanatory scholastic profligacy.\footnote{Robert Pasnau, “Form, Substance, and Mechanism,” *The Philosophical Review* 113, No. 1 (Jan., 2004), 50-51.}

Despite the Aristotelian motivations referenced in (2), all these innovations appear *prima facie* – from a “paradigmatic” or “parsimonious” perspective – to challenge the integrity of Scotus’s Aristotelianism. Clearly, he does not subscribe to the same kind and degree of ontological fundamentality that Aquinas attributed to primary substances. For Scotus, matter and form do not depend *for their existence* upon the composite or “complete (categorial) substance” in which they are. Furthermore, for Scotus, at least some (absolute) types of accidents do not necessarily depend *for their existence* upon their subjects.

As I will show, Scotus retains some superficial similarity to Aristotle’s system in the face of these challenges by holding that matter, form, and accidents have an intrinsic aptitude for “depending” non-causally upon primary substances, and thus primary substances are the natural *locus* for them. Thus, primary substances still retain a kind of metaphysical fundamentality.\footnote{Cf. Marilyn Adams, “What’s Metaphysically Special About Supposit? Some Medieval Variations on Aristotelian Substance,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 79 (2005), p. 21.} As we will see, however, a more serious challenge to the Aristotelian project is Scotus’s belief that individual primary substances are only contingently “supposit” – i.e. ultimate subjects of predication. Scotus holds that created
substances may be supernaturally caused to depend upon “foreign suppositors,” in a way analogous to an accident’s dependence on a substance.44

Scotus signals an affinity with the Aristotelian conception of science when he talks about “quiddities” and their proper passions. According to Scotus, the proper passions of something follow upon its complete quiddity, not upon its essential parts.45 Thus, for Scotus, the description of a thing according to its quiddity is the fundamental description of it. It is according to this description that the thing is a being, and can produce the first intention concept “being” – so, it virtually includes this concept and the concepts of the passions of being, as well as its own properties (as a human being includes risibility.) However, he extends the proper meaning of “quiddity” to accidents, too, when he says that all of the Aristotelian categories are the summa genera. At the same time, Scotus thinks that some quiddities are more fundamental than others, in that other categorial items have an essential ordering to substances.46 Substantial quiddities are more fundamental than their accidents (whether necessary or contingent, proper or common), and in general, supposita are more fundamental than the natures they bear, in that they have a natural tendency to be ultimate subjects of predication for their own essences and for accidents.47 Furthermore, complete substances are more metaphysically

44 Ibid.
47 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 15 (Vatican, IX, 6-7).
fundamental than their parts, insofar as their parts (even in the dissolution of the whole) have an intrinsic aptitude to compose substances,\(^{48}\) and also insofar as their parts (when the whole exists) non-causally “depend” upon substances, in the sense of being attributed to them as to an ultimate metaphysical subject.\(^{49}\) (This is so even though Scotus thinks that their parts do not depend upon them for their existence.)

Scotus is a pluralist about the kinds of “dependence” by which different quiddities can “ground” other quiddities and their properties. In addition to causal sorts of dependence, like the multi-dimensional causal dependence by which created substances are created and conserved by the divine essence, or the causal dependence by which substances cause their proper accidents, Scotus holds that created quiddities may also be non-causally dependent upon other quiddities, as when a Trinitarian person “assumes” a created primary substance, and as when an accident is “attributed to” a substance. In the case of a normal un-assumed substance, a nature is said to “depend” upon the supposit in this non-causal way, although the nature and supposit are only conceptually distinct in this case. In the case of the incarnation, the individual human nature bears this same kind of dependence to the second person of the Trinity. This is enough to cause the created substance and the divine person to be one \textit{per se} unity together, such that the properties and accidental characteristics of the created substance are ultimately attributed to the divine person. In this case, the created substance is no longer “fundamental” in the sense of being the ultimate metaphysical subject of its characteristics.

\(^{48}\) “Hunks of prime matter have the natural aptitude to unite with complements of substantial forms (e.g., with corporeity and sensory soul) to make something one per se (e.g., Beulah the cow or Brownie the donkey). Some substantial forms have natural aptitudes to complement one another (e.g., corporeity and sensory soul) in a composite to make an individual substance while others… do not.” Marilyn Adams, “Aristotelian Substance and Supposits,” 21.

\(^{49}\) cf. Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 44 (Vatican, IX, 19).
Here, I list the five “metaphysical miracles” for which Scotus revises orthodox Aristotelianism, and the consequent modifications of the system. Note that the “metaphysical miracles” are so called, precisely because they are irreconcilable with a paradigmatic Aristotelian ontology. However, note also that despite this terminology, Scotus’s motivation in some of the cases – i.e., (2), (3), and partly even (4) – is not wholly theological in nature.

1. For Scotus, the doctrine of the Trinity demonstrates that it is possible for one individual nature to be shared by multiple ultimate subjects of predication, or “supposits.”

2. Scotus believes substantial forms in general can exist apart from their current composites -- as is actually fulfilled in the case of the human intellective soul.

3. Scotus believes prime matter can exist without being informed by any substantial form at all.

4. Scotus believes that at least some accidents (as in the Eucharistic sacrament) can exist independently of substance.

5. Scotus believes that created substances can be “assumed” so that they are no longer supposits, and even that multiple created substances may be assumed by the same supposit simultaneously.


51 In Metaph. VII.16, n. 34, n. 43-44 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 320ff); n. 46: “nec hoc ideo est quia forma materialis est in materia actualiter, quia si esset separata, non esset perfectior quam sit in materia, ut ita non minus ex se habens suam unitatem.” (Franciscan Institute, IV, 325).

52 Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 47-48 (Vatican, XIX, 86).


54 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 44 (Vatican, IX, 18): “Non asserendo, potest mediari interistas duas vias, negando ... aliquam entitatem positivam esse in natura intellectuali creata cui repugnet contradictorie communicari communicacione aliqua repugnante personae, quia nulla videtur entitas positiva in natura creata quae non sit possibilis dependere ad verbum...” cf. Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 127 (Vatican, IX, 57).
Importantly, the modality that is involved in these possibilities is not a “natural” but rather a “metaphysical” or “broadly logical” modality. That is to say, only a preternatural act of God could bring about the actualization of the possibilities expressed by “can” in statements 3, 4, and 5, and the possibility expressed in 2 for substantial forms other than the human soul to exist apart from matter.55 Now I will elaborate how each miracle impacts Scotus’s re-formulation of traditional Aristotelian concepts of substance.

(1) Scotus’s doctrine of the Trinity allows there to be a numerically single, individual nature which is “communicated” to three persons.56 Each of the three persons exemplifies what is numerically the same divine nature, and it is the form by which each is divine.57 Thus, in Scotus’s system, individual substances of a certain nature, which Aristotle calls “τοδε τι” or “this-such,” are not necessarily ultimate subjects of predication; in at least this one case, they can be shared. This qualifies the way in which they can be called “fundamental.” Of course, Scotus denies that the divine nature is a categorial substance, but it is still a “this-such,” i.e. an “individual of a certain nature,” in a sense that excludes composition. Thus, substance-individuals and supposits do not necessarily coincide, as they do in the original Aristotelian picture.

(2) Scotus’s revisionary doctrine of form and matter allows Scotus comfortably to accommodate the doctrine of the immortality of the disembodied soul – a substantial

55 “No merely natural power could actualize these capacities [i.e. of prime matter, substantial forms, or accidents] for separate existence, but – because divine power could – this looks like enough to make the components naturally prior to the primary substances they constitute.” Marilyn Adams, “Aristotelian Substance and Supposits,” 20.


57 “ideo videtur proprie posse concedi ibi similitudo secundum essentiam…in quantum est actus et quasi forma, qua personae sunt Deus.” Ord. I, d. 31, q. un., n. 17 (Vatican, VI, 210).
form that can exist apart from the composite it is supposed to be in. Aquinas ascribes the same capability for separate existence to the human soul – but it is more perplexing, on Aquinas’s picture, how the substantial form of a composite can do this, since he does not admit that substantial forms in general are capable of such separated existence. Both agree that the human soul is naturally immortal. Scotus, at least, thinks that other kinds of substantial forms might be preserved independently of matter, by divine power.

(3) Scotus also believes that it is metaphysically possible that prime matter should exist without being informed by any substantial forms whatsoever. This is a consequence of his view that prime matter has an actuality and quiddity of its own. In this respect, Scotus appears to be a forerunner of Descartes’s views on physics. However, Scotus surely cannot be charged with denying that there are final causes or

58 Aquinas also believes in the disembodied human soul, but it is an exception to his doctrine of the inseparability of substantial forms of composite substances; for Scotus, on the other hand, it is not impossible that other substantial forms should also exist apart from their composites.

59 Scotus, In Metaph. VII.16, n. 34, n. 43-46 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 320-325).

60 Scotus, Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 47-48 (Vatican, XIX, 87-88): “…Ideo respondeo quod secundum illud esse quod haberet si esset materia separata, est perfectibilis a forma.”

61 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 5-6, n. 187 (translation in Spade, Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals, 107): “And just as a composite does not insofar as it is a nature include its individual entity by which it is formally a ‘this’, so neither does matter insofar as it is a nature include its individual entity by which it is ‘this matter’, nor does form insofar as it is a nature include its individual entity by which it is ‘this form’.”

62 Cf. Descartes, Principles of Philosophy II, paragraphs 22-23.

Cf. James Ross, “Aristotle’s Revenge: the Fate of the Analysts,” 63: “Early in the century, Descartes and a few others envisioned a new science of nature (roughly, terrestrial and celestial mechanics for res extensa under divinely imparted, universal and conserved motion). Descartes developed his astrophysical theory of vortices, and various principles of physics and of the conservation of motion, with particular emphasis that matter (res extensa) is governed entirely by universal mathematical laws. He held that all matter, contrary to the presentations of common sense experience, is completely deterministically mechanical, like clockwork, and throughout exactly ‘the same,’ differing only in relative position, velocity, aggregation, and so forth. (It is as if the whole cosmos were a contained body of water, all in swirls, underwater-waves, currents, vortices’ and ripples explained as one system in motion with universal laws which tell how an initial deposit of divinely imparted motion is transformed forever in the relative motions of the particles.)”
substantial forms in the natural world, as perhaps Descartes can be. Scotus’s main concern is to set matter apart from form, so that it has its own autonomous role to play as an explanatory principle intrinsic to physical substance. Thus, he eschews the Augustinian doctrine of “rationes seminales,” according to which matter has some intrinsic aptitude for a particular form. Rather, matter is an entirely passive principle, and thus fungible, equally capable of being informed by any sort of substantial form.

Scotus’s adherence to possibilities (2) and (3) appears to threaten the ontological primacy of substance, in that it brooks that a substance has proper parts which are themselves fully entitled to discrete thing-ness. According to Scotus, an individual substantial form and the prime matter which it informs, are both “really distinct,” i.e. separable, each from the other. Scotus’s version of hylomorphism is thus markedly different from Aquinas’s, in that he admits that a composite substance is made up of independently identifiable and separable parts. In Scotus’s view, a particular instance of matter or substantial form has the ability to exist apart from the composite in which they are. Thus, substantial form and matter do not depend for their existence on a substance in which they are. Matter has some actuality of its own, and in consequence, it could exist without any substantial form whatsoever. Substantial form is likewise separable from matter, and this possibility becomes actual in the case of the disembodied human soul. In this case, Scotus agrees with Aquinas in characterizing the disembodied soul as a

63 Scotus, In Metaph. VII, q. 12, n. 44 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 208).
64 Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 47-48.
65 In Metaph. VII.16, n. 46 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 325): “nec hoc ideo est quia forma materialis est in materia actualiter, quia si esset separata, non esset perfectior quam sit in materia, et ita non minus ex se habens suam unitatem.”
subsistent thing, but not a “complete being” or hypostasis. However, Scotus goes beyond Aquinas in affirming that it is metaphysically possible for this to happen in other cases too.

We might worry that this threatens the integrity of Scotus’s Aristotelianism, since the view seems to make a substance dependent upon its parts. However, Scotus preserves a modified version of the Aristotelian primacy of primary substance, by holding that essential parts of substance have a natural aptitude or orientation towards existing as components of primary substances. Furthermore, Scotus thinks that in the normal run of events, i.e. when things behave according to these natural aptitudes and God does not intervene, a complete substance-being is the ultimate subject of predication for its own nature, the essential parts of its own nature, and its accidents.

---

66 Cf. Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 44; cf. Aquinas, ST I, q. 75, art. 4, ad. 2, trans. Freddoso: “Not every particular substance is a hypostasis or person; rather, a hypostasis or person is a particular substance that has the complete nature of a species. Hence, a hand or foot cannot be called a hypostasis or a person. And, likewise, neither can a soul, since it is a part of a human nature (pars speciei humanae).”

67 For human intellective soul, cf. Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 44 (Vatican, IX, 19): “Nec cum secunda concedendum est quod sola negatio dependentiae ad personam extrinsecam est completivum formale in ratione personae, quia … tunc anima separata esset persona.” The implication here is that the separated soul is disqualified from being a person by its possession of “aptitudinal dependence” upon a complete substance – a disqualification for personhood which is clarified in the following paragraphs of the passage.

For the natural aptitude of prime matter to compose a substance, cf. Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 17-18 (Vatican, XIX, 74): “…si autem non esset materia, non esset aliqua privatio quae posset esse terminus ‘a quo’ in generatione, quia privatio non est nisi in subjecto apto nato ad habitum…”

68 Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 45-47 (Vatican, IX, 20): “Sed sic distinguishendum est inter dependentiam actualem, possibiltem, et aptitudinalem: et huiusmodi vocando ‘aptitudinalem’ quae semper – quantum est de se – esset in actu (quo modo ‘grave’ semper aptum naturam est esse in centro, ubi semper esset, quantum esset de se, nisi esset impeditum); et ‘possibilem’ voco absolute illam ubi non est impossibilitas ex repugnantia vel impossibilitate terminorum (et ista possibilitas potest esse quandoque respectu potentiae activae supernaturalis, non tantum naturalis…tamen negatio dependentiae ‘aptitudinalis’ potest concedi in natura creatae personata in se ad Verbum…Nec tamen haec independetitia aptitudinalis ponit repugnantiam ad dependentiam actualem, quia licet non sit aptitudo talis naturae dependendi, est tamen aptitudo obedientiae, quia natura illa est in perfecta obedientia ad dependendum, per actionem agentis supernaturalis.”
To understand Scotus’s views it is helpful to make a distinction between “natural potency” and “metaphysical possibility.”\(^\text{69}\) Scotus thinks it is \textit{metaphysically} possible for the essential parts of substance to exist apart from the substance, although this is not something that they have a \textit{natural} aptitude for. As Marilyn Adams describes Scotus’s views: “When nature is allowed to take its course, prime matter and material substantial forms exist only as components of primary substances; accidents exist only insofar as they inhere in primary substances.”\(^\text{70}\) Thus, “in the natural order of things,” complete categorial substances are fundamental. However, upon their dissolution, their parts may also be the ultimate subject of accidental qualities, as when God maintains the disembodied soul in existence and continues to give it phantasms.

But what of the objection that distinct thing-hood for form and matter, makes form and matter “more fundamental” than composite substances? The Scotist response to the objection is double. First, as I have already mentioned, there may still be a sense in which form and matter \textit{non-causally} “depend” upon a complete substance, in that a complete substance is the “supposit” or ultimate subject of predication to which its

\(^{69}\) Cf. Alfred Freddoso, “The Necessity of Nature,” \textit{Midwest Studies in Philosophy} 11 (1986): 215–242; Freddoso, “Human Nature, Potency, and the Incarnation,” \textit{Faith and Philosophy} 3:1 (1986), pp. 31-32: “[Laws of nature on an Aristotelian conception] do not specify which events will or must follow upon other events, but instead specify what behavior is naturally proper to a given class of agents under given circumstances….Given this philosophical conception of nature, the Christian philosopher can reasonably take the de re claim that it is naturally necessary for a created thing x to have a property P to be roughly equivalent to the claim that x is by nature such that it would have P if (1) it existed and (2) God were to perform no ‘external’ acts other than those required for the existence and ordinary causal interaction of created agents.”

essential components are ultimately attributed. This amounts to saying that any accidental
changes that occur in the form or the matter of the substance, are ultimately changes in
the substance itself, as long as it exists.

Second, according to Scotus, form and matter have an intrinsic orientation to
being part of a complete substance, even in the naturally impossible situation when they
are not parts of a composite: A substantial form in a certain category has an intrinsic
aptitude towards constituting an individual of that kind; and prime matter has an intrinsic
aptitude to be informed by a substantial form of some kind.\footnote{And even, perhaps, by a certain particular form; cf. Ord. IV, d. 44, q. 1, nn. 16-17 (Wadding, 10:115, cited in Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus}, [Oxford University Press, 1999] 80, 187, n.48)} Thus, there is a legitimate
sense for Scotus in which the parts of substance “depend” upon a complete substance for
the fulfillment of these intrinsic aptitudes, thus allowing complete substances to be
metaphysically (if not ontologically) fundamental.

(4) A fourth metaphysical miracle is required by the doctrine of the Eucharist, in
which the sensible accidents of the bread and the wine exist independently from their
original substance.\footnote{Cf. Marilyn Adams, “Aristotle and the Sacrament of the Altar: A Crisis in Medieval Theology,” 195-249.} More generally, Scotus thinks that all the individual accidents in

---

\footnote{Cf. Lect. II, d. 12, q. un., nn. 17-18 (Vatican, XIX, 74): “Si non esset materia, manens eadem sub utroque contrariorum, nulla generatio passiva esset naturalis, quia si non esset materia, tune nullus appetitus praecessit ad terminum generatum nec esset ibi aliquod quod naturaliter inclinaretur ad terminum generatum….si autem non esset materia, non esset aliqua privatio quae posset esse terminus ‘a quo’ in generatione, quia privatio non est nisi in subjecto apto nato ad habitum…”}

\footnote{Scotus has arguments that purport to show the metaphysical possibility that absolute accidents should exist apart from substances, but Cross argues that these reasons only show that some accidents could exist in a different subject than the one they are in. Cross seems to suggest that Scotus’s doctrine of separable accidents is ultimately motivated by the doctrine of transubstantiation: “(4) [i.e. that some accident can exist independently of a substance] will be accepted for theological reasons by anyone who accepts the doctrine of transubstantiation. According to the doctrine of transubstantiation, in the Eucharist the quantities of bread and wine exist without any substance at all. Scotus clearly accepts (4).” Richard Cross, \textit{The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision} (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998), 101.}
Aristotle’s nine accidental categories are real forms.73 This is so even of relational accidents, though Scotus thinks relational accidents are different from absolute accidents in that they cannot exist apart from their *relata*. Furthermore, the individual accident of dimensive quantity does not necessarily characterize its subject. For the Eucharist, Scotus holds that it is metaphysically possible for at least some accidents to exist apart from substances. Scotus holds that accidental forms are things in themselves, rather than mere modes of substance, on the grounds that their substances do not necessarily have them. This realism about accidents appears to threaten the primacy of substance, by allowing that there are genuinely real things that are not reducible to primary substances, nor to mere modes of primary substances.74

The doctrine of the Eucharist is not the only motivation for Scotus’s thinking about this topic. As I’ll show in the next chapter, he is also motivated by the consideration that the Aristotelian taxonomy of sciences requires distinct formal objects for each science, which must be diverse from the formal objects of other sciences.75 For

---

73 Scotus, In Metaph. V, qqs. 5-6, n. 81 (Franciscan Institute, III, 466).


75 Diverse sciences must have diverse formal objects. One science has one unique formal object. “Et similiter, ex quo diversae scientiae habent diversas rationes formales, non potest esse una ratio formalis per se considerata ab una et ab alia. Item, ad unitatem scientiae requiritur unitas rationis formalis (salem primae, non tantum in se sed ut comparatur ad materialia quorum est ratio)…” Scotus, In Metaph. I, q. 9, nn. 29-30 (Franciscan Institute, II, 172).

According to Scotus, metaphysics does not study quiddities under their proper notions; rather, it studies common notions, i.e. “being” and its passions. Scotus thinks that if quiddities under their proper notions belonged to the study of metaphysics, too, then there would be no object left over for the other sciences to study, other than “entities per accidens” – but there is no science of these: “sequitur si aliae scientiae non considerant nec quidditatem, nec hanc in se, sed tantum secundum accidentia sibi – cum ergo quiditas cum accidentibus sit ens per accidens – sequitur quod omnes aliae scientiae metaphysica essent de ente per accidens. Sed de illo non est scientia, secundum Philosophum VI [Metaphysics]. Et probo: quia necesse est praecognoscere de subjecto quid est; ens per accidens non habet ‘quid’, quia omne tale vel est genus, vel est in genere. En autem per accidentis non est in genere, quia distinguuit contra omnia decem genera in libro VI [Metaphysics].” IN Metaph. I, q. 9, n. 18 (Franciscan Institute, II, 169-170).
example, Aristotelian physics studies things under the aspect of their “mobility,” which is a proper passion of their quiddities, but is distinct from it.76

As we saw from earlier chapters, there are quiddities in all ten categories, but Scotus makes the quiddities in the accidental categories to be both causally77 and non-causally78 dependent upon substantial quiddities (though they are not, in general, causally dependent upon the substantial quiddities of their subjects, but upon the agent that induces them in their subject). The non-causal dependence of an accident upon a substance is the relation by which we may attribute the accident to the substance, as its ultimate metaphysical subject. Thus, Scotus’s adherence to real accidents does not ultimately threaten the Aristotelian primacy of substance, suitably formulated by Scotus’s lights. According to Scotus, accidents have a natural aptitude towards depending upon substances, and do not cease to depend upon substances except in circumstances produced by a supernatural agent.

We might feel some parsimony-related incentive to do away with real accidents by reducing them to aspects of substances, as Henry of Ghent tried to reduce the category

---


77 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 116 (Vatican, IV, 207-208): “Substantia etiam, quae modo est genus generalissimum, ut accipitur pro omnibus speciebus inferioribus continet virtualiter omnia accidentia: ita quod si Deus sola individua substantiaria causaret, illa haberent in se virtualiter unde causarent omnia accidentia, et tamen propter hoc non negarentur substantiae creatae esse in genere quia continent virtualiter accidentia per modum sui, non per modum accidentium.”

78 Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 15 (Vatican, IX, 6).
of Relation to a “mode” of substances. I think that Scotus allows that in general, the existence of accidents may be efficient-causally explained in terms of the actualization of powers of substances, whether of the substance that is the subject of the accident, or the of substance that induces the accident in a different substance as subject. However, for Scotus, individual accidents in all nine of the accidental categories are mind-independent things (res). In general, we do not find accidents coming apart from the substances they originate in; however, Scotus thinks that there may be exceptions to this rule that are brought about by a preternatural act of God – as in the Eucharist. Thus, Scotus thinks that at least some accidental forms are metaphysically separable from the substances in which they are. One important thing that is achieved by holding to real accidents, as Scotus does, is that accidents are not a mind-dependent matter: It is not as a result of the mind’s consideration that Socrates is red or a father.

(5) Last, some more serious challenges to the Aristotelian picture stem from Scotus’s Christology. Specifically, these challenges come from Scotus’s belief in the possibility of “assumption” of created substances by a divine person, with the Incarnation as an actual example. In the Incarnation, the individual human substance of Jesus is prevented from being an ultimate subject of predication, insofar as it acquires a contingent relation of non-causal dependence upon the Word. Furthermore, Scotus apparently thinks it is possible that a divine person could likewise become the ultimate

---

79 Giorgio Pini, “Scotus’s Realist Conception of the Categories,” Vivarium 43:1 (2005), 73. “[According to Henry,] Substance, Quality, and Quantity each have their own res...Matters are different for the remaining seven categories, however. Even though each one of them is composed of a thing and a mode, the thing in question is not proper to them. So, Relation has its own proper mode of being but no proper thing, since it is not a thing different from one of the first three absolute categories.”

80 “Accordingly, [for Scotus] all the categories are things in the same sense, i.e. as extramental entities.” Pini, “Scotus’s Realist Conception of the Categories,” 84.

supposit to which all the properties of *every* created substance would be attributed.\textsuperscript{82} I will call the possible world in which this happens, the “universal assumption” world.

Note how this relation of “dependence” of the assumed human substance on the divine person is parallel to the relation of the essential parts and accidents of an (un-assumed) created substance to that very substance. The divine person in the one case, and the (unassumed) created substance in the other, are both “supposit” – i.e., substances on their own, which are not ultimately attributed to other substances. In both cases, the supposit is the “ultimate metaphysical subject” of the properties of the thing that depends, in the sense that the properties of the parts, accidents, and assumed substances are ultimately “attributed to” the supposit by virtue of the “dependence” of these other entities upon the supposit. Thus, although a human intellective soul may be the *proximate* subject of thoughts, a complete human person or “hypostasis” is the *ultimate* subject of the thoughts that are in her soul, just as the divine person *ultimately* has the thoughts and sufferings that are in the soul of the assumed human nature. In the *usual* case, therefore, the created supposit under its own quidditative notion will be “fundamental,” although for any created substance, the possibility of “being assumed” entails the possibility of not being fundamental.

Also, note that the incarnate Christ is a per se unity, which involves individual primary substances. Thus we see that Scotus has a different criterion for per se unity than Aquinas does: For Scotus, a per se unity can have components that are primary substances with different natures.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{82} Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 127 (Vatican, IX, 57).

\textsuperscript{83} Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus” (Oxford Univ. Press, 1999); pp. 74-75: “[Scotus] holds that it is simply not true that the presence of exactly one form is necessary for substantial unity. So Scotus proposes
The first problem stemming from “assumption” is that it seems to offer a counterexample to the reading that the things denoted by categorial substance-predicates are fundamental. For, in what Scotus views as the actual world, there is at least one categorial entity (i.e. Christ’s human nature) which is not “fundamental” in the sense of being a metaphysically ultimate subject.

The second problem is that the possibility of universal assumption seems incompatible with the idea that created natures are essentially constituted through positive constitutive characters that are “primarily and of themselves incompatible” with other such characters. Scotus seemed to say that in general, different creatures are distinguished from one another by positive realities which are “repugnant” to other such realities. Indeed, this is precisely how Scotus characterizes individuating principles; and it seems most elegant to hold that essential natures work the same way, since they are positive determining factors, just as much as individuating principles are. But the possibility of universal assumption in Scotus’s philosophy, entails that the very same supposit could formally exemplify multiple Aristotelian natures, simultaneously – albeit, as it were, “secondarily,” as a function of its bearing the “assumption-relation” to them. Thus, different substance-natures can exist in the same supposit. Thus, the possibility of

Instead a quite different criterion for substantial unity. A material substance is a unity if and only if some of its properties are such that they could not be had by any of its parts alone.” Cross cites Scotus, Ord. III, d. 2, q. 2, nn. 7-11 (Wadding, VII, 76-81).

85 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 2.
86 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 127 (Vatican, IX, 57): “Respondeo: cum alia natura posset habere dependentiam istius rationis sicut ista natura, et etiam simul potest, quia non est repugnantia ex parte naturarum (actualis enim dependentia unius naturae non repugnat dependentiae alterius naturae), nec est repugnantia ex parte Verbi (quia per hoc non ponuntur in eo nisi plures relationes rationis, vel nulla relatio rationis, sed tantum quod ipsum terminet plures relationes reales ad ipsum: hoc autem non est impossibile, sicut tota Trinitas terminat omnes relationes creaturarum) -- nulla est ergo causa impossibilitatis vel incompossibilitatis assumptionis alterius naturae, etiam ista natura manente unita.”
universal assumption challenges Scotus to specify the precise difference between substance natures and individuating principles, such that Plato’s and Socrates’s individuating differences are “formally and of themselves incompatible” with one another while different natures are not, since – in the “universal assumption” world – the substances which constitute Plato and Socrates could both be assumed by the same supposit.

4.4 Assumption and Fundamentality

The fifth and final sort of “metaphysical miracle” seems to pose the severest problems for an Aristotelian project of carving reality at the joints, since it entails that all created quiddities are possibly non-fundamental. Therefore, I will discuss this problem at greater length in this section.

Scotus thinks that in principle, God could assume every created substance simultaneously.87 How does this bear on the issue of whether species natures are “mutually incompossible” in the same way that different haecceities are? Does Scotus think that the assumption relation works differently with respect to a quiddity than with respect to a haecceity, in such a way that only the quiddity gets attributed to the supposit? And if so, how does he keep this from being unprincipled and ad hoc?

A further problem afflicts Scotus’s picture of the actual world: It appears as though “human” can’t be a predicate that truly carves at the joints, as long as there is one case in which it applies and is not a fundamental description. Individual human beings,

87 Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 127 (Vatican, IX, 57).
which are identical to their individualized substance-natures, are usually supposit as well; but the individual human nature of Christ is not a supposit.

Notwithstanding the problems that arise as a result of possible or actual assumption, Scotus appears to be on board with the essential commitments of the Aristotelian project of finding the substances, and also appears to agree that in the natural run of events, changes “here below” can be ultimately attributed to complete categorial substances in virtue of their powers and activities, even though they are causally dependent on God, and even though God could bring about exceptions to the behavior of things according to their natural tendencies. For Scotus thinks that every categorial substance has a natural aptitude to be such an ultimate subject, which would be fulfilled, barring divine intervention. Thus, all the Aristotelian substance natures would be fundamental in what we might call the “no-assumptions” world.

Furthermore, even in the actual world they could all have a sort of fundamentality which grounds “agreement” between created entities as such. Apparently Scotus thinks that these “agreement” relations are not affected by any assumption events. The fact that Christ’s human nature remains to be a genuine human “substance” in the sense of “this-such,” entails that it does not cease to “agree” with the natures of other human persons as a result of being assumed by the Word. Rather, the most plausible reading is that the assumption of the individual human nature by the Word, simply brings about an additional “agreement” of the divine son with other human beings. Alternatively, the assumption of this human being does not bring about a new “agreement,” but simply brings it about that the “agreement” of this human being with other human beings is

---

88 Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 45-47 (Vatican, IX, 20).
ultimately attributed to the Word. Perhaps the difference between these two alternatives is merely verbal.

I also point out that in the case of the Incarnation, for some characteristic $F$, the assumed substance which is $F$ seems “fundamental” in explaining why the assuming supposit is $F$. As Scotus clearly says, the individual human nature is that “by which” $(quo)$ the divine son is human.$^{89}$ The integrity of the human nature of Christ as a concrete, individual, essentially human thing, is not impaired by its ceasing to be an ultimate subject of predication: rather, such integrity is required, in order for the Incarnation to achieve its goals of making it possible for Christ to suffer and die. According to Christological orthodoxy, Christ must have a complete human nature, including both body and soul – for, “what was not assumed cannot be healed.”

Thus, notwithstanding the Incarnational fact that Christ’s individual human nature gives up its role as an ultimate subject of predication, it still retains its role as an individual primary substance with the sort of causal powers proper to it. It continues to bear these powers and the contingent accidents that it has, although not as their ultimate subject. Otherwise, it couldn’t be part of the explanation of how the second person of the Trinity could have them.

What of the other problem, that Scotus thinks that different categorial substance-natures could be attributed to the same supposit simultaneously, yet he continues to hold

---

$^{89}$ Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 49 (Vatican, IX, 21): “Incommunicabile quod pertinet at rationem personae excludit duplicem communicabilitatem, videlicet communicabili ut ‘quod’ et communicabili ut ‘quo’; natura creata est incommunicabilis primo modo, quia singularis singularitate primo modo (singulare enim non est communicabile ut ‘quod’ nisi sit illimitatum, ut essentia divina); sed natura creata non est incommunicabilis secundo modo, intelligendo per ‘incommunicabile’ negationem communicationis simpliciter, scilicet negationem communicationis actualis et aptitudinalis…”

that haecceities are mutually incompossible? This seems to call for some principled explanation, of how an individual nature – but not the individual contracting entity which is metaphysically inseparable from it – could be attributed to an alien supposit. However, I will not pursue this further, here.

4.5 Carving at the Joints, Fundamentality, and Natural Properties

Before further documenting Scotus’s distinctions, let us once again consider the relationship between reality and some different kinds of language, using some labels from contemporary metaphysics. This is preliminary to ranking the different types of “structure” admitted by Scotus, according to the different kinds of distinction he admits, in chapter 5.

In chapter 3, I talked about what it means for language to “carve at the joints,” and began discussing the relation of “joints” to structure. One way of “carving at the joints” is for vocabulary to mark or line up with the mind-independent distinctions between different aspects of reality. But as I pointed out, predicates that require distinctions between their proper foundations and their subjects, do not ipso facto line up with metaphysical constituents that are shared among multiple things. As we saw in chapter 3, it is only when we have predicates that pick out shared metaphysical constituents, that we have the “natural” properties.

Neither do predicates that imply some real or formal distinction, always correspond to the best description of a thing. Let us define the “best description of a
thing’ as “the description of that thing (if there is one) that necessitates or explains other necessary descriptions of it, and is not itself necessitated or explained by any other description of that thing or of any other thing.” It is only when we have identified those predicates, that we have identified the fundamental properties. In general, for Scotus, these will generally be some quidditative predicates which are most “proper” – i.e., of some infima species.90 Furthermore, for Scotus qua Aristotelian, there is a special place for primary substance, which effectively regulates and also bears its accidents as an ultimate subject of predication.91 Accidents, though they are natural properties and real “things” according to Scotus, are naturally non-fundamental. So, within the natural world, “best / fundamental descriptions” and “natural properties” do not perfectly coincide, but rather “best / fundamental descriptions” probably coincides most closely with the description “natural properties that are substantial quiddities.” However, Scotus’s doctrine of the Incarnation falsifies this putative coextensiveness: as we just saw, created substances are possibly non-fundamental, in the event of a divine act of “assumption.” And as we will see, Scotus’s skepticism about the epistemic accessibility of substantial quiddities, entails that sometimes we talk about substantial quiddities without knowing what they are.92

Scotus thinks that accidental forms are also “things” which may be categorized according to mind-independent similarities between them. As we will see in chapter 5,

90 Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1-2, n. 73, n. 76 (Vatican, III, 50-51).

91 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 116 (Vatican, IV, 208): “substantia etiam, quae modo est genus generalissimum, ut accipitur pro omnibus speciebus inferioribus continet virtualiter omnia accidentia…et tamen propter hoc non negarentur substantiae creatae esse in genere quia continent virtualiter accidentia per modum sui…”


such similarities would track formally distinct realities of the same generic or specific type, within accidental forms themselves. Thus, although primary substance is the most fundamental type of being, concepts which classify accidental forms according to their proper natures may “carve at the joints” in the senses of (1) implying structure internal to the accidental form itself, and (2) tracking essence-based, natural-property-based, similarities between these things. Thus, any “accidental unity” or substance-accident pair, involves two “things,” one of which is more fundamental than the other, but both of which may be the proper significates of descriptions that “carve at the joints” in one or another sense.

To talk of formal distinction internal to a subject, is always to talk of structure. However, some items that are thus contained in a subject may correspond to more or less “fundamental” descriptions: some items correspond to the description of a subject according to its substantial quiddity, and some correspond to a description of a subject according to some “passion” or necessary accident of that quiddity. In general, Scotus says that substances “virtually contain” their proper passions and accidents – a term suggesting that they are somehow causally prior to them.

My hypothesis – to explore in chapter 5 – is that Scotus holds there are at least two types of cases involving passions. In some cases, subjects are only formally distinct from their proper passions, to the “lesser” degree of formal distinction; in these cases,

---


94 Scotus, In Metaph VI, q. 1, n. 49 (Franciscan Institute, III, 20): “quod si oportet ulterius dividere ad inveniendum subjectum alicuius scientiae, non oportet procedere dividendo aliquod genus accidentis. Nam quodlibet istorum, et quaelibet species cuiuslibet eorum, in aliqua specie substantiae virtualiter continetur immediate vel mediate. Et ita quodcumque istorum poneretur pro subjecto – licet forte haberet aliquam passionem de se scibilem – non esset tamen primum subjectum.”
they are metaphysically inseparable from them.\footnote{Cf. Scotus, In Metaph. IV, q. 2, “utrum ens et unum significent eandem naturam.”} An example of the first case is the “unity” and “goodness” of an individual substance, or the powers of intellect and will possessed by the intellective soul.

In other cases, subjects produce their passions as a matter of natural necessity, and in this case, the passions are different \textit{things} from their subjects. For natural necessity is at least supernaturally defeasible.\footnote{Alfred Freddoso, “The Necessity of Nature”; “Human Nature, Potency and the Incarnation,” \textit{Faith and Philosophy} 3 (1986): 27-53.} Thus, some passions are such that they could be prevented by a preternatural act of God. For example: a human substance has a natural tendency to “personate” itself – i.e., to be the ultimate subject of predication for its essence and accidents. Thus, the negation of actual dependence upon another substance is \textit{a proprium} that a human substance naturally has.\footnote{Scotus, Ord. III, d. 1, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 51 (Vatican, IX, 23): “ad tertium dico quod negatio potest dici ‘propria’, quia non est communicabilis multis ut ‘quod’, et ita negatio in creaturis est propria per illam entitatem positivam qua natura est ‘haec’, cui repugnat communicari multis ut ‘quod’; vel potest intelligi propria ut incommunicabilis alii ut ‘quo’, et sic in creaturis non est propria per affirmationem.”} (This example is tricky, because the \textit{proprium} in view is negative rather than a positive entity.) However, its possession of this \textit{proprium} is defeasible, since God might “assume” it.

Another example of different kinds of \textit{propria} is provided by accidental forms; but here, we are considering accidents as subjects of predication. Insofar as they are beings, accidents must always be subjects of predication for the passions of being, even if they are not “ultimate” subjects.\footnote{Scotus, In Metaph VI, q. 1, n. 49 (Franciscan Institute, III, 20): “quod si oportet ulterius dividere ad inveniendum subjectum aliiuis scientiae, non oportet procedere dividendo aliquod genus accidentis. Nam quodlibet istorum, et quaelibet species cuisslibet eorum, in aliqua specie substantiae virtualiter continetur immediate vel mediate. Et ita quodcumque istorum poneretur pro subjecto – licet forte haberet aliquam passionem de se scibilem – non esset tamen primum subjectum.”} However, in accordance with their essence, they also have a natural tendency to depend upon their subjects; and thus “dependence” will be a
“proper passion” of such forms, since the tendency to depend is predicated of them per se in the second way.99 In the Eucharist, this inherent tendency is overridden, in that the accident of “quantity” ceases to depend upon the bread when the bread is annihilated.

Now let us consider the sort of structure that is intrinsic to an “accidental unity.” Like Aristotle, Scotus holds that “accidental unities” do not have essence, strictly speaking. This is because an accidental unity involves two beings – a substance and an accident.100 Thus, predications that attribute some accident to a subject, are only true because of the contingent inherence of one concrete being in another. However, this contingency could either be a full-blown metaphysical contingency, or a natural contingency alone. In the first case, it might be a tendency natural to the substance to have that accident, though it could possibly be thwarted by a supernatural act of God.101

Descriptions from non-substantial categories that are semantically abstract (– e.g. “whiteness,” albedo), properly signify the essence of an accidental form, which is “attributed” to a substance as to its ultimate subject because it actualizes some potency of the substance by informing it – thus constituting an accidental unity.102 The adjectival predication “Socrates is white” implies the inherence of a particular accidental form of whiteness in the human substance which is Socrates. Such inherence is both naturally and metaphysically contingent, since Socrates and “this whiteness” are different things and


100 Scotus, In Metaph. VII, q. 7, n. 25 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 155): “but in those things said according to accident [secundum accidentes] not so, because they do not have a “what it was to be” [quod quid est], because they are two beings” [my translation].


102 In Metaph. VII, q. 7, n. 22, n. 25 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 153-155).
Socrates does not have a strong natural aptitude to be white.\textsuperscript{103} This predication is “denominative,” insofar as Socrates is white in virtue of something that is distinct from him – i.e., \textit{this} whiteness.

\textsuperscript{103} Cf. Freddoso, “The Necessity of Nature.”
CHAPTER 5:
STRUCTURE AND THE OBJECT OF SCIENCE

Before discussing the “structure” of physical substance according to Duns Scotus, I will explain my use of the word. It has something in common with the strictly mathematical notion that Kathryn Koslicki, Nicholas Rescher, and Paul Oppenheim endorse (and that David Oderberg criticizes) as an account of Aristotelian substantial form.¹ On that account of structure, structure is the abstract configuration – specified in terms of a domain of “slots” or positions, and the types of objects that may occupy the slots – which some variable set of parts or mathematical elements may bear together.² I intend, however, to be using it in what seems to be a slightly stronger sense: i.e., that there is an instance of “structure,” if and only if there is some mind-independent non-identity or distinction between two or more items, where the items also bear some real unifying relation to each other.

But not just any specifiable relationship between different items counts as “unifying” in the relevant sense. As a list of the types of unity that can be involved in “structure,” I choose the following types of “unity” that Scotus offers: the unity of


simplicity, the unity of a composite substance, accidental unity, and the unity of order.\(^3\)

Although it’s dubious that it falls under any of the previously mentioned types of unity, I
also include the “real less than numerical unity” which – as we’ve already seen – Scotus
ascribes to all the members of a categorial genus or species, insofar as they bear the
nature of that genus or species. These items too will enter into a “structure” which is
marked out by the relations of real agreement which they all bear, one to another, as a
result of their collective bearing of the “real less than numerical unity” that is proper to a
Scotist common nature. Scotus also mentions a “unity of aggregation” and a “formal
unity,” but I do not include them in my Scotist definition of “structure,” because I think it
is doubtful that mere aggregation involves any real unifying relation, and because Scotist
“formal unity” doesn’t involve items that are in any way mind-independently distinct.\(^4\)
Thus, every instance of “structure” in my sense is probably an instance of “structure” in
Koslicki’s, Rescher’s, and Oppenheim’s sense – but not vice versa, since God might enter
into “structure” with creatures in their sense but not in my sense.\(^5\) Furthermore, their

---

possomus inuenire in unitate multos gradus – primo, minima est aggregationis; in secundo gradu est unitas
ordinis, quae aliquid addit supra aggregationem; in terto est unitas per accidens, ubi ultra ordinem est
informatio, licet accidentalis, unius ab altero eorum quae sunt sic unum; in quarto est per se unitas
compositi ex principiis essentialibus per se actu et per se potentia; in quinto est unitas simplicitatis, quae est
vere identitatis (quidquid enim est ibi, est realiter idem cuilibet, et non tantum est unum illi unitate unionis,
sicut in alis modis) – ita, adhuc ultra, non omnis identitas est formalis. Voco autem identitatem formalem,
ubi illud quod dicitur sic idem, includit illud cui est sic idem, in ratione sua formalis quidditativa et per se
primo modo.”

Cf. Cross, “Duns Scotus’s Anti-Reductionistic Account of Material Substance,” Vivarium 33:2

\(^4\) For the unity of aggregation, cf. Cross, “Duns Scotus’s Anti-Reductionistic Account of Material
Substance,” 143-145.

It is clear that for Scotus, “formal unity” is the same as “adequate identity” or “Leibniz identity” –
i.e., it is complete indiscernability. Cf. Tweedale, Scotus vs. Ockham: A Medieval Dispute Over Universals,
vol. 2 (Edwin Mellen, 1995), 471.

sense appears to leave open the possibility that things may bear a “structure” that is entirely the result of a collating mind – whereas my Scotist sense of “structure” does not.

According to my favored use of “structure,” then, for any substance, thing, or ordered set of substances or things that exemplifies some “structure” between the different components, there will be some real non-identity or distinction between the items that are involved, and some type of real relation or real unity between them, such that this real relation or unity is borne “mutually” by each thing in the structure, with respect to all the other things in the structure. Conversely, whenever there is some non-identity or distinction between different things in reality, such that those things collectively bear some unity or unifying relation to each other in one of the given senses of “unity,” there will also be a “structure” that obtains between the different relata.

As Scotus thinks, there are many types of item that may enter into some kind of “structure,” including different common natures in the same individual supposit, different quidditative formalities or “realities” in the same thing, different “perfections” following from the quiddity of a thing (as with the divine essence and its attributes), really distinct and separable things in an accidental unity, or complete substances that stand in (e.g.) cause and effect relations to one another.

In general, the project of an Aristotelian science is to demonstrate that quidditative items in the subject’s essence are naturally accompanied by other items – called “propria” – where all these items are such that they enter into one or another type of structure together. This chapter will be largely concerned with different types of “propria” as they are more or less distinct from their subjects, and the difference between cases where propria are distinct “things” that actualize some real potency of their
subjects, as opposed to cases in which they are merely formally distinct “perfections” of their subjects. My plan is to list the different types of structure that play a role in Scotus’s account of material substance, according to the different types and degrees of distinction as Scotus lists them; and then to show how this list of structure-types underwrites his account of the different sciences. The *propria* considered in some Aristotelian sciences are “unitively contained” in (i.e. formally distinct from) their subjects, and hence are mere “perfections” that don’t actualize any potency in their subjects. Others, however, are *per se* accidents that their subjects cause as a matter of natural necessity. In the latter case, Scotus seems to think, a particular sort of common nature provides the unity for the object of a particular science.

As examples of items that are in some way distinct from their subjects, I will consider the *propria* of substances as considered by the “real” sciences of metaphysics, mathematics, and physics. Mathematics and physics both take “corporeal substance” as their *subject*, i.e. as the type of *suppositum* of which they treat. Each of these sciences considers that subject, insofar as it has different types of *propria* or *per se* characteristics, as considered from their several perspectives. Traditionally, mathematics regards the aspect of quantity, and physics the aspect of movement. Each science demonstrates further *propria* which necessarily hold for corporeal substances, as a result of the specific

---

6 “Physics” is also known as “natural science” – cf. Scotus, In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 53 (Franciscan Institute, III, 22).

7 In Metaph., VI, q. 1, nn. 52-53 (Franciscan Institute, III, 22): “Restat igitur substantia corporea cui absolute consideratae inest primo quantitas continua – et, secundum aliquos, discreta – et mediante quantitate omnia quae quantitatem consequuntur, ut relationes fundatae super quantitatem et qualitates quartae specie…ergo ipsa potest esse et est subjectum scientiae speculativeae possibilis nobis alterius a metaphysica…Ulterius eadem substantia corporea, non contracta ad inferius sed alia modo considerata, scilicet in quantum habens formam quae est principium determinatae operationis et motus et quietis, habet multas passiones sic sibi inhaerentes et scibiles per viam sensus. Ergo quoad istas erit alia speculativea quae dicitur physica sive naturalis.”
natures and primary *propria* of corporeal substances in a variety of particular circumstances.\(^8\) Thus, different kinds of *propria* constitute the sciences’ *formal objects* – those descriptions or aspects of the subjects, particular to a science, under which the necessary conclusions of that science follow.\(^9\) Similarly, metaphysics – in a way that has perfectly general application – demonstrates the “passions of being” (“one,” “good,” “true,” etc.) as *propria* of its subject, “being *qua* being.”\(^10\)

5.1 A Metaphysical Framework: Cataloguing Scotus’s Distinctions

It is especially typical of Duns Scotus’s philosophical *repertoire* that he distinguishes between distinctions. In this section, I will catalogue the various types of “structure” that Scotus admits, according to the different sorts of distinction that play a role in his philosophy. First, I will attempt to determine his conditions for a formal distinction, showing what sets it apart from a modal distinction. Then, I will discuss the different sorts of “structure” in his metaphysics, accordingly as they are subsumed under the different sorts of distinction he offers. This will allow us to compare and contrast the sort of structure in which common natures are involved, from the sort of structure which involves different “perfections” of the same common nature. I will also arrange the different sorts of distinction that do heavy lifting in Scotus’s metaphysics, according to the degree to which they “carve at the joints” of their subjects.

---

\(^8\) In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 52-53 (Franciscan Institute, III, 22).

\(^9\) In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 62-63 (Franciscan Institute, III, 24-25).

\(^10\) In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 47 (Franciscan Institute, III, 19-20).
5.1.1. Scotus’s Taxonomy of Distinctions

Scotus’s official taxonomy of distinctions includes three main types – the real distinction, the formal distinction, and the modal distinction. However, what Scotus believes to be the difference between the modal distinction and the formal distinction is a matter that requires some subtlety.\(^\text{11}\) The feature that is distinctive of a “modal distinction” vis-à-vis the “formal distinction,” I argue, is that the relata of a modal distinction together constitute only one “formal object” of cognition, since the distinction is between a “reality” and its “intrinsic mode.”\(^\text{12}\) For there to be two “formal objects,” is for there to be two items, each of which can properly terminate a cognition that is “adequate” to its reality; an “adequate cognition” is one whose content expresses the full intelligible content of the characterized item which is its object.\(^\text{13}\)

Importantly, Scotus supposes the modal distinction to be somehow \textit{less} than the formal distinction between genus-reality and difference-reality in a thing, on the grounds that the latter case involves act-potency composition.\(^\text{14}\) But, given Scotus’s account of the

\(^{11}\) Some have argued that the difference between the modal distinction and the formal distinction is merely a difference between a species of distinctions and its genus: i.e., that all pairs of items which are “modally distinct” are also “formally distinct” in a broad sense. (Cf. Alan Wolter, \textit{The Transcendentals and their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus} (Franciscan Institute, 1946), 24.) Although I believe this claim is false, I will show how it might be motivated in the current section of the paper, when I talk about the necessary and sufficient conditions for formal distinction.

\(^{12}\) Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223): “si ponamus aliquem intellectum perfecte moveri a colore ad intelligendum realitatem coloris et realitatem differentiae, quantumcumque habeat perfectum conceptum adaequatum conceptui primae realitatis, non habet in hoc conceptum realitatis a quo accipitur differentia, nec e converso – sed habet ibi duo objecta formalia, quae nata sunt terminare distinctos conceptus proprios. Si autem tantum esset distinctio in re sicut realitatis et sui modi intrinseci, non posset intellectus habere proprium conceptum illius realitatis et non habere conceptum illius modi intrinseci rei…”

\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Cf. Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 108 (Vatican, IV, 202-203): “illa [conceptus] autem per quae commune aliquod contrahitur ad deum et creaturam, sunt finitum et infinitum, qui dicunt gradus intrinsecos
formal distinction between the divine attributes and the divine essence, we can see that there are other instances of genuine, full-blown “formal distinction” that are – for the very same reason – less than this particular case of formal distinction. For the divine case involves formal distinction without act-potency composition: the divine attributes do not stand to the essence as act to potency. And as we will see, there are examples from the created sphere, as well: created things have transcendental “perfections” that do not actualize any potency in them.

Thus, in addition to the interpretive issue of how the modal distinction is supposed to differ from the (to beg no questions) “paradigmatic” instances of the formal distinction, Scotus provides us with another riddle: he often speaks as if the formal distinction itself has different degrees. The idea seems to be that certain pairs of items which are “formally distinct” are somehow more distinct than items in other such pairs – or, conversely, that for some cases of formal distinction, their relata are “one” to a greater degree than in other cases. Thus, in the case of certain types of items that Scotus thinks are formally distinct from other items included in their subjects, it is not ipso facto clear just “how distinct” he wants the items to be.

ipsius; ergo ista contrahentia non possunt esse differentiae, nec cum contracto constituint conceptum ita compositum sicut oportet conceptum speciei esse compositum, immo conceptus ex tali contracto et contrahente est simplicior quam possit esse conceptus speciei.”


Some interpreters have mistakenly thought that Scotus has two different versions of the “formal distinction”: an earlier version that implies a thorough-going realism concerning the items that are “formally distinct,” and a later version that does not – which Scotus putatively developed in response to dialectical and theological pressures at Paris.17 Others, however, in treating the formal distinction and its role in Scotus’s metaphysics, have demonstrated his unchanging ontological commitment to the mind-independent existence of the “formalities” or “realities” that are the relata of a formal distinction.18 Scotus talks a lot about how the distinction between these items is much “less” than a real distinction; but we can see that what Scotus intends to mitigate is the distinction, rather than the reality of its relata.19 And it’s clear from these studies that an unmitigated realism would characterize Scotus’s stance with respect to the relata in both “degrees” of the formal distinction mentioned above.

Although anachronistic, it is not false to say that Scotus’s formal distinction is a way of talking about a particular kind of “structure.” For Scotus, items that are formally distinct are items that are both metaphysically inseparable and distinct in such a way that the distinction is not created by the mind. For any pair of formally distinct items, both

17 Marilyn Adams, “Universals in the Early Fourteenth Century,” in Kretzmann & Kenny, eds., The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 416: “Some of Scotus’ Parisian opponents charged that his application of formal identity and distinction to God compromised divine simplicity. Perhaps it was for this reason that Scotus took a different position….he now denies that [formal distinction] involves distinguishing a plurality of property-bearers within what is really one and the same thing.” Cf. Peter King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” in The Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 24: “This [later] formulation minimizes the ontological commitments of the formal distinction, since on its face, it does not require the existence of multiple property bearers within one and the same subject but merely asserts that a particular relation does not hold among two ‘ways’ (A and B) that a thing can be.”


19 Ibid.
items are “really there” and are somehow distinct, prior to any consideration by the mind. Thus, they must both be taken into account, in an attempt to “write the book of the world.”

What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for positing a formal distinction, in any case? Scotus seems to hold in Ordinatio I, distinction 8, part 1, question 4, that for anything we can speak of under different descriptions, whenever those different descriptions (1) are not lexically synonymous, (2) are not merely syntactically different (like “swim” and “swimming”), and (3) are not formed by comparison of the thing ad extra, there is an ontological requirement for formally distinct perfections in that thing, to explain the application of the semantically divergent concepts that apply to it. It is probable that Scotus does not offer (1-3) as a list of necessary and sufficient conditions; but he appears to take these conditions as collectively sufficient in his argument for a

---

20 Ord. I, d. 2, pt. 2, qq. 1-4, nn. 401-402 (Vatican, II, 355): “Potest autem vocari differentia rationis, sicut dicit Doctor quidam, non quod ‘ratio’ accipiatur pro differentia formata ab intellectu, sed ut ratio accipitur pro quidditate rei secundum quod quidditas est objectum intellectus; vel alio modo potest vocari differentia virtualis, quia illud quod habet talem distinctionem, in se non habet rem et rem, sed est una res habens virtualiter sive praeminenter quasi duas realitates, quia utrique realitati ut est in illa re, competit illud quod est proprium principium tali realitati, ac si ipsa esset res distincta: ita enim haec realitas distinguit, et illa non distinguit, sicut si ista esset una res et illa alia.”

21 Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 190 (Vatican, IV, 258): “…quia quantumcumque aliqua per impossibile separentur, si eis separatis aliquid competat uni et non alteri, hoc non potest esse nisi propter aliquam distinctionem formalem rationis istius a ratione illius. . . unde numquam esset hic fallacia accidentis ‘intellectione distinguuntur ista, intellectio est natura, ergo natura distinguuntur’, nisi ratio intellectiois extranearetur rationi naturae, in quantum comparantur ad tertium; ergo illa extraneatio praevnit ‘aliquam distinctionem’ rationis ab illa, in quantum comparantur ad tertium, et illa praevnit distinctionem rationum inter se.”

Cf. King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” 24: “The presence of formally distinct items within a thing provides a real basis for our deployment of different concepts regarding that thing, which are thereby anchored in reality. For, by definition, formally distinct items exhibit different properties, and these can serve as the real basis for our distinct concepts.”
formal distinction between God’s attributes. And at least one commentator has identified this list as a list of necessary and sufficient conditions.\textsuperscript{22}

But as Scotus’s discussion of the modal distinction in distinction 8, question 3 suggests, perhaps there is really a \textit{further necessary condition}, unstated and merely implicit in question 4: (4) items related by formal distinction must be such that \textit{neither} is an “intrinsic mode” of the other. This requirement would secure their status (granting conditions 1-3 are also met) as distinct “formal objects” of cognition – each of which is apt to terminate its own proper “adequate” or intuitive cognition. Otherwise, it would follow that the modal distinction itself must be a special instance of the formal distinction! I will shortly discuss why that is so, and why it is an undesirable conclusion.

In either case, the requirement for a formal distinction appears to be that, for pairs of descriptive concepts that differ in meaning, each must have been formed simply by the thing’s own intrinsic and innate characters, as cognized through the intellect’s simple application to the thing, and not as a result of the sort of mental operations that produce “relations of reason.”\textsuperscript{23} True, Scotus thinks that some items thus contained within a

\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Marilyn Adams, “Universals in the early fourteenth century,” in Kretzmann & Kenny, eds., \textit{The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy} (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 415: “Scotus restricts the relations of formal identity and distinction to entities that are or are in what is really one and the same thing and understands that (A) x and y are formally distinct…if and only if (a) x and y are or are in what is really one and the same thing (res); and (b) if x and y are capable of definition (in the strict Aristotelian sense, in terms of genus and differentia), the definition of x does not include y and the definition of y does not include x; and (c) if x and y are not capable of definition, then if they were capable of definition, the definition of x would not include y and the definition of y would not include x.”

\textsuperscript{23} "Perhaps the most intelligible and still fairly accurate notion of a ‘formality’ is to consider it as the objective basis of a concept which, though real, does not represent the whole intelligible content of the physical [or non-physical] entity, but a part only.” Wolter, \textit{The Role of the Transcendental Concepts in Scotus’s Metaphysics}, 30.
subject are not epistemically accessible to us through sense experience; in that case, whatever we can know of them must be discerned by inference from what is epistemically accessible to us through sense experience.\textsuperscript{24} So the sort of intellective understanding by which a thing is understood under different first-intentional concepts, may presuppose discrete steps of inference: i.e. from the constancy of a certain set of accidents, to the conclusion that there is a determinate type of substance that contains “per se in the first way” all the different quidditative items that are needed to explain the constant correlation of those accidents.

The point is that concepts of first intention are concepts that capture intrinsic characteristics, rather than mind-dependent characteristics; and therefore, they imply the sort of internal structure that is involved in formal distinction. Thus, the systemic requirement for a formal distinction is ultimately metaphysical and epistemological: the idea is that knowledge, reference, the truth of language, or scientific adequacy requires that the structure of classificatory and predicative language bear some isomorphism to the structure of the world. Furthermore, the characters thus contained are not limited to intrinsically absolute ones, but may also include inherently relational characters – e.g., the relation of dependence of the creature on God.\textsuperscript{25}

It is obvious that for any candidate pair of items in reality, those items either are, or are not, “formally distinct,” whether we choose conditions (1-3) or (1-4) as


\textsuperscript{25} Scotus, Lect. II, d. 1, qq. 4-5, n. 256 (Vatican, XVIII, 86).
constitutive of formal distinction. However, let us also consider what it could mean for Scotus to talk as if it is possible for distinction to have degrees, in either case. We can explore how either candidate set of conditions would make sense of this idea, and thus judge whether the modal distinction and the formal distinction are really different. I will do this by first supposing that (1-3), then that (1-4) is the correct description of the formal distinction.

First, suppose that (1-3) typifies the formal distinction. Then, it immediately follows that the modal distinction is a species of the formal distinction. For the paradigmatic instances of concept-pairs involved in cases of modal distinction, meet all the necessary conditions for formal distinction mentioned in question 4: both the concept of a “reality” and of its “intrinsic mode” can be nonrelational concepts, non-synonymous, and more than merely lexically different. Scotus says that something containing items that are only “modally distinct” is comparatively simpler than a formal distinction involving act-potency composition. On the present supposition, then, the modal distinction itself is just a very “small degree” of formal distinction – like the case of the divine attributes and the divine essence. We will say that items which are formally distinct to a very “small degree,” are as strongly unified as it is possible for distinct items to be – but we must also grant that all such item-pairs are distinct in a way that is equally as important as other formal distinctions for writing the complete book of the world. Put

---


In Metaph. VII, q.19, n. 44 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 370): “Est enim maxima [distinctio] naturarum et suppositorum. Media naturarum in uno supposito. Minima diversarum perfectionum, sive rationum perfectionalium unitive contentarum in una natura.”

27 Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 108 (Vatican, IV, 203): “…immo conceptus ex tali contracto et contrahente [i.e. ex realitate et modo intrinseco] est simplicior quam possit esse conceptus speciei.”
differently, we must say that each relatum involved in the modal distinction is a distinct item that must be listed in that comprehensive catalogue. But this option makes it too hard to understand what Scotus means by saying that the concept of a reality without its “intrinsic mode” is an “inadequate concept.” For this Scotist locution implies that a reality “without its intrinsic mode” is not a real item that is “there” in the world to be talked about at all! Rather, the only item that exists – in any mind-independent way – is the reality that includes the “intrinsic mode.” This, after all, is what is most plausibly meant by saying that the mode is “intrinsic” to the cognized object.

So perhaps Scotus implicitly intends (4) as a further necessary condition for formal distinction. And this makes more sense of the Scotist language about the adequacy of concepts and the intrinsicality of modes. On this supposition, there will be two contrasts – one between different cases of the formal distinction, and one between the formal distinction and the modal distinction. For each contrast, I make a terminological suggestion.

(1) With reference to the differing degrees of formal distinction, I suggest we say that as Scotus posits increasingly “lesser” degrees of formal distinction – so he “carves at the joints more finely.” Appropriately enough, this sounds as if we are saying that formal distinctions of the “lesser” sort are “joints” that are somehow less pronounced because the items involved are so strongly unified, but are still every bit as important as the

---

28 Richard Cross, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” Antonianum 76:1 (2001), 13. “This means that for Scotus, the concept [i.e. being] as such is a vicious abstraction, an abstraction that does not apply to any real extramental property of the thing.”

29 Cf. Scotus, Quodlibetal Questions 5, n. 4 (Wadding, 12: 119): “Ex hoc sequitur quod infinitas intensiva non sic se habet ad ens, quod dicitur infinitum tanquam quaedam passio extrinseca adveniens ill enti: nec etiam eo modo quo verum et bonum intelligentur passions vel proprietates entis: immo infinitas intensiva dicit modum intrinsecum illius entitatis, cuius est sic intrinsecum, quod circumscribendo quodlibet, quod est proprietas vel quasi proprietas eius, adhuc infinitas eius non excluditur, sed includitur in ipsa entitate, quae est unica.”
others for writing the book of the world. For both of its relata must be taken into our ontological inventory, to explain all the true fundamental statements. This would apply nicely to Scotus’s way of thinking about the distinction between the divine essence and divine attributes – as we saw from the last section of chapter III; and probably to the distinction between the different “passions of being” in an individual thing.

(2) With reference to the difference between the formal and modal distinctions, I suggest that when we use descriptions of things which signify the relata in formal distinctions, we use the descriptions that are joint-carving, whereas those associated with a modal distinction are not. Appropriately enough, this sounds as if we are saying that the formal distinctions, as opposed to the modal distinctions, are the ones that are important for writing the book of the world: i.e., both relata in a formal distinction are items which must be taken into the complete account – but not so for the relata of a modal distinction. We could still say that the modal distinction is important for metaphysics, since it is part of the story about how diverse realities can produce the same transcendental-level concept.

If the formal distinction and the modal distinction are really different, it is most plausible to take the first suggestion as stating the contrast between different instances of Scotus’s formal distinction as they do or don’t involve act-potency composition, while the second suggestion applies to the difference between the formal distinction and modal distinction. Thus we could make some sense of the difference between them, while also proposing two different ways in which a pair of putative items can be “more strongly unified.” If (on the other hand) the modal distinction is just a species of the formal distinction, then we would have to choose between suggestions (1) and (2) for
understanding how items could be “more unified,” since they would thereby become competing options for understanding the difference between “greater” and “lesser” degrees of formal distinction. Either way we take it, Scotus’s habitual mode of expressing himself requires that it is intelligible to talk about real “degrees” of distinction that are “less” than that of the simple formal distinction as such – or at least that some instances of the formal distinction are “simpler” and “less” than others.

Suggestion (1) has to do with the difference between cases of formal distinction, as they do or don’t involve act-potency composition. But what precisely is this difference, and what is it to “carve at the joints more or less finely”? Scotus thinks that the reason that the divine attributes vis-à-vis the divine essence are distinct by a “lesser” distinction, is that they do not actualize any potency in the essence. The idea is that neither item supplies any deficiency in the other: i.e., that neither item determines the other, such that (considered in itself) it could have been determined differently. By contrast, he thinks the genus-reality and the difference-reality in any created thing, are distinct by the sort of formal distinction which implies act-potency composition: the difference-reality stands to the genus-reality “as act to potency.” But what might this mean?

As an example, let us take “animality” and “rationality” for the genus-reality and the difference-reality in a complete human substance. For Scotus, “animality” stands as potency with respect to “rationality,” and “rationality” is the actualizing factor with respect to that potency. Now consider a tempting but ultimately unworkable reading of

---

this Scotist saying. Remembering Scotus’s doctrine of the plurality of substantial forms, someone might construe that “animality” refers to the person’s fully organized body, as constituted by prime matter and the substantial forms of the organs and of corporeity; while its “rationality” would be its rational soul; and that these are the two items that are related by composition. For after all, these two things are metaphysically separable on Scotus’s account, since the substantial forms that constitute the body do not include the intellective soul, and the intellective soul is separable from body.31

But this can’t be the right way of conceiving of the present sort of act-potency composition, since Scotus thinks that a single form in a categorial genus is also structured by act-potency composition of genus-reality and difference-reality.32 Furthermore, items that are related by formal distinction, in the way that Scotus thinks “genus-reality” and “difference-reality” to be, are always metaphysically inseparable. We must note that both the human soul and the human body, equally belong in both the species “human” and in the genus “animal.” And so the animality of a person (i.e. as a complete being) could not be separated from their rationality, not even by a metaphysical or broadly logical possibility. Rather, Scotus’s way of putting things is that the animality taken abstractly in itself, insofar as it is animality, could be determined by the specific difference that constitutes (e.g.) penguins.33

---


32 In Metaph. VII, q. 19, n. 71 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 378): “[O]mnis forma informans materiam primam habet unam rationem realem imperfectissimam et potentialissimam quae constituit perfectibile per aliam rationem rationem eiusdem formae actualiorem et perfectiorem…”

33 Scotus, In Metaph. VII, q. 19, n. 51 (Franciscan Institute, III, 372): “Nec tamen quaecumque continentia perfectiunum sufficit ad rationem generis et differentiae, sed illarum quorum altera potentialis est ex propria ratione respectu alterius; et sic potentialis quod, quantum est ex per se ratione eius in re, non repugnaret sibi esse sub opposito actu. Sicut perfectio coloreitas non tantum est perfectibilis per gradum
What then does Scotus mean, then, by saying that the genus-reality and the
difference-reality are related by “act-potency composition”? The idea seems to be that
within human nature, animality and their rationality are different quidditative items, i.e.
different quidditative perfective characters or natural properties, within the essential
make-up of human nature, each one being its own “formal object” that can uniquely
terminate an adequate or intuitive cognition. They are not just different powers or
perfections that human nature has, ad extra; they are formally different elements in its
metaphysical constitution. This may still leave us with questions about the particular sort
of “act-potency” relationship Scotus thinks is involved here. Perhaps the only “potency”
involving here is “logical potency,” a mutual compatibility for opposites that attaches to
the terms and concepts themselves.34

The contrasting case is that of different “perfections” that are grounded by the
same quiddity; for example, the intellective soul immediately has the different perfections
of intellect and will, just as angels do; a created substance exemplifies the different
“passions of being” equally with some other being that is “primally diverse” from it.
“Perfections” in this sense do not actualize any potency in their subjects.35 A “perfection”

perfectionis proprium albedini, sed etiam quantum est ex propria ratione coloreitatis illius non repugnaret
sibi subesse gradui proprio nigredinis.”

34 For logical potency, see In Metaph. IX, q. 1-2, n. 18 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 514); cited in

35 Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 11 (Wadding, 6.2, 767): “…Si [potentialia] sunt partes essentiales
substantiales, igitur una erit perfectibilis ab alia essentialiter, ut intellectus a voluntate; igitur anima non
posset informare corpus. Probo, quia potentia receptiva et perfectibilis ab alia potentia, non potest esse
magis dependens quam materia ignis vel alterius corporis. Sed materia ignis, vel ignis ipse, non potest
inessse alciui, ipsum informando; igitur sic nec anima potest esse forma, vel actus primus alicuius, quia suae
parti essentiali, scilicet potentiae illi repugnaret informare; igitur tota anima non potest esse forma alicuius. Si
autem dicatur quod in idem redit, scilicet quod una non perficit aliam, sed omnes perficiunt materiam
animae, tunc videtur idem quod prius, scilicet quod toti animae repugnaret esse actum primum alicuius, et
informare primo: quia parti suae essentiali, scilicet suae materiae, repugnaret informare; homo etiam non
esset unum per se et primo.”

209
in the sense that is relevant here, is merely a function or power of some subject’s particular quiddity *ad extra*, and not involved in the subject’s metaphysical constitution. Thus, as we saw from chapter 3, if two things do not share a nature, but have a similar effect, they may be univocally describable by the same “perfection” term. And anything that falls under different descriptions that meet conditions 1-4, must also have different “perfections” to ground these descriptions. So these terms will always correspond to formally distinct characters in the subject, but *not* always to different quidditative items in it that stand to one another as act to potency. “Perfections” in this sense are metaphysically inevitable, given the complete quiddity, and they may be thought of as manifestations or properties of it. So we may say that this sort of structure is real, but “less pronounced” than the other sort.

Now, consider the next contrast. I think the difference between the formal distinction and the modal distinction can be described as a difference between cases of concept-foundations in which structure is and is not involved, respectively. That is, formal distinction involves structure; modal distinction does not. One way of further fleshing out suggestion (2) about how the formal distinction and the modal distinction differ is to argue that, for pairs of items that are only modally distinct, Scotus places more emphasis on the mind’s role in abstracting the concept of the “reality” as conceived without its intrinsic mode, than in instances when the mind abstracts concepts of items related by a formal distinction. For, in instances of the formal distinction, Scotus thinks *both* items – e.g., the genus-reality and the difference-reality; God’s wisdom and God’s justice – are apt to produce their own, nonoverlapping “adequate, first-intentional” concept. For, as Scotus says, each of these characters constitutes its own proper “formal
object” of cognition, and “can terminate an intuitive cognition in its own right” – which is the sort of cognition that guarantees an isomorphism with its object. Maybe Scotus implies that the intellect takes a merely passive role with respect to the abstractive formation of these concepts; but that in the case of the modal distinction, the mind must engage in a further abstraction – after all its simple classifying is done – in order to produce the “imperfect” concept which does not express the full reality of its formal object.

All this suggests that condition (4) crucially distinguishes the formal distinction from the modal distinction; and it also suggests that there is no real or formal distinction between a reality and its intrinsic mode.

5.1.2 An Ordering of Scotist Distinctions

Given these preliminaries, I offer the following ranking of Scotist distinctions. I list them in an order proceeding from what Scotus calls “greater” degrees of distinction to what he calls “lesser” or “more simple” degrees of distinction. This order, not coincidentally, is also an ordering according to the presence of characteristics that make for importance in metaphysics – i.e., naturalness, fundamentality, and structure – in such a way that whatever concept exemplifies these things, or more of these things, to a

36 Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 142 (Vatican, IV, 224). “…non enim [conceptus communis] accipitur ab aliqua realitate ut conceptus aequatus realitati illi, sive ut perfectus conceptus illi realitati aequatus, sed deminutus et imperfectus, in tantum etiam quod si illa realitas, a qua accipitur, videretur perfecta et intuitive, intuens ibi non haberet distincta objecta formalia, scilicet realitatem et modum, sed idem objectum formale, - tamen intelligens intellectione abstractiva, propter imperfectionem illius intellectionis, potest habere illud pro objecto formali licet non habeat alterum.”

37 Richard Cross, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” Antonianum 76:1 (2001), 13. “This means that for Scotus, the concept [i.e. being] as such is a vicious abstraction, an abstraction that does not apply to any real extramental property of the thing.”

greater degree, is to that degree “more joint-carving.” Thus, the items here are listed in a sequence according to which the proper concepts for the relata in the earlier distinctions are comparatively “more joint-carving” than the proper concepts for the relata in the later distinctions.

1. The real distinction between two complete beings.

2. The real distinction between a “res” and a different “res” within the same being, where the different “res” are either essential parts of substance, or contingent accidents.

3. The formal distinction between a “realitas” and a different “realitas” in the same being, such that one is act and the other is potency.

4. The formal distinction between a “formalitas” and a “formalitas” in the same being, such that they are not related to one another as act to potency.39

5. The modal distinction between a “formalitas” and its “intrinsic mode.”

Now I will briefly discuss the textual loci and examples for each one of these degrees of distinction, and the ways in which Scotus differentiates them from one another. First, consider:

1. The distinction between two complete beings.

This, of course, is an instance of the “real distinction” rather than the “formal distinction.” “Complete beings” are Aristotelian primary substances; as such, they are in possession of all their essential parts (formal and material), and do not have any natural

39 Scotus sometimes uses the term “realitas” to refer to items at this level of distinction, but I have chosen the term “formalitas” in the interest of clearly differentiating these two levels.
tendency to be “attributed” to some other “complete being.” They may be either more or less simple, as they are of the kind to be composed of multiple substantial forms, or to be constituted by a single one. As we saw, all primary substances have a natural aptitude to “supposit” themselves – i.e. to be the ultimate subjects of predication for every item which is predicated of them, whether per se or per accidens. Thus, in the way I have stipulated that we use the language, it makes sense to say that descriptions of things as they are “complete beings” are the most joint-carving descriptions, in the sense that they are the “best description,” “natural,” and signify things that are “really distinct from one another” – the greatest degree of distinction that Scotus posits. As we also saw, Scotus thinks that complete beings may be made up of metaphysically separable parts.

Scotus formulates “real distinction” in terms of the metaphysical possibility that, for any items that are really distinct, at least one of them could exist without the other. Scotus argues that in general, a relation of some created thing to another created thing is itself a thing that is really distinct from its “foundation,” on the grounds that its foundation can exist without it. According to the way Scotus uses the term, then, both relata of a real distinction are always distinct “res.” However, items that are “really distinct” only need be such that one of them can exist without the other – not necessarily


41 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 55 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 23): “scientia alia est de conceptu communissimo per se passiones habente, scilicet de ente, et alia de conceptu minus communi primo passiones habente. Et per ‘primo’ excluditur omne accidens, intelligendo sic quod primo habens passiones non sit passio alterius.”

42 Lect. II, d. 1, qq. 4-5, n. 184 (Vatican, XVIII, 18).
such that each may exist without the other. Thus, “real distinction” only implies “one-way separability.”

In Scotus’s system, for something to have the status of “res” need not imply its possible independent existence, and indeed, there are some res for which independent existence is not possible. For example, Scotus argues that the relation of similarity that Plato bears to Socrates is a “res” on the grounds that Plato can exist without it, but his general account of relations entails that it cannot exist unless both Plato and Socrates exist. (He rules that in general, relations cannot exist apart from their relata.) Thus, all individual accidents are also “res” that are really distinct from substance, although they have an intrinsic ordering to substance, and even though some of them are not able to exist apart from their substances.

This brings us to the degree of distinction which is next in terms of joint-carving:

2. The distinction between a “res” and a different “res” within the same being, where the different “res” are either essential parts of substance (i.e. substantial form or prime matter), or contingent accidents.

This also is an instance of the “real distinction” rather than the “formal distinction.”

However, it is “less” in that accidents and the essential parts of substance have an

---

43 Cf. Scotus, Quodlibetal Questions, q. 3, in Opera Omnia (Vives) vol. XXV, pp. 138-139; Wadding, XII, pp. 81-81; as quoted in Martin Tweedale, Scotus vs. Ockham: A Medieval Dispute Over Universals, vol. 1 (Edwin Mellen, 1999), 135-138. Tweedale’s commentary: “I favor, then, an interpretation that ascribes to Scotus mutual inseparability, where a proof of the real otherness of A and B requires only that A can exist without B or B without A, but does not require both.” A Medieval Dispute Over Universals, vol. 2, 582. Tweedale’s interpretation is borne out by the way that Scotus defends the reality of real relations in Lect. II, d. 1, qq. 4-5, n. 184 (Vatican, XVIII, 18).

44 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, qq. 4-5, n. 205 (Vatican, VII, 103-104).

45 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., n. 323 (Vatican, III, 193): “[Q]uia omnis respectus habet aliquid in quo fundatur, quod secundum se non est ad aliud...”
intrinsic aptitude to be attributed to substance. Thus, they are not “complete beings” on their own, even though they are truly “beings” and “essences” on their own. “Accidents” are truly “beings” and as such they have their own “essences,” as well as a natural aptitude to depend upon primary substances. If that is so, then to refer to an accidental form, substantial form, or prime matter, may be to use language that is “less joint-carving” than when we refer to a complete being, but which is still joint-carving to some degree – since it refers to an essence or “natural property,” and also to a distinct thing.

3. The distinction between a “realitas” and a different “realitas” in the same being, such that one is act and the other is potency.

This distinction holds between a genus-reality and a difference-reality in the same thing, as well as between the whole quidditative reality and the individual difference in

---

46 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 163 (Vatican, III, 101): “concedo tunc quod totum quod accidens est, attributionem habet essentiale ad substantiam…”


Cf. Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, nn. 106-107 (Vatican, IV, 201-202): “hanc rationem aliaqualiter pertractando intelligo sic, quod in aliquibus creaturis genus et differentia accipiuntur ab alia et alia realitate (sicut ponendo plures formas in homine, animal accipitur a sensitiva et ratione ab intellectiva), et tunc illa res, a qua accipitur genus, vere est potentialis et perfectibilis ab illa re a qua accipitur differentia. Aliquando, quando non sunt ibi res et res (sicut in accidentibus), saltem in una re est aliqua propria realitas a qua sumitur genus et alia realitas a qua sumitur differentia; dicatur prima a et secunda b: a secundum se est potentialae ad b, ita quod praecise intelligendo a et praecise intelligendo b, a ut intelligitur in primo instanti naturae – in quo praecise est ipsum – ipsum est perfectibile per b (sicut si res esset alia)…”

49 “According to Scotus, the minimal distinction required to ground our concepts of genus and difference is that of two formally distinct realities (realitates) related as act and potency in one and the same thing (res). The concept of a genus is taken from one reality, perfected by and potential to, the formally distinct reality from which the difference is taken.” Stephen Dumont, “Transcendental Being: Scotus and Scotists,” Topoi 11 (1992), 138-139.
a substance. The idea, as Scotus puts it, is that the reality associated with the specific
difference is “actual,” while that associated with the genus is “potential”:

I say the reality from which the specific difference is taken is
actual with respect to the reality from which the genus or the
notion of the genus is taken, in such a way that the latter reality is
not formally the former one. Otherwise there would be
unnecessary repetition in a definition; the genus alone, or the
difference, would sufficiently determine the species... Yet
sometimes this contracting difference is other than the form from
which the notion of the genus is taken, namely when the species
adds some reality over and above the nature of the genus. But
sometimes it is not another thing, but only another formality or
another formal concept of the same thing… So too the reality of
an individual is like a specific reality in this respect: it is so to
speak an act determining the reality of the species, which is as it
were possible and potential. But it is unlike it in this respect: it is
never taken from an added form, but rather precisely from the last
reality of the form.50

As this passage shows, the composition of a “realitas” and a “realitas” is not the same as
the composition between different “res” in a substance: The former are not
metaphysically separable, while the latter are.51 We can see from these passages that a
single categorial res will always contain formally distinct realitates. For example, every
substantial form in the genus of “substance” includes a genus realitas and a species
realitas, as well as an individual realitas.52 Scotus justifies this claim on the grounds that
each substantial form that informs matter, belongs in a genus of forms according as they

50 Scotus, Ord. II, dist. 3, p. 1, q. 6, nn. 179-180 (Spade, 104).
51 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 106.
52 Cf. Tweedale’s commentary: “Here Scotus argues for a line which would be quite in accord
with the view of Aquinas that any single material substance has just one substantial form. That form
unitively contains a nested series of formal perfections of increasing determinateness as we descend from
the highest genus. Each lower level is achieved by adding a “perfectional difference” to the preceding
potential perfection. Each potential is perfectly proportioned to the ensuing actualization through a
difference. None of this implies a series of forms attached in layers to some original matter.” Tweedale, “A
Medieval Dispute Over Universals,” vol. 2, pp. 545-546.
are intrinsically oriented to matter, and thus contains a genus-reality which is of itself in potential to the reality of the specific difference.\textsuperscript{53}

Even though a substantial form of the sort that constitutes a material substance is not a “complete being,” Scotus still puts it within the category of substance “by reduction,” i.e. since it is an essential part of a complete suppositum in that category.\textsuperscript{54} Presumably, it will also fall under a given categorial species, in that same way. Given that whatever has a species predicated of it, also has a genus and a specific difference predicated of it, it follows that there are always at least two natural perfective characters in any created res, to account for both these predicates. These quidditative characters will be other than the non-quidditative character of the individuating principle. If so, and if the categorial predicates correspond to the “natural properties” or real universals, it follows that everything that falls (whether primarily or by reduction) under some Aristotelian category – including substantial and accidental forms – is constituted not just by one but by at least two universals.

4. The distinction between a “formalitas” and a “formalitas” in the same being, such that they are not related to one another as act to potency.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} In Metaph. VII, q. 19, n. 71 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 378): “[O]mnis forma informans materiam primam habet unam rationem realem imperfectissimam et potentialissimam quae constituit perfectibile per aliam rationem rationem eiusdem formae actualiorem et perfectiorem…”

\textsuperscript{54} Cf. In Metaph. V, qq. 5-6, nn. 47-49 (Franciscan Institute, III, 458).

\textsuperscript{55} Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 193 (Vatican, IV, 261): “Hoc declaro, quia includere formaliter est includere aliquid in ratione sua essentiali, ita quod si definitio includentis assignaretur, inclusum esset definitio vel pars definitionis. Sicut autem definitio bonitatis in communi non habet sapientiam in se, ita nec infinita infinitam. Est igitur aliqua non identitas formalis sapientiae et bonitatis, inquantum earum essent distinctae definitiones, si essent definibiles; definitio autem non tantum indicat rationem causatam ab intellectu, sed quidditatem rei, est ergo non-identitas formalis ex parte rei.”
This degree of distinction holds between different transcendental “perfections” in God, and the different powers in the intellective soul. It also holds with respect to the “personal property” and the quidditative reality of the divine essence, in a divine person. It is plausible that Scotus thinks this same degree of distinction also applies with respect to the different “passions of being” in a creature. This degree of formal distinction is always less than the kind that involves “act-potency” composition, for it doesn’t involve some item being “perfected” by another item.

56 Scotus, Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 17 (Wadding, VI.2, 772): “ideo dico aliter sic…continentia unitiva, non est eorum quae omnino sunt idem, quia illa non uniuntur; nec est eorum quae manent distincta, ista distinctione, qua fuerunt distincta ante unionem: sed quae sunt unum realiter, manent tamen distincta formaliter, sive quae sunt idem identitate reali, distincta tamen formaliter, huismodi autem contenta sunt in duplici differentia: quia quaedam sunt de natura continentis, ut quaeque sunt superius ad continentem, verbi gratia, ab eadem re accipitur ratio albedinis, coloris, qualitatis sensibilis, et qualitatis: et haec sunt superioria ad hanc albedinem, et ideo omnia sunt de essentia eius. Alia sunt contenta in aliquo unitive, quasi posteriora, quia quasi passiones continentis, nec sunt res aliae ab ipso continentem. Isto modo ens continet multas passiones, quae non sunt res aliae ab ipso ente, ut probat Aristoteles In Prin. 4 Metaph., distinguuntur tamen ab invicem formaliter, et quidditativae, et etiam ab ente; formalitate dico reali, et quidditativa; aliter metaphysica concludeat tales passiones de ente, et illas considerans, non esset scientia realis, sicut ergo ens continet unitive rationem unius, veri et boni aliquorum: sic anima continet potentias istas unitive, quanquam formaliter sint distinctae.”

57 Scotus, QQ. 5 (Wadding, XII)

58 Cf. Scotus, In Metaph., IV, q. 2, n. 143 (Franciscan Institute, III, 354).

59 Scotus, Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 11 (Wadding, 6.2, 767): “Si [potentiae] sunt partes essentiales substantiales, igitur una erit perfectibilis ab alia essentialiter, ut intellectus a voluntate; igitur anima non posset informare corpus. Probo, quia potentia receptiva et perfectibilis ab alia potest esse magis dependens quam materia ignis vel alterius corporis. Sed materia ignis, vel ignis ipse, non potest inesse alciui, ipsum informando; igitur sic nec anima potest esse forma, vel actus primum aliquius, quia suae parti essentiiali, scilicet potentiae illi repugnat informare; igitur tota anima non potest esse forma aliquius. Si autem dicatur quod in idem reedit, scilicet quod una non perficit aliem, sed omnes perficiunt materiam animae, tunc videtur idem quod prius, scilicet quod toti animae repugnat esse actum primum aliquius, et
The basic idea, I suggest, is that items formally distinct to this degree, are not such that they constitute different quidditative items that make up the essence of a thing. Rather, such items may be different intrinsic properties or powers of the same quidditative item, precisely with respect to different sorts of objects ad extra.60 For example: the power to cause the concept “being” is formally distinct from the power to cause the concept “good,” but one being that is absolutely simple in its metaphysical constitution may have both these perfections. The mental comparison of the subject to these objects is not what gives rise to the real existence and real distinction of these powers or capacities in the subject61; but they are only intrinsically “really different” to whatever minimal degree is necessary for their subject to give rise to different concepts, or to different effects ad extra.

A different example of things distinct to degree (4) is that of the personal property and the divine essence in a Trinitarian person. In this case, although both realities are called “perfections” because they are positive entities rather than mere negations, they are not exactly the same quidditative item, because the personal property is not included

---


61 Ord. I, d. 8, pt 1, q. 4.
formally in the divine essence (nor vice-versa). At the same time, neither of them actualizes any potency in the other. So this case is a little different, and does not fit unproblematically into the terrain I have sketched. However, it certainly falls under degree (4).

As we have seen, Scotus describes the difference between the two grades of the official “formal distinction,” i.e. items (4) and (3) on the scale, as a matter of whether the items that are “formally distinct” stand in an act-potency relation to each other or not. If they do, they are to that degree “more” distinct on the scale I have presented; if they do not, then they are “less” distinct. But what does this contrast really amount to? As I have already suggested, the difference between realities that are related as “act” and “potency,” seems to contrast with the case of a difference between realities or formalities that are not thus related, in that the latter case is not a matter of containing formally multiple quidditative items, but of having formally different “perfections” in the sense just indicated. Formally different “perfections” may be produced or contained by what is formally one quidditative item – in such a way that they would accompany it in any possible world. Multiple quidditative items, however, can be thought of as different quidditative bits, the more general of which “could have” been accompanied by other

\[\text{References:}\]


63 “nec tamen quaecumque continentia perfectionum sufficit ad rationem generis et differentiae, sed illarum quarum altera potentialis est ex propria ratione respectu alterius; et sic potentialis quod, quantum est ex per se rationis eius in re, non repugnaret sibi esse sub opposto actu. Sicut perfectio coloreitatis non tantum est perfectibilis per gradum perfectionis proprium albedini, sed etiam quantum est ex propria ratione coloreitatis illius non repugnaret sibi subesse gradu proprio nigredinis.” Scotus, In Metaph. VII, q. 19, n. 51 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 372).
quidditative bits—*in whatever mysterious sense of potency that we saw Scotus invoking* earlier in this chapter.

Furthermore, in light of chapters 1-3, I submit a further difference between these cases: Scotus holds that multiple quidditative items will ground multiple “real agreement” relations, as long as another being with one or more of the same quddities exists; multiple “perfections” in the same nature, however, do not do so, or at least they do not do so primarily, but only in virtue of the common nature that “grounds” them (so to speak). God’s perfection of wisdom does not ground an agreement relation to our perfection of wisdom, even though they are the “same perfection.”

All this brings us to the “least” degree of distinction:

5. The distinction between a “formalitas” and its “intrinsic mode.”

This, of course, is the modal distinction. There is never any act-potency relationship between these items.

As we have seen, Scotus distinguishes (5) from paradigmatic instances of the “formal distinction,” in that the distinction between a reality and its mode is a distinction between different ways of cognizing the same “formal object” of cognition, while items that are “formally distinct” are also different “formal objects” of cognition. Thus, a formal distinction should not be spelled out in terms of a modal distinction, but rather in terms of a distinction which is always associated with distinct “formal objects of

---

64 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 142 (Vatican, IV, 224). Cf. Wolter, Transcendentals, 25. “‘How can the concept which is common to God and creatures be considered real unless it be abstracted from some reality of the same kind?’ The perfection and its intrinsic mode, Scotus answers, are not so identical that we cannot conceive the perfection without the mode. . . Such a distinction in the thing suffices to safeguard the reality of those imperfect and common concepts predicable of God and creatures.”
cognition.”65 This means that every relatum of a formal distinction will be able properly to terminate an intuitive cognition, and to be the referent of an adequate concept.

Some scholars have missed this important contrast, construing that genus concepts are “imperfect” in relation to specific differences in the same way that “being” is imperfect with respect to its intrinsic mode.66 This construal misses Scotus’s belief that genus-reality and difference-reality are distinct formal objects of cognition. However, these commentators have some excuse – Scotus sometimes talks of a genus concept as being “imperfect” in comparison to the concept of the infima species.67 But the way in which a genus is imperfect relative to the difference is not the same as the way in which “being” is imperfect relative to a particular quiddity. For, Scotus often says that there is a distinct formal object that properly corresponds to a genus reality – unlike “being.” After all, a genus is not just an intrinsic mode of a species – nor vice versa. A genus can be defined independently of the species. Although a genus concept may be less perfect than a species concept in the sense that it conveys less of the full intelligible content that characterizes the substance that is being discussed, the genus concept will still be an “adequate concept” in the sense that it exhaustively describes the genus reality in the thing. By contrast, the transcendental concept of “being” – i.e. of a reality as conceived without its intrinsic mode – will never be an adequate concept in either way.

65 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223).

66 Daniel Dahlstrom, “Signification and Logic: Scotus on Universals from a Logical Point of View,” Vivarium XVIII:2 (1980), 87: “Secondly, that concepts are perfect or imperfect (by means of a recognition of a distinction between a reality and its intrinsic mode) serves at least as a basis for establishing genus, species, differentia, etc.”

In any event, to distinguish a “reality” from its “intrinsic mode” is to generate a concept that is not adequate to the reality. To that degree, the “modal distinction” carves reality at a place where there is not really any joint. Also, note that the “non-adequate” concept that is produced by the reality when it is conceived apart from its “intrinsic mode,” is included in the “adequate” concept that the same reality produces when it is conceived along with its intrinsic mode, and to that degree the “non-adequate” concept always contains less information than the “adequate” concept does.

Scotus typically deploys the modal distinction in recognition of the fact that some accidental quiddities in the category of Quality can have different “degrees” (gradus) or “modes” of intensity or perfection, without differing with respect to that same nature.68 In these cases, the “degree” is only modally distinct from the essence which it characterizes. However, his most famous application of the modal distinction is in the discussion of how “being” can be univocal in its application to God or a creature. As we have seen, Scotus’s idea is that the transcendental concept “being” may refer to both, since it does not express the intrinsically infinite or intrinsically finite mode of either. This application is intrinsically more puzzling, since it is difficult to understand how something could be more or less a “being.” However, as we have already seen, this application of the modal distinction is crucial for Scotus’s account of the univocity of religious language. These difficulties may meet with some alleviation in Scotus’s official explanation of what it is for a being to be infinite.69

---

68 Cf. King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” 25: “The core intuition behind Scotus’s modal distinction is, roughly, that some natures come in a range of degrees that are inseparably a part of what they are, and that this is a fact about the way things are rather than about how we conceive of them.”

Cf. Ord. I, d. 17

69 QQ. 5, n. 3 (Wadding, XII, 118).
Up to this point, I have proposed reading Scotus this way: that categorial predicates, as they are more or less general, correspond to different quidditative realities in the same thing; whereas the transcendental concepts of “being” and its passions do not correspond to formally distinct “realities” or “quiddities” in a thing, but rather only to formally distinct “perfections” in a thing. As I have shown, Scotus says the difference between formally distinct “perfections” can be much “less” than the difference between formally distinct quidditative realities, in that the latter degree of distinction involves act-potency composition between the items that are distinct to that degree, while the former does not. Further, the distinction between different “realities” that are formally distinct in whatever way is much “less” than the difference between really distinct things or “res.” In this picture, the difference between two “realities” that are “formally distinct” in the greater sense, is the difference between two natural properties; whereas the difference between two “perfections” that are “formally distinct” in the lesser sense, although it is not constructed by the mind, is still only a minimal difference, such as to explain the thing’s intrinsic capacity to cause two different concepts.

However, it is time to figure out how to apply this taxonomy of distinctions to the case of the different “necessary accidents” and propria that provide the objects of the different sciences. Scotus sometimes identifies them as “accidents,” but he seems to give different answers about whether they should be placed on full “quidditative” footing. That is to say, his answer differs from case to case, whether they should be “formally distinct” items with the full status that Scotus accords to the relata of degree (3) of the formal distinction, or if they are just different perfections of the same nature – i.e., relata for item (4). In some cases, Scotus clearly thinks that certain types of propria are the
relata of the distinction of type (2); e.g. Scotus says in some discussions that an individual instance of “dimensive quantity” – the proper object of mathematics – is a separable accident.

5.2 Scotus’s Account and Taxonomy of Aristotelian Science

In general, Scotus seems to think of common natures as providing unity for the “objects” of various cognitive powers, habits, and dispositions. As I will show in this section, Scotus thinks that common natures play a role in explaining the unity of at least some sciences, since some of the sciences require a certain type of common nature as their formal object. Common natures ensure the validity of Aristotelian sciences, and are themselves constitutive of certain sciences’ proper objects.70 “Metaphysics” is an exception to this rule because of the diversity of subjects it studies. Other Aristotelian sciences, however, study corporeal substances, insofar as they exemplify some common nature and as that common nature gives rise to “perfections” and “proper passions” that mark out subjects of that sort. For science is not of the particular, but of the universal.71 In general, different sciences demonstrate different propria of their subjects, where these propria stem from the common nature exemplified by subjects of the relevant sort.

5.2.1 Objects of Sensory Powers

As a parallel case that also provides relevant context, consider what Scotus says about the relation between the object of a sense power and its supposit. Although Scotus


71 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 5-6, nn. 145-146; nn. 193-194.
does not rely upon the idea in his argument for common natures, he holds to the belief that common natures are necessary for the unity of a sensory power’s primary object.\textsuperscript{72} The supposit that is involved in our sense experience bears its sensible attributes as their ultimate subject of predication. And one will have cognitive access to the supposit, only by having cognitive access to some accidental common nature which is of the right sort to activate the relevant sensory power.\textsuperscript{73}

The argument for common natures \textit{does} rely upon the idea that the representative content of our sensory perceptions is provided by a common nature. For Scotus, the content of sensory acts does not include the “haecceitistic” aspect by which a given thing is individual, but only the quidditative entity that is exemplified by it.

The power that cognizes the object…insofar as the object is one by this unity [i.e. that of an object], cognizes it insofar as it is distinct from whatever is not one by that unity. But sense does not cognize the object insofar as it is distinct from whatever is not one by that \textit{numerical} unity. This is apparent because no sense distinguishes this ray of the sun as differing numerically from that ray, even though they are nevertheless [numerically] diverse because of the motion of the sun. If all the common sensibles – for example, diversity of place and orientation – are disregarded, and if two quanta were posited as existing simultaneously by divine power,

\textsuperscript{72} Note that Scotus thinks that it is at least conceivable that the primary object of a sense power would have no real unity: “For it could be maintained that a primary object, insofar as it fits the scope of the power, is something common abstracted from all particular objects, and so does not have any unity except the unity of being common to the several particular objects.” Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 22 (translation in Spade, \textit{Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals}, 62).

But Tweedale comments on this passage:“Apparently Scotus has come to think that the primary object of a sense faculty can without incoherence be thought of as not having any real unity…this view certainly emasculates Aristotle’s doctrine of ‘primary objects’ and \textit{should not be taken as a view Scotus would endorse}. There is every indication that Scotus himself favors the view in which the primary object of a faculty does have a real unity; it is just that he knows of no totally compelling way of proving this” [italics mine]. Tweedale, \textit{Scotus vs. Ockham: A Medieval Dispute Over Universals}, vol. II, 637.

\textsuperscript{73} In Metaph. VII, q. 15, nn. 20, 22 (Franciscan institute, IV, 301-2): “nulla potentia cognoscitiva in nobis cognoscit rem secundum absolutam suam cognoscibilitatem, in quantum scilicet est in se manifesta, sed solum in quantum est motiva potentiae. Quia cognitivae hic moventur ab objectis; natura autem non movet secundum gradum singularitatis.”
and they were entirely similar and equal in whiteness, then vision would not distinguish that there were two white things there. But if it cognized one of them insofar as it is one by \textit{numerical} unity, it would cognize it insofar as it is a \textit{distinct} one by numerical unity.\footnote{Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1, nn. 20-21 (In Spade, \textit{Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals}, 61-62).}

Here, Scotus’s main concern is to show that a specific quiddity is the \textit{per se} object of a sense power. But then, individuals \textit{as such} are not the proper objects of sense powers.\footnote{cf. Giorgio Pini, “Scotus on the Objects of Cognitive Acts,” \textit{Franciscan Studies}, Volume 66 (2008), pp. 281-315.}

Rather, sensible common natures are. The sensory cognition of singulars is possible in our current state, only insofar as those singulars exemplify some common nature that is accessible for the relevant sense power. This does not entail that an individual cannot be sensed – only that it is not accessible to sense under the precise aspect which makes it the particular individual that it is.\footnote{Cf. Cross, “Duns Scotus’s Theory of Cognition,” 20-21; but for the contrary reading cf. Pini, “Scotus on the Objects of Cognitive Acts,” 300, 303.}

Furthermore, Scotus makes clear that the proper content of \textit{substantial} quiddities is epistemically inaccessible to us in our current state. For Scotus, only accidental quiddities can be the direct objects of sense experience. We attribute certain specified complexes of sensorily accessible accident-types to the underlying “subject” as reliable proxies for that subject’s essence, thus managing to refer to the essence without having epistemic acquaintance with its content.\footnote{Giorgio Pini, “Scotus on Knowing and Naming Natural Kinds,” \textit{History of Philosophy Quarterly}, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Jul., 2009), pp. 255-272; Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus’s Theory of Cognition}, 76-77; cf. Ord. I, d. 22, q. un.}

The important idea is that the proper objects of the senses are constituted by common natures that are really distinct from the individual subjects they characterize.
It is arguable that Scotus seems to go even further than this, suggesting that certain genus-level common natures constitute the “adequate object” of some sense power. For example, “color” might be the adequate object of “sight.” (As King points out, Scotus thinks the object of sight couldn’t be “the visible” since that is an inherently relational concept; to characterize the “object of sight” in this way would be uninformative. So “objects” must be inherently absolute.) The idea would be that, for any sensory power, that power apprehends individual substances under their most specific aspect, but also under the aspect of the general common nature which constitutes them as apprensible by that power, since this general common nature is the proper or “primary adequate object” of that power. The idea of a “primary adequate object” is of a general type, under which all things apprehensible by some cognitive power must be subsumed.


81 Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 118.

King notes, “In a later annotation to Ord. 1 d. 3 p. 1 qq. 1–2 n. 24, Scotus remarks: ‘The per se object is clear from the acts of the potency; the primary object, however, is derived from many per se objects, since it is adequate.’” King, “Scotus on Metaphysics,” in Cambridge Companion to Duns Scotus (CUP, 2003), p. 3, note 6.
The natural necessity with which common natures give rise to their “proper passions” ensures the infallibility of a science’s demonstrations, since a “natural cause” always tends to one effect.\textsuperscript{82} And this is also supposed to solve the problem of induction, as Scotus thinks that it is naturally evident to us, by a proposition “reposing in the soul,” that “Whatever occurs in a great many instances by a cause that is not free, is the natural effect of that cause.”\textsuperscript{83} So, if we perceive certain effects usually following on the subjects that we recognize by their sensible properties, we are enabled to conclude that this is also a manifestation of their nature. Presumably, Scotus thinks the same reasoning would also hold, with respect to the very sensory manifestations they bear; but one doesn’t experience the underlying nature, in any event, so one has no access to the constant correlation between the subject and its accidents.

As a Christian philosopher, Scotus holds that God may sometimes interfere with the usual consequences of a thing’s nature. Thus, Scotist common natures underwrite a broadly Aristotelian view of nature, in which natural laws manifest a thing’s preternaturally defeasible intrinsic tendencies, rather than being reducible – as in a Humean view – to exception-less regularities.\textsuperscript{84} Which “passions” are absolutely or...

\textsuperscript{82} Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 235 (Vatican, III, 141; translation in Wolter, \textit{Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings}, pp. 109-110). Cf. Scotus, In Metaph. IX, q. 15; cf. Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 1-2, n. 76 (Vatican, III, 52): “…causa naturalis agit ad effectum suum secundum ultimum sui potentiae, quando non est impedita; igitur ad effectum perfectissimum quem potest primo producere, primo agit.” (Here Scotus is arguing that a common nature, in ideal circumstances, produces the most complete concept of itself in a suitably disposed observer.)


Cf. Wolter’s text, p. 110: “Iste enim effectus evenit a tali causa ut in pluribus, hoc acceptum est per experientiam, quia inveniendo talam naturam nunc cum tali accidente nunc cum tali inventum est quod quantacumque esset diversitas accidentium, semper istam naturam sequetur talis effectus, igitur non per aliquod accidens isti naturae sed per naturam ipsam in se sequitur talis effectus.”


229
metaphysically necessary to a given quiddity, and which are only naturally necessary to it, must be decided on a case-by-case basis. However, all “passions” always fall outside\textsuperscript{85} the quiddity or common nature with which they are associated by natural law or metaphysical necessity (as the case may be); and they are sometimes conceived as being \textit{caused} by it.\textsuperscript{86}

5.2.2 Objects of Sciences

For Scotus, a “science” is a habit which disposes someone to know by deductive demonstration certain conclusions which hold true of a given subject \textit{per se}, whether in the first or second way. To have this habit, one must have quiditative knowledge of that subject.\textsuperscript{87} These demonstrations are supposed to be infallible because deductive, and also to yield truths that are \textit{de re} necessary concerning the subject, since the principles that lead to the conclusions are necessary.\textsuperscript{88} In paradigmatic cases of science, scientific demonstrations are also supposed to be explanatory, to show the reason why the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{85} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 134 (Vatican, III, 83).
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 200 (Vatican, IV, 265).
\item \textsuperscript{87} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 40 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 15-16): “Cum enim conclusiones sint in principiis virtualiter, et principia virtualiter in subjecto – nam subjectum includit praedicatum in principiis primis, et hoc vel essentialiter si sint per se primo modo, vel virtualiter si sint per se secundo modo – sequitur quod in subjecto incomplexo, quiditative cognito, virtualiter contineantur principia et conclusiones de tali subjecto; et sic, tota notitia quae de ipso subjecto nata est haberi.”
\item \textsuperscript{87} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 41 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 17).
\item \textsuperscript{88} Scotus, In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 65 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 25): “[Q]uia quaelibet [scientia speculativa] est ex principiis necessariis et ad conclusiones necessarias.”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
conclusion is true. However, Scotus is famously cautious about giving “propter quid” demonstrations like this, since he thinks we do not know the essences of God or of created substances. Apparently, the only reason for the feasibility and success of sciences like physics and mathematics for us, is that their objects are sensorily accessible to us.

Some sciences take up where other sciences have left off. That is, some types of propria are the termini ad quem for the demonstrations of some sciences, but the termini a quo for the demonstrations of others. As we will see, scientific objects are not all the same: For some sciences, the relevant propria are constituted by accidental common natures borne by individuals that are really distinct from the subjects of which they are propria; in other cases, as I will show in section III, they are formally distinct perfections, inhering in that subject’s own common nature.

One may speak of the habit which disposes one to contemplate the “subject” of a science under its proper notion, in which conclusions about that subject’s per se characteristics are “virtually contained,” and the multiple individual habits which are indexed to individual conclusions concerning the per se characteristics of that subject, as

---

89 R. J. Hankinson, “Philosophy of Science,” in The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 110: “To have scientific knowledge, then, [for Aristotle] is to have explanatory understanding: not merely to ‘know’ a fact incidentally, to be able to assent to something which is true, but to know why it is a fact. The proper function of science is to provide explanations, the canonical form of which is something like ‘Xs are F because they are G.’ The holding of one property for a class of objects (mortality of men, say) is to be explained in terms of the dependence of that property on some other property (e.g., being an animal): men are mortal because they are animals. Moreover, this fact can be exhibited syllogistically…”

90 Cf. Metaphysics I.9, n. 22 (Franciscan Institute, I, 171).

91 In Metaph. I, q. 9, n. 41 (Franciscan Institute, II, 177).
distinct habits inhering in the mind.\textsuperscript{92} The discrete mental habit that is indexed to an individual demonstrable conclusion, is caused when an act of contemplating that conclusion leaves behind a “similitude” in the mind. This “similitude” inclines one to contemplate that very same conclusion again.\textsuperscript{93} Scotus says we may call a small-scale disposition of this sort, an “infima species” of sciential habit.\textsuperscript{94}

If we call these “infima species” of habits, “sciences,” then there are as many “sciences” as there are demonstrable scientific conclusions.\textsuperscript{95} But we usually think of a “science” as a mental habit that disposes one to draw several different conclusions, not just one. Thus, “sciences” of the sort that we are interested in classifying, must be individuated according to some determinate quiddity or passion of a certain type of subject, and not according to individual habits. Thus, the unity of a science derives from the unity of its “formal object,” i.e. the proper aspect of the subject that is relevant to the aims of that science, rather than from the numerical or specific unity of a mental accident that inheres in the mind.\textsuperscript{96} Thus, many different mental acts of drawing a conclusion may be “virtually contained” within the same “sciential habit” of knowing the quiddity of the

\textsuperscript{92} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 39-40 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 15-16): “[D]uplex potest poni habitus. Unus proprius, qui formaliter inclinat ad speculationem eius tamquam naturalis similitudo ex eius consideratione derefta. Alius communis qui virtualiter inclinat ad speculationem eius, inclinando formaliter ad speculationem alterius in quo tale complexum virtualiter continetur. Primo modo potest concedi…quot scibilia tot scientiae…Secundo modo potest esse unus habitus respectu multorum complexorum.”

\textsuperscript{93} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 39 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 15).

\textsuperscript{94} In Metaph. IV, q. 1, n. 41 (Franciscan Institute, III, 17): “prima ergo distinctio scientiarum, secundum conclusiones scitas, potest esse secundum species specialissimas.”

\textsuperscript{95} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 40 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 15): “primo modo potest concedi prima opinio: quot scibilia tot scientiae…”

\textsuperscript{96} In Metaph I. 9, nn. 29-30 (Franciscan Institute, II, 172): “Et similiter, ex quo diversae scientiae habent diversas rationes formales, non potest esse una ratio formalis per se considerata ab una et alia. Item, ad unitatem scientiae requiritur unitas rationis formalis (saltet primae, non tantum in se sed ut comparatur ad materialia quorum est ratio)...”
science’s subject under its formal object, insofar as it disposes one to draw these
conclusions, even if one hasn’t drawn them yet.

Scotus also distinguishes between a “proximate genus” and a “remote genus” of
sciential habits. A “science” properly speaking is either a “proximate genus” or a
“remote genus” with respect to multiple “infima species” or small-scale individual
sciential habits, each disposing to the demonstration of an individual conclusion. A
“proximate genus” of sciential habits is a quidditative knowledge of a subject that is
perfect enough to grant the ability to draw the multiple individual conclusions about the
*propria* that belong to it in virtue of its specific nature. A “remote genus” of sciential
habits is a less perfect and more generic knowledge of a subject’s quiddity, which does
not automatically grant the ability to demonstrate the most specific *propria* of substances
that are subsumed under the subject. For example: to know the quiddity “corporeal
substance” is one thing, but to know the quiddity of fire – a specific type of corporeal
substance – is another. One can only demonstrate the *propria* of fire, if one knows the
proper quiddity of fire – not just because one knows the quiddity “corporeal substance.”

Thus, the sciential habit of knowing “corporeal substance” is a “remote genus” with
respect to the proper conclusions one can demonstrate concerning fire; knowledge of fire
under its proper quiddity is a “proximate genus” with regard to those conclusions. Thus,
an “infima species” of sciential habits will be immediately contained in its “proximate
genus,” and only potentially contained in its “remote genus.”

---

97 In *Metaph. VI*, q. 1, nn. 41-42 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 17).
98 In *Metaph. VI*, q. 1, n. 41 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 17).
99 In *Metaph. VI*, q. 1, n. 42, n. 48 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 17, 20).
100 In *Metaph. VI*, q. 1, n. 41 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 17).
A necessary condition for this disposition is to have the knowledge of the subject of a science, precisely under its quiddity. A science proves that certain predicates obtain of this subject – whether they inhere in it “per se” in the first way, or in the second way.\textsuperscript{101} As a general matter, \textit{propr\textit{i}a} are “virtually contained” in their subjects, and subjects “virtually contain” the concepts according to which they are conceived in these ways.\textsuperscript{102} Scotus assumes that the perfect knowledge of some quiddity, would give someone the ability to demonstrate all of its proper passions that are “virtually included” in it – rather in the same way that he thinks that the perfect knowledge of the divine essence would bestow perfect knowledge of whatever God was going to cause.\textsuperscript{103} A science is a habit of demonstrating those predicates which hold \textit{per se} of some subject, precisely as it is described in a certain way – as well as those predicates which hold of other things than the subject itself, in virtue of their relation to the subject.\textsuperscript{104}

All accidents are predicated of their subjects “per accidens” with respect to their subjects’ quidditative notion, but it is possible to make a distinction between “per se” accidents and “per accidens” accidents. The former fall outside the formal quidditative

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{101} “cum enim conclusiones sint in principiis virtualiter, et principia in subjecto – nam subjectum includit praedicatum in primis principiis, et hoc vel essentialiter si sint per se primo modo, et virtualiter si sint per se secundo modo, sequitur quod in subjecto incomplexo, quidditative cognito, virtualiter contineantur principia et conclusiones de tali subiecto; et sic, tota notitia quae de ipso subjecto nata est haberi. Et etiam ulterior, quae nata est haberi de aliis per rationem eius, sive sint inferiora contenta sub ipso, sive sint aliqua attributa ad ipsum tamquam ad primum. Ergo habitus, inclinans formaliter ad speculandum tale subjectum secundum rationem quidditativam, inclinat virtualiter ad omnia complexa praedicata; sed primo ad cognoscenda de ipso subjecto; per se autem sed non primo ad cognoscenda de aliis per rationem eius. Et ita respectu omnium istorum est unus habitus virtualis.” IN Metaph, VI, q. 1, n. 40 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 15-16.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
notion of their subject, but are caused by it, as a matter of at least natural necessity. The latter, on the other hand, cannot be exhaustively explained by the quiddity of their subjects. Thus, it is not the case that every true predication that is per accidens can be exhaustively explained in terms of predications that are true per se, because contingent propositions don’t follow from necessary ones. The Aristotelian dictum “every ‘per accidens’ predication is [causally] reduced to a ‘per se’ predication” is true, insofar as the obtaining of some per se predication is at least a necessary condition for every per accidens predication. It is false, if it is understood to say that every predication per accidens can be exhaustively explained by predications that are true per se.

Scotus offers a division of Aristotelian sciences. He restricts the domain of this division to the sciences that are theoretical, “real,” and possible to human beings in our current state. Scotus divides this domain into metaphysics, physics, and mathematics. Scotus thinks that metaphysics, physics, and mathematics are “real” sciences, which entails that for each, its object is not created by the mind. Thus, all three of these sciences study things insofar as they fall under certain “first intention” concepts. The characteristic of being “real,” differentiates these sciences from “logic” – insofar as it is

105 “Nota bene: potest concedi ‘quandocumque aliquid est a per accidens, quod aliquid sit a per se’, quia a est a ut sic reducatur per accidens ad per se tanquam ad necessario praesuppositum…Potest enim tota causa inhaerentiae per accidens a esse in subjecto, sicut etiam est communiter in proprietatibus per se quia causa inhaerentiae per se est in subjecto, non in praedicato.” Scotus, In Metaph. IV, q. 2, n. 35 (Franciscan Institute, III, 328).

106 Scotus, In Metaph. IV, q. 2, nn. 35-37 (Franciscan Institute, III, 328-329).

107 Ibid., n. 35

108 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 43-45 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 18).

109 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 43 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 18): “Ubi sciendum est quod [divisio hic scienstarum] intelligendum est hic primo de scientia speculativa reali, quae scilicet considerat intentiones primas abstractas a singularibus realibus et dictas de illis in quid. Per quod excluditur logica, quae est de secundis intentionibus quae de nulla re primae intentionis praedicantur in quid.”
the science of “second intentions.” Mathematics and physics study corporeal substances, insofar as corporeal substances give rise to the proper accidents of “extension” and “mobility,” respectively. Metaphysics studies “being qua being,” insofar as it gives rise to the “passions of being.” The descriptions of things under their proper quiddities are more fundamental than the descriptions of them according to their propria. Some sciences demonstrate the inherence of propria that other sciences take for granted for the purposes of their own demonstrations.

For Scotus, the transcendental concepts do not correspond to shared properties or common metaphysical constituents in the things that fall under those concepts. There is no common reality, possessing a “real less than numerical unity,” in all the things that are beings insofar as they are beings, nor in all the things that are “good,” or “one,” etc. If the concept “being” does not correspond to a common nature, but is still the object of metaphysics, then it follows that the object of a real science need not be a common nature. However, Scotus is positive that “being” is a “real” concept, i.e. a first

---

110 Ibid.; cf. Stephen Dumont, “Transcendental Being: Scotus and Scotists,” Topoi 11 (1992), 147, n. 33: “generally speaking, a first intention is a concept that has something real as its referent. A second intention is a meta-concept, so to speak, having a concept of first intention as its referent, indicating the logical class of universal to which it belongs. Thus, the concept of animal is a first intention, while the concept of genus, which indicates its logical relation to the subjects of which it is predicated, is a second intention.”


112 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 47 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 19-20).

113 In metaph. I, q. 9, n. 37 (Franciscan Institute, II, 174): “[Q]uia subjectum, secundum rationem subjecti, prius est naturaliter passione. Tunc passio non est formalis ratio considerandi ipsum, ex quo est posterius.”

114 In Metaph. I, q. 9, n. 41 (Franciscan Institute, II, 177): “Sed semper considerans posteriores praesupponit primam inesse; ergo nulla scientia considerans demonstrat primam passionem inesse, sed praesupponit ipsum demonstrari in alia. Sed conclusio, ubi demonstratur prima passio, est principium in inferiori scientia, ubi demonstratur posterior.”
intention. And that is precisely what allows it to be the object of metaphysics. But metaphysics is unique in studying being qua being, and other sciences regard more specific aspects of substances. On Scotus’s account, as I will now show, sciences other than metaphysics actually do require certain generic types of common natures inhering in their subjects, in order to be sufficiently unified.

First I clear up a small difficulty about the object of metaphysics. “Being” is an absolute concept, which is not predicated by virtue of some mental comparison to something else. But, given the way that Scotus argues for the existence of a formal distinction in other contexts, one might conclude that the concept “being” corresponds to some real, formally distinguishable character – if not the same one – possessed by the objects of all the cognitive acts which truly predicate “being” of something. If such status is typical for the objects of real sciences, then perhaps being the object of a real science requires being the relatum of a distinction which is at least as real as the formal distinction, and thus being a component in some structured whole. But one easy way to resist this thought is to point out that for Scotus, “being” is “quidditatively included” in the genus-reality of any given nature. So, it is not some metaphysical component, distinct from the genus-reality in a thing. Rather, the ability to cause the concept “being” is a perfection that is possessed by the subject, formally distinct from other perfections like (e.g.) the ability to cause the concept “good.”

Note that there is a difference between the propria that something has under its own notion, and the propria that are “passions of being” and thus convertible with

---


116 See section I. cf. Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 190 (Vatican, IV, 259).
“being.” The latter pertain to metaphysics; the former to physical science. The latter are
the predicates which the science of metaphysics demonstrates, concerning beings in
general. Thus, the proper formal object of metaphysics is “being qua being.” Its passions
include “one,” “true,” “good,” etc. Metaphysics demonstrates these passions of its subject
– i.e., “being,” – since everything which is a “being,” virtually contains these other
transcendentals as proper passions. By contrast, the proper formal object of physics, is
corporeal substance under some specific quiddity which is a principle of motion – e.g.,
“human.” This quiddity has “risible” as its properium.

To find the proper subject of the Aristotelian sciences other than metaphysics,
Scotus thinks that we must divide “substance” into the lower species which it
subsumes.117 The first division of “being” is into the ten categories. The first division of
“substance” is into “corporeal” and “incorporeal” substances. Since incorporeal
substances are not accessible to us under their own notions, the only sciential knowledge
that we have of them falls under metaphysics: we cannot demonstrate the proper passions
which follow upon their specific quiddities.118 However, corporeal substances under the
aspect of their passions come within the domain of our senses; thus, the proper subject of
the remaining theoretical sciences within the specified domain, is corporeal substance
under the passions of “quantity” and “mobility.”119

---

117 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 48-49 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 20-21): “quod si oportaret ulterius
dividere ad inveniendum subjectum alicujus scientiae, non oportet procedere dividendo aliquid genus
accidentis. Nam quodlibet istorum, et quaelibet species cuiuslibet eorum, in aliqua specie substantiae
virtualiter continetur immediate vel mediate…Oportet igitur dividere praecise substantiam, ut subjectum
primum habeatur scientiae alterius a metaphysica.”

118 Ibid., n. 51 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 21).

119 “Mathematica vero, quia considerat substantiam corpoream sub tali conceptu secundum quem
includit principia propria quantitatis et ita necessario requirit materiam – licet non ut principium potentiale
sive mobile – ideo mathematicus sic definit per materiam, non in quantum principium motus.
According to Scotus, the knowledge of “corporeal substance” has the unity of a remote genus, with respect to the conclusions of physics and mathematics. That is just to say that, in order to demonstrate all the conclusions of which either science is capable, it is not enough to be acquainted with the universal quiddity “corporeal substance.” One must also be acquainted with the common natures that give rise to the particular conclusions of these sciences. Metaphysics is different: since it studies “being qua being,” its conclusions do not require the knowledge of any specific quiddities at all.

Thus, physics and mathematics both have “corporeal substance” as their subject. But “corporeal substance” is a single intelligible concept; then we might well ask, how are physics and mathematics different sciences?

Aquinas distinguishes physics and mathematics by saying that “being as quantified” is the object of mathematics, while “mobile being” is the object of physical substance. However, Scotus disagrees with this way of drawing the distinction: For Scotus, “mobility” is not the formal object of physics, but is rather one of the passions that physics demonstrates concerning corporeal substance. Scotus’s answer to the problem of how physics and mathematics differ, is twofold: First, they differ with respect

---

“In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 62-63 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 24-25).”

---

“Physica vero considerat substantiam corpoream in quantum in conceptu, quem de corpore habet, includuntur principia motus et operationis. Ideo per materiam sic definit. Non quod motum ponat in definitione, quia iste est passio apud eum, sed materiam secundum considerationem contractam secundum quam est principium motus.” In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 62-63 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 24-25).

---

120 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 58 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 23): “non est igitur quodlibet membrum praedictae divisionis [scil. scientiarum] aequum unum. Sed metaphysica, in qua primo stat divisio, est una unitate generis proximi, non habens sub se nisi species specialissimas. Unde est una secundo modo. Mathematica vero sive physica, in qua in tertio gradu stat divisio, est una tantum unitate generis remoti et tertio modo; quarum utraque in plures descendit, habentes unitatem secundo modo [scil. Generis proximae].”

121 Ibid.

122 Aquinas, Metaph. VI, lect. 1; Commentary on De Trinitate, q. 5, a. 3.

123 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 76-77 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 30).
to the set of passions that they are allowed to “take for granted” – i.e. the “formal object” of one science is different from that of the other. Second, they differ with respect to the sorts of conclusions that they draw.

“Quantity” provides the proper object for mathematics. However, this does not mean that “quantity” is the “subject” of mathematics. As an accident which depends upon a substance, any passions that follow upon the nature of quantity will be ultimately attributed to a corporeal substance, as their ultimate subject. “Quantity” is a “primary passion” of corporeal substances, in that it does not depend upon any other passions that corporeal substances have. Thus, mathematics does not have to demonstrate quantity of corporeal substances; rather, it takes this passion as “manifest.” Scotus indicates that there is a logical ordering: a corporeal substance of a certain type comes first; then, quantity; then, certain other passions of that corporeal substance which follow upon quantity. A true and “propter quid” science would follow this order in demonstrating its conclusions, although in reality we encounter accidents before we are acquainted with any substantial quiddities.

124 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 52 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 22).

125 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 49 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 20-21): “et ita quodcumque istorum [scil. generum accidentium] poneretur pro subjecto – licet forte haberet aliquam passionem de se scibilem – non esset tamen primum subjectum…Oportet igitur dividere praecise substantiam, ut subjectum primum habeatur scientiae alterius a metaphysica.”

126 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 52 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 22): “quia non multum mathematica comparat quantitatem ad substantiam corpoream, sed posteriores passiones ad quantitatem quae est prima passio, et quia illa nota est inesse subjecto, quasi supponitur ut ratio subjecti – tamen subjectum primum virtute continens omnia est substantia corporea.”

127 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 73 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 29): “Tamen, sicut dictum est in solutione questionis, quia quantitas non ostenditur inesse substantiae corporeae sed quasi manifestatum supponitur, et de substantia corporea non ostenditur aliquid in mathematica nis per naturam quantitatis tamquam primae passionis, ideo videtur esse quasi ratio propria subjecti illius scientiae et quasi ponitur subjectum, licet sit ibi passio, quia includitur in subjecto priori…”
Physical or natural science, on the other hand, considers corporeal substance, precisely “insofar as it has a form which is the principle of a determinate operation, both of movement and of rest.”\(^{128}\) Thus, it studies specific types of corporeal substances, precisely insofar as they principiate “mobility” and other passions.\(^{129}\) “Mobility” is not the formal notion that physics presupposes as its object, since it must be demonstrated through the knowledge of priors. Mobility is a proper passion of corporeal substances,\(^{130}\) but Scotus seems to think that the form in virtue of which a material substance is mobile, is the substantial form that determines that particular substance to belong in its \textit{infima species} – i.e. the form which Scotus calls the “ultimate completive form.”\(^{131}\)

Alternatively, perhaps Scotus has the “forma totius” or whole essence in mind, here, as the principiator of mobility. In any case, physical or natural science studies corporeal substances under their most proper quiddities, insofar as those quiddities all are principles of mobility.\(^{132}\) This would shed light on why, from the perspective of Scotus’s physical

\(^{128}\) In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 53 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 22): “Ulterius eadem substantia corporea, non contracta ad inferius sed alio modo considerata, scilicet in quantum habens formam quae est principium determinatae operationis et motus et quietis, habet multas passiones sic sibi inhaerentes et scibiles per viam sensus. Ergo quoad istas erit alia speculativa quae dicitur physica sive naturalis.”

\(^{129}\) In metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 76 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 30): “naturalis autem per rationem substantiae habentis formam determinatam substantialem, quae vere est natura – sive in universali sive in particulari consideretur – tamquam per primum medium (si esset ‘propter quid’ tradita) haberet ostendere determinatam quantitatem de tali substantia et etiam qualitatem tertiae speciei. Et per istas duas primas passiones – quarum neutra alteram ostendit, licet habeat ordinem in inhaerendo substantiae corporeae – ostenderentur omnes passiones posteriores de substantia naturali.”

\(^{130}\) In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 63 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 25): “Physica vero considerat substantiam corpoream in quantum in conceptum, quem de corpore habet, includuntur principia motus et operationis. Ideo per materiam sic definit. Non quod motum ponat in definitione, quia iste est passio apud eum, sed materiam secundum considerationem contractam secundum quam est principium motus.”

\(^{131}\) In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 53 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 22).

\(^{132}\) Scotus, In Metaph. I, q. 9, nn. 37-38 (Franciscan Institute, II, 174): “Dico quod mobilitas non est formalis ratio subjecti, sed quidquid consideratur in scientia naturali. Cuius probatio est quia subjectum, secundum rationem subjecti, prius est naturaliter passione. Tunc passio non est formalis ratio considerandi ipsum, ex quo est posterius. Mobilitas autem est passio in scientia naturali. Dico ergo quod quiditas ignis
scientist, only the infima species is “univocal”: Her goals make it important to classify things in the most proper way possible. Physical science demonstrates their most proper passions – unique to them, rather than common – by means of the most precise knowledge possible of these specific quiddities. It also shows how “mobility” follows from the proper nature of each type of corporeal substance. I think that the idea is that each kind of substance first gives rise to a proper “affection” or “passion” which is in the third sub-species of quality, which then gives rise to the further “secondary” passion of mobility.

In his discussions of physical and mathematical science, Scotus considers “quantity in general” and “determinate quantity.” Both of these are species of the “dimensive quantity” which is associated with a particular chunk of prime matter, and of the form which is the immediate source of the divisibility of a particular continuum of matter; but both are to be distinguished from the “one” that it convertible with “being.”
It is metaphysically possible that God should remove a particular individual instance of
dimensive quantity, and replace it with a numerically different instance of dimensive quantity.\textsuperscript{136} Scotus thinks that this “quantity” is not included \textit{per se primo modo} in the
quiddity of a material substance, but that it is a proper passion of it.\textsuperscript{137} Mathematics
studies corporeal substances precisely under the aspect of dimensive quantity, and it
considers the relations that are founded upon different quantities, such as “equality,”
etc.\textsuperscript{138} However, the individual instance of dimensive quantity is an accidental form
which is ultimately attributed to a corporeal substance. Thus, corporeal substance,
considered under dimensive quantity, is the ultimate subject of the science of
mathematics.\textsuperscript{139} However, its “object” or “formal reason” is the accident of quantity
itself.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, everything it studies, it studies precisely under the aspect of bearing this
accident.

Material substances are such that “dimensive quantity,” i.e. “extension,” and also
“mobility,” naturally characterize them; but these items are not included in their
quidditative \textit{ratio}. But just how distinct from material substances does Scotus want these
\textit{propr\textit{ia}} to be?

\textsuperscript{136} Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, nn. 77-78.

\textsuperscript{137} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 52 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 22). “…quia non multum mathematica
comparat quantitatem ad substantiam corpoream, sed posteriores passiones ad quantitatem quae est prima
passio, et quia illa nota est inesse subjecto, quasi supponitur ut ratio subjecti – tamen subjectum primum
virtute continens omnia est substantia corporea.”

\textsuperscript{138} In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 52 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 22).

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.: “quia non multum mathematica comparat quantitatem ad substantiam corpoream, sed
posteriores passiones ad quantitatem quae est prima passio, et quia illa nota est inesse subjecto, quasi
supponitur ut ratio subjecti – tamen subjectum primum virtute continens omnia est substantia corporea.”

\textsuperscript{140} In Metaph. I. 9
5.3 The Formal Distinction and the Proper Object of Aristotelian Science

In this section, I will present Scotist texts that exemplify how different sciences are concerned with objects that entail different sorts of structure on the part of the subject of science. The passions with which metaphysics is concerned, are “perfections” of their subjects, only formally distinct from them, in a way that doesn’t imply act-potency composition. Other sciences are concerned with the properties of “things” that are really distinct from their subjects – e.g., the individual accidents of dimensive quantity and motion that characterize physical substance, and actualize a certain potency for them that physical substance has of itself. This, of course, is the doctrine of “real accidents” that was criticized as useless and non-explanatory by Descartes.

5.3.1 The Case of Dimensive Quantity

Even in the case of what we might think of as inseparable accidents such as the quantity that a thing has, Scotus asserts that God could exercise a preternatural power to separate them from their subjects:

First: An actually existing substance, not changed by any substantial change, cannot from “this” become “not this.”…But an actually existing substance, even if there is no substantial change made or changed in it, can be under one or another quantity without contradiction, and under any absolute accident whatever…

The minor premise is clear. For it is not a contradiction that God preserve the same substance, now quantified by this quantity, and inform it by another quantity. The actually existing substance will not for this reason be changed by a substantial change….If you say the described situation is a miracle and therefore does not argue against natural reason, to the contrary: A miracle does not occur.

---

141 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 77 (Spade, 76-77).
with respect to contradictories; there is no power that can do that… 142

In a passage that may afford an important clue with regard to how Scotus thinks of the passions of material substance, Scotus says that “quantity” has an act-potency relationship with the substance it is in. He distinguishes between two senses of “divisible.” According to one sense, something is “divisible” if and only if it actually has some form, according to which it can immediately be divided. 143 In a second sense, something is “divisible” if and only if it is in unactualized potency to receiving a form, according to which it could immediately be divided. According to Scotus, a material substance, of itself, does not have “divisibility” according to the first sense, but only the second sense. 144 Scotus’s view seems to be that the quiddity of the subject formally contains a potency or receptivity which is not another res from the subject. According to this essential receptivity, the subject is “of itself” in potency to a distinct kind of form – the “form of divisibility” – which is another res from the subject. Presumably, this actualizing form is the same as extension – something with an actuality of its own, on Scotus’s quasi-mechanistic picture. 145 The subject’s potency, therefore, is always

142 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, nn. 78-79 (Spade, 77).

143 In Metaph, V, qq. 5-6, n. 139 (Franciscan institute, III, 479): “ aliquis est potens videre quando habet habitum et ante, sed aequivoce. Secundum quod est potens primo modo, habet formam secundum quam; quod secundo modo, non. – Similiter, divisibile uno modo dicitur quod habet formam secundum quam formaliter potest dividi; secundo modo quod non habet in actu formam, sed est in potentia ad formam per quam immediate posset dividi. Substantia Corporea secundo modo de se est divisibilis.”

144 In Metaph V, qq. 5-6, n. 141 (Franciscan Institute, III, 479-480): “Ad argumentum: quod substantia non est divisibilis formaliter antequam sit sub quantitate (nisi in potentia) et sub quantitate actu. Et secundum quod est subjectum quantitatis non habet partes de se nisi in potentia, sicut nec subjectum qualitatis est quale de se nisi in potentia. Tunc ad argumentum: sicut quantitas tota recipitur in tota substantia in potentia divisibili, ita partes in partibus substantiae, quae sunt in potentia. Tunc ad argumentum cum dicitur ‘omne divisibile est quantum’, verum est de divisibili extenso in actu.”

naturally actualized by a particular individual form that is another *res* from the subject. Furthermore, the existence of this form seems to follow on the existence of the subject as a matter of some sort of necessity. Perhaps the idea is that it is metaphysically necessary that it have a form of this type, but only naturally necessary that for some form of that type, the subject has *that particular* form.

Thus, there are two possible senses in which a proper passion is a “perfection” or an “act” with respect to its subject. In the first sense, we may understand a thing’s *propria* as parallel to the perfections with respect to the divine essence: it is only formally distinct from its subject, according to strength 4 of the formal distinction. At this level, a thing’s “propria” do not stand to its quiddity as act to potency. However, beyond the quiddity of the subject, there is an *additional categorial form*, one that *does* actualize the potency that this quiddity contains *per se* in the second way. This additional form will “piggyback” on the proper passion, so to speak. The proper passion will provide the potency for it. It will only be metaphysically and not naturally separable from its subject. The proper passion of receptivity, will be neither metaphysically nor naturally separable from its subject, as it is “unitively contained” in it.

5.3.2 The Case of the Transcendental “One”

There seems to be some indication in Scotus that even the transcendental “one” is, in an Avicennian sense, an “accident” of a being.146 This is because Scotus does not

---

146 Scotus, QQ. Metaph. IV, q . 2, n . 142: “nota etiam quod opinionem istam de diversitate reali non oportet imponere Avicennae, licet Averroes videatur ei imponere. Quaecumque enim dicit Avicenna III Metaphysicae suae vel VII de hac materia, exponi possunt: quod accidens est quidquid est extra per se intellectum quiditatis, sicut ipse loquitur in suo V : ’Quiditas est tantum quiditas, nec universalis, nec particularis’ etc., hoc est, nullum istorum acti includitur in intellectu quiditatis, sed quasi prius naturaliter praesupponit quiditatem. Sed hoc non necessario forte ponit quod sint accidentia, sed unitive contenta.”
make a distinction between the categorial “one” and the transcendental “one” in the way that Aquinas does. If someone were to argue that the transcendental “one,” as a proper passion of being, is metaphysically inseparable from a given being and must therefore be in the same genus as it, Scotus thinks that it will still be an accident in the sense of falling outside the proper quiddity of the subject, and therefore a different essence or nature—though of the sort that is metaphysically inseparable from it.

At the same time, he asserts that unity is not a different “res” from its subject, but is a distinct formality that is “unitively contained” in its subject.

The important question is whether “one” is a distinct reality that actualizes “being,” to which “being” is in potency. The answer to this question seems to be “no.” On my reading, “one” and “being” are only concepts that correspond to formally distinct perfections in a thing, not to formally distinct “realities” that are in an act-potency

147 “The third difficulty is the question whether the one that is convertible with being is the principle of number (n. 83-109). In this case too it is illuminating for the understanding of the difficulty to make a comparison with Thomas Aquinas. He had made a clear distinction between the transcendental or "metaphysical" one that is convertible with being and the "mathematical" one that belongs to the category of quantity…. Scotor's solution to the difficulty consists in the observation that one and the same thing does not possess two unities. In every created thing the unity that is convertible with being does not really (realiter) differ from the unity that belongs to the category of quantity. However, the concept of transcendental unity is always more general than that of numerical unity since it is ex se indifferent to the limited and the non-limited, while the unity of a determinate category necessarily denotes something limited.” Jan Aertsen, “Being and One: The Doctrine of the Convertible Transcendentals in Duns Scotus,” Franciscan Studies, Vol. 56, Essays in Honor of Dr. Girard Etzkorn (1998), 51. Aertsen cites Scotus, In Metaph IV, q. 2, n. 100.

148 “Being and the one are related to each other as subjectum and passio. No substance is ever the passio of another substance or of itself. The property is therefore an accident….For all that, Scotus maintains that the transcendental character of the one is not thereby eliminated.” Jan Aertsen, “Being and One: The Doctrine of the Convertible Transcendentals in Duns Scotus,” Franciscan Studies, Vol. 56, Essays in Honor of Dr. Girard Etzkorn (1998), 59.

Aertsen quotes Scotus, In Metaph IV, q. 2, n. 70: "Concedo tunc quod omne unum est determinati generis, scilicet quantitatis. Sicut enim omne alius a Deo dicitur creatum, ita quod creatio-passio est proprietas entis, et tamen creatio est unius generis, ut relationis, et determinata species in ilio genere, sic unum potest esse determinati generis, et tamen convenire toti enti simpliciter vel secundum quid."

149 Scotus, In Metaph. VII, q. 1, n. 11.
relationship, nor to different things or “res.” Indeed, Scotus explicitly compares this case with the case of formally-distinct perfections in God.\(^{150}\) This passage implies that the distinction in reality corresponding to the different coextensive transcendentals is not a distinction of “res,” and perhaps not even a distinction of “realitates” in act-potency composition, but rather a mere distinction of perfections.

But there is still a puzzle here, in that Scotus holds to three propositions that apparently cannot all be true:

1. Categorial quantity is separable from its subject,\(^{151}\)
2. The transcendental “one” is unitively contained in its subject, (and hence only formally distinct),\(^{152}\)
3. There is not a difference between the transcendental “one” and the categorial “one.”\(^{153}\)

150 Ibid. IV, q. 2, n. 143: “Sicut essentia divina infinitas perfectiones continet et omnes unitive, sic quod non sunt alia res, sic essentia creatae potest alias perfectiones unitive continere. Tamen in Deo quaelibet est infinita; et ideo proprie non potest dici pars unius totalis perfectionis. (...) In creatura quaelibet perfectio contenta limitata est, et limitatio essentia continente secundum totalitatem considerata. Ideo quaelibet potest dici pars perfectionis, non tamen realiter differenti quod sit alia natura, sed alia perfectio realis, -alietae, inquam, non causata ab intellectu, nec tamen tanta quantum intelligimus cum dicimus 'diversae res'; sed differentia reali minori, si vocetur differentia realis omnis non causata ab intellectu.”

151 Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 4, nn. 78-79 (Spade, 77). “The minor premise is clear. For it is not a contradiction that God preserve the same substance, now quantified by this quantity, and inform it by another quantity. The actually existing substance will not for this reason be changed by a substantial change….If you say the described situation is a miracle and therefore does not argue against natural reason, to the contrary: A miracle does not occur with respect to contradictories; there is no power that can do that…”

152 Scotus, In Metaph. IV, q. 2, n. 143.

153 “The question naturally arises, How does transcendental unity differ from predicamental unity? Scotus answers that they are not really distinct at all in creatures. [Metaph. 4, q. 2, n. 18; VII, 167-168a] His position may be explained further by pointing out that the distinction between the two is that of a formal perfection and its mode. This distinction is not only characteristic of unity. It is common to all the so-called pure perfections or those whose formal ratio does not involve limitation.” Wolter, Transcendentals, 102.

Cf: “The third difficulty is the question whether the one that is convertible with being is the principle of number (n. 83-109). In this case too it is illuminating for the understanding of the difficulty to make a comparison with Thomas Aquinas. He had made a clear distinction between the transcendental or "metaphysical" one that is convertible with being and the "mathematical" one that belongs to the category of quantity…. Scotus's solution to the difficulty consists in the observation that one and the same thing does
It appears that the only way out of this puzzle is to say that, within the category of “quantity,” the categorial “one” is a different species than the species of “divisibility,” and thus to deny that (1) is unrestricted in its scope. Perhaps the “one” that follows on a subject, is different from other “categorial quantities,” such as the quantity of the matter that is involved in a substance’s composition. Perhaps Scotus holds that the former is inseparable from its subject, while the latter is separable.

In conclusion, we must make a distinction between objects of different sciences, in terms of whether they are metaphysically inseparable from their subjects: Some of them are, and some of them are not.

The ones that are separable, actualize some potency in their subjects, and are constituted by a distinct type of common nature. The unity of this common nature constitutes the unity of the “formal object” of the science which studies substances under the aspect of this type of accident.

The ones which are inseparable, on the other hand, are only studied in metaphysics. And if these are to be considered “accidents” of their subjects, they are only so in the sense of falling outside their subjects’ quiddities, and falling inside a different categorial genus.154

---

154 Scotus, QQ. Metaph. IV, q. 2, n. 142: “nota etiam quod opinionem istam de diversitate reali non oportet imponere Avicennae, licet Averroes videatur ei imponere. Quaecumque enim dicit Avicenna III Metaphysicae suae vel VII de hac materia, exponi possunt: quod accidens est quidquid est extra per se intellectum quiditatis, sicut ipse loquitur in suo V: ‘Quiditas est tantum quiditas, nec universalis, nec

249
particularis' etc., hoc est, nullum istorum actu includitur in intellectu quiditatis, sed quasi prius naturaliter praesupponit quiditatem. Sed hoc non necessario forte ponit quod sint accidentia, sed unitive contenta."
CHAPTER 6:
SCOTUS’S ACCOUNT OF CREATIVE CAUSALITY:
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTUALITY AND
GOD’S VIRTUAL CONTAINMENT OF POSSIBILIA

In the sixth chapter, I shift focus to Scotus’s account of creative causality, which involves his doctrine of the divine ideas. This case is instructive because it provides a counterexample to the systemic requirement that Scotus seems to apply to creaturely cognition, namely that scientific thought must bear some structural isomorphism to its objects. For Scotus, God can think of creaturely essences, without bearing any internal or intrinsic structure that corresponds to their structure. This does not mean that there is no structure in God – indeed, we saw from chapter 3 that on Scotus’s account, there is some structure in God, which is borne by the divine essence and the attributes together. The implication is rather that the structural isomorphism between thought and reality – the requirement that in Scotus’s views typically leads him to argue for the existence of a formal distinction – does not apply for every type of thought. It is only creaturely thought that must have internal distinctions which mirror the formal and real distinctions in reality.1

Scotus does not think that there is anything real in God that uniquely corresponds to a particular creature, whether of an absolute or a relative nature. Rather, God’s

---

1 See Richard Cross, “Duns Scotus’s Account of Cognition,” 159, 169-170; Duns Scotus on God, 68.
perfection is such that, for any possible issue of creative power, that act would have no
effect on any of God’s intrinsic characters. There are not different powers or perfections
in God, corresponding to the different *possibilitia* God could make. Every created reality is
contingent, but God bears no “real relations” *ad extra*. So the case is also unique, in that
it provides an example of a structured effect – the universe – which does not require an
isomorphically structured cause.\(^2\)

Another reason for exploring Scotus’s account of creative causality is that there
are instructive links between the doctrine of divine ideas and the whole issue of
universals. “Universals” have sometimes, among Christian philosophers, been associated
with the exemplar forms in God’s mind; but for Scotus, the real referent of a universal
concept is the common nature which is really immanent in created things, and not the
exemplar idea in God. But we may still ask: What is the *ultimate origin* of the
“quidditative” elements that Scotus thinks are involved in the composition or the content
of created essences? For on Scotus’s account, that story must involve some reference to
God’s “quasi-principiating” or “thinking up” the divine ideas in the divine intellect.\(^3\)

Furthermore, Scotus’s view of the logical order of God’s thoughts and modal
truth is a complex issue that has important implications for the relationship of possibility
and actuality. In short, if Scotist common natures are Aristotelian rather than Platonic,
then they existentially depend upon their exemplifications in the real world. Then, the

---

\(^2\) Scotus, Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 16 (Opera Omnia, Wadding, 6.2, 770-771): “Nam, non est
necesse, quod pluralitas in effectu, realis, arguat pluralitatem in causa; pluralitas enim ab uno illimitato
procedere potest. Dices, quod erit ibi saltum differentia rationis penes diversa connotata, a quibus imponitur
nomen intellectus et voluntatis, concedo, sed hoc nihil faciet ad principium operationis realis. Concipere
enim solem ut est principium vermis vel ranae, iste conceptus nihil facit ad hoc, quod sol producit realiter
vel vermem vel ranam; et tunc oportet dicere, quod potentiae ut distinctae includunt respectus, sed non ut
sunt principium operandi. Ista via sustineri posset sicut sustinetur de Deo, quod omnino idem re et ratione
reali, est principium plurium realiter distinctorum.”

\(^3\) Scotus, Ord. I, d. 36, q. un, nn. 39-41 (Vatican, VI, 286-287).
**possibilitia** as represented in God’s mind are not the “universals” or the “natural properties,” and “universals” or “natural properties” do not have any sort of existence, prior to creation. So the existence of Scotist “natural properties,” wholly depends upon God’s creative activity. Scotus thinks that even the divine ideas of creatures are due in some way to the activity of the divine intellect. At the same time, Scotus also thinks there are logical constraints on God’s possible creative activity. The divine intellect is not a free power, like the divine will; and it only extends to creatures that are broadly logically possible. So one wonders precisely what God’s relationship to modal reality is supposed to be.

Addressing these issues requires an excursion into Scotus’s philosophy of mind, his philosophy of language, his idea of “objective being” or “diminished being,” his views on the God-world relationship, and the difference between divine and creaturely cognition.

6.1 Scotus on Creative Causality

The way Scotus conceives of the causal relationship between creaturely essences and the divine essence is situated within (1) his doctrine of divine infinity, according to which the intensive infinity of the essence, grounds intensively infinite attributes of intellect and will; and (2) his doctrine of creation, in which the infinite divine perfections get drafted for creative purposes. From eternity, the divine intellect and will operate together so that Scotus’s God contingently chooses to produce some selection of creatures, in time.\(^4\) God’s infinite essence grounds infinite perfections, which are capable

\(^4\) QQ 5; Ord I, d. 2, q. 1; Ord. I, d. 45, q. un., nn. 5-6 (Vatican, VI, 372).
of ultimately terminating all creaturely causal-dependence relations, without themselves being dependent.\(^5\)

Scottus thinks of creatures as ultimately depending on the divine essence, with respect to final, efficient, and exemplar causality. One passage that handles this creaturely “triple dependence” with respect to divine infinity is in Scottus’s *Quodlibetal Question* 5. Here, Scottus’s main concern is to show that the personal property of each Trinitarian person is not “formally infinite.” This is so, he argues, even though the personal property in a divine person is “really the same” with the divine essence, and the divine essence itself is “formally infinite.” In this passage, Scottus’s primary strategy is to show that certain things must be “\textit{per se primo modo}” true of the personal properties which are incompatible with being “\textit{per se primo modo}” infinite; so they are discernible. These properties must be \textit{per se} incommunicable, while anything infinite is \textit{per se} communicable; further, these properties must be really distinct from other such properties in other divine persons, while what is formally infinite is necessarily unique; and so on.\(^6\)

Thus, in the course of making his case, Scottus spells out in more detail what it is for the divine essence to be “formally infinite.”

The passage continues with an exposition of an infinite thing as something that is totally independent in its being and causation, and argues that such a thing, by itself, can terminate all causal dependences of other things.\(^7\) Further, the sorts of causal dependence

\(^5\) Here I have benefited from Richard Cross’s essay, “Duns Scotus on Knowing and Naming God: An Essay on the Reception of Greek Patristic Theology in Western Scholasticism,” 11.

\(^6\) Scottus, QQ. 5 (Wadding, 12: 125).

\(^7\) “\textit{Unum infinitum sufficienter terminat dependentiam omnium finitorum, et specialiter primum, a quo dependent, sed non possunt plura sufficienter terminare dependentiam in eodem ordine dependentiae eiusdem dependentis: ergo nec plura esse infinita.” Scottus, QQ. 5 (Wadding, 12:125)
it can terminate are efficient-causal, exemplar-causal, and final-causal.\textsuperscript{8} The passage goes on to say that the divine essence is “infinite” in that it contains all perfections, in the way in which it is possible for something “formally one” to contain all perfections. The passage makes clear that this is not a matter of formal containment.\textsuperscript{9} Rather, the formally one divine essence contains the pure perfections according to “perfect identity,” i.e. real sameness with formal distinction, while it contains created things, i.e. “limited perfections,” eminently.\textsuperscript{10}

The passage continues with an argument that something formally one and infinite must be at the top of every causal chain: “By ascending according to the essential order in beings, we always come to a unity, and consequently it is necessary for that order to have a status in something one: but something intensively infinite is altogether highest, and this according to the essential order: therefore it is altogether one.”\textsuperscript{11} Therefore, a formally single reality that has an intrinsic infinite mode – i.e. the divine essence as a “this” – is the only thing that can ultimately terminate all causal dependence. Thus, to take exemplar causality as an example, we see that the divine essence does not exemplate

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} “Apparet etiam illa major de facto, quia unica essentia terminat sufficienter omnem dependentiam cuiuscunque dependentis: quia tam illum, quae est ad primam causam efficientem, quam illum, quae est ad causam exemplanatem et ad primam finale.” Scotus, QQ. (Wadding, 12: 125-6).
\item \textsuperscript{9} Cf. Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 199 (Vatican, IV, 265): “…quia contradictio est unicam rationem formalem continere actu tot rationes [i.e. omnes perfectiones sub propriis rationibus formalibus].”
\item \textsuperscript{10} “Sicut ergo prima probatio majoris procedit ex hoc quod infinitum habet realiter et unitive omnem perfectionem simpliciter, quia omnis talis potest hoc modo haberi in eodem; sic ista probatio procedit ex hoc quod infinitum habet in se eminenter, et contentive omnem perfectionem limitatam: et ex hoc omnem dependentiam entis limitatui sufficienter terminare potest, et sic istae duae procedunt ex hoc quod dictum est in primo articulo de Infinito, \textit{quod habet omnem rationem entitatis, sive omnem entitatem eo modo quo possibile est haberi ab unico, quod est vel identice pro perfectionibus simpliciter vel eminenter pro perfectionibus limitatis}.” Scotus, QQ. 5 (Wadding, 12: 126).
\item \textsuperscript{11} “In entibus secundum ordinem essentialem ascendendo semper itur ad unitatem, et per consequens necesse est illum ordinem statum habere in aliquo uno: infinitum autem intensive est omnino summum, et hoc secundum ordinem essentialem: ergo est omnino unum.” Scotus, QQ. 5 (Wadding, 12: 126; my translation).
\end{itemize}
the different *possibilia* according to formally distinct perfections that it has; rather, it ultimately terminates their dependence insofar as it is “altogether one,” i.e. under the notion which is most proper to it, as “this essence.”

Causation brings about a relation of an effect to its cause: the effect depends upon its cause. And one might think it also involves a real relation of a cause to the effect: the cause brings about the effect by being oriented towards it, or having some potentiality that is intrinsically ordered to the effect. But Scotus does not endorse the second condition, in any case. He thinks that in general, something is a causative principle in virtue of its non-relational character. Any relation between the cause and effect only comes about after the causing is done; and any relations of the cause to the effect, will always be naturally posterior to relations of the effect to the cause.

Thus, with respect to creative causality, Scotus thinks that only the first condition obtains. God terminates all creaturely relations “*sub ratione mere absoluta*.” That is to say, every relation of the creature to God only requires God as its *relatum* under some ultimately non-relational description of God. This is because a real relation depends upon its relata for its existence. Thus, if some real relation to a creature were intrinsic to God,

---

12 Ord. I, d. 30, q. 1-2, nn. 34, 36 (Vatican, VI, 182-3): “ergo ita definit actus potentiam, quod e verso non definitur per ipsam, et per consequens actus non refertur ad potentiam, sed est mere absolutum, et hoc sub ea ratione sub qua definit potentiam; definit autem potentiam, in quantum potentia est ad ipsum ut relatio ad terminum; ergo actus, secundum quod mere absolutum ‘quid’ est, est terminus huius relationis, qualscumque sit illa relatio, sive simpliciter sive secundum quid.”

13 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 35, q. un, n. 32 (Vatican VI, 258); Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 87 (Vatican VII, 45-46): “et quando arguitur contra istud per rationem ‘quia oportet naturaliter aliquam habitudinem novam praecedere in producente ad productum et non e converso’, - dico (sicut dictum est distinctione 35 primi libri et alias frequenter) quod absolutum in causa immediate sequitur absolutum in effectu, - et in effectu, primo consequitur respectus ad causam; et tunc, si aliquis est respectus causae ad effectum, ille respectus ad effectum est ultimus et aliquando nullus.”

14 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 30, q. 1-2, n. 31 (Vatican, VI, 181).

15 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 30, q. 1-2, n. 51 (Vatican, VI, 192).
then something in God would depend upon that creature. The implication is that “there are no real relations in God ad extra.” The only real relations in God, are relations internal to God (e.g. the personal relations in the trinity). The only relations to creatures in God, are rational relations – brought about by some mind’s comparison of a creature to God.

Scotus further argues that having real relations *ad extra* would be incompatible with God’s simplicity and necessity. Scotus’s idea is that a perfectly simple and necessary being would not formally contain any real entity as a result of the existence of anything external to it. But Scotus also applies this point to the secondary objects in “quidditative being” which God contemplates, prior to making them. Although some philosophers argue that these possible objects are necessary, and hence would necessarily generate a real relation in God insofar as God understands them, Scotus responds that these objects do not actually correspond to anything real in God. The take-away is that these objects are only in *esse intelligibile*, which is not real being, but only “*esse*

---

16 Ord. I, d. 30, qq. 1-2, nn. 49-51 (Vatican, VI, 192).
17 Ibid, n. 51.
18 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 30, q. 2, nn. 50-51 (Vatican, VI, 192).
19 “Sic etiam nec illae quidditates sunt ex se necessariae in illo esse quidditativo, sed per participationem sunt sic necessario entes; nec terto, creaturae – si essent necessariae (secundum philosophos) essent ita necessariae sicut primum, sed haberent necessitatem tantum participatam. Et ideo ponere ista non esse, non esset ita impossibile sicut aliquam realitatem in primo non esse (quia nullum istorum est ita necessarium sicut quaecumque realitas in primo est necessaria)... Non ergo ad aliquod istorum, licet aliquo modo necessarium (non tamen ex se necessarium), posset esse aliqua realitas in necessario ex se.” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 30, q. 2, n. 57 (Vatican, VI, 195).
That is just to say that their whole being consists in being thought-objects.\textsuperscript{21}

There are at least two formally distinct powers in God that are oriented towards possible and actual creatures in some way – intellect and will. By utilizing these powers in a particular way from eternity, God first knows all the possible creatures, and then freely chooses from among them which are to be actual.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, necessarily, there are at least two relations that creatures bear to God – being known by God, and being willed by God.

Scotus teaches that God knows possible creatures \textit{by} knowing the divine essence.\textsuperscript{23} In his view, the divine intellect is “moved” – in a way analogous to the movement of the human intellect by an intelligible species – by God’s essence alone; but in such a way that divine act of knowledge “stretches beyond” (\textit{protendi}) the divine essence so that it also represents all possible creatures, as well as itself.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, in the divine intellect, the only intelligible species or \textit{ratio cognoscendi} is the divine essence itself.\textsuperscript{25} However, in addition to causing the natural knowledge of itself, the divine essence also “quasi-principiates” knowledge of all the possible creatures God could cause. (Scotus chooses the term “quasi-principiation” to connote the dependence of the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Ord. I, d. 35, 36
\textsuperscript{21} Richard Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus on God}, 87: “God’s essence is a real thing, and thus God’s self-knowledge has a real object, really identical with God himself…But secondary objects known by God have merely objective existence, and nothing real in God is affected by the identity of such objects.”
\textsuperscript{22} The sequence, of course, is a logical rather than a temporal sequence.
\textsuperscript{23} “…essentia dei est primum objectum intellectus divini, quia ipsa sola movet intellectum divinum ad cognoscedendum se et omnia alia cognoscibilia ab illo intellectu.” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 127 (Vatican, III, 80). Cf. Quodlibet Q. 5, n. 11 (Wadding, 12: 126).
\textsuperscript{24} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 36, q. un, nn. 39-41 (Vatican, VI, 286-287).
\textsuperscript{25} Duns Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt 2, q. 3, nn. 388, 394, 395 (Vatican, VII, 590-594).
\end{flushright}
thought-objects upon the divine intellect, while also making room for the necessity of God’s conceptions regarding *possibilia*.\(^{26}\) Scotus holds that the divine essence can do all this because of its infinite perfection.\(^{27}\) Thus, the single divine act of understanding has a “primary object” (God’s essence) and multiple “secondary objects” (possible creatures).\(^{28}\) And the divine will is absolutely free with respect to all these “secondary objects.”

In addition to being known and willed by God, there is also the relation of being actively caused by God. The causation obtains as long as the creature exists, while Scotus thinks the willing can be an eternal and contingent volitive act with consequences in the present.\(^{29}\)

If the preceding chain of Scotist reasoning is sound, then there is nothing that God is, intrinsically, which is best described by making reference to some creature – whether as known, willed, or actually existent. It is true that *what God is intrinsically* in terms of the perfections of intellect and will, serves to *explain* his role in terminating the relations of the creatures to him. But in God, there is no reciprocal “being toward” creatures.

On the other hand, creation entails that there must be three relations that every creature bears to God: the creature must be such that it is known by God, willed by God, and caused by God. And God surely knows of all these relations in eternity, by comparing the possible and willed creatures to his own essence. So it follows that there are at least three *rational* relations in God, with reference to creatures: God is knower

\(^{26}\) Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, 68-69.

\(^{27}\) Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 2, q. 3, n. 395 (Vatican, VII, 592).

\(^{28}\) Ord. I, d. 36, q. un., n. 41 (Vatican, VI, 287).

\(^{29}\) Ord. I, d. 45, q. un., nn. 5-6 (Vatican, VI, 372).
with respect to all the possible creatures, willer with respect to all the actual creatures, and cause of all the actual creatures as long as they exist. Although it is mind-independently true that God is these things with respect to creatures, the relations to creatures that are implied by these descriptions are strictly a result of the divine mind’s consideration, as God compares the creaturely essences to himself. Otherwise, something in God would depend upon creatures; and given God’s status as pure act, perfect and undetermined, this cannot be.

A parallel case is that of the intellective soul, which can virtually contain acts of different kinds, by having formally distinct powers. Unlike Bonaventure’s or Aquinas’s view, Scotus thinks the powers of the soul are really the same with the soul. The powers of the soul need not be accidents or parts of the soul, but may be immediately ascribed to it, as a proper principle of operation. The outcome in both cases is dictated by the principle of parsimony – do not posit more distinct entities than are needed to account for the effects.

If this is the right way of thinking about divine causation of creaturely essences, then there are not different realities in God, corresponding to the different creatures that God could make or that God will make. Although there are texts which speak of God’s intrinsic character in virtue of which he has the ability to create some creature as a divine “perfection,” these texts never establish that Scotus thinks God has formally different “perfections,” according to the different creatures he could make. Rather, all the evidence reviewed so far indicates that Scotus would believe this is false. To see what this means,

---


31 Ord. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 69 (Opera Omnia, Bari, III/1, 1113).
consider what it is to ascribe a “perfection” to God. A “perfection” is some positive, real, characteristic. Scotus says that distinct perfections in God do not depend upon any comparison of God to something external in order to characterize God.\textsuperscript{32}

This matter is easily misunderstood, since one might think that God’s ability to create different creatures, entails different abilities; or that God’s ability to know different creatures, entails different acts of knowledge. But according to Scotus, neither of these is the case. As we have seen, Scotus thinks that God’s essence can serve as the “principiator” of divine knowledge just because it is infinitely perfect. The important difference between God’s knowledge and ours is that God’s knowledge is not in any way dependent upon the objects known. Rather, the infinite perfection contained by the essence, is the only factor that “moves” God’s essence, such that by the same movement, it can also know “secondary objects” virtually contained in it.\textsuperscript{33} Further, it is of such infinite perfection as to make the divine essence suitable to serve as the “intelligible species” or single intellective act by which creatures, too, may be known:

[T]he same act of knowledge can embrace several interrelated objects, and the more perfect this act is, the greater can be the number of objects. Consequently, an act that is so completely perfect that it would be impossible to have anything more perfect, will embrace all that can be known. Now the understanding of the First being is of such perfection; therefore there is but one act for all that can be known.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, n. 167 (Vatican, IV, 239).
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ord. I, d. 36, q. un., n. 41 (Vatican, VI, 287).
\item \textsuperscript{34} Scotus, Ord. I.d. 2, q. 1, n. 101 (Vatican, II, 185-186; translation in Wolter, \textit{Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings}, p. 59).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Later in the same passage, Scotus says that for any two creatures x and y, for God “to know x is a perfection, and to know y is likewise a perfection.” But if that is so, are they different perfections? Unfortunately, Wolter’s text in his collection, *Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings*, transmutes the second occurrence of “some” (aliqua) to “other” (alia), with the gratuitous implication that the perfection involved in knowing a is a different perfection than the one involved in knowing b. But this reading is not the same as that in the Vatican text produced by the Scotistic Commission, which leaves the matter more ambiguous. The Vatican critical edition text at least does not necessitate that the perfections required for knowing two different possibilia are formally distinct perfections. It also adds a marginal “textus interpolatus”: “Response: numerical difference [between creatures] does not imply some other perfection [in God].” It does not seem that Scotus had made up his mind what to say about this “responsio” at the time of writing the note. At any rate, the text as it stands in the critical edition does not contradict the response. Here Scotus only talks about the perfections of understanding a and b being “included eminently,” and of understanding both a and b “as if there were two understandings,” in the subjunctive.

One might think that even if God’s knowledge does not depend on creatures, God’s will must be in an intrinsically different state, according to whether God eternally

---

35 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, q. 1, n. 127 (Vatican, II, 203). “…Quia ubi pluralitas requirit vel concludit maiorem perfectionem quam paucitas, ibi infinitas numeralis concludit infinitam perfectionem. Exemplum: posse ferre decem maiorem perfectionem requirit virtutis motivae quam posse ferre quinque; ideo posse ferre infinita concludit infinitatem virtutem motivam. Ergo, in proposito, cum intelligere a sit aliqua perfectio et intelligere b sit similiter aliqua perfectio, numquam intelligere idem est ipsius a et b et aequae distincte, ut duo intelligere essent, nisi perfectiones duorum intelligere includuntur in illo uno eminenter…”

36 Wolter, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 69.

37 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, q. 1, n. 127 (Vatican, II, 203): “[Responsio: differentia numeralis non infert aliquam perfectionem aliam.]”
chooses to create possible world a or b. But the overriding tendency of Scotus’s thought is to put intrinsic contingency and temporality on the side of creatures; while everything real in God is necessary and timeless with regard to all that is intrinsic to it. According to Scotus, the will of God is “the immediate and prime cause that causes contingently,” otherwise we would have to go back *ad infinitum*, “because contingents do not follow from necessary matters.” The idea is that the act of the divine will has to provide a stopping-place for the explanation of all contingent matters. It can do this because it is a “free” as opposed to a “natural” power. Yet, at the same time that it causes contingents in a contingent manner, every state that ever intrinsically characterizes the will of God is essential to it. There are no accidents in God. Thus, there is no ultimate reason to be given why the First cause, caused contingently in just the way it did. That is, there is no


39 Ibid., II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 91.

40 “The only source of contingent action is either the will or something accompanied by the will. Everything else acts with a natural necessity and, consequently, not contingently…” Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, pt. 1,qq. 1-2, n. 81 (Vatican, II, 177; translation in Wolter, Philosophical Writings, p. 54).

41 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, pt. 1,qq. 1-2, n. 89 (Vatican, II, 189; translation in Wolter, Philosophical Writings, p. 56): “[Second conclusion]: the knowledge and volition of this First Being is the same as its essence. This is true, first, of its volition of itself as object, so that to love the first cause is something essentially identified with the nature of this cause, *and the same holds for every act of its will.*” (Wolter’s Translation). Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2 nn.89-110 (Vatican, II, 180-188).

42 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 1, n. 15 (Vatican, IV, 159).

43 Ibid., II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 88.
ultimate reason to be given why it created ‘this’ possible creature instead of ‘that’ one, or why it created at t1 rather than t2.44

In like manner, Scotus may hold that the plurality of possible creatures does not correspond to some plurality in God. This is true, even if God is possibly the efficient cause of all of them, but ends up creating only some of them. In this case, it’s not as if different causal powers in God have been actualized, while others have not; rather, for God’s single, necessary act of creation to issue in creating creatures x, y, z and not a, b, c – just is for God to have chosen to create creatures x, y, and z. God’s eternal, necessary act of willing and of creating would have been intrinsically the same, in either case.

In summary, Scotus holds that everything really intrinsic to God is necessary to God, and is really the same with the divine essence – including the acts of the divine intellect and will. But he also holds that the contingency of creatures stems from the divine will, since God could have chosen to create a different set of creatures. Similarly, he holds that the contingency of God’s choice to create at a certain time – say, t1 – is not a matter of some difference in how God would have intrinsically been, had God chosen to create at t2; and yet, it was still possible for God to have chosen to create at t2, even when he was creating at t1.45 (This is Scotus’s “synchronic account of contingency.”) One might be troubled by the implication that there is some time in which God creates, since after all, on the classical theist conception, God is supposed to bring time itself into

---

44 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 91 (Vatican, VII, 47): “Et ideo ista voluntas Dei – quae vult hoc et pro nunc – est immediata et prima causa, cuius non est aliqua alia causa quaerenda: sicut enim non est ratio quare voluit naturam humanam esse in hoc individuo et esse possibile et contingens, ita non est ratio quare hoc voluit nunc et non tunc, sed tantum ‘quia voluit hoc esse, ideo bonum fuit illud esse’; et quare huius propositionis – licet contingentis immediatae – aliam rationem, est quarere rationem cuius non est ratio quaerenda.”

45 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 88 (Vatican, VII, 46).
existence. But the main point here can be saved if we consider the contingency of some event, other than the first temporal instant of creation.)

Perhaps we may get at Scotus’s meaning here by distinguishing between an act of the divine will and the content of that act. Thus, Scotus might say that God’s very same act of will to create the set of actual creatures, could have been an act of will to create a different set altogether. Thus, God’s very same act of will φ to create the set of actual creatures, could have been an act of will to create a different set of creatures. In that case, God would have chosen differently, and not by adding a further act of will ψ to determine φ. Similarly, God’s very same act of will φ to create the world at t1, could have been an act of will to create at t2. In that case, God would have chosen differently – and not by adding a further act of will ψ to determine φ. Thus, the particular, contingent ways in which God’s act of will might issue in time and in actual creatures, do not correspond to different ways in which God’s intrinsic act of will could have been. This leaves difficult questions about whether the content of God’s act is entirely external; and if so, then how could God’s intellective and volitive act be prior to the things themselves? This is a deep question that would require its own treatment.

If we deal analogously with the principiation of the possibilia in God’s esse intelligibili, their multiplicity is not due to a multiplicity of causal powers or distinct intelligible species in God; rather, it is due to the intensively infinite perfection of God’s formally single essence. Although the existence of possibilia is due in some sense to God’s thinking, their multiplicity does not correspond to distinct perfections in him. The

---

46 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 91 (Vatican, VII, 47).
47 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 88 (Vatican, VII, 46).
48 Ibid.
divine essence generates multiple *possibilia* as a function of its intensively infinite perfection, and not as a one-to-one function from infinite perfections to *possibilia*. Thus, God does *not* get ideas of different possibles by having different divine perfections.

A similar lesson comes from Scotus’s insistence that perfections in God do not depend upon relations to anything that is extrinsic to God. In Scotus’s view, possible creatures are quidditatively extrinsic to God. Thus, for any x, the actual *perfection* involved in God’s being able to create x is not a matter of bearing some *reference*, whether real or rational, to x. Rather, as Scotus makes clear, any such rational relations to x in God arise subsequent to x’s being constituted – *or conceived* – as an absolute.49 If that is so, then for possible creatures x and y, God’s power to create x does not depend upon a relation to x, and God’s power to create y does not depend on a relation to y. Then, for some possibilia x and y, such that x ≠ y, *God’s power to create x and God’s power to create y may be formally the same perfection in God*. There would be no question of requiring a distinct power to create each of them, since the one power exists with an intrinsic mode of infinite perfection.

### 6.2 Scotus on the Nature and Content of the Divine Ideas

As an intelligent agent, God creates things according to a plan.50 God knows all possible created essences prior to the existence of any of them, as they are “virtually contained” in the divine essence. However, God knows them because they are antecedently logically possible, not because they are somehow caused to be possible in

---

49 Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 2, n. 87 (Vatican, VII, 45-46).

50 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 36, q. un.
virtue of the extent of God’s power.\textsuperscript{51} And such knowledge does not entail any “real existence” possessed by these essences, whether as a distinct “intelligible species,” i.e. a bearer of semantic content in God’s mind, or as a real character possessed by God.\textsuperscript{52} For Scotus makes a distinction between God’s knowledge and the knowledge of created beings: angels and human beings require distinct intelligible species corresponding to each of the things known, while God knows all things by means of the infinite, formally single, divine essence.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, although all created quiddities imitate God, they do so in virtue of the coextensive transcendental concepts under which they necessarily fall, and not in virtue of their most determinate quidditative characters.

Scotus thinks that God can know the possible creatures \textit{by} knowing his essence, such that the representational content of God’s single act of knowing his essence “stretches beyond” (\textit{protendi}) the essence to include possible creatures as “equivocal secondary objects.”\textsuperscript{54} Since on Scotus’s view they are “equivocal” and “do not agree in anything real,” there is no possibility that God knows creatures as if they were items formally included in God’s quidditative \textit{ratio}, nor that they quidditatively overlap with respect to any real item or “common nature.”\textsuperscript{55} Rather, God’s essence is somehow able to

\textsuperscript{51} Richard Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus on God} (Ashgate, 2005), 62-63, 73.


\textsuperscript{53} Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 2, q. 3, n. 395 (Vatican, VII, 592).

\textsuperscript{54} Ord. I, d. 36, q. un., n. 39, n. 41 (Vatican, VI, 286, 287). The secondary objects are “equivocally principiated” by the essence insofar as the essence explains the knowledge of them, but does not agree with them in nature.

fulfill this role by “eminently containing all perfections.” Given Scotus’s doctrine of divine simplicity, God’s single act of knowledge is “infinitely perfect” and is really the same with the intellect, which is really the same with the divine essence. Thus, on Scotus’s view, it is really the infinite perfection of the divine essence which makes it suitable to play the role of “prime adequate object” of the divine intellect, in virtue of which all possibilia are comprehensively known.

I now contrast Scotus’s view of the divine ideas with the views of other medieval philosopher-theologians on this topic, and then I attempt to explain Scotus’s view of the relation between the divine ideas and possibility.

There are similarities and differences in the ways Scotus and other medieval philosophers conceive of the divine ideas as being grounded in God. Scotus, Aquinas, and Henry of Ghent all hold that creatures are created to represent God by resembling him in a certain way, and furthermore that God’s essence can be imitated in various ways, such that for each creaturely essence, instantiating that essence involves instantiating something which imitates the divine essence. Thus, the divine perfections

---

56 Cf. Scotus, Ord. II, d. 3, pt. 2, q. 3, n. 395 (Vatican, VII, 592, my translation): “[T]he divine essence, which is infinite, eminently includes all perfections, -- and therefore nothing higher [in the great chain of being] is a sufficient reason for knowing [ratio cognoscendi] something lower, except for the divine essence…”


59 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 2, pt. 1, qq. 1-2, n. 89 (Vatican, II, 189; translation in Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, p. 56): “[Second conclusion]: the knowledge and volition of this First Being is the same as its essence.” (Wolter’s Translation).


may be imitated in any one of the possible beings. God freely chooses from among these which he will actualize.

However, in addition to this, Henry of Ghent holds that a relation of imitability stemming from the essence is essentially included in the divine idea or exemplar of every creaturely essence. Indeed, for Henry and Aquinas, this rational relation to the essence constitutes the divine idea. In their view, God reflects upon his nature qua the different ways in which his nature can be imitated, thus giving rise to the different ideas of creatures. Thus, this intellectional reflection on the essence qua imitable in a certain way, just is the divine idea.

According to Henry’s account of the divine ideas, the very possibility of creatures consists in these relations of imitability or participation. Henry distinguishes between thinkable-but-impossible “things” that do not have an exemplar in God – e.g., the chimaera from Greek mythology – and thinkable things that do have such an exemplar, and are thus possible. The latter are called entia rata, and they are constituted as such precisely by this relation borne to God:

In order to understand this, one must know that the concept of any created thing, in the sense that it is called a thing (res) from “I think, you think” (reor, reris) is other than the being of essence, which belongs to it by reason of the fact that it is a certain nature and essence and called a thing (res) from stability (ratitudine). And a thing has this by reason of the fact that it has the character of an exemplar in God [habet rationem exemplaris in deo], as has often

---


62 Scotus agrees with Henry that chimaeras are impossible. However, one might wonder why, since Scotus’s criterion of (logical) possibility is only that the quidditative notes in the description of a possible thing must be logically compatible – as one might think they seem to be (at least in a narrowly logical sense) in the case of a chimaera.
been said. For every creature . . . is called a certain essence and nature by reason of the fact that it has an exemplar idea in God, in accord with which it is naturally able to be produced in actual being, and as a result of this the being of essence belongs to it. Hence . . . whatever does not have such an exemplar idea in God is a pure nothing in nature and essence . . . nor is it possible for it to be produced in actuality, because God cannot produce anything in actuality of which he does not have in himself an exemplar idea in order that it might exist in some creature.

There is another intention by which it is called a thing absolutely from “I think, you think,” which it has from the mere fact that some concept can be formed of it in the soul. And this intention of “thing” does not determine that it is a certain essence that has its exemplar in God, but it is related indifferently to this and its contrary . . . [A] thing has it from the same relation that it is in itself a certain essence and nature and that the being of essence belongs to it – namely, from its relation to the idea of the divine exemplar – so that its own proper being, which is called the being of essence, does not come to its essence as something new . . .

Thus, in Henry’s view, for any given nature, that nature must include a relation of imitation to the divine essence – which essence is, under a certain consideration, the exemplar of that nature – in order to be a possible being or ens rata. In summation, Henry teaches that what constitutes an ens rata as distinct from “figments” (which are, for Henry, conceivable but impossible beings) is just this relation of participation that the former bears toward God as first being. Thus, on Henry’s teaching, the relationship of participation or imitation “is formally” a possible being’s ratitudo, thus constituting things in possible being.

---


Similarly, Thomas Aquinas held that God himself, understood as imitable in different ways, is the exemplar cause of every creature. Thomas appears to think this view is a consequence of the doctrines of creation, aseity, and simplicity. Arguably, these doctrines entail that God does not stand in need to anything outside himself for any factor or element in the creation. Thus, for any possible being, that being would be derived by formal, efficient, final, and material causality, with God as the ultimate source in all four orders of causality. God creates and is the ultimate source of creatures, in all four ways. Thus, there cannot be some Platonic realm of necessarily existent properties from among which God chooses to instantiate, precisely if that realm is conceived of as independent of God. Neither could a multiplicity of distinct mental acts arise in God’s intellect, since the simple divine essence excludes any actualization. Given all this, Aquinas draws the conclusion that the divine ideas must be tantamount to the divine essence precisely as

---

65 Cf. Alessandro di Conti, “Divine Ideas and Exemplar Causality in Auriol,” *Vivarium* 38:1 (2000), pp. 99-116; cf. Aquinas, ST I, Quaest. 44, art. 3 (Leonine, 4, p. 460): “Whether the exemplar cause be something other than God…I respond it is to be said that God is the first exemplar cause of all things. For the evidence of which, it is to be considered that for the production of something, therefore [ideo] an exemplar is necessary, that [ut] an effect follow upon a determinate form: for an artist produces a determinate form in matter, on account of the exemplar to which he looks, be that exemplar on which he gazes outside, or be that exemplar interiorly conceived by the mind [interius mente conceptum]. But it is clear that those things which come into being naturally, follow determinate forms. But this determination of forms it is necessary that it be reduced, as to a first principle, to [in] the divine wisdom, which thought out the order of the universe [ordinem universi excogitavit], which consists in the distinction of things. And therefore it is necessary to say that in the divine wisdom are the notions [rationes] of all things: which above we called ‘ideas’, that is exemplar forms existing in the divine mind. Which indeed, although they be multiplied according to a respect to things, yet they are not really other than the divine essence insofar as its similitude [prout eius similitudo] can be participated in by diverse [things] in diverse ways. Thus therefore God himself is the prime exemplar of all. – There can also be said to be certain exemplars of others among created things, according as certain ones are towards the similitude of others, either according to the same species, or according to the analogy of some imitation…it is to be said that, although creatures do not attain to this that they be similar to God according to their nature, by a similitude of species, as a generated human is to a generating human; yet they attain to his similitude according to a representation of the ratio understood by God, as the house which is in matter, [attains to the similitude of] the house which is in the mind of the artificer” (my translation).

66 ST I, q. 45, art. 1-2.
understood as imitable in different ways.\footnote{Thomas Aquinas, ST I, q. 15, a. 2 (ed. Ottaviensis 111b): “Sic igitur inquantum Deus cognoscit suam essentiam ut sic imitabilem a tali creatura, cognoscit eam ut propria rationem et ideam huius creaturae.”} Thus, in Aquinas’s view, the divine ideas are constituted in their multiplicity by the multiple imitability relations that the divine intellect causes by reflecting on itself insofar as it can be imitated in many ways – albeit it does so in a single act, with no proper parts that are also acts. Since the relations of imitability are rational relations, they do not, as it were, “leave anything behind” in the divine essence, and so the doctrine of simplicity and of God as “pure act” is inviolate.

Scotus would probably agree with most of the premises in this chain of reasoning, and even with the idea that there is no Platonic realm of properties that is independent of God. However, he would deny that these premises entail that creature essences quidditatively include a relation of participation or imitation toward God – much less that creaturely essences are constituted by such a relation. Scotus thinks views of the sort held by Henry and Aquinas would reduce creaturely essences to being relational entities -- i.e., that their essence would quidditatively include a relation.\footnote{Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., n. 315} Contrary to this, all creaturely essences except those in the category of Relation are, essentially and quidditatively, absolutes.\footnote{Cf. Marilyn Adams, “What’s Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?” \textit{Journal of Analytic Theology}, Vol. 2, May 2014, p. 7; Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., “On the Vestige.”} With regard to their essence, they can be adequately conceived of and understood without the inclusion of any relation to the divine essence, and thus without quidditatively including any understanding of the divine essence.\footnote{Cf. Richard Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus on God} (Ashgate, 2005), p. 62.} Indeed, such is required in the first place, for them to ground relations of imitation to the divine essence,
since in Scotus’s view relations are always distinct in some way from their foundations.\textsuperscript{71} This doesn’t mean that creaturely essences do not imitate God – they do so necessarily – but only that a creaturely essence must first be constituted in possible being before it can be said to involve a possible way in which God’s essence may be imitated. Then, any relations of “dependence upon God” or “imitation of God’s essence” or “participation in God’s goodness” can be proper passions of creatures as they exist in reality, not quidditatively but rather qualitatively predicated of the creature.\textsuperscript{72} Scotus holds that for something to be possible – an \textit{ens rata}, in Henry’s terminology – it is only required that the notes in its quidditative specification be not of themselves repugnant to one another.\textsuperscript{73} Conversely, all that is needed for the proposed description of a candidate “being” not to have a possible referent and thus to be a “figment” (e.g. “chimaera”) is that “one part is repugnant to another.”\textsuperscript{74}

As we have seen, Scotus accepted a doctrine of the divine ideas according to which the absolutely simple divine essence, without having additional intelligible species distinct from itself, can itself be the single mental act or “intelligible species” which represents different possible creatures as secondary objects.\textsuperscript{75} These multiple

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Cf. Scotus, Ord. II, d. 1, q. 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{72} Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un, n. 326 (Vatican, III, 196): “…quia ‘per se primo modo’ participatio ipsa non est quo est ens ratum formaliter; si autem intelligatur per ly ‘in quantum’ causalitas pertinens ad secundum modum ‘per se’ (qualis est in subjecto respectu propriae passionis), sic concedo quod ‘tale ens in quantum tale ens’, puta lapis in quantum lapis, participat ipsum ‘esse’….quia lapis in quantum lapis, participat ipsum ‘esse’, ita quod lapis, positus in entitate rata, de necessitate et ‘per se secundo modo’ habet respectum participationis, sine qua ipsum ‘esse’ includit contradictionem, sicut subjectum esse sine propria passione…”
  \item \textsuperscript{73} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., n. 314; Ord. I, d. 43, n. 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un., n. 319.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} “…in intellectu cognoscente primum objectum et ex eius cognitione cognoscente objectum secondarium…” Scotus, \textit{Ord.} I, d. 35, q. un. (Vatican, IV, 257).
\end{itemize}
representations “shining out” (relucentes) as it were within the divine essence would be merely entia objectiva or entia deminuta in Scotus’s view, not having real being, but merely esse intelligibile. This entails that the distinctively creaturely perfections represented by the divine ideas need not be actually or “formally” possessed by God himself at the moment he has representations of them – nor indeed at any moment after that.

To sum up: Scotus rejects Aquinas’s and Henry’s view of the divine ideas as essentially relational, in a nutshell because he thinks that the divine mind must first represent a possible being as possible under its own quidditative notion, in order for the being to bear any relations to the divine essence. In Scotus’s view of the divine ideas, the rational relations of imitability that creaturely ideas bear to the divine essence do not constitute the ideas of creatures, but rather presuppose them. The ideas are propagated in their “intelligible being” by the infinite ideational power of the divine intellect. In the sequence that Scotus gives in Ord. I, d. 35, the relationship between events in God’s mental life is such that relations of imitating God arise from the divine ideas of creatures.

---

76 Cf. Peter King, “Duns Scotus on Mental Content,” in Duns Scot a Paris: 1302-2002, ed. Boulnois, Karger, Solere, and Sondag (Brepols Publishers 2004, Turnhout, Belgium), pp. 65-88. King defines mental content as “the feature of mental acts in virtue of which each has the character it does qua mental act. When I think about Socrates, the content of my thought is Socrates, which is what makes my act of thinking be about Socrates . . . since Socrates may not exist when I happen to think of him, there must be some feature of the mental act that goes proxy for him in my act of thinking, and this feature is ‘mental content’ properly so-called.” King, 65. According to King’s portrayal, Scotus makes a break with predecessors in his “proposal that mental content is a (perhaps complex) internal constituent of an act of thinking. More succinctly, Scotus invents the notion of mental content.” King, 66

77 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 2, q. un. (Vatican, III); Ord. II, d. 1, q. 5 (Vatican, VII).

In the first instant, God understands his essence under the notion of something absolute; in the second instant he produces a stone in intelligible being and understands the stone, such that there is a relation in the stone understood to the divine understanding, but as yet nothing in the divine understanding towards the stone, but the divine intellection terminates the relation ‘of the stone as understood’ to itself; in the third instant, perhaps, the divine intellect can compare its own intellection to anything intelligible to which we could compare it, and then by comparing itself to the stone understood, it can cause in itself a relation of reason; and in the fourth instant it can as it were reflect upon that relation which was caused in the third instant, and then that relation of reason will be known. So, therefore, the relation of reason is not necessary for understanding the stone – as if it were prior to the stone – as an object, but rather [the relation itself] ‘as caused’ is posterior (in the third instant), and will still be posterior ‘as known’, in the fourth instant.79

The relation of the divine essence to the creature is thus entirely a feature of God’s mental life, as he compares his essence to the possible creature essences. Although God’s necessary omniscience ensures that he does this from eternity, this rational relation to the creature does not figure in the essential constitution of the created essence as such. Since creatures in the category of substance are absolutes, their own relations of imitation and dependence upon God do not enter into their quidditative make-up, either – even if it is impossible they exist apart from such a relation. The idea of the “third instant” is that the intellect can engage in second-order reflection of its own intellection, thus giving rise to a relation of reason “as understood” that the thing is represented as bearing to the intellect. As Alessandro di Conti explains, “The relations of imitability play no decisive role in this ‘chain’ of mental actions, nor do the respectus rationis, which, in contrast, were the cause of the multiplicity of ideas according to St. Thomas.”

79 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 35, q. un, n. 32 (Vatican VI, 258, my translation).
However, this leaves questions about how God produced the divine ideas in the first place, and how they might be derived from the divine essence. Di Conti articulates these further questions: “Scotus’ solution is weak on one important point: it does not clarify the relation between the divine essence which God thinks of ‘at the first instant’ and the ideas of possibles that He produces straight after. The relationship between these ideas and the essence is left ambiguous.”

6.3 The Divine Ideas, Possibility, and Potency

Given Scotus’s description of the divine ideas as eternally and necessarily having esse intelligibile in the divine intellect, someone might wonder whether Scotus is a Meinongian possibilist, holding that there are real beings that don’t actually exist. However, it is notable that Scotus holds that having esse intelligibile is not a matter of having real esse, but merely of having esse secundum quid. And there is no evidence that he thinks that categorial natures really exist in some shadowy non-actual way, prior to instantiation.

Further evidence that he does not accept Meinongian possibilism comes from his affirmations that, prior to their creation, creatures are in “objective potency” and not in “subjective potency” to being created. According to some interpreters, Scotus differs

---


81 Ord. I, d. 35-36

from Aquinas in this respect. The difference between these two sorts of potency is treated in Scotus’s handling of prime matter, where he says something is in “objective potency” if it is the possible term of a power and has yet to be produced by that power, while something is in “subjective potency” if it is possibly subject to some modification which does not yet characterize it. Thus, to say that creatures are in “objective potency” before being created is to deny that a created thing is really anything “there” to receive existence, prior to its reception of actual existence. Thus, Scotus is not a Meinongian possibilist.

Alternatively, one might wonder whether he thinks that there is some realm of necessarily existent possibilia that is independent of God’s thoughts, such that it provides the required object for God’s capability to think about abstract entities. This matter is a little more complicated. For Scotus, God himself brings all possible things into esse intelligibile in an instant prior to creation. Thus, God generates entia objectiva whose

---


84 “Nam aliquid dicitur esse in potentia dupliciter: uno modo, quia est terminus potentiae, sive ad quod est potentia – et istud dicitur esse in potentia objective (sicut Antichristus modo dicitur esse in potential, et similiter albedo generanda); alio modo, dicitur aliquid esse in potential ut subjectum potentiae sive in quo est potentia, -- et sic dicitur aliquid esse in potentia subjective, quia est in potentia ad aliud, quo tamen nondum perficitur (ut superficies dealbanda).” Scotus, Lectura II, d. 12, q. un, n. 30 (Vatican, XIX, 80).

85 Lect. II, d .12, q.un., nn. 30-6, 62-5 (Vatican, XIX, 80-2, 93-5).

86 If “possibilism” were defined as the view that “being” is prior to “existence” (cf. Christopher Menzel, “Classical Possibilism and Lewisian Possibilism”, addendum to “Actualism,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2014), then Scotus could be a possibilist in this sense, because he holds that for a thing to be “a being” is logically prior to its existence. But this is only to say that God can think of Socrates before Socrates exists.

87 Scotus, Ord. I, d. 35, q. un, n. 32 (Vatican VI, 258).
representational content embraces all logically possible entities.\textsuperscript{88} The content of God’s idea of a dodo bird is not necessarily a real, actually existent dodo bird – neither is it some shadowy possibile that exists apart from God. Rather, we might say, for God to contemplate a dodo bird in \textit{esse intelligibili} is only for God to contemplate what the world would be like if there were dodo birds. Thus, to say that there is dodo nature in \textit{esse intelligibili} is not to ascribe any real existence possessed by dodo birds or dodo nature, but rather to say that it is intelligible and non-contradictory that there might be such, and that God has thought of it.\textsuperscript{89}

However, it is not as if Scotus’s God determines modality, \textit{a la} Descartes. Neither does Scotus present all modalities as counterfactually depending upon God. Rather, God “thinks up” all the possible natures; and in this same instant of nature, things are possible just because the “notes” involved in their quidditative make-up as thought by God are not incompossible. As Scotus says, these quidditative notes are not “of themselves repugnant” to each other.\textsuperscript{90} For Scotus, logical possibility is grounded in the compossibility of quidditative notes, which itself is a brute fact, resulting from the natures of things as they are in God’s intellect in \textit{esse intelligibili}.\textsuperscript{91} The implication is that that the way that any given quidditative notes interact with each other in terms of

\textsuperscript{88} Scotus, Ord. I, d. 43, q. un.

\textsuperscript{89} I have borrowed the example of “dodo birds” from the online lecture by Marilyn Adams, “Analytic Theology Lecture,” posted at Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame, accessed \url{http://philreligion.nd.edu/videos/}; cf. Marilyn Adams, “What’s Wrong With The Ontotheological Error?” \textit{Journal of Analytic Theology}, Vol. 2, May 2014, pp. 7-8.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.; cf. Richard Cross: “The modalities require something to bear them, and this is what Scotus means when he claims that, principiatively, it is not the case that modalities are from themselves. In fact, they are principiatively from God. But if there were no God, then they could be principiatively from anything real…” Cross, \textit{Duns Scotus on God}, 77.

compossibility could not have been any different. Thus, although for Scotus the things in esse intelligibile depend upon God’s thinking them, the way in which their quidditative notes would have to interact is not something that depends upon God.  

Scotus holds that the set of objects in God’s esse intelligibile is necessarily coextensive with the metaphysically or “broadly logically” possible. However, this sort of possibility is to be distinguished from the potencies that substances have, in virtue of their essences. In general, broadly logical or metaphysical possibility is always a matter of the formal compatibility of quidditative notes, as represented in God’s intellect. One important text for this conception comes from a passage in which Scotus seems to say that the existence of the world would still be logically possible, in the counter-possible world in which God didn’t exist. This sort of possibility can’t be anything other than a function of the compossibility of quidditative notes. Thus, logical possibility as such does not counterfactually depend upon God.

Thus, although the matter is complicated, Scotus denies ex professo that there is some realm of Platonic possibilia that is independent of God. He also denies the view that God’s representations of the essences of created things essentially include or are constituted by a rational relation of imitation borne towards the divine essence. Rather, most created essences in the Aristotelian categories are absolute, as they seem to be, and are indeed not in the category of Relation.

From among possible creatures, God freely selects some but not all and brings such creatures into being. The creatures have no mode of existence before God creates

---

92 See Richard Cross, Duns Scotus on God (Ashgate, 2005); pp. 75-77.

93 Ordinatio 1, d. 7, q. 1, n. 27, as referenced by Normore.
them. Rather, God’s intellect has the power to represent them as possible, under their own proper notions which do not overlap quidditatively with the notion of God’s essence as a “this,” prior to any real existence that they might have.
CONCLUSION

In the course of this project, I have treated the associated issues of “realism” and “structure,” as they appear in the philosophy of Duns Scotus. The issues are related because the idea of “structure” is the idea of some specifiable relation into which multiple real items may enter. In particular, I have addressed the question, “According to Scotus, what mind-independent structure must characterize the world, for scientific knowledge to be possible?” Scotus’s answer involves his celebrated theory of “common natures” or “quiddities.” Structure is exemplified by different “quidditative” items within the complete essence of something, related by a “formal distinction” to one another – as “genus reality” with respect to “difference reality,” or as the complete quiddity to the individuating principle or “haecceity.” Scotus posits multiply-exemplifiable characteristics or “natural properties” in a one-to-one relationship with the list of predicates in Aristotle’s ten categories. However, it is not the case that every relatum in a formal distinction is either quidditative or individual.

Richard Cross has pointed out that Scotus follows John of Damascus in thinking of the divine attributes as being “things around the essence.”¹ In my view, the perfection passions – whether proper or coextensive with “being” – bear a similar relationship to

¹ Cross, “Duns Scotus on Knowing and Naming God: An Essay on the Reception of Greek Patristic Theology in Western Scholasticism.”
created essences.² For according to Scotus, the coextensive transcendentals require their own foundation in reality, just as much as proper predicates do.³

Scotus’s philosophy of science requires that the object of scientific knowledge be constituted by a determinate “common nature” or “quiddity,” which generates its various “perfections” – i.e., its aptitudes to produce certain types of external effects, and the objective foundations for certain extrinsic characterizations that are true of it as a result. In scientific practice, the “principle of parsimony” functions as a theoretical constraint that is founded upon the innate power of our intellect to reflect the structure of the real world in its proper actions. The intellect’s innate method, or pre-given pattern, for achieving understanding is to explain an object’s manifold “perfections” in terms of a single quiddity.⁴ This one-to-many structure is always a real feature in things; so that science manifests the intrinsic intelligibility of the world. However, according to Scotus, there are limitations to scientific knowledge. The human intellect, in its current state, cannot access the content of “substantial quiddities” – it can only identify their presence, as manifested by their sensible accidents or “properties.”⁵ Therefore, human cognitive powers are such that scientific knowledge bears at least a structural conformity with the world. This is a conclusion that mediates between optimism and skepticism.

Scotus distinguishes between categorial predicates and transcendental predicates.⁶ Only predicates from the former class, properly designate common natures. The “genus

³ Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4.
⁴ Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, qq. 3-4.
⁶ Cf. Scotus, Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3.
reality” and the “difference reality,” as formally distinct “quidditative items,” provide the referents for categorial predicates of greater or lesser generality within the same thing.\(^7\)

As I understand the idea of “structure,” the formal distinction is a paradigmatic instance of it in Scotus’s philosophy. However, Scotus thinks there are at least two different cases of formal distinction: (1) For pairs of distinct common natures that are exemplified by the same individual, whether essentially or accidentally, those natures may be thought of as distinct “quidditative items” related by “act-potency composition” within the individual thing that exemplifies them. (2) Transcendental predicates, on the other hand, correspond to different “perfections” or “properties” that are generated by the individual’s nature, and do not stand to it “as act to potency.”\(^8\) This latter kind of entity is merely some type of function or power of some subject’s particular quiddity \textit{ad extra}, and is not involved in the subject’s metaphysical constitution. Thus, if two things do not share a nature, but have a similar effect, they may be univocally describable by the same “perfection” term. And anything which is describable by multiple non-synonymous terms denoting perfection must itself be something like the “ground” for different real

---

\(^7\) In Metaph. VII, q. 19.

\(^8\) Cf. Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 11 (Wadding, 6.2, 767); Cf. Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 17 (Wadding, VI.2, 772): “ideo dico aliter sic…continentia unitiva, non est eorum quae omino sunt idem, quia illa non uniuntur; nec est eorum quae manent distincta, ista distinctione, qua fuerunt distincta ante unionem: sed quae sunt unum realiter, manent tamen distincta formaliter, sive quae sunt idem identitate reali, distincta tamen formaliter, huiusmodi autem contenta sunt in duplici differentia: quia quaedam sunt de natura continenter, ut quaecunque sunt superiore ad continens, verbi gratia, ab eadem re accipitur ratio albedinis, coloris, qualitatis sensibilis, et qualitatis: et haec sunt superriora ad hanc albedinem, et ideo omnia sunt de essentia eius. Alia sunt contenta in aliquo unitive, quasi posteriora, quia quasi passiones continentis, nec sunt res aliae ab ipso continent. Isto modo ens continet multas passiones, quae non sunt aliae ab ipso ente, ut probat Aristoteles \textit{In Prin. 4 Metaph.}, distinguuntur tamen ab invicem formaliter, et quidditative, et etiam ab ente; formalitate dico reali, et quidditative; alter Metaphysica concludens tales passiones de ente, et illas considerans, non esset scientia realis, sicut ergo ens continet unitive rationem unius, veri et boni aliorum: sic anima continet potencias istas unitive, quanquam formaliter sint distinctae.”

283
perfections, formally distinct from itself and from each other, in order to provide the required foundations for those different terms.\(^9\)

The case of distinct “passions” or “perfections” is both similar to and different from the case of “genus reality” and “specific difference reality,” and an important aspect of my project is to try to say exactly what the difference is between these two cases of structure. Both cases involve the formal distinction, in that the items involved in either case of structure are only “formally distinct” from one another. I argue that the difference between them is a difference between things that are some function or result of the metaphysical constitution of something, and different items intrinsic to a thing’s metaphysical constitution.\(^10\) The case of distinct perfections can also be described in terms of being “extrinsic characterizations” or “metaphysically inevitable results” of something’s quiddity.

Every quidditative component within a “common nature,” the “genus reality” as much as the “difference reality,” is properly apt to terminate an “adequate” cognition, and in this respect is unlike transcendental perfection passions in a thing.\(^11\) An “adequate” cognition is one that expresses the full essential content of the item which is its object, whether that item is a complete substance or a “(quidditative) formality” or “reality” within that substance.\(^12\) But the only “adequate concepts” used by humans, are categorial ones; and all the categorial concepts are adequate to some quidditative formal reality.

---

\(^9\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 4, Rep. II, d. 16, q. un.

\(^10\) Cf. Rep. II, d. 16, q. un., n. 17 – posteriora vs. superiora; n. 19 – “egreditur…ebullit.”

\(^11\) Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3.

\(^12\) In Metaph. VII, q. 15, n. 16 (Franciscan Institute, IV, 298-299); Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 140 (Vatican, IV, 223).
This entails that the reality in virtue of which something is a “being” or “good” is not a “complete formal object” and is therefore not a distinct element apart from something’s metaphysical constitution – even if it is formally distinct from other such formalities and is “outside of” the thing’s essence. Therefore, the reality in virtue of which something is a “being” is really the same “formal object” as the thing’s essence, although the formality which provides the objective foundation for the predication of its “goodness” or “unity” falls (at least partly) outside the essence.\footnote{Scotus, Ord. I, d. 3, pt. 1, q. 3, n. 134 (Vatican, III, 83).} When a substance is described by the coextensive transcendentals, it is being described by an “imperfect concept” which is indeterminate to finite and infinite reality.\footnote{Ord. I, d. 8, pt. 1, q. 3.} By contrast, a perfect or adequate concept would express some quidditative formality within the thing’s essence, and would therefore be a categorial concept.

In chapter IV, I show how Scotus’s thinking about substance, accidents, and the essential parts of substance, is different from that of orthodox Aristotelians. Also in chapter IV, I situate Scotus within the history of philosophy, more generally.

In chapter V, I will discuss the metaphysical role that common natures have within Aristotelian science, and Scotus’s story about the way in which we come to know about common natures. I discuss in further detail the difference between the formal and modal distinctions, and the difference between the case of distinct quiddities vs. distinct perfections. Alan Wolter actually gets the modal distinction wrong! He thinks that it is a variety of formal distinction – just a very small one.\footnote{Wolter, Transcendentals, 24.}
In Scotus’s broadly Aristotelian picture, quiddities are supposed to ensure the infallibility of Aristotelian science. But the relationship of sciences to quiddities, differs from science to science. For physics takes the diverse quiddities of natural substances, as its object of study – demonstrating the causal connection between quiddities and their proper passions. Metaphysics, as the most general science, takes being in general as its object, demonstrating the common passions of being. Furthermore, metaphysics demonstrates that there is an asymmetrical dependence structure in being as a whole – i.e., that there must be a first being upon whom all other beings depend, but which does not depend on other beings.

Here is Scotus’s list of Aristotelian sciences:

1. Logic. This is the science of “second intentions” and therefore not a “real science.” (A “real science” takes some first intention as its object. For the difference between first and second intentions, see chapter 2.)

2. Metaphysics. According to Scotus, this science takes “being” as its formal object, shows the passions of being are true for everything; but it also demonstrates that there is a “first being.” It counts as a “real science,” since “being” is a first intention; but it does not take some particular quiddity as its object.  

3. Theology. For Scotus, this science is not a “propter quid” science in our current state. God is only ever “present” to our intellect as a “voluntary object.”

4. Mathematics. This science takes “dimensive quantity” as a given, since it is “primary passion” of physical substances. 

---

16 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, nn. 47-48.

17 In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 52.
5. *Physics*. According to Scotus, this science takes “movement” as evident to sense. Furthermore, it considers physical substances under their proper quiddities, which are diverse principles of movement. Like metaphysics, physics proves the existence of God, but under a less informative and fruitful concept than metaphysics does – i.e., the concept of “first mover.” For further research, a Scotist might consider the following question: Does Scotus’s view on physics require it to be a “propter quid” science, or does physics work solely by “quia” demonstrations?

---

18 In Metaph. I, q. 9; In Metaph. VI, q. 1, n. 53.
Adams, Marilyn. “‘What’s Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?’” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 2 (2014).


Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* II, paragraphs 22-23.


Ross, James. “Aristotle’s Revenge: the Fate of the Analysts.”


