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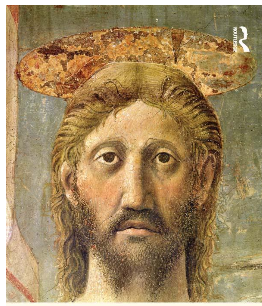

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JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

Richard Cross

John Duns Scotus was born *c.*1266 in the small town of Duns, just north of the border between England and Scotland, and some time early in his life became a Franciscan friar. By inference from the place of his ordination in 1291 (Northampton), we learn that he was studying at Oxford by that date. Scotus remained in Oxford until at least 1301, and in the last couple of years of the thirteenth century started lecturing on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, a necessary step for a Bachelor of Theology on the way to becoming a Master of Theology. We know that Scotus was in Paris, lecturing on the *Sentences*, during the academic year 1302–3, in order to qualify as Master of Theology in the pre-eminent of the two great medieval theological centres. He became Master of Theology at Paris in 1305, and was moved to Cologne in 1307. Known from very soon after his death in 1308 as the 'subtle doctor', Scotus wrote the first systematic treatise dedicated to a proof for God's existence, the *De primo principio* or *On the First Principle*. As his nickname might suggest, the treatise – as with most of Scotus' works – is not an easy read. In what follows, I shall try to summarize some of the moves that Scotus makes in this treatise, and add some further relevant material from other works of Scotus'.

THE EXISTENCE OF A FIRST CAUSE

Scotus' aim, in *De primo principio*, is to try to find a proof for God's existence that rests not on contingent premises but on necessary ones. Scotus chooses three such necessary premises:

(1) Some producible nature exists (Scotus, *De primo principio* [hereafter *DPP*] 3, n. 1; Scotus 1982: 43).
(2) Some nature able to be directed to a goal exists (*DPP* 3, n. 8; Scotus 1982: 59).

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(3) Some nature able to be exceeded in perfection exists (*DPP* 3, n. 9; Scotus 1982: 61).

At first sight, these premises seem to be contingent, not necessary. But an item in the domain of interpretation of all three premises is a *nature*: not an individual in the world, but something more akin to a universal – as Scotus puts it, "a being understood quidditatively" (*DPP* 3, n. 1; Scotus 1982: 43). And the existential claim made in the premises amounts to no more than that such natures can be instantiated in the real world. The quantification ranges over properties, not individuals. In this sense, the first premise, for example, really means that there 'is' a (property/universal) *being producible*, and 'exists' should be understood in this specialized sense. So (1)–(3) amount to the following:

(1*) Something of a producible nature is possible.
(2*) Something of a nature able to be directed to a goal is possible.
(3*) Something of a nature able to be exceeded in perfection is possible.

This is not the only odd feature of the three premises. For Scotus understands the modalities (i.e. 'able to be') as somehow parasitic on the constitution of the actual world: if there 'is' a *being producible*, for example, this is because the following two conditions are satisfied: *being producible* is internally coherent, and its instantiation is compatible with the world as constituted. Given this understanding of the modalities in (1)–(3), Scotus argues that these three premises imply the following three conclusions, respectively:

(4) Some nature able to produce exists (*DPP* 3, n. 1; Scotus 1982: 43).
(5) Some nature able to be a goal of activity exists (*DPP* 3, n. 8; Scotus 1982: 59).
(6) Some nature able to exceed in perfection exists (*DPP* 3, n. 9; Scotus 1982: 61).

And these amount to the following necessary claims:

(4*) Something of a nature able to produce is possible.
(5*) Something of a nature able to be a goal of activity is possible.
(6*) Something of a nature able to exceed in perfection is possible.

Scotus puts the inference from (1) to (4) as follows, and argues similarly for (5) and (6), *mutatis mutandis*: "There is among beings a nature that can produce an effect. Which is shown thus: some [nature] can be produced, therefore some [nature] can produce an effect. The consequence is clear by the nature of correlatives" (*DPP* 3, n. 1; Scotus 1982: 43). Scotus here appeals to a standard argument form, that from relative opposites, and such arguments are necessary

when concerning possible situations; here, if something can be produced, then something can produce. The relation between the inference and the relevant understanding of modality is that, for example, nothing could be such that it is producible unless there is something that has the power to produce it. Possibility here is dependent on the constitution of the actual world. Analogously, the property of *being producible* is correlative to the property of *being able to produce*: the one property requires the other. There is no *being producible* without a *being able to produce*. Still, Scotus has not made any claims about individuals in the world; his point is merely that the causal constitution of the actual world is not such as to block the existence of causes, goals and things more perfect than other things.

Scotus argues at considerable length for the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes, at least in cases where the causal relations are transitive ("essentially ordered", as Scotus puts it); the key argument is the first: "The totality of essentially ordered causes is caused: therefore [it is caused] by some cause that does not belong to the totality (for then it would be its own cause), for the whole totality of dependent things depends, and [does so] on no member of the totality" (*DPP* 3, n. 3; Scotus 1982: 47).

The first cause of any essentially ordered causal series is not itself a part of that series. Every member of an essentially ordered series is dependent; by removing the first member from the series in this way, Scotus can ensure that, since every member of the series is dependent, the whole series is, and thus requires some first cause.

Given the impossibility of an infinite causal series, (4) entails

(7) Some simply first nature able to produce exists,

which amounts to the following necessary claim:

(7*) Something of a nature that is simply first and able to produce is possible.

As Scotus puts it:

> Something able to produce an effect is simply first, that is, neither able to be produced, nor able to produce in virtue of anything else. It is proved from the first [conclusion]: something is able to produce an effect. Let it be A. If [A] is the first, understood in this way [viz., in the second conclusion], the proposal is shown. If not, then it is a producer later [than some other producer], for it can be produced by another, or is able to produce in virtue of something else (for if a negation is denied, the affirmation is posited). Let that other be given, and let it be B, about which it is argued as it was argued of A. Either we will proceed to infinity in producers (of which each will be second with respect to a prior), or we will reach something not having anything prior. An

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> infinity in an ascending [order] is impossible. Therefore primacy is necessary, for whatever has nothing prior is not posterior to anything posterior to it [given the impossibility of] … a circle in causes.
> (*DPP* 3, n. 2; Scotus 1982: 45)

(Again, Scotus holds similar principles that yield analogous conclusions from (5) and (6), too, but for the sake of simplicity I focus here on the cosmological proof.) Scotus' next move is to argue that

(8) Any simply first nature able to produce is uncausable.

His reasoning is that if such a nature were causable, it would not be simply first. So (7) amounts to the claim that some uncausable nature exists:

> Anything that is able to produce an effect, and that is simply first, is uncausable, because it cannot be produced as an effect and is independently able to produce an effect. This is clear from … [(7)], for if it were produced as an effect, or causative in virtue of anything else, there would be a regress to infinity, or a circle [of causes], or else we would reach something that cannot be produced and is independently productive. And I call this the first, and it is clear that the other is not the first, from what you grant. It is further concluded that if the first cannot be produced, it is uncausable.
> (*DPP* 3, n. 4; Scotus 1982: 51)

The next stage of the argument establishes (Scotus believes) the actual existence of an individual that instantiates such a first nature:

(9) Something simply first, able to produce, exists.

Scotus' argument runs as follows:

> Something simply first, able to produce an effect, is actually existent, and some actually existing nature is thus able to produce an effect. It is proved: anything with whose nature it is incompatible to have the possibility of existence from another (*cuius rationi repugnat posse esse ab alio*), has the possibility of existence from itself, if it can be. But it is incompatible with the nature of anything simply first, able to produce an effect, that it have the possibility of its existence from another (from [(8)]); and it can exist (from [(7)]) … Therefore anything simply first, able to produce an effect, has the possibility of existence from itself. But what does not exist of itself does not have the possibility of existence from itself, for then non-being would produce something in

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> being, which is impossible; and furthermore the thing would then cause itself, and thus would not be entirely uncausable.
>
> (*DPP* 3, n. 5; Scotus 1982: 51–3)

The gist of (7) is that the existence of something instantiating the first nature is possible (in the sense of being compatible with the causal constitution of the actual world), and the gist of (8) is that such a thing, if it exists at all, cannot be caused by anything else: it "has the possibility of existence from itself". By itself, the conjunction of (7) and (8) does not amount to showing that there is a first being. But Scotus subscribes to a further principle, which I shall label the 'actuality principle', which explains why he thinks himself entitled to conclude to the existence of such a first being. The principle is this: "Nothing can not-be unless something positively or privatively incompossible with it can be" (*DPP* 3, n. 6; Scotus 1982: 53). What the actuality principle means, in effect, is that it is non-existence, rather than existence, that requires explaining: actuality is in every sense primary, and a nature is actual – is instantiated – unless something in the actual world prevents it. Putting it crudely, if there is nothing about the causal constitution of the actual world that prevents something from existing, then that thing exists. This claim relates precisely to the modal assumptions that Scotus makes in this argument (indeed, as far as I can see, it entails them, although it is not entailed by them). If something can be, at some time it is, and this is because its possibility is precisely the result of the causal constitution of the actual world. This is closely related to the so-called 'principle of plenitude', and shows how in this context Scotus' understanding of the modalities is far removed from the innovative one that he develops elsewhere, which I discuss below. If there is nothing incompatible with the existence of a first being, then that being exists. The key point about the earlier stages in the argument – particularly (7) – is to show that the existence of such a being is not incompatible with the causal features of the actual world.

Scotus argues similarly for the instantiation of an ultimate goal of existence and a maximally excellent being, and goes on to show that anything that instantiates one of these attributes (*being a first cause*, *being an ultimate goal*, *being maximally perfect*) instantiates the other two as well: the attributes are coextensional. He argues that any being satisfying any one of the attributes is uncausable (*DPP* 3, nn. 9–10; Scotus 1982: 59–61), and that anything uncausable is a necessary existent (*DPP* 3, n. 6; Scotus 1982: 53). But, he reasons, there can only be one kind of necessary existent. So only one kind of thing can instantiate the three relevant attributes (*DPP* 3, n. 10; Scotus 1982: 63). Scotus argues that the possession of the property of necessary existence is supposed to provide in some sense an explanation for the existence of the substance: a necessary existent cannot fail to exist. But different kinds of necessary existent would require additional attributes, necessary for their existence. This seems, however, to generate a contradiction: the attributes fail to be required (because necessity is sufficient);

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the attributes are required (to differentiate the kinds of necessary existent) (*DPP* 3, n. 6; Scotus 1982: 55–7). At first glance the argument seems to prove too much, because it would entail that necessary existence is the only attribute that could be had by a necessary existent – something that Scotus does not accept – God has many other attributes too. But Scotus does believe that God's attributes are somehow 'contained in', or intrinsic to, his being in a way in which the attributes of other beings fail to be, and that this containment relation cannot obtain between necessary being and any kind of attribute other than the ones that God has, as we shall see.

ATTRIBUTES OF THE FIRST CAUSE

Scotus is aware that none of this entails that there is just one instantiation of these coextensional attributes, and at a later stage in his argument tries to come up with some reasons for there being just one such instantiation. But these reasons are parasitic on the most famous feature of Scotus' account of God: his attempt to show that any instantiation of the three coextensional attributes must be *infinite*. The most important argument for infinity begins from the notion of omniscience. There are infinitely many objects of knowledge; any intellect that simultaneously knows these objects – such as God's – is infinite (*DPP* 4, n. 15; Scotus 1982: 103). Infinity entails perfection:

> Let us change the idea of the potentially infinite in quantity into the idea of the actually infinite in quantity, if it could be actual. For if the quantity of the [potentially] infinite necessarily grew by taking part after part, so too we could imagine taken at once (or to remain at once) all the parts that can be taken, and we would have an actually infinite quantity, for it would be as great actually as it is potentially … If we were to understand there to be, among beings, something actually infinite in entity, that should be understood proportionately to the imagined actual infinite in quantity, such that that being is said to be infinite that cannot be exceeded in entity by anything, and that truly will have the feature of a whole, and of something perfect: whole, for although the whole actually infinite in quantity lacks none of its parts, or no part of such a quantity, nevertheless each part is outside the other, and thus the whole is from imperfect things. But a being infinite in entity has nothing entitative 'outside' in this way, for its totality does not depend on things imperfect in entity: for it is whole in such a way that it has no extrinsic part (for then it would not be totally whole). So although the actually infinite could be perfect in quantity – for it is lacking nothing of the quantity, according to itself – nevertheless each part is lacking some of the quantity, namely, that which is in another

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> [part]: neither is it perfect in this way [namely, quantitatively] unless each [part] of it is imperfect. But an infinite being is perfect in such a way that neither it nor any of its [parts] lacks anything.
> (*Quodlibetum* 5, n. 2; Scotus 1639: 12:118)

Modelling God's infinity on the mathematical infinite is radical in an Aristotelian universe in which actual infinities are held to be impossible. The thought experiment involves too the thought that degrees of qualities can be somehow quantified, a move that proved very important in the history of science. But more important for our purposes here is the argument that there cannot be two perfect infinite minds. The question is how such minds would know each other. If directly, then each would be dependent on the other, and thus not wholly perfect. If by means of a representation, then each would understand itself better than it understands the other mind, and thus would not have wholly perfect knowledge of the other (*DPP* 4, n. 38; Scotus 1982: 149).

Still, all this presupposes that the first being has knowledge. Why should we accept this? Scotus' argument begins from the thought that the universe appears to be contingent, and to include events that occur contingently. Such an event is one "whose opposite could have happened when it did" (*DPP* 4, n. 6; Scotus 1982: 85); note here Scotus' innovative understanding of the modality in the modern way, as broadly logical, not the world-dependent nomological modality of the argument for God's existence. The contingent events that Scotus has in mind are particularly the results of human free will. If there is genuine contingency, then the first cause must be able to cause contingently. But Scotus, in common with his broadly Aristotelian age, holds that there are no random events: "There is no principle of acting contingently other than will, or something requiring the will, for everything else acts by the necessity of nature, and thus not contingently" (*DPP* 4, n. 5; Scotus 1982: 83). But voluntary activity requires that there are goals of activity that are known, and thus requires a mind (*DPP* 4, n. 5; Scotus 1982: 83).

As we shall see below, Scotus holds that God cannot have accidental properties. In line with this, he holds that God's knowledge of contingent truths cannot be the result of anything external to himself, or the result of God's 'seeing' things external to himself (*Reportatio* [hereafter *Rep.*] 1A.38.1–2, n. 24; Söder 1999: 230). So his knowledge of free creaturely actions is the result of his being a (partial but presumably irresistible) cause of such actions (*Rep*. 1A.38.1–2, n. 37; Söder 1999: 233–4). Scotus spends a great deal of time attempting to show that this view of God's knowledge is compatible with genuine creaturely freedom (*Ordinatio* [hereafter *Ord.*] 2.34.7.1–5, nn. 143–50; Scotus 1950– : 8:429–32). Although Scotus believes God to be timeless (for the evidence, see Scotus, *Ord.* 1.8.2.un., nn. 294, 297; Scotus 1950– : 4:322, 4:324) – which I think he takes to be an inference from God's immutability – he is unable to resolve the issue of the compatibility of human freedom with divine knowledge. His view that God cannot 'see' things external to himself entails that it is not open to him to claim

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that God timelessly 'sees' all time and thus knows future contingents without having to cause them.

Scotus' view of God's unconditioned nature leads Scotus to a strong emphasis on divine supremacy. God's ideas of unreal but possible objects are themselves the result of some minimal kind of causal activity on God's part: he cannot simply 'inspect' his essence to gain knowledge of such things (*Ord*. 1.35.un., nn. 47–9; Scotus 1950– : 6:264–6); and God's knowledge of modal truths likewise depends on God's causing those truths: not that God could cause the contents of such truths other than he does, or that he could avoid causing such truths at all, but that there would be no such truths at all were it not for God's causal activity (see the discussion in Cross 2005: 69–77). Equally, the infinite perfection of God, coupled with the fact that all his external causal activity is contingent, has some curious results on Scotus' ethical theory. God has no obligations other than to himself. If he had obligations to creatures, or were in some way constrained to act in accordance with what would count as obligation were he a moral agent, then (some of) his external acts would be necessitated, which is false (*Lectura* 1.39.1–5, n. 43; Scotus 1950– : 17:492). A consequence of this is that natural law extends only as far as the first table of the decalogue: those commands governing the 'Godward' aspects of creatures' moral duties. God can command creatures as he will (*Ord*. 3.37.un., n. 6; Scotus 1639: 7:645).

DIVINE SIMPLICITY AND THE FORMAL DISTINCTION

Classical theism of the kind defended by Scotus maintains that God is simple: that he lacks any kind of part. This doctrine is, according to Scotus, entailed by divine infinity. Suppose the relevant parts are finite. Then, as Allan Wolter has put it, "According to Scotus' definition of infinity the infinite exceeds the finite by a non-finite measure. Thus, no matter how many the parts, they do not add up to infinite" (Scotus 1982: 353). Suppose the relevant parts are infinite. Then, absurdly, the parts would not be less than the infinite whole (*DPP* 4, n. 31; Scotus 1982: 135). Divine infinity likewise entails that God cannot have any contingent or accidental properties. The infinite cannot lack anything; so it always has whatever properties it can have (*DPP* 4, n. 33; Scotus 1982: 139). (It is a hard matter for Scotus to square this with his belief that God's external willing and action are contingent, but let that pass, since Scotus at least recognizes the problem: see Cross [2005: 86–7].) This view, incidentally, further entails that God is immutable (see *Ord*. 1.8.2.un., n. 228; Scotus 1950– : 4:281).

More distinctive is Scotus' view on the relation between the various divine attributes, and between these attributes and God's substance (God himself). Many versions of classical theism maintain that there is no distinction between the various divine attributes, and likewise no distinction between the divine attributes and God's substance. On this view, God does not have properties or attributes (I

use the two terms synonymously here): not only is he just properties, but he is just one property – his own nature or self. Scotus is vehemently opposed to this way of thinking of God. He has little problem with the thought that God could be just properties. But he strongly disagrees with the view that God is just one property: that there are no distinctions between the various divine attributes. As Scotus understands the view that he opposes, when we talk about different divine attributes, we are merely talking about different ways in which God can be resembled by creatures, or represented to them. These different ways do not correspond to anything real in God other than just God himself (see Scotus' summary of the position he opposes at *Ord*. 1.8.1.4, n. 162; Scotus 1950– : 4:233–4). All that the position asserts is that we can correctly think of God in various different ways. Scotus opposes this view by arguing that there must be some kind of distinction in God, and thus that the things so distinguished must have some kind of reality independent of our way of thinking about them. To defend this position, Scotus develops an elaborate account of various different kinds of distinction, because, as we have seen, he rejects the view that God could be composed of really distinct parts, so whatever his doctrine about the divine attributes amounts to, it cannot entail that God is composed, or that the attributes are really distinct from each other. The key passage is worth quoting in full:

> There is therefore a distinction [between essential divine perfections] preceding in every way the intellect, and it is this: that wisdom really exists in reality (*est in re ex natura rei*), and goodness really exists in reality, but real (*in re*) wisdom is not real goodness. Which is proved, for if infinite wisdom were formally infinite goodness, then wisdom in general would be formally goodness in general. For infinity does not destroy the formal notion of the thing to which it is added, for in whatever degree some perfection is understood to be (which degree is a degree of the perfection), the formal notion of that perfection is not removed by the degree, and thus, if [this perfection] *as in general* does not formally include [that perfection] *as in general*, neither [does this perfection] *as in particular* [include that perfection] *as in particular*.
>
> I show this, because 'to include formally' is to include something in its essential notion, such that if there were a definition of the including thing, then the thing included would be the definition or a part of the definition. Just as, however, the definition of goodness in general does not include wisdom, neither does infinite [goodness include] infinite [wisdom]. There is therefore some formal non-identity between wisdom and goodness, inasmuch as there would be distinct definitions of them if they were definable. But a definition indicates not only a concept caused by the intellect, but the quiddity of a thing: there is therefore formal non-identity from the side of the thing, which I

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> understand thus: the intellect forming this [sentence] 'wisdom is not formally goodness' does not cause, by its act of combining, the truth of this combination, but it finds the terms in the object, and a true act is made by their combination.
>
> (*Ord.* 1.8.1.4, nn. 192–3; Scotus 1950– : 4:261–2)

Halfway through the second paragraph here, Scotus claims that there is some "formal non-identity between wisdom and goodness". This is Scotus' (in)famous 'formal distinction': very roughly, the kind of extramental distinction that exists between two inseparable properties of one and the same substance (on the assumption that properties are in some sense real features of things, and not merely linguistic or mental items – predicates or concepts – an assumption to which I shall return in a moment). But why suppose that God's wisdom and goodness (for example) are distinct in this kind of way? The argument is that the relevant creaturely attributes – wisdom and goodness – are not coextensional, and thus that there must be some sort of distinction between them. But if the intelligible content of the relevant divine attributes overlaps with the intelligible content of the corresponding creaturely attributes (as Scotus supposes to be the case), then there must be some sort of distinction between the relevant divine attributes too (even if the relevant divine attributes are coextensional with each other).

Still, why suppose that properties are in some sense real features of things? The end of the passage makes some preliminary suggestions: for at least certain sorts of property, statements about the identity or distinction of different properties require truth-makers, and these truth-makers must be (somehow) real, entailing that the properties themselves are somehow real. But this argument as it stands is hardly decisive (since it does not provide a principle for distinguishing cases such as this from those in which no extramental truth-maker is required), and elsewhere Scotus develops what he has in mind at greater length. Fundamentally, Scotus maintains that there are some concepts under whose extensions both divine and creaturely attributes fall. The concept of *wisdom*, for example, includes in its extension both divine and creaturely wisdom. And if creaturely wisdom and creaturely goodness are distinct in Socrates, then they must be somehow distinct in God too. As Scotus puts it in the passage just quoted, "if infinite wisdom were formally infinite goodness, then wisdom in general would be formally goodness in general".

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AND UNIVOCITY

Now, I have shifted from speaking of properties to speaking of concepts, and the reason for this is that Scotus is fundamentally appealing to a certain *semantic* theory to secure his conclusion here, albeit, a material conclusion with important theological consequences of its own. The semantic theory involves conditions for

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univocity, for employing the same *concept* in different contexts. Scotus states the conditions as follows:

> I call that concept univocal which is one in such a way that its unity is sufficient for a contradiction when affirmed and denied of the same thing, and also is sufficient for a syllogistic middle term, such that the extremes are united in the middle term which is one in such a way that they can be united between themselves without the fallacy of equivocation. (*Ord*. 1.3.1.1–2, n. 26; Scotus 1950– : 3:18)

The issue here is sameness of *concept*, and the criteria for such sameness are syntactic. But what is at stake is, nevertheless, a *semantic* matter: identity of informational *content*. For, accepting standard Aristotelian medieval semantic presuppositions, concepts are meanings of words. And one of the grounds for syllogistic validity is that the terms mean the same things in the premises and conclusions. Thus, Scotus maintains that theological reasoning requires that God and creatures fall under (some of) the same concepts:

> Every metaphysical inquiry about God proceeds by considering the formal notion of something and removing from that formal notion the imperfection that it has in creatures, retaining the formal notion, attributing to it utterly the highest perfection, and then attributing it to God. Example of the formal notion of wisdom (or intellect) or will: for it is considered in itself and according to itself, and from the fact that this notion does not formally entail imperfection or limitation, the imperfections which follow it in creatures are removed from it, and, retaining the same notion of wisdom and will these are attributed to God most perfectly. Therefore every inquiry about God presupposes that the mind has the same univocal concept which it receives from creatures. (*Ord*. 1.3.1.1–2, n. 39; Scotus 1950– : 3:26–7)

What Scotus is wondering about is this: how could we argue from one perfection to another unless the meanings of the words that signify the various perfections were the same – exactly the same – in the premises and the conclusion? How could we (e.g.) infer from God's wisdom that God knows many facts unless we knew that all things that are wise know many facts? Once we know (on whatever grounds) that the inference is sound, we know that the various words are being used univocally. I do not think that Scotus or his contemporaries would have regarded as in any way controversial the thought that theological arguments that are *prima facie* sound are in fact sound; thus, as Scotus puts it in a much-quoted passage, "Masters who write of God and of those things that are known of God, observe the univocity of being in the way in which they speak, even though they deny it with their words" (*Rep*. 1.7.1, n. 7; Scotus 1639: 11:43).

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Given that there is some kind of distinction between the various divine attributes, what account does Scotus give of their unity? And how does he distinguish these formally distinct attributes from really distinct parts? The answer to both questions relies on Scotus' controversial account of real identity. For Scotus maintains that formally distinct attributes can be really identical with each other and with the whole that emerges from the union of such attributes (i.e. that emerges from their real identity with each other). These claims require careful construal, for Scotus' account of real identity is not exactly as the accounts of modern philosophers presuppose. Fundamentally, real identity, at least between different properties, is most closely related to the modern philosophical notion of *compresence*, a relation that ties together distinct properties, and which has the formal properties of symmetry and (unlike real identity) intransitivity. Intransitivity allows two sets of compresent properties to overlap without thereby being identical with each other, a requirement that turns out to be vital in Scotus' defence of the doctrine of the Trinity (see Cross 2005: 169–70, 237–40). Scotus maintains that divine infinity automatically explains the real identity of his various attributes with each other:

> If we abstract wisdom from anything which is outside the notion of wisdom, and likewise if we abstract goodness from anything which is formally outside its notion, each quiddity will remain, understood precisely, formally infinite. From the fact that the cause of their identity in this very precise abstraction is infinity, the cause of the identity of the extreme terms [in a sentence such as 'divine wisdom is divine goodness'] remains. For these were precisely the same not on account of their identity with some third thing from which they are abstracted, but on account of the formal infinity of each.
>
> (*Ord*. 1.8.1.4, n. 220; Scotus 1950– : 4:275)

The idea is that if a divine attribute could be part of a composite, it would not itself be infinite. The reason for this goes back to those arguments that derive simplicity from infinity, mentioned earlier. Things that can enter into composition are finite, since being a component entails being less than the whole made up of components. Infinite attributes are such that they cannot be exceeded, and therefore such that they cannot enter into composition with each other. They are therefore really identical. Thus, considered even in complete abstraction from their subject (in this case, the divine essence), divine attributes can be predicated of each other "by identity", as Scotus puts it. Infinity guarantees numerical identity, and thus occupies a key role in the most characteristic Scotist teaching on divine simplicity, namely the real identity of, and formal distinction between, the various divine attributes. And this explains how God's attributes are somehow 'contained in' his infinite being, as mentioned above, and why the argument for divine unicity is not undermined by the presence of distinct attributes in God.

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On EXISTENCE OF GOD see also Chs 5, 6, 13; Vol. 1, Chs 18, 19; Vol. 3, Chs 6, 12, 13, 14, 15, 21; Vol. 5, Chs 11, 16. On FIRST CAUSE see also Ch. 14; Vol. 1, Chs 15, 16; Vol. 3, Ch. 6.

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